



The Globe

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Nobles County library director terminated for misconduct

By Kari Lucin
The Globe

WORTHINGTON — Nobles County Library Director David Bradford's employment has been terminated due to employee misconduct, and County Administrator Bruce Heitkamp will temporarily take on the library's administrative duties.



"I appreciate everyone's support during this difficult time and ask that everyone be respectful to all parties involved," Heitkamp said Wednesday.

Bradford declined to comment on the matter on Wednesday.

Bradford, who was hired for the position in December 2019, was notified of the termination on Dec. 22, and both the Nobles County Board of Commissioners and the Nobles County Library Board were informed shortly afterward, Heitkamp said.

Earlier this month, the county was alerted to a matter relating to Bradford, which was then subject to an investigation "not of a criminal nature," Heitkamp said at that time.

The county will begin reviewing its library director job description next week, with a vacancy notice being offered soon after.

Library director

Bradford had been working with consultants with Library Strategies on strategic planning for the county library, and had also begun gathering information for a potential renovation of the library's Worthington branch.

BRADFORD: Page 8

City Council splits vote on OSHA policy regarding testing, masks

By Julie Buntjer
The Globe

WORTHINGTON — Worthington Mayor Mike Kuhle broke a tie vote among council members Tuesday night, resulting in a 3-2 split approving a COVID-19 vaccination and face-covering policy for all city employees. Council members Amy Ernst and Alaina Kolpin supported the policy, while Chad Cummings and Chris Kielblock were opposed. Councilman Larry Jansen was absent from the meeting.

The policy is in response to OSHA language that remains in battle in the court system, but if approved will require all employers with 100 or more employees to require employees to show proof of vaccination against COVID-19 or submit to weekly testing and wear a face-mask while at work.

City Administrator Steve Robinson said an employee is classified as anyone who receives a W-2 from the city of Worthington. That includes not only full- and part-time employees, but temp and seasonal workers, firefighters and election judges. The definition puts the city at more than 200 employees.

COUNCIL: Page 6



Emma McNamee / The Globe

Volunteers and participants near the check in table for Seeds of Justice's food distribution event at St. Mary's.

Food helping families

Distribution event provides culturally-sensitive food to over 130 local families

By Emma McNamee
The Globe

Worthington

Seeds of Justice, a Worthington non-profit organization, partnered with Partners in Quality Care to conduct a food distribution event a week before Christmas, aimed at helping families with children under the age of 18.

Culturally-sensitive foods such as mangos, beans, peppers and papaya were provided through Partners in Quality Care, another non-profit organization that focuses its support on programs that care for youths and seniors.

"The goal is to have Worthington as a site (for food distribution)," said Peter Ekadu, who assisted

with organizing the event, and connected Seeds of Justice with Partners in Quality Care. "The last one we did was like a pilot to see if there were many people who would be interested and we were overwhelmed by the need."

Ekadu is a former project coordinator with Voices for Justice, and currently does volunteer and public health

work. Seeds of Justice's position and connections within Worthington made partnering with them a "no-brainer", according to Ekadu.

"They have a lot of unique connections," he said. "It kind of is an organization that represents the demographics of Worthington."

FOOD: Page 7

COVID put stress on District 518 students

Staff encourage parents to keep watch for changed behavior, grades

By Kari Lucin
The Globe

WORTHINGTON — After two years of the COVID-19 pandemic, many adults are feeling the stress — and so are many children, prompting school staff to keep an

ever-watchful eye out for their students.

"They had to adjust a lot," said Lindsay Jenniges, school social worker at Worthington High School.

"Overall, I think a lot of students adapted. ... it truly

does affect each of us differently," added Lakeyta Swinea, a school counselor at WHS.

At the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year, District 518 did a needs assessment, and students were

able to answer questions about how they felt about COVID-19. Some said it hadn't impacted their lives at all, while others said it had changed things significantly.

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WEATHER

CLOUDY/WIND

HIGH 11°
LOW -12°



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FOOD

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Seeds of Justice notified community groups and began contacting families they knew would qualify. They quickly had over a hundred adults on their list. “Food insecurity is one of the things that Nobles County and a lot of communities of color face,” said Leticia “Letty” Rodriguez, an organizer with Seeds of Justice. “So we jumped right on the idea and that’s kind of how it started.”

Two weeks later, on Dec. 18, the event was held in the cafeteria at St. Mary’s Church, which Seeds of Justice has used for food drives and vaccination clinics in the past. An estimated 522 individuals were served, accounting for over 130 families.

Fourteen volunteers, speaking a variety of languages, showed up to help with food distribution and cross language barriers.

Along with the food, face masks and hand sanitizer were offered to participants. Seeds of Justice also delivered several bags of food to families who were on their list, but were unable to attend the event.

Food insecurity is an issue for many families of color, especially those that include new immigrants who might not qualify for government aid, said Rodriguez. There are struggles in terms of accessibility, for people who lack both the transportation and funds to get groceries, as well as learning how to prepare foods that may be unfamiliar to someone who just immigrated to the United States. Rodriguez said food isn’t always a priority for families who also have to worry about shelter, transportation, other utilities and work.

“If you have no transportation and you have utilities and clothing and all of this, then the food becomes kind of like a precious commodity,” Rodriguez explained, “because you need to pay for

the rest before you can put food on the table.”

Seeds of Justice works to help families who might not be aware of the resources available, or might not come out to access them for a multitude of reasons.

“That’s why it’s important to connect with other agencies that can let (people) know what’s happening and possibly try and connect them with food distributions, like ours or anyone (else’s).” Rodriguez said.

Organizers like Rodriguez and Ekadu hope this event will be the first of a regularly occurring initiative. There are currently plans for another food distribution event to take place in mid-January, and families with children under 18 who are interested in being included should reach out to Seeds of Justice organizers Rodriguez (507) 202-7573, or Aida Simon (507) 202-8475.

“We would like to continue with this,” said Ekadu. “We had a distribution to over 130 families, and established that in Worthington, that there is still a need.”



Emma McNamee / The Globe

St. Mary’s cafeteria, where bags of food have been set out on tables for Seeds of Justice’s food distribution event.

STUDENTS

From Page 1

“I lost my job for a little while at the beginning,” one senior wrote. “I was unable to visit my grandparents for a while as well. It’s caused a lot of disagreements for everyone (whether or not we should wear masks, get vaccinated, stay home, do this do that etc etc) which is a lot of unnecessary stress added to everything happening in the world already.”

Losses and difficulties

District 518 keeps a staff of 10 school counselors, four school social workers and three and a half school psychologists, all of whom help provide students with mental health resources and assistance when needed.

The pandemic has posed a series of shifting challenges to everyone regardless of age, and students are no exception. Some of those challenges began to ease off in 2021 while other arrived to take their place.

“Last year, it was really difficult switching back and forth between learning models,” Jenniges said. “That’s been better this year, in general.”

At the same time, she has seen more anxiety and depression in students, some of whom enjoyed doing schoolwork at home in their pajamas, where it was quiet.

It can help students to focus on what they can control and change, Swinea said — their own actions and responses.

And many of the stressors adults have experienced throughout

the pandemic are shared by children.

“Some kids have been stressed by the idea of getting COVID and passing it on to the family,” said Abby Alfson, school psychologist for the district. “... it almost comes down to uncertainty.”

Many children are dealing with parents who have lost jobs, and some are dealing with the loss of one or more parents. With a loss of an income can come the loss of access to food and other basic needs, such as the reliable wireless internet service students require.

Some students have faced unexpected academic difficulties, particularly freshmen who were transitioning into high school and then also had to transition into online coursework, Jenniges said. Credit recovery options can help those students who didn’t pass their classes catch up, in many cases.

Other students are grieving other kinds of losses, such as the seniors who missed out on the traditions of their final year in high school because large gatherings weren’t allowed.

Many of last year’s struggles were about the routines and structures of ordinary school time vanishing; this year, the students have had to readjust to the return of those routines and structures, Swinea said. That means getting to school on time every day.

Not all families had the same resources for dealing with COVID-19 either. Some students became caregivers to their younger siblings as their parents had to work, Alfson said, and District 518 staff worked to accommodate them too.

“The empathy factor

really moved up,” she added.

She and Jenniges praised teachers for their patience and kindness in helping kids weather the pandemic.

What to watch for

Stress manifests differently in different age groups, but there are a number of behaviors parents, mentors and community members can look for.

Changing behavior can be a sign that a child may be experiencing difficulties. If a student had been getting As and Bs and suddenly brings home Ds and Fs, or if a student’s personality seems to change suddenly, that can be a sign that they’re struggling with stress, Alfson said.

A child might also show that they’re stressed by disengaging in the things they used to do, or by showing more anxiety, particularly social anxiety, agreed Swinea and Jenniges.

Changes in sleep patterns might also be a symptom, Swinea noted.

“It badly affected my mental health, relationships with others (parents, partners, friends), education,” a District 518 senior wrote in the needs assessment.

A junior noted it had made it “hard to focus” on education, and another senior said it “made us go online and I hated it.”

Some age groups were affected in different ways than others. Many preschoolers, for example, are a bit behind with their social skills, such as learning appropriate ways to socialize and show their emotions to others, Alfson said. Generally, the freshman class is a bit immature compared to previous

freshmen, due to similar socialization gaps.

“The structure thing has been huge,” Alfson said, pointing out that many students have had to re-learn what they’re supposed to be doing, and “just how to be in school.”

That can mean that to an observer, a child might seem to be defiant or deliberately misbehaving when “they really just don’t know what to do,” Swinea said.

Silver linings

Though some have had difficulties, sometimes children adapted remarkably well to various pandemic-induced changes. They seemed to do well with face masking, for example.

Other young people took on significant responsibilities during the pandemic.

“We have a lot of students that are young adults,” Swinea said, praising their resilience and their ability to weather change. These students have also grown to understand the importance of self-care and coping skills — and they have empathy, with an understanding of the pandemic’s impact on their parents that made them want to help others.

In turn, the community has rallied around the kids, Jenniges said.

When the pandemic prevented students from celebrating an in-person graduation ceremony, they had a virtual one with a drive-by parade. The community came out to cheer for the kids, celebrating their accomplishments with lawn signs and applause.

“I think if (students are) connected to the community, they feel that support,” Alfson said.

“Hopefully they know.”

At least some students certainly did.

“(COVID-19) has made me grateful for the people I have in my life,” one District 518 senior wrote in the needs assessment. “It has affected my high school experience, but it wasn’t that bad, because I didn’t mind learning from home. Being independent made me more accountable for managing my time properly.”

A different normal

In 2021, students returned to school in person, and while COVID-19 is still around, they are “returning to a different normal,” Jenniges said.

District 518 has done a number of things in order to help students deal with the stress of COVID. It adopted “Character Strong,” a social-emotional learning curriculum, and students now have a designated advisor for all four years of high school. The district has also increased mental health staffing levels, adding three school counselors. There are even “Mental Health Mondays” emails sent out on mental health-related

topics, such as depression, sleep and cyber bullying, and “Words of Wisdom Wednesdays” for positive quotes.

The school even put up a “virtual calming room,” where parents, students and the public can access it on the District 518 website, on the Learning Center’s page.

To help students struggling with basic necessities, Worthington High School started a wellness room, where kids can get donated shampoo, deodorant, conditioner, winter gloves, socks and other necessities. Items are donated by District 518 staff, but the public can contribute as well by contacting Alfson or Swinea.

The biggest thing that parents can do to help children weather the pandemic, though, is to just talk to them about it, Jenniges said.

“It might be a tough conversation, but you’ve got to have that communication,” Swinea added.

As one ninth-grader wrote: “It’s been hard, but no one goes through their life without a challenge or two!”

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