

AN ECHO PRESS EDITORIAL

Survey shows need for mental health support

As disruptive as the pandemic was during the 2020-21 school year, students still learned and accomplished academic goals – more than some initially thought.

According to a University of Minnesota analysis of the new Minnesota Safe Learning Survey, the extent of how much coursework was perceived to be higher than the spring of 2020, but lower than pre-pandemic times.

The statewide survey of 10,500 educators, families and students was conducted in May and June. The goal was to provide a broad picture of how those most impacted by the state's Safe Learning Plan actually experienced it in practice.

Here are some major points from the study, as cited by university leaders.

Support is needed for mental health

When asked to name their top three challenges during the school year, educators in all roles including administrators, teachers and support professionals, cited “taking care of my own mental health” and “supporting student mental health” as their top challenges. Families and students reported mental health support as their third greatest challenge. These findings were the same in the winter 2021 survey.

“The most salient finding between the Winter and Spring Safe Learning Surveys was that educators, families and students are concerned about mental health,” said Katie Pekel, the principal in residence at the University of Minnesota. “As we prioritize our return to school planning, this is a finding that cannot be overlooked.”

Learning occurred

As in winter, all three groups surveyed – students, educators and parents – felt that learning did occur during the 2020-21 school year. However, as grade levels increased, families felt that their students were learning less. Additionally, all groups continued to believe there was

more learning taking place pre-COVID and that more learning occurred this school year than spring 2020 when the state shifted entirely to distance learning.

Student engagement shows mixed results

While findings suggested that there were successes in student engagement, researchers also found challenges. Teachers reported “engaging students in learning” as their third-highest challenge, while students reported that “keeping up with my school work” and “understanding my school work” were their top two challenges. This may indicate that there were successes in reaching surface levels of learning during the 2020-21 school year, but challenges in achieving the support needed for deeper engagement in learning.

Moving forward

The Spring Minnesota Safe Learning Survey added questions related to support needed moving forward. All respondent groups reported mental health and engagement among their top concerns and reported a desire to return to in-person schooling as much as possible. Educators discussed school infrastructure needs, including a more manageable workload and more funding, staffing and resources. Students generally desired changes that would help them feel less stressed and worry less about their grades, including a more manageable workload and more meaningful assignments. Family respondents, who largely expressed frustration with COVID-19 restrictions, reported their top concerns as student social interactions and relationships and students being behind academically.

Read the full report of the spring Minnesota Safe Learning Survey at <https://www.cehd.umn.edu/research/safe-learning-survey/> The survey will be distributed to districts across Minnesota one final time, from October to November 2021.

LETTER

Evansville works hard to keep a friendly, growing community

To the editor: To say that I was shocked and heavily saddened by the letter to the editor printed in the Echo Press on Friday, Sept. 3 regarding the cleanliness of Evansville's City Hall would be an understatement. In a time when the world is trying to encourage kindness, it's sad to think that someone would write such an unkind and false letter to a newspaper.

I checked with our highly qualified city staff and they have not had anyone, that they recall, stop by since we opened back up to inquire about property. One needs to ask why you would do so when our city has a Realtor whose information was posted by any lots or property available? One also needs to ask how you saw a door which said, “employee's only” and people in the clerk's office at the same time? Because, if the door was open, the sign would be on the side against the wall and not able to be seen.

As a city councilwoman in Evansville, I am proud of my community and the friendly people that live and work here. Evansville has had many new businesses move in or begin recently and hosted two events with the Central Lakes Trail Association where people from around the nation visited. We had a fantastic Fourth of July celebration and have an active Arts Center, Historical Foundation. We hosted a Storyteller at our school's open house from Virginia who was amazed at all Evansville had maintained, developed and currently offered. Like many small towns, we are working hard to keep a friendly and growing community.

I hope all who read the previous letter to the editor will come visit our community. I believe you will see for yourself that the Storyteller from Virginia was correct and not this person from Maple Plain who doesn't seem to exist in any online search conducted.

**Deb Berry
Evansville City Council member**

1996: Ultimate skating center hits a snag

This Week in 1996 – 25 years ago: Plans to combine two Alexandria ice rinks into an “ultimate skating center” hit a rough patch when bids for the project came in at just over \$450,000 – \$100,000 higher than expected. The Alexandria City Council approved the skating center plan back in June. The project would connect the city's Runestone Community Center with the Alexandria Area Hockey Association's new west rink. While expressing strong support, the council decided to defer the bids for two weeks and try to come up with a way to cover the extra costs.

1971, 50 years ago: Stan Kaess, Principal of the Evansville High School, was selected by a county committee as the Outstanding School Administrator of Douglas County. Stan represented the county at the School Administrators Recognition Day at the 1971 Minnesota State Fair. The Board of Directors of the Minnesota School Board Association and the Minnesota State Fair Board were sponsors... It wasn't the middle of the winter, but a snowmobile show was held at the Alexandria State Bank parking lot with nearly all dealers represented. Included in the show was a drawing for a snowmobile suit which was won by Wayne Whiting.

1996, 25 years ago: In preparation for the upcoming primary and general elections, Harvey Tewes conducted an election process class with about 50 election judges throughout the county. As in previous years,



RACHEL BARDUSON
Observations from the Archives

Tewes emphasized the importance of adhering scrupulously to the state guidelines, especially during the ballot-counting process, adding that paper ballots must always be counted into stacks of 25... Productive Alternatives, a non-profit corporation with a branch in Alexandria, is helping area residents with a variety of disabilities find jobs in the community. Headquartered in Fergus Falls, the corporation also has branches in Little Falls, Moorhead, Parkers Prairie and Perham. Community Service Coordinator, Lynette Holtberg, said Productive Alternatives was established to promote the social welfare of people with disabilities through vocational and rehabilitative training... Luree Lybeck is about to begin her 70th year of subscribing to the newspaper. Lybeck grew up on a farm near Union Lake, where she developed her fondness for reading the Echo Press, then called the Lake Region Echo. Since then, she has seen many transitions, including the unification of the Lake Region Echo, the Lake Region Press and the Lake Region Shopping Guide.

2011, 10 years ago: Walking and bicycling to Lincoln Elementary School in Alexandria will soon be safer. The Minnesota Department of Transportation

reported that Alexandria's application to receive a \$268,432 grant through “Safe Routes to School” program was approved. The project calls to build sidewalks on both sides of 12th Avenue, and as a second priority, on the south side of 13th Avenue between Lark and Elm Street. The plan also includes 6 new street lights, 20 stop signs, crosswalks, crossing guard areas and other improvements designed to improve safety and encourage walking and biking.

Just for fun – 1971 – 50 years ago: Alexandria's Garden Center has scheduled a grand opening for its newly remodeled and expanded bowling facilities. Now hailed as the largest and finest bowling center between the Twin Cities and Fargo, Garden Center boasts 20 fully automatic lanes plus a complete Pro Shop. LeRoy Meyer, owner, will also start several new bowling events. He's also offering Gold Bond Stamps as gifts for bowling achievements.

Sports Trivia 1971 – 50 years ago: The 1971 Jefferson High School football cheerleaders are Pat Fitzgerald, Pat Klein, Carla Solum, Anne Nodland, Mary Jo Fladwood, Lynn Boysen, Terri Wienk and Kim Haaven... 1996 – 25 years ago: Hal Miller, former Alexandria athlete and graduate, has begun his 19th season as head girls tennis coach at Willmar High School this fall. Miller has had a most successful career while at WHS.

Rachel Barduson of Alexandria is a regular contributing columnist to the Echo Press Opinion page.

COMMENTARY

Many aspects to consider on Biden's vaccine mandate

By State Rep. Paul Anderson, R-Starbuck

Last week's speech by President Joe Biden dealing with vaccine mandates for upwards of 80 million Americans has further divided our country, which is the last thing we need. Forcing companies with over 100 workers to use vaccination as a condition of employment is a major step, one that many view as unconstitutional. Vaccination should be a personal choice, with decisions made in the context of what's best for me and my family.

Full disclosure here: I've been vaccinated. Because of a respiratory condition I have, it was an easy choice for me. I had two doses of the Moderna vaccine back in late winter/early spring with no complications except for feeling a bit lethargic the day after the second shot.

I think we are being given mixed signals about how serious this second round of COVID-19 actually is. College and professional football teams are starting their seasons playing to capacity crowds of 60-70,000 fans, many of whom are not wearing masks. Major concerts are being held once again, and we just concluded our Minnesota State Fair, and while attendance was down, it was still over one million.

Early on, we were told that once we reached the 70-percent level of vaccination, we would be OK because of “herd immunity.” We are now there, both at the state and national levels, but there is little talk of that anymore. Having said that, I realize this is a difficult situation, one where we're still learning how to combat this virus.

This latest push to mandate vaccination is a heavy lift. It will affect 80 million workers, in addition to another 17 million working in health care facilities that receive federal Medicare or Medicaid dollars. On top of that, add another one million who do contract work with the federal government.

Only one state so far, Montana,

has a law making it illegal for private employers to mandate vaccination as a condition of employment. Precedent, however, says that federal rules overstep state law. How state and federal rules interact with each other will be a major issue as this moves forward.

Just how is this going to play out? The Biden administration is putting enforcement of the vaccine mandate in the hands of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration. They are drafting the rule which will probably not be finished for several weeks. One thing said so far by the agency is that fines could be “quite significant” for refusing to follow the rule.

Even after the rule has been formulated, in all likelihood, it will be challenged in court. South Dakota, for example, is preparing a lawsuit against the proposed mandate. These challenges will probably wind up at the Supreme Court so it could be weeks or even months before this issue is settled.

One key element to any rule developed involves exemptions for those who have religious or medical issues with vaccinations. Another is how to handle those who work exclusively from home. Are they mandated to get the shot, even if they never go into the office? What about those who have already had Covid-19 and have antibodies in their system? Then there's the issue of workers at large companies leaving and going to work at a competing company that doesn't hit the 100-employee threshold. And what about a company with just over the threshold number letting workers go in an effort to get below the 100 mark?

Another major concern is the health care industry. Already critically short of workers, what will happen if any number of nurses or other staff leave because of a mandate? We have great health care in this country, but it's the people doing the work, many times in difficult and overworked situations, that give us that care. We can't afford to lose any of them!