

Kettle Run teacher reinstated after suspension

Shelly Norden, former school board candidate, transferred to Fauquier High

By Robin Earl
TIMES STAFF WRITER

Kettle Run High School English and journalism teacher Shelly Norden, who ran unsuccessfully for the Fauquier County School Board, said she was escorted out of the school on Nov. 25 and placed on administrative leave for “harassment of colleagues.” She said it was because of a social media post.

Norden said she met on Monday, Dec. 16, with human resources representatives and was told that she could return to the classroom after the holiday break – but she would be reporting to Fauquier High School as an English teacher without any journalism classes.

Norden said, “This new teaching assignment removes me from teaching what I love -- journalism. I’ve been teaching journalism for 15 years ...”

Harassment allegation

Norden said her suspension had its roots in her bid for the Scott District school board seat, which she lost to incumbent Suzanne Sloane.

Norden said that on Election Day, a disparaging remark had been posted about her and she reposted it with the original poster’s name. The original writer, she claimed, is a school division employee.

Two weeks after the election, Norden said she was accused of harassment because of the post and placed on administrative leave.

Norden’s suspension did not go unnoticed by county officials.

In a Dec. 6 letter addressed to school board members and Superintendent of Schools David Jeck, Board of Supervisors Chairman Chris Butler wrote on behalf of the entire board of supervisors, “... the Board of Supervisors members wish to state their concern and request assurances that any process initiated against Ms. Norden is fair and just and will be conducted in full accordance with appropriate school processes and policies and is not in retribution for activities associated with Ms. Norden’s candidacy for school board. In addition, the Board of Supervisors members wish to express their concern that all allegations regarding activities on the part of Ms. Norden or activities on the part of other teachers or employees of a similar nature are also appropriately investigated and treated in a similar fashion.”

In a follow-up email to the *Fauquier Times*, Butler said, “I, along with the other board members had numerous constituents reach out to us asking why a teacher with a stellar record and tenure be suspended for a social media post. The board agreed we’d reach out in writing to ask that the process be transparent and fair.”

The School Board responded to the letter with one of its own, signed by Jeck. The Dec. 9 letter acknowledged the communication from the supervisors and stated, “Matters re-



SHELLY NORDEN

lated to school division employees are personnel matters and, per policy, school division employees and board members are not at liberty to discuss. Please know that all employee issues are handled with care and in accordance with school board policies and procedures.”

School division officials and school board members also declined to comment to the *Times* on Norden’s suspension, emphasizing that they are unable to respond to questions about personnel matters.

Lillie Grimsley, entertainment editor for Kettle Run’s student newspaper, *The Chronicle*, said that journalism classes have been taught by substitute teachers since Norden was

placed on administrative leave. The class, Grimsley said, “has not been a learning environment. We work really hard to produce a paper. We try to do the best we can, but without a faculty advisor, it’s difficult. If we have questions about our writing, there is no one to ask.”

Both the journalism classes and the photojournalism classes are full-year subjects, and both had been taught by Norden.

Kettle Run Principal Meaghan Brill confirmed that the journalism program will continue at the school. As of Dec. 27, there was an English teacher position opening listed at Kettle Run but no mention of journalism classes in the listing.

Grimsley said that she and her fellow student journalists are concerned and would like to see Norden return to Kettle Run. “No one could teach us like she does.”

Citizens Time

During Citizens Time at the last two school board meetings, several residents have spoken in harsh terms about the administration’s treatment of teachers. At the Dec. 9 meeting, Denise Schefer claimed, “Teachers do not feel valued. They do not have an avenue to address complaints.” She pleaded with the school board to “give teachers a voice.”

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Students speak about Kettle Run’s journalism program

Several students – past and present -- praised Kettle Run High School’s journalism program.

Emma Gray, editor-in-chief of Kettle Run High School’s student newspaper, *The Chronicle*, remembers, “I entered the [journalism] program as a freshman and I instantly fell in love. The program has given me opportunities such as covering issues and topics that are important to me and the student body.

“It has also granted me the opportunity to attend some pretty amazing experiences that I would never have been able to go to, such as the U.S. Senate visit to watch the ‘Willie’ premiere and to meet Mr. O’Ree himself,” Gray said of Willie O’Ree, the National Hockey League’s first black player. Kettle Run journalism students were invited to watch the documentary about him when it was shown in the Senate.

Gray, a senior, added, “It’s a [journalism] program that is very near and dear to my heart and it needs to be valued by all.”

Erin Hogge, a journalism and history major at Penn State University, was the editor-in-chief of *The Chronicle* during her senior year at Kettle Run (2017-2018). She said, “... I’ve taken a couple of journalism courses at Penn State that have taught me topics I had already learned in Mrs. (Shelly) Norden’s class, which has helped me excel beyond my peers. ... She taught me skills like professionalism and leadership, rather than skills needed solely to pass an exam.”

Hogge remembered, “My senior year, a few other staff members — as well as the editor-in-chief of the yearbook, *The Prowl* — and I attended the Virginia High School League media championship where our newspaper staff won First Class (the second-highest distinction) for the paper and Trophy Class (the highest distinction) for our news website. The first time the publication won Trophy Class (equivalent to winning a state championship) was 2015-2016, my sophomore year and first year taking journalism. The yearbook staff also won First Class ...”

Also in 2016, Norden was named Kettle Run’s Teacher of the Year and VFW Teacher of the Year.

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“The Firm To See”

Shelly Norden, former school board candidate, transferred to Fauquier High

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She said that teachers need an impartial third party to report complaints to because their grievances are not being addressed, before adding, "Take Shelly Norden off administrative leave."

The campaign for school board

Norden ran her campaign for school board on a platform that claimed teachers are not respected. She was outspoken – in person and

on social media -- about the fact that her fellow educators were afraid to speak up when they saw problems with administration and that they felt undervalued. She said teachers felt they had no impartial party to talk to when they had an issue.

If Norden had been elected to the school board, she would have had to give up her teaching position.

Sloane won her seat for a second term with 1,866 votes to candidate Mike Hammond's 1,825 and Nor-

den's 1,694, according to returns from the Virginia Department of Elections.

The campaign was contentious up to Election Day, Nov. 5, when some voters were handed sample ballots that were marked for Sloane, indicating she was the candidate endorsed by the GOP. The local Republican Party did not endorse anyone in the race, and its official sample ballot showed no endorsement.

Commonwealth's Attorney Scott Hook said Dec. 27 that the sample ballot question is under investigation by his office. He said he expects the investigation to be wrapped up "within a week or two."

Bullying among faculty

School Board member Brian Gorg (Center District) said at the Dec. 12 personnel committee meeting that bullying among staff members needs to be addressed.

He asked, "What is our policy? We have had more complaints about it, and I think it is on the rise ... Do other divisions have more rigorous policies?"

He added, "Our lack of policies doesn't help HR deal with specific problems when they come up if we leave things fairly gray."

He acknowledged that since it was his last meeting as a member of the school board, he is looking to the new board to address the policy. "It is a very long-term issue ... I realize

I won't be here, but ... Your brand is your people. When we don't treat each other properly, we are setting ourselves up for a problem."

In response to questions about Gorg's comments, Tara Helkowski, school division spokesman, wrote, "As discussed in the personnel meeting, we're reviewing current policies and language."

Recently elected School Board member Susan Pauling declined to comment on the situation regarding Norden, but wrote in an email, "I do believe bullying is an issue for some of our students and school employees. Collectively, we need to continue educating our community about the dangers of bullying and trauma

"I also believe we have to start the conversation as to why some teachers feel isolated and unheard. We owe it to our teachers and school staff to be available and approachable if assistance is needed navigating a difficult working relationship. This shouldn't be seen as an overstep of power, but a reinforcement that the school board wants to see all employees thrive in our school system.

"There have been a lot of ideas presented on how we can better serve our staff. I know in the months to come we have a lot of work to do to improve communication and morale for all our employees."

Reach Robin Earl at rearl@fauquier.com

PUBLIC SAFETY

16-year-old driver arrested after high-speed chase Christmas Eve

After leading a Fauquier County Sheriff's Office deputy on a high-speed chase on Christmas Eve, a 16-year-old driver was arrested and charged with reckless driving, felony eluding law enforcement, providing false ID to law enforcement, no driver's license, altered VIN, improper vehicle registration, failing to register a vehicle and no insurance.

Sgt. James Hartman, FCSO spokesman, said that a deputy traveling north on U.S. 29/Eastern Bypass outside of Warrenton encountered a vehicle that he said was driving recklessly. At 9:22 p.m. the deputy conducted a traffic stop on the black Dodge truck with out-of-state tags, but as the deputy approached the truck's driver, he sped off.

Hartman said the truck drove through the median and proceeded southbound on U.S. 29, driving fast and weaving in and out of traffic. A deputy successfully deployed a spike strip device in the Opal area in an attempt to end the pursuit, but the truck drove over the device and continued southbound. Hartman said the driver failed to negotiate the turn at the Opal interchange and drove off the roadway.

Hartman added that the truck continued to drive through a field for 100 yards until the vehicle became stuck. The driver attempted to move the truck backward and forward while deputies commanded him to stop. The driver was able to move the truck again for approximately another 150 yards, when he stopped and fled on foot.

With assistance from the Virginia State Police, FCSO deputies quickly established a perimeter around the scene and the driver was taken into custody a short time later on Avatar Way off of Opal Road. The driver is from Madison Heights, Virginia, Hartman said. He was being held in a regional juvenile detention facility.

Five men charged after AR-15 bullet strikes Christmas tree in Fauquier home Dec. 28

Four 19-year-old men and a 20-year-old man were arrested Saturday after Fauquier County sheriff's deputies retrieved a bullet from a .223-caliber AR-15 rifle that struck a window and a Christmas tree inside a home in the Brookside neighbor-

hood outside Warrenton.

Deputies were called to a home on Tucan Court in Brookside at 3:07 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 28, after a caller reported he heard a noise in his living room and then discovered a bullet had pierced his window and struck his Christmas tree, according to Sgt. James Hartman, spokesman for the Fauquier County Sheriff's Office.

A deputy retrieved what appeared to be a .223-caliber bullet from inside the home, Hartman said.

The sheriff's office investigation led to a residence on Rogues Road near Redturn Lane in Fauquier County; the residence is located behind Tucan Court but several hundred yards away through a wooded area.

Deputies discovered five men who had been shooting a .223-caliber, AR-15 style rifle. The rifle and magazine were located during the investigation, Hartman said.

The deputies investigated the area where the men were shooting the high-caliber rifle and found they were using a backstop, but that the backstop was likely insufficient for the type of rifle being used, Hartman said.

"The round they fired appeared to have traveled several hundred yards," Hartman said. "But it doesn't appear that any of this was intentional."

Robert Lee Barr, 19, of Warrenton; Robert Lee Culler III, 19, of Warrenton; Travis Joseph Brown, 19, of Nokesville; Isaac Justin Brooks, 19, of The Plains, and Trevor Joseph Dezutti, 20, of Sanford, North Carolina were arrested and charged with reckless handling of a firearm, a Class 1 misdemeanor, in connection with the incident, Hartman said.

The incident is one of 167 calls the sheriff's office has responded to in 2019 regarding the suspicious discharge of a firearm, Hartman said.

The incident underscores the importance of knowing local ordinances and state laws that apply to the safe, recreational use of firearms. Those who use firearms also need to use proper backstops and know what lies beyond the property where they are firing, Hartman said.

"Know the local ordinances, applicable laws and know your backstop and beyond," Hartman said. "The safety of everyone is paramount."

Anyone who would like to report a similar incident or has information about the Saturday, Dec. 28 incident is encouraged to contact the Sheriff's Office at 540-347-3300.



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A man and two women charged in Warrenton homicide



EMILY RACE

One suspect still at large

Two women and a man have been charged in the shooting death of Fabian Sosa and the wounding of two other men in Warrenton, according to Interim Warrenton Police Chief Tim Carter. One of the suspects is still at large and is considered armed and dangerous.

Sosa, 27, of Warrenton, was found shot to death in an apartment on Jackson Street Wednesday morning. Two other men were found suffering from life-threatening gunshot wounds after police were summoned to the apartment complex by neighbors, who reported yelling and gunshots at 4 a.m. on Jan. 8.

Warrenton Town Manager Brandie

Schaeffer said the two injured men are still hospitalized.

Carter said that detectives have charged three individuals with one felony each as a result of the continuing investigation:

- Makoya Denham, 21, of Detroit, Michigan, is charged with accessory to murder

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Kettle Run gamers take it up a level with esports

By Robin Earl
TIMES STAFF WRITER

In this particular quarterfinal high school match, there were no emotional moments of helmet bumping or end zone celebrations. No uniforms or bleachers, either, and no running or jumping. The only balls were one-dimensional. -- on screens in front of the players.



TIMES STAFF PHOTO/ROBIN EARL
Coach Kurt Mergen and player Felipe Gutierrez talk strategy. Gutierrez is a member of Kettle Run's second-tier team. He was present during the quarterfinals match to support the team.

During the first match of the VHSL-sponsored esports playoffs at Kettle Run Thursday, Jan. 9, the atmosphere was decidedly understated, but there were moments that elicited cheers. Not long after the opening bell of the first Rocket League match, two Kettle Run teammates crashed their cars, catching a giant ball between them. The ball was squeezed tight; under the pressure it shot clear across the playing field. It was unclear whether the move was the result of clever strategy or a happy accident, but either way, it was apparently a good thing. A rare moment of celebration broke out in room 204.

The celebration was predictive. The Kettle Run squad won the match and is headed to the state tournament at Shenandoah University on Jan. 18.

See **ESPORTS**, page 4



Warrenton group sews comfort for Australian animals

Ruby Wrigley models the wallaby swing, created for the small kangaroo look-alike to hang out in.

TIMES STAFF PHOTO/ROBIN EARL

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Citizens of the year honored

By James Ivancic
TIMES STAFF WRITER

This year's presentation of the Fauquier Citizen of Year awards honored a family that's run a business for 200 years, a nonprofit that rescues and cares for animals, a citizen advocate for better transportation and the recently retired commissioner of revenue for the county.

The awards each year goes to a person or an organization chosen by each the five supervisors for service in their district.

Present at the Jan. 9 supervisors meeting to receive their award were members of the Stribling family of Stribling Orchard in Markham, nominated by Marshall District Supervisor Mary Leigh McDaniel; Devon Settle and Dr. Elizabeth Krause of the Fauquier SPCA selected by Cedar Run Supervisor Rick Gerhardt; Peter Eltringham, a member of the Fauquier Transportation Committee, chosen by Scott District Supervisor Holder Trumbo, and Ross D'Urso, the county's commissioner of revenue until his retirement on Dec. 31, who was nominated by Lee District Supervisor Chris Butler.

The honoree from the Center District chosen by Supervisor Chris Granger will be announced and receive the award at the February supervisors meeting.

"This is really a family affair,"

said McDaniel, as she invited five members of the Stribling family to come forward. McDaniel, who was voted chairperson of the board for 2020 by her fellow supervisors earlier in the day, noted the Stribling family has been in business for two centuries.

She recounted some of the history of Stribling Orchard, which exported apples to far away Europe and England, then started a pick-your-own operation after World War II that continues to this day. Stribling Orchard also sells baked and canned goods.

"This really is a family endeavor," said Stacia Stribling. "As a native New Yorker, I don't think I had any idea what the future held." She said that both she and her husband, Rob, have other careers, but feel that it's important to keep the orchard business going.

Gerhardt spoke about the work of the Fauquier SPCA in Casanova, a private nonprofit organization that provides shelter for neglected and abused animals, runs an adoption service, provides spaying and neutering and behavioral training.

"I think many of us in this room have been fortunate enough to adopt a beloved pet from the SPCA, including my family – many times," Gerhardt said.

Devon Settle, executive director of the SPCA, said the award was



PETER ELTRINGHAM



ROSS D'URSO



TIMES STAFF PHOTOS/JAMES IVANCIC

Stacia, Rob, Mallory, Andrew and Linda Stribling, along with other family members not present, received Citizen of the Year honors to mark the 200 years that Stribling Orchards has been in business.

U.S. 29 and Vint Hill Road.

The problem intersection was a "tough nut to crack" that took years before a workable, cost-effective solution was developed, Trumbo noted.

Eltringham He said the intersection project was tough because of environmental, safety and preservation of history challenges. The project area includes Buckland, the site of a well-known Civil War battle.

D'Urso served six terms as commissioner of revenue and was a deputy commissioner for five years prior to his first term. Butler said D'Urso continues to be involved in the community as a member of the Rotary, plus he's quite a guitarist on the side, Butler added.

D'Urso helped get Gloria's, a concert venue on Main Street in Warrenton, off the ground in 2018 as a member of its board of directors.

"an unexpected honor. I wish there were a lot more names" on the plaque she was given. She cited the work of her "incredible" staff and board of directors.

Trumbo said he first met Eltringham a little more than 12 years ago during his first run for county supervisor.

"One particular fellow kept turning up at campaign events and kept pestering me about what I thought about transportation planning in Fauquier County," said Trumbo.

"I said if you are so interested, come work for me. He got himself appointed to the transportation committee. He has spent a whole lot of time straightening me out on what we should be doing about transportation planning," Trumbo said.

Eltringham is a member of an advisory committee that helped the Virginia Department of Transportation with the intersection project at



DEVON SETTLE AND DR. ELIZABETH KRAUSE

Esports for gamers

ESPORTS, from page 1

Kettle Run esports coach Kurt Mergen said that the school piloted a program in the fall of 2018 with 19 students. That spring, the number doubled. For the fall 2019 season, 47 students were on the roster.

Mergen describes himself as a liaison rather than a coach. "The kids are leading the way; I'm just here to facilitate." He volunteers his time on Tuesdays and Thursdays when the teams meet to practice.

Kettle Run has four teams that play Rocket League (three players each) and League of Legends (three teams of five players each); Liberty High School plays as well, and also has a team that plays the game Smite. Fauquier High students have expressed interest, but there is no esports team there yet, said Mergen.

He said that the goal in esports is to remain calm and collected; concentration and strategy rule.

The skills the players develop, he said, are cerebral. "They learn strategy, decision-making, risk-reward skills. They develop self-evaluation and reflective skills as well. Physically, they develop finely tuned motor skills and reaction time." And because it doesn't matter how tall or how strong a player is, "video games are equalizing."

Mergen also stressed the value of consistent practice. Some students have more than 4,000 hours of game play logged. Mergen said, "This generation of kids, they are told that the things they like to do are bad. The team validates what they are doing; they may be able to develop what they learn here into viable skills – like piloting a drone."

Alex Hohn, 11th-grade Rocket League player, said, "The Kettle Run esports program is very



TIMES STAFF PHOTO/ROBIN EARL

Kettle Run esports team member Alex Hohn gets ready to compete in the league quarterfinals.

innovative ... "Esports provides a legitimate opportunity for friendly competition for students and is almost always an accepting and beneficial environment for students who enjoy competitive video games ..."

He said there is value in "the community and team dynamic that is provided with esports, as well as the opportunity to get better and compete against other schools in a league format."

Senior Rocket League player Michael Dao said, "[the team] gives people ... a feeling of playing on a team for those who don't play sports or do any other extracurriculars that involve teamwork."

Matt McNeil, a senior and a member of the winning Rocket League team, mused, "Being a part of a team consisting of people in real life allows for a more solid relationship. This is not to say online relationships are worthless; however, seeing people in real life comes with a different feel and deeper relationship."

The esports program

Mergen teaches AP calculus and AP comput-

er science classes and has found that some team members sign up for his classes because they know him as the esports coach. "It's not measurable, but it may open them up to new opportunities." He added that video gaming does not directly translate to computer science skills, but many gamers have, out of necessity, become their own tech support.

He said 12 players play on one afternoon, 15 on another. The computers are high-performance machines. Some players use keyboards and mice; others prefer controllers. Mergen said that computers were purchased in components and assembled by the team members.

"That was harrowing," Mergen remembered.

In the future, Dao said, "I would love to see the program ... get a dedicated room for our club and equipment so that we don't have to move our computers from one computer lab to another to play."

McNeil agreed that he'd like to see the team have a dedicated room. "I think this concept -- video games as a competitive sport -- is not taken as seriously as it could be. ... A dedicated room to the esports program ... could provide more awareness to the program ..."

Hohn added, "I would love to see more funding and attention from the school board, and [have] more people try to understand the benefits of esports ..."

Mergen would like to see compensation for teachers who choose to lead esports teams. "Esports is a valuable way to engage kids. Coaches need to be compensated for their efforts."

Mergen is seeing interest in esports surging. At the big tournaments, he said, there are big screens and pageantry and play-by-play broadcasters. He'd like to see the school system continue to support the program as interest grows.

"I haven't had them do gamer yoga yet, but it exists," Mergen said.

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**ELLEN ALLEN
RETIRES:**
COUNTY COACHING
LEGEND LED TEAMS AT
KETTLE RUN, LIBERTY
AND FAUQUIER.
SPORTS, PAGE 13



Teachers: We are ready to rock 100% virtual school year

By Robin Earl
TIMES STAFF WRITER

Parents who discovered on Aug. 10 that school instruction would be delivered 100% virtually because of the COVID-19 pandemic may have found their lives upended – again. The county’s teachers, too, were forced to quickly rethink how to deliver lessons to their students. Fauquier County abandoned its original plan to enlist a hybrid model (some remote and some in-person classes) when it became apparent that the division did not have the workforce to make that happen in 2020.

Students will get some live instruction from their teachers (synchronistic learning); some days they will be given assignments to complete independently (asynchronistic learning).

Classes started Monday, but teachers are easing students into digital learning slowly. Serious instruction is not expected to start until at least next week.

Nicole Goepper, who teaches French at Fauquier High School, said during the school division’s podcast “Now We’re Talking” on Friday that



COURTESY PHOTO

Brittany Hundley teaches third grade at Greenville Elementary.

the last month or so has been an extreme emotional roller coaster. “Last Monday,” she said, “I sensed around here that everybody was a little bit crumbling under the stress. It got really real. I found myself in a low, anxious place.”

She said that she stood up in a leadership meeting and talked of positivity, optimism and enthusiasm for the task in front of them.

“As the words came out of my mouth, I felt my whole mindset flip; I felt a cloud being lifted off Fauquier

Teachers’ children eligible for day care in school buildings

Free child care is available to Fauquier County Public School staff for their children aged 4 to 11 who attend Fauquier County public schools. The child care is being provided by FCPS staff or staff members of Fauquier Community Child Care.

As of Aug. 21, about 96 children were expected to participate, but school spokeswoman Tara Helkowski said the number will probably fluctuate.

Activities during child care will include completion of school assignments and recreational opportunities.

High School. And that’s when ideas began to flow.”

Soon after that experience, she said, she was presented with an opportunity to hold a virtual exchange program with students in France.

It’s one example of how teachers are adapting to the new circumstances. They are relying on training they’ve participated in over the

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Warrenton throws Rev. Winter a birthday parade

By Robin Earl
TIMES STAFF WRITER

The Rev. Dick Winter was lauded by friends and family on Thursday, Aug. 21, as he celebrated his 98th birthday. The pandemic prevented a traditional party, but that didn’t stop his admirers from rolling past his house, honking and cheering all the way.

Bright and shiny trucks from the Warrenton Fire Department were there, as were numerous police vehicles and dozens of friends who wanted to make sure his birthday was happy.

Winter served as pastor of the Warrenton Presbyterian Church from 1951 until 1987. He became active in the community early on, serving as a volunteer fireman and as chaplain of the Warrenton Volunteer

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PHOTO BY CARSON MCRAE/MCRAE VISUAL MEDIA

Steve Ross and Roy Crane of the Warrenton Fire Department stopped by to visit with their friend the Rev. Dick Winter, with whom they served “back in the day.”

45 ‘active’ cases of COVID-19 at Warrenton nursing home

By Robin Earl
TIMES STAFF WRITER

Forty-five people who live or work at Warrenton’s Brookside Nursing and Rehab Center are actively positive for COVID-19 as of Tuesday morning – 35 current residents and 10 employees, according to Beverly Greene, administrator of the facility. The Virginia Department of Health was reporting Tuesday that a total of 48 cases have been associated with the outbreak.

Greene said that three people have been hospitalized; one has returned to Brookside and two are

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Teachers: We are ready to rock 100% virtual school year

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summer and their own creative problem-solving skills. And according to teachers who spoke to the *Fauquier Times* on the subject, they are relying on one another most of all.

Collaboration has been very valuable, said Carrie Limbaugh. She is a math teacher at Liberty High School and also teaches the Teachers for Tomorrow class. She said that the collaboration that teachers share just by being in the same building is invaluable. "We are being very safe, social distancing, but it's been so helpful being able to share ideas."

Brittany Hundley, third-grade teacher at Greenville, agreed, "Having people work together is the only way. It would be hard to collaborate in such a short time if we weren't all in the same place. Everyone has different opinions and skills."

As a guest on the podcast, Hundley said, "We are all learning how to do the same thing at the same time. We are being forced to be risk takers and we have to lean on one another. ... Innovation doesn't happen in isolation."

In a Zoom call with Limbaugh last week, Hundley said she is excited by all the options. "The tools are endless. And more will pop up as we learn." But she cautioned, "Just because something is new and exciting, doesn't mean it's the best tool for teaching third grade."

Hundley pointed out that "being on screen so much is new for most of my kids. Some are shy about it. I have to give them other avenues to be able to speak up." She said that the Google Suite allows for voice to text, for instance, so kids can send her messages rather than speaking up during class.

Amy Fields, instructional coach for the school division, said on the podcast that as a former reading teacher, she knows how important it is to keep young students engaged, "so they want to pay attention and



Carrie Limbaugh teaches math and the Future Teachers of Tomorrow class at Liberty High School.

want to learn." It can be a challenge from a distance. She said teachers learned a lot by teaching summer school.

Jeck said that the summer school program got rave reviews from parents. The difference between what teachers were able to accomplish in the spring and what the fall will look like "is what we did in summer school," he said.

Allyson Martin, who teaches at Brumfield, said on the podcast that she grew as a teacher while teaching summer school. "I'm now able to help my colleagues; I'm very Google-friendly." She said she's been collaborating with educators from other schools as

well. "I'm ready to build relationships with my kids and fill my teacher's heart."

Bill Davidson, engineering/architecture teacher and ISTEM leader at Kettle Run, said, "When [100% virtual learning] was first announced, we all went into our separate cocoons to try to figure it out. Then we started talking to others. Department lunches became important" for collaborating.

He remembered, "I wanted to try a grid on Google Meet but I didn't know how to do it. I had a grid with 25 of us on one screen; trying to figure out how to use it."

He added, "I've had people knock on my door," to ask questions. "We are all learning from each other."

Davidson said his biggest obstacle is software. "We do pretty high-end stuff in here," he said, and the computer-aided design program he uses with his students is not cloud-based; he had to find a different solution. "Then about three days ago, I found a web-based program that looks pretty robust. My biggest challenge



Bill Davidson is an engineering teacher and leader of the ISTEM Academy at Kettle Run High School.

is learning that new software before I have to teach it to the students."

He said he's got a few weeks before he'd be introducing the software to his students. "I'm eager to learn something new."

He wants his students' parents to know, "Don't worry. I got this."

Lisa Mergen, music teacher at Auburn Middle School, said she has had to learn to think outside the box so that she can have her students sing and play together in the digital format. "It's presented an opportunity to bring in guest speakers, composers," she said.

"As the only music teacher in the school, I can feel like an island. But the last couple of weeks, it's been a continuous collaboration among schools — document sharing, resource sharing. It can be overwhelming, but I've never felt like more a part of a team."

She said she's had to rethink the process and her philosophy about teaching. "I'm coming out of this a better teacher."

She enthused, "I'm so excited to get the band back together."

School division considering 'internet cafes' for students with poor connectivity

Although enthusiastic about the ability of local teachers to deliver quality learning opportunities to students remotely, Superintendent of Schools David Jeck admits that connectivity in some parts of the county is a barrier.

The school division has provided hotspots to families that need them, but lots of hotspots are not working well, he acknowledged. "The devices are only as good as the cell service," he said on the school division's podcast "Now We're Talking," on Friday. "Lots of families are telling me their service stinks."

He said the school division is working on a plan to use school buildings as "internet cafes" for students who need them. Children in homes without internet could gather — socially distanced — in the school cafeterias or gymnasiums to do schoolwork that requires a connection.

The superintendent believes children could be accommodated safely, according to Centers for Disease Control guidelines. "The Virginia Department of Health and CDC allow for in-person instruction with certain safeguards," he said. "We are going to have to bite the bullet and do it."

Jeck said he anticipates that more details will be available by the end of the week.

"My biggest challenge is learning the new software before I have to teach it to my students."

BILL DAVIDSON

Hundley admits to feeling overwhelmed sometimes, trying to learn so many new skills so quickly. "This is the most mentally exhausting work I've ever done." She said teachers have been "all hands on deck since March."

When Hundley's 5-year-old ran in to interrupt her Zoom call, it was a reminder that teachers are taking on a lot of new information -- while coping with their own pandemic-disrupted lives.

Limbaugh encourages parents to model optimism about virtual learning. "[Students'] feelings about learning are reflective of their parents. If you are excited about this challenge, they will be too. ... This is a chance to develop innovative learners, in charge of their own learning. That's what we want."

Davidson said he thinks FCPS teachers are ready. "I'm stoked. I don't think it's going to be a big problem at all. I think that everyone I'm looking at on screen is on their game."

Reach Robin Earl at rearl@fauquier.com



Matt Walker, civics/geometry teacher at Taylor Middle School, said he was worried about having to communicate with his students on a screen. "I thought I couldn't be engaging." He has learned that with a laptop on wheels, he can break his lessons into segments in different parts of his classroom to keep kids interested.

Teacher takes super-sized approach to remote learning

Google-certified middle school educator connects with students

By Robin Earl
TIMES STAFF WRITER

Since in-person meet-the-teacher gatherings are off the table during the pandemic, language arts teacher Cathleen Beachboard introduced herself to her students via a homemade video. In the missive she appears as a flying superhero, making a smooth landing in front of Taylor Middle School.

She tells students that she's a Star Wars fan and an Edgar Allan Poe aficionado – and she hates to read. “I have dyslexia,” she explains in the video, “so it's hard for me. But I do it anyway. Sometimes we have to do things that are hard for you. It makes you a better person.”

In addition to teaching middle school English, Beachboard is mother to seven children, a part-time education consultant and Google-certified educator, so the whole superhero thing may not be a stretch. And she's working on her second book. (Her first was called “10 Keys to Student Empowerment.”)

Like other Fauquier County teachers facing a fall semester of 100% virtual teaching, Beachboard has been preparing to make the most of the new format. She has extensive experience in teaching remotely but realizes that internet-based teaching can be intimidating – for teachers, students and parents alike.

Beachboard invited parents and students into her virtual classroom last week. Using Google Classroom, she showed attendees how to use the “chat box,” how to schedule an appointment with her and where to find e-books to read; she gave a tour of some of the resources they'll use to complete their assignments.

To start the meeting, Beachboard took a poll to see how many were feeling excited about virtual learning; it was a way to demonstrate one tool she'll use to get instant feedback from students.

Beachboard also explained Remind, a texting app for exchanging messages with students -- and parents -- in real time.

“Emoji Desk” allows each student to have a virtual desk where they'll write essays and complete journal entries. It's also where their teacher will leave links to educational resources and video feedback on their writing assignments.

How does Beachboard have time to record video responses to every assignment for each child? Actually, she said, it's faster than typing out her comments. “I turn on the camera while I'm reading and give in-depth feedback that way,” she said.

Beachboard created Emoji Desk herself; when she shared it with other teachers through her Twitter feed (@cathleenbeachbd), she said, “It went viral.”

Recognizing that children learn from one another, Beachboard will be able to set up small groups of students through Google Meet so they can collaborate. “Kids speak kid-talk. They understand each other.” She'll be able to pop in and out of those meetings to offer suggestions.

And everything is recorded, so if a child wants to review what happened in the “classroom” on a particular day, they can review those recordings.

Parents will get a weekly report with grades, complete with time stamps. “Everything is completely transparent,” said the teacher.

“When they need my help, I'll be there. If there is a problem, I can swoop in and save the day.”

CATHLEEN BEACHBOARD

Objective: I know I am successful when I can work with a group to creatively problem solve and make a persuasive sales pitch to sell the solution.

Agenda:

[The Lottery](#)

[Who am I?](#)

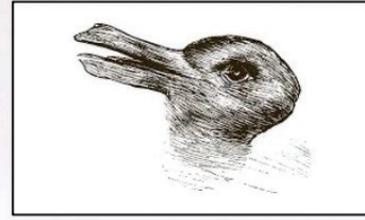
A video to motivate your child

Check-IN

Warm up: Write a bad idea for a restaurant at your desk.

Class: [Record a motivating message for your child](#)

Group work- [Fixing a problem and selling](#)



→ Ethos
Pathos
Logos

How I'm doing:

Red
Help!



Shelby



Yellow
Maybe
help.

Green
I got
this.

Warm up response:

A bad ideas is that iwo ouwid b

Paper for lesson: peter?

During her meet-the-teacher sessions, Beachboard also introduced a couple of free tools that could be helpful. Immersive Reader, for instance, will read a highlighted passage out loud. It will even help students in their home language if they are not native English speakers.

An app Beachboard recommended will translate longhand writing to typed text. She explained, “They just take a photo with their phone and it sends the text to their google drive.”

She said, “We don't want the kids to be in front of a screen all day. They can take a break from the computer and write their assignment out longhand, then put it in the app and upload it later.”

Connectivity

Beachboard understands that even families with solid Wi-Fi will have a problem if too many people are trying to connect to the internet at the same time. She encourages parents to set up a Google Meet with all their children – and anyone who might be working from home -- in different rooms. The test will let them know the limits of their bandwidth. She said that even though she has reliable internet at her house, when the whole family is logged on, her Wi-Fi can't keep up.

She recommends that students with limited connectivity use a special phone number to call in to class. The slides on the screen take up very little bandwidth, so using the phone for audio is a great solution, she said.

Her kindergartner needs to have audio and video together to stay engaged, but “my senior can handle calling in,” she said.

Beachboard suggested other workarounds for children whose internet service is subpar. Students can download a week's worth of resources before classes begin each Monday – from a Starbucks or from the parking lot of their school. “When they come to class, they already have what



COURTESY PHOTO

Cathleen Beachboard is a language arts teacher at Taylor Middle School.

they need,” she said.

Beachboard emphasized that she is such a big fan of virtual learning because she is able to tailor lessons for each child. In one-on-one calls with students every Wednesday, they will set goals for the week. “I want every child to grow according to their abilities. I want to help them be the best version of themselves.”

This individualized approach means that Beachboard needs to know how her kids are doing – academically and emotionally. The first tool the students see when they log in is a “check-in” that asks them how they are feeling and what problems they might be having.

She said, “If a child's parents are sick and they have to take care of a younger sibling, they are not going to be able to participate in the same way. If they are having internet problems, I need to know that so I can address it.”

Even on days when the students are working independently, said Beachboard, “I'm still the biggest tool they have. When they need my help, I'll be there. If there is a problem, I can swoop in and save the day.”

Reach Robin Earl at rearl@fauquier.com

Emoji Desk, created by Cathleen Beachboard, is an individualized space where children can work and interact with their teacher.