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Laconia High School principal Mike Fredericksen monitors the corridor as students leave the cafeteria. (Adam Drapcho/The Laconia Daily Sun)

Laconia schools strive to make connections

By RICK GREEN
THE LACONIA DAILY SUN

LACONIA — At Laconia High School, faculty members once gathered to look at a board with a picture of every student.

The goal was to ensure every student had an adult in the building they

trusted and could go to if there was a problem — part of a range of programs in the district to give children a greater chance for success.

Students often face problems outside the classroom that can interfere with their ability to learn, said McKenzie Harrington-Bacote, grants administrator with the district's

Office of Student Wellness.

She and Superintendent Brendan Minnihan participated in a public meeting at the state Education Department in Concord this week, where they talked about helping students with emotional, personal, intellectual, physical, environmental, occupational and social factors that

affect their ability to learn.

Relationship-building

One key is ensuring students have an adult they can talk to when they are having trouble.

“We know intrinsically that all the see **SCHOOLS** page 9

Parking-space beef leads, eventually, to eviction from park

By THOMAS P. CALDWELL
THE LACONIA DAILY SUN

GILFORD — From an attorney's perspective, the decision to evict a low-income resident who has failed to follow the rules is a simple case to prove on its merits. The evictee, however, has a different perspective, and so does his boss.

“Sometimes people don't know their rights and how to help themselves,” said Marc Bourgeois, a partner

see **EVICITION** page 7



Edward Matthews has been evicted from his mobile home, center, over a dispute that began with the loss of a parking space in front of his home. (Tom Caldwell/The Laconia Daily Sun)

Bill Tobin was a man of many tools, talents

By THOMAS P. CALDWELL
THE LACONIA DAILY SUN

SANBORNTON — Many will recall William “Bill” Tobin as a man committed to his community, serving on multiple local boards and organizations. Others will recall his service as a state representative who, although a died-in-the-wool Republican, worked across the aisle with the Democrats to produce effective legislation. Still others recall his sense of humor while serving as an auctioneer at benefits for Boy Scouts, the New Hampshire



TOBIN

see **TOBIN** page 4

A pedicure of a different kind

see *On the Farm*, page 17



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Relationship-building is key school strategy to engage students

SCHOOLS from page 1

research shows that for kids to be successful, they need to have one adult who they are connected with in a relationship of trust, someone they can go to," she said in an interview Wednesday.

Relationship-building reduces the alienation that can lead to school dropouts, discipline problems or worse.

"We don't want a child to not feel safe in our building," Harrington-Bacote said. "Research the federal government has done into school shootings show a lot of it involved students who weren't happy in the school building. There was alienation."

At the middle school level in Laconia, there is a "check-in, check-out system," in which there is an adult in the building specifically connected to a student.

In the morning, the adult may ask the student, "How was your morning? How was your night? What is your day going to look like?"

At the end of the day, the questions could be, "How did it go? How was your day?"

'We Connect'

At Pleasant Street Elementary School, there is a "We Connect" program.

It's a mentoring and confidence-building effort in which a teacher works with a group of 10 to 12 students who are not in the teacher's normal class.

"The students say it's the best time of the week," Harrington-Bacote said. "There are no discipline problems. The kids are engaged with what they are doing."

"They learn about acts of kindness, brain science, mindfulness, arts and crafts, projects for the building and community, different things they want to learn, decision-making skills, anger-management skills, dealing with grief. Whatever makes sense for that group is what they are doing."

Later, if a child gets sent to the office for a discipline problem, he or she has the option of talking to his or her "We Connect" teacher.

Harrington-Bacote said such programs have reduced by 50 percent the number of students who have had to be sent to the principal's office for discipline problems over the last five years.

Risk factors

In Laconia, a majority of students have family income low enough to qualify for the federal program that provides free or reduced-price lunches. There were 118 students who experienced homelessness last school year, she said. And it's no secret that substance abuse is a significant problem in the community.

"If a kid is living in poverty, or homeless, they might not have food all the time," she said. "They come to school very worried. We can't get to academics if we don't address these things."

A survey given at participating high schools in New Hampshire found that:

- 30 percent of respondents reported living with someone who has or had a problem with alcohol or drugs.
- 25 percent report going hungry at some point because there was not enough food at home.
- 9 percent report having at least one parent or other adult in jail or prison.
- 14 percent report hearing adults in their home slap, hit, kick, punch or hurt each other.
- 15 percent report seriously considering attempting suicide.

Sen. Maggie Hassan

In recognition of Harrington-Bacote's efforts, U.S. Sen. Maggie Hassan brought her to President Trump's State of the Union Address last year.

"From implementing evidence-based prevention curriculums to providing access to group and individual supports to help students cope with anxiety and stress, McKenzie has helped the Laconia School District become a model for supporting students impacted by the substance misuse crisis and addressing students' overall behavioral health," Hassan said at the time.

"I am inspired by McKenzie's innovative approach

and grateful for her commitment to strengthening the health and well-being of young people in Laconia and across New Hampshire, and I will continue to support her efforts."

Harrington-Bacote has spoken about student wellness at multiple conferences, including some sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education. Other districts have sought her advice about setting up their own wellness programs.

"We have really invested heavily in trying to better understand the things we can do better in setting up environments where kids can be more successful," Harrington-Bacote said. "There are less disruptions for teachers and administrators spend less time in having to deal with discipline problems."

Grant funding

Grants pay Harrington-Bacote's salary and that of others who work in her office. Millions of dollars have been brought in through grants, including for after-school learning, extended learning and summer learning.

"I grant-write for the district," she said. "We look to leverage outside funding opportunities. We need it. We have a cap on our funding. If there are things we need and we don't have the money, we need to find it somewhere else."

The New Hampshire Bureau of Student Wellness has been successful in funding district-level programs through competitive federal grants, including an \$8.6 million Safe Schools/Healthy Students grant, a \$12 million System of Care grant and a \$9.7

million Project AWARE grant.

The Laconia district has social workers for all of its schools, there is a licensed alcohol and drug counselor at the high school, a homeless education facilitator, a health and wellness training and marketing coordinator.

There is also a clinician from Lakes Region Mental Health for the high school and one for the middle school.

Life skills

Harrington-Bacote said her office tracks attendance, discipline referrals and suspensions as ways of gauging success, but there are also intangibles.

"A lot of the things we are teaching will become lifelong skills," she said.

One of those skills is dealing with stress.

Kelly Untiet, a spokeswoman for the state Bureau of Student Wellness, related an anecdote about a second-grader who used one of these skills.

"They had been spending time learning about mindfulness, remaining calm and coping with stressors. His class was engaging in annual standardized testing and the student put down pencil stood up and got into one of his calming poses.

"He got himself centered and went back to the test and the teacher later looked at test scores. The test when he utilized his mindfulness techniques, his score was up 23 points over the time he had taken it earlier in the year."

To contact Rick Green, send him an email at rick@laconiadailysun.com.

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