

## Vaccine just in time for sick leave change

By Timothy Junis

The Durant teaching and support staff started receiving the first of two vaccine shots for COVID-19 last week. And it couldn't have come at a better time for high school science teacher Mrs. Hailey Houk.

The school nurse, Mrs. Mary Dorris, gave out 35 vaccine doses last week. All staff vaccinated received the Moderna vaccine.

Under a new district policy, COVID-19 could have taken a bite out of Mrs. Houk's bank account if she had contracted the coronavirus.

At the beginning of January, the district sent out a message to staff notifying them that COVID-19 sick leave was changing because the president did not extend the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) past December 31.

Prior to the new year, federal funds covered sick days missed by a teacher who had a COVID-19 related absence.

The new policy developed by the school district says that if teachers are being

quarantined from a school exposure, they wouldn't have to use their own sick leave. However, an exposure from an outside source will force teachers to use their own sick leave.

This could have put the science teacher in a tough situation.

"Being a newer teacher at Durant and having forfeited all of my previous leave from my previous district, along with taking maternity leave (which comes out of our sick leave bank) at the beginning of the year, I do not have that many sick days left," said Mrs. Houk.

Last year was Mrs. Houk's first year being a teacher at Durant. She has not yet had COVID-19, but she did have to use partial days for sick leave last semester when her children had an exposure.

Under the old FFCRA, she was able to use two-thirds of a "COVID" sick day and supplement the other one-third out of her own sick leave. She did this to avoid having any unpaid time.

Mrs. Houk explained that if she

were to have to take her own sick leave for COVID-19, she most likely would have to take some of it unpaid.

Although she was vaccinated last Friday, she is not out of the woods yet because she will still need to get a second shot four weeks from the last one until she is fully immune.

As for determining whether or not a teacher got COVID-19 at school, Superintendent Mr. Joe Burnett said that it would be a case-by-case basis. The administrators would work with the health professionals and teachers involved to find the best outcome.

Social studies teacher Mr. Matt Straube said that is not an enviable task.

"Schools are cesspools for germs, but how do you prove where you got it from," he said "You can make educated assumptions, but pinpointing it has to be extremely difficult, and to me that seems like it would have to be a nightmare for the decision makers."

Even though the national govern-

ment is not continuing the funding currently, Mr. Straube believes that Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds should replace this funding at the state level.

"I think it is unfortunate that the federal government is no longer funding for sick leave. I think workers deemed 'essential' that are not able to work from home should have their sick leave protected during this pandemic, and that isn't just for school employees. That is for any industry with workers deemed 'essential,'" said Mr. Straube.

Mr. Straube said that Gov. Reynolds has been consistent in her desire to get students back in the classroom. He feels that she should back up those demands with actions.

"I don't want to make this seem like 'woe is me' because I'm a teacher, but I feel that Reynolds's push has been to open schools back up 100% in person," he said.

"I think that if we are going to do that, then we should do what we can to do it safely."

## Wildcat sophomore reveals racial challenges growing up

By Kiley Stineman

Sophomore Joslyn Entsminger has been a Durant student since kindergarten and has experienced many instances where she has felt different from her peers.

Entsminger is one of two African-American students in a student population that is 95.6 percent white.

As a child, Entsminger said she would hear comments from fellow students about her skin tone and hair texture.

"I've been dealing with it since I first got to Durant," said Entsminger. "When I was little, it started out as ignorance like people would talk about my skin tone and be like, 'Oh, Joslyn, why are you so dark? Oh, why does your hair look like that?'"

"I wouldn't say that was racism, but it's ignorance on some people's parts."

Entsminger said her peers "weren't

used to seeing people who are different."

As Joslyn and her peers got older, the innocence of their comments died away, and it was replaced with the N-word and even using racial slurs such as "monkey."

"I wouldn't chalk that up to ignorance anymore. I think it's more like blatant racism," she said.

Joslyn believes that the Black Lives Matter protests this summer have now created an environment where racial harassment has been given a wrong sense of normalcy throughout the school.

"I hear a lot of people talking about the BLM movement in negative ways," she said in an interview last month. "They say things like no lives matter."

Junior Lauryn Tate said she has also been dealing with racial harassment issues this year alongside Joslyn.

Both girls said the number of incidents has increased from about one a week last school year to about five a week this year. Last semester, the girls reported multiple incidents to Principal Mr. Joel Diederichs and are taking more actions to stop the negative environment.

The two students have talked with the Durant school board president and vice president about their issue. The school board will continue conversations with Tate and Entsminger, according to Superintendent Joe Burnett.

According to the school's anti-bullying and anti-harassment policy, school administrators must take certain steps to stop such incidents.

Their first steps would be to listen to all students involved, said Mr. Diederichs.

The policy stipulates that adminis-

trators investigate each altercation that was brought to their attention and could suspend or expel a violator if it was deemed appropriate.

In the meantime, the school administration will continue to handle every issue that comes their way with the appropriate protocol, said Mr. Diederichs.

He also thinks that the political climate has affected the entirety of school life.

"The happenings in the world have affected the way we live and the society we live in," he said.

The question now is how the school and community can create a more diverse and accepting atmosphere, he said.

"We're all on the same team, and we should be working together to make our school and our community a better place," said Mr. Burnett.

## Spanish teacher rocks and rolls with Durant High students

By Brock Jones

One often-overlooked quality of the Durant teaching staff is the presence of two talented instrumentalists whom students can go to for advice and even personal lessons.

Perhaps the most known is high school Spanish teacher Mr. Jeff Trask and the guitar lessons he offers for students of any age.

Mr. Trask has been playing guitar for over 15 years and teaching it to Durant students for over a decade.

"Off the top of my head, the students that I've had that are currently in the high school are Ally Happ, Logan Wolf, Brock Jones, Timmy Junis, Aydin Flockhart, and Ethan Schlapkohl. Before my first student, I never really thought that it was something I could do," he said.

"It just so happened that during my second year, I had one student who knew I played guitar, so they would ask me for help restringing their guitar and things like that, which eventually built up to actual guitar lessons."

For his first couple years of teaching guitar, Mr. Trask said that he would try new approaches and strategies with every



Photo by Nicole Brown

High school Spanish teacher Mr. Jeff Trask gives a guitar lesson to junior Logan Wolf. Mr. Trask has taught 14 students so far.

student. "It's just something that I had to learn over time," he said, "and every student is different. Some catch on really quick, and others take a little more time. So you kind of have to change stuff on the fly."

As Mr. Trask taught more and more students, however, he began to develop a pattern.

"It's very similar to teaching a language. You've got all these little components that don't mean much on their own, but when

you put them together it creates music. The hardest part for me was figuring out how to split music up into those teachable components and which ones I should teach first," he said.

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