

# GOING THE E

## Staff members' duties expand in order to mitigate spread of virus

**B**ehind the scenes, Eanes staff members are cooperating and communicating with one another to prioritize the students' and staff's health during COVID-19. Although cases have declined, these roles are still integral to keeping school running smoothly.

### Debbie Brown

Before this school year, the nurses' office was a place where students waited for their parents to pick them up, took their prescribed medications or

tests positive, the two nurses inform students and parents about the protocols. Once students return to remote learning for the required 10-day quarantine period, Hubbell and Brown notify the students' teachers of the symptoms they are experiencing. And if the student plays sports, the nurses contact the coaches and trainers in the same way. The nurses do not administer COVID-19 tests, but the sick students are allowed to return only once they have received a negative test.

"[I was working] part-time before the fall semester, but I came back full-time because we really felt like one nurse could not handle all of the emails," Brown said. "It is a lot of emailing."

They both want to keep teachers informed, a task they weren't responsible for before the pandemic.

"We're trying to make the teachers feel safe and know that we're not going to let kids that we know are sick come into their classrooms," Brown said. "[Teachers] get worried when they have someone in their class who they don't see one day."

The nurses are not in charge of contact tracing the staff's positive cases, which is the Human Resources Department's job. They are only responsible for communicating the students' cases, but work closely with HR. Brown and Hubbell update the cases on a spreadsheet, which is reposted every day by Director of Safety and Risk Management Matt Greer. The Eanes COVID-19 Dashboard, which can be found on the school website, displays the nurses' findings in the student case column and Human Resources findings in the staff column.

Aside from posting positive

cases and protocol information on their website, the nurses answer calls from the community with questions on how to stay safe.

"A lot of people call in with questions, and I love that because there is so much information out there and [not all of it's] good or correct," Brown said. "I can explain it to them, and then they usually feel a lot better."

When the nurses have to notify parents about their child exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms, the parents have been very supportive overall, according to Brown, but there are exceptions.

"We have to say, 'You have to come pick up your kid because he has a headache,' and they'd say 'Why does he have to go home?'" Brown said. "So, yes, some parents do get upset, but there was a run of positive cases where the only symptom was a headache, so [we have to be careful]."

Brown realizes that the precautions the school is taking for one disease may work to prevent others and that wearing a mask is a great way to keep flu or strep throat outbreaks at bay.

"I think that wearing masks help, but I never would have thought of that before all of this because we never did it," Brown said. "I'm really hoping that the flu and other cases are down because we are taking precautions with the masks, handwashing and staying six feet away."

### Bryan Shippey

Assistant principal Bryan Shippey's role as director of campus security has taken on new meaning in the pandemic. He's in charge of similar tasks as the nurses plus contact tracing. With his personalized 6-foot pole in hand, Shippey and other assistant

# XTRA SIX FEET

principals ask for the mandated seating charts from teachers then alert everyone who sits 6 feet from the student who tested positive that he or she has been identified as a close contact. With many cases a day, having to go to each student's eight classes adds up. And their work doesn't end at the 4:15 p.m. bell.

"Every weekend I'm calling parents if we get a notification of somebody who tested positive," Shippey said. "[I spend] Sunday and Saturday evenings calling, and talking to people. It's episodic; some days are busier than others."

It is not required for the community to inform the school about a positive case, but it is common to receive calls of the sort, according to Shippey.

"We have some very conscientious people in the community that want to help anyway," Shippey said. "We really appreciate that parents and students are being so open and transparent."

Shippey said he believes call-ins have been so frequent because the APs don't judge the student if they've contracted the disease outside of school.

"We don't demonize anybody who hung out with people over the weekend where somebody got sick and it's spreading quickly," Shippey said. "Our job is to just trace where we can and keep everybody as safe as we can."

Not only do the students and parents help with the contact tracing process, staff members who are completing graduate degrees or certifications in education also assist. If they are required to do field-based work, contact tracing is an opportunity to help further their career and the safety of the school.

"I'll reach out to them and say, 'Here's a piece of this thing that you can work on for us,'" Shippey said. "There are always opportunities to help people further any

sort of career path they want to follow right now."

Shippey is personally juggling the health of the students and that of his own family by taking the necessary precautions, like not eating out.

"I have an elderly mom that I'm hoping to see, so I keep that as a baseline for what decisions I make in case I have to help her," Shippey said. "I don't want to expose her to anything."

Overall, he is very grateful for the help from administrators, staff, the nurses, students and parents. Without it, according to Shippey, he would have an overwhelming amount of work to handle.

"Westlake is not in any different position than any other big high school that's open with students in-person," Shippey said. "We're having the same issues, but we're fortunate that we have a lot of support. I don't know if that's the case in a lot of places."

### Steve Stracke

A year ago, ice cream Fridays and bagel Mondays were routine. Once students had their food, they got in line and punched in their lunch number. Now, it's a little more complicated. Instead, students have to stay 6 feet apart, the cafeteria staff is surrounded by Plexiglas shields and the thrill of pressing their lunch number into the keypad is no more, for now they scan the barcode on their ID badge.

The cafeteria staff in all nine campuses have always worn gloves, and even with the addition of masks and the Plexiglas, staff members who are concerned about exposure said they don't feel safe.

"I had two employees leave right before school began who were just very concerned [about COVID-19]," Eanes Director of Nutrition Stracke said. "They were both in their late 50s and

60s and had some underlying health issues. They felt uneasy even with the precautions we were taking."

After seeing Plexiglas surrounding the staff on the side and back, cashiers felt more comfortable.

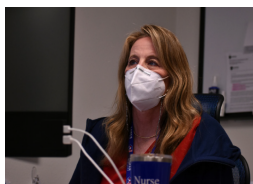
"Yes, I did lose a couple of employees due to those concerns, but out of 60 employees, losing two over that was not a big deal," Stracke said.

An opportunity that has been available during the pandemic, but one that not many students in Eanes are eligible for or utilize, is pre-ordering meals and picking them up at Forest Trail. The National School Lunch Program overruled normal restrictions for food consumption, such as the student needing to eat the purchased food on campus, so

"In the fall, I came across pre-cut 6-foot dowels at Lowe's and bought one for each member of the admin team. Because we're Westlake, we couldn't just have a plain wooden dowel, we had to Chap-ify them! Fortunately, my wife is a very talented artist and was able to stain, paint and decorate one for each of us."

-assistant principal Casey Ryan

Assistant principal Bryan Shippey holds his personalized 6-foot pole which is used to contact trace on campus. Prior to using these poles, administrators used yard sticks or measuring tape to determine the distance between desks when a student contracted COVID-19. This is to alert the surrounding students of potential contact with the virus.



Nurse Debbie Brown answers emails from parents and students about quarantine protocols and takes a student's temperature before entering the nurses' office, all while staying separated from passersby by a yellow chain.



Photos by Vanessa May and Sarah Sada

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Julia Franco

that students who rely on free and reduced meals can access them while learning online. The process is similar to the curbside pick-up option currently offered at restaurants.

"What happens is that students are able to come here, they can preorder [via] a Google Form that we make available to them, and they call us when they arrive," Stracke said.

One of the reasons not many students partake in this option is because more students have been returning to in-person school, and picking up meals has not been a priority. In addition, only 296 out of approximately 7,954 Eanes students are eligible for free or reduced price meals, which is based on the guardian's income and translates to 3.72% of students.

Besides reminding the elementary students to stay on their socially distanced dots during lunch, Stracke said he feels maintaining this system of precautions has been relatively easy.

"The process reminds me of this old adage: 'It's easier to keep a room clean than to clean a room,'" Stracke said. "If you work at something a little bit every week or every day, it might take you 30 seconds to do that. If you

let it build up over a month, it could take you an hour or two of your time to get it clean."

Community members have stepped up to show appreciation for the nutrition staff in the same way they have worked to make Shippey and Brown's job a little easier.

"The community came forth and donated funds to provide every one of our child nutrition staff members with gift cards to H-E-B, just out of the blue," Stracke said. "So I went to all of the nine schools and handing these gift cards out with thank-you notes. I mean, how cool is that?"

#### Fritz Klabunde

Even the eagerly anticipated first ride on the school bus for elementary schoolers was different.

Windows are rolled down on days with good weather, there are specialized filters in the AC vents and one student per seat, with two rows vacant as a buffer between the driver and students. However, as more students ride the bus, it is difficult to set aside that much space as a buffer. Once the riders are off, the bus is disinfected, all of the areas the students touched wiped off before the afternoon rides. On top of the extra protocols, the department is navigat-

ing decreased and fluctuating ridership.

"During the first two weeks when only 25% of the students were back, we had 800 to 900 riders [for all of Eanes]," Director of Transportation Fritz Klabunde said. "If this were any other year, we'd average between 2500 to 2800 riders a day."

These statistics fluctuate. For example, according to records from one day in November, there were about 1200 total riders from the morning and afternoon.

As a result of experiencing a decrease in riders and being short six drivers — who left due to concerns of contracting COVID-19 — the department decided to switch up the routes. The bus riders are dispersed, and the drivers are trying to pick up and drop them off in less time to minimize the time they are spending in close proximity. The department is trying to achieve this while training three new drivers.

"[We start] five or 10 minutes earlier than we have in the past to give us that extra time to run those extended linked routes to get the kids to school on time and do those secondary runs," Klabunde said.

Klabunde has help with the logistics, but he is primarily in

charge of communicating with students and parents.

"It's about making them feel secure and safe while riding the bus, not from a hazard standpoint or worries about an accident, but more from a health issue perspective," Klabunde said.

To achieve this, he also communicates with custodians on campus about the cleaning supplies used to stay consistent and with the APs for contact tracing.

"We have videos on the bus, and the great thing is we can use the seating charts to do contact tracing," Klabunde said. "If we can't quite see a student on the video, the smart tags let us know who went on and off the bus when."

The high level of cooperation in Eanes, according to Klabunde, is not the same in other districts he's worked at.

"In some districts, the board's always just worried about the classroom, which of course that should be everyone's focus, but it takes a lot of constructive effort and cooperation to make that a success," Klabunde said. "This board gets it, this administration gets it, and I think that's why you hear so many positive comments [about Eanes]."

—Julia Franco

# TEACHER APPRECIATION

Challenges of COVID-19 force educators to adapt; campus groups, individuals show support



**While students are learning to manage either online or in-person school, teachers are learning to manage both.** This year, their job is to keep students safe, keep themselves safe and continue to educate. Teachers face challenges in ensuring that testing is fair for both in-person and remote students by experimenting with equal testing resources, open-note testing and study guides. They also have to prioritize which lessons they teach due to irregular schedules (think: snow days, early release days, Thought Break days, personal work days and asynchronous days).

During an October Eanes ISD school board meeting, members pushed out a survey to staff members to better understand what they need help with this year. The majority of the 485 respondents expressed that they felt stressed because they did not have enough time to do their job or take care of their families and themselves. The data proved what Eanes staff members have reportedly felt since last March: they need more time. The district implemented Thought Break days, similar to early release, as a result of feedback like this.

"The Thought Break days came from the District Leadership Team, which is a committee made up of staff members, parents and high school students from all campuses across the

district," assistant principal Casey Ryan said. "They were tasked with looking to find additional time for staff."

While this gives teachers and students an opportunity to play catch-up, educators are still sacrificing personal time to get things done.

"I've been teaching since 1996 ... a LONG time," biology teacher Jean Davis said. "This year has felt like my first year of teaching all over again. There is never enough time to prepare while learning all new systems, apps and ways to communicate with students. I can tell you that each and every teacher has put in hundreds of hours to make lessons work remotely and in-person."

Some student groups have taken steps to show their teachers that they see the effort they put in and appreciate it. For example, the yearbook staff treated the faculty to Crumbl cookies as a way to show their gratitude.

"Our teachers just do so much for us, and especially in yearbook they are always willing to help us out whenever we need quotes or information about photo opportunities," life and sports editor junior Rachael Barkoff said. "We know this has been a very challenging year, so we are just glad to be able to make them smile any way we can."

—Bella Romero

## Student suggests ways to value faculty, staff

As of Aug. 18, 2020, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention classified educators as "essential workers." That's a complicated designation, but we can all agree that it doesn't take a governor to tell us teachers are necessary in our lives. Thanks to teachers, students have the opportunity to learn no matter where they are, whether remotely or in person.

Teachers are putting their health on the line every day for their students, as well as putting their families' health at risk. To be the safest we can be in the building, we need to hold ourselves accountable for things like keeping our masks up and trying our best to not get too close to others. This doesn't only benefit us, but it benefits our teachers.

Let's all consider writing thank-you cards, being respectful in class and thanking staff members in the hall. Or for the remote students, turning your camera on or putting your phone away is a great way to acknowledge your teachers. Especially this year, they deserve praise for their dedication.

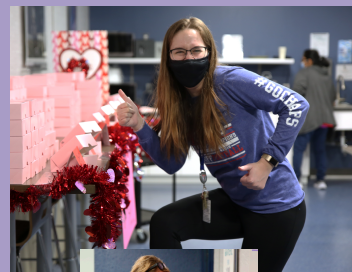
Whenever we walk into classes, our teachers always have a smile on their faces, even if it's hidden behind a mask. Teachers continue to show up for their students during this time, which calls for a celebration of their devotion, passion and respect for our learning.

—Bella Romero

Yearbook students offer Crumbl cookies in the teachers' lounge Feb. 13 to show gratitude for the faculty's work during the pandemic.



Photos by Julia Franco





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