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Sidway kids get an extra dose of learning

District adds a half-day of in-person instruction for youngest students

BY KAREN CARR KEEFE

Sidway Elementary students got an early Christmas present this past Wednesday – an extra half-day of in-person learning.

"For them to come in that day, you could just see the joy on their faces, they were so excited," said Sidway Principal Denise Dunbar.

While in years past, school kids may have looked forward to the chance for a snow day – or any extra day of – the new Wednesday half-day sessions are a hit with kindergartners and first-graders, as well as their parents and their teachers.

"So last Wednesday was our first Wednesday, and it went very, very well. Peanut butter-smooth," Dunbar said. "We were really anticipating difficulties with transportation, and children that didn't have bus notes or we didn't know their parents were bringing them, like typically happens on a half-day, and there was very little of that," she said.

"Kids were so excited to come in, bounding off of the buses. I'm back at school today!" They were so excited that it was two days in a row, and they haven't had that in a while. We haven't been able to say, 'See you tomorrow' all year," Dunbar said.

School Superintendent Brian Graham had a very favorable impression of how the added in-person class time is working at the elementary school.

"I had the opportunity to walk through Sidway on Wednesday to observe our students reporting to school for the half-day sessions. I was very pleased to see our students fully engaged in learning and it was obvious that Mrs. Dunbar and her team did a fantastic job," he said.



Sidway Elementary School Principal Denise Dunbar greets students arriving on March 3 for the afternoon session of the school's new extra half-day of in-person learning on Wednesdays. The program began last Wednesday, Feb. 24. (Photo by Nathan Keefe)

Most Grand Island students learn in a hybrid model that includes a combination of two days of in-person learning, along with three days of virtual learning. A small percentage of the students have 100% virtual learning.

Students are divided into two groups, or cohorts, based on where their surname falls in the alphabet. For example, those whose names begin with A-L attend in-person schooling on Mondays and Thursdays; those whose last names begin with M-Z attend in-person classes Tuesday and Friday. On Wednesday, all students participate in virtual learning online.

Sidway parents had responded favorably in a survey when the idea of an extra half-day of in-person learning was discussed.

"I think it's a response from a lot of the parents and the community that really want to see kids in school every day," Dunbar said. "And all of us want to see kids in school every day – administration, teachers, everyone wants to see kids in school every day. But we can't when we still have all the precautions that we have to follow," she said.

"For example, the 6-foot distancing: That has not been eliminated or reduced, so until

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Memories are painful for families of Island KIAs

BY MICHAEL J. BILLONI

Each of the 18 families of Grand Island veterans listed on the Killed in Action monument at the southern end of DeGlopper Memorial at Baseline Road and Grand Island Boulevard can share tales of extreme loss of their loved ones and the heartache felt for those who sacrificed their lives fighting for our country. What makes the stories even worse is when the communication of these horrific messages from the Armed Forces leaves uncertainty and then hope, before the reality of death is apparent to families.

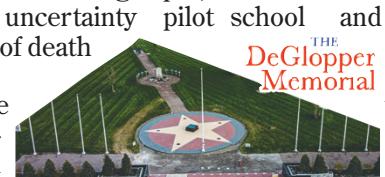
Consider the story of Eugene H. Dinsmore and his wife, Catherine Bartram Dinsmore, when World War II began in 1939. They lived on a family farm at 2140 Love Road that dates back to when the Dinsmores settled on Grand Island and operated four farms in the mid-1800s. Melville "Chubb" Dinsmore, one of Eugene and Catherine's eight children, had been drafted into the U.S. Army early in the war. When a younger son, Eugene F., graduated from Tonawanda High School in 1940, another brother landed him a job at the Carborundum Co. in Niagara Falls. The company was considered essential to the war operations because it made grinding wheels for

the military, assuring Eugene was safe from being drafted. That allowed him to help his dad and brother on the family farm during the day, while working in the plant at night.

Whether it was the nationwide promotion to serve your country during the war, his desire to become a pilot or following in the footsteps of his brother or another Tonawanda High School graduate, Charles N. DeGlopper, Dinsmore enlisted in 1942. He completed pilot school and flight training the following year and in early 1944, he arrived in England and was assigned a new P-47D fighter aircraft.

Back then, the only correspondence between a soldier and his family was through letter-writing, which Eugene did regularly until he arrived in St. Dizier, France, in November 1944 to join the 411th Squadron, 405th AAF Fighter Group of the 9th Air Force. The assignment was classified, and his letters were censored by superiors, but his parents knew he was alive and well until the letters stopped being delivered a month later, according to his nephew Gene Dinsmore, a veteran who

See DINSMORE, continued on Page 2



THE DeGlopper Memorial



Gene Dinsmore, Diane Lapp and Ray DeGlopper with some of the information they have collected about Second Lt. Eugene F. Dinsmore

Town Board supports reopening schools

BY KAREN CARR KEEFE

The Grand Island Town Board approved 5-0 a resolution supporting the reopening of Grand Island schools to full, in-person instruction.

As schools follow state rules meant to slow the spread of COVID, a lack of face-to-face learning has harmed students' education and mental health, the resolution states.

The approval came following a lively discussion at a workshop meeting prior to the March 1 board session. Four speakers at the later meeting also urged the full reopening of schools during the board's public comment section.

Councilman Michael Madigan spearheaded the resolution, which will be forwarded to a list of officials and legislative representatives, including the Grand Island Board of Education, the superintendent of schools, Gov. Andrew Cuomo, state Sen. Sean Ryan, Assemblyman Angelo Morinello, the Erie County Legislature, County Executive Mark Poloncarz and county Health Commissioner Gale Burstein.

While the board voted to support the measure in the regular board meeting, there was a wide-ranging discussion before unanimity was reached.

Councilman Tom Digati expressed hesitancy over adopting a resolution that seemed to tell the Board of Education how to do its job.

"I'm having trouble grappling with it because I don't think we'd appreciate them telling us what to do, but on the other hand, I want the kids in school five days a week as much as anybody else." Digati had the expectation that the state would relax the rules in the near future, and thought it might be wise to wait and see what develops before approving the resolution.

Council member Jennifer Baney had a different take on the resolution. "It's a tool that can be used to help a process along. At the State of the Town this week, we heard Dr. [Brian] Graham share – and at the last board meeting – that he and the board of education would like

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