

'In the Loop' with the Lewiston-Porter Board of Education

Vaccinations to begin for Lew-Port educators, staff

BY **JODEE RIORDAN**

Board of Education President

The Board of Education met this past Monday for a lengthy work session. The board began with a briefing on policy updates and review. The BOE policy committee, led by board member Anne Orr, meets monthly to review and recommend new state and federal additions and amendments. In addition, the policy committee reviews each section of the manual annually, to keep the policy manual up-to-date and relevant.

Superintendent Paul Casseri then provided the board with an update on district operations during the COVID-19 crisis. While cases continue to spike in the Niagara County community, there has been no evidence to date of spread within Lewiston-Porter schools. This reinforces that the safety protocols and procedures in place – social distancing, mask-wearing and limiting numbers on campus through the hybrid and remote models – are working.

As the Niagara County Department of Health (NCDOH) continues to be overwhelmed, more

and more of the work of contact tracing and notification continues to fall on school districts. Since early December, schools have been instructed by NCDOH to become the first line of communication in terms of isolation and quarantine notification.

Lew-Port's district administrators, led by Dr. Patricia Grupka, are helping NCDOH with the initial contact with students and staff as a means to keeping everyone safe. In the event that contact tracing presents evidence of exposure, parents and families will be directed by district/building level administration and/or school nurses to quarantine or isolate per NCDOH direction and protocols; and if possible, the county may then follow up.

It is important for the public to understand the change in protocol and follow the instructions as provided by district personnel.

Lewiston-Porter remains ever hopeful that we will get through this crisis sooner than later, with the vaccination process now underway. Beginning this week, vaccination of teachers and other educational employees begins.

So far, the process has been challenging, but hopefully county and state health officials will pull coordination efforts together and all Lewiston-Porter's teachers and staff are able to receive the vaccination as quickly as possible.

•Also on Monday, the BOE officially began the budget process for 2021-22 with (very) preliminary discussions. Dr. Grupka introduced framework for the budget development calendar and an overview of where things sit right now. She said necessary data, including the consumer price index (CPI), is not yet available to calculate the 2021-22 tax cap calculation necessary for budget development. At this time, there are no numbers coming from the state or federal government as to budgets.

However, absent federal support, New York state is projecting an approximately \$8.2 billion gap, which would reflect the need for about a 20% cut to all school districts/municipalities across the board. In addition, Lewiston-Porter has no concrete information yet on the restoration of state funds already withheld, nor major

issues impacting district finances (such as its FEMA application, or the status of CARES Act funds – Niagara County has received no funds – plus UPK funding cuts and federal nutrition funding withholdings).

The board hopes to begin budget development in earnest at its Feb. 8 work session. Please join us; a link to the meeting is posted to our homepage.

•The Lewiston-Porter Alumni Association (LPAA) has launched a new project to honor the service and sacrifice of graduates who served in the United States armed forces. The planned memorial will include a memorial bench dedicated to the honor and sacrifice of all Lewiston-Porter alumni who served our country in war and peace. The seat will be engraved with the words "Freedom is Not Free."

Vice President Ed Engel, Class of 1958, who runs the popular Lew-Port Alumni Facebook page, shared, "We've always honored athletics, academia, public figures and service. We have never honored alumni that have served or given their life in service for

their country. This is the reason for the proposed veterans' memorial at the school, because if it were not for them, we would not have a true & free education. We would like this memorial near the entrance of the school so as the students enter and exit, they will see it every day and know that 'Freedom Is Not Free.'"

Dedication of the memorial is targeted for Memorial Day 2021. LPAA President Bruce Newton, Class of 1965, added, "Any donation is appreciated, so we can make this vision become a reality."

To make a donation toward the memorial, visit the Lewiston-Porter Alumni Veterans' Memorial GoFundMe account at <https://www.gofundme.com/f/lewiston-porter-alumni-veterans-memorial>. Donations can also be sent to the Lewiston-Porter Alumni Association: Memorial Fund, 4061 Creek Road, Youngstown, NY 14174.

Please visit the L-P Alumni Facebook page or contact Bruce or Ed for more information.

NCCC student honored with statewide award

On Dec. 14, State University of New York Chancellor Dr. Jim Maltras hosted a virtual Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) Honors Awards ceremony recognizing the achievements of 45 students from 49 SUNY campuses statewide. Elaine Champagne-Lewis of Niagara County Community College was chosen

to receive the 2020 Norman R. McConney, Jr. Award for EOP Student Excellence, which celebrates EOP students who have overcome significant obstacles in life to achieve their educational and personal goals.

The award is named after the late Norman McConney, one of the architects of the statewide

EOP program and a champion of youth empowerment. The EOP program provides academic support services, counseling, advisement and financial assistance to historically under-served students from low-income families in New York.

A mother of two, Champagne-Lewis is a nontraditional student who was motivated to pursue a degree in human services after working several minimum-wage jobs while trying to support her family.

"I struggled so much to get by, and I want to set an example for my kids," she said.

A friend encouraged her to look into studying at NCCC. Cham-

pagne-Lewis worked with an adviser who helped her through the process of enrolling.

Once on campus, she saw she met the qualifications for the EOP program and was accepted.

"The EOP workshops helped me to learn balance and self-care, to ask questions when I don't understand things, and connected me to appropriate resources when I needed help," Champagne-Lewis said.

Since enrolling at NCCC, Champagne-Lewis has excelled.

"Elaine has consistently demonstrated the utmost commitment, perseverance and resiliency in pursuing her academic goals. She has maintained a perfect G.P.A.

throughout two semesters of the pandemic while also working as a single mother to not only provide for her children, but help assist in their education, as well. Her strength and dedication is an inspiration to me as her adviser, and I believe her example can be an inspiration to others," said Ted Mallwitz, the EOP academic support specialist who nominated Champagne-Lewis for the EOP Award for Student Excellence.

When asked if she had any advice for other nontraditional students in a similar circumstance, Champagne-Lewis offered the following: "Ask questions and put in the effort, because it will pay off. There are so many people ready and willing to help you if you just ask. Going back to school feels like something you can't do, but just put one foot in front of the other to make changes in your life."

Champagne-Lewis said she expects to finish her degree at NCCC in the fall of 2021 and plans to continue her education at Buffalo State College studying social work. She currently participates in an internship with a local substance abuse and mental health organization where she hopes to gain full-time employment after graduation.

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