

TEACHERS from page 1A

First-grade teacher Shannon Graham has two college-aged kids at home. She has been teaching for 20 years, with 17 of those at SES.

Harklerode has been principal at SES for 10 years. Prior to that, he had nine years in the classroom and at district-level positions. He has three kids in the school district.

First-grade teacher Jeannette Jones has one elementary student and one middle schooler. She has taught at SES for five years and has over 20 years of experience in the classroom.

Fourth-grade teacher Carrie McNeill has three kids with her husband Aaron, a math teacher at SHS. She has been a teacher at Siuslaw for four years and this is her 20th year teaching.

Fourth-grade teacher Vicki Rankin is one year away from retirement. She is in her 29th year of teaching and has a SHS student at home.

The transition to teaching from home

Graham: I did not feel at all equipped to start teaching from home. I had never used Google Classroom or knew anything about how to set one up, assign assignments and quizzes, etc. I had to teach myself how to make Google slide presentations, create and edit videos, create sound bites to read simple sentences for first graders to understand instructions, and how to create interesting and informative interactive slide presentations for first graders. The learning curve was so huge at first that it was overwhelming and mentally exhausting. ... Now, we're starting to feel like we get it.

Jones: I felt completely overwhelmed at the prospect of teaching from home. ... The transition was bumpy. My own children had to learn that even though I was home, I wasn't instantly available to them. I ended up working late into the night for quite a while because I was needed by my own children during their school hours. It took us a good two to three weeks to find a new rhythm, but it still doesn't feel normal. It is still really hard.

McNeill: It has been stressful learning how to create online lessons, hold virtual class meetings, and make sure all my students are doing OK during the

closure. I think people assume teachers have a lot of down time right now and really it is the opposite. I am working more hours now than I did working in my classroom.

On adapting to technology

Botgger: Coming right out of college and already knowing a lot about online learning from a student standpoint really helped. I've gotten into the groove of uploading assignments and google meetings with my students. It takes practice. I am one of the luckier ones who has a computer and fast internet at home. I can't imagine what it would be like for someone who doesn't.

Crossley: Our household does not have internet, and we live in an area where it is not easy to get reasonable internet. We have a cellular hotspot so it suffices for what our family needs. My son and I both need access.

McNeill: I have learned so much about how to create videos, online lessons, how to use the Google Classroom platform, and how to participate in a Zoom meeting. I feel so fortunate to have the technology we do to be able to communicate with our students and their families.

Rankin: I have worked in the Siuslaw School District for 25 years. I was not prepared for distance learning. I have never considered myself a techie kind of person. I was petrified! However, with the help of my colleagues, I have become pretty good at this online learning.

On reaching students

Harklerode: Our teachers care tremendously about doing a good job. They want to really reach kids. That's a lot harder from a distance. The "Ah-ha" moments when something really clicks with a student are what makes teaching so rewarding. Those don't translate as well with distance learning.

Crossley: I had a good rapport and communication with my classroom families going into this pandemic so I've been able to reach out via phone, email or our Class Dojo app. I know some families are working and, like my own circumstances, trying to find a balance with it all. Most second-grade students need a guardian with them while accessing Google Meet or Classroom so it is based on the par-

ent/guardian's availability.

Graham: I feel successful in creating creative online lessons with rich content, but I do not feel that this is a successful model for the majority of my students. This is incredibly challenging for a first-grader's attention span, when they really need hands-on, in person lessons. I know that a lot of families have felt too overwhelmed with technology issues and their own children's very short attention spans and do a minimum amount.

Jones: I love that because of technology I am able to stay connected with my class. I still get to see their smiles, hear their stories, share their worries, laugh together and even cry. It's not the same, and it will never be the same, as what happens in face to face, in person communication and teaching. It's been challenging reaching some families due to their work schedules and internet access/connectivity issues. ... The lack of experience first-grade students have with platforms like Google Classroom really made this round of distance learning extra challenging. Students this age need a lot of guidance and support as they access lessons and complete work, and families aren't always able to provide that needed support.

McNeill: Distance Learning is definitely not the same as getting to see my sweet students every day. I am so fortunate that all my students have been able to access online learning. I love our Google Meets. I get to see my students' smiling faces as well as a glimpse into their lives at home. We have had dogs, cats, hamsters, baby chicks all part of our virtual class meetings. Students get so excited to share a different side of themselves with you that they can't in the classroom.

Rankin: I haven't reached ALL of my students, but I do feel like I have helped them with this process. Things are running much smoother than at the beginning. We are getting the hang of this thing called distance learning. The highlight of my week is when I see my kids during a Google Meet. It may be on a computer screen, but we do get a chance to see each other.

Botgger: Right now I am very lucky. My students are fifth graders, they have experience with computers. When I see them on Google Meet, I get pretty excited! To say the least, I feel pretty

successful in reaching them.

Family at home

Crossley: I have three children aged 1, 3 and 8. This affects my teaching in so many ways! I have to teach in my car, or in front of the local library (where I can get free WIFI) if I want zero distractions while working from home. ... My second-grade son has a hard time focusing when his sisters are around. Our house isn't set up with an office or space for working/learning from home.

Harklerode: I have one student in the elementary, middle and high school. My sons are older and more independent in their computer skills than my fourth-grade daughter. My wife's work schedule allows her to be of help to our daughter.

Jones: I've had to adjust my working hours to fit around their schoolwork and the mere fact that we live in a smallish house. I choose to work early in the mornings or later in the evening. ... We are all home now, but time together feels like it's less because I often work when my husband gets home. I'm often exhausted. I feel like all I do is school.

McNeill: Our house has turned into a giant classroom. My dining room table is our teaching area and where my husband and I meet with our students. It is hard to juggle at times as we have to be careful how many people are using our internet at once or we all get bumped off. Juggling being a mom and helping my own kids with distance learning and assignments while also being available to my students has been a struggle at times. I find myself working late at night after my kids have gone to bed and the chaos of the day's online meetings are over.

Rankin: I have a 10th grader at home and getting him through this distance learning has been a challenge because he's such a social kid.

Graham: I have both of my college-aged children living at home with me right now, and it is challenging to find quiet time to produce my video lessons and audio record sound bites. It is also challenging because with all of us at home it puts a strain on the bandwidth and things take longer to load.

Community Support

McNeill: We live in a wonderful community. Parents have

had to take on the role as educator overnight and they have really stepped up to the plate. We are so lucky. While it would be amazing if all kids had access to the internet and devices to help them be part of distance learning, we are fortunate to have as many kids online as we do thanks to our district loaning Chromebooks and others helping to provide internet services.

Botgger: The parents and community have provided a lot of support just by being patient with us and their own children. Communication is definitely key over this period of time, if you need help please just ask!

Crossley: Teachers are doing different things due to their home situations and parents/guardians are teaching in different ways due to their current situations. We are all doing the best we can and that's all we can do given the circumstances. If we can all just have grace for one another at this time and give ourselves grace as well.

Jones: The best support families can give students and their teachers is to stay in communication. Stay connected. Reach out. We want to help if we can. We know it's hard.

'Keep supporting each other'

Botgger: We miss the kids. I got into this profession because I liked helping children learn and grow as human beings. Through this time I have seen so much empathy from your children. Be proud of them, be patient with them.

McNeill: If I could say anything to our community, my students, etc., it would be to keep supporting each other. This is hard but it is my hope that we will come out of this a stronger, kinder, and more compassionate community.

Crossley: I would like to thank all parents, grandparents, caregivers etc. to know that I am extremely grateful for their efforts in teaching their children at home to their best abilities. As a parent myself, I know how hard it is to juggle it all — work, homeschooling, and just life in general during this very abnormal times. Your child will be OK academically. I would also like to tell all of my students that I am very proud of them. They are learning in a very different platform.

Graham: I want my students and their families to know how

very much I care about each and every one of them. I care about their academic success and their personal growth and want the very best for them. I know that this is hard, but we will get through this, together.

Jones: This has been incredibly hard for everyone. No one is without their struggles in this closure. This is hard. Teaching and learning in this way has taken a huge toll on families and educators alike. But I have seen a willingness to pull together, to work through hardships, and to give each other abundant grace. There have been bursts of kindness that will stay with me always. ... To the families who had to learn Google Classroom, thank you for your patience as we learned right along with you how to navigate a new learning platform. Thank you for supporting your kids and helping them learn in this new way. But it has to be said again — this is really hard.

Concluding remarks

While only a small sampling of the staff at SES, let alone the entire school district or region, the teachers returned again and again to the fact that working from home has been hard. However, many of them showed hope, especially as they got into the new rhythm.

"The domino effect of things that happened as a result of going to distance learning is a long string of one thing after another," Jones said. "My use of technology has increased to a level I never thought it would. I've learned many new tools and techniques. I've watched countless hours of tutorials. I've leaned hard on colleagues and friends near and far who have more experience with current educational technology and distance learning. I had to accept it was okay to fumble along for a while, because what other choice did I have? There wasn't time for training. There was no time to prepare."

For Graham, "The positive side of being forced to learn all of this technology is that I am excited about being able to use my new skills to enhance teaching in the regular classroom as well now."

The teachers talked about all the different apps and platforms used as a way to connect with students. Some have made purchases of microphones, recorders and other equipment to support distance learning. Many work strange hours to reach as many students as possible, or work around their own family's daily schedule.

"The teachers who do have families or children at home are definitely superheroes," said Botgger, who acknowledged that her own set up consisted of quality internet without as many distractions.

Harklerode acknowledged that the strangeness of the year, and that metrics normally used at this point in the school year may be ineffective.

"We have had to really narrow the scope of what we do with most elementary students. There are a number of standards we won't be able to complete this year," he said. "To keep skills sharp, parents can read each day with their student. We have books at levels available on the myON App which can be found on our website, siuslaw.k12.or.us. Please know teachers are doing the best they can in new circumstances. They are working harder than ever to keep kids growing and learning."

"We know this is hard. We would ALL rather be together at school. For now, this is the best way we can make sure everybody is safe and healthy."

For many of the teachers, their bonds with colleagues across the district have made the past months possible.

"I am extremely proud of what we as a school and as teachers have done. I really just wanted to share some of the reality of what the experience has been for me," Jones said. "I really want it shouted from the rooftops how proud I am of my school and fellow teachers and support staff, but I also wanted to give a glimpse of what many have experienced as teachers/parents. I am also extremely grateful for the parents of my students who have labored with me through this process. They've been incredibly kind and supportive."

For those struggling, Crossley offered some words of wisdom: "Above all, keep reading and show love and compassion to one another. This is all temporary. Yes it's the toughest endeavor I've faced in my career, but we care about our students so much."

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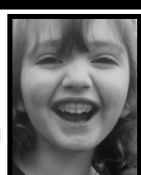
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