

New teachers in Drain, N. Douglas, settle in

By Tricia Jones
For The Sentinel

Eight days into the school year at North Douglas Elementary, Cassie Reigard's fourth-graders were celebrating a birthday for one of the boys in the class.

One child, though, didn't look so happy. Lucas Nelson explained to his teacher that his birthday fell on the first day of school, and he didn't receive the good wishes his classmate was enjoying.

Reigard apologized. On Sept. 5, she didn't yet have a birthday list for the class, so Lucas was overlooked. But that didn't mean he was forgotten.

"We're going to do something special for you along with Hunter," she said. "I didn't tell you because I wanted to surprise you."

Lucas' delight over his red-letter day illustrated one of Reigard's objectives in her first year as an elementary school teacher. "My goal is to create a meaningful learning community, where students support one another and know they are loved and cared for by their teacher," she said.

Reigard's is one of 10 fresh faces reporting for duty at North Douglas School District this year. The number reflects an unusually high staffing change for a district with 51 employees.

Superintendent John Lahley said a 3 to 5 percent turnover at the start of the school year is more typical for North Douglas. But numerous transitions – retirements, changes in family situations,

realignment of certain positions – have resulted in new hires for nearly 20 percent of the staff.

"Besides the changes in people's lives, we did some switching in staff, combining of duties, and it all had a domino effect," Lahley said.

For perspective, North Douglas Elementary Principal Jody Cyr noted that until this year, he'd hired only three teachers in his eight previous years in the job. "Usually, when they come, they stick around," he said. "But I'm excited we'll have some new individuals who will be able to bring in their ideas and energies to assimilate with the experiences of people who are here."

North Douglas High Principal Scott Yakovich agreed with Cyr about the value of infusing innovative attitudes.

"It's tough to lose the people with quite a bit of experience. But at the same time, you're getting a breath of new life, people with positive outlooks," Yakovich said. "It brings in opportunity."

Teachers make up four of the newcomers, with support staff representing five others – four instructional assistants and a secretary who works part-time for the high school, part-time for the district office. In the remaining position, Chris Murphy has started her duties as a part-time counselor for elementary students. No one could remember the last time the school district was able to employ a counselor.

Cyr said Murphy's duties will be wide-ranging, "from assisting teachers in behavior management

to providing interventions to individual kids to providing group work to kids who are dealing with the same issue."

Murphy said much of her initial work will revolve around introducing students to what a counselor does.

"Conflict resolution, managing emotions, working through feelings, friendship and school skills – these are things we'll be working on," she said. "A counselor's goal is to be a resource for teachers dealing with behaviors and to be proactive about how we handle them. Ideally we don't want the problem to get huge."

Cyr said Murphy's job came about following a little research into the use of Title I funds. These are distributed through a federal program that seeks to aid schools and school districts with a high percentage of students from low-income families. Over time, the program has loosened restrictions on how the money may be used. Lahley discovered that the funds in question could be applied to the counseling position without losing services from other programs.

Murphy's hire isn't the only bright spot for administrators. Lahley said he was pleased to employ two Yoncalla High graduates who are outstanding teachers and great buddies. Down the hall from Reigard's fourth-grade class, her longtime chum Christina Mast teaches third grade. They share a bond not only professionally, but also as community organizers. The two were

among four Yoncalla friends whose efforts helped revive last August's Yoncalla Summer Festival.

"I haven't worked with Cassie as a teacher before, but we grew up together," said Mast, whose first teaching job in Yoncalla was in the same third-grade class she'd attended as a youngster. "You could say we came over here together as kind of a packaged deal."

Cyr agreed that the bond between Mast and Reigard was a plus for him, but that they, along with Murphy, share something even more important.

"I want to hire people who fit within our staff and become part of our family," he said. "And 100 percent of their emphasis is on taking care of our kids."

"I do believe that there is not one aspect of my job that is more important than hiring. And we got very lucky in bringing all three of these people on board with us."

Lahley added that school district support staff members play a vital role in ensuring that certified employees are able to do their jobs to the best of their abilities. That includes everyone from instructional assistants to secretarial staff to those who keep the buildings in good working order.

"We are committed to maintaining our high graduation success rate and low drop-out rate, along with continuing to find the best ways to match our high school students with college or vocational options," he said.

New teacher profiles



NAME: Cassie Reigard

POSITION: Fourth-grade teacher

EDUCATION: Bachelor's degree in elementary education, University of Phoenix

EXPERIENCE: Fourteen years teaching at a private preschool in Yoncalla

Anybody who thinks teaching is a deadline project should talk to Cassie Reigard. For her, teaching is a work in progress, in which she seeks to improve her skills one day at a time. Less than two weeks into her new job, she said she was as comfortable as if she'd been there for 10 years. "I chose education because I have a passion to help students become successful learners," she said. "I want to see them thrive in the classroom and in real life, and I enjoy teaching them the skills to do so."



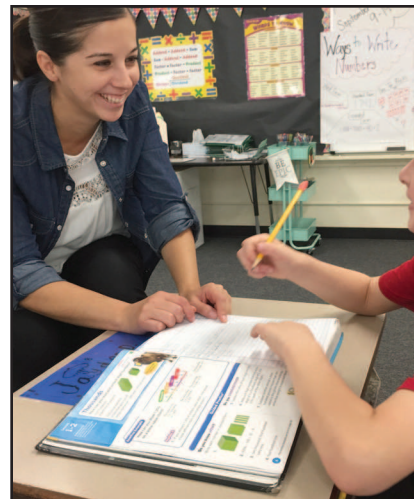
NAME: Chris Murphy

POSITION: School counselor

EDUCATION: Roseburg High graduate, bachelor's degree in sociology, University of Oregon; master's degree in counseling, Northwest Christian University; working on second master's as a licensed professional counselor.

EXPERIENCE: More than 10 years as a school counselor, with two years of field experience as a school-based counselor. Has worked for Roseburg Public Schools and the Sutherlin School District.

She may not be able to stop children from having problems, but Chris Murphy makes it her mission to equip kids with tools to help conquer them with. "Sometimes that means being able to look at a conflict and making the decision to walk away," she said. Yet even when days are beset with challenges, Murphy said she remains upbeat. "I genuinely love working with children of all ages and being a positive force for them."



NAME: Christina Mast

POSITION: Third-grade teacher

EDUCATION: Yoncalla High graduate, earned bachelor's degree and master's degree in education at the University of Oregon

EXPERIENCE: Four years teaching at Yoncalla Elementary School

Christina Mast knows how important teachers are in their kids' lives. That fuels her desire to show up each day ready to deliver her very best. Her favorite subject is math, but whatever the lesson is, "we make learning fun. I love a classroom filled with laughter. But it's very structured." She's been known to pull up YouTube in class to get students chanting along with catchy songs to count by threes. After all, "if it's boring for me, it's definitely boring for the kids. We can't let that happen."

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