

## Press Clippings 1/20/2022

### Daily Herald

#### McHenry County Board approves new regional superintendent --- 1/20/2022

By Ben Szalinski for Shaw Media



Former Elgin Area School District U-46 administrator Diana Hartmann has been appointed the next superintendent of the McHenry County Regional Office of Education. *Ryan Rayburn/Shaw Media*

The McHenry County Board has turned the page on several years of troubles at the McHenry County Regional Office of Education by approving a new regional superintendent.

On Tuesday, board members voted 19-2 to approve Diana Hartmann, a special education administrator at Elgin Area School District U-46, to take over as the county's regional superintendent.

"I have seen over the years there wasn't much being done at the office, and I look forward to bring a lot more service back," Hartmann said in an interview.

The position was vacated in November when the county board voted unanimously to remove Leslie Schermerhorn as superintendent following years of unaddressed accounting issues and organizational problems that left board members saying they felt like they had no choice but to make a change.

Hartmann -- one of three people interviewed for the job -- said she wants the office to have a greater public presence and a better grasp on the issues parents and school officials feel need to be addressed.

"Hopefully, over the next year, people will begin to know what the office does," she said.

The McHenry County Regional Office of Education is different from most of the other 34 in Illinois because it covers a single county, while many offices are responsible for multiple counties. The regional offices of education in Lake, Kane, DeKalb, DuPage and Will counties also serve single counties.

The regional office of education is responsible for handling teacher certification, truancy issues and GEDs, as well as ensuring the county's public school districts remain financially viable and in compliance with state curriculum requirements.

Hartmann said she is ready for the "cleanup job" that is ahead of her.

During Schermerhorn's tenure, the regional office of education had at least six consecutive state audits come back with errors, many of them repeats from previous years. Audits of fiscal 2020 and 2021 have yet to be completed by the Illinois auditor general. An audit conducted by the county last year also produced 27 findings.

"She is enthusiastic about the position and will work closely with our school districts and county board to get our ROE back on track," said county board Chairman Mike Buehler, a Crystal Lake Republican.

Among Hartmann's priorities will be cleaning up the office's accounting errors, getting to know how the office functions and finding out what issues people in the county need to be addressed.

Hartmann is a Lakemoor resident and comes to the regional office of education with a special education background in addition to her administrative experience. She previously was director of student services at the Alexander Leigh Center for Autism in McHenry and taught special education classes at Hannah Beardsley Middle School in Crystal Lake. She also was a teacher at Harvard High School.

Hartmann said she thinks her various areas of experience in education will make her transition to regional superintendent smooth.

"I feel pretty confident," she said. "I've served in a lot of different roles in the years I've been in education."

The regional superintendent is an elected position, and Hartmann said she plans to run for reelection as a Republican in November.

## Kane County Reporter

### **‘There’s a backlash’: Mother claims Elgin U-46 allowing son to be bullied over refusal to wear masks --- 1/20/2022**



Noelle Dupuis, principal at Hawk Hollow Elementary, in black. | Hawk Hollow Elementary Twitter

Local parent Rebecca Englese is accusing her son’s school of overlooking his bullying because it involves students enforcing a mask mandate on him.

Englese said other students have been encouraged by school officials to pit pro-mask students against her son, who has refused to wear a mask at school and the bus ride home due to medical concerns.

“Starting last week, we had a bullying report reported to the school on my son's behalf because kids on the bus keep telling them to pull their masks and keep repeating it won't leave them alone,” she said. “And one occasion in November, an older girl had twisted my son's arm to get him to put his mask over his nose. So that investigation is under way.”

**Elgin Area School District U46** serves over 37,000 students in Elgin all of which are currently subject to mask mandate, meaning nearly the entire class day they are required to wear masks, up to eight hours at a stretch.

Her 6-year-old son attends Hawk Hollow Elementary, where he recently served a suspension after an incident in class.

Englese said her son became concerned about mask usage after his twin older brothers developed sores on their faces from masks.

“The doctor prescribed them an antibiotic and said that the bacteria accumulation, as well as the moisture within the mask, is a contributing cause to what's going on on their face,” she said.

Englese said her son also noted that the mask restricts his breathing. Prior to the beginning of this school year, she said the school denied a mask exemption on medical and religious grounds. She also said his concerns about bullying and the masking have gone unheeded by school officials.

Englese's son was suspended, she said, after his entire classroom turned on him and taunted him for not wearing his mask, chanting “put your mask on, put your mask on.”

“Finally, the teacher stepped in and told me something: He would need to put a mask over his nose or he'd be removed from class. So she ended up calling the principal and to remove him from class. The principal put him in an isolated room where she conducted an investigation to see why he wouldn't put his mask up over his nose,” Englese said. “After an hour of an investigation, decided to call me and let me know that I needed to come pick him up because he was going to be suspended from school.”

**Noelle Dupuis** serves as principal for Englese's school. She noted the matter with Englese and her husband in an email.

Dupuis was recently pictured in a group of adults and students, masked but close, on its Twitter page. “This is what a principal in action looks like! Dropping everything, getting down to the right level and listening to students read!” **Dr. Kyle Bunker, Executive Director of Elementary Schools, tweeted.**

Still her she said her son served his suspension for refusing to wear mask in school.

“Good morning, Mr. and Mrs. Englese. We look forward to meeting with you via Zoom today at 10:30 to explain the concerns you address in your multiple emails to me yesterday/early this morning,” Dupuis said in an email follow-up with Englese. “In the interim, kindly know that the District is conducting an investigation into the allegation of bullying that you raise.

“In addition, please know that (name redacted) is again refusing to wear his mask. Staff have requested that (name redacted) wear his mask, and is non-compliant with the staff directive. I am currently meeting with (name redacted) to ask that he comply with staff directives. Again, we look forward to meeting with you shortly.”

Englese noted in her meeting with Dupuis that the principal defended the children who were enforcing the mask mandate on her son.

“If they see a child breaking a rule that they're supposed to say something, and if they can't confront the matter and solve it on their own, then they need to ask an adult,” Englese said. “And that — in my eyes — is starting to turn into bullying from classmates, getting friends against friends, creating a very divisive environment for these kids.”

Englese said deputizing children is problematic.

“They're being tasked with policing their fellow student and friends and classmates on issues that they are not emotionally capable of dealing with,” she said. “They don't realize the significance of the situation that's going on right now, and there's a backlash, and many, many, many parents that are against the mandate that has gone into the courts and is now in front of the judge. And but yet they're still trying to force my kids to do that, not really realizing, and then the leadership at the school is encouraging that.”

She added that Dupuis is partially responsible for the environment in which children at the school fear each other.

“It's also the principal and stated that these kids are fearful of getting sick and that they would die if they got sick,” she noted. “And that in itself is psychological damage that has been done to these kids to think this way when it's like less of a serious condition to them, if not the same as the flu.”

In fact, Gov. J.B. Pritzker's authority to mandate masks in schools has been challenged successfully by three school districts in Illinois which haven't allowed to remain mask optional pending further action by the court, just like most schools across the country and world.

The World Health Organization has noted children five and under should not be forced to wear masks while the Centers for Disease Control has dropped their limit to two years and older.

However, when the **Wall Street Journal** went to write about masking in children they could only find one study on the matter and its results were inconclusive.

Critics have called forced masking in children **“child abuse”** particularly given the lack of scientific evidence that masking has any identifiable effect.

“We lack credible evidence for benefits of masking kids aged 2 to 5, despite what the American Academy of Pediatrics says,” former dean of Harvard Medical School, Jeffrey Flier said, according to the New York Post.

Many are asking why Illinois is holding onto masking given the lack of data backing up Pritzker's executive orders.

A **University of Illinois at Chicago study** found that "cloth masks and face coverings are likely to have limited impact on lowering COVID-19 transmission, because they have minimal ability to prevent the emission of small particles.. and offer limited personal protection with respect to small particle inhalation.”

Another study found protection to be minimal and that fitting itself could be a problem.

"Does that Face Mask Really Protect You," a **2010 research article** by Dr. Larry E. Bowen of the Southern Research Institute in Birmingham, Ala., fit various types of masks on a

mannequin to study their effectiveness,. It found that wearing surgical, bandana and dust masks offer "very little protection" compared to N95 masks and concluded that "wearing these face masks may produce a false sense of protection."