

## Spanish teacher makes switch from classroom to office

With Kate Murray's ascension to principal, a new interim assistant principal is chosen

By Sean O'Melia & Haley Reid  
STAFF REPORTERS

Michael Spears, Spanish teacher and technology specialist, has stepped in as interim assistant principal.

Principal Kate Murray began her role as principal on Feb. 28, leaving an empty seat for assistant principal.

Now begins the process to find the person to fill that job. North has appointed an interim assistant principal until the position can be filled permanently.

"An assistant principal needs to be an instructional leader and have to be dedicated to students and they also have to be committed to following through and following up," Murray said. "Mr. Spears is an incredibly talented teacher and comes with 18 years of successful classroom experience. He has a great compassion and dedication to stu-

dents and the ability to communicate with diverse groups of people."

Spears will work as a teacher on assignment, meaning he will put the classroom aside until a new assistant principal is selected.

"I have some of the best students that I've had since I've been at North, and it's really hard to walk away from that, but knowing that I'll still be in the building, I'll still be working with the long-term substitute. I can pretty much stop in every day, if I want to," Spears said.

Assistant Superintendent Dr. Jon Dean is working to find the permanent assistant principal.

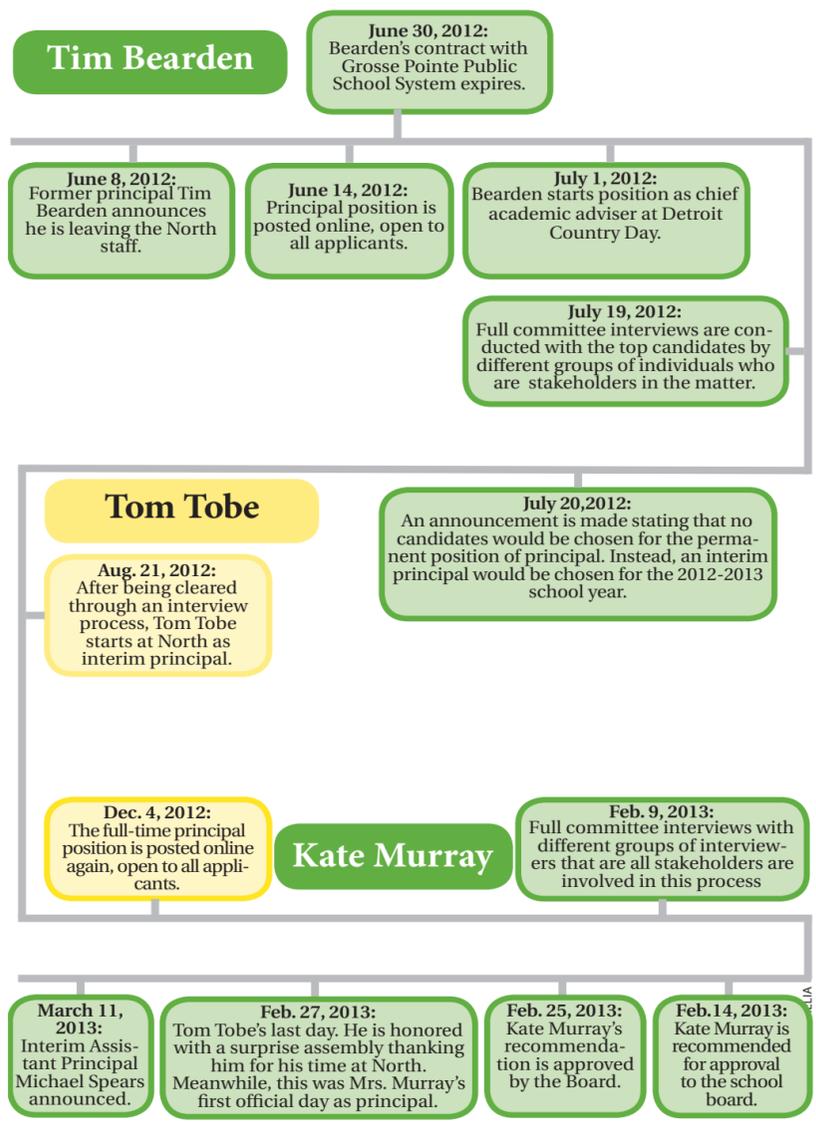
"We will have interview teams that consist of staff, parents and students once we have identified candidates we are interested in," Dean said. "I anticipate that the Board of Education will receive a recommendation for a new permanent assistant principal in May."

Superintendent Dr. Thomas Harwood is confident that the next assistant principal, will be up to North standards.

"We ... have many talented individuals who come to our district and ... continue to develop their professional skills. Because of their advanced training, they may aspire to move to a higher level administrative position within our district or outside of our district," Harwood said in an email. "For North High School, we are very fortunate to currently have such a strong leadership pool of both administrators and teachers who will help continue the growth and progress of the North High School students and community."

Spears said he will not be applying for the permanent assistant principal position.

"I'm happy to help out as an interim. I feel that the best place at North for me is in the classroom. I like being a teacher, and I like being the department chair of the foreign language department, I think that's probably where I'm happiest."



**SPRING MEET THE COACHES**  
Tuesday, March 19, 6:30 p.m. at North in the cafeteria.

**FIRST DAY OF SPRING**  
Wednesday, March 20.

**CHOIR CONCERT**  
Thursday, March 21 at Assumption Greek Orthodox Church, 7 p.m.

**BAND SPRING CONCERT**  
Wednesday, March 27, 7 p.m. in the PAC.

**EASTER**  
Sunday, March 31.

**SPRING BREAK**  
Begins on Good Friday, March 29. School resumes Monday, April 8.

**EVENTS**  
North will be having a fashion show on Thursday, March 21, 6 p.m. at the Lochmoor Country Club. The evening will include a raffle, silent auction, dinner, and a fashion show featuring items from Girlie Girl modeled by North students.

Please recycle after reading.  
**Thank you!**

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## Committee researches block scheduling, presents findings to School Board

By Maria Liddane & Sarah Schade  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF & STAFF REPORTER

The 21st Century High School Review Team was 63% in favor of recommending a seven-period alternating block schedule to the Board of Education. The High School Schedule subcommittee selected this schedule as a best fit for the District, but the entire committee did not reach the 70% threshold established at their inception that they needed to make a recommendation.

"It wasn't enough for us to make a recommendation to the Board and say, 'We should switch to this,'" senior and committee member Francesca Ciaramitaro said. "So, we just presented them with our research and said, 'This is what we found.'"

The entire committee, created and led by deputy superintendent Dr. Jon Dean, was designed to consider aspects of the high school experience. The group is broken down into three subcommittees: High School Schedule, Blended Learning and Dual Enrollment, and Credit Recovery. Twenty teachers, seven community members or parents, six administrators and four students make up the committee as a whole.

The schedule in discussion has eight 90-minute periods – seven classes and an advisory period (90 minutes where students work and can talk to teachers), four periods one day and four periods the next.

Ciaramitaro was part of the High School Schedule subcommittee and favored the block schedule. The subcommittee visited Birmingham Lahser and Northville High Schools, who both use this block schedule. A 21-page slideshow of the subcommittee's research and work was presented to the Board, though they could not make an official recommendation.

Principal Kate Murray, a committee member, understands both schedules have pros and cons.

"There is no such thing as a perfect high school schedule," Murray said.

Murray said the current schedule provides students with "lots of different opportunities," and she recognizes elective and tutorial op-

tions as beneficial.

"I also am intrigued and understand the educational benefits of a longer teaching period, and I'm attracted to that idea," she said. "I also think that an advisory is an interesting option for the high school, so that every student would have an advisory at the same time along with the teachers. So no matter which class you are struggling in you could have access to that teacher."

Dean also views longer classes as an asset of the block schedule and approves of the advisory period.

"One of the things we're having a problem with right now is that some kids have tutorial and some kids don't. I don't know what the rationale for our decisions on that all the time are. If it's valuable, why doesn't every kid have it? Or if it's not valuable, why do so many kids have it?" he said.

The 21st Century High School Review Team's goal is to identify what will "best meet the needs of all GPPSS students." The group agreed that "financial stewardship will be a consideration" but "will not supersede the needs of students."

"We looked at it, but it wasn't a primary consideration. Certainly, for the Board it gets to be a primary consideration for them because one of their jobs is making sure that we have the correct funding and support for programs we need for kids," Dean said. "I think there are ways that it could be done, but there are costs involved. And I think that's one of the things that might have to be worked out."

Dean estimated this block schedule would add \$800,000 to \$1 million to the cost of running our high schools.

"There were pros and cons to making a switch to an alternating AB block schedule, and I respect several great teachers who supported the prospect of making a switch," South parent and committee member Cynthia Sohn said in an email. "However, many questions concerned me regarding a change to the alternating AB block schedule. Is 90 minutes too much for the average student attention span? Would missing one day of class be like missing two days since our current two days of learning would be consolidated into one day of learning? How would teachers adjust lesson plans to avoid loading up on 90 minute lectures/double geometry lessons, etc.?"

South parent and "School Board watcher" Allison Baker sees longer periods as problematic.

"Students on the block plan need to be able to focus on one subject for longer periods of time, which could be difficult for younger students, especially those with ADHD," she said in an email.

## ACT and MME raise pressure for juniors, district

By Izzy Ellery & Melina Glusac  
STAFF REPORTERS

"This is it." This thought races through every juniors' mind before they aim their fresh, No. 2 Dixon Ticonderoga pencil at minuscule bubbles.

"I want to do good on every standardized test," junior Brian Almeria said.

The busy layout of "Test Fest" week on March 5, 6 and 7 gave Almeria the opportunity to put his attitude into action on the ACT, WorkKeys (which assesses employment skills) and the MME (Michigan Merit Exam). For many, the days were already organized in order from "vital" to "not even trying."

"I think more people worry about the ACT because it's a harder test, and it is one of the main things colleges look at," junior Vince Bruno said.

Although students find it irrelevant to their future, the MME actually assesses juniors for their immediate college readiness in addition to garnering accolades for the district based on scores.

"Schools are judged, and they're posted, and you see that we're in the top 3% that comes from the Newsweek rating, and the state of Michigan publishes where each school is at. That data is used by communities to advertise their communities and say that we're in the top 10% of communities in the state," Assistant Principal Tom Beach said. "Realtors use it, and when people are buying a house in the district, they say that we're in the top 2% of schools in the state, so the ratings become very important."

Recognizing this importance, Brian Almeria has vowed to try his best on the MME portion.

"I want to live up to the standard of Grosse Pointe (and the) expectations of everything the school is," Almeria said.

The Michigan Merit Exam is not just part of day three of testing. Rather, it encompasses all tests given in the week, including the WorkKeys and the highly valued ACT.

"Day three is what is called the Michigan components. We used to run the MEAP for juniors before they switched it to the MME, which is the Michigan Merit Exam. The (state legislators) decided that the ACT did not measure fully a student's ability, so they created extra questions in math and English and social studies to assess a student's abilities to see whether or not they're ready in Michigan standards," Beach said.

## FIVE MINUTES WITH Cafeteria worker Sandy Bielak

By Jennifer Kusch  
STAFF REPORTERS

Cafeteria worker Sandy Bielak did not attend her sister's wedding hoping to meet the man with whom she'd spend the rest of her life, but that's exactly what happened. She and her husband, Ron, have been married for 26 years and are "as happy as can be."

"We are a good match, and it's give and take all the way around," Bielak said. "We have our disagreements, but we work them out. We don't blow them off."

Sandy and Ron's three kids reinforce the importance of their marriage.

"They bring you together, and you do more... They're our everything, they really are."

Growing up with five siblings taught Bielak the importance of family time.

"We did everything together. Baseball, basketball, all those sports. Girl Scouts, vacations, I mean, we did everything together."

Now that she has a family of her own, albeit on a somewhat smaller scale, she appreciates that her spouse loves to focus on the family as much as she does.

"He's great with kids. I tease everybody and say that I have four kids because he really is just a big kid. He loves them so much and is just a great dad."

However, Sandy has also found that family life has its challenges, which can try even the strongest of marriages. Their 16-year-old adopted son, Joshua, is currently enrolled in military school.

"He has emotional struggles, ADHD, he's bipolar... he just has a lot of emotional problems."

But the Bielak's grave through circumstances on an infinite scale, their closeness allows that.

Thanks to the priority they've put on their marriage, the Bielaks have navigated the past 26 years together successfully and are looking forward to many more.



JENNIFER KUSCH

Cafeteria worker Sandy Bielak has worked with the Sodexo lunch program at North for 11 years.

### What is your favorite movie?

I love romantic comedies, so probably While You Were Sleeping. I love the romance of it. Sleepless in Seattle is one of my favorites, too.

### What is your favorite thing to do?

Knitting and baking. I love to bake. I'll bake anything they'll eat. And I love trying new things, like pies, cupcakes, cookies.

### What is your favorite childhood memory?

We didn't do a lot of big vacations, but we went camping. Family camping vacations were a lot of fun.

### If you could switch places with someone for one day, who would it be?

I'm happy with my life. I don't think I'd want to switch with anyone. I really don't think I would. I'm happy with where I'm at.

### What is your favorite food?

I like fruits. It's healthy, and I'm trying to eat healthy. I don't always do it, but I try. But, I mean, I'm not really picky.

## Junior testing

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

"You get an individual score on the ACT for colleges, but the MME score is made up of a combination of questions from the ACT, the WorkKeys, the Michigan component. In the beginning, we had kids say, 'Oh, I'm only going to take the ACT because it's free, and I don't care about the rest.' Well, you end up not getting a valid score under the MME, and colleges do look at what your score was, so they don't just look at your ACT score anymore."

So which portion should students stress about the most?

"They're both important, but they measure different things," Beach said. "The ACT is a test for college readiness. Am I ready to be successful in college? The MME portion of the test really determines a little more depth. There's a difference between being ready and being able to perform there."

He offered advice to students: sharpen your Dixon Ticonderoga and your focus.

"It's important that students come prepared and ready," Beach said. "It's a high-stakes test. We treat it that way."

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## Block scheduling

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

"But the biggest difficulty I found with the Block Plan was that if you were ever sick, or had an emergency and had to miss class, you would miss much more than ... just one lecture, it was very hard to catch back up."

Dean sees student focus as a legitimate concern.

"I look at it this way: I think 49 minutes is too long to do any one activity with kids. If you walk into a class and a teacher talks to you for 49 minutes, I think it's hard to

tend to that," he said. "I think in good teaching, you need to vary your instructional practices. I think that's true of 49 minutes or 90 minutes. But it's certainly more true in a 90 minute block of time."

The Board also had questions.

"I'm not exactly sure where we're going to go with block scheduling at this point," Dean said. "Clearly they have many questions that still need to be answered before they consider a move to block scheduling. I think the community wants to see more data on how this would positively impact students. I think the Board wants to see, and I think the community would like to see, how teaching might look different."

## Committee surveys community

While the surveys had many questions revolving around block scheduling, they also included questions related to the sum of work by the 21st Century Review Team subcommittees, which explore the integration of technology into schools and graduation requirements, among other things. Each survey was created specific to audience. There were 18 questions on the faculty survey, 24 on the student survey and 25 on the parent survey.

\*There was a "skip" option for each question.

97 faculty members

463 students

876 parents

95% of parents indicated that the current 7-period day meets the needs of their child.

53.7% of parents are interested in learning more about possible improvements to the schedule.

63.4% of students like the current schedule and have no interest in any changes.

32.8% of students like the current schedule but are interested in potential im-

51.7% of faculty members are "favorably impressed" with the current schedule and not interested in any potential changes.

36.8% of faculty members are "favorably impressed" with the current schedule but are interested in potential changes.

### Subcommittees within the 21st Century Review Team

High School Schedule

Blended Learning & Dual Enrollment

Credit Recovery

### Principal Kate Murray on blended learning possibilities:

"On this side of the continuum, it would be what you have right now; you sit 49 minutes in your class every day Monday through Friday. On this side of the continuum, you have a student that has a fully online course and never sees a teacher and never sits in a desk. So we have options in between there."

And so Grosse Pointe is looking at some options in terms of having a combined class where some of the time would be spent in the traditional setting, in the classroom, in front of a teacher and then the other part of the class would be online. I'm interested and excited to try to create what those options would look like for North students.

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