

Shane Oakes
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Greetings, my name is Shane Oakes and I'm the first year principal here at White River Valley High School but this is my 7th school year working here.

I've taken an interesting path to get here. I moved to Vermont with my wife after we graduated from college and settled close to her family in central Vermont. I started my professional career as a Correctional Officer having studied Criminology in college. I always saw myself in a career of service as a law enforcement officer. I quickly realized that I wanted to make my impact doing work upstream in a more proactive and preventative manner.

I moved to a job in community mental health working first working with adults but then moving into a position at East Valley Academy, Alternative School for students with Emotional and Behavioral Challenges just up the road in East Randolph. I held a number of different positions at EVA and worked to earn my VT teachers licence at Physical Educator and ultimately served as Head of School and Director of School Based Services overseeing all of the school based contracts and services that the Clara Martin Center had with the schools in our service area. It is in this capacity that I first worked with Principal Bowen and Superintendent Kinnarny and how I came to have a better understanding of the challenges that our public schools face.

I left that role in 2015 to work at the Family Center of Washington Country, joining the field of early childhood which was a field that was also in need of and going through significant changes. This is where I first hear the analogy of the New England Farm House to describe the way our systems were built. Start with the house, add a barn, then an addition to some out building, and eventually connect all of these things to help combat the cold winters. What you get is serviceable, unique, and often viewed as charming, but it isn't efficient and if designed from the outset would have been constructed entirely differently.

I will be honest, as a product of a small rural school in Northern Maine whose footprint mirrors that of our WRVSU (though absent the topographical challenges that our mountain ranges provide) I couldn't understand how I could drive from Chelsea, down through Tunbridge then South Royalton over to Bethel and past Stockbridge and over the Rochester and see so many schools. At the time this included 4 different high schools which honestly didn't make sense to me. However, through previous education reform measures and a lot of difficult but important work by our communities we have made changes with an eye towards meeting the needs of our students and communities as well as maintaining fiscal responsibility.

These are the reasons that when I chose to return to the field of education in 2019 that I chose to come to White River Valley. This school and our communities were doing the work that I felt needed to be done and making these changes doing so through a systematic approach. I

started out as the MTSS Coordinator working to ensure that our systems and support was responsive and worked to meet the needs of all students. This system has only grown and strengthened in my time here and focuses on 3 things; creating a community of belonging and opportunities, community connections and partnerships and providing opportunities for all learners.

Community of Belonging

- I believe that our strong sense of community with deep connections between teachers and students is the strength and backbone of our school. This is essential to creating the foundation of trust needed for students to push themselves and grow.
- We accomplish this through a variety of ways starting with our Teacher Advisory structure and school wide morning meetings.
- We lean into these structures in ways that I believe are unique to WRV in with our advisory cup, student led morning meetings, and school wide activities and transitions such as Turkey Trot, Outing Days, Winter and Spring Carnivals and other activities and events designed to foster relationship and build camaraderie.
- We also have a long history of community based learning where students find meaningful opportunities to engage in learning outside of the classroom and explore areas of interest, different careers and volunteer opportunities to give back to the community.

Connections and Partnerships - We continue to ask more and more of schools to support students and families and this isn't just a shift in the delivery model. Access to health care, dental, and mental health supports are absolutely needed to support the needs of students and families so that students can access their education.

- Clara Martin Center and HCRS school based and outpatient services.
- School Based Clinicians, Behavioral Interventionists, BCBA's
- South Royalton Health Center - Care Coordinator integrated into our MTSS team
- Health HUB and Dental Clinic providing services to students here at school
- We have some strong partnerships with UVM and VT Law and Graduate School

Opportunities - for a small school we have a tremendous amount of opportunities for students to engage in and most students do engage in these opportunities that are very much part of student learning growth and personal development.

- Flexible Pathways Department
- Personalized Learning Center providing targeted and intensive in school support
- Access to 2 different Tech Centers providing options for both full and half day Tech Programs to better suit student needs, interests and long term goals.
- Elective Seminar - exploring a variety of different areas of interest with learning focused on the WRVSU Portrait of a Learner Characteristics
- 17 varsity sports as well as member to member partnerships that allow access to sports that are not able to offer
- Concert Band

- Jazz Band
- Chorus
- Drama
- NHS
- Numerous clubs

I will say to this committee that I don't think we can take a one size fits all approach to addressing the challenges in our education system nor the burden on property taxes. We don't have the resources to demolish the old New England farmhouse which is what this one size fits all approach feels like is intended to do. We need to look closely at the recommendations put forth by the task force and keep the needs of our students and communities in mind while taking actual steps that find efficiencies and continue to improve the opportunities and educational outcomes of our students.