

New superintendent, new teachers, staff changes all set for 2021-2022

By Lydia Ely
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With the school year rapidly approaching, Park County schools have been finalizing a batch of staffing changes to lead the first full school year in person since the 2018-2019 school year.

Notable among the group is the installment of a new Livingston School District superintendent, Lynne Scalia. Scalia's background is deeply rooted in Montana education — previously, she was the principal of Park High School, and before that, she was the superintendent of Monforton School in Four Corners, taught in the Bozeman School District for 11 years, and attended both University of Montana and Montana State University for her bachelor's and doctorate degrees respectively.

Scalia comes in with an ambitious agenda, wrapped up in a three-year plan for student growth. Serving this is a large administrative restructuring. The restructured leadership roles and new teachers in the Livingston School District are as follows:

• At Washington Elementary School

- Anne Penn Cox will be the principal and deputy instructional director for Student Support Services. She will also be the Early Childhood Liaison, and will provide oversight for Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS).

- Paige Stewart will be the new Two-Year Kindergarten teacher.

- Megan Tingley will be the Pre-K Special Education teacher.

• At Winans Elementary School

- Patti Durgan will be principal and director of Professional Development, continue to build Livingston Public Schools' Basecamp for all employee groups, assume some Literacy Grant Facilitator duties, and perform oversight for MTSS. She will also serve as teacher on special assignment, serving as dean of students, and supporting district teaching and learning projects.

- Brian Shepard will teach music.



Photo by Lydia Ely

ABOVE AND ON THE COVER: Lynne Scalia, the new superintendent of the Livingston School District, is pictured in her office.

- At East Side Elementary School
- Leah Shannon will be principal.
- Roxy Shneehan will teach third grade.
- Brian Shepard will teach music.

• At Sleeping Giant Middle School

- Brian Murakami will be assistant principal and support East Side and SGMS 504 plans for students.
- Morgan Smith will teach seventh grade math.
- Annie Bandstra will teach seventh grade English.
- Aleesha Redmon will teach eighth grade English.
- Kaitlin Fedel will be a counselor.
- Alicia Herman will teach special education.

- At Park High School
- Nate Parseghian will be the District Activities Director.
- Lindsay Baciuska will teach special education.
- Andrew Marsh will teach special education.
- Cassidy Corrigan will teach agriculture education.
- RD Jenkinson will be a counselor.
- Alyssa Sylvia will teach English.
- Hunter James will teach industrial technology.

• In general district roles

- Katy Brammer will be a Park Online Education Expedition teacher.
- Barbara Racine will be a school psychologist.
- Bob Stevenson will be the director of Student Support Services.
- Todd Wester will be the director of COVID-19 Recovery, Community Partnerships & School-Based Mental Health, Work-based Learning build-out, work with the superintendent on facilities, work on the Cradle to Career dashboard.
- Jordan Viegut will be the director of Teaching and Learning, Virtual School director, and oversee and be a team member of the IT Plan.

Shields Valley Schools also has a new crop of staff

- Debbie Johnston will teach kindergarten.
- Kelsi Vincent will teach first grade.
- Theresa Watts will teach second grade.
- Shannon Baukol will teach sixth grade.
- Ashley Johnston will be the librarian at the elementary school.
- Jenny McMichael will be the resource teacher for special education at the middle and high school.
- Jeni Sager will run the Title I program.

• Gardiner Schools have no new staff. Arrowhead, Cooke City and Pine Creek schools could not be reached before press time.

• St. Mary's Catholic School is restructuring its leadership with Melissa Beitel and Father Garrett Nelson as co-administrators. Also at St. Mary's, Anngelea Klein will teach first grade and Catherine Sorenson will teach fourth grade.

How to help students improve their focus on their studies

Teachers strive to create supportive and challenging classroom environments for their students. Such settings can bring out the best in students and help them overcome obstacles, including an inability to focus.

The struggles students can have with focusing on their studies was apparent during the pandemic. A 2020 survey of more than 400 college students found that 64 percent were concerned about their ability to maintain their focus and discipline in remote instructional environments. Though educators, students and parents are hopeful that remote learning will soon be a thing of the past, no one is certain about what lies ahead

in regard to the 2021-22 school year. Ideally, students will be back in school time full-time five days per week by the start of the new academic year. However, there's no guarantee that will be the case, and students may need help focusing on their studies.

- Emphasize one activity at a time. Various studies have shown that multitasking adversely affects performance and makes it hard to concentrate. A recent study from researchers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology found that performing two or three activities simultaneously puts significantly more demand on the brain than simply doing those tasks one after

another. All students, and especially those who are struggling with focus, should be encouraged to take on one task at a time.

- Take breaks. The Cleveland Clinic notes that various studies have found that periodic breaks improve mood, boost performance and increase a person's ability to concentrate and pay attention. Many students are well acquainted with lengthy cramming sessions on the eve of a big exam, which can feel like a rite of passage for high schoolers and college students. Parents and educators can emphasize the importance of taking breaks during such sessions and how periodic rest can

help improve performance.

- Take a piecemeal approach to big tasks. The Child Mind Institute notes that breaking big tasks down into smaller, more manageable pieces can help kids effectively tackle more challenging tasks. The piecemeal approach can make big tasks seem less daunting, and the success kids have at each smaller task can provide some needed momentum as they draw closer to solving the problem.

Many students struggle to focus on their studies. Some simple strategies can help students overcome such challenges and fulfill their academic potential.