

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 2, 2021

# JORDAN INDEPENDENT

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PHOTO BY EDEN TELLER

Jordan School District principals Ben Bakeberg, left, Melissa Barnett, center, and Jeff Vizenor collaborated intensely and leaned on each other for support throughout the past 18 months of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## COVID IMPACT

# Rollercoaster for child care

## Local centers take hit from pandemic

BY JACQUELINE DEVINE  
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Over the past year and a half, child care centers around the nation have suffered throughout the COVID-19 global pandemic. Child care providers are now speaking out on how it has negatively impacted their industry.

Since the pandemic began and schools moved to virtual learning, millions of parents have had to work from home. Fearing for the health and safety of their children, many parents have opted out of child care services which in turn has led to labor shortages.

New Horizon Academy CEO and Minnesota Child Care Association President Chad Dunkley said there are currently 72 New Horizon Academies throughout the state. He said the last year and a half has been a rollercoaster for all child care providers across the country. Minnesota was no exception.

“Back at the last end of March of last year, New Horizon Academy was serving over 10,000 Minnesota children, and in a matter of weeks we went to serving about 2,200. We were really struggling with what do we do now,” said Dunkley. “Pre-pandemic we had over 3,100 teachers here in Minnesota and at one point we had about 1,000. We’ve continued to hire and more families have returned. Today, we sit a little over 2,100 teachers here.”

Dunkley said he understands that

**Child care to 4 ►**

# Back to school

## As students return to their desks, Jordan principals reflect on the last year, and the new one

BY EDEN TELLER  
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As students return to classrooms for their first fall of in-person learning since 2020, the Jordan Independent sat down with the three principals of Jordan Public Schools to ask how their community navigated these last 18 months and what they’re looking ahead to this fall.

When in-person learning shut down in the spring of 2020, “we spent Saturdays and Sundays here, trying to figure out what we were going to do,” said Jeff Vizenor, principal of Jordan High School. The amount of cooperation between staff and families was greater than he’d ever seen before

at the beginning of the pandemic. As a parent, he also saw his daughter – who graduated from Jordan High School in 2021 – struggling with the isolation.

“Nothing can replace that face-to-face conversation, that high-five, that smile from your teachers,” Vizenor said. It was “a real effort to get to June when we had kids walking across the stage” for graduation, he added.

“It’s a model of what can happen when people work together,” added Ben Bakeberg, principal of Jordan Middle School. “It’s got to be about kids and what’s best for all kids, not just a few kids.”

For Melissa Barnett, principal of Jordan Elementary School, having a smaller district was a major benefit as her staff “built the plane while it’s

flying” to adjust to the pandemic, she said. “You can build stronger relationships with your administrators.”

Having a smaller district also helped create relationships with families, who were up close and personal with teaching in a way they hadn’t been before. When learning went virtual, some teachers were apprehensive at having “parents in their world” in a closer way, Barnett said, but on the flip side, “families get to see what teachers do every day... to see the teaching side of it, as a parent.” That built a lot of understanding and appreciation, even as schools were delivering bad news to families.

“We were the messengers, a lot, for

**School to 16 ►**

## INDEX

OPINION.....	5
OBITUARIES.....	6
SPORTS.....	11
CLASSIFIEDS.....	13

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VOLUME 139, ISSUE 16  
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