

Anna Ostendorf's speech during the Rotary Club's Service Above Self banquet on April 26, 2022:

In March 2020, Minnesota State emergency declarations ordered our schools to close while simultaneously tasking districts with providing free childcare for Tier I and II workers. Remember when we thought it would only be for a couple of weeks?

The Red Wing Public Schools action plan included creating the COVID Response Team, spearheaded by Dawn Wettern, who is the Community Education director and oversees Kids Junction, which is the school's child care program. It also included Shanda Jorgensen, the district's safety consultant. In July, Joni Gorman joined the team as the district's new lead licensed school nurse. This COVID Response Team's responsibilities included safe protocols, contact tracing, messaging, "and more."

As many of us know, the "and more" has been a wild ride throughout this pandemic.

In nominating the team, Superintendent Karsten Anderson said, "For nearly two years they have worked extra hours – often weeknights and weekends -- without complaint, always putting students' and fellow staff members' health needs first. Their guidance in best practices was key in bringing students back to school and then keeping them in school. Their diligent work helped Red Wing Public Schools provide the best, safest place for our young people to be."

Dawn, Shanda, and Joni have often shouldered the burden of delivering unwelcome news and unpopular guidance. They constantly walk the fine line between protecting the health and safety of our students and staff and maintaining an engaging, in-person learning environment as much as possible. They have pivoted – that COVID buzzword – over, and over, and over as this virus and what we know about it has changed over the past 2 years. Their tireless work has maintained a guiding light for our district through the storm.

As a school board member, as a parent, as a community member, and as an occasional substitute teacher in the schools, I cannot begin to thank them enough for their service. They have truly embodied service above self.