

LOCALNEWS

Surveys receive good response

BY EMILY GEDDE
Staff Writer

Administrators at Independent School District No. 361 got what they wanted. Last month, two different surveys were distributed to district residents asking what the residents thought were strengths and concerns of the district. Hoping to get a good turnout of responses, administrators were pleased to learn more than 600 surveys were completed.

“I was very pleased to hear we had good participation,” said Superintendent Kevin Grover. “I’m excited to dive into the results and see what direction this will lead us.”

Handled by the Minnesota School Board Association, the surveys were distributed in an effort to help define goals the district should consider to help it move forward in a positive direction.

Last week, Sandy Gundlach, director of school board services, visited the community and said she, too, was encouraged by the number of surveys completed.

“I was surprised a community of this size had the participation it did,” she said, adding more than 300 students responded to the survey. “(Student) response is important. It will be interesting to analyze.”

Gundlach spent two days in the area meeting with school board members, administrators, staff, students and parents to gain more information on expectations for

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Kevin Grover
Superintendent



the district. Results from the surveys and her visit should be available in February, she said.

“When we go over these responses, we’ll be looking for common themes,” Gundlach said. “We of course can’t address every concern, but this will help us measure what we should be looking at.”

And while concerns will play a role in defining goals, strengths will be noted, too.

“One of the strengths this district has is the staff and students working together,” said school board member Gordy Dault. “There is a lot of positive reinforcement with the kids.”

In addition, he said implementation of new programs and college in the classroom is already helping the district.

“There is dedication from the top down,” he said. “Our staff is really keeping the kids in mind.”

Board members agreed a main goal the district has is retaining its students while attracting newcomers.

“I think we’re on the right track,” said board Chairman Michelle Hebner.

And, members agreed improving the school’s infrastructure should also be a focus.

“Our facilities need a lot of work and a lot of updating,” said board member Mike Holden. “We’re not there yet, but there are good things happening.”

What’s next

Grover said Gundlach is expected to visit the community again for meetings with district officials and members of the Blue Ribbon Panel to put long-term and short-term goals into place.

“We will work together to form the direction the district is going to go,” Grover said. “There will be a lot of ideas and all kinds of pieces to this, and, unfortunately, we won’t be able to take into consideration every need issue.”

However, the superintendent said when some goals are met, hopefully new ones can be put in place.

“This is just the first step,” he said. “We have a long way to go. This is only the start of the process and hopefully we can set formal goals each year.”

Working ‘round the clock

BY SPENSER BICKETT
Staff Writer

Instead of physically punching a time card, Koochiching County employees will soon be able to clock in and out electronically, greatly streamlining the process.

The Koochiching County Board Tuesday approved the purchase of a new electronic timecard system from RtVision, a software engineering company from Little Falls.

The system costs \$36,065, county Administrative Director Teresa Briggs said. Along with a first-year maintenance cost of \$4,023, the total initial cost is \$40,088. There is an option to enter a two-year service agreement later in the year which would save the county some money, Briggs said.

The county’s current timecard system is entered manually on paper and the system reports a summarized total, Briggs said. It can’t produce a report showing daily attendance, she said, which is used often for auditing reports, family and medical leave situations and more.

“It’s time savings, it’s efficiencies, and it’s going to get us the reports that we want through

a computerized system instead of manually,” Briggs said.

In December, Briggs said representatives from RtVision met with county department managers, supervisors and staff who work with the current timecard system, all of whom expressed unanimous support for the new system. The new system would be fully implemented by June 1, she said.

In order to save the county money, Briggs said she’d charge part of the cost to the county Highway Department, county Land and Forestry Department, and county Health and Human Services Department, all of which would have their portions reimbursed through outside sources.

In other business, the county board approved adding Justin Franz to the county sheriff’s office part-time deputy call list. Franz recently joined the International Falls Police Department as a police officer.

Undersheriff Jon Froemke said the call list is used to fill part-time shifts, and a certain number of deputies is needed on the list to make sure shifts are covered.

“With sharing a lot of our part-timers with the

city, and sometimes up in dispatch, sometimes I run into a pinch and I need those guys,” Froemke said. “It’s good to have those guys on the list.”

Franz is dependable, and even though he’s working for the IFPD, Froemke said he’s confident Franz would pick up a shift that needed to be covered if needed.

The Koochiching Development Authority met prior to the county board meeting, and elected Brian McBride as the board’s chair for 2015, with Wayne Skoe elected as vice-chair. The KDA is made up of members of the Koochiching County Board.

The KDA reviewed the Pine Island peat bog project located northwest of Big Falls. Berger Horticultural Products, the project’s developer, announced recently it will reopen the harvesting site. KDA member Wayne Skoe reported Tuesday workers from Berger were working on-site at the moment.

According to a press release from Berger, this initial phase will cover 40 acres, and the future harvesting site will allow the company to access high-quality sphagnum peat moss in order to respond to an increasing demand.

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