

OPINION

OUR VIEW

Safety changes
good move

Changes being made at International Falls schools to improve the safety of students and staff are right moves at the right time.

And, kudos to Falls School Board members and staff for planning for these changes even before the tragic December shootings at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut.

Clearly, the need for these changes is a sad comment on our society, but necessary in today's world. And being proactive on such improvements is key to keeping our students and staff safe.

Students and staff will see the changes on the first day of school next fall. Upgrades to the security in the schools will include electronic accesses, panic buttons and cameras. Restricted access to the schools will only be in effect while school is in session.

These improvements will take some money, \$79,000, but

we believe that this is money well spent and a small price to help ensure that our learning institutions are safe places for our children, friends and family.

While these changes will be made immediately, it's likely that other changes could come in future years as district staff and school board members consider long-term plans that could offer even better security options in the future.

The changes will require cooperation from parents and other members of the public. We encourage patience and understanding by the community when attempting to gain access to the schools during the school day.

Change is often difficult, but in this case it's a necessary and smart move. The Falls School District has balanced the need to provide an open and inviting place for our children to learn, while at the same time bringing changes that will make this place safer for everyone.

How to contact your lawmakers

FEDERAL OFFICES President Barack Obama Democrat The White House 1600 Pennsylvania Ave. N.W. Washington, D.C., 20500 202-456-1111 Website: www.whitehouse.gov E-mail: president@whitehouse.gov U.S. Rep. Rick Nolan 2447 Rayburn House Office Building Washington DC 20515 202-225-6211 Website: www.nolan.house.gov Facebook: US Rep Rick Nolan Twitter: @USRepRickNolan Duluth Office of Congressman Rick Nolan (TEMPORARY) Gerald W. Heaney Federal Building and United States Courthouse 515 West First Street, Room 235 Duluth, MN 55802 218-464-5095, 5096, 5097 and 5098 Brainerd Office of Congressman Rick Nolan Brainerd City Hall 501 Laurel Street Brainerd, MN 56401 218-454-4078 U.S. Sen. Amy Klobuchar Democrat 302 Hart Senate Office Building Washington, D.C. 20510 202-224-3244 Minnesota Office:	1200 Washington Avenue South, Suite 250 Minneapolis, MN 55415 612-727-5220 Website: www.klobuchar.senate.gov U.S. Sen. Al Franken Democrat Senate Hart Building 320 Washington DC 20510 202-224-5641 Website: www.alfranken.com E-Mail: info@franken.senate.gov STATE OFFICES Gov. Mark Dayton 130 State Capitol 75 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. St. Paul, MN, 55155 800-657-3717 E-mail: Mark.Dayton@state.mn.us Rep. David Dill 571 State Office Building St. Paul, MN 55155 651-296-2190 800-339-0466 rep.david.dill@house.mn Assistant: Joan Harrison Sen. Tom Bak 75 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. Capitol, Room 226 St. Paul, MN 55155-1606 Capitol Office phone: (651) 296-8881 Email: www.senate.mn/ senatorbakkemail
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GUEST COLUMN

Dinner bells and other
lost sounds of summer

Editor's note: This column is an excerpt from Tom Purcell's new book, "An Apple Core, a Toilet: Misadventures of a 1970s Childhood."



Tom
PURCELL

I long for the sounds of summer I knew as a kid.

In the '60s and '70s, you see, most of our neighbors kept their windows open day and night, allowing the outside sounds to come in and the inside sounds to go out.

I woke every morning to the birds chirping outside my window screen, a dewy chill in the air. I'd smell my father's pipe, which he smoked while he read the paper downstairs. I'd go down to greet him. Sometimes he'd make scrambled eggs and toast covered with butter, and we'd eat while the birds kept on singing.

The evening sounds were equally powerful: a dog barking; a motorcycle downshifting on some faraway hill; people out on their porches listening to the Pirates play on the radio; a baby crying; a couple talking; children laughing; a window fan humming.

Sounds carry far in the summer air. One family on the hill — they had three adult kids still living at home — entertained the whole neighborhood with their cussing and bickering: "You're an idiot!" one would shout.

"No, you're an idiot!" said another.

"Shut up the both of youse!" the old man would yell. He told our next-door neighbor once he couldn't understand why his kids were so rude to each other, the lousy idiots.

The sounds I miss the most, though, were the shouts and

chants and bells that families relied on to call their kids home for supper.

In those days, kids didn't participate in one adult-run activity after another. We didn't sit inside air-conditioned homes playing video games. No, we were out in the hills roaming and exploring and creating all day long.

We collected scrap wood and built shacks. We dammed up the creek and caught minnows and crayfish. One summer, we built a motorized go-cart with some scrap items from a junked riding mower and a couple of two-by-fours. It was one of the great engineering feats in my neighborhood's history.

Occasionally, we'd fib to our mothers and ride our bikes 20 miles farther than we said we would. Or we'd pluck some baby pears off a tree by Horning road and whip them at cars. Every now and then, a car would screech to a stop, and we'd sprint through a creek aqueduct that ran 200 feet beneath the neighborhood.

There was only one major rule a kid had to abide by: you'd better be home in time for supper.

Every kid had a unique sound to call him home. My father went with a deep,

booming, "Tom, dinner! Tom, dinner!" I could hear him a mile away or more.

When moms did the calling, they always used full names. They always sang, too, as my Aunt Jane did: "Miiiiikkkeeeelllll, Keeeeevvvviiiiinnnnn, suuuuuppppppeerrrrr!"

The Givens boys, up on the hill across the railroad tracks, were called in by a large bell. The clanging sounded off at 6 every night, giving us the sense that a river boat was making its way up the Mississippi or a chow wagon was calling in the cow hands for some grub.

One family used a riot horn. The piercing "hrmmpppphhhhhh!" could be heard for miles. There was no way that kid, attempting to explain why he was late for supper, could claim he didn't hear it.

These mystical summer sounds have been gone a long time now. How wonderful it would be to bring them back.

At least one month every summer, why don't we cease every structured activity for our children, cancel every tournament, and end every adult-run event.

Let's turn off the television and computer. Let's shut down the air conditioner and unshutter the windows and doors.

Let's allow our kids to go out into the hills to roam and play and discover all day long. That will require us to call them home at dinner.

And our shouts and chants and bells will breathe some much needed music into the sweet summer air.

Purcell is a Pittsburgh Tribune-Review humor columnist and is nationally syndicated exclusively by Cagle Cartoons Inc.

WHAT OTHERS SAY

COLLEGE TRUSTEES MADE SMART MOVE

We are glad to hear the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities board of trustees honored its agreement with legislators last week when it voted to freeze tuition rates for college students next year, which includes students at our own Riverland Community College.

While the long-term effects of the state Legislature's enormous \$2 billion tax plan remain to be seen, one of the bright spots to come out of this year's legislative dealing is an increase in higher education funding, something

the state has drastically lagged behind with in recent years.

With student debt only increasing — studies show a college graduate will accrue an average of more than \$25,000 in debt to pay for school — any help students can receive is a benefit. Community colleges and technical schools are assuming an increasing role in higher education as well, since career and technical labor is in increasing demand.

That's why it's important for colleges to make student tuition as affordable as possible: With an increased need for the kind

of jobs you can learn to do at postsecondary institutions like Riverland, any sort of financial help is welcome. Officials say tuition at Riverland and other two-year public schools across the state will average about \$5,360, already higher than most would like to see.

It's good to see colleges taking student tuition seriously, so more students can get the education they need. Lets find more ways to decrease tuition, albeit without a subsequent tax increase.

Albert Lea Tribune, June 24, 2013