

ENROLLMENT

► continued from A1

day,” he added. The superintendent was adamant dissolving an eight-period day the district had in place at one time was a mistake and “it needs to be brought back.” “The board has been working on getting a seven- or eight-period day for quite some time,” he said. “I don’t know why it was ever given up. It shouldn’t have been given up.” Nelson said with more electives, students would be given more choices and options when dealing with scheduling conflicts. “I’d like to see more fine arts,” he said. “Students need those kinds of options.” On the same note, he gave

credit to the district and school board for offering a new engineering class for high school students. The class, Nelson said, has already brought back some PSEO students. He said the district needs to more clearly define its graduation requirements outside of what is mandated by the state. “We need to have long-term goals on what the school district is going to require for graduation,” he said. “It is important we take a look at some of the things we are requiring here.”

OTHER ISSUES

Nelson said he understands some previous issues families have had, namely bullying, within the district’s schools has prompted them to transfer to a neigh-

boring district’s school. Comments made on social media sites blame the Falls district for its lack of handling bullying issues. Nelson, however, said that isn’t the case. “Every school district has to address bullying – it’s in our society both inside and outside school,” he said. “We are no different here.” A new approach to rewarding positive behaviors is being taken at the elementary level and Nelson said he believes it will cut back on bullying and harassment and build up the positives. In addition to class sizes, limited electives and social issues contributing to the loss of students attending the district, is the local economy. The May 2 announcement from Boise Inc. to layoff 265 people at the lo-

cal paper mill by Oct. 1 has already resulted in “a few families moving elsewhere,” Nelson said, adding the number will likely increase as the layoffs begin. “It was kind of a double whammy with Boise,” he said of this year’s decline in enrollment. Initially after Boise’s announcement, Nelson predicted the current school year would see a reduction of about 5 percent in students. Later in June he said a more “realistic” number was about 1 percent. “It takes approximately a year to really see the effects of a major closure like this,” he said. “A year from now the 1 percent may be increased. It would be nice if it wouldn’t, but we’ll see a year from this fall.”

STAFFING ADJUSTMENTS

Efforts to increase staff at both schools led Nelson to believe the district was on the right path to keeping students local. He said he doesn’t foresee the need to reduce any staff, but rather some of its hours. “We’re going to take a strong look at staffing arrangements,” he said. “We will need to adjust the number of labor hours the district has in place... At this time, we want to maintain our course on class sizes and see what the numbers are next spring to make any further adjustments accordingly.” Nelson said the district may also need to apply the brakes on some of its spending. “There may be some purchases we would like to make, but may need to cur-

tail those purchases,” he said. “We will really take a strong look at our facilities and if an issue can wait – we will look at putting things off...I’d rather see that than reduce our staff.” All in all, Nelson said the district is improving behind the scenes. “Teachers and students are improving with test results and we have to be happy about that,” he said. “We may not be up to that state average line, but we continue to make progress year after year.” In addition, he said the implementation of iPads into the curriculum is making the district more competitive. “It is easy to focus on the negatives, but we have to stay positive,” he said. “We are improving and will continue to do so.”

LEVY

► continued from A1

the current 11 officers in 2010, when former Chief Bruce Raboin retired and suggested the city not fill an vacant officer position left with his resignation. In addition, Jaksa said an administrative support position was reduced to half time, as suggested by Musich. Jaksa said she’s considered the number officers in comparable size cities and said many have a force smaller or equal to the number of police in the Falls. She noted that without benefits, the average annual wage of a Falls officer is \$73,000. “I will listen to Mike and find out what he has to say, but I don’t know,” she said of adding an officer. She said retirements often give a government the opportunity to evaluate a department, and pointed to the need to fill the now vacant city administrator position with someone who has a strong human resources background to assist with those decisions. Two items that could stir discussion involve how to fund the local airport. Jaksa and other councilors have suggested establishing a taxing district that they say would make funding more equitable between city residents and those who live outside the city. The airport is jointly owned by the city and Koochiching County and governed by a local airport commission. Jaksa also said sewer and water costs may bring great discussion. She said sewer rates were recently increased and are expected to increase again, while water rates are not likely to be increased. “If the sewer district raises rates, we will have to pass that on,” she said, adding that the city’s sewer fund cannot go into a deficit. The sewer district bills the city for sewer services and the city pays a lump monthly sum to the sewer district. Then the city bills customers. Jaksa said \$1.8 million was budgeted for sewer service for this year. “What I would like to do is cut \$200,000 out of water and sewer budget,” she said. “I have my ideas and that requires retirements — cuts we can make in the future.”

Jaksa said she expects the amount the city pays for lobbying services to be hotly debated by the committee. She said the city now pays about \$10,000 each for membership in the Coalition of Greater Minnesota Cities and the League of Minnesota Cities. She believes the city should be members of both. The league cannot lobby because it represents all cities, but offers services including insurance savings and training resources. She said she will argue to continue with the coalition because it lobbies for cities in greater Minnesota. She said the coalition hired a consultant that developed the formula now used to figure local government aid, which has increased the amount International Falls will receive in future years. The city anticipates receiving about \$4 million in 2014 in LGA and \$5 million in 10 years. But she said she’s not as committed to the Washington D.C. lobbying firm the city contracts.

Other budget issues include considering the \$112,000 the city annually allocates to other entities, including:

- \$54,000 to Backus Community Center, which Jaksa believes should be continued because of its beneficial youth and food programs.
- \$31,500 to the Koochiching Museums.
- \$10,000 to Koochiching County Community TV, a public access channel that recently garnered \$17,000 in grants to allow for the purchase of equipment and training. Jaksa said the allocation is not likely to be sought again.
- \$9,000 to the Fourth of July celebration.
- \$5,000 to Friends Against Abuse, which Jaksa said serves as a partner with local police in dealing with domestic violence.
- \$2,000 to the Koochiching Senior Center.
- \$1,000 to Music in the Park.

“We will probably have some argument what goes in (the annual allocations),” she said. The city also provides \$34,000 to the International Falls Area Chamber of Commerce. Much of the rest of the city’s budget involve labor costs, and she noted that benefits have already been established in union contracts.

COUNTY

► continued from A1

Hoffman told commissioners that she carries a responsibility to find fraud and she found no issues. “Your county has SKE — skills, knowledge and expertise — in the financial people,” she said. “They get it.” Hoffman told commissioners working with county staff is a pleasure. “Your departments are good; everyone is doing their jobs. There is no reason to suspect anything is going wrong, but the buck does stop here,” she reminded them of their responsibility. Later Tuesday, the board adopted a proposed 2014 levy

that calls for no increase over the amount collected from property owners in 2014. The levy is expected to generate \$3.9 million to help support the budget. Jaksa said how the levy is allocated won’t be determined until after the budget is developed and adopted in December. “It’s fortunate we don’t have to raise taxes,” she said. Pavleck said that doesn’t mean commissioners won’t get calls from property owners. Some areas of the county, including properties on the shores of lakes and riv-

ers, may see an increase in tax because their valuation has increased. “But know that if their share goes up, someone else’s goes down,” he said. A part of the levy, but handled separately, are the taxing district levies, which the board also approved. The following levies of subordinate service taxing districts and fire service taxing districts were approved:

- Littlefork Ambulance Service — \$43,106 (2013-\$59,600).
- Northome First Re-

sponders — \$6,700 (2013-\$6,683).

- Rainy River First Responders — \$9,900 (2013-\$6,000, a reduction because of the economic downturn).
- Fire District 1, Northome — \$13,361 (2013-\$13,099).
- Fire District 2, Loman — \$16,900 (2013-\$15,950).
- Fire District 2, Littlefork — \$79,275 (2013-\$75,875).
- Fire District 3, Birchdale — \$9,900 (2013-\$9,900).
- Fire District 4, Williams — \$3,500 (2013-\$3,000).
- Fire District 5, Big Falls — \$20,000 (2013-\$20,120).

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HAPPY BIRTHDAY

Happy 5th
Birthday
Addison

Love
Mom, Dad,
Piper & Phoebe

**Scott Lestico
&
Beth Milette**

would like you to join them in a
casual backyard BBQ style
wedding reception

following a private
wedding ceremony on
September 21st @ 6:00 pm
at our home at 701 W 17th Street.

Sha Sha will be closed Saturday,
Sept. 14th for a private wedding.

Fall Hours Started
Monday – Thursday Closed
**OPEN for the weekend
starting at 4:00 on Friday**

LAST DAY OF THE SEASON IS SEPT. 22

**SHA SHA
RESORT**
On Rainy