

# LOCALNEWS

## Panel highlights areas in need of improvement

BY EMILY GEDDE  
Staff Writer

A panel of community members made it clear to the Falls School Board Monday that setting goals and having good, positive communication are keys to success of the district's schools.

The Blue Ribbon Panel made up of 22 community members met in May to brainstorm ideas to better the Falls school district. Five of those members – Allen Rasmussen, Kelly Gordon, Wyatt LaVigne, Dave Serrano and Jenn Windels – presented an outline of ideas and suggestions formulated by the panel.

“The 22 (people) who were able to meet were quite diversified,” Rasmussen said of panel participants. “We broke into small groups to discuss some different topics...It was a chance to get some positive suggestions, I

felt, that will hopefully give the board some direction and advice.”

In April, Falls Superintendent Nordy Nelson reported to the school board the driving force behind establishing the panel to was retain and grow student numbers and tackle other ideas.

Windels said in order for the school to improve, short- and long-term goals need to be set. And, she said, those goals need to be linked with better communication between the school and the entire community.

“I know the board already has a process of setting goals for the district,” she said. “But, as community members, we might not always be aware of what is going on.”

Windels suggested that a professional consultant be hired to best discuss what kinds of goals need to be set

and how to communicate those goals with community members.

“We’d like to get moving forward with a clear plan where all the players of the district know where we’re heading, so overtime, it can be seen we’re heading in the direction we set,” she said.

Board member Gordy Dault commended the suggestion of seeking outside help.

“If we’re going to keep this thing going, we need to get a professional to see how we can get these things into action,” he said. “We need to follow through.”

Windels nodded in agreement saying, “We really tried to streamline an idea of a plan everybody in the community would be aware of.”

In line with setting goals, Rasmussen said, is the need for more communication and positive communica-

tion.

LaVigne said a reoccurring theme among panel members is a need to increase communication between the schools and parents and others in the community. LaVigne is married to Kristie LaVigne, a teacher at Falls Elementary.

“We need to bring in some positive activity,” he said.

And Gordon said a lot of the communication needs to start internally with getting kids excited about school. She noted that in the past, school board members and administration haven’t always gotten along, which hasn’t helped the situation. Gordon is married to Kevin Gordon, a Falls Elementary physical education teacher.

“A lot of it is going to start in the classroom,” Gordon said. “We need to work with the teachers to get that classroom exciting and make kids want to be there.”

Gordon explained that there are a handful of kids who leave the high school their junior and senior year to attend classes at Rainy River Community College through the Post Secondary Enrollment Option program.

“The (students) who go to Rainy River because of the lack of class options is something we can get together and work on,” she said. “If we can get the excitement back in the kids, they will turn around and bring that to the community...They can help (the district) with its advertising.”

Board member Mike Holden said he has been meeting with varsity coaches “who are working really hard” to restore school spirit through athletics.

“We need to get pride and tradition back,” he said. “Somewhere this all fell off to the wayside.”

The board appeared to be very receptive of the ideas and suggestions set for by the representatives of the panel, but, said they felt it necessary the group meets more than once per year.

“Maybe (the panel) can get together on a more regular basis,” board member Michelle Hebner suggested. “I think we’d move forward faster.”

Board member Will Kostuik agreed and mentioned meeting on a quarterly basis.

Rasmussen said the panel would consider meeting more often, but in the end, whatever is done needs to be in the best interest of the Falls’ students.

“We should be starting with what’s best for students, not the district,” he said. “I think this is just the beginning...We want to move on from here with positive suggestions.”

### DISTRICT COURT

The following people have been sentenced for aggravated misdemeanor or felony crimes in Koochiching County District Court. This information is provided to The Journal by court staff.

**Aaron E. Davis**, 18, International Falls, was sentenced Aug. 19 for felony fourth-degree drug possession, intent to sell. He was sentenced to one year at the Minnesota Correctional Facility, St. Cloud, which was stayed for five years. He was placed on five years

supervised probation and ordered to serve 135 days jail. He was ordered not to consume or possess drugs or alcohol and must follow the recommendations of an evaluation. He must submit to random testing.

**Matthew H. Isensee**, 24, International Falls, was sentenced Aug. 19 for felony terrorist threats — reckless disregard of risk and gross misdemeanor obstruct legal process.

On the felony, he was sentenced to 21 months at

the Minnesota Correctional Facility, St. Cloud, which was stayed for five years. He was placed on five years supervised probation and ordered to serve 90 days jail and 20 hours with the Sentence to Serve program. He was ordered to pay \$275 fine and fees and supply a DNA sample to the state. He must submit to random tests and searches and may not enter bars or liquor stores. He may not leave Minnesota without written court approval.

On the gross misdemeanor, he was sentenced to 20 hours with the sentence to Serve program.

**Trevor J. Ames**, 24, International Falls, was sentenced Aug. 19 for felony third-degree assault, victim under age 4. He was sentenced to one year jail and \$3,225 fine and fees. All but 30 days of the jail time and \$275 were stayed on court conditions and he was placed on three years supervised probation. He may have no contact with

the victims and must supply a DNA sample to the state. He must complete chemical and domestic abuse evaluations, submit to random testing and searches and may not use or possess alcohol or drugs and may not enter bars or liquor stores. He must serve 40 hours with the Sentence to Serve Program.

**Robert J. Hill**, 18, Deer River, was sentenced Aug. 19 for felony third-degree criminal sexual conduct — victim age 13-15. He was given a stay of adjudication

and placed on eight years supervised probation. He was ordered to pay \$1,000 fees and serve 40 hours with the Sentence to serve program. He may not consume or possess alcohol or enter bars or liquor stores. He must submit to random testing and searches and may have no contact with people under age 18 or with the victim. He may not leave Minnesota without written court approval and must follow the recommendations of a psycho sexual evaluation.

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