



Getting the right name is crucial to school

One little-discussed portion of the Staples Motley School District's Re-start proposal was the directive to change the name of the school.

Because people were concerned with other issues in the Re-start proposal, the name change was put on the back burner.

There were some preliminary suggestions that we could change it to Crow Wing River schools, after the river that unites both Staples and Motley. That has worked elsewhere in Minnesota. Maple River is a school that was formerly Mapleton, Amboy and Good Thunder. I guess Maple River was better than MAGT (alternately pronounced "maggot"), or, when Minnesota Lake joined the district, MAGTML (maggot mill).

But crowing the river (see what I did there?) is only one idea. Some schools make a mash-up of the communities involved, such as Rocori (Rockville, Cold Spring and Richmond) or MACCRAY (Maynard, Clara City and Raymond).

For us, could we live with Moples or Stotley?

Stately could be an honorable mash-up, but we would probably have to change it to the correct spelling, Stately. The imperfect spelling trick can be done, since the Bird Island-Olivia-Lake Lillian district somehow came up with the name BOLD. I guess they chose that instead of BOLL, which would forever label them as the Weevils. For the Stately Cardinals, I suggest our mascot start wearing a tuxedo or a formal gown.

If we want to incorporate other communities not currently named by the school but are sending students here, I came up with "MoStOyLLAld-Lead-Phil" (Motley-Staples-Oylen-Lincoln Lakes-Aldrich-Leader-Philbrook), with the downside of

it being mistaken for a leadership training seminar, a Welsh proverb, or a rap lyric.

That example just shows what a diverse district this really is. Some schools have added the word "area" to their district to show it is not just one town. But I don't like that, because every district covers an area so it isn't any more descriptive than without it.

One of the fears of changing a name is that each community could lose some of their identity. I know people who had no idea of where Staples is, except that they drive through Motley on their way up north. I also know people who had never heard of Staples or Motley, except through the school's sports teams.

The question becomes, how much value is it for each town to keep their identity tied to the school?

There is a school called Yellow Medicine East, which as we all know is in Yellow Medicine County, but few people in this area know what towns are involved in the school. It is based in Granite Falls, one of the best names of any Minnesota city, and draws students from the communities of Clarkfield, Hazel Run, Hanley Falls, Echo and Wood Lake. Novelist and Staples native Jon Hassler couldn't have come up with better folkloric Minnesota names than those cities. After driving through those towns, you could expect to see Stag-ferd coming up next.

But do they suffer because they are no longer associated with a school?

The names Staples and Motley are a good match, they go together like bread and butter. Just from the name alone, people judge us to be hard-working people, capable of great things.

So the trick for the school district is to maintain our identity, yet signify that we are a single united school district. Maybe just saying "Staples Motley United" or other related words (amalgamated, cohesive, unanimous, unified...) could accomplish that task.

The school has asked for input in shaping their restart process. If you have some ideas, send it in and we will print it or get it to the school.

Small town diet



By Mark Anderson Editor

Ten Commandments for Open Meetings

By Brian J. Hunhoff

"I think heroic deeds were all conceived in the open air."

The quote atop this editorial is from Walt Whitman's Song of the Open Road - a cheerful 1856 tribute to freedom and the great outdoors.

Hopefully, Mr. Whitman would have approved use of his prose to promote open, well-aired government. It's unlikely the great poet favored government secrecy and closed-door meetings. He also wrote, "Out of the dark confinement, out from behind the screen!"

For today's purposes, Whitman's "screen" represents the executive session - a self-important term for a classic oxymoron: closed public meeting.

Too many elected boards seek every opportunity to meet out of sight of the public they serve. Some schedule executive sessions as a regular agenda item. Some hold up to three executive sessions in a single meeting. Some have executive sessions that last longer than the open portion of their meeting.

In most cases, executive sessions do not violate open meeting laws. The closed-door discussions are often suggested or encouraged by an elected board's legal counsel.

But legality and necessity are two different things.

Consider the following list our Fourth Estate counsel to county commissions, city councils, and

school boards everywhere on executive sessions and general government openness. Citizens should hold their elected officials to the standards below. These are Ten Commandments for Open Meetings:

ONE: Do not gather as a quorum outside of regular meetings, and do not hold special meetings without giving at least 24 hours public notice.

TWO: Do not habitually add last-minute items to the agenda, and do not act on anything not listed on the posted agenda.

THREE: Do not abuse the litigation excuse for executive sessions to speculate about possible or imagined lawsuits.

FOUR: Do not stretch the personnel excuse for executive sessions to discuss policy issues. Example: Creating a new position or changing a department's job descriptions are policy decisions and not appropriate topics for a closed meeting.

FIVE: Do not dial up the "negotiations" excuse to suddenly exclude the public from discussion of controversial issues that were previously aired thoroughly in open session.

SIX: Do not allow executive session conversations to stray to other topics.

SEVEN: Do not vio-

late the spirit of the open meeting law with frequent phone, email or text dialogues with other members. Reach consensus at the meeting.

EIGHT: Do not make a habit of whispering or passing notes at meetings. You were elected to speak for us. Tell what you have to say out loud and proud!

NINE: Allow public input at every meeting. Include it on every agenda.

TEN: Be as transparent as possible. Do not hold executive sessions simply because counsel advised it is "legal" to do so. Ask yourself: "Is it absolutely critical we discuss this privately?"

That should be the standard because legality and necessity are two different things.

We appreciate our local commissioners and board members. They serve for minimal compensation. They make tough decisions. They sometimes lose friends and make enemies. Their dedication to community is admirable.

We simply ask elected officials to think twice before kicking the public out of public meetings.

Strive for fewer. Less is more. A closed meeting should be a rare occasion, not a habit.

Brian Hunhoff writes for the Yankton County Observer in Yankton, South Dakota. His editorials about open government won the 2015 Freedom of Information award from the National Newspaper Association.



Letter to the Editor

Wadena County leads state in unemployed parents

It was reported (from the 2015 Minnesota Early Childhood Risk & Reach Report) that 25 percent of children in Wadena County have parents who don't work, higher than any county. The state average is 3.4 percent. Only Mahnomon County

was higher for children under six.

Could this be the reason Wadena County has three full time county attorneys?

I believe that Hubbard County who has twice as many people has only two. Ask your County Commissioner what they plan to do to fix this.

John Finnegan
Wadena, Minn.

Staples World

Established in 1890. USPS 518-760
©2016 Devlin Newspapers, Inc.
Published Thursdays by Devlin Newspapers, Inc.
Office located at 224 4th Street NE
Periodicals postage paid at Staples, Minnesota 56479.

Mailing Address: P.O. Box 100
Telephone: (218) 894-1112 - Fax: (218) 894-3570
Toll Free: 1-888-894-1112
www.staplesworld.com - E Mail: info@staplesworld.com

Official Newspaper for:
City of Staples,
Staples Motley School District,
Freshwater Education District and Todd County.

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Subscription Rates:
Local: (Todd, Wadena, Morrison, Cass Counties) \$40 per year
Website: \$37 per year
Minnesota: \$45 per year - Out of State: \$50 per year
Foreign: \$60 per year Student Rate: (Sept. through Apr./in-state) \$29
There is a \$5 charge for address change from local to out of state.

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Parent involvement is key to student success

Flips, slides, turns. Rhombus, hemisphere, hexagon, cube. These are just a handful of things required on a project that Doreen Butler's third graders were given this past month.

To demonstrate their learning in math and geometry, students were asked to work on a family project creating a robot. The items above plus several more were part of the "checklist" of things that they should try to include on their project. Every year as the robots roll into school we are more amazed at the hard work that gets put into each project by the students and families.

Regrettably, I was not quick enough to get pic-

tures of the students with their robots before they went back home. I snuck into the classroom to take some individual pictures of each robot but didn't make it to visit with the kids. So, I enlisted the help of my own personal third grader and snapped a picture of him with his friend "Robo." You can view pictures of other robots on the district Facebook page.

Admittedly, I had nothing to do with this project. I left that one to him and Dad. Boy, did they have fun. (I think Dad had more fun than the kid...) They planned and strategized, then scrounged the garage and workshop for their materials. They laid out their parts, then Dad did some gluing and welding (did I mention that he enjoyed this project?). They painted and added some finishing touches. I am quite sure they created some pretty special memories together working on Robo.

As a teacher, sending home a "family" project is always a gamble. Families are busy, and sometimes don't always understand an assignment no matter how clear we think the instructions are. Or, it's hard work. Believe me, we know how stressful working on multiplication facts or spelling list can be.

But, there is no question that having a parent involved in school work or activities, whether it's fun or not, is a very important piece of your child's learning. Whether you are helping with homework,

working on a fun project, attending conferences, or getting involved in and attending school events, it all makes a difference.

Your child will naturally work harder and find more value in school and learning when you are involved. They want to make you proud, they want to share what they are learning and they want to have fun with you. Even when the work is hard, having your support and encouragement will stick with them and drive them to learn and grow more than you know.

I encourage you to keep practicing those math facts and spelling lists, embrace the projects that come home and give them some help where they need it. Carve out time every day to read some books and enjoy learning together. Talk about school and their friends, ask questions like "What was the best part of your day?" Or "What was a challenge you had today?" Help them through the tough things and celebrate the fun things.

The transitions we look forward to with the Re-Start Plan are a great opportunity for you to get involved with the planning or simply making sure you are having positive conversations with your children about the changes they will face in the next school year. Contact your school office if you have questions or feedback regarding the transition plans or if you'd like to get involved in the planning.



By Deb Ferdon Motley Elementary Admin. Dean



Sawyer and Robo