

Three vie for school board position

By Jim Cornelius
News Editor

Three candidates are in the running for Position 4 on the Sisters School Board.

The slate for the May 19 election fell out in an unbalanced manner: While Stephen King, Steve Mathews and Karan Swaner vie for Position 4, Position 3 and Position 5 are uncontested (Amanda Clark and Jeff Smith, the candidates for those positions, will be profiled in a later story). Position 2 has two candidates (*see story, page 10*).

Stephen King

Stephen King is the incumbent in Position 4, to which he was appointed last year.

“My real passion really comes down to what I would call community involvement,” he says.

King notes that Sisters has an extraordinary pool of talent in the community that can be leveraged to enhance education and to strengthen schools that have struggled with tight budgets.

To that end, King brought together a group of disparate people who have formed an ad-hoc group called “Sisters Strong” that is dedicated to shoring up the schools and bringing students and families into the district.

King believes the school district should be shooting to be one of the best in the United States.

“I see no barriers to that,” he says.

In order to achieve that, he says, “You need to start with a teacher-centric program and work back.”

That means focusing on tools and training for teachers to inculcate excellence— and less concern about small class sizes.

“A great teacher can provide great education for 20 or 40,” he says.

King wants Sisters to develop a broader curriculum — more advanced-placement classes, better SAT preparation programs and more internships so that students can translate classroom learning into work-world relevance.

“The on-ramp to that is still too hard,” he says.

He is seeking reelection in order to keep pursuing those goals.

“I think it’s become a bit of an unfinished job, in a way,” he says.

Steve Mathews

Steve Mathews is a lifelong artist and arts educator. Part of that background includes teacher training and an intensive study into what causes kids to drop out of school — and what can keep them engaged.

“I tend to think outside the box,” says Mathews, who continues to volunteer in the school arts programs and serves on the board of the Sisters Folk Festival. “I’m pretty creative and tend to come up with solutions other people don’t think of.”



PHOTO PROVIDED

Stephen King.



PHOTO BY JIM CORNELIUS

Steve Mathews.



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Karan Swaner.

Mathews believes that his kind of approach will have value in a time of transition — with a new superintendent in the wings and continued concerns over enrollment and budgets.

“Some not-popular decisions are going to have to be made,” he says. “You are going to have to draw your priorities on what you think is important.”

Mathews believes that the programs that make Sisters schools unique are very important. They help to make local students more mature, more engaged with their community, and better equipped to venture out into the wider world.

“Our kids are unique,” he says. “They really are. It’s amazing.”

He asserts that “programs like IEE (Interdisciplinary Environmental Education) and the arts programs are

really important to kids.”

And for Mathews, service to the school district all comes down to serving kids. He does that as a volunteer — and his style takes students seriously as adults and artists.

“I’m brutally honest with kids,” he says. “When I critique their work, I’m probably tougher than their classroom

teacher.”

That’s part of preparing students for post-school education and work. Like King, he believes the district needs to create more real-world education opportunities through internships.

“I think Sisters can

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