

December 9, 2014

1. IF-A Study Committee:

The Iowa Falls-Alden School Study Committee met at 5:30 p.m. in Iowa Falls. Committee members in attendance: Suzanne Murphy, Lisa Prochaska, Jeff Burchfield, Clyde Tarrence, Kim Nelson, TJ Norman, Joe Scallon, Kyle Janes, Todd Bicknese, Greg Lascheid, Paul Hoversten and John Robbins. Others present: Sara Konrad Baranowski and Trish Lee.

2. Purpose:

The purpose of the study committee is to earnestly discuss the merits of reorganization, and make recommendations to both school boards as to what should/could an IFA consolidated school district look like.

3. Minutes from the Previous Meeting:

The minutes from the April 22, 2014 meeting were reviewed. Clarification was given regarding who the Whole Grade Sharing Survey respondents included; explanation of tax rate information; and dollars generated through whole grade sharing and operational sharing incentives.

4. Grade Level Arrangements for a Consolidated District:

The committee discussed whether it would make sense to bring students together at an earlier grade level (i.e. 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> grade). Pros and cons were cited for the various transition levels. Whenever the students make this transition, they begin to build relationships. The year of a transition brings about an opportunity to even out class sizes and to better adjust the number of teachers needed to deliver quality education. Teachers also have a greater chance to team/work together that would, in-turn, directly enhance instruction and student learning.

An increase in the number of transitions from one building to another can be hard on students. Even though it has meant an additional transition year, Iowa Falls committee members did not feel that Iowa Falls' parents would support reverting back to the "neighborhood school concept" when the district had two separate

PK-5<sup>th</sup> elementary schools instead of the current PK-2 and 3-5 elementary schools.

The districts should focus on what works well and continue doing what works well. There has been improvement in both districts by working together and synergizing. Parents are now comfortable with 6<sup>th</sup> grade being a good transition year. There have been exploratory opportunities for 6<sup>th</sup> graders, i.e. shop and home economics. If a modification were made to the grade level structure, there would need to be sufficient prep for this type of change.

5. Use of Space

Space utilization in each of the school buildings was discussed. It has been determined that Iowa Falls and Alden could not accommodate all current IF-A students with one less school building. With stable enrollment, this should help alleviate concern for Alden residents about losing their school building.

6. Choice of Schools:

The committee discussed the loss of choice with consolidation. Currently, parents have the option of choosing what elementary school they wish to send their students. With reorganization, this choice is reduced. It was also mentioned there is value in additional choices due to size factors. Additional offerings can be made (orchestra, debate) for the benefit of the students. Additions of this type bring more choices for high school students, not necessarily additional programming for elementary students.

7. Difference in Tax Rates:

The estimated consolidated tax rate was discussed. The increase in the tax rate for Alden residents would likely be a significant concern. The committee discussed what the higher tax rate for Alden residents would accomplish? What will come into existence that isn't here now? What will the residents get for their money? Is there any value added incentive with consolidation? It was also discussed whether the split in tax rates will ever get closer. There are many variables and factors to consider, which makes it hard to predict.

It was also pointed out that:

- It is the valuation per student that is driving the districts' tax rates apart – Alden's valuation per student is significantly higher than Iowa Falls' valuation per student.
- TIF districts have a sizable impact on tax rates in Iowa Falls. The city needs TIF as a tool in order to recruit businesses to Iowa Falls. This is a benefit to both communities.
- There is a negligible difference in the actual cost per pupil between the two districts.
- Employment costs have a minor impact on tax rates. The number of students a district has and the district's valuation per pupil largely determines tax rates.

8. Cost Savings Through Reorganization?

The committee discussed what type of savings would be realized through reorganization. Some districts save a lot of money by eliminating the use of a building when they reorganize. IF-A currently has three elementary buildings, and would still need all three after reorganization. There could possibly be a small financial savings if fewer employees were needed. However, this cannot feasibly be calculated without determining how classes would be realigned/restructured, or if the savings would make up for the loss of sharing dollars?

9. What Additional Information Needed?

Some committee members would like to obtain additional expertise regarding what age is best for transitions for students. Is there child development-based research on this that would provide assistance in determining what grade levels are most appropriate for transitions? Are there other districts in similar situations that can give guidance about what is working for them?

Other committee members felt that we have a good district, and we already know what works. What are the complaints with our current structure? What exactly are the concerns? What can we do better? What needs to be changed?

10. Future Discussions:

Future items for possible discussion were suggested. What happens when a bond issue is needed by one of the districts? What is the attitude of this committee about the pool of Superintendent candidates that would be available due to the shared arrangement whenever that time arises?

11. Next Meeting:

The next meeting will be held in February/March 2015 in Alden.  
This meeting was adjourned at 7:10 p.m.

Submitted by: Trish Lee, Board Secretary