

**Executive Summary
of the
Reorganization Feasibility Study
for**

Virten CUSD #4

Girard CUSD #3

Presented: November 6, 2008

Consulting & Resource Group

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Executive Summary for Girard-Virden Study:

In the course of the extensive study completed for the Girard and Virden School districts, a wealth of information is provided for the reader concerning this very important issue. With a study completing over 280 pages, it is necessary for the authors to provide a more concise synopsis of the study.

There are numerous reorganization options available to schools in this study. For the purpose of clarity and to enhance the focus of this presentation, this Executive Summary will only address those options that make the most sense for Virden and Girard and the presentation will reflect only these options.

Let me first briefly describe the incentives that are available to the districts. The different incentive amounts have been included in the study and represent money available from the Illinois State Board of Education upon the successful reorganization.

Currently, the State of Illinois offers four financial incentives for school districts to merge in ten of the eleven allowable reorganization options. The incentives and amounts are determined by the Illinois State Board of Education are as follows:

- General State Aid Equalization. Over a four year period the newly reorganized district would receive **\$952**. This means that the newly reorganized district would receive approximately **\$238** annually in General State Aid after the four year incentive period is over.
- Teacher Salary Equalization. Over a four year period the newly reorganized district would receive **\$1,034,460** (the actual number would be calculated on a teacher by teacher basis after a successful reorganization). Each school district has a different salary schedule and contract and these would be abolished and a new contract would most likely be negotiated by the certified staff.
- Debt Difference Payment. A single payment is made for districts experiencing operational deficits at the time of a merger. Since neither district qualifies as having an operational debt, this incentive is not offered for this newly reorganized district.
- \$4,000 Payment for Certified Employees. After a successful merger of districts and according to a ranking from the Illinois State Board of Education, the new district would be eligible for **\$1,200,000** over a three year period. Therefore at the end of the second, third and fourth year of the newly reorganized district, they would receive **\$400,000**.
- Total reorganization offered as listed above is **\$2,235,412**.

Other significant factors dealing with school finance for the newly reorganized district include the following;

- Current property tax rates between the two districts are very similar in rates and amounts.
- Both districts have a positive balance in their main operating funds.

- The equalized assessed valuation of both districts which determine local tax revenue is increasing at a moderate pace for both districts.
- A total tax rate of \$4.66 would generate the same amount of revenue for the new district as compared to the current total tax rate for Virden of \$4.68 and \$4.64 for Girard. Please keep in mind that the author does in no way suggest that this rate should be utilized for planning for a reorganization referendum.
- Teacher tenure is guaranteed for certified staff that are maintained by the new district. The staffing factor would be determined by both existing school districts prior to a reorganization referendum.

While there are eleven current allowable procedures for the merger of school districts in the State of Illinois, the authors recommend a merging of districts utilizing the Article 11-A-3 method. This method would entail the required referendum to pass with a simple majority of votes in both districts. If a successful referendum is achieved, both boards of education would be abolished and a new Board of Education would be elected. This Board may be elected at the same reorganization referendum or at a subsequent election.

Features of this reorganization would require a petition to the Regional Superintendent of Education by both districts or a citizen petition with at least fifty voters signing the petition from each district. After a petition is received, the Regional Superintendent would gather information and publish the time and place of a public hearing. At this hearing, constituents of both districts may speak to this issue. After the hearing the Regional Superintendent and subsequently the State Superintendent must approve the reorganization petition. If both officers approve the petition, the referendum is scheduled for the next regularly scheduled election. If the election is approved by a majority of voters in “each district” then the newly reorganized district would begin operation on the next July 1, after the successful reorganization.

Curriculum & Instruction Issues:

If a merger occurs in any combination, teachers from both districts will need time for training on the “new” curriculum and a plan will need to be developed on how the elementary, middle, and high school’s curricula will mesh in this process.

Teacher in-service time should be devoted to combining the new high school curriculum, mapping curriculum changes, and continue RtI training at the upper grades and implementation at the lower grades.

The "Internal Review" process, whether required or not by the ISBE, provides a clearly defined process of school improvement. It is intended as a forum for articulation about curriculum. A reorganized district would be able to encourage more articulation among buildings through the Internal Review Team of each school.

Alignment: Both districts have shifted their focus of curriculum alignment and mapping to the Illinois learning standards. In a merger, this will help better prepare all students for the Illinois Standards Achievement Tests at grades 3-5-8 in reading, math, and writing,

and grades 4 and 7 in science and social science. Discussions with the high school have taken place to ensure standards are met with incoming groups from the elementary & middle/junior high schools.

Textbooks: A new PK-12 textbook adoption schedule would have to be established over time in a reorganized district since each district is following a different schedule. When this occurs, curriculum design should precede textbook purchases. This proposed procedure will help teachers and administrators develop more meaningful curricula that are not dictated by textbook companies. Supplemental materials which enhance and help address subject content, skills, and assessments.

Technology: Technology curriculum, services, and support staff should be evaluated to offer a newly organized district the best possible program. Much organization would be needed to catalog hardware, software, and equipment. A reorganized technology curriculum will need to be developed. Current Technology Coordinators can help the administration and teaching staff with this process.

Special Education Services: If a merger occurs, SASSED special education cooperative services would continue for the newly merged school district. This issue could affect the staffing of SASSED employees.

CACC Services: Girard High School currently sends 32 students to the CACC for vocational training and Virden sends 28 students to the same location. This may require 1 additional bus to Springfield.

Curriculum Enhancements:

Add Virden High School's courses in Art and Economics to the new high school curriculum. Middle school Art could also be added to the curriculum.

Add an additional specialist in Vocal Music for 6-12. Girard and Virden currently do not offer a choral program.

Since Girard offers French instruction and Virden offers Spanish. Both languages could be offered 6-12 beginning in grade 6-8 as an elective rotation into the current schedule.

The existing early childhood programs could continue to meet the needs of children ages 3-5, as they are currently offered.

A second Technology Coordinator may have to be added to assist with hardware, routers, and curricular alignment over a newly formed K-12 district.

Enrollment, Facility and Transportation Issues:

Enrollment

- Student projections are made using existing class numbers to develop percentages
 - These percentages are applied to future classes using the Cohort Survival Method
 - Live births provided by the Census Bureau are used to project Pre-K and K enrollments
- Projections indicate that the enrollment for both districts will continue to steadily and slowly decrease over the next five years
- Virden saw a reduction of 55 students from 2003-04 to 2008-09
- Virden is projected to gain 12 students between 2008-09 and 2013-14
- Girard lost 11 students from 2003-04 to 2008-09
- Girard is projected to lose 36 students between 2008-09 and 2013-14

Transportation

- Both districts own and maintain their buses
- Virden spends \$149,142 for regular transportation or \$3.80/mile
- Girard spends \$170,570 for regular transportation or \$3.88/mile
- Special Education rates are \$127,480 for Virden and \$77,934 for Girard
- Special Education rates are \$2.19/mile for Virden and \$3.72 for Girard
- Vocational costs are \$22,903 for Virden and \$43,800 for Girard
- Anticipated increases in transportation cost for a consolidated high school would be \$88,472.
- This additional cost could be partially offset by the savings in vocational transportation since only one bus would be required.
- Additional transportation saving could occur with consolidation of SASSED transportation.

Building

- The buildings in both districts are well maintained, clean and attractive
- The major health, life safety requirements have been addressed
- Roofing and electrical needs have been addressed by both districts with Virden needing to finalize the roofing of the high school
- Girard is using every room and two additional rooms would provide better service to their students
- The two gymnasiums at Girard High School present an issue when scheduling physical education for all grades in the Girard district
- Virden is approaching 100% capacity in the middle/high school building
- Combining the two high school would result in a current population of 479 (467 currently housed in Virden MS/HS)
- By 2013-14 the high school population is projected to total 439 and the middle school population will be 319 (345 currently housed in Girard MS/HS)
- Creating a new consolidated district in which the high school is located in Virden and the Middle School (6 – 8) is located in Girard would increase the student population for both attendance centers creating greater educational opportunities for the high school and middle school students, and possibly open up some space within the Girard School building to better serve the Pre-K to 8 students.

Recommendation

- Move all high school students to Virden and middle school students to the Girard
 - No additional building costs
 - Buildings can accommodate existing population
 - Transportation costs \$88,472 higher
- New HS = \$26 – 30 million
- HS addition = \$4.5 million 15 rooms

The authors of this study are cognizant of the importance of this issue for both school districts, their constituents, staff and students. It has been our job to bring the issue into focus for consideration by all of the aforementioned groups. We have attempted to gather information, to make comments and suggestions relative to this very important issue. This study is dedicated to that end and the authors sincerely appreciate all of the valuable assistance received by the districts Boards of Education, administration and staff in the preparation of this report.