

Continuing the Conversation

Investigating the Possibilities of District Merger
Millersburg Area and Upper Dauphin Area School Districts

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*Information in this presentation has been provided utilizing guidance documents available to school districts by the PA Department of Education.

Common Themes - Sports Cooperative

- Sports cooperative rationale received majority of support from constituents.
- Condense the implementation dates of the Cooperative – framework was too drawn out.
- Possibility of the two districts to proceed with a complete merger.
 - The concept of merging raises many questions. The administration sought information from the Pennsylvania Department of Education – specifically its website and several guidance documents.

Background

- After WWII, the number of school districts in PA was reduced from 2,700 in 1955 to 600 in 1962. There were another 100 reductions through 1979. Our present number of districts in PA is 500.
- The Commonwealth proposed in 2009 to further reduce the number to 100. Not much has happened since.
- Since the 1990s, Millersburg and UDA have experienced declining enrollment.*

UDA	Millersburg
2011-2012: 1,249	2011-2012: 843
2020-2021: 1,103	2020-2021: 764
2021-2022: 1,084	2021-2022: 739
2022-2023: 1,077	2022-2023: 722
2023-2024: 1,055	2023-2024: 706
2024-2025: 1,047	2024-2025: 686

*December 30, 2016 PA Department of Education enrollment projections

<https://www.education.pa.gov/Documents/Data%20and%20Statistics/Enrollment/Enrollment%20Projections/2015-16%20School%20District%20Enrollment%20Projections.pdf>

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Board Considerations

- Name of the new district.
- Organizational chart - what administrative structure will administer the district?
- Which buildings will be operated?
- Differences in collective bargaining agreements – Costs of renegotiating contracts?
- Staff training to ensure effective integration of educational programs and smooth transition into merged school district.
- Bus routes and schedules, including potential rebidding of contracts for transportation.

Board Considerations - Continued

- Depreciation schedules.
- Maintenance.
- Equipment inventory.
- Food Service.
- Transportation/transportation software/additional equipment.
- Connecting classroom computers between districts and providing additional software for consistency.
- Transfer of Data – merge/upgrade systems/archive/employee records/student records.

Board Considerations - Continued

- Educational licenses software used to support educational programs, including the library.
- Alignment of curricula.
- Community College support.
- Legal Services/legal review of existing service contracts.
- Changes to district signs and letterhead to reflect new name/logo/mascot.
- Unanticipated/One-Time expenses.

Questions for Consideration

What are the benefits of mergers to residents of the district (taxpayers)?

- Reorganization of school districts can create new community centers, particularly in rural areas.
- Smaller schools are often less cost efficient (source: PA Legislative Study by Standards and Poors)
- With a declining tax base in many small districts, merging with another district could increase the overall tax base and reduce the reliance on this declining base and state funds (source: Center & Monaca Study)

Questions for Consideration

What are the benefits to a school district?

- Equalization of educational opportunities is enhanced.
- Local control is diluted when "district sharing" is a solution to declining opportunities and enrollment, as opposed to a merger where a new organizational structure that is better suited for the long term is put into place.
- Through reorganization staff could be used more effectively, efficiently and maximized.

Board Governance

- A unified board of 18 members that includes both districts involved in the merger process will need to be in place and stay in place until the first round of elections after the completion of the merger.
- Both boards will be required to obtain a majority of their members to vote in favor of the merger and cooperate throughout the merger and act as one unit until the new board for the combined district is elected.

Board Governance - Continued

What are the first steps?

- The first steps taken by a school board considering the option of a merger with a neighboring district should begin with an **open discussion** amongst the school board members of both districts.
- A **feasibility study** should be carried out to examine the process between the districts to determine the timeline for a potential merger, the associated costs, and to examine the future enrollment as well as the projected savings of a combined district.
- Conducting a feasibility study is the **key first step** to evaluating whether a merger could work as an effective way of maintaining educational opportunities while saving money for both districts.

Direction to Administration?

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