

IOWA SCHOOL REORGANIZATION MANAGING THE CHANGES

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Reorganization Series I

Annual School District Reorganization Report

**State of Iowa
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Bureau of School Administration and Accreditation
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Des Moines, Iowa 50319-0146**

June 30, 1991

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SCHOOL DISTRICT REORGANIZATION REPORT

In 1987, as required by the General Assembly, the State Board of Education proposed four school district reorganization plans. One of the four plans was entitled the "Managed Change Plan." The two basic theses of the plan were that "natural progression" will continue to cause more school districts to combine their programs and reorganize, and that a certain degree of management is necessary in order to make the plan work in a logical manner.

The Natural Progression period of change began in 1985, and has greatly escalated since that time. The movement was only in its infancy in 1987, and few people anticipated the magnitude of change that was to come. The focus of this report is to demonstrate the degree of change that has taken place, address the causes of the change, and provide some guidance for management of the change.

This report, coded as Reorganization Series I, is published annually, partly in order to chronicle the reorganization activities for future reference and analyze problems that developed during the year. The previous publications, beginning in 1982, were all produced in January. The January, 1991, edition was postponed until June 30, 1991, since more of the pertinent data becomes available at the end of the fiscal year, rather than at the end of the calendar year. This publication date pattern will be continued.

THE PERIOD OF CHANGE

The 1984-85 school year was the last year of a period of relative calm concerning school reorganization. Most school officials and citizens of small school districts were feeling secure since nothing had happened since the major thrust of high school closing came to an end in 1962. The few staff members from the Department of Education who dealt with reorganization were also quite "laid back." The advice and consultations being provided to local boards of directors generally reflected the attitude that it was satisfactory if districts wanted to reorganize, but it did not seem to be an immediate concern.

The feelings of complacency began to change in 1985-86. In 1984-85 only two school districts engaged in whole-grade sharing. Corwith-Wesley and Lu Verne were operating their high schools together through a contract signed by the boards. The number districts whole-grade sharing increased to 10 in 1985-86, and has steadily increased each year since then. In 1991-92, there will be 111 districts whole-grade sharing. There would have been 18 more, but they ceased whole-grade sharing due to reorganization.

The trend to reorganize after four or five years of whole-grade sharing is becoming fairly apparent. On July 1, 1991, there will

be five less districts. Four reorganizations and one involuntary merger become effective that date. This is the largest number of mergers since July 1, 1963. As of June 30, 1991, four consolidations have already been voted on and passed for the 1992-93 school year. As of the same date, one more reorganization election is scheduled for July and two reorganization hearings are set for July and August.

In summary, in 1984-85 there were 438 school districts, and 437 of them operated high schools. In 1991-92 there will be 425 school districts, with only 371 of them operating high schools.

The trend which began in 1985 is expected to continue through 1995 or 1996. This predicted ten year period will be similar to the two earlier ten-year periods of school mergers which began in 1910 and again in 1952. Another factor that may signal an end to the era is the potential make-up of the new General Assembly after reapportionment. The 1990 Census showed, as was predicted, an increased move of representation to the metropolitan and other more heavily populated areas of the state.

If the rate of change remains constant for another five years, the number of school districts maintaining high schools could be down to 330. During this time, there is the likelihood that whole-grade sharing will be followed by reorganization.

The natural progression period does not entail a minimum enrollment that could be prescribed by the Code; however, districts are setting a pattern through local actions. The majority of whole-grade sharing and reorganization activities are forming "double-section", or larger districts. Double-section districts are those that are large enough to employ two teachers per grade and provide a high school program to match. The K-12 enrollments of double-section districts are usually at least 500 to 600 students.

At the end of the high school closing portion of the Community School Movement, which was the last period of school consolidation, only 23 districts remained with less than 300 students. A district with 300 students in grades K-12 has an average of 23 enrolled in each grade, and is considered a "single-section" district. Those 23 districts dwindled over a period of time, and have been plagued with uncertainty. If the current period of reorganization ends in a similar manner, there will be a few districts left that are less than double-section.

CAUSES OF CHANGE

The basic causes of reorganization activities are the changes in the state's economic and social characteristics. The legislature has provided incentives to reorganize and a lesser degree of more

direct encouragement. The Department of Education's role has been largely that of helping districts manage the changes the districts are considering.

All too often, citizens and school officials claim that the state is making them reorganize. This feeling about legislative activities can be counter-productive. It implies that the legislature is causing the changes; therefore, the legislature can prevent the changes. An analysis of the economic and social changes in rural Iowa and other rural portions of the United States reveals that the reorganization changes are much more closely aligned to the natural changes coming from private enterprise and from population modifications than they are related to actions of state government.

An examination of the reorganization situations and activities in other states reveals that many other rural areas of our nation are going through the same changes or are contemplating the changes. This helps support the contention that this is not exclusively an Iowa issue fomented by the legislature.

Minnesota, as one example, has 432 school districts, and 48 of them maintain only K-6 or K-8 programs. In other words, through their form of sharing, 48 districts send their high school students to neighboring districts.

A September, 1990, article from a Minnesota newspaper, tells about the closing of the Elmore high school and about the general conditions in the state. A reader could barely distinguish the Minnesota activities from those in Iowa, other than by the names of the towns.

Another article in the same newspaper describes the effort to keep the Motley and Staples schools together. The smaller Motley school was sending its high school students to Staples. Then the original Motley board was voted out of office and replaced by a board that wanted the high school back. Then the parents of a majority of the high school students, and many elementary students, wanted their children to go to Staples on open-enrollment. This could be Iowa.

A June, 1990, publication entitled "Rural Update" describes the conditions of combativeness between the factions in Oklahoma. The rhetoric is familiar.

Over the past few years, this consultant has received numerous calls from school and state officials from Illinois, Nebraska, and Wisconsin regarding school reorganization. In general, these people have wanted to know how the changes are occurring in Iowa.

In 1990, this consultant was invited to Michigan to speak with local and state officials about school reorganization in Iowa.

If Detroit and its surrounding area is not considered, Michigan is very similar to Iowa in square miles, population, community sizes, and school district sizes. Both have large areas of agriculture land, with many small towns and small school districts.

Three overall natural factors seem to be shaping the reorganization movement. They are the changing and shifting of the Iowa population; the altering of farming from a labor intensive industry to a capital intensive industry; and the movement of mercantile and business activities from the small towns to the metropolitan areas and larger municipalities. These are the elements which seem to be at work in many rural states, causing a myriad of changes in social institutions.

Another factor, which contributes to the change is the interest of parents to send their children to "full-service" schools. This particularly applies to the high school and to the middle or junior high school.

Several aspects of legislation, which will be elaborated upon later, are adding to the movement. The legislation has been effective since the time is right for school combinations.

Population Trends

From 1980 to 1990, Iowa's population dropped from 2,913,808 to 2,776,755, a loss of 137,053. This 4.7 percent decline is not particularly large, but it does emphasize that the century long trend of modest growth or slight decline is still with us.

From a long-range perspective, Iowa's population in 1900 was 2,231,902, and there has been a gain of 544,902. The total growth was 24.4 percent. At the beginning of the century, the United States population was 75,994,575, and the 1990 population is 248,709,873. This represents a 227 percent increase.

From a more local outlook, the first two counties in the alphabet, Adair and Adams, had 16,192 and 13,601 populations, respectively, in 1900. Those amounts slipped to 8,409 and 4,866 in 1990, for respective losses of 48 percent and 64 percent. During the same period of time, the two most populated counties, Linn and Polk, grew by 205 percent and 296 percent, respectively. Although Adair and Adams were among the largest losers of population, the general pattern has been for strong gains in counties with large municipalities and losses or slight gains in the rural counties. The continuous, slight rate of growth in Iowa has not been distributed evenly across the state.

The general population loss in the state and the aging of the population have had dramatic and direct results on school districts. In 1969-70, the total public school enrollment was 658,602 and it dropped to 483,397 in September, 1990. For the past several years, the enrollment has remained slightly below or above 480,000. Again, the losses and gains have not been evenly distributed around the state. For the most part, the largest losses occurred in the rural districts.

Farming Economy

Iowa's farm population dipped from 964,659 in 1930, to 391,070 in 1980, a 59 percent loss. This pattern of decline is expected to be even greater when the 1990 farm population data is available, and the trend is expected to continue into the next century.

The reduction in the farm population has been a direct result of advancing technology. Early in the century, the advent of mechanical inventions allowed farmers to work larger tracts of land. Then, chemical farming added to the number of acres that could be worked by one farmer. It has been reported that scientific advances in genetics will keep the trend going in the direction of larger farms.

In 1900, the average size of an Iowa farm was 151 acres. The average size was 301 acres in 1987, and that number is continuing to rise. In 1900, there were 228,622 farms--the largest number in Iowa history. The number has dwindled to 105,180 in 1987. Some authorities believe it is difficult to compare 1900 and the present day since there are now more "hobby" farms, and that tends to keep the average number of acres at a lower level.

It is exceedingly clear, however, that farms are getting larger and that there are less farms and people living on them. This, coupled with the smaller family size, is causing the deflation in the number of students living on farms.

Mercantile Trends

There are approximately 950 incorporated municipalities in Iowa. Most were established by 1900 for the purpose of serving the farming industry.

Not all towns could be classified as "full-service" communities, but most of them at one time had the mercantile establishments that could provide much of the basic necessities of life--grocery stores, hardware stores, gas stations, etc. However, as numerous recent documents and

newspaper articles report, the numbers of empty business buildings in small towns have greatly increased over the years. Mercantile establishments are leaving the smaller towns and congregating in the larger communities.

Schools are changing in a manner similar to private enterprise. For the most part, the communities that are large enough to maintain mercantile establishments, are able to keep the school districts, or at least the high schools.

Much of the trauma and problem of change revolves around the communities losing another business--the school, or the high school. Just as businesses are leaving the small towns, schools are following.

From the records available at the Department of Education, it appears that the number of high school districts reached its zenith in 1933, with 937 districts maintaining high schools. That is almost one high school per municipality. That number gradually declined to 836 in 1952, and then during a brief ten year period dropped to 469. This is similar to the current movement, which started with high schools in 437 districts in 1984-85, and is already down to 371 in 1991-92.

If school districts were run by private enterprise instead of local governments, the changes would have taken place much sooner and at a more steady pace. School reorganization seems to proceed for many years with very little movement, and then for a short period of time experiences rapid change; whereas, economic activities controlled by the market place tend to respond quicker to the needs for major adjustments. As an example, the number of farms has gradually dwindled each decade since 1900.

Full Service Schools

Another natural factor that is causing change is the desire of parents to have their children in full-service schools. The double-section, or in many cases, the quadruple-section school districts are seeming to meet this need. In hundreds of conversations with parents, board members, and students this author has been told that a vast majority believe that they have improved the educational programs of their schools by entering into whole-grade sharing contracts or reorganization. Also from interviews, it is apparent that many people did not want to make the changes in the first place, but the approval rate is significant in a few months after the districts are combined.

Another indicator of the desire for full-service districts is the pattern of open enrollment. The majority of the

movement out of districts has been from the small schools. Of the 54 districts in 1990-91 that had more than two percent net open enrollment out, only two were larger than 600 enrollment (605 and 740 students). There are many reasons for open enrollment, but one of the strong motivators has been the desire to have students attend high schools that have more course offerings and programs.

Legislation

The legislative actions that helped move the change process along can be divided into five categories. Although some of the legislation has caused districts to make decisions to whole-grade share or reorganize, none would have been effective unless the natural conditions were at work.

Reorganization Laws. The Code chapter on school reorganization and other related sections on whole-grade sharing are permissive in that they do not force reorganization. The only forcible means to merge districts go into effect if a district fails to maintain grades K-12, with certain exceptions, or if a district fails to meet the standards. In 1990-91, Hedrick was the first district to involuntarily merge as the result of not meeting the standards. The reorganization law has not caused the current series of events

Financial Incentives. During the past decade the legislature has enacted laws that provide financial incentives for moderate sharing, whole-grade sharing, administrator and superintendent sharing, and reorganization. Moderate sharing is the sharing of students and teachers on a basis that is less than whole-grade sharing. Some of the incentives provide extra funding for schools for limited periods of time, and others provide tax breaks to property owners under certain conditions. The incentives have helped encourage districts to share and to reorganize; however, they have not been the driving force. The incentives merely neutralize problems and criticisms at the beginning of the sharing or reorganization process.

As an example, Lakota and Buffalo Center-Rake were in the fourth year of whole-grade sharing when the issue of reorganization was taken to the electorate. The proposition was voted down in Lakota, even though the property owners would have received substantial tax breaks. Many citizens have given the message time after time, that when they do not want to lose the high school, or other parts of the district, financial incentives alone are not going to change their minds. On the other hand, if districts are ready to reorganize, the incentives may speed up the process and help neutralize some of the negative elements.

Standards. New school standards were effective July 1, 1989, as required by the legislature, but certain elements of the standards are being phased in over several years. The new standards, for the purposes of reorganization, can be viewed from three perspectives.

First, there are those standards that involve the establishment of committees, the development of policies, and in general are on paper. These standards can be met by schools of any size. They cause some extra work, but do not impose hardships that could cause schools to reorganize.

The next group of standards are those that require a minimum number of courses to be taught in high schools. These standards may have contributed to the decisions of some boards to enter into whole-grade sharing; however, many very small schools are continuing to operate independently and are able to meet the minimum.

The third set of standards are those that require added personnel, other than for the number of courses, as noted above. Generally, the requirements are for guidance counselors, principals, etc. These requisites may be causing some districts to contemplate whole-grade sharing. However, many very small districts are meeting these standards on their own, or with some moderate sharing of personnel.

An aspect of the standards that may be causing change is the perception that people do not like to be at the "minimum." School board members usually want to feel that their schools are quality operations, and it is difficult to maintain this belief when the district is at the minimum level.

Open Enrollment. Open enrollment appears to be having an effect on the reorganization movement. As noted earlier in this report, most of the districts with the higher percentages of open enrollment out of the districts are the very small ones.

Finances. The effects of school finances on reorganization need to be viewed from two outlooks--before July 1, 1991 and after July 1, 1991. The full impact of the new finance law embodied in the new Chapter 257 is not fully implemented as of this date, but some of the outcomes can be surmised.

In general, the old finance formula in effect prior to July 1, 1991, favored the continued operation of small districts; however, the original versions of the old finance formula from the early 1970s did not seem to be directed toward that goal. A movement to more equally blend state funding sources (state aide) and local funding sources (property

tax) began in the late 1960's. This movement also was pointed toward the equalization of per pupil funding and spending.

Prior to the establishment of the foundation formula, property taxes were the major sources of school funding, and property wealthy districts were able to raise and spend more per pupil than the poor ones. Using the January, 1989, information, the district with the lowest per pupil assessed valuation is Norwalk, with \$71,421. The highest is Lakota, with \$488,392 taxable value per pupil.

The tax rate variations were also extreme. Even after two decades of equalization, the rates still vary almost three-fold. Norwalk is high, with \$21.61 per thousand taxable valuation, and Lakota is low, at \$8.14.

The original laws, beginning in the late 1960's and early 1970's made great strides toward equal funding and equal spending on a per-pupil basis. However, within a few years, various legislation was enacted that eventually allowed the range of per pupil financing to widen considerably. Many people view per pupil spending as being very equal. This is because they consider only the formula per-pupil district cost that does not include all necessary data. The formula amount is established by the finance chapter of the Code, and it does not take into account extra levies and phantom students. However, in reality, some richer districts are able to raise and spend almost twice as much per pupil as the lowest. This determination is made by dividing the actual funding or spending in the general fund by the actual number of pupils. For example, in 1989-90, the highest funded district in the general fund was Lytton, at \$6,611. The lowest was Southeast Polk, at \$3,408.

These variations were developed since the implementation of the foundation plan by two types of changes. First, over the years, new optional property tax levies were allowed. These generally favor the property wealthy districts, which are for most part the smaller ones. The other change was the advent of the so-called phantom students. Again, the highest percents of phantom students are in the very small districts.

In summary, the original foundation plan narrowed the per-pupil expenditure range. If the plan had gone unchecked, it would have brought the higher-spending small districts to a lower level of spending, thereby possibly causing reorganization. However, in reality, the addition of phantom students and the allowance of many optional property tax levies provided the smaller districts with the ability to spend more per pupil. Some of the smaller districts are

at the lower end of the spending range, but they tend to be the exceptions.

The new finance formula does not substantially change the optional levies that are still available. The current options in the operating fund are the talented and gifted, dropout, SBRC, instructional support, educational improvement, asbestos, enrichment, and cash reserve levies and funding requests. Some require voter approval, but most are optional to the local boards. Some require School Budget Review Committee approval. Outside of the operating fund are the voted plant, regular plant, schoolhouse, lease purchase, playground, and debt services levies. Some are optional to the boards, and other need voter approval.

The major change of the new finance formula, as it may affect the smaller districts, is the phasing out of phantom students. Most of the districts with large percents of phantoms are very small. The district with the highest percent in 1990-91 was Thompson. Over 45 percent of its budget enrollment was comprised of students that were not there--phantoms. At the other end, half of the districts with no phantoms had enrollments of over 1,000.

In conclusion, the new finance formula will equalize per pupil funding and spending to the degree phantom students are eventually eliminated. However, the disparity in per pupil funding resulting from optional levies and sources will continue. In general, the elimination of phantoms may cause districts to rely more heavily upon the options, and it may cause some of the smaller districts to whole-grade share or reorganize.

The causes of this period of severe change come from several different sources. The changing of the agriculture industry, the general economic changes in the state, and the overall population losses and shifts are the overriding factors. Not only are these components affecting school districts, they are causing changes in almost all sectors of our state. The two other inducements of change seem to fit into the natural conditions rather than act as prime movers. The interest of some parents to have their students attend the larger full-service schools and the actions of the legislature are definite components of change, but they exist because the natural conditions are there.

MANAGING THE CHANGE

Although many aspects of school reorganization are beyond the control of the local districts, a degree of the management process remains within the purview of the school boards and citizens. This section of the report addresses how local boards

are managing some of the change. The observations and recommendations are based upon this consultants knowledge of the actions, both successful and unsuccessful, that over 150 districts have taken regarding whole-grade sharing and reorganization.

Studies and the Two Major Questions

The first, and foremost recommendation is that school boards thoroughly study their situations. This encouragement is not limited to boards of the smaller districts that may feel compelled to reorganize or whole-grade share, but is extended to boards of larger districts that may be parts of alliances with smaller districts.

The studies can be conducted by local citizens' committees. Often this is viewed as the method that is closest to the people. However, in some instances, the boards have conducted their own studies. This consultant recommends citizens' groups as the preferable method.

Many districts engage the services of outside consultants. The Department of Education has conducted full studies, partial studies, and financial studies for an average of 40 to 50 districts a year since 1987. Many of the districts request two studies before they take final action. These studies are conducted by this consultant, and, if they are full studies, the respective accreditation consultant is involved.

A few university professors conduct reorganization studies for districts. Some districts may prefer this type of study over the Department of Education approach. The major difference between Department studies and other studies is that the Department always considers the welfare of contiguous districts and others in the region. The university staff is more likely to stick to the issues defined by the hiring board. Department studies are free of charge, and the universities generally charge. Private consultants outside the universities may also conduct studies.

Board members are encouraged to keep open minds regarding school reorganization studies. Only a few short years ago, this consultant heard board members say that "they" have been talking about reorganization for years, and we are still here. A continuance of this attitude may allow action to go on all around a district, while most options become lost.

On the other hand, Department staff have seldom encouraged boards to act in haste. The most common reason for us to

suggest quick action is if neighbors are making moves. Sometimes, the best options are taken away if districts wait too long.

The results of studies should lead boards to the positions where they can make two decisions. The first is whether the district should whole-grade share, reorganize, dissolve, or remain as an independent entity. The second, if the district is to enter into some type of reorganization activity, is to decide who should be the partner or partner schools. All other information supports these two decisions.

Specific Elements of Study and Consideration

The question as to whether a district should reorganize has two sides to it. The first is whether a program merger would improve the educational opportunities for students, the financial condition of the district, or other elements of school operation. The second is whether the district will be able to last as an independent unit.

Along with conducting a study, one of the best ways to assess the educational value of becoming larger is to visit districts with enrollment levels the size of the combined proposal. If it is evident that a larger district would be able to provide a more expansive level of service, the decision making process will have been facilitated.

Among the many considerations concerning the long-range stability of a district is an evaluation of reorganization activities taking place throughout the state. An examination of the whole-grade sharing and reorganization projects should reveal what appears to be the lower limits of stability. The ten year period of change ending in 1962 seemed to culminate in single-section schools--those with at least 300 students in grades K-12. Only a few districts remained at that time with smaller enrollments.

This period of change appears to be aimed toward developing schools with a minimum enrollment of 500 to 600 students--double-section schools. This may not be the ultimate size, but it seems to be what local control is now considering the minimum. However, often a greater degree of satisfaction is achieved when quadruple-section schools are formed.

If smaller units are formed, there are two conditions that should exist. First, the two districts together should be able to stay together if they join a third district. In other words, if the combined enrollment of a merger is 400, and it is very likely the district will go through the merger process again, care should be taken so that the

second union will not be divided between two other districts. Experience has shown that students form bonds very quickly, and it is not right to put them through two major periods of fluctuation in a short interval of time.

The second caution is to refrain from forming small school districts where major building construction may be needed. The maxim is that a school district should be able to last at least longer than the time it takes to pay off a bond issue--usually 20 years. In only two or three instances has a Department of Education study team recommended major building projects when a reorganization was involved, and in those studies, the newly combined districts were large enough to stand the test of time. In several cases significant remodeling was suggested, but seldom a new building.

A corollary consideration is the condition of the facilities of the larger district. In several instances in recent years, smaller districts refrained from or hesitated forming alliances with larger neighbors because the conditions of the larger districts' facilities did not present good images or seem to be in adequate conditions for providing the desired educational programs.

Another factor that needs to be managed is the financial position of a school district at the time of reorganization. It is usually better for a district to enter into whole-grade sharing or reorganization before its financial position has deteriorated. There are many reasons for this recommendation, but one concrete example involves two districts that reorganized a few years ago. The board of the smaller school knew that its buildings would be closed after reorganization, and they did not want this older building to be boarded-up and sit in town for the next two decades. Prior to the reorganization the board made sure that it had enough funds to tear down the old structure, at a cost of over \$100,000, which included asbestos removal.

A financial factor that will be important for the next few years is the potential loss of phantom students. Larger districts are more able to "roll with the punches" as this type of financial reduction works its way through the financial formula. Small districts have less options. For example, a larger school that has seven math teachers may pare back by eliminating one position. However, a small district with only one, or less than one, full time math teacher in the high school, has very few options to cut back as it loses enrollment. The consequences of enrollment loss and budget reduction are generally much more severe for the smaller districts.

Open enrollment patterns need to be studied prior to whole-grade sharing or reorganization. Districts must be able to predict how many students will be lost to open enrollment as the result of the program merger. In some cases, enrollment loss may be acceptable and considered a part of the solution. However, in other situations, too many students may be lost, thus reducing the viability of the hoped for merger. This may be the indicator that the merger plan is not a sound one.

Another aspect of open enrollment that boards need to study is the pattern of students leaving a district. Are the parents exhibiting their desire for the district to enter into a whole-grade sharing contract? This type of message cannot be ignored.

Athletic competition has changed dramatically as a result of the wave of whole-grade sharing. In all instances this past year, the districts that whole-grade shared, also shared all sports. In other words, the numbers of girls' and boys' basketball teams has declined by over 50 since 1984-85. This is causing continuous realignments of conferences and schedules.

In general, there are many criteria and conditions to examine when school districts contemplate a reorganization activity. No two situations are the same. In some cases finances are important, and in others they are not. For some schools athletics weigh heavily in the minds of the people, and for some they do not. The list of items that need to be studied is quite lengthy. The three major criteria examined by the Department of Education when its staff does a reorganization study are educational program, geography, and long-term stability.

Planning for the Future

As noted earlier, the current locally controlled era of change is leading school districts to form alliances that have combined enrollments large enough to be at least at the double-section level. A greater degree of confidence is achieved by the local decision makers if they can build quadruple-section districts--with more than 1,000 students in grades K-12. In any event, this era of transformation is taking place within a set of parameters.

Another, very important consideration local leaders need to be aware of is the likelihood of another era of reorganization. Iowa has experienced two distinct ten year periods of school change that began in 1910 and again in 1952. The current period began in 1985, and has run on for six years already. It is clear that it will continue for at

least another two, and most likely for three to five more years.

Then, as before, there may be a plateau of relative calm. The first duration of stability lasted about 30 years and the second was 20 years. Is it now possible that another stage of change will begin? If history is any lesson, the answer is yes, and the interval of calm before the changes begin again will possibly be shorter than the previous ones.

The lesson to be understood is to avoid making decisions now that will cause irritations if change comes again. Are alliances being formed now that will have to be undone in a few years?

The next period of reorganization may take on two different characteristics. The first may be the continuation of the reorganizations that are occurring now. In other words, districts will continue to combine until a certain enrollment size is reached that provides for what people may consider full-service districts. The local rationale for change that is being evidenced now may basically resurface.

The other characteristic of change may be the advent of regionalism. During the past school year, studies were requested of the Department of Education that involved the concept of regional instruction.

One example involved the two southwestern districts of Clarinda and Shenandoah. In the spring of 1991, citizens' committees from both districts recommended to their boards that they study the possibility of a combined high school being built between the two towns. The boards asked the Department to do the study.

Both districts enroll more than 1,000 students in grades K-12, and they are located 19 miles apart on a major highway. Both high school buildings are relatively new and are excellent facilities, with auditoriums and expensive, complete athletic facilities.

The people advocating the combination seemed to want three additional services that generally require more than their individual enrollment sizes to provide. The requested additions are advanced academic courses, special vocational offerings, and alternative programs.

The Department of Education team recommended that the two districts remain intact and that they continue to operate their own high schools. The overall reason was that both schools offer excellent opportunities for the vast majority of the students and that the change to a combined district

would be too expensive in terms of finances and social upheaval to warrant the benefits that would become available to a relatively small percent of the student body. However, the team agreed that the students who need these additional programs lose out by not having them. This led to the recommendation of the team that the districts may wish to form a "regional instructional service center" in order to provide the three types of programs. The regional center could be located in either or both existing school buildings, or in a new, lower cost structure located somewhere between the two municipalities.

The other mentions of regionalism involved the United Community School District located between Ames and Boone, and the two mid-sized districts of Anamosa and Monticello. In a few other studies and board consultations regarding reorganization, the concept came in on a minor note.

The important point is that the idea is on the table, and it is beginning to attract attention. The concept is still being defined. In some cases, regionalism may include a combined high school serving a larger geographic territory. Other types may be the magnet school concept considered by the United Community school board or a combined instructional service center for several schools, as studied by Clarinda and Shenandoah, and Anamosa and Monticello.

In summary, local control, for the most part, took school districts through two historical stages of school district reorganization and is doing the same thing now. The changes in our agriculture-based land use, the fluctuation of the businesses within the state, and shifting populations are forcing much of the change. The challenge for local districts is for the school boards and citizens to assess the situation and to manage the changes to the extent possible.

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