

Girard-Carlinville school merger studied

But Girard-Virden consolidation to be considered first

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GIRARD — The Girard and Carlinville school districts should consider consolidating, according to a study by educational leadership faculty at the University of Illinois at Springfield.

But Girard school officials say they won't make a decision until a study considering the feasibility of consolidating the Girard and Virden school districts is completed this fall.

About 300 fewer students attend the Carlinville schools now than a decade ago, according to School Superintendent Michael Kelly.

"We want to continue to be able to offer the variety of courses at the high school we do now," Kelly said.

The state of Illinois has long encouraged the consolidation of smaller districts into a new district or annexation of one district by another. Such action is seen as benefiting districts financially while allowing them to improve curriculum and extra-curricular activities.

"A larger district can offer more," said Virden Superintendent Ron Graham.

A feasibility study in 2003 found that Virden and Girard should consider consolidation and recommended that the high school for a new district be in Virden and a middle school in Girard. No action was taken, but school officials from Virden and Girard are again interested in discussing possible consolidation of their districts, according to Graham and Girard School Superintendent Marlene Brady.

The latest study is expected to draw on data from the 2003 research as well as the Girard-Carlinville study.

Meanwhile, information about the Carlinville-Girard feasibility study is available on the Carlinville and Girard schools' Web sites.

Among other things, that study says that should Carlinville and Girard consolidate:

- . Pre-kindergarten through eighth grades should be housed on each of the districts' current campuses.
- . The high school for the new district should be what is now Carlinville High School.
- . About \$4.9 million over four years would be provided by the state to offset costs associated with consolidation.
- . Only one superintendent would be employed, and no teacher layoffs would be anticipated.
- . Of the potential for the Carlinville and Girard school districts to merge, Carlinville Mayor Robert Schwab said he believes both districts could benefit.

"With one, larger district, you could expand curriculum and provide more rather than having two districts duplicate efforts. Carlinville and Girard are close together, about 15 miles apart. I think it could be a good thing," Schwab said.

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