

# W. Chicago High School, feeder districts talk consolidation

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It was a lengthy lesson on the intricacies of consolidation.

Nearly 40 school officials and parents from West Chicago Elementary District 94 spent Monday learning about how to consolidate West Chicago High School and its three elementary feeder districts into a single school system.

School officials made no promises on whether they'd even take the plunge and spend money on a study to find out whether it makes sense to pursue a consolidation plan.

"Within the next meeting or two, we'll have some sort of discussion on this topic," said Bob Brown, a school board member from Winfield Elementary District 34. "As always, public participation is welcome."

Members of District 94, District 34, West Chicago District 33 and Benjamin District 25 did get a crash course Monday on what options they have available to them if consolidation of the four districts is pushed by either school officials or diligent parents.

William Phillips, an associate professor at the University of Illinois-Springfield and a leading authority on the topic, spent much of the evening talking about the implications of such a move and the formal study that's to assess how the districts would be affected by a consolidation.

A handful of school districts in Illinois consolidate each year, he said, most of them in the central and southern parts of the state, and most often to offset financial constraints.

Such a move would be prompted by either a school board's petition or a similar request filed to the DuPage County Regional Office of Education by 50 residents in each of the school districts seeking to consolidate.

"This decision is not up to me," Phillips told the audience. "This is a very complicated issue. ... You need a base of information to make a decision."

The plan for consolidation has been pushed for months by the high school district's school board president, Tony Reyes, who has argued that the four districts need to consider the idea as a way to create a more efficient and cost-effective learning environment for the roughly 7,200 students in the districts.

Reyes' idea has been met with a tepid response from school officials in all three elementary feeder districts. School officials have stressed they'd be willing to do more to communicate among the districts about their respective activities.

But school officials in District 25, for instance, have said they're not interested in pursuing the matter because of concerns from parents that consolidation would compromise the district's local control and traditionally high standardized test scores.

That sentiment was shared by Winfield residents Cherie Stone and Velvet Kent, one of the few parents in the audience.

"From everything we've heard, it sounds like our taxes would go up," Stone said. "I feel like a study is a waste of taxpayers' money."

Talk: Some worry consolidation would hurt standardized test scores