

## **Keep It Simple, School Board**

KISS: Keep it simple, stupid!

You may have heard this dictum before. It's always good advice – don't make things any more complicated than necessary. And it's exactly the advice I'd like to offer to the Oshkosh School Board. Keep it simple, School Board!

We are all painfully aware of, and totally frustrated with, the process the Board has gone through in redesigning the entire Oshkosh School System. Some of this was unavoidable – you can't change a boundary six inches without someone getting upset. But a lot of it can, and should be, avoided. By keeping it simple, School Board.

The problem is that the School Board is trying to do too much. Yes, some elementary schools need to be closed or consolidated. And yes, enrollments in the two High Schools need to be balanced, in a way that makes socioeconomic sense. So do that, but do it as simply as possible. Make the changes needed to accomplish your two goals, but only the changes needed to accomplish those two goals. Keep it simple, School Board.

First, let's drop all the K-4 and 5-8 (or whatever it is) nonsense. It's not needed to reach your two goals. Maybe K-4 and 5-8 is a better configuration than the K-5 elementary and 6-8 middle school system we now have. Frankly, I doubt that it makes a dime's bit of difference. But it's another change, on top of all of the actually necessary changes you're asking us to swallow, and change is always difficult. So drop the unneeded change, and focus on what really needs to be accomplished. Keep it simple, School Board.

Second, balancing the High Schools shouldn't mean relocating middle school students. Ideally, middle school students should still be able to walk or bike to school; high schoolers can drive or take the city busses if needed. And no, there's nothing wrong with sending some west side middle school's students to North, and others to West.

Yes, Becky and Shelly will be distraught about never seeing each other again. But they'll get over that real soon. The reality is, kids switch schools all the time, especially between middle and high school. And almost none of their middle school friends would've still been close friends through their high school years, anyway.

After all, high school is a time of rapid change, rapid growth, rapid development – and that means new concepts new outlooks, new interests, and invariably, new friends. Becky and Shelly will be going separate ways anyhow, and their forced separation will probably only help them grow and mature that much more.

So here's the plan, School Board. Come up with the simplest, cleanest set of changes needed to accomplish your goals. You've already identified the elementary schools you want to close; now find the simplest way to reallocate those students. If space constraints require sending some 5<sup>th</sup> graders from a few elementary schools to a middle school, then do that – but don't feel you have to send all 5<sup>th</sup> graders to all of the middle schools, and shift a thousand elementary and middle students around, just to justify that small, actually needed change.

You've also (roughly) identified what students you want to switch from West to North. Fine, make that switch, maybe even make it a somewhat bigger group as a number of parents have suggested. But make the size decision based on what works for the two high schools. Leave the middle schools alone.

Because remember, you're going to need to come to us to finance your decisions. And we don't like complexity. So keep it simple, School Board.