

# Talking Consolidation: Part 4 - Wood River/Hartford Superintendent Patrick Anderson

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**WOOD RIVER** - Wood River/Hartford Superintendent Patrick Anderson said the move for consolidation does not fit with the "economy of scale."

The Wood River/Hartford Board of Education passed a resolution against the consolidation of the Wood River/Hartford, East Alton and East Alton Wood River High School districts, citing it being under-researched and reckless at this time. Anderson said he agrees with his school board, and said this current push for consolidation does not have what he considers the required backing of the three current districts as well as extensive research.

"They are opposed to it, because there is truly no plan on this for consolidation," Anderson said. "There are way too many unknowns to go into this blindly. There's no plan on finances, and no knowledge of incentive money from the state to do it."

Anderson said he was aware of various state incentives to push for consolidation of school districts, but was unsure about the money being used to fund them.

"The state has not been real great on doing this," he said. "The Spring Garden School District was promised \$384,000 and only got \$37,000. That's why this is a huge problem, we're looking at complete unknowns with incentive money. Incentive money is a year-to-year thing. It could be in the budget one year, and not in the next. That's a big problem."

The move for consolidation was placed on the ballot before the Illinois General Assembly and Illinois Governor Bruce Rauner could agree on a budget.

"This was even put on the ballot before there was a budget this year, before the governor even said he would fund it even somewhat," Anderson said. "The board thought it was reckless."

Taxes are also an issue to Anderson. He disagrees with East Alton Wood River High School Superintendent John Pearson's take on having a larger tax base for the new district would result in similar, or even lower, tax rates generating the same revenue. Anderson said the tax base would remain relatively the same for the new district, citing no new communities being added to the new district.

"If we added Roxana or Bethalto, we would have a larger tax base," Anderson said. "We will still have the exact number of households there would be after consolidation. We don't see an expansion of more households."

Anderson cited the economy of scale as another reason consolidation is unnecessary. He said consolidation works in certain situations, which work within the economy of scale.

"Economy of scale works when there are two small high schools with possibly 125 kids in them, and they can combine," he said. "That new district can have one superintendent and maybe one Spanish teacher, but we already have 27 or 28 kids in a classroom, the economy of scale is not productive there."

Added administrative costs also worry Anderson. He said the new district may require more middle management on an administrative level. With this fact, the proposed savings of eliminating the position of two superintendents would not be enough to

justify consolidation into a unit school district to Anderson, who believes more administrators will be needed.

When asked why consolidation is being pushed by many members of the district as well as the East Alton Wood River High School District, Anderson said he did not know.

"I don't know exactly why it's happening, but I think everyone wants what's best for kids," he said. "I think everybody cares about kids, but I wish the process was being done a little differently."

Anderson ultimately said he was not against consolidation in general as a concept, but wished there was more collaboration between school districts and expert advice and studies before undertaking something, which cannot easily be undone.