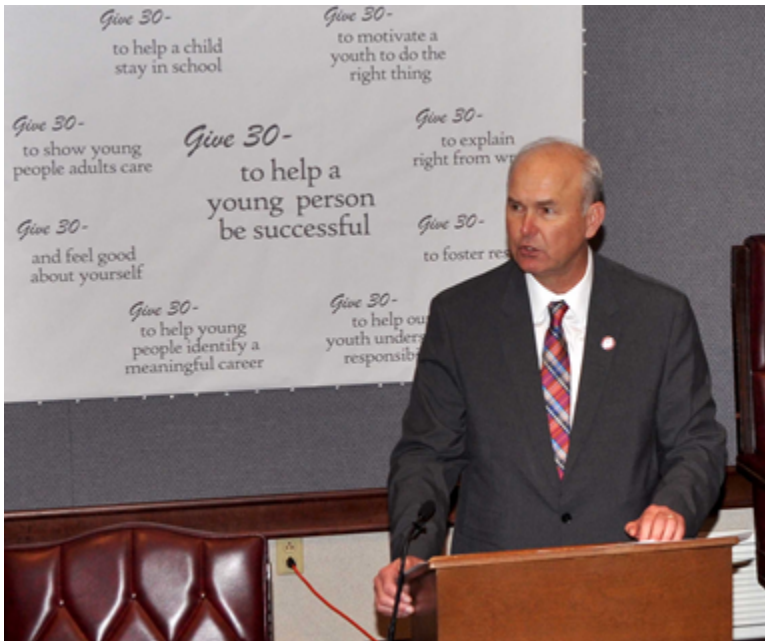


# Talking Consolidation: Part 5 - Madison County Regional Superintendent Robert Daiber

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**EDWARDSVILLE** - Madison County Reigional Superintendent Robert Daiber is completely neutral in regards to the possible consolidation of the **East Alton, Wood River/Hartford** and the **East Alton Wood River High School** districts on the upcoming ballot.

If consolidation is chosen by the people of the districts, however, Daiber and his office will play a crucial role in ensuring the transition from three separate districts into one,

new unit district goes as smoothly as possible. If consolidation is chosen, none of those three former districts will exist any longer. They will be replaced by an entirely new entity - a community unit school district.

A community meeting of all three school boards as a planning committee would be the first step if consolidation is chosen, Daiber said.

"They're going to need to plan for dissolving the districts, making sure contractual obligations met correctly for the end date of June 30, make sure staff lists are accurate for review for staff to be hired by new districts and they're going to need to discuss the disposal of assets to the new district and the transfer of assets to the new school district."

The 2016 push for consolidation of the districts preempted the two year wait usually required by law after the movement was voted down by less than 10 votes in 2015. This was because of a special circumstance of the **East Alton School District** being placed on the **Illinois Financial Watch List**. **East Alton Superintendent Virgil Moore** said the designation was due to bad timing of bills being paid in a different fiscal year in which they were originally scheduled, making the appearance the district lost much more money than it generated.

Daiber said consolidation would negate that position on the watch list, because the entire East Alton School District would be negated.

"The district will not be in existence, the new district would start clean," he said.

"Starting clean," in this case, does not explicitly mean a clean slate. Daiber said the new district would still be responsible for paying back bonds incurred by each district. After consolidation, if it passes, the residents of each district would be responsible for repaying the bonds borrowed by each district. Under this scenario, taxpayers from the former **Wood River/Hartford School District** would not be responsible for bonds taken out by the East Alton School District. Everyone within the new district would be responsible for the bonds issued by the East Alton Wood River High School District, however, because that district is being used as the borders for the new proposed district.

Assuming consolidation is chosen, a new school board would have to be elected in an April 2017 election. That board would be seated by the second week of May, Daiber said, and the new district would be up-and-running by July 1, 2017. In this small amount of time, the new board would have a lot to do.

"They must put in place a superintendent, an administrative team and a teaching staff," Daiber said. "They'll need to adopt a budget, and move forward with an educational plan."

Daiber's office will assist as consultants in any capacity the new school board would need, but Daiber said he was not a governing official for the hypothetical new district.

"In the time after the new board is elected, that board will be the governing body of that district," he said. "We are not governing, we would be working as advisors."

Another issue the new school board would have to address will be levying for a tax rate. The Committee of 10, which collected petitions from registered voters within the district to place the movement for consolidation on the ballot, also established a tax rate for the new district.

The proposed tax rate for the new district, as proposed by the **Committee of 10**, will be \$3.40 for every \$100,000 in equalized assessed values (EAV) within this district. This compares to the current \$2.32 being paid to the East Alton Wood River High School District in 2015, \$4.89 being paid to the East Alton School District in 2015, and \$3.01 being paid to the Wood River/Hartford School District in 2016. Ultimately, that new tax rate appears lower than what taxpayers currently pay to two separate districts (one to the elementary district, and the other to the high school district).

This lower tax rate concerns Moore as well as **Wood River/Hartford Superintendent Patrick Anderson** and consolidation expert **William Phillips** of the **University of Illinois in Springfield**. Each worries a lower tax rate will equate to less revenue in the future, which is daunting to them in the face of current funding woes from the **State of Illinois**.

**East Alton Wood River High School Superintendent John Pearson** said the lower tax rate comes from an increased tax base. More people will be paying into the new district, which Pearson said would lead to a lower tax rate creating the same amount of revenue.

Daiber said the new tax rate on the ballot may have to be augmented due to bonds issued by the different districts.

"The new district will levy to cover outstanding bonds from each district," Daiber said. "Each outstanding bond will have to be taken into account. People shouldn't think that will go away. The communities will still be responsible for those bonds in addition to the cost of the new district. This tax rate will be if there was no other incurred cost."

To help with some of these costs, the State of Illinois has incentives in place for consolidation. Last year, however, those incentives were prorated significantly. This year, however, the state ensured the incentives would be paid in full. The incentives, which Daiber said are numerous, include \$4,000 for each teacher in the district. This

incentive is in place to ensure staff does not have to immediately be downsized after new collective bargaining terms are set for the new district.

Currently, these three districts are the only ones in **Madison County** operating as dual districts. Every other district operates as a unit school district. Daiber said dual districts were the norm in the 1950s, before consolidation occurred. Districts such as **Marine**, **Alhambra** and **Worden** operated on their own. Communities chose consolidation, however, because many found it to be more efficient.

If consolidation is chosen by voters, Daiber said it could never truly be "undone," but said voters could choose to create another new school district by breaking apart a new unit school district created from consolidation. If this push fails, another movement for consolidation would have to wait two years before it could be placed on the ballot, unless another special circumstance occurs.

"It would have to wait two years, unless one of the districts goes on the financial watch list next year," he said. "If that happened, it could come back again next year."