

Letter to the Editor:

ISD 2142's Plan to realign the District will be put to a public vote on Dec. 8, 2009.

What will a "No Vote" assure?

1. According to our school board members, that the Orr, Tower and Cotton schools will close at the end of the 2009-2010 school year.
2. That Cook and Orr (and Tower and Ely) probably will not start their own district because they wouldn't be able to generate enough income to support a district with 3-4 schools. Losing most of the sparsity aid and taconite tax relief income generated from other schools (especially Babbitt, Cherry and Cotton) in our existing ISD 2142, a new district would not be financially feasible. Each of our schools is sinking on its own. Without each other we are not able to exist.
3. That we would, most likely, lose the support of the Albrook, Cotton, Cherry, and Babbitt communities who generally favor the District's restructuring plan. If we wanted a new plan to remodel the Cook School we would ask these other communities to put their plans on hold while we regroup and then ask them to vote again. The Minnesota Department of Education would, most likely, not give us a second chance. They have already approved the District plan stating that it is educationally and economically sound. Meanwhile students in Tower and Cotton will have left for other districts. (A "Yes" vote keeps all seven schools open for another year [2010-11] while construction takes place.)
4. That most students from Orr and Nett Lake will probably, although reluctantly, come to a crowded old building in Cook. (Sadly, Nett Lake may choose to find its own way.) (The Cook High School was built in 1932 and the elementary school, gym and home economics room in 1958. Newer band, science, additional elementary rooms and activity room have been added more recently.) With overpopulated rooms, fewer rooms available (many are used for Special Ed student services), the potential for health and safety problems, and an inadequate learning environment, parents who can will quickly transport their children to neighboring districts, leaving behind those who don't have the means to travel. Soon ISD 2142 will be in Operating Debt. If the District doesn't dissolve by itself then the Minnesota Department of Education will, most likely, decide to dissolve it. If our students are transported to Virginia and we pay their referendum, our taxes will double the cost of a "Yes Vote" on Dec. 8. If Virginia builds a new school, as they plan to do, that figure would be considerably more. That new school would do nothing for the growth of our Nett Lake, Cook, Orr and Tower communities and would cost our citizens even more as they travel to neighboring districts for concerts, conferences, sporting events and other school programs.

As this is happening, our best teachers, administrators and support staff will be looking for other jobs, many of them moving away. What will happen to our communities if we aren't progressive? Without a safe, healthy, modern school within a reasonable driving distance between our communities (some supported by vans to shorten distances), how will we keep our residents and attract new members to our beautiful communities? We can only survive if we stand together.

**What will a "Yes Vote" assure?**

1. A modern, progressive school with at least 45 students in each grade and 600 students in K-12. A school which will provide more course offerings in the high school and smaller class sizes, especially in K-8 classrooms.

2. More opportunities for *Everybody to be Somebody*.
3. More students for Choir, Band, Home Ec, Culture, Ind Arts, Art, Business, Technology, Foreign Language, etc. and College in the Schools classes.
4. More students for sporting teams, Knowledge Bowl, Math League, plays, Peer Helpers, Student Council, etc.
5. A financially sustainable district.
6. An energy efficient school that meets health and safety standards and provides for the latest technology including internet access throughout the building for all students during the entire school day, and modern labs for science, technology and art classes. A theater space and Personalized Learning Plans for each K-12 student.
7. A great buy, paid for, not only by our community, (including non-homestead residents who pay for bonding referendums) but also by members of our combined ISD 2142. With additional reduction in the valuation of some of our homes next year and the end of the Health and Safety referendum of \$20 per \$100,000 home in 2011, we are still paying less than most of our neighbors. The \$206 per \$100,000 home is also reduced by taconite credits and homestead tax credits. We have been paying \$51 per \$100,00 home. We have paid less for our schools for many years and we have received much in return. Most of us can say that we have benefited greatly from the education we have received at the Cook and Orr/Nett Lake and Tower Schools. Many of our parents and children have attended these schools and have gone on to obtain advanced training, degrees and good jobs. We owe much to these schools, their personal attention, and our great communities. This is our opportunity to show that we love this area and want to keep it vital and progressive for future generations.

School Enrollments: :

2009 Cook/Orr Elementary 2009

2009 Cook/Orr/Nett Lake High School

Grade:

Grade:

K  $27 + 11 = 38$

7  $24 + 25 = 49$

1  $25 + 9 = 34$

8  $28 + 26 = 54$

2  $33 + 10 = 43$

9  $35 + 20 = 55$

3  $39 + 6 = 45$

10  $19 + 29 = 48$

4  $29 + 12 = 41$

11  $28 + 24 = 52$

5  $24 + 8 = 32$

12  $27 + 28 = 55$

6  $35 + 16 = 51$

**K-12 total**

**$373 + 226 = 599$**

The above figures show the significance of all our communities participation in the District's plan. The ideal class size of 45 and total K-12 enrollment of 600 students points to the value we must give to all of our communities. Without each other we are failing and our communities will die. We would hope that Tower students, home schooled and open enrolled students would also choose to attend our new, modern, and progressive, community school where every student receives individual attention and gets to be Somebody.

Respectfully,

Mickey Maki

Teacher/Counselor Retired

Orr/Cook