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Special School Election - Reorganization Vote

Upcoming Reorganization Vote - Article July 2022 Newsletter

The voters of the Algona CSD and Lu Verne CSD will have the opportunity to vote on whether the district should reorganize (or merge) starting on July 1, 2023. The vote will take place on September 13, 2022 in a special election held in both our school districts. I thought I would take some time to just remind people of the path we took to get to this point.

Lu Verne CSD and Algona CSD started sharing students during the 2015/2016 school year. At that time we did not apply for any special state aid figuring we would wait until we got closer to the potential time when we might have to reorganize. Three years ago we decided it was time to look at moving towards reorganizing as one district.

The state had incentives (for three years) for each district to move towards that goal (it was called Joint Employment). After this year we will have received roughly \$2.4 million in extra spending authority (through positive district financial management both districts are in very good financial shape - so money right now isn't the main issue). These funds are based solely on us working towards reorganization (after reorganization we then have three more years of financial incentives from the state). The last part of this process is to allow the communities to vote on reorganization (and that will take place on September 13, 2022).

We already share the following: Director of Curriculum and Instruction, Director of Buildings and Grounds, Director of Transportation, Level I investigator, Teacher Leadership Program, music instructor, instructional coach, calendar, bus route, grades 6-12 (and added Kindergarten this year), professional development opportunities, Title IX program, administrative meetings, and the coordination of our various programs. This has allowed both districts to expand opportunities for not only our students but also our staff.

I would like to talk about the challenges schools are facing in Iowa. Today I looked at Teach Iowa (a site where schools post job openings) and just looked at how many elementary teacher positions are still posted. There are hundreds of posted job openings in the state of Iowa for this year in elementary education. This has made it very difficult to compete for elementary candidates (not only for Lu Verne but also the bigger districts like Algona). We have had to be very creative in our schedules and sharing opportunities with neighboring school districts to meet our educational needs. If you look at the national news there is a teacher shortage throughout the nation, not just Iowa.

Schools are not only struggling to find teachers but also support staff. Right now we have a large number of our support staff who are at retirement age or nearing retirement age. It is very difficult to replace experienced people in our support staff areas (like bus drivers, janitors, business staff, secretaries, aids, lunch staff, etc). We are very fortunate our staff is dedicated to our district and students to stay on for this year, but they will not stay forever (you might have had them when you were in school). In fact a year ago we had a bus driver retire and couldn't fill that position (thankfully Algona agreed to help us pick up those students).

Finally we are still seeing a decrease in students in rural Iowa (in 2005 we had 1399 students, in 2020 we had a total of 1408 students - but that also includes the addition of 2 more school districts in Titonka and Corwith-Wesley). Most towns are struggling to have adequate child care which takes a lot of students from our roster (they go to daycare where the parents work) and we have a lack of jobs in rural communities. This means our population in our school is dropping just like the populations in rural communities are dropping. This is something that is out of our control but it is affecting a lot of small rural districts in Iowa (including Lu Verne). To be a school we need students, and this year alone we felt we didn't have enough students to offer a Kindergarten class (plus we are down two teachers). Thankfully Algona offered to take those students who would have been in our Kindergarten class for the 2022-2023 school year.

Whether you agree with the reorganization or not, we are encouraging everyone to please get out and vote on September 13, 2022. If we have learned one thing from past elections is that every vote counts and on September 13 you will have the opportunity to let your voice be heard. Next month I will talk in more detail about the three items you are voting on during that special election (reorganization, SAVE revenue purpose statement and voter approved Physical Plant and Equipment Levy).

If you have any questions please email me at jhueser@cwl-csd.org or call 515-882-3357 or you can view our reorganization website (which even has a FAQ section) by going to <https://www.luverne.k12.ia.us/Content2/reorg>

Reorganization Vote - 3 Items on the Ballot - Article August 2022 Newsletter

This month I am going to talk about the 3 items that will be on the September 13, 2022 reorganization vote ballot (to combine the Algona CSD and Lu Verne CSD into one new district beginning on July 1, 2023). Please watch the local papers for more information on where your school election voting precincts are in each district (this is done by the local county auditors). That information is posted on our website: www.luverne.k12.ia.us and we encourage you to visit our reorganization web page which is located at www.luverne.k12.ia.us/Content2/reorg.

The three items that will be on the ballot come September 13 are: Reorganization of the Algona CSD and the Lu Verne CSD into one new district, adoption of a Revenue Purpose Statement (for our state SAVE funds or state 1% sales tax funds) and to implement a voter approved Physical Plant and Equipment Levy (PPEL). Each one of the items is a separate vote but the revenue purpose statement and voter approved PPEL are extremely important supportive pieces for the potential new school district.

1. Reorganization of the Algona CSD and Lu Verne CSD-

You will have the opportunity to vote on whether Algona CSD and Lu Verne CSD should become one new school district starting on July 1, 2023. We have actually been working towards this process for the past three years with our request from the state of Joint Employment funds (3 years worth of financial incentives from the state). If this vote is approved the "new" district will then get an additional 3 years of financial incentives. Even though both districts are in really good financial shape, we are both struggling to find staff (not only teaching staff but also support staff including aids, kitchen help, and bus drivers) and rural Iowa continues to trend down on public school students (remember combined we are only 9 more students than we were as separate districts 17 years ago).

2. Revenue Purpose Statement-

This is nothing new for the patrons of our two districts. Both districts presently have an almost identical revenue purpose statement already in place. When Iowa went statewide with the 1% sales tax for schools (SAVE), every district had to approve a revenue purpose statement. This statement tells the public how the district will use those funds in general terms. According to Iowa state law if we become a new district on July 1, 2023 (with the passage of the reorganization vote), the new district must have a new revenue purpose statement on file. Instead of holding a separate vote at a different time on this statement we have decided to include it on the same ballot as our reorganization vote.

3. Voter Approved Physical Plant and Equipment Levy (PPEL)-

Presently Algona and Lu Verne both have the board approved PPEL levy (which is capped at \$0.33 per \$1,000 assessed value). Algona also has a voter approved PPEL levy in place (at \$0.67 per \$1,000 of assessed value). They use these funds to purchase buses, update technology, update buildings and grounds, replace roofs, install and update HVAC, etc. In fact, you can see the funds at work if you drive by the athletic complex at the high school. That new entrance and softball field has been built with these funds or if you watch every student in 5-12 walking home from school with a chromebook, yes those were purchased with these PPEL dollars. Because we would become a new district this would need to be approved in order for our new district to continue to receive these funds. These funds are crucial to the district in order to be able to continue to improve our buildings, update the playgrounds, update athletic facilities, purchase vehicles, update technology and update other programs.

We would like to encourage everyone to come out and vote on September 13, 2022. If you have any questions please contact Joe Carter at jcarter@algona.k12.ia.us or Jon Hueser at jhueser@cwl-csd.org or visit our websites (<https://www.luverne.k12.ia.us/Content2/reorg>) for more information and to view the reorganization FAQ document.