

## **Proposal: Summitville Elementary would go kindergarten to grade 2**

By Rebecca R. Bibbs

The Herald Bulletin

**FAIRMOUNT** — Students living in Summitville may find themselves attending school in Fairmount for part of their elementary school years if a proposed realignment is approved by the Madison- Grant United School Corp.'s Board of School Trustees.

Madison-Grant Superintendent Dr. Scott Deetz proposed on Monday that Summitville Elementary School become an early childhood learning center for students in grades kindergarten through two while Park Elementary in Fairmount would serve students in grades three through six. The plan, if approved, would be implemented in the 2017-18 school year.

“Educationally speaking, it made tremendous sense for students, staff and financial sustainability,” he said. “For our teachers and students, it can be nothing but a win-win.”

Deetz said he will conduct community meetings at yet undetermined dates to explain the plan to parents. He hopes to present the plan to the board for approval in April.

Deetz, who previously was a principal, where a similar plan was put in place after his first year there, called it a “powerful structure.”

The advantages of the plan, Deetz said, is elimination of replication of programming in the two buildings and being able to right-size classes according to grade level.

“What’s more exciting about it,” he said, “is it doesn’t require more buildings. It’s just rearranging our resources to maximize their impact.”

For instance, each school may have a highability classroom at several grade levels, but those could be reduced to one per grade level within the district, Deetz said.

“In a sense, we take the same resources and divide them up, the way things are now,” he said.

In terms of class sizes, there may be 26 firstgraders in each classroom at Summitville but three classrooms with only 15 students at Park. A realignment could bring class sizes to between 17 and 21 students, Deetz said.

“We just don’t have a natural ability to level things out,” he said.

The realignment would not require additional staff, Deetz said.

“At no time would we be using funds from our general fund,” he said.

However, the plan might require some retrofitting of the schools, which would be paid for using leftover construction funds, he said. For instance, Summitville’s student restrooms may require smaller toilets to accommodate younger students.

One area that is expected to become more expensive is transportation, Deetz admitted. Because about two-thirds of the district’s fleet of 24 buses would be putting on an additional 12 to 24 miles daily, the cost may rise by \$8,000 to \$10,000, he said.

However, unlike many surrounding districts, which have had to move money from their general funds to cover higher transportation costs, Madison- Grant has underspent its transportation fund by about \$98,000, Deetz said.

“Logistically speaking, we know it will work,” he said.

Elwood Community Schools is a district with recent experience in converting schools to K-2 and 3-6 configurations. The district realigned about four years ago.

Elwood Superintendent Chris Daughtry was not in charge at the time, but he had previous experience with a similar realignment to K-3 and 4-5 in Wabash. He said there are several advantages, especially in smaller school districts.

For instance, sometimes poorer students move between a district's buildings, sometimes at inconvenient times of the school year for the child, because the family needs to move. Realignments reduce student mobility by ensuring students who move within the same district can continue to attend the same schools, Daughtry said.

"We see kids who bounce back and forth between elementary schools in small towns, so we eliminate some of that," he said.

Reducing the grade levels to one building also ensures continuity among same-grade classrooms, Daughtry said. In part, that's because it's easier to provide professional development and for teachers to collaborate, he said.

However, Daughtry admitted it's difficult to tell whether the realignment in his district had any measurable effect on student achievement as measured by state-mandated standardized tests. That's because the tests have been changed over the years.

"It was probably the worst timing for us because every time we did something the testing changed," he said.

However, a down side can be dissent from parents when such a plan is introduced, Daughtry said.

"People get very invested in their school, and when people go through a change like that it can be difficult," he said.

Daughtry said it was not unusual to hear from a parent who opposed realignment talk about it several years later.

"Two or three years down the road it was just accepted as part of the culture, and people seemed to be pretty happy with it," he said.



**Summitville Elementary** first-grader Pyper Howard reads "Fancy Nancy at the Museum" in class Wednesday.

Don Knight | The Herald Bulletin

