

## Alden School Board Whole Grade Sharing Statement, Feb 15, 2016

We'd like to thank the Iowa Falls School Board for their statement of intent regarding future sharing agreements. Unfortunately, with a single newspaper article reporting a few rash statements, much damage has already been done as our community members choose sides. It's time for some serious evaluation and reflection, and to determine if there are valid reasons to revise our current structure. It is obvious that there is much to be done to educate the community on the value of our current agreement and the benefit of having two districts working together rather than forming one consolidated district. This statement is the first of several which will attempt to do exactly that.

In 2014, an independent study by the State of Iowa Area Education Association labeled our partnership as "one of the best in the entire state." During their presentation at the annual joint meeting, the presenters indicated that both districts had benefitted substantially in financial health, student achievement, and student cohesiveness. Our shared districts offer safe, bully-free, nondiscriminatory learning environments using current technology in well maintained buildings. It was the AEA's conclusion that this agreement would continue to serve both districts well, and that other districts should study the IFA sharing plan as a template for any plan they might adopt.

The Alden Board is proud of our teachers, administrators, and students from preschool to our high school graduates. It is our belief that the current agreement best serves our kids and fulfills our primary directive of providing a quality education. While there has been exhaustive work on the merits of full consolidation, 10 years of study committees have failed to document any advantage to doing so. The Iowa Falls Board is searching for a good reason to continue sending "their 6<sup>th</sup> graders" to Alden. We would remind them that we consider "your" children's welfare and accomplishments while in our care as being equal to our own. As such, we'd like to think they are ours too. To clarify the issue, we have developed a list of benefits which focus on all our 6<sup>th</sup> grade children.

We believe:

- 1) Integrating at the 6<sup>th</sup> grade level is an ideal age for our children to form life-long friendships.
- 2) 6<sup>th</sup> grade tends to be a difficult, pre-teen, year as our kids transition from young children to young adults. The Alden building offers a safe environment away from older children who tend to take advantage of the struggles we all remember with puberty and the greater demands of an advanced level of education. As a result, all our children can relax, advance academically, and enjoy what otherwise would be extremely stressful school year surrounded by older and more mature 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students.
- 3) The Alden building provides bully free environment in an advanced elementary setting with an early middle school curriculum. As the oldest children in the building, they can concentrate on unifying as a class before peer pressure and hormones begin to influence their thoughts and behaviors. Further, self-confidence and personal satisfaction are increased, in much the way it is when they become seniors. There are few times in your life when you get to be the "top dog."
- 4) The Alden building offers a dedicated 6<sup>th</sup> grade wing, a home economics room, a wood shop, and computer lab. These are usually not found outside of a high school level facility and allows our students greater interest explorations.
- 5) All students in the Alden building have the opportunity to be leaders, role models, and educational partners with our youngest (Grade 1-3) children. This helps develop a greater

sense of responsibility and patience as they guide younger kids in special projects or daily assignments. We love that all our students interact in positive ways. We are proud of the way our teachers integrate this type of peer involvement into the Alden experience.

- 6) Our agreement allows the Iowa Falls District to retain 22% of the State Supplemental Aid money for the students they send to Alden. This provides nearly \$125,000 that the Iowa Falls District can apply to other grades and needs, because there are no significant education costs to students that are not educated in an Iowa Falls building.
- 7) Because we share responsibility for all of our children's educations, the actions of our school boards and administrators are synchronized. The benefit of having twice as many board members, and 25% more administrators all focused on our children cannot be overstated. We benefit because we have 2 independent boards focused on one common goal.
- 8) Throughout the agreement, there has never been any reason for either the Iowa Falls or Alden school boards to address a quality of education issue for the services provided in any school at any level.

As the Iowa Falls board is aware, the Alden Board has extended an offer in 2015 to evaluate and rectify all costs. In addition to a fairly negotiated reimbursement plan, Alden pays all college tuition, and voluntarily paid high school computer expenses incurred on behalf of Alden students. We have never attempted to take advantage of this arrangement, and have always paid what the Iowa Falls board of directors felt was fair at the time of each renewal.

It is the Alden Boards position that the agreement, as currently operated, best serves Iowa Falls and Alden students, communities, and both district's long term financial viability. We are resolved to maintain at least some level of independence for our district well into the future. We agree with the State Area Education Association's 2014 assessment that our current agreement is a best case scenario, and are committed to the partnership forged by hard work and community good will. In our opinion, any change from our current agreement would be a step backwards and provide no discernable benefit to the educational experience we provide our children. We would like to thank the Iowa Falls Board, community, staff, and students for the 12 great years they have shared with us and truly believe we could not have had a better partner in this journey.