



EDITORIAL: Despite concerns, regional school model is worth exploring

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MPNnow.com — Local forums this past week that explored the possibility of a regional high school in Ontario County shed light on new opportunities to streamline costs — and potentially create much-needed relief for taxpayers.

And for that, we applaud all nine school districts for being proactive and participating in **the study by the nonprofit Center for Governmental Research** and funded through a state Local Government Efficiency (LGE) priority grant.

We believe it's critical for Ontario County residents to get informed about this study — which is not a proposal for one central school district and requires no immediate changes or actions.

Currently, we have nine separate districts with nine separate school boards. A regional model would call for a single district with multiple facilities and one regional board.

In light of declining state aid, staffing cuts, the property tax cap and increased performance expectations for students and staff, exploring options seems critical. Additionally, all districts except Victor (with an increase of 18 percent) continue to see declining enrollment. According to CGR's study, by 2019, Ontario will serve 9 percent — or 530 — fewer high school students, down from 5,734 in 2010 to 5,207 in 2019.

The nine districts collectively spend approximately \$50 million on core high school services for 5,500 students. CGR contends that a regional model provide a more comprehensive learning experience, with more learning opportunities while reducing costs.

But change is never easy. It's likely many people hear the word "regional" and see their identities being wiped out; no more mascot, no more school colors — that type of jarring scenario. But multiple facilities under a regional district with services such as transportation, administration and other operations-related services streamlined could evolve a number of ways.

With creative thinking and cooperation, could we not find ways to preserve our identities without spending \$50 million to educate fewer than 6,000 students?

If it would bring millions in savings, as projected by CGR, and we could find ways to keep our individual school identities while increasing the quality of the educational offerings for our kids, the prospect of a regional model is worth a good, hard look.

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