

Presentation by Dr. Emmett Lippe to the School Board on March 8, 2010

My responsibility this evening is to present to you my recommendation for a possible referendum that addresses the \$3.6 million deficit facing the Center Grove Schools. As most of you know, the school corporations in Indiana are struggling to balance their budgets, given the current economic conditions -- not only in Indiana, but throughout the country. The Center Grove Community School Corporation is experiencing the same financial restraints. Early last fall approximately \$1 million was trimmed from the budget for this current year. This spring the district was faced with continuing to make budget reductions or conduct a referendum to lessen the impact on education in this community. This is the reason the Board is considering conducting a referendum.

As part of the process to make a recommendation for the contents of the referendum, I have held many discussions and read many emails during the last several weeks. I have also visited all the schools, attended meetings, and received suggestions from three groups: the Teachers, the Financial Advisory Committee and the Administrators. It has become quite obvious to me that many people feel this community has excellent schools, based on the many comments that I heard and the many student activities that I have observed. My first impression is that you also have a quality staff that cares about the students they work with every day. This includes not only teachers, but bus drivers, food service personnel, secretaries, custodians, maintenance workers and administrators.

This community also cares very much about the quality of Center Grove Schools. We heard many of their comments during the public forum held a few weeks ago. It is obvious there is much pride when people talk about the programs available for their children and grandchildren. Do you know how many communities would like to have the quality of schools that you have here in Center Grove? Do you realize how long it takes to build the reputation that you enjoy today? I have heard several times that many persons move to Center Grove because of the schools—and they stay. It is also well known that one of the real positive assets this community has is the Center Grove school district.

The community depends upon the schools for both the strong academic programs and the high quality of the many extra-curricular activities. It takes both the academic and extra-curricular activities working together to provide a quality education for all students. By doing so, the schools provide a well-rounded and sound foundation for continued development of students in such areas as leadership skills and teamwork as well as the opportunity to participate in some activities they otherwise might not try. These activities are oftentimes the ones where students find a niche and pursue these interests for a lifetime.

You have "excellence" in so many areas that provide students many opportunities. Isn't this what "education" is all about -- providing stimulating opportunities and activities both within and outside the classroom? You have all these components -- right here in White River Township. These academic programs and extra-curricular activities keep students busy involved in top quality programming, whether it be band, vocal music, robotics, athletics, or any one of many different venues of student interest. The alternative is to reduce these programs, resulting in your children and teenagers being less engaged in the areas of skill-developing programs -- and perhaps resulting in some students headed toward less honorable pursuits.

When I was asked to review the suggestions of the three groups: the Financial Advisory Committee, the Teachers, and the Administrators -- I asked myself where I start. My first thought was to respond to cuts in a very forthright manner and simply place on the reduction list everything that had some consensus among the three groups. The groups would be happy, the Board might be pleased, and I would have done my job. We would then start school next year with many of the so-called "extras" removed from the program and be left with only the most essential elements of the school program.

But then I got to thinking, if I lived in this wonderful community and someone recommended to the School Board that the voters could only vote on a portion of what makes Center Grove what it is today -- How would I feel about that? To help me answer that question, I made a list of things that would provide a sense of direction for me as I addressed this important challenge.

Let me share my thoughts with you.

- My first and foremost thought was this -- "How can this community preserve the many outstanding programs -- while at the same time be sensitive to the financial realities?"
- The second thought was, "What about the Center Grove students?" What impact would many of proposed reductions have on them? Would the schools remain a safe and orderly environment in which to learn? Would they still be able to have a high quality educational program and also provide extracurricular activities that enhance the development of your children?

- The third thought was that it takes time to develop a high caliber school district. It does not happen overnight. It happens over time with a lot of work on the part of the school staff and a lot of involvement from parents and community members. As we make decisions, how can we be sensitive and respectful of the persons that help make Center Grove what it is today?
- Another thought that went through my mind was – How do the vast majority of parents and other residents feel about maintaining a school district that has a very high quality of programs versus offering a program that may be less than what the students enjoy today.
- Finally, I asked how can I be true to myself as I make the decisions as to what to recommend to the School Board? Do I make a recommendation that maintains the quality of Center Grove schools, or do I recommend something less than what you have? What is quality? Often times it is said that it is difficult to define, but you know it when you see it. Folks, I have spent many years working in and with school districts, and believe me when I say that you have quality programs!

As I was thinking all of these thoughts, trying to determine what to do, it suddenly dawned on me – what was I thinking about? All the times that I have been involved with school votes, it was the community that decided the level of education for the students in the community. This is the decision that the community must make. It's not up to one person (me in this instance), nor is it up to the School Board. Sure, they have to place a reasonable proposal on the ballot, but the real decision should be made by the community by voting on a proposal that preserves and continues the quality of Center Grove Schools. The proposal should not compromise the quality of the schools. If the voters say "no," then the school district will offer the best programs that it can within the confines of the revenue available. If they say "yes," then the schools can continue and build upon a strong program based on the financial support received from the community. At the very least, the community should have the opportunity to make this choice. This is the reason for the referendum.

When I met with the various groups, almost everyone had a special program or activity they would like to keep and spoke with strong passion about the merits of the program that were of special value to them. We all have received many emails with the same type of content. The bottom line for me is that it would be extremely difficult to keep these programs and a strong support system without a referendum, because frankly the bad news is that a \$3.6 million deficit would reduce most programs that were mentioned to me.

But wait, there is good news. The good news is that most programs, if not all, would be restored with a successful vote on the referendum proposal. My suggestion is that parents and community members avoid promoting one program against another. You should work together and spend all that time and energy in supporting the proposal that is being recommended this evening, because it includes funding for these important educational programs. It would be a real credit to this community if the parents, other community residents, school district employees, and members of the School Board could focus on the larger picture. Think on the positive side, that a collaborative effort in supporting the referendum could preserve the programs for the children and young people of this community. It is for you and other community members to decide.

As I outline my recommendation for the referendum, I am hopeful the members of the School Board will embrace my recommendations and place on the ballot a proposal that would allow the Center Grove Schools to maintain and build upon the high quality of student programs that you have in this community. Before I outline the specifics of this proposal, I want to remind you that you have also asked the Referendum Committee to make suggestions to you related to certain aspects of the referendum that you are considering.

Thank you for your patience in allowing me to make these comments. Within this context and based on input from various committees and individuals, I will now present my recommendations.

The recommendations this evening include:

Adjustments that impact the budget (approximately \$600,000)

Permanent reductions that should be made (approximately \$800,000)

The total for these two groups is \$1.4 million.

I am also recommending additional reductions in the amount of \$1.6 million that can be restored if a positive vote in the referendum is received, for a total of over \$3 million. The other approximately \$600,000 would come from either closing an elementary or by additional reductions that would be placed on the referendum proposal. The recommendation includes two scenarios – one with closing an elementary school and another scenario with keeping the elementary open.

WGES CLOSED

1. Previous Budget Cuts:

Administrators	\$345,000
Support Staff	\$295,000
Teachers	\$125,000
Other	<u>\$55,000</u>
	\$820,000

2. Adjustments:

45- Move band uniforms to Rainy Day	\$10,000
55- Remove 09-10 teacher pay increase	\$125,000
58- Move Security to Title 4 and Parking	\$27,000
69- Teacher retirement incentive	\$350,000
125- Re-evaluate FDK fees	\$35,000
147- Move staff to Food Service	<u>\$60,000</u>
	\$607,000

3. Permanent Cuts:

01- Eliminate temp. grounds position	\$16,000
03- Cut back community newsletter	\$25,000
10- Heightened energy practices	\$90,000
14- Reduce travel in the General Fund	\$37,000
15- Reduce Superintendent annuity	\$20,000
17- Elim. 1 corp. half-time Receptionist	\$22,000
29- Eliminate corp. Purchasing Agent	\$43,400
36- Eliminate Admin. \$1 insurance	\$112,000
37- Elim. Admin. individual memberships	\$4,000
40- Reduce overtime	\$10,000
42- No Lit. Coaches in General Fund	\$275,000
46- Reduce Alt. Ed. Asst. to half-time	\$8,300
52- Reduce School Board stipends	\$1,500
55- Admin. .5% salary reduction	\$13,500
68- Reduce number of cell phones	\$10,500
99- Reduce Dues/Fees accounts	\$15,000
100- Eliminate gas for Superintendent	\$3,000
115- Reduce consultants/services	\$47,000
143- Elim. admin. ins. retirement benefit	\$21,600
144- Eliminate admin. cancer insurance	\$7,700
146- Eliminate uniform allowances	<u>\$1,500</u>
	\$784,000

New Permanent Cuts \$1,391,000

WGES OPEN

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WGES CLOSED

4. Cuts to Be Restored:

08- Reduce custodial hours/days	\$74,000
16- Eliminate corp. PR Specialist	\$24,900
17- Elim. 2 nd corp. half-time Receptionist	\$22,000
19- Eliminate 2 M.S. Deans	\$170,000
24- Reduce Professional Development	\$29,000
33- Eliminate some secondary Office Asst.	\$75,000
34- Eliminate some elem. Instr. Asst.	\$67,500
38- Do not fill some ECA positions	\$200,000
39- Pay-to-participate at sec. schools	\$126,000
44- Eliminate staff recognition	\$7,200
48- Reduce supply accounts	\$54,000
51- Eliminate Sp. Programs Coordinator	\$60,000
58- Increase parking fees (to security)	\$10,000
61- Reduce Finance Sec. to half-time	\$30,000
80- Eliminate H.S. Clinic Assistant	\$20,000
114- Reduce MS/HS Athletic Director	\$57,000
129- Admin. retirement benefit	\$72,000
11- Eliminate 10 teaching positions	<u>\$500,000</u>
	\$1,598,600

5. 27- Close WGES:

Administrators: eliminate 1 Principal	\$90,000
Teachers: 1 counselor	\$50,000
Cost Avoidance: 3 specials teachers	\$150,000
Support: eliminate 6 support staff	\$172,500
Other: utility savings	\$64,300
Other: supplies savings	<u>\$14,900</u>
	\$541,700
20- Eliminate elem. Asst. Principal	\$79,000

Total Proposed Cuts \$3,610,300

Total to Restore by Referendum (4+5) \$1,598,600

Required tax rate: \$0.0761

Annual cost for \$200,000 house: \$74**

** Note that these costs are just examples. The final tax impact of a referendum cannot be determined until after the Referendum Committee has completed their analysis and made a recommendation to the Board.

WGES OPEN

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129- Admin. retirement benefit	\$72,000
11- Eliminate 10 teaching positions	<u>\$500,000</u>
	\$1,598,600

4. 27- Leave WGES Open:

11- Eliminate 11 more teach. positions	\$550,000
20- Eliminate Elem. Asst. Principal	<u>\$79,000</u>
	\$629,000

Total Proposed Cuts \$3,618,600

Total to Restore by Referendum (4+5) \$2,227,600

Required tax rate: \$0.1061

Annual cost for \$200,000 house: \$103**