

Summary Notes from staffing hearing at Castle Dale Elementary on May 15, 2019, and at Cleveland Elementary on May 16, 2019.

Note: These summary notes paraphrase presentations, questions and comments. The notes are not verbatim nor all-inclusive but touch on the most relevant input.

Prior to the hearing, the following letter was made available to all district and school administrators and school board members. It was also posted on the district website:

May 9, 2019

**Parents of 2019-20
Emery School District
Kindergarten Students**

Dear Parents:

The Emery School District is working on staffing and scheduling for the 2019-20 school year. In doing so, we have encountered some unique challenges based on student enrollment and financial support. Of primary concern is the decline in elementary student enrollment from 2018-19 to 2019-20 across our six elementary schools. We will have a reduction of 45 students in elementary and a net loss to the district of 30 students which will cut the district maintenance and operation budget by over \$100,000. We cannot sustain the current level of staffing in our elementary schools based on this data.

The Emery Board of Education has directed the district staff to pursue the following actions:

- Combine the Cottonwood (8 students) and Castle Dale (12 students) into one kindergarten class to be held at Cottonwood. Kindergarten students from Castle Dale will be bused to the Orangeville school.
- From among the 34 kindergarten students registered at Cleveland Elementary, seek parent volunteers willing to bus their kindergarten students to Huntington. If we are able to find 8-10 such students, we will be able to have one kindergarten class at Cleveland and two classes at Huntington with about 24 students in each.
- Where possible and practical in the district, look at split elementary classes.

It is the intention of the Board to avoid a reduction in staff by utilizing these kindergarten and split-class options, and it is the belief of the Board that by adopting these measures, our students will still be able to realize a quality education. These measures are for the 2019-20 school year only. During the next year, the Board will be looking at the district demographics and seeking a more long-term solution.

Parents of next year's kindergarten students in the Emery District are invited to hearings on this matter on Wednesday, May 15, at Castle Dale Elementary at 6 pm and Thursday, May 16, at Cleveland Elementary at 7 pm.

**Sincerely yours,
Larry W. Davis, Superintendent
Emery School District**

Castle Dale Hearing

Superintendent Davis opened the meeting, presenting the dilemma the district is facing going into the 2019-2020 school year due to declining enrollment and imminent reductions in funding to the district. It was noted that the board specifically directed the district office staff to pursue combining Castle Dale and Cottonwood kindergarten classes into one with students being bused from one community to the other. However, other proposals were also discussed by the board prior to the hearing. It was noted that the board has not made a final decision regarding these matters.

Elementary Supervisor Ralph Worthen presented and discussed the proposals and the advantages and disadvantages of each. The proposals included the following but were not necessarily discussed in each hearing:

#1: Best but financially impossible, leave every school the same except for Cleveland; add a teacher in Kindergarten in Cleveland.

#2: Busing kindergarten students from CDE to CWE or CWE to CDE to create one combined class with 20 students (12 from CD and 8 from CW). For Cleveland/Huntington, bus 8-12 students on a voluntary basis from Cleveland to Huntington. This would create one kindergarten at Cleveland and two at Huntington with about 24 students in each.

#3: For CDE and CWE only: Create separate K-2 and 3-5 schools. One at CWE the other at CDE. Long term planning required.

#4: Based on student teacher ratio. Each school would be given an FTE number based on school population. Principal/Staff would make decision as to where to place teachers. Would require schools to add split classes or to have large classes.

#5: For Cleveland/Huntington only: Rather than busing kindergarten students, bus 5th graders. All or nothing. Large classes at Huntington.

Transportation Supervisor Roger Swenson discussed how transportation would be handled relevant to each proposal as well as the legal requirements and limitations of school busing.

Questions/Comments from the public with noted response from the panel:

What about next year's plans? The Board is focusing on plans for the 2019-20 school year as the most urgent need since staffing has to get underway ASAP. Longer term plans will be researched and discussed throughout the next school year with plans in place going into the 2020-21 school year.

Why bus students from Castle Dale to Cottonwood instead of Cottonwood to Castle Dale? This decision was made by principals on May 7. The discussion involved avoiding widening the student body gap between the two schools as well as the use of existing transportation routes and having an established resource self-contained unit at Cottonwood.

Will siblings be allowed to be bused from Castle Dale to Cottonwood? The district has protocol in place for such requests. It would require permission from the in-taking school principal; permission from the transportation supervisor; and permission from the superintendent. Principal and transportation supervisor approval would be based on class and bus capacities.

How would moving kindergarten to Cottonwood affect staffing in each school? The district elementary supervisor will work with school administrators and their faculties to determine staffing at each school for next year. However, the Board has made it clear that laying off teachers is not an option. There will be some movement of teachers as each school's staffing needs are met.

Teachers should have been brought into the discussion before the letter of hearing notification was sent to the public. Why weren't they? Here is the timeline: Wednesday, May 1- The board gave direction to the district office staff to advance the possibilities of one kindergarten for Cottonwood and Castle Dale and seeking volunteer kindergarten transfers from Cleveland to Huntington. Tuesday, May 7: The directive was discussed with elementary principals at the Administrative Council Meeting where it was agreed that if kindergarten classes were to be combined at Castle Dale and Cottonwood, the class would be held in Orangeville, and that public hearings would take place in Castle Dale and Cleveland on the 15th and 16th respectively. The letter was written by the superintendent on Wednesday, May 8, and sent to board members for review. It wasn't until Thursday, May 9, that a majority of board members had responded, and each gave approval to post the letter. It was then sent to the principals, other Administrative Council Members, and the school board at 2:40 pm. There were several school days prior to the hearings that principals could have shared this information with their teachers.

Is the district considering going back to half-day kindergarten? The board has not discussed that as an option even though it would resolve issues related to declining enrollment and loss of funding. It would also result in teachers being laid off.

When a school loses kids, the budget goes down. Cottonwood is losing one teacher due to retirement, wouldn't that even out the budget? Funding to run our schools' staffing (FTE) isn't a matter of school-level financing but rather district-level financing. The district has to look at overall needs as well as specific school needs in staff placement.

What is the plan if the classes get bigger after the start of school? Would teacher aides be hired? Where justified, aides would be provided. The district or individual schools pay aides by the hour. The number of hours cannot exceed 29.5 hours per week to avoid additional costs relevant to benefits. Aides would be much more affordable while contributing to management of large classes.

Regarding transportation, where are the bus stops, and when are they set for the school year? Bus stops are made according to student population. Stops could change in November depending on needs.

What if parents chose not to send their kids on the bus? Will that change if that decision is made? No, busing is already in place. There are some unknowns that will have to be addressed as they come up.

How does any of this help the district? By combining the two kindergartens, the district will save the cost of a teacher which would contribute to mitigating our financial challenges.

Can't we just move a teacher? Doing so would cost a teacher in another school a job.

What is the timeline for staffing? Following the hearings and any additional input, the board will discuss the options and make a decision for next year as soon as possible. The process regarding staffing will then take place along with any other changes.

Concerns without comment:

Splitting up siblings

Full-day kindergarten may be too much for kindergarten-aged kids.

22 kindergarten students in one class is too many.

The school with the biggest population should be the one to keep the kindergarten students.

Kindergarten kids are too little to ride the bus. Concerned about bullying on buses.

I am in favor of keeping Cottonwood and Castle Dale students where they are now.

Concern about the following: movement of teachers related to the future, transferring teachers, impact on teachers and their own children, transportation dictating the changes, and lack of communication with teachers involved.

Concern about kindergarten kids riding buses with high school kids.

Concern about losing all-day kindergarten as a way to resolve these issues.

I would be interested in looking more at a K-2 and 3-5 configuration.

Avoid split classes where possible.

Why not contact parents of each kindergarten student individually to have this discussion?

Cleveland Hearing

Introductory information followed the same format as that of Castle Dale with Mr. Davis, Mr. Worthen, and Mr. Swenson making presentations. The Cleveland presentation also included information from Ryan Maughan, supervisor of student services, who addressed how the proposals would impact resource students.

You knew about this problem for some time and yet replaced two district supervisors which is the biggest cost. Was that considered? The process of determining staffing for the next school year can't move forward until after the legislative session ends, and superintendents and business administrators get budget numbers from fiscal analysts, a process which continues up to the end of the school year. The district also needs to have kindergarten registration numbers in place which is more or less completed in March. Regarding replacing the two district-level positions, there were no discussions about eliminating either or both positions. However, the district office has revised assignments for each supervisor as a means of giving as much time as possible to our district's greatest needs.

What happens the next year? The board is working toward a solution for the 2019-20 school year now. That is the most urgent need. It will look at long-term solutions beyond that throughout the next school year.

Why not bus Castle Dale kids to Huntington? Isn't it about the same distance as Cottonwood? It is several miles further to Huntington. Also, doing so would still leave Cottonwood with just eight kindergarten students.

You are asking for volunteers to send kindergarten students to Huntington. What if no one volunteers? The board would have to look at other options. No kindergarten student would be forced to go to Huntington.

What about the savings the district will have from those retiring and those replacing them? That could free up some funding, but we don't yet know exactly how much until we complete this process. Also, our business department is looking at every possibility for additional funding to our district.

How were the proposals received in the Castle Dale hearing? Generally, not too well.

Regarding the possibility of split classes as a means of staying within our budget, what are we looking at? One in Cleveland, two in Ferron, and one in Castle Dale. Other elementaries may also need split classes.

What about long-term planning and getting numbers sooner about future classes? What about surveys? Getting accurate numbers prior to in-coming kindergarten students is very difficult, and the results are generally unreliable

What happens if we get more students? If the numbers warrant, we would add FTE. If not, we would maximize our class numbers and supplement with aides. Remember that the more students we have, the more funding we will receive.

Can we use TSSA (Teacher Student Success Act) money for teachers? The board has dedicated 40 percent of the district's TSSA funding to qualifying teacher salaries. The rest goes to individual schools to use within the board's framework which emphasizes literacy and social/emotional support. The money on the school level could go toward the hiring of a teacher, but there is not enough in any individual elementary school to do that. However, it could go toward classroom support such as teacher aides.

Can we get rid of aides and hire teachers? With respect to limited funding, aides are very cost effective because they work less than 30 hours per week and do not receive benefits.

Would it be better to bus our small 5th grade class (11 students) to Huntington rather than some of our kindergarten students? That would put the Huntington 5th grade classes at 29 each which are very large classes and much larger than what two kindergarten classes would be with a few Cleveland students enrolled.

What about getting funding from other sources, federal, etc.? We look at every grant opportunity but find it hard to qualify or to meet the grant requirements, such as matching funds. We do have Necessarily Existent Small Schools (NESS) funding but that is limited. We also have Lands Trust funding which is at the discretion of the School Community Council and could include the addition of personnel.

What about the district's "rainy day fund"? That's something that the business administrator would have to answer.

Concerns without comment:

Busing kindergarten kids from Cleveland/Elmo to Huntington is too far/too long.

Seems like Cleveland is being punished because Elmo kids are already being bused.

We need to think about our need for district supervisors. Eliminating what they are doing could be detrimental to our district.

I don't want any of our students to leave Cleveland. Our school is willing to make compromises, but this is not good for our kindergarten students.

Our schools have experienced split classes before. It's not the best, but it has worked.

Go back to half-day kindergarten.