

Letter to the Editor concerning the Alpine School District Division proposal

July 10, 2004

Dear Editor,

Since it now appears unlikely that any debate will be arranged before the July 28th public hearing, I would like to respond to the charges made against the Alpine School District Division proposal.

The proposed Pioneer District would geographically be equal in size to the rest of the district, and Lehi is now the third largest city behind Orem in Utah County. The proposed district would be bigger than two-thirds of the districts in the state, with over 8000 students, and growing.

Much research is available on my website at www.smallerchools.org that shows the value of community-sized districts and the problems that bigger districts create, including the strong tendency to build bigger, more extravagant schools instead of neighborhood schools, the organization becoming more of a big bureaucracy, and the U-shaped diseconomies of scale (costs go up if the organization gets too big as well as too small). **The opponents seem unwilling to discuss or even read any of this information specifically, so let's discuss their charges.**

Cost

The big one is cost. Will the division result in a 40% increase in school taxes over five years (24% of total property tax or \$100 on a \$100,000 home per year)? This is about the rate of increase we have been experiencing anyway. **Creating a Pioneer District does NOT automatically raise taxes by itself. Taxes would only go up if the new board voted to.** The projection, which DID include new buildings, was

figured only from averages and based on current expenditures. **No actual revenues were calculated because the District and the State Office of Education said it would be too hard to figure.** The actual, complete tax base was also not computed.

The vast majority of your property tax for schools is taken by the state, added to by the state income tax, and redistributed so that funding for each student is equalized regardless of the tax base of each area in the state. There are a few additional small revenue streams that are subject to the tax base in the general fund. Last year these included the voted leeway - \$9.7 (million), board leeway - \$3.0M, recreation - \$0.8M, transportation extras - \$1.3M, tort liability \$0.2M, and an additional amount allowed called "10% of basic" - \$6.9M, totaling about \$22 million. Out of a general fund budget of about \$230 million that is about 10%. So only 10% of the general fund (which pays for salaries, benefits, and programs) is based on tax base. In other words we might drop a percent or two in the general fund overall because of tax base. That doesn't mean a big tax increase or cuts in benefits and salaries.

Bonding for buildings, on the other hand, IS based on tax base almost completely (some comes from the state). We would have to change some things on the kinds of schools we would build. Many districts nationwide are going to K-8 grammar schools or 7-12 high schools and are doing away with jr. highs (usually the worst time of their K-12 experience) as they can. These schools can be built in walking neighborhoods, saving transportation costs for both schools and parents, and are still more efficient to build than current practice.

They also have better student behavior and scores, parental involvement, and support from the community.

Jobs

The teachers' union is charging that all teachers would stay with the old side of the district, which would then lay off younger teachers for the new district to hire. This is obstructionist nonsense. **Employees would stay in the buildings they are currently teaching in with all their accrued seniority, etc.** It is regrettable that union threats of litigation are being made because **they are only made to prevent the division by intimidation, rather than to protect the teachers.** There are currently less than half of the teachers in the Pioneer area that are members of the union and they are afraid this could become the first non-union district in the state.

Will the teachers' salary and benefits only be guaranteed for one year? Yes, that's all they are now in the District. Each year the District negotiates a contract, which can be changed from year to year. The new district would have to be free to negotiate (with or without a union) with the teachers for future years. It wouldn't be fair to bind them to what some other district did, would it?

Pioneer District will have to compete with Alpine, Provo, Nebo, Jordan, and others for teachers and so **salaries are not going to go down.** It is possible that we would change our priorities on some programs. Some might get more, some less, but **WE would decide what our communities thought was most important instead of six other board members from other communities.**

Conclusion

The opponents claim that we are not listening to the community, that they are the vast majority. If so, **why are they so afraid of letting this go to a vote?** The best way

to kill it is to have it voted down. It would then never come up again.

There was no way to divide a district in statute before. Now there is a methodical process that we are engaged in which gets the issue out in the open. If there are hidden agendas, they are coming from those who don't want it to come for a vote. **Ultimately, if placed on the ballot, the voters decide.** They have a right to form their own district if they desire! **The schools belong to the people!** The union didn't buy them. Our parents and we did!

Are there risks with forming a new district? Of course, **you can't have freedom without risk.** Could taxes go up? (I think they will, even if we don't divide.) Could we mess it all up? Of course, but I have more faith in us than that. We are a free people. We built a state and a nation. We can build a new district for our children's sake.

Sincerely,
David N. Cox
State Representative
5th grade teacher
7812 N. 8350 W.
Lehi, UT 84043
(801)768-8759