

# Island School Board Mulls Over Shared Services Idea To Cut Costs

By Ryan Schlehuder

Sharing a superintendent with another school district is unlikely, say Mackinac Island school board members, but other shared services may be possible. The concept of sharing resources is being promoted by the Michigan Department of Education and legislators to cut costs, as state revenues to support education continue to fall.

Mackinac Island Public School's personnel committee has yet to meet officially to discuss the search for a new superintendent to replace Jack Dehring, who will be retiring in July, however, but some committee members and Mr. Dehring believe sharing a superintendent with a neighboring district would be too complicated.

"In my opinion," said board President Ben Mosley, "it wouldn't work at our school because our superintendent wears so many hats. It would not be to our advantage."

Mr. Dehring agrees, adding that a principal would be required to maintain discipline.

"It's something which you would want a person to be here at least two days a week," he said of a part-time superintendent. "But you also have to have someone here daily to cover the disciplinary part, along with other issues. I've covered as an athletic director, minimally, a substitute teacher, and I've been known to push the broom every once in a while, too."

Appointing a teacher to also be principal takes that teacher away from the classroom, said Mr. Mosley, although Mr. Dehring notes that teacher Karen Allen has handled most of the elementary principal duties for many years.

Rising costs and declining enrollments, which result in less state support, have made shared services a topic of discussion at schools across the state. Administrators argue that revenues based on enrollments don't work in times of declining school populations and high inflation. Smaller districts like Paradise, DeTour, and Mackinac Island are especially vul-

nerable and are seeking ways to save money.

Special state appropriations such as the Saving Paradise fund, which supports geographically isolated schools like Paradise and Mackinac Island, help, but may not be enough, said trustee Paul Wandrie.

Mr. Wandrie and fellow trustee Leanne Brodeur, at the board's regular meeting Thursday, March 23, reported to the board what they learned from a conference discussing the possibilities of shared services in Michigan. Both trustees watched the conference from the school's interactive television (ITV) classroom.

Gary Webster, superintendent for Kaleva-Norman-Dickson and Bear Lake Schools, was the guest speaker and discussed the economy of the state, projected costs for schools in the coming years, and how schools may be able to save money. Mr. Webster has been superintendent of two districts for seven years.

Mr. Wandrie reported that Michigan ranks last among the 50 states in economic momentum, which is measured by personal income, employment growth, and population growth. Since 1994, the state has enacted 78 tax cuts, which has reduced funding by \$550 million a year. At the same time, school utility costs, staff wages, insurance, and retirement costs are increasing.

Insurance, he said, is expected to increase 10 percent to 15 percent a year and could cost as much as \$58,000 per teacher by the 2020-21 school year. Retirement costs are estimated to increase 215 percent from 2004 to 2020.

Some money-saving ideas gleaned from the conference are to trim staff costs by encouraging teachers to retire earlier, decrease staff, increase insurance deductibles and co-pays, and hire younger staff with lower salaries and benefits.

Hiring teachers who are able to teach multiple subjects, such as special education and music, or health and art, can also help,

Mr. Wandrie said.

Mackinac Island Public School implemented the ITV classroom in the early 1990s, which, said secretary Barb Fisher, allows the school to pay only a portion of a teacher's salary. The cost is formulated on the number of students involved in the ITV class, plus an annual technology fee paid to the EUP Intermediate School District.

This year, Mackinac Island high school students can take calculus from Cedarville, French from Rudyard, and Spanish from DeTour through the ITV classroom.

Mr. Dehring said the school could possibly share an athletic director with another school, but that person now schedules games for each sport and is present for each home game to open and close the school.

Traditionally, visiting schools playing over the weekend stay overnight in the school gymnasium to cut the costs of traveling to the Island.

"A lot of the ideas for shared services are not practical, basically because of our logistics," said Trish Martin, school board

member and chair of the school's personnel committee. "Simply put, we're an island. You would always have to worry about boat schedules, airplane schedules, and, of course, the weather."

The personnel committee has yet to meet, said Ms. Martin, owing to Mr. Dehring's

announcing his retirement right before the school's week-long spring break. She said shared services will be discussed, along with searching for a new superintendent. Ms. Martin hopes the committee can begin interviews with superintendent applicants before this school year ends in early June.

## Poetry, Fort Mackinac Mayhem Scheduled

Mackinac Associates, the friends group that raises money for Mackinac State Historic Parks programs, has scheduled two new programs for the season.

The annual G. Mennen Williams fundraising dinner will be Saturday, June 24, beginning with a tour of the Marlee and Dan Musser cottage in Hubbard's Annex on Mackinac Island, followed by dinner at Grand Hotel. The event is open to the public and the cost for the evening has not been set yet.

Shipwrecks of the Straits of Mackinac dinner cruise is a new event and is scheduled for Thursday, July 13. Donations from the Audrey and Edgar Jaggi family and support from

Audie's Restaurant and Arnold Transit will allow most of the proceeds to go the Mackinac Associates Education Endowment. Seating is limited, tickets are \$95 per person, and the cruise is open to the public.

The Mackinac Associates' annual meeting will feature poetry readings by area residents. The Thursday, August 10 event is being produced by summer Island residents Penny and John Barr and will be held at Mission Church.

The first Murder, Mystery, and Mayhem at Mackinac is scheduled for Friday evening, September 15, at Fort Mackinac and will include ghost stories. The event is open to the public with cost yet to be determined.

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