

School library could open to public

Written by MARK JAEGER

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Northern Ozaukee School District administrators recommend merging materials, staff in single location

The Northern Ozaukee School District is considering a major shake up of its school libraries that could result in the public having access to the district's reading collection.

The Administrative Council, which is made up of the district's administrators, has been refining a plan to combine the elementary school library with the library now shared by the middle school and high school.

The move would allow the district to open a media center in the space now occupied by the elementary school library.

Another component of the library reorganization would be to open the combined library for public use on a limited basis.

The plans came under criticism during Monday's meeting of the Northern Ozaukee School Board even before they were presented to the board.

Library aide Cindy Preisler said the district's library staff was informed of the plans last week, while wrapping up the school year.

The plan will involve moving and reshelving the elementary school's 11,000-book collection in time for the start of the 2010-11 school year.

"Is this consolidation in the best interest of our students and staff?" Preisler asked.

She said scheduling class time in the library will be difficult if all three district schools are competing for slots.

The questions caught some board members off guard.

Board member Kendall Thistle said Preisler's comments were the first he heard about the proposal.

"We need to be kept in the loop as a School Board. It is embarrassing to sit with that 'deer in the headlights' look in our eyes," Thistle said.

Supt. Bill Harbron said the consolidation of the library is being pursued as a way to maximize the use of the facility and the tax dollars required to support it.

Harbron said more details of the consolidation should become clear after a planning session set for Monday, June 21. Depending on the input, officials could consider deferring the project.

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"I do believe it is an improved utilization of the current OMS and OHS library," he said following the School Board meeting.

"It enables the district to further embrace the concept of sharing resources among the schools as well the flexible use of the facilities for all ages groups. I do believe many of the age barriers we create are artificial. I do believe students can respect and work with a variety of age groups with appropriate guidelines in place."

Harbron said administrators see the consolidation as an opportunity to make the collection and a bank of research computers available to anyone in the community.

By doing so, he said, residents are likely to feel more connected to the school system.

Harbron said community-related expenses could be covered by Fund 80 money, moving those costs from the state restricted levy cap.

At this time, officials are considering making the library available to the community in the late afternoon and early evening.

Harbron said the district's current collection of books would probably be sufficient to meet the initial needs of the community, although that topic will also be the subject of additional study.

Harbron was equally enthusiastic about the prospect of creating a media center at the elementary school, although how that room will be equipped may require more planning.

"The media center is thinking toward the future as students and faculty begin to effectively develop media products for communication. We saw a number of the students effectively demonstrate the use of media with their eighth grade seminar projects," he said.