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A Feasibility Study on the Formation of a Community Unit District for Oblong Township High School

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A Feasibility Study on the Formation of a Community Unit

District for Oblong Township High School
(TITLE)

BY

Edgar W. Morgan

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

Specialist in Education

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

1971

YEAR

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THIS THESIS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING
THIS PART OF THE GRADUATE DEGREE CITED ABOVE

July 28, 1971
DATE

ADVISER

July 28, 1971
DATE

DEPARTMENT HEAD

PREFACE

This feasibility study is being prepared for Oblong Township High School in partial fulfillment of the requirements of Education 601 and 602 at Eastern Illinois University, under the direction of Dr. Walter Garland and Dr. Gerhard Matzner, respectively. These courses comprise the field experience in administration which is designed to provide a comprehensive experience planned and supervised by the graduate students faculty committee. The field experience is part of the required program of studies in educational administration and supervision leading to the advanced Specialist in Education degree.

This study was not designed to serve as a comprehensive unit district survey but rather to point out the desirability of such a survey as it might relate to Oblong Township High School District No. 203.

As a dual district, Oblong High School is located between Jasper County on the west and the Robinson Community Unit on the east. Jasper County has been considering a unit district study involving the entire county. On the other hand, a feeling has been expressed in the Robinson area, for a number of years, that the surrounding schools should be consolidated to form one Crawford County School District. Either situation would affect the Oblong community and Oblong High School in particular.

During the 1969-70 school year, meetings involving interested school representatives were called to discuss several of these problems. However, many questions were left unanswered at these meetings. Questions

regarding tax rates and differences in state aid appeared to be the most important at that time. The primary objective of this feasibility study is to list and compare the various financial benefits and educational advantages or disadvantages of a unit type of organization as it might affect those living within the present boundaries of Oblong Township High School. This report is being prepared for the benefit of the Board of Education and interested citizens of Oblong High School District.

Acknowledgement is made to the office and Staff of Mr. Andrew M. Plunkett, County Superintendent of Educational Service Region, for assistance in gathering State and local data for the 1969-70 school year.

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I

EARLY CRAWFORD COUNTY

Oblong Township High School is a dual district system located on the west side of Crawford County with a small area adjoining Jasper County. Crawford County, at this time, supports three elementary, one high school, and three unit districts.

A Crawford County School Survey Committee was organized on October 16, 1945 and functioned through May 15, 1948 in order to study and report on school reorganization in Crawford County. This Committee not only worked with the State Advisory Commission but with the State Colleges, University of Illinois, and the State Superintendent of Public Instruction and his staff.

The School Survey Committee, in 1947, ultimately recommended four community units for Crawford County. They temporarily recommended dual districts for the West Elementary and Oblong High School area. However, the State Advisory Commission was not in agreement with this part of the committee report and recommended a unit district with high school facilities located at Oblong.

Hutsonville Community Unit #1 was voted in as a unit district on March 6, 1948. Robinson Community Unit #2 was voted in on April 17, 1948, and a Palestine Community Unit vote failed on March 6, 1948. However, a later vote was successful and on July 1, 1948 there were three new community unit school districts in Crawford County.

The Crawford County Survey Committee approved a temporary dual plan for the west side of Crawford County. This committee approved the cross county line areas in the Bend, Willow Hill, and other parts of affected districts along the county line because Jasper County agreed and

because it was approved by the State Commission on Consolidated Elementary School Districts. Another element considered in this formation was the fact that the boundaries of the Willow Hill Elementary District were not the same as the overlying Oblong Township High School District.

The Bend Community Consolidated District No. 210 was approved and voted on in the spring of 1947, the Hardinville Community Consolidated District No. 6 was approved and voted on April 3, 1948 and the Oblong Community Consolidated District No. 7 was approved and voted on May 22, 1948. At that time there were still eleven one-room schools not yet ready to consolidate.

In 1948 Oblong Township High School District No. 203 had 57 square miles of territory in Jasper County and 81 square miles in Crawford. At that time, the part in Jasper County took in most of the Bend Community Consolidated No. 210 District, which was a corner cut off of Jasper County by the Embarras River, and most of Willow Hill Elementary School District as well as a small part of Hunt and Yale Districts. The Hunt and Yale districts were later consolidated and the Willow Hill boundaries have since been revised. As a result of this revision, Oblong High School lost approximately 24 square miles in Jasper County.

In the final report of May 15, 1948, the Crawford County School Survey Committee made the following recommendations concerning the west side of Crawford County:¹

- A. That the West Elementary Consolidated Districts remain as voted and that the one-room districts be annexed to the consolidated districts adjacent by petition as they become ready.
- B. That all the remaining non-high school territory in Crawford County be annexed to the Oblong Township High School District No. 203.

¹Roe M. Wright, Final Report. Report of the Crawford County School Survey Committee, May 15, 1948. (Robinson, Illinois: Office of the County Superintendent of Schools, 1948), p. 18.

- C. That a Community Unit School District be formed from the territory to be covered by the Oblong Township High School District and all of the Willow Hill Elementary School District in Jasper County.

It should be noted here that the 1948 survey and recommendations were presented for the purpose of supplying background information. This does not necessarily imply that recommendations presented twenty-two years ago would continue to be effective and valid on this date. However, from the stand point of Oblong High School, these would certainly be desirable recommendations.

II

COMMUNITY UNIT DISTRICTS

A community unit school district is a school community supporting an elementary and a secondary program within a given boundary. The community unit district offers advantages in an increased tax base and a unified educational program.

A community unit has one rate of tax levy. One rate extended over a larger tax base tends to equalize the tax burden of school support. A single budget promotes more equitable spending for all levels and permits better budgetary control.

The unit district, with a larger tax base, often is more able to raise funds for educational purposes than can separate, smaller districts. The unit district, with its larger area and greater assessed valuation, enables most school districts to operate at the same or a lower per capita cost for improved services. More and better education per dollar expended is made available when unit districts are created. Central purchasing makes quantity buying possible at better prices.

In contrast to a dual system, the community unit affects economies in many ways by having one legal and business operation instead of several:

- a. one legal notice to be published
- b. one school board election
- c. one audit
- d. one accounting system
- e. one insurance program
- f. one treasurer

A community unit has one board of education, one superintendent, one

staff, and one purpose. The community unit eliminates the duplications of services that are present in several dual districts.

One board of education develops the educational policies and regulations for all students in the district, kindergarten through grade twelve. The single administration of the community unit district makes possible uniform textbooks and other instructional materials for better educational opportunities. This is further emphasized by the coordination of such services as transportation. There is more of an opportunity for all staff members, elementary and secondary, to work cooperatively in developing a coordinated and articulated educational program from kindergarten through grade twelve. More supervision is possible with a coordinated district school calendar. A more complete testing and guidance service is available to all students. The services of a librarian and a district nurse would also be available to all students. At this time trained personnel are not available to all students to provide these many services. It is to be noted that Oblong Elementary is the only district now providing the services of a qualified nurse. In addition, the coordinated schedule within a unit district could possibly extend the elementary curriculum to include such areas as foreign language, industrial arts, and home economics. There is also a needed coordination of custodial and maintenance services.

The qualifying rate for state aid in a unit district is \$.72 per \$100 assessed valuation less than the combined rate in a dual system. The present law fixed the qualifying rates at \$1.08 for the unit and \$.90 each for the elementary and the high school. The difference in qualifying rates between the rate of \$1.08 for the unit and that of \$1.80 for the dual system almost always produces considerably more state aid for

the community unit district.

A flat grant is paid at the rate of \$48.00 per pupil in average daily attendance. The flat grant for high school students is weighted at 1.25 which enables a high school to qualify for an additional flat grant of \$12.00 per student in average daily attendance.

The organizational advantages of a community unit provide:

- a. financing and purchasing opportunities
- b. improved administration
- c. a broad educational program
- d. improved supervision and instruction
- e. coordinated activity programs
- f. unified instructional materials and improved special services for children

A small dual district, alone, cannot possibly offer this wide variety of services and opportunities. A community unit school district is designed to fulfill the intent of the legislature in its promotion of an equal educational opportunity for all children. The stated intent is a better education for all children through reorganization.

Oblong Area Districts

The present educational programs found in the existing districts today may be considered adequate, but they are not the best programs we have the capability to provide. In addition, these programs are not coordinated or operated in the most efficient manner possible.

Our high school program, for example, is continually improving, but we still badly need health services along with remedial and certain special education personnel.

The present structure of our individual dual districts does not:

- a. have the organizational opportunities and benefits of a community unit.
- b. have the administrative opportunities and benefits of a community unit.
- c. provide broad educational programs in each district in:

foreign language	art education
health and safety	physical education
music education	vocational education
- d. provide either the supervisonal or instructional advantage of a community unit.
- e. present a coordinated and unified pupil activity program.
- f. provide benefits of an organized instructional materials center.
- g. provide opportunities and benefits of complete guidance services.
- h. provide the necessary health services and benefits.
- i. provide the best possible educational opportunity for every boy and girl in our educational community.

A unit district, formed in cooperation with the present districts of Hardinville, Oblong Elementary, Oblong High School, and Bend would eliminate three boards of education (21 members), three chief administrators, and three district treasurers. There would then be one board of education, one unit superintendent; one unit treasurer, and one unit bookkeeper.

With this arrangement both Oblong Elementary and High School could function well and efficiently with full-time building principals on no more than a ten month contract each. Hardinville and Bend Schools would require only a head teacher in each building on possibly 9½ month contracts.

The custodial staff would stay approximately the same size in order to keep all buildings clean and safe. The kitchen staff could be reduced

by at least one and in all probability by two. And it is quite possible that some of the bus routes might be consolidated and better organized. It certainly would improve matters to have a district maintenance and service garage in order that all buses be kept in a uniform state of safe repair.

All students in the district could benefit from trained guidance personnel, a school health service, and specially trained art and music instructors. In addition, all faculty members would operate under the same salary schedule while all non-certified employees would benefit from a uniform hourly wage scale for services performed.

It would be advisable to transfer all seventh and eighth grade students to the Oblong Elementary building, along with two teachers. The room would be available, and there are definite advantages to having all students in grades seven and eight located in one building.

This would leave at least one room free in each of the Bend and Hardinville buildings. These rooms could easily accommodate kindergarten classes, special education services, or lower grade students who might live closer to these attendance centers than to Oblong. This might be an important factor if Oblong attempted to accommodate and absorb the 54 elementary students now attending Willow Hill.

The attendance centers at both Bend and Hardinville are in good repair and would be used within a district for some time to come. However, a drop in enrollment in these areas and the added maintenance and upkeep expenses for small attendance centers would eventually force these buildings to close their doors. It should be pointed out here that Oblong Grade School does not have adequate facilities, at this time, to accommodate all the elementary students in such a unit district. They

recently completed a building program and it will probably be a few years before they will be ready to attempt another.

Under the present organization, even though the schools share such services as bus transportation, each district independently operates their own program. The four schools frequently close at different times of the year. This means in any one family high school students may be at home while the elementary students are in school or the situation may be reversed.

Although the schools sometimes attempt to coordinate their programs, there is very little progress. In the past three years the two Oblong schools have adopted one science series in cooperation. This past year both districts had teacher committees studying texts. When they finally met together in the spring, the two groups were totally unable to agree upon a uniform English program.

It appears that a unit district would permit a considerable savings to be made on all volume items that could be put out on bid. This would include supplies for transportation, the building, custodial, office, and teacher supplies. A unit district could certainly eliminate a number of duplicated services and expenses in such areas as administration, transportation, and in all purchasing.

School costs, it is assumed, will continue to increase due to inflation and demands for better programs. This will be true whether the area continues to maintain a dual district arrangement or a unit district structure.

The Division of Recognition and Supervision and the Department of School District Organization have established the following criteria to be considered in a quality educational program:

- a. gifted programs
- b. guidance
- c. instructional aides center
- d. art
- e. music
- f. vocational training center
- g. special education
- h. facilities for physical education
- i. adequate teacher time
- j. adequate classroom and laboratory facilities
- k. time for supervision and administration
- l. remedial program
- m. teacher turnover
- n. pupil-teacher ratio
- o. local tax effort
- p. number of courses units of instruction
- q. assessed valuation per pupil
- r. teacher salaries
- s. at least one teacher per grade
- t. teaching in major field
- u. adequate clerical personnel
- v. dropout rate
- w. success of non-college bound
- x. success of college bound

At this time the programs of both Oblong Schools would be hard pressed to successfully and adequately meet much more than 50% of the criteria considered necessary in a quality education program. The

educational programs of Bend and Hardinville Schools, although recognized by the State, satisfactorily meet little more than 25% of the suggested and desirable criteria.

III

OBLONG HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

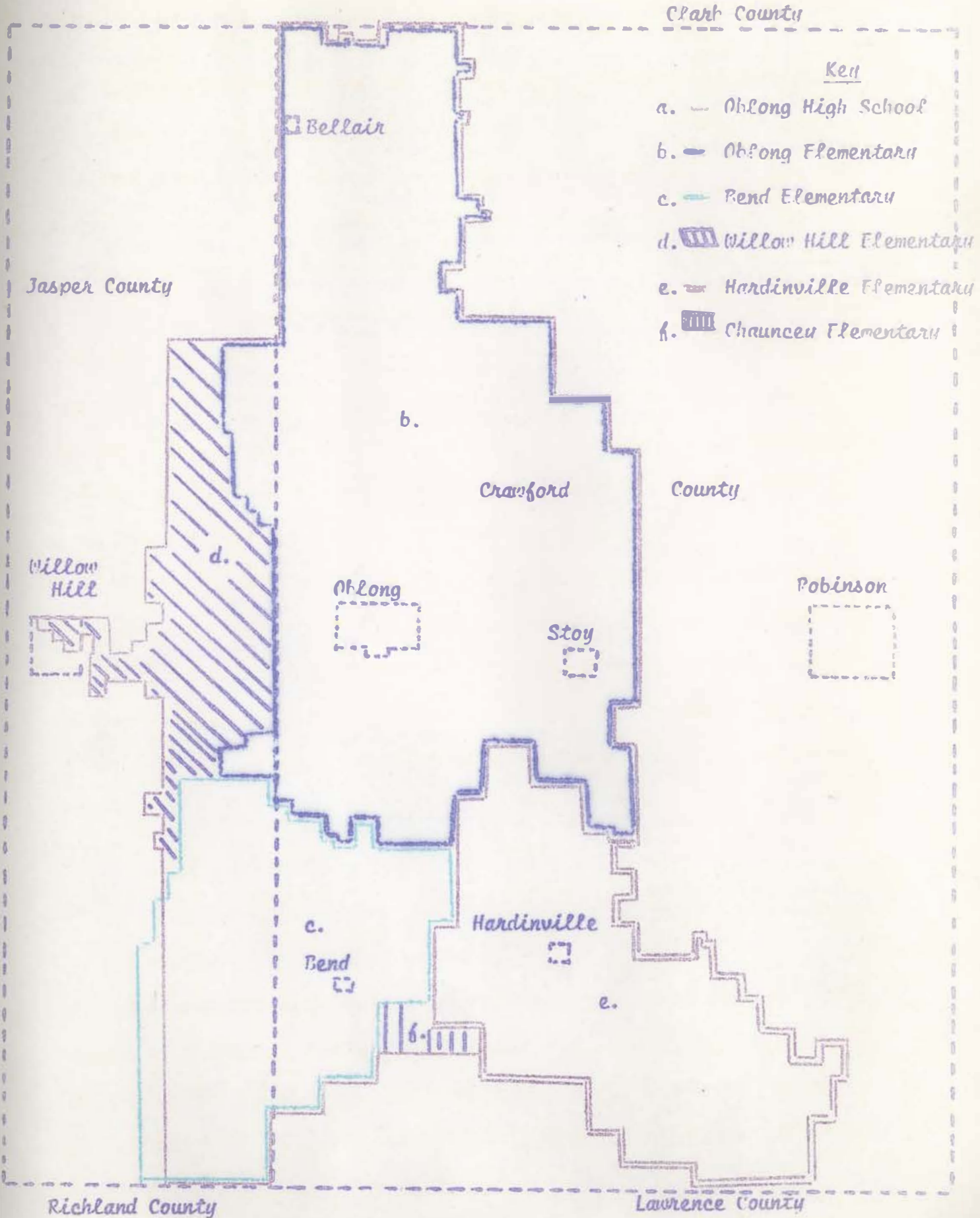
Oblong Township High School, at this time, overlies the elementary districts of Oblong, Bend, Hardinville, and a portion of Willow Hill. Therefore, the student enrollment is composed of graduates from the four elementary attendance centers. This lends not only to wide variances in the academic preparation of students but there is also a noticeable lack of coordination between the involved districts. The latter is true because each district is concerned mainly with its own problems, the operation of their district, and the wishes and desires of the local people. Few, if any, appear to be concerned with the overall educational problems or the benefits and opportunities available to youth of the area if such a picture were to be drawn and studied.

Oblong Township High School is a dual district lying within Crawford and Jasper Counties. The total area of the high school district is 163.70875 square miles. Of this area 33.9062 square miles are located in Jasper County. As indicated by the map on page 13, the following elementary dual district areas are almost totally within the high school boundary:

<u>Key</u>	<u>District</u>	<u>Area</u>
b.	Oblong	92.96265 sq. miles
c.	Bend	32.15620 sq. miles
e.	Hardinville	33.03125 sq. miles
Total		158.15010 sq. miles

The Bend Community Consolidated District (c) has an area of 18.000 square miles located within Jasper County. As shown by the map, a small portion of the district, on the extreme west side, is outside of the high school district. The Hardinville Community Consolidated District

OBLONG TOWNSHIP HIGH SCHOOL
 District No. 203
 Crawford & Jasper Counties



Clark County

Key

- a. — Oblong High School
- b. — Oblong Elementary
- c. — Bend Elementary
- d. [diagonal hatching] Willow Hill Elementary
- e. [dashed square] Hardinville Elementary
- f. [vertical hatching] Chauncey Elementary

Jasper County

Crawford County

Willow Hill

Oblong

Stoy

Robinson

c.

Bend

Hardinville

e.

b.

d.

f.

Richland County

Lawrence County

(e) is situated entirely within Crawford County and the high school boundary. While studying the map it is interesting to note that there is a small amount of land (f), on our southern boundary, between the Bend and Hardinville Districts, that is a part of the Chauncey Elementary District in Lawrence County. However, there are no school age children living in this area. The Oblong Community Consolidated District (b) has 7.000 square miles of its area within the borders of Jasper County.

Oblong Township High School (a) has a total area of 163.70875 square miles. Of this area, 33.9062 square miles are located within the boundaries of Jasper County. The Jasper County territory represents \$2,690,670.00 of Oblong High School's assessed valuation.

IV

SCHOOL DISTRICT COMPARISONS

For the 1969-70 school year the three Crawford County elementary districts enrolled 53 kindergarten students and 671 in grades 1-8 for a total elementary count of 724 students. The grade distribution may be studied in Table I.

Table I

ENROLLMENT COMPARISONS 1969-70

	High School	Bend	Hardinville	Oblong	Willow Hill	Total
Grades	9-12	1-8	1-8	K-8	K-8	
K				53	5	58
1		10	8	58	4	80
2		10	13	68	9	100
3		13	9	64	6	92
4		8	13	71	11	103
5		9	8	60	2	79
6		11	18	64	6	99
7		8	11	57	6	82
8		6	12	62	5	85
9	89					89
10	74					74
11	87					87
12	68					68
Total	318	75	92	557	54	1096

The high school enrollment for 1969-70 was 318 students. This combined with the elementary count of 724 gives a total county enrollment of 1042 students. During this period of time 54 students in the Willow Hill Elementary District were living within the Oblong High School boundary. Therefore, a total potential enrollment of a community unit district for the 1969-70 school year might have been 1096 students. Although a unit district of this size is really quite small, it can be operated just as easily and much more efficiently than can several smaller, separate districts.

Table II

FIVE YEAR ENROLLMENT COMPARISONS

	1969-70	1968-69	1967-68	1966-67	1965-66
High School	318	315	334	341	345
Bend	75	76	68	68	70
Hardinville	92	98	89	98	95
Oblong	557	579	541	542	538
Willow Hill	54	62	63	64	62

Table II compares school enrollments during a five year period. The Oblong High School enrollment fell by 27 students during these years, Hardinville lost 3, and the number of high school district students within the Willow Hill district decreased by 8. During the same period of time the Bend enrollment increased by 5 and the Oblong elementary by a total of 19 students. However, the over-all trend has been a lessening in all grades. At this writing all districts do not have a valid pre-school census and so it is impossible to determine precisely if the indicated enrollment trends will continue.

The 54 Willow Hill elementary students living within the Oblong High School district represent 26% of the total Willow Hill student body. Willow Hill School District had a total school enrollment of 208 students for the 1969-70 school year.

Table III indicates the total faculty and staff, for 1969-70, for Oblong High School and the elementary districts of Bend, Hardinville, and Oblong.

As a point of interest, the four chief administrators in these districts were paid a total of \$48,000 for the school year 1969-70. At the same time the 53 teachers received a total salary of \$421,995. Had these

teachers been placed on a uniform salary schedule, such as at the high school, the total increase would have amounted to only about \$2100.

Table III

DISTRICT EMPLOYEES 1969-70

	High School	Bend	Hardinville	Oblong
Superintendent	1	-	-	1
Supt.-teacher	-	1	1	-
Teachers	20	3	3	27
Custodians	4	1	1	4
Cooks	3	1	2	5
Nurse	-	-	-	1
Bookkeeper	1	-	-	1
Secretary	1	-	1	1
Treasurer	1	1	1	1
Laundress	1	-	-	-
Bus drivers	5	2	2	5

It appears that many services are needlessly duplicated within the four school districts. The number of superintendents and treasurers would be reduced by three each in a unit district. In addition, other staff members such as cooks and bus drivers could be much more efficiently utilized under one administrative organization. Our schools need to unite and cooperate in order to continue to provide the best possible education within our means. Since the population trend in rural districts is usually marked by a slow but steady decrease in numbers, each of our schools face the same type of problem, a small enrollment and a dual district type of organization.

Should a unit district be formed, the initial financial expense for staff or equipment would be very minimal. The Bend and Hardinville students and staff could be combined in order that one teacher per grade would be utilized. For the first year, it is conceivable that four grades could be held in the Bend School while the remaining four could be accommodated at Hardinville. The combined enrollments per grade, would be as follows:

Grade	Students
1	18
2	23
3	22
4	21
5	17
6	29
7	19
8	18

With this arrangement only grade six would be approaching a capacity enrollment, however, an elementary room of 30 students is not uncommon. If the 54 elementary students in the Willow Hill district were a part of the Oblong Unit then at least one additional teacher would be needed.

The Oblong Elementary School now employs 24 classroom teachers in addition to their music and art teachers and building principal. The Willow Hill area students could easily be absorbed into the Oblong school with the addition of only one full time classroom teacher. This could be accomplished because some class sections at the Oblong school are now quite small. The additional students would require the placement of three teachers at each grade level in addition to two $\frac{1}{2}$ day sections of

kindergarten. The largest class would then number approximately 27 students.

It has been estimated that an expenditure of at least \$20,000 will be needed in order to employ a unit superintendent and to provide equal educational opportunities to the students living in the Bend and Hardinville area. It would be necessary to furnish art, music, and health services to these students as part of the Oblong area unit district. In order to provide the required services, an additional teacher and another school administrator would necessitate an initial expenditure of approximately \$30,000.

Willow Hill District

It should also be pointed out here that there is still a bonded indebtedness due on the Willow Hill School in the amount of approximately \$98,000. In the event a portion of the Willow Hill District becomes part of the new Oblong area unit school, then the new district would have to assume a proportionate share of the current indebtedness. This would be in the form of an additional tax levied upon the total residents within the Oblong Unit District. However, the Oblong District would also be entitled to a proportionate share of the value of the Willow Hill School, in the event the district was divided. Other expenses would be partially offset by the additional state aid received on these students. For the 1969-70 school year this would have amounted to approximately \$24,000 based on an estimated ADA of 47 students.

It should be explained, at this point, that approximately \$18,000 or 3/4 of the state aid due the Oblong Unit because of the Willow Hill area students is money which the State will simply transfer from the Willow Hill School to the Oblong District. The additional \$6,000 would be new state aid funds due the district because of the qualifying rate

and assessed valuation factors in the state aid formulat developed for unit districts.

Student average daily attendance (ADA) differs from the total school enrollment in that this figure takes into consideration only the actual days of student attendance. Therefore, the days on which a student is absent from school are not counted as a part of the school's average daily attendance, even though the student is still considered as part of the total school enrollment.

Although the total Willow Hill School District is not being considered in this study, some additional information about their district might be of value. Willow Hill is an elementary K-8 district with an enrollment of 208 students. They have an area of 44.5800 square miles and an assessed valuation of \$4,228,262. Their total tax rate in 1969-70 was 1.584 for each \$100 of valuation. Their staff includes:

- 1 Superintendent
- 11 Teachers
- 1 Custodian
- 2 Cooks
- 1 Nurse
- 1 Bookkeeper
- 1 Secretary
- 1 Treasurer
- 3 Bus Drivers

School Organization

The drive to eliminate dual districts and to consolidate others is not new in the State of Illinois. In 1945, Illinois was supporting 11,955 school districts.² By July 1, 1969 the total number of districts had been reduced by 10,728. On that date there were 1,227 school districts. Through elections and petitions the people of Illinois have created 415 unit districts. On July 1, 1969 there were still 637 elementary districts and 175 high school

²Loren Nicol and Willis Pickerill, The Status of School District Organization, (Springfield, Ill.: Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1970), p. 7.

districts in the state. Between July 1, 1968 and July 1, 1969 there was a decrease of 52 school districts in the State of Illinois. Twenty-two new unit districts were formed while 50 elementary and 24 high school districts were eliminated. Of the 102 counties in the State of Illinois, 42 now have only unit districts.

District Statistics

Table IV

AREAS-By District 1969-70

	Crawford County	Jasper County	Total Area
High School	129.80255	33.9062	163.70875
Bend	14.1562	18.0000	32.1562
Hardinville	33.03125		33.03125
Oblong	85.96265	7.0000	92.96265
Willow Hill		13.4062	13.4062

It is interesting to note that the total area for the three Crawford County Elementary Districts is 3.34755 square miles more than the total area of the high school district. According to information received from the Office of the County Superintendent, this can only be explained by an error in the figures released by the State Department of Revenue. Also, in order to balance the areas for the portion in Jasper County, 4½ square miles must be deducted from the Bend District. This area is part of the Newton High School District.

The 1969-70 assessed valuation of Oblong High School was \$19,563,670 with \$2,690,670 of this amount being assessed in Jasper County. The elementary school of Bend and Oblong had a combined assessed valuation of \$1,567,343 in Jasper County. However, Oblong High School had \$1,123,327 in valuation within the Willow Hill District, which was not part of either Bend or Oblong Elementary Schools.

Table V

ASSESSED VALUATIONS 1969-70

	Crawford County	Jasper County	Total Valuation
High School	\$16,872,954	\$2,690,670	\$19,563,670
Bend	882,050	1,346,024	2,228,074
Hardinville	2,526,270		2,526,270
Oblong	13,419,474	221,319	13,640,793
Willow Hill		1,123,327	1,123,327

Table VI

INDIVIDUAL TAX RATES 1969-70

	Total Rate
High School	1.377
Bend	1.497
Hardinville	1.550
Oblong	1.718
Willow Hill	1.584

The differences in total tax rates for the involved districts range from a low of \$.12 to \$.34 for each \$100 of assessed valuation. Oblong High School and Oblong Elementary both levy an educational rate of \$.92 which is the maximum allowed without referendum. Both Bend and Hardinville levy more than \$1.00 in this fund. The maximum building rate is \$.25, only Bend is slightly below this figure with a rate of \$.236. At this time Oblong High is the only school district which does not have to levy for a bonded indebtedness. The tax rate for the Illinois Municipal Retirement Fund will vary with each school according

to their own individual need. The maximum transportation rate, without referendum, is \$.12 and each school finds it necessary to levy the total allotted amount. In addition, all schools levy the permitted \$.05 for Life-Safety work. The tax rates for the Willow Hill school were included only for the purpose of comparison and for additional information.

Unit District Projections

The purpose of this study is to stimulate interest in the need for a unit district operation and to show the financial advantage of such an organization. As a means of comparison and for the purpose of this feasibility study, a hypothetical unit district was formed, on paper, for the 1969-70 school year. In order to operate the new unit an educational rate was established at \$1.36, a building rate was set at \$.375, and the other established levy rates were the present maximum rates without referendum. A total tax rate of \$2.2232 for each \$100 of assessed valuation was established as the rate needed to produce approximately the same amount of financing as was received by the four individual dual districts of Oblong High, Oblong Elementary, Bend and Hardinville.

In order to determine the total tax rate that would be needed it was necessary to first add the net state aid received by the four individual districts of \$239,018.88 to their total tax extension of \$575,195.58 in order to show that the four Crawford County districts received total funds amounting to \$814,214.46. The next step was to estimate the state aid that would be available for the 1970-71 school year. This formula uses the 1968 high school assessed valuation of \$18,893,909 and the 1969-70 ADA of 1121.80. The projected state aid is \$379,281.79, which is then subtracted from total actual funds to arrive at a difference of \$434,932.47. It was then calculated that a tax rate of \$2.2232 would be

needed to furnish the necessary needed funds.

As stated, the total tax rate for such a unit district would be \$2.2232 per \$100 assessed valuation. At the present time the combination of tax rates of any two of the districts is at least \$.65 more than this amount. As indicated in Table VII the tax savings would range from a minimum of \$.6454 in the High School and Bend districts to \$.8664 per \$100 in the High School and Oblong Elementary districts.

Table VII

TAX RATE COMPARISONS 1969-70

	Tax Rate	Possible Savings
If Unit	\$ 2.2232	
Bend & High School	2.8686	\$.6454
Hardinville & High School	2.9216	.6984
Oblong & High School	3.0896	.8664
Willow Hill & High School	2.9556	.7324

Again, the Willow Hill tax rates are presented for the purpose of comparison and for the benefit of any individual living in the Willow Hill Elementary District and the Oblong High School District. It is evident that the over-all educational tax rate levied upon the taxpayers within the unit would be less than they are now paying in the dual system.

Table VIII is offered to show the total operating expenditure of the four Crawford County districts. During the 1969-70 school year 70% of the school funds were provided by local effort and the other 30% through state funding. With the proposed unit formation 45% of these funds would have been provided by the State of Illinois.

Table VIII

SCHOOL DISTRICT EXPENDITURES 1968-69

	Operating Expense
High School	\$357,639.18
Bend	48,390.90
Hardinville	56,093.72
Oblong	402,375.30
Total	\$864,499.10

Table IX

1969-70 ASSESSED VALUATION PER ADA

High School	\$ 62,776
Bend	29,191
Hardinville	27,285
Oblong	24,531
<u>Willow Hill</u>	<u>20,755</u>

The information in Table IX is pertinent only in that it indicates the duplicated, taxable assessed valuation behind each student in average daily attendance at the various centers.

Table X

TAX EXTENSIONS 1970 REPORT

High School	\$269,391.74
Bend	33,354.27
Hardinville	39,157.19
Oblong	234,348.82
<u>Total</u>	<u>\$576,252.02</u>

The 1970 Crawford County tax report, in Table X, shows that it is necessary for Oblong High School to request nearly one-half of the school tax money levied upon the residents of these four Crawford County districts. This condition is necessary because the size of the district provides a high assessed valuation-low pupil ration which does not allow it to qualify for state aid through equalization. The important point to note is that these schools levy a total of over \$576,000 to operate the four individual districts for one year.

Now let us suppose the four Crawford County districts had formed a unit for the 1969-70 school year, at the previously mentioned rate of \$2.2232.

Table XI

1969-70 UNIT DISTRICT EXTENSION BASED ON
PRESENT HIGH SCHOOL VALUATION

Unit Tax Rate	\$ 2.2232
Unit Tax Extension	434,939.41
Tax Extensions for Combined Dual Districts	575,195.58
If Unit, Local Tax Savings	140,256.17

If a unit tax extension had been issued based on the present high school valuation, as indicated in Table XI, the tax payers in these districts would have realized a tax savings of over \$140,000 for this one year alone.

The state aid formula for 1969-70 was based on a foundation level of \$520 per pupil in average daily attendance (ADA). A flat grant of \$48 per pupil is given to all schools with a qualifying tax rate of \$.90 in dual districts and \$1.08 in unit districts. In addition, there is a

1.25 weighting factor for all high school students in ADA. The 1969-70 WADA was established at 1121.80 and the 1968 total equalized assessed valuation was \$18,893,909. The state aid claim was then computed in accordance with the standard formula.

Table XII

DISTRICT ADA 1969-70				
	K-8 ADA	9-12 ADA	9-12 WADA	Dist. WADA
High School		300.97	376.21	376.21
Bend	74.91			74.91
Hardinville	95.14			95.14
Oblong	528.54			528.54
Willow Hill	47.00			47.00
If unit, 1969-70	745.59		376.21	1121.80

The purpose of Table XII is to establish the average daily attendance figure for each individual district as it was reported to the state office. The figure given for Willow Hill indicates that for the 54 elementary students living within the boundaries of the proposed unit, these students had a total ADA of 47.00

In computing a state aid claim the guarantee refers to the weighted average daily attendance times the foundation level of \$520. The State of Illinois guarantees each school district this level of funding, provided the minimum qualifying rate has also been established. This law guarantees that a minimum amount of funding is available to each and every student in the district based on average daily attendance, in order that equal educational opportunities are provided. The qualifying amount,

which must be provided by local effort, refers to the assessed valuation times the qualifying rate of \$.0090 for a dual district or \$.0108 for a unit.

Table XIII

CLAIM FOR STATE AID 1969-70

	Guarantee	Qualifying Amount	Flat Grant	Special Equalization	Net State Aid
High School	\$195,629.20	170,045.18	18,058.08	25,584.02	24,923.31
Bend	38,953.20	19,680.43	3,595.68	19,272.77	19,530.98
Hardinville	47,472.80	23,363.37	4,566.72	26,109.43	29,685.67
Oblong	274,840.80	116,692.50	25,369.92	158,148.30	164,878.92
Total	558,896.00	329,781.48	51,590.40	229,114.52	239,018.88

The special equalization factor indicates the difference between the guarantee and the qualifying amount. The flat grant is determined by simply multiplying the WADA claim times \$48. It might be explained here that the flat grant of \$48.00 per student in average daily attendance is guaranteed for all students attending public schools in the State of Illinois. However, the flat grant amount is part of the special equalization figure and is not added to it. The flat grant is of importance only in districts that do not qualify for equalization. In that case the schools are assured of funding at least in the amount of the flat grant or \$48 per student in weighted average daily attendance. The net state aid claim is based on the special equalization figure less any adjustments that may be determined by the state office.

The 1969-70 state aid claim, based on a weighted average daily attendance, reveals that Oblong High School received less than \$25,000. However, Table XIII verifies that Bend Elementary with an ADA of 75

students, qualified for almot \$20,000. The four combined Crawford County schools qualify for a total of \$239,018.88 in state aid. Had the involved area been a unit district during the past year it would have qualified for \$379,281.79 in state support. This would amount to an increase of \$140,262.91.

Table XIV

STATE AID 1969-70

	Rec'd by 4 Crawford Co. Dist.	Amt. Possible If Unit	Difference If Unit
Guarantee	\$ 558,896.00	\$583,336.00	\$ +24,440.00
Qualifying Amount	329,781.48	204,054.21	-125,727.27
Flat Grant	51,590.40	53,846.40	+2,256.00
Special Equalization	229,114.52	379,281.79	+150,167.27
State Aid Claim	\$ 239,018.88	379,281.79	\$+140,262.91

As shown by Table XIV the guaranteed amount to the schools in question is increased by \$24,440.00 due to increased enrollment from Willow Hill. In a unit district the funds required by local effort are decreased in the amount of \$140,000. However, the total claim that would have been provided by the State of Illinois, through special equalization, amounts to \$140,262.91 more than we actually received under our present organization.

In 1969-70 the four Crawford County districts levied local tax extensions of \$575,195.38 and collected state aid in the amount of \$239,018.88 for a grand total of \$814,214.46. A unit district over this area at the established tax rate would have lost \$140,000 in local tax

extensions and gained \$140,000 in state aid for the 1969-70 school year. It should also be remembered that the local tax rate was established only so as to provide the same amount of total funding. It is quite possible that in a unit formation the local tax rate might be established at as much as \$.50 - .75 higher than the rate of \$2.2232. This loss of state funds to our schools might be multiplied by the number of years in which the separate districts have operated in this manner or by the number of years in which they continue to do so.

Table XV

FINANCIAL SUMMARY 1969-70

	Total Funds 4 dual dist.	Total Funds If Unit dist.
Net State Aid	\$ 239,018.88	\$ 379,281.79
Tax Extension	575,195.58	434,939.41
Total Funds	\$ 814,214.46	\$ 814,221.20

SUMMARY

This study reveals that within the designated area, four school districts are now operating and recognized by the State of Illinois. Each district in question, because of either a small area or enrollment, faces ever mounting difficulties in attempting to achieve and maintain an acceptable educational program.

It is evident to all that the State of Illinois favors a unit district type of organization and that a financial advantage is given to these districts. Also, it is known that small dual districts are gradually but steadily being forced out of operation. This occurs because the small district cannot meet the financial burden or provide the new programs and services required in the operation of an acceptable educational program.

The best example of this situation is Bend and Hardinville, each of which must go to the expense of providing kindergarten services for the 1970-71 school year. In addition, each district has the problem of two grades per teacher, a situation which is no longer recommended by or totally acceptable to the State of Illinois.

The four school districts within the area of study are in operation, as they have been for many years, and the individual boards of education have been content to let them continue in this manner. However, no apparent thought or effort has been devoted to providing the best possible educational facilities, services, and opportunities to the young people of this area. In addition, a considerable tax savings could be realized for the voters and property owners living within the district.

It appears that the one main excuse for continuing the present type

of dual operation is to satisfy some outdated need of the parents rather than a desire to provide the best possible educational opportunity for their children. The schools in question have always been here, the parents went to these schools, they are familiar, and the areas are afraid of losing their schools and their identities.

Various alternatives may be open to these schools. First of all, they might stay as they are now organized for a limited amount of time. In a short while Bend and Hardinville will be faced with the problem of losing state recognition. They would then be required to consolidate or annex to an adjacent district. On the other hand, these schools might be content to wait and then find themselves part of the Jasper County district. An even greater possibility lies in the formation of a Crawford County School district. If the districts in the Oblong area continue in operation, under a dual district form of operation, there is a strong possibility that one or more of them will face a serious financial crisis within the next few years. If this were to happen, it is conceivable that a movement to form a County School District would soon follow. At that late date, the only immediate alternative for the preservation of the schools would be to consolidate with Robinson. However, even though an organization of this type would present a number of educational advantages, it would not be well accepted by the majority of community and county residents not presently living within the Robinson School District. At this time there are too many feelings of natural rivalry toward the neighboring community and deep rooted prejudices expressed toward Robinson, the largest, most dominant city in Crawford County.

Oblong High School, as a separate district, cannot continue to provide an adequate educational program without placing an extremely high

tax burden upon the residents of the district. If the tax money is not provided, then the high school program will quickly deteriorate.

It appears that the most reasonable solution, at this time, is for the residents of this area to work for and support the formation of a community unit district. All students would then be offered uniform educational opportunities and taxpayers of the area could avail themselves of a more reasonable tax base.

If an area is to prosper it must depend upon the utilization of its greatest resource, its youth. A wise planning for the future should take advantage of every possible educational opportunity. To this end every individual should have the selfish motive, desire, and obligation to insure the provision of the best possible educational opportunity. And in this case, when such a form of organization can also provide a considerable tax savings to the local people, school administrators, boards of education, and the local tax payers should demand a thorough investigation of the problem.

The primary concern of each informed individual is for the best possible educational opportunity for every boy and girl living in the school district. It has been stated that this end can best be served through unification, coordination, and reorganization. This writer, therefore, recommends that a Crawford County Community Unit District No. 4 be formed involving the four remaining dual districts located in the western portion of Crawford County.

Conclusion

In accordance with the information gathered for this study, and approximately ten months after the study was initiated, a joint meeting of the Boards of Education of Oblong High School, Bend, Hardinville, and

Oblong Elementary was called to discuss the possibility of forming a community unit district. The meeting was held on January 22, 1971, and was made necessary in part by the questionable financial status of the four dual districts involved and partially because of the unit district study being conducted in Jasper County.

A steering committee was then established, local informational meetings were held, and a disputed boundary line was settled between Crawford and Jasper County. Petitions were then filed asking for a hearing and election on the formation of an Oblong Community Unit District. A hearing was held, the petition approved and on May 11, 1971 an election was held and the formation of a new unit district was approved by a total vote of 9-1.

The Oblong Community Unit District No. 4 is now a reality and will be in operation for the school year 1971-72.

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