

What is the Support for School Consolidation?

At various times throughout the year, expressions can be heard throughout the state discussing school consolidation in counties with several school districts. While the groups in favor of consolidating these districts mention various reasons for making a change, few can provide substantiation to support the benefits they claim consolidation will bring. I would like to give you some ideas to think about as you weigh this possibility for Spartanburg County.

The fundamental point people debate is whether school consolidation will save money for the county taxpayers. Several years ago, South Carolina developed a financial analysis model called *Insite* to assist school leaders as they compare expenditures within school districts. These comparisons are based on the per pupil cost of the school district. Per pupil spending is calculated by dividing the budget by the number of students in the school system. I encourage you to visit the state department website* and check out the details for yourself. You will find that counties with multiple districts—such as Spartanburg County—are, in fact, actually less expensive to operate. You will see that the District One expenditure for administration is the lowest in the state by 1% and more than 3% lower than the state average. Additionally, our superintendent has provided a detailed cost comparison that is available on our District Website.

A subsequent point to consider when discussing consolidating a county is student achievement. Counties with multiple districts often have higher levels of student achievement, a fact that is found on the SC Department of Education's website**. Those who support having multiple districts within one county believe the reason for these higher levels of student success stem from the ability of a smaller district to focus its efforts on its students. Smaller districts mean smaller schools; smaller schools mean that the faculty and staff can know their students better. The Palmetto Assessment of State Standards (PASS) scores in our younger grades rank Spartanburg District One sixth in the state, and our High School Assessment Program (HSAP) scores continue to exceed the state average.

The final point I have for you to take into consideration is this: the idea of the closeness of our Spartanburg District One offices to our schools and our community. The fact that Spartanburg District One has a strong, supportive leadership that is physically close to its schools and families sustains and strengthens the ties between our administration and the educational work of our district. If you have a question or a concern—about your child, about your child's teacher, or about the school as a whole—you know who I am and where I am. In addition, you are always welcome in Campobello, to speak with Dr. Garner or the school board. You have a voice in Spartanburg District One. We appreciate hearing it; we encourage you to use it.

I hope that these ideas will generate dialogue about the data being used to support the consolidation efforts in our state. The data demonstrates that we are a student-centered, success-focused district. I invite you to contact me to talk about this matter in greater detail. Thank you, as always, for your support of Chapman High School and Spartanburg District One.

* <http://ed.sc.gov/agency/Finance-and-Operations/Finance/old/finance/insite/>

** <http://ed.sc.gov/agency/Accountability/Data-Management-and-Analysis/QuickDataPortal.html>