

Sparta CUSD #140 Feasibility Inquiry Committee Summary

Purpose and Background

The Sparta Community Unit School District #140 Board of Education completed a Feasibility Study to examine the district's long-term structure, including facilities, academic programming, staffing, and financial sustainability. The purpose of the study was not to determine an immediate course of action, but rather to provide a foundation for continued inquiry, stakeholder engagement, and thoughtful discussion regarding the future of Sparta CUSD #140.

Following review of the feasibility study, the Board of Education approved the formation of a Feasibility Inquiry Committee to further examine available data, gather stakeholder perspectives, and evaluate potential scenarios that could support the long-term success of students, staff, and the community.

The committee's work has been guided by the question:

“What structure best positions Sparta CUSD #140 to provide the greatest educational opportunities for students while remaining financially responsible and aligned with the district's strategic vision?”

Feasibility Inquiry Committee Structure

The committee was designed to include representation from across the district:

- Superintendent (Committee Chair)
- Regional Office of Education representative (Co-facilitator)
- Board of Education representatives
- Principals from EAC, SLS, and SHS
- Teacher representatives from each school
- Parent representatives from each school
- Sparta Education Association representative
- Sparta Service Employees Union representative

This structure ensured that discussions included perspectives from governance, administration, teachers, families, and the broader school community.

Committee Charge and Scenarios Reviewed

The committee was asked to review data and provide a balanced list of potential benefits and challenges associated with four possible future scenarios:

Scenario 1: Continue the Current District Structure

Maintain the existing K–8 attendance centers and current programming model.

Scenario 2: Restructure K–8 Programming

Explore opportunities to balance programming, resources, and student opportunities across schools (examples include balancing electives, enrichment opportunities, or grade-level configurations).

Scenario 3: Restructure Use of District Facilities

Explore alternative uses of existing buildings and grade configurations.

Scenario 4: Consolidation Options

Consider full or partial consolidation opportunities, including potential grade-span changes.

The committee was not tasked with selecting a final option, but rather with identifying strengths, challenges, questions, and additional information needed to assist the Board of Education in future decision-making.

The committee decided after meeting #3 that they would concentrate on discussing scenarios #1 and #4 only as Scenarios # 2 and #3 were not providing a clear path forward.

Areas of Study

Throughout multiple meetings, the committee reviewed and discussed:

- Enrollment trends and demographic projections
- Cost-per-student comparisons
- Academic programming and instructional opportunities
- Teacher staffing patterns and retention
- Collaboration and professional learning structures
- Facility capacity and long-term maintenance considerations
- Transportation implications
- Student opportunities and equity of programming
- Community impact and district identity

Key Themes Identified Through Committee Discussions

Equity and Student Opportunities

A primary theme throughout the committee's work was ensuring all students have access to equitable academic, extracurricular, and support opportunities.

Potential benefits identified with restructuring or consolidation included:

- Expanded access to electives, enrichment, athletics, and extracurricular activities
- Increased access to intervention and student support resources
- Greater consistency in programming across schools
- Additional opportunities through larger collaborative teams

Potential concerns identified included:

- Larger class sizes
- Loss of small-school relationships and individualized attention

- Challenges associated with student transitions and change

Academic Programming

The committee reviewed current instructional practices, including districtwide curriculum implementation in ELA and mathematics.

Strengths identified in the current structure included:

- Consistent curriculum across schools
- Strong community relationships
- Familiar learning environments for students
- Continued improvement through current district initiatives

Potential advantages of restructuring included:

- More balanced programming opportunities
- Increased collaboration among teachers
- Greater access to advanced coursework, electives, and intervention supports

The committee also recognized the importance of maintaining the academic gains achieved through recent curriculum and instructional improvements regardless of future structure.

Staff and Collaboration

Teacher collaboration and staffing were significant discussion topics.

Strengths of the current structure included:

- Strong relationships between teachers, students, and families
- Teachers' knowledge of their communities
- Personalized support for students

Potential benefits of restructuring included:

- Larger professional learning communities
- Increased teacher collaboration and mentorship
- More opportunities for instructional consistency
- Improved staffing flexibility
- Opportunity to provide more support for all students (ex. Curriculum Director and Special Education Director)

Concerns included:

- Potential impacts on staff morale
- Staff retention
- Teacher transitions and uncertainty

Financial and Operational

The committee reviewed cost-per-student data and discussed long-term financial considerations.

Key points included:

- Cost savings would depend on multiple factors, including staffing decisions, transportation, and facility usage.
- Closing or consolidating facilities alone would not necessarily create significant savings without corresponding operational changes.
- Potential future savings could provide opportunities for additional student programming and resources; however, decisions regarding the use of savings would occur only after future phases of planning.

The committee emphasized that financial considerations should be balanced with the district's responsibility to provide strong educational opportunities.

Facilities and Community Considerations

The committee discussed the importance of school facilities as part of the identity and history of Sparta CUSD #140.

Considerations included:

- Long-term facility needs and maintenance costs
- Efficient use of district buildings
- Transportation impacts
- Community connections and traditions
- The potential impact of changes on students, families, and staff

Members recognized that any structural change would require thoughtful communication, planning, and attention to maintaining a strong sense of belonging.

Additional Data Reviewed

The committee requested and reviewed additional information, including:

- Attendance open enrollment data:
 - 45 students residing in Evansville attendance boundaries currently attend Sparta Lincoln School.
 - 8 students residing in Sparta Lincoln boundaries attend Evansville Attendance Center.
- Cost-per-student comparisons using Illinois Report Card data.
- Information regarding transportation, Title I funding, staffing, enrollment trends, and facility considerations.

A parent survey was initiated to better understand why families choose to attend a school outside their designated attendance area. Results will provide additional insight into enrollment patterns and family decision-making.

Committee Reflection

Throughout the process, committee members were encouraged to:

- Review facts before opinions
- Consider the long-term future of Sparta CUSD #140
- Listen respectfully to differing perspectives

- Honor the history of the district while considering future opportunities
- Focus decisions on what best serves students

The committee discussions reflected a shared commitment to maintaining a strong school district while thoughtfully examining opportunities to improve student experiences and ensure long-term sustainability.

Next Steps

Future decisions regarding district structure, programming, facilities, or potential implementation steps will be determined by the Board of Education following review of all available information and stakeholder feedback.

The goal of this process remains focused on one priority: ensuring Sparta CUSD #140 continues to provide the highest quality educational opportunities for students while responsibly planning for the future of the district and community.

Board Consideration Questions

1. Which option best positions Sparta CUSD #140 to provide equitable, high-quality educational opportunities for all students?
2. Which option best supports the district's long-term financial sustainability while preserving strong academic programming and student services?
3. Which option most closely aligns with the district's strategic vision and the long-term needs of our students, staff, and communities?