

Legislative limelights

School merger offers tough legislative problem

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The 23 hearings conducted throughout the state on school consolidations in August only strengthen the belief school consolidation in Idaho will be a tough nut to crack.

State Rep. J. F. Chadband, R-Idaho Falls, the prime mover for such legislation, said he hopes some consensus on what future steps can be taken will be reached at an executive committee meeting soon at Boise.

This committee is made up of the two co-chairmen, Chadband and Sen. John Barker, R-Buhl; Pat Harwood, Boise, executive secretary of the Idaho Association of Commerce and Industry; Rulon Ellis, Pocatello school superintendent; Dr. Gary Haddock, chairman of the Blackfoot School District Board; and Sen. Bill Ringert, R-Boise.

Also to be called into this session are the chairmen of subcommittees, Rep. Dan Kelly, R-Mountain Home, configuration; and Donna Scott, R-Twin Falls, school administration. Ringert heads the finance subcommittee.

The current legislation calls for a study of the entire spectrum of school consolidation. An appropriation of \$14,000 was grudgingly approved by the financially-strapped Legislature to underwrite the study.

The study indicates the Legislature will look into such laws that require two-thirds instead of majority vote to pass building bonds, merits of state funds for sparsity



Rep. J.F. Chadband

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factors in rural isolated school districts, coordinators to bring about greater cooperation among neighboring school districts, and other laws that will help bring about consolidation

"As the state pays more than 70 percent for schools, it should have a voice on school matters," said Chadband. "Many of the patrons at the public meetings expressed fear of losing local control but under consolidation the running of schools still lies with the local people."

Chadband said he attended seven of the meetings and found there is a wide divergence of opinion throughout the state on school consolidation.

The Challis and Rexburg meetings showed strong opposition to any consolidations while there was some support in the Idaho Falls meeting.

Chadband said he regretted there was not more input from the school patrons, but most of the meetings were attended by school administrators and other educators. As many felt it might cut their jobs, they naturally expressed opposition.

"However, some of the teachers who did testify and a few who called me privately, indicated support as they said it would bring more efficiency in teaching programs," said Chadband. "They pointed out specialized foreign language teachers, for example, could teach more students, rather than be restricted as at present."

Some support for consolidation of Idaho Falls School District 91 and Bonneville School District 93 was expressed. Chadband contended consolidation in most cases will bring some savings and certainly more efficiency.

One of the most flagrant cases is in Canyon County which has part or all of 13 school districts, said Chadband. Here the study showed the average school administration cost reached \$144 per year, compared with only \$21 per year in the county's largest school district at Nampa.

He noted Twin Falls showed interest in consolidation but fears it may not get the two-thirds majority for passing building bonds. Some patrons in Silver Valley in the Panhandle also felt mergers would help in offsetting the decreased revenue resulting from a depressed mining activity.

Chadband also cites Idaho Falls where Michele Brown is the coordinator. She has done much in coordinating relations among Idaho Falls, Bonneville, Shelley, Rigby and Shelley schools on various programs. He said this could be duplicated in most other school districts in Idaho.

Chadband said after the executive board meeting and a later meeting of the 24-member Idaho Task Force on School Administration, a clearer picture likely will emerge on what type of consolidation legislation can be proposed for the 1984 Legislature.