

REORGANIZATION OF THE ST. GEORGE,
KANSAS SCHOOLS

by

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this problem is to study Reorganization Bill No. 190 which was passed by the Kansas Legislature at its regular session in 1945 and to determine the possibilities of solving the educational problems of the St. George, Kansas Schools through the reorganization plan. It is also the purpose to determine what kind of an educational program and what kind of a school system can be used to the greatest advantage as a result of the reorganization plan.

Past trends of closing schools and attendance areas of pupils of closed schools were studied to determine any significant facts. It was found that House Bill 190 was based on these significant facts. Too, it was discovered that the purpose of House Bill 190 is to help materialize more quickly the objectives of the past trends of rural school consolidation.

It was found that it is possible that House Bill 190 will accomplish for the St. George, Kansas Schools the desired consolidation of the rural districts.

This report shows the work in proposing the desired plan to the County Reorganization Committee and how that plan will solve the problems of the St. George, Kansas Schools.

REORGANIZATION OF THE ST. GEORGE, KANSAS SCHOOLS

In order to understand the basis upon which the Kansas Legislature prepared and passed the Reorganization Bill 190, a study of rural school consolidation was made. In this study the objective was to find if there were any noticeable trends in the closing of rural schools and if there were any definite attendance areas established.

TRENDS IN RURAL GRADE DISTRICTS

The report of the Kansas Legislative Council contains the following statement concerning the school situation:

The common school district system of Kansas is now undergoing rapid transformation after remaining for 75 years virtually in the same form as that established in the early days of statehood. Marked changes are occurring in the number of operating schools, the size of attendance areas, the distance pupils go to school, and to some extent in the rates of taxation for school support, and in the items of expenditures for education. While these developments are much more pronounced in some parts of the state than in others, they occur in some degree in practically all counties. Precisely the same tendencies exhibited in an extreme form in a few outstanding cases also are found to a smaller extent in all sections of the state.¹

Closed Districts

The two striking facts revealed concern the large number of districts which have closed their schools and the places to

1. Closed Schools In Kansas, Publication No. 113, Research Department, Kansas Legislative Council, Sept. 1942, p. 1.

which these closed schools have sent their pupils. The closing of the schools prior to 1945 was basically a "grass roots" movement which was carried on independently in communities as to local circumstance.

One-fifth (1,601) of the organized elementary districts of the state did not maintain school in 1941-1942. A total of 1,382 schools were closed in 1940-1941. The gross increase in 1941-1942 was 312 closed schools, 93 schools reopening, leaving a net increase of 219 over the preceding year.

A sweeping upward trend in the number of districts closed has occurred during the last eight years. The largest increase (263) was in the year 1937-1938. The number closed last year represents an increase of 1,332, or 500%, over the average number of 269 closed during the period 1928-1933.

There was a wide variation among individual counties in the number and percentage of schools closed. The range in the number closed in 1941-1942 was from one in Logan and Wyandotte counties to 50 in Jewell county. The average number closed per county was 15. Half of the counties had more than one-fifth of their schools closed and a third more than 30%. The range in percentage of all elementary schools closed was from 3.1% in Wyandotte to 57.1% in Edwards county.¹

For a long period of time there has been an upward trend in the closing of rural grade schools. In the last few years, the annual increases have been large.

Where These Students Go

It was found that the closing of rural schools has developed school centers. True, too, is the fact that these centers are already graded schools and that they have the reputation of being better schools. These school centers are nearly always accessible on good roads.

1. Closed Schools In Kansas, Publication No. 113, Research Dept., Kansas Legislative Council, Sept. 1942, p. ix.

Probably the most outstanding fact brought out is the predominance of graded school centers, approximately two-thirds sending pupils to graded schools, those having two or more teachers. It also is significant that most closed school districts (64%) sent their pupils to elementary school centers in which a high school is located. In some localities, the rural high school district in effect is becoming an attendance area for elementary pupils.¹

Reasons For Closing Schools

The reasons for closing rural districts and transporting pupils to school centers are the same basic reasons offered for having better schools.

The closing of schools usually results from a combination of factors. Probably the principal motive is the desire for better educational facilities for the children at less cost to the taxpayer. The immediate occasion usually has been a decrease in enrollment, some emergency situation, or opportunity for economy, rather than careful community planning or conscious attempt to establish a new system to provide better education for rural children.

Two-thirds of the closed school districts have indicated a preference for a graded school education. The more varied program, better trained and more experienced teachers, and larger number of pupils in each age group in the schools having more than one teacher, apparently, are among the advantages desired for their children by parents in many closed school districts.²

Previous Methods Of Closing Schools

There has been no definite method of closing schools nor has there been any set method of selection of the school to be attended. The closing of schools is a matter which has been determined by the patrons of each district. The school to be attended has been a matter of family choice. Prior to 1943

1. Closed Schools In Kansas, Publication No. 113, Research Dept., Kansas Legislative Council, Sept. 1942, p. xi.

2. Ibid., p. xii.

there were no statutory provisions compelling the closing of schools or forcing consolidation of schools. There were, however, three different statutory provisions provided by Kansas law authorizing the closing of schools. General Statutes 1935, Section 72-701, provided that if there were not enough children in a school district to warrant the holding of school the district could discontinue its school for the year and make provision for sending pupils to other districts.

The Cooperative School Area Law, General Statutes 1935, Section 72-916, authorized school districts to cooperate in maintaining school. This law was for the cooperative joining of schools not more than five miles apart and whose combined enrollments would not be more than 28 pupils. But the trend has been to transport pupils to graded schools and not to maintain the rural school even if adequate territory and sufficient pupils could be provided.

General Statutes of 1935, Section 72-901, authorized the county superintendent to close schools under certain conditions. This did not apply to many districts as it included only those districts with less than five pupils of school age. Too, the costs were to be prorated and this would have made costs higher than the tuition which could be arranged by a school closing voluntarily.

The study revealed that the trend of closing schools has been on a rapid increase even without a statutory provision forcing the closing of schools. Also, it was noted that most of the pupils from closed schools have been sent to graded schools and, moreover,

that the rural high school district has become the attendance area for elementary pupils.

At the regular meeting of the State Legislature of Kansas in 1945, the question of the reorganization of Kansas rural schools was brought before the Legislature by Representative Ross of Emporia, Kansas. The Legislative Council had studied the facts and trends of rural schools for two years. The Research Department of the Kansas Legislative Council had made an exhaustive study of the Kansas rural school problem. As a result of this study House Bill 190 was placed before the Legislature. House Bill 190 is based on the three trends already noted: (1) the closing of rural schools by the patrons; (2) students of the closed districts going to graded schools; and, (3) that attendance areas are high school districts.

HOUSE BILL NO. 190

House Bill No. 190 went into effect April 1, 1945.

An act relating to schools, creating a division of school reorganization within the state department of education and a county reorganization committee in each county, prescribing powers and duties, providing state funds and methods for the distribution thereof, amending sections 72-5010 and 72-5011 of the General Statutes Supplement of 1943, and repealing said original sections.¹

Besides giving the county committee the powers and duties of reorganizing rural school districts, the bill also gives the committee the right to change the boundaries of school districts maintaining high schools in cases where the territory is or can

1. House Bill 190, Kansas State Legislature, 1945, Section 15.

be made conterminous. Such changing of high school lines is to be deemed advisable in order to eliminate the overlapping boundaries of high school districts and elementary school districts and to unite such school districts under one school board. This uniting of both grade and high school districts into one unit under one board is for the purpose of being able to organize our educational system into some other than the eight-four plan, and to make the attendance area a unit unto itself. One administrator will then supervise the whole unit.

PROBLEMS OF THE ST. GEORGE, KANSAS SCHOOLS

The greatest problem confronting the St. George Grade School is finances. The valuation of the grade school district is only \$388,160 and this past year, even with a levy of 9.35 mills, emergency warrants had to be issued. Tuition is received from District 106 and District 96 for the pupils which they transport to the St. George Schools. These districts do not have ample funds to maintain their own school. Even with all available funds possible the grade school could provide only the bare necessities and the high school had to provide athletic equipment, maps, and library material. In fact, the grade school could not have continued if it had not have been for the help of the high school in providing many of the necessary materials. The grade school had no money to purchase new equipment and, in most cases, could not keep its old equipment in repair. The St. George Grade School cannot provide an adequate

education for its own pupils, and the students from the other districts really add a burden since the tuition paid for the out-of-district students does not pay their share of the schools expenses.

Because of the grade school's financial difficulties, it has not been possible to hire very highly qualified teachers. The salaries that are offered to prospective teachers are, of course, based on the ability of the district to pay. This ability is so low that the good, well qualified teacher is not attracted. For the same reason it is out of the question to attract a man teacher to the grade school and, therefore, there is no athletic program for the boys. There has been no music training in the grades because of not being able to hire a teacher trained in music. Each teacher takes care of her own room and there is no departmentalized work of any kind.

The high school has a well equipped shop, home economics department, library, gymnasium and science laboratory which are available to grade pupils if the schools were a single administrative unit. At present the high school teachers are too busy with their high school schedule to be able to help with the educating of the grade school pupil.

The St. George Rural High School is organized as a four year high school under the Kansas Rural High School Law and, therefore, is a unit unto itself with a three man board operating the school. The St. George Grade School is also a unit unto itself with grades from one including eight operated by a

three man board. The high school is under the authority of a high school principal with a faculty of three teachers. The directing of the grade school is done by the grade principal with a staff of two teachers. The supervision of the two schools is done separately and the two principals are responsible to separate boards of education. So the grade school and the high school, while operating in the same plant, are separate in organization and authority. But with the grade school district such a small part of the high school territory and each being a separate tax unit it is impossible for there to be any other type of organization until the boundary lines of the districts are conterminous. Before there can be any satisfactory change of organization there must be a centralized authority as is the case in the six-six, the six-two-four and the six-three-three plans of administration. The past two years the high school principal has been given some authority over the grade school, but even then many cross-purposes appear because of the separate units.

Under the separate units no complete cumulative record can be kept nor is a guidance and testing program possible. A complete cumulative record must begin with the primary pupil. It must be kept with the pupil and transferred with the pupil as he is promoted. This record is then sent with the student to high school. This record and the testing program must be conducted according to a unified plan taking in the entire school and it must be a part of the student's life throughout his

school attendance.

It is accepted that a successful physical educational program must begin at the time the child enters school. Even if it is playing games and rhythmic drills, the play must be organized and properly supervised. The St. George student does not have a properly supervised physical education program until he enters high school. This is because finances do not allow the hiring of anyone qualified to teach physical education at the elementary level.

The grade school has no health program because there are no funds to provide it with such a program. This health program should even begin with the pre-school child and be carried on through his entire school life.

Each teacher has charge of her own room. She teaches all subjects including music and art. She provides all recreation and supervises all playground activities for her own pupils. There is no departmentalized work of any kind in the grade school.

In summarizing the problems of the St. George Schools we find they appear as follows:

1. Poorly qualified teachers.
2. Inadequate physical education program.
3. Insufficient equipment.
4. Inadequate music training.
5. No health program.
6. No departmentalized work in the grades.
7. No opportunity for grades to use high school equipment.

8. Separate units of administration.
9. No cumulative records.
10. Incomplete guidance and testing program.

The first seven of the above problems are the result of insufficient funds. That is, if an adequate amount of money were available the first seven problems could and would be solved. This lack of sufficient funds is due to an inadequate tax base.

The last three problems are a result of organization and if the boundary lines of the grade school and the high school were conterminous, then the type of organization could be changed so that the present separate means of administration would be abolished. A complete unit of administration could then be used.

The causes of the problems of the St. George Schools, then, are an inadequate tax base and the separate boundary lines. With this in mind a survey was made to determine the possibilities of solving these problems by reorganization. Special permission was granted by the County Reorganization Committee to work on a proposed plan for the St. George Schools. They welcomed the proposal and gave access to all of their material. Permission was then granted by the County Reorganization Committee to work out a plan and to submit that finished plan to them. Most of the material was obtained from the offices of the County Superintendent and the County Clerk. Some of the material was obtained from the State Superintendent's office. This survey was made with the objective of creating a sufficient one-unit tax base and making the grade school and the high school lines conterminous.

FIRST PROPOSED PLAN

The result of this survey is found in Fig. 1.

On this map it may be seen that the Kaw River makes a natural boundary to the south. The Kaw River is also the boundary line between Riley and Pottawatomie counties.

To the east the original line between the St. George High School and the Wamego High School was used. This line cuts through Rural School Districts 102, 41 and 82 and will place into the Wamego and the St. George proposed districts the land already contained in their high school districts.

To the north, the St. George High School District contains some of the Flush Union III School District. The Flush Union III is a rural grade district maintaining a high school. Under the reorganization law this territory would then be double taxed. It was decided to divide the territory equally between Flush Union III and the St. George Grade School. Also there was gained a compromise of dividing the disputed territory by letting the patrons adjoining the boundary line decide to which district they wished to belong. Rural districts 46 and 76 were divided as to the original boundary line of the St. George High School District, all land north of this line to be in Flush Union III. The patrons having property adjoining this line were allowed the privilege of having their land attached to either the St. George or the Flush Union III district. When patrons having

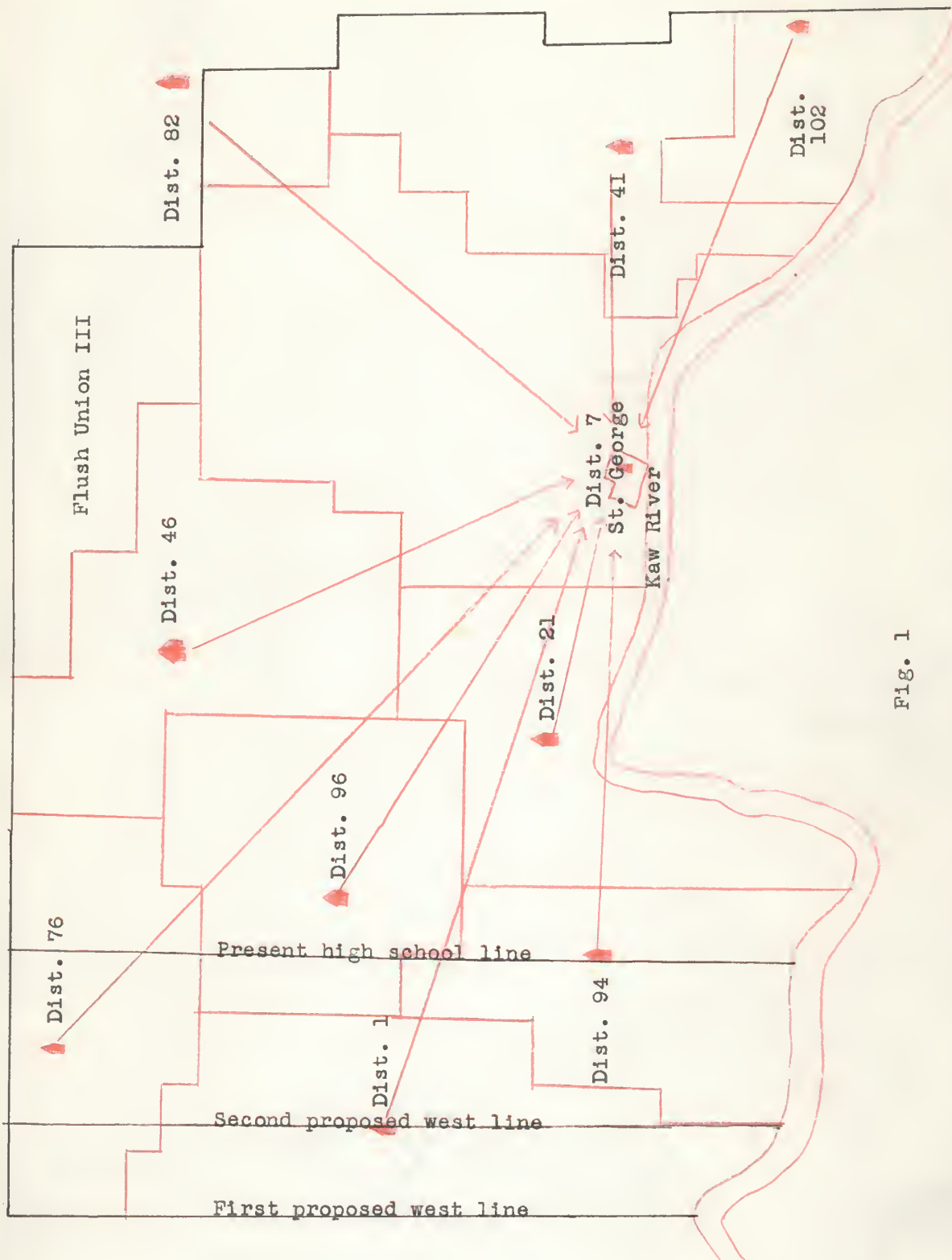


Fig. 1

land adjoining a boundary line wish to join the other district they can do so by stating their wish at a regular hearing and naming the reason for which they wish to be in the other district. Then the County Committee will act upon the request at one of their regular meetings.

The territory between the west line of the St. George Rural High School District and the Pottawatomie transportation territory is "free territory" and does not belong to any high school district. "Free territory" must now contribute in taxes to the county high school fund, but it does not support any specific high school. The west line of the present high school district was moved to the Pottawatomie transportation territory line which is about one and one-half miles west of the former line.

This proposed plan would give the St. George School system a valuation of \$1,700,000 and all boundary lines would be contemporaneous, which would remove the causes of the problems of the St. George Schools. There are 102 grade pupils in this proposed district.

This proposed plan was then submitted to the patrons of the St. George District at their Parent Teachers' Meeting, and met with their approval. The County Committee accepted the plan and requested the author to present the plan to all interested parties at a hearing in St. George.

When any committee has prepared its written plans and charts for reorganization, it shall fix dates and places for hearings thereon and give notice thereof to all the patrons of the districts affected and all interested parties. Such notice shall be by publication for two consecutive weeks in a newspaper or newspapers of general

circulation in the county or counties affected and by written notice to the clerk of each of the districts affected. In case territory in two or more counties is involved, the reorganization committees of such counties shall hold such hearings jointly at a place to be agreed upon by the committees. The committee shall hear all objections, suggestions and testimony offered by any party or school district interested in the reorganization plans (1) as relates to the formation of a new district or the transfer of territory from one school district to another or to the attachment to an established school district or districts all or any part of another district; (2) as relates to the value and amount of all school property and all indebtedness of each school district affected; and (3) as relates to any subject set forth in subsection 1 of section 7 of this act. After such hearings, the committee shall make such revisions or modifications in its written plans as it deems necessary and shall thereupon adopt its final reorganization plans and, within ten days after such adoption, file same in the office of county superintendent of the proper county or counties: Provided, Whenever any reorganization plan proposed by the committee contemplates or provides for the inclusion of any rural territory in a city school district having within its boundaries a city having a population or more than 15,000, such rural territory shall not be included in the proposed city school district unless a majority of the legal electors residing in such rural territory consent in writing to the inclusion of such rural territory in the proposed school district. In order to determine the sufficiency of such consent, the committee shall appoint some person to take a census of the qualified electors residing in such rural territory. If after the adoption of any final reorganization plan and before December 31, 1948, the committee shall find and determine that any final reorganization plan adopted is unsatisfactory, inequitable or needs to be changed for any reason, then said committee may again reorganize the territory involved in such order in the same manner as the original reorganization plan was adopted and the committee shall then meet in the same manner as prior to the completion of the original reorganization.¹

At this hearing the plan was accepted completely, as far as the South, East and North lines were concerned, but there was a group of patrons on the West side of the proposed district that wanted a school of their own. If they could not have a

1. House Bill No. 190, Kansas State Legislature, 1945, Section 8.

school of their own, they wanted their territory attached to the Manhattan district. This group of patrons submitted a petition signed by nearly all concerned in their part of the proposed district. The County Reorganization Committee felt that the people opposed to the proposed plan were in such firm opposition that this plan was dropped. The signers of the petition threatened that if their petition was not considered they would take their cause to court. The County Reorganization Committee did not want court action if there were any way possible to avoid it. The Committee considered discarding the entire plan and submitting a proposal which would allow another district in the West side of the proposed district. It was suggested to the Committee that, perhaps, a solution for the west line controversy could be found, so that the proposed plan would not be discarded entirely. The County Committee then suggested that another survey be made on the west side of the district and that, if possible, a new plan be submitted to them immediately.

SECOND PROPOSED PLAN

The second survey was started immediately with the objective of seeking a solution to the west boundary line. Upon checking the names on the protest petition it was found that they consisted mainly of people of one faith who really desired to send their children to a parochial school in Manhattan. In checking the residences of the protesting members it was found that they all, with one exception, lived in the west half

mile of the proposed district. When it was suggested to those living in the west half mile that the west line be drawn back east one-half mile, so that they would be in the Manhattan district, they readily agreed that they would withdraw their names from the petition. The withdrawing of the majority of the names from the petition would, of course, invalidate the power of the petition so far as the remaining signers were concerned. The signers of the petition living east of the second proposed west line felt that if they could not have a district of their own they would rather have their children go to St. George. All indications are that the new west line will be accepted by all concerned.

The County Reorganization Committee did not want to make a new district as was suggested in the petition, because their purpose was to reorganize districts into attendance areas and not to start new districts. The same allowance of joining either district was made to persons having land adjoining the line.

The County Reorganization Committee has accepted this revised plan of organization which they intend to post as the final reorganization of the territory surrounding St. George. There is no concentrated opposition and it is felt that without a doubt this will be the new district for the St. George Schools.

The new district will have the same boundaries on the south, east, and north as the first plan. However, the west line is drawn back one-half mile east in the second proposed plan.

The new district will have a valuation of \$1,540,000. If

this valuation is assessed the tax limit of fourteen mills, a total of \$21,560 can be raised for school purposes. The high school county allotment fund will bring the total amount available for school purposes to about \$26,750. This amount is about three times as much money as is now spent for annual current expenses for the St. George Schools. This increased tax base will be more than ample to solve the financial problems of the St. George Schools. Therefore, the first seven problems listed can be solved as all those problems are problems because of a lack of finances. The sufficient tax base will now provide ample funds.

According to Fig. 1 the boundary line of the reorganized St. George Grade School District is also the same boundary line for the reorganized St. George Rural High School District. The boundary lines are conterminous and, therefore, the problem of the separate organization of the St. George Schools can be remedied.

House Bill 190 states the following duties and powers of county committees:

Change the boundaries of school districts maintaining high schools in cases where the territory is or can be made conterminous, insofar as it is deemed advisable, in order to eliminate the overlapping boundaries of high-school districts and elementary school districts and consider the uniting of such districts under one school board.¹

1. House Bill 190, Kansas State Legislature, 1945, Section 7, Provision 3.

ORGANIZATION OF NEW DISTRICT

At the school meetings in April both boards of education brought before the patrons of the community the matter of making one school system of the St. George Schools. There were no dissenting votes and the members of both boards of education are in accord with the proposed plan.

The new proposed district will become a legal district by the time yearly school meetings are held in April of 1947. At present it is planned to post the proper notices before the High School yearly meeting in April of 1947, and at that meeting to dissolve the present St. George Rural High School. Then on the next day, which is the day for the Grade School yearly meeting, the St. George Rural Graded School will be dissolved.

All orders of the committee shall become operative and effective on the first day of March succeeding final approval of same: Provided, Before such orders shall become operative and effective, the county committee shall designate a time and place for a meeting for the purpose of electing a school board, consisting of a director, clerk and treasurer; ten days' notice of such meeting shall be given by printed notices posted in three or more public places in each of the newly organized school districts affected, and as soon as such officers are elected and have qualified as required by law, the county committee shall declare the old districts disorganized: And provided further, Said school board may maintain separately until the end of the term, any schools that may be in session at the time said declaration is issued: And provided further, That in the event the school district created by the order of the committee includes within its boundaries a city of the first or second class, no such election shall be held and the members of the existing board of education shall continue to hold their respective offices until the expira-

tion of the terms for which they were elected.¹

That same afternoon as soon as the grade school has been dissolved, a meeting of all patrons of the newly organized district will be held in the high school gymnasium to organize a St. George School system under one school board. The new board of education of the St. George Schools will then have the powers and duties of all education in the new district.

The present plan for reorganizing the school system includes hiring a school superintendent and two additional teachers. The type of organization probably will be the six-six or the six-three-three plan with such departmentalization as is deemed feasible and essential. With the one unit of organization and ample funds all of the aforementioned problems of the St. George Schools can be solved.

INAUGURATING PART OF PROPOSED PLAN FALL OF 1946

A part of the one-unit plan of school organization will be started this fall. The seventh and eighth grade girls will be given one class period a day in home economics taught by the high school teacher of home economics. During the same period the seventh and eighth grade boys will have a class period in agriculture taught by a grade school teacher. In this class farmers in the community will serve as field instructors.

All grade pupils will also have some part-time training in music by a high school teacher. A few class periods each

1. House Bill 190, Kansas State Legislature, 1945, Section 15.

week in physical education will be given to all grade students from the fourth grade through the eighth grade.

A partial step in a student cumulative record system will also be started this fall, with a beginning in a unified guidance program.

This inauguration of a part of the proposed system of organization is hoped to be used to more quickly and easily start the final plan for the fall of 1947.

This study has also brought forth the fact that the St. George District is the only district in Pottawatomie County in which the boundaries of school districts maintaining high schools can be made conterminous and such districts united under one board.

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