

Clay County News  
March 5, 2009  
Reporter: Kris Moody

## The vote is in

Clay Center Board of Education votes to pursue merger with Sandy Creek

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Clay Center – After a few months of meetings, information gathering and addressing community concerns, the Clay Center Board of Education unanimously voted on Monday to pursue a merger with Sandy Creek Public School.

A large number of community members showed up to the meeting to ask a few questions before the vote and to witness the board’s decision first hand. Although the board members said the merger will provide a great education for the students, the vote signaled the end of an era for Clay Center at the same time.

“It’s a mixed bag for me personally,” Lee Sayer, Clay Center Superintendent said. “It’s partly sadness because we can’t continue Clay Center Public School as it currently is.”

Sayer said the school has made great improvements in technology, staff, curriculum and its reading program in the last few years, and he hopes that by going to Sandy Creek, their successes will provide them with an influence to continue those projects.

Kent Miller, Superintendent of Sandy Creek Public School, said that the schools are more similar than they are different and believes that they can help each other to create an even better learning environment.

“We’re wide open to look at anything we can do because of this merger to enhance the academic opportunities of both schools,” Miller said.

The Sandy Creek Board of Education was alerted via phone call of Clay Center’s decision to pursue a merger with the school, and Miller described the reaction of the board members and the patrons in attendance as excited and pleased. Likewise, the Clay Center community seemed to largely appreciate the decision that was made.

“The role of the board is, in part, to run the school as the public would like

to have it run,” Sayer said. “The board was trying to honor the community’s wishes.”

Sayer said that when the process first began, the initial focus was on Harvard Public School. The schools had worked together a great deal, co-opping activities and classes.

Through the board’s meetings and encounters between board members and community members around town, parents and residents expressed more of an interest with Sandy Creek. Six students had already filed the necessary paperwork to option to Sandy Creek, and Sayer said that the board members heard a number of people say that they, too, would option for Sandy Creek if the decision to merge with Harvard was made.

Despite the difficulties surrounding the process, the board had nothing but great things to say about Harvard and was sure that had the decision gone the other way, the goals and expectations would have remained as high as they are now.

“No matter which way we would have gone, I believe our staff and administration, as well as the other staff, would have worked just as hard to ultimately provide a better education for our kids,” Sayer said.

From now until the schools would merge, at the start of the 2010-2011 academic year, both districts have a lot of work to do in order to accomplish a successful transition, The next step is to file a formal petition to the state reorganization committee, which must be submitted by this December, or January at the latest.

Miller said that it may seem like there is a lot of time between now and the first day of school for that year, but with everything the districts need to do internally and with the state, they don’t have the luxury of sufficient time.

Clay Center will have school as usual next year, while the reorganization process figures out the details concerning staffing, transportation, curriculum, etc. Sayer said that it will be important to develop a timeline for the long term and to stick with it.

“We know that there’s a lot of work to do for an official merger to take place,” Miller said.