

Sharing Between the Bellevue CSD and Marquette Catholic?

As the year started there were some who asked why the Bellevue CSD is not sharing with Bellevue Marquette for the 2021-2022 school year. There are several aspects that have impacted the decision by the Bellevue CSD in this decision, and these include the aspect that the students we are most responsible for are students who are enrolled full-time at the Bellevue CSD. Any student in the Bellevue boundary lines can attend the Bellevue Schools, along with those living outside of district boundary lines by completing open enrollment documents in a timely manner. Once again, the Bellevue CSD does not turn away any students who wish to enroll in our district.

The decision to offer Bellevue Marquette an option to enroll in any and all courses offered at Bellevue MS/HS and to share all extracurricular programs was presented to the Marquette administration on April 19, with a follow-up meeting with two board members and their administration on May 4. At this meeting, while there were questions presented, it was agreed upon by the Marquette Board representatives and the Bellevue CSD representatives from the school board, and myself, that we would meet again to discuss this after Marquette had a chance to share the conversation specifics with their board and other stakeholders.

Unfortunately, the next time the Bellevue CSD heard from Marquette was on the morning of July 13 when a letter arrived at the district office. The Bellevue CSD Board of Education had a regularly scheduled board meeting that evening and discussed Marquette's request in the letter to resume sharing as it had been prior to the pandemic. At this short notice, it was not realistic to alter our decision without more discussion so the board decided to wait until the August meeting to discuss it further. At that point, the Bellevue CSD had a lengthy discussion that led to sharing not being offered for the Bellevue Marquette school system.

At the same time, the Bellevue Community School District already serves the private school in our community in many ways, along with the public funding from the state of Iowa that is received by Bellevue Marquette. Federal funds for textbooks are received, along with funds for professional learning, special services, preschool, and more on an annual basis. At the same time, the public school is accountable for these funds and must submit reports to the state on the use of funds by both the public and private school system. Additionally, for most of these funds, the public district must pay for the expenses upfront and then request reimbursement from the state - usually quarterly. Thereby, the district loses interest on the district's money. The public district must also take the responsibility and make sure the nonpublic is spending the resources as required by law, plus complete all applications and file for reimbursement.

In addition, the Marquette system receives "free busing" annually from the Bellevue CSD, which the public school is only reimbursed by the state for about 75% of the cost. The district has also chosen to allow Marquette to "rent" our buses and suburbans regularly, which Marquette is charged mileage for at an agreed-upon rate.

The decision to not share courses with Bellevue Marquette is multi-faceted, and some of the specifics include the following:

- Bringing other students into our system takes attention away from full-time students enrolled in classes who may need it, or who would benefit from a smaller class size.
 - An increased emphasis on assisting students enrolled in the BCSD takes place when classes are not shared.
 - Courses and clubs at the Bellevue CSD are designed to benefit those involved in the Bellevue CSD system full-time, and should not be designed to benefit other students from other schools.
- Bellevue Marquette switched their class schedule during the 2020-2021 school year, and as a result, scheduling became a challenge. Additionally, even when the schools were on the same schedule Marquette students were late each period, and often left early. There are also multiple times when Marquette students do not attend based on their school's activities and schedules, and at times when we have special activities that Marquette students do not need to attend.
- The Bellevue CSD did benefit from a small amount of state funding for sharing courses with Marquette, but this amount is limited based on state regulations and changes over the years in school funding. Additionally, Marquette does not pay anything to the Bellevue CSD to take courses at the public school. The district has provided this opportunity in the past, but it is not a "right" for a private school to take courses at the public school, and the sharing of courses between the two entities has become unique over the last several years.
- Families have chosen to not attend the Bellevue CSD, and Marquette has apparently decided to offer the courses themselves if their students are interested in them. Schools have the responsibility to offer courses to their students that are needed, of interest, or advantageous for any reason. If they cannot offer a course, they must make a decision about how the courses will be offered in order to continue to be a strong school system. Non-public schools, in order to be accredited, must offer certain courses and strands of courses, and being a school means offering these courses to students as a requirement.

While the sharing of courses is one topic for the school system, another topic often linked to sharing is the sharing of extracurricular programs. The sharing of extracurricular programs by the two school systems in Bellevue has many potential benefits for our schools and the community as a whole. Some of these benefits include the following:

- The potential to unite our tightly-knit community in the long run with strong combined high school programs in extracurriculars, both athletics and fine arts. This would include all athletic teams, along with band, vocal, theatre (musical and drama productions), art, and similar areas.
- A sole sharing program would increase numbers in a program, therefore providing an ability to field teams at all levels of competition athletically - Varsity, Junior Varsity, Fresh/Soph, and Freshmen teams would potentially be possible. Additionally, larger and more successful teams may increase revenue (spectators, etc.), and provide an

enhanced sense of pride in the community for large theatrical and music productions of various types.

- Combining teams/groups and joining all students together may provide for more competitive programs and stronger fine arts productions than either school is offering by themselves, while not raising classification drastically (if at all) in athletics.
- While both schools share Cole Park for baseball and softball currently, sharing programs would free up the diamonds for teams, including youth programs.
- Athletically, providing various levels for students to compete would allow students to play at the “level of competition” that is appropriate for them and their talent level. At times in programs with low participation numbers, students are forced to play varsity before they are physically or mentally ready.
- Providing one consistent team for all youth to participate in, along with potentially strengthening youth programs, is a key to success in many extracurricular activities.
- One set of high school programs would allow for fewer “fundraising” commitments for local businesses and community members and organizations. Having both schools fundraise for the unified programs, and the benefits to Bellevue would potentially be immense based on “common teams” and not constantly asking businesses, etc for donations.

While annual evaluations of programs would occur, I would advocate for the transition plan to have an extensive evaluation after five years.

Ultimately, people make a choice to enroll in the school of their choice, by the rights granted by the state. Just like people choose to put a pool in their yard vs using the public pool or home swing set vs a public playground - they still pay taxes for the public pool and playground whether they choose to utilize it or not. The district is simply trying to make the “public education/activity programs” more accessible to everyone for their tax dollars, and why the public school is advocating for this beneficial community change for students from courses to activities. Unified Bellevue programs are an essential part for the potential betterment and enrichment of programs in the community.

