

C.R. schools have messy feeder systems

Written by Jim Ecker

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The math seems so simple, but it's not.

Not when you're talking about the middle schools and high schools in the Cedar Rapids Community School district. Not when you're trying to find a simple or workable solution that would help the high schools and their teams.

There are six middle schools and three high schools in the district, so at first blush you'd think it would be easy. Two middle schools would feed each high school and that would be that.

The high school coaches could work directly with the middle schools and develop feeder systems for all their teams.

Unfortunately, it doesn't work.

It doesn't work geographically and it doesn't work numerically. If it did, school administrators would have changed the system by now.

Here are the enrollment figures for the six middle schools:

- Harding 884
- Franklin 643
- Taft 616
- Roosevelt 565
- McKinley 557
- Wilson 379

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In a perfect world, you could pair the middle schools together by enrollment and have them feed one of the high schools.

For instance:

- Harding + Wilson = 1,263 students
- Franklin + McKinley = 1,200 students
- Taft + Roosevelt = 1,181 students

One look at the map, and you know that won't work without massive busing and a major revolt.

Franklin and McKinley mesh nicely together. They could feed Washington High School (and do for the most part).

Taft and Roosevelt work nicely together as well. They could feed Jefferson High School (and do to a great extent).

But Harding and Wilson? There's the snag, unless you want to ship those 379 kids from Wilson from the southwest side of town to Kennedy on the northeast side when they're ready for high school.

As a result of all this, students from the same middle school end up going to different high schools to balance enrollments.

Franklin kids go to Washington and Kennedy. Taft kids go to Jefferson and Kennedy. Roosevelt kids go to Jefferson and Kennedy. And so forth, based on where they live. And that does not include kids who open enroll somewhere.

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This has an impact on the high school sports program. It's not an earth-shattering problem, of course, not in the grand scheme of offering kids a quality education. You can study math, science and English at any of the high schools and get a good education.

It does make a difference to the high school teams, however. It's messy.

My son, for instance, played football at Roosevelt Middle School and was invited to attend Future J-Hawk Night at Jefferson one year. There was just one problem, however. We live in the Kennedy district and that's where he was headed.

The Kennedy-bound Roosevelt kids felt a little left out of things. They didn't seem to get the same information that Kennedy-bound kids at Harding were getting. This was years ago and hopefully things have changed by now, but it was a problem back in the 1990's.

It certainly wasn't possible for Kennedy coaches to tell Roosevelt coaches how to run their middle school teams and get kids ready for the next step. The Jefferson coaches wouldn't have cared too much for that, and most of the Roosevelt kids were headed to Jefferson.

What's the big deal? Well, it puts Kennedy, Washington and Jefferson at somewhat of a competitive disadvantage against the other high schools in the Metro area.

Linn-Mar, Prairie and Xavier all have fairly clean and simple feeder systems. For the most part, the coaches at Linn-Mar, Prairie and Xavier know who's coming their way from their middle schools on an annual basis.

Marion High School also has a clean feeder system, but the Indians do not compete head-to-head with the other Metro schools on a regular basis. In some sports yes, but most sports no.

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Kennedy, Washington and Jefferson can fight back with informal feeder systems that appeal to young athletes who will enter their doors some day, but those are independent feeder programs that are run by well-meaning folks. They are not organized by the schools themselves or funded by the Cedar Rapids Community district.

It's impossible to predict the future, but it's easy to see how Linn-Mar might dominate the Metro sports scene in years to come. The Lions have an effective feeder system, but they also have a wealthy and rapidly growing district that has already built a \$10 million football palace with a \$5 million aquatics center and a \$2 million baseball/softball complex on the way.

Kennedy, Washington and Jefferson, meanwhile, are land-locked and the school district considered a 5 percent cut in extracurricular salaries last spring before tabling the idea when it faced immediate opposition. The proposal could resurface at any time, however.

There are no easy answers for the Cougars, Warriors and J-Hawks. But if you care about those schools and their teams, you may want to ask some questions.