

Daily Chronicle ONLINE

Your Towns | Your Neighbors | Your Newspaper

Updated: Oct 05, 2003 - 12:34:01 am CDT

DeKalb-NIU project at Malta school has great potential

The DeKalb School District and Northern Illinois University outlined a program that will bring innovative and exciting projects to an elementary school that will be set up in the old Malta High School.

Together the two institutions will set up all-day kindergarten. They will offer child care from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. Special programs in technology and fine arts will be offered. The speech and hearing clinic will offer special services. Student teachers will assist and Northern professors will offer special training.

School Superintendent Brian Ali said the school district will pay no more for this school than they would for any other.

Northern President John Peters says money will be diverted from other programs to pay for the Malta project. The university also will look for grants.

The university will benefit because the program will offer opportunities for staffers and students to study special programs close up.

The benefits to the students attending Malta are many. They will have opportunities to take part in innovative projects that are the envy of the rest of the state. They will be able to take courses in special programs that interest them. Those suffering from hearing problems will get prompt, effective treatment.

But the special benefits to the entire district may be less obvious.

Though school officials bristle at the suggestion that Malta will become a laboratory school, it is our hope that many projects tried out in Malta will eventually spread to the rest of the district.

Making Malta special with no plan to roll out effective programs to the rest of the district would undermine the concept of good education and services being provided to all.

The real benefit to the Malta program will not be the benefits directly felt by today's Malta students but the long-range benefits offered to students throughout the district.

If successful, all-day kindergarten should be extended to the rest of the district. The early-arrival and late-dismissal programs offer tremendous advantages for students and parents in all parts of the district. Many of the tutorial programs and special projects being considered for Malta could eventually be transferred to other elementary schools.

The long-range goal ought not to be making the Malta school special, but using Malta to pave the way for great programs in all schools.

Beyond the walls of the school district, another benefit of the project is that it will help break down

walls between the university and the community at-large.

The Malta project can help erase some of those boundaries and open the door to mutually beneficial programs in business, social activities and culture.

The DeKalb School Board has the opportunity to open many doors when it votes on approving the concept Monday night.

That's not to say there are plenty of questions to be answered and hurdles to be cleared.

Just what students will be attending the Malta school? The district wants it to be voluntary, but what if an insufficient number of students sign up? Or, as we suspect will happen, what if there isn't enough room at Malta for all those who want to attend?

How will the district ensure that there is racial, ethnic and academic diversity at the school? How will the district arrange for transportation? How will the school officials get the work done in time for the fall 2004 deadline?

But the difficult decisions in the days ahead shouldn't scare the school board away from the important decisions it has to face this week.

This is an opportunity too good to pass up.

The school board should accept this plan and quickly get to work to implement it.

Send the Chronicle a letter to the editor.

Leave a daytime phone number where you can be reached with questions.

To get your letter to us:

---- Mail it to the Daily Chronicle, 1586 Barber Greene Road, DeKalb, IL 60115.

---- E-mail it to jkelleher@-pulitzer.net.

---- Fax it to (815) 758-5059.

---- Drop it off at our Barber Greene Road office.

Or, if you would rather use Ear to Ear, call (815) 756-4841, Ext. 700, or the toll-free number, (877) 688-4841, Ext. 700. Record your message. Make it as brief as possible and speak slowly and clearly.

Copyright © 2007, Daily Chronicle. All rights reserved.