

College Place Issues

In recent years, the impact on Walla Walla high schools of approximately 400 grade 9-12 students from College Place has been argued at length. Some have claimed that College Place would soon build its own high school and those 400 students would leave Walla Walla schools, thus alleviating the present overcrowding. Others have asserted that the present relationship between the two school districts will remain. The Facilities Task Force created a subcommittee to study the issues. The results of their study follow.

College Place is a “non-high” school district operating only in grades K-8. To educate its grade 9-12 students, it has a legally “designated” high school which is Walla Walla High School. This relationship between the two districts is both legal and historic. It has both operational and procedural requirements. The Walla Walla Public Schools cannot unilaterally exclude College Place students from attending Walla Walla High School. However, all federal, state, and local operational funding for College Place students follows the students to the designated high school.

In addition to operational requirements, there are procedural requirements for capital or facilities renewal (Chapter 28.540 RCW). When voters in the Walla Walla School District pass a facilities bond for the “designated” high school, the College Place School District is compelled to support its proportional share of the project’s costs. College Place voters have two attempts to pass a bond to support these costs through property taxes. Should College Place fail to support its District’s measure, the State of Washington would intervene and initiate a proposal of annexation for the College Place School District to meet its obligation.

There are some in College Place who aspire to pass a bond to construct a new College Place High School. However, just three years ago, a high school bond placed before the College Place voters failed. Currently, the College Place School District has plans for \$25 million bond for improvements to its K-8 facilities. Their bonding capacity is approximately \$32 million. Even if the entire K-8 facility improvement plan moves forward, this leaves only \$7 million dollars for facility improvements for grades 9-12. This amount might be adequate to support facility improvements for the “designated” high school in Walla Walla but it would not be enough to construct a 9-12 facility in College Place. Therefore, the subcommittee has concluded that likelihood of College Place students leaving Walla Walla High School is remote and facility planning for Walla Walla School District should include the 400 College Place students.