

EIRC's Ivory: Sea Isle students are at a disadvantage

By MARY RUDLOFF
Ocean City Sentinel

SEA ISLE CITY - Three months ago, Dr. Charles Ivory, executive director of the Educational Information and Resource Center (EIRC), told the Sea Isle Board of Education student needs were not being met.

At the June 19 meeting, Ivory recommended to send middle school students - fifth through eighth grade - to another district, most likely Ocean City. At that time, he told the board the tiny Sea Isle district was not meeting some of those students' needs.

In the months since that statement, after the board voted down Ivory's recommendation, the board never asked what needs weren't being met.

EIRC is the outside organization hired in July 2006 to run the school district. Ivory is EIRC's head administrator.

This week, Ivory explained,

"What are they not receiving or not being offered? My expectation was it would be discussed at a school board meeting," Ivory said when contacted Tuesday. "I am not saying the educational program is inadequate. But in a larger school setting, like Ocean City, the opportunities

would be greater because of a larger number of children."

He explained students would benefit more with technology and World Language.

"Putting aside athletics, although I know that is an issue for a lot of people, those would be my key points," Ivory continued. "For some, athletics is a major issue, and it certainly is a real issue in our (Sea Isle) school. The school may not have the opportunity to field some teams this year because enrollment in the middle grades is low."

Some parents have said students from Sea Isle could have a disadvantage making

it onto Ocean City High School teams because of the limited athletic opportunities in Sea Isle.

Ivory said because Sea Isle City's students attend high school in Ocean City, sending middle grade students there would make for a smoother and more natural transition.

Projected enrollments for Sea Isle in the current school year have class sizes in single digits below eighth grade, with four students expected in sixth grade. The total enrollment is expected to be 80 students this year, with 36 of those in fifth through eighth grade. Last year's feasibility study projects enrollment dropping to 69 next year, with 30 students in the middle grades.

"My concerns about the district, and my recommendation to send the middle students to Ocean City has nothing

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ing to do with appropriateness of the program offered, but is about expanding options for students in a larger setting," Ivory said.

The timing of Ivory's recommendation - less than a month after EIRC staffer and then-Chief School Administrator Tim Wade recommended keeping Sea Isle City's school open at status quo - raised concerns and the anger of some board members and confused many of the public in attendance.

"Tim Wade's recommendation was based on the vote of the board. That is what his position was reflecting," Ivory said.

Ivory said heading into the May meeting, Wade had a series of recommendations from keeping the school open to closing entirely and sending all students to another district.

Ivory said the board was aware of them before the meeting.

"Tim (Wade) had a series of recommendations that were based on different options the board could take. They never got to his other options," Ivory said. "The recommendations ranged from the status quo to dissolution of the district. They were all in front of the board, and the board knew what they were, but voted for the first option, to stay open."

"They were presented in sequence, and the board knew that going into the meeting," Ivory said.

"Clearly, the board knew the options, and knew their responsibility was to vote as each resolution came up."

Ivory said the board is also aware that he will be coming back with the same recommendation - to send middle school students elsewhere.

"I still feel the same way about it, regardless of the board's vote. It is not coming from a negative place, but to improve the opportunities for the youngsters. I am committed to that and still feel that would be the proper direction for the board to take."

Ivory said his June recommendation was made in anticipation of the board giving EIRC authorization to move forward and giving the district a year to explore it.


"There was an option stated, to explore sending them for the September we are in now, but to me that was never a realistic option," he explained. "I will discuss when to bring it back with the board president and we'll pursue it at a later meeting."

Ivory said he was not ready to discuss what he called "a number of options" regarding sending students elsewhere and possibly keeping Sea Isle's school open as a primary school only.

Meanwhile there are not a lot of options to improve what is offered to the middle school students.

"There is not a lot we can do, if we don't have the numbers or the financial resources," Ivory said. "We have made a lot of leaps, in technology and in training the teachers to integrate it, and with the work in curriculum. I think we will see improvements, but there is only so far we can go with the financials and the numbers we have."

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