

Interview with Janet Vass
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Interview # 1: June 26, 2013
Phil Pogue

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Pogue: We’re in Carthage, Illinois. It’s June 26, 2013. My name is Phil Pogue. We’re doing follow-up on the topic of Illinois school reorganization. We have with us, here in Carthage, Janet Vass, who’s going to be giving us an update on the reorganization of Illini West, which was done through a conversion method.¹ We earlier had an oral history, provided by Robert Clifton, who was a board member at the time.

Janet, thank you for taking part in this reorganization. It’s been six years since the reorganization; what have been the biggest challenges?



*Janet Vass, board member
Illini West School District*

¹ A school district conversion is the formation of a single new high school district and new elementary districts, based upon the boundaries of dissolved unit districts. School district conversion includes forming dual districts from two or more existing unit districts or from one or more existing high school districts and one or more existing unit districts.

Vass: The biggest challenge that we are facing is just our building situation. We lease our building from Carthage Elementary. It's not big enough. We have portable classrooms outside. Our lunchroom is quite small. It's hard for our gym to fit all of our students, along with parents, when we hold events.

We recently tried to pass a referendum, so that we could participate in the Capitol Development Program and bond and get our part ready. That failed, mostly, I believe, due to the location. It was a non-central location that was proposed.

Pogue: I didn't bring out that you are currently a board member with Illini West.

Vass: Yes, currently I serve as a board member for Illini West. This is my second, four-year term. I'm the board secretary, and I'm a resident of Dallas City, Illinois.

Pogue: You talked about the issue of the high school being an older building and owned by the elementary. This is somewhat unique. Could you explain that?

Vass: Yes, technically, we are un-housed. When we passed our initial convergence, we knew that we would need a building, and Carthage High School building was available for us to lease. It's now owned by the Carthage Elementary, because each unit district disbursed into elementary districts, then forming that fourth district, which is our high school district. So, we currently lease our high school building from the Carthage Elementary.

Pogue: If repairs are needed, then how, legally, is that done?

Vass: Through our contract of lease that we have with the Carthage District, we pay a portion of the repairs, and then Carthage also has to pay a portion to help just maintain the building. It is a very old facility. I served on the Committee of Ten,² which was part of the reorganization committee that got the convergence vote on the ballot.

² The Committee of Ten was a working group of educators that, in 1892, recommended the standardization of American high school curriculum. This approach is often used in school consolidations today.

In just trying to solve all the problems, I think one of the things that probably we didn't think out as well as we could have—our options were limited for our high school building—is just the lack of technology being able to be implemented in an older building. We struggle yearly with how to provide our students with the capabilities they need in their classrooms, technically-wise.

Pogue: If you have a particular minor repair issue, do you have to go to the Carthage Elementary Board?

Vass: What we do is, we have a maintenance person that we now employ. They have a maintenance person, and it's just a matter of filling out a work order and then deciding which person is going to do the work at the time. Some things we do ourselves. It's within our contract that we have that we are able to. Other things, we have to leave it to the Carthage Elementary and their board, then, to vote and proceed with it. Sometimes there's a little delay with when things get repaired. There's just a lot of things that can happen within that parameter of maintaining the building.

Pogue: You also talked about the number of students that are in the building. Has that presented a problem with the enrollment?

Vass: Well, our enrollment has declined slightly since our initial class, but still we maintain... This year our enrollment is 385, I believe; 386 is what our enrollment is that we ended at the end of the year. Our cafeteria only seats 65 students at a time. So, we are forced to have an open campus at lunch.

Our gym only seats, I think it's 850; it might be 1,000, but I don't believe it is. So, graduations, other events that are held at our gym, even just our basketball games sometimes, it's very overcrowded trying to seat people.

Pogue: You've had two referenda on this and both were unsuccessful.

Vass: Correct.

Pogue: The second one, you actually had a slightly lower rate or bond capacity?

Vass: Right. Through the Capitol Development Grant and getting our name on the list when we did, because of our economic status, we qualify for 69.8 percent of our building, the funding to come from the state. So we're just bonding, basically, that 30 percent within our three communities. I think the failing vote came, based on the location of the proposed high school. Serving on the Committee of Ten, it was our hope that we could have a centrally located building.

When we started proposing sites, we solicited, through ads in the newspaper, for anyone within our district who had an interest in selling property to submit a bid to us. We received three that were all within the Carthage community. So, we selected what we thought was the most viable site, out of those choices and put that on the ballot.

It failed the first time. The second time we made a few adjustments, but the committee still felt that we should still keep the location where it was at, attempting it the second time. It failed even more, again because, I think, it spoke volumes that, though we have a large percent of students in Carthage, we still have a larger percent that live more rural, and they're wanting a more centrally located building.

Pogue: Because of the failed second attempt, what has the Illini West Board tried to do to deal with this problem?

Vass: Well, after our second attempt at failing, I think right now we're just getting through our end of the year, but we know that we're going to have to try to draw in more of our community members from each of our three communities.

The first two times, I think, that's been something that's hindered us, not having that full cooperation from everyone. So right now, we're just working on trying to form a committee. We're doing a survey that's out on our website for our parents and our students, so that we can try to establish what are their wishes and needs? Then we're going to proceed from there.

Pogue: To help people who are listening to this interview, how far is Dallas City from Carthage?

Vass: We are seventeen miles. From Dallas City to Carthage, it's about seventeen miles. Then La Harpe is just slightly further. They might be twenty. When I say miles, I'm talking from like the elementary school to our high school.

Pogue: And you certainly would have other people who live farther away from those districts.

Vass: Exactly.

Pogue: Before we go to other topics, are there any other issues tied to the building, which you indicated is the number one concern?

Vass: No, I believe it's just the location, and then currently, just the problems we face with just maintaining it and maintaining the technology that we need for our students.

Pogue: You've got now four districts and the double routes and who's busing whom. On the issue of busing, did all of that get resolved?

Vass: Initially, our elementaries continued to pick up all our high school students and our elementary students at the same time. Then they took their local students into the elementaries, and we had a high school bus that shuttled them from the elementaries to the high school.

This last year, Illini West purchased seven more buses, and we started doing our own transportation. The elementaries had expressed need to discontinue shuttling our students. It causes a delay in start and ending times and days. They just felt that they wanted Illini West to start being responsible for our students.

Pogue: You are doing the busing from Dallas City and La Harpe. Are you also doing it in the Carthage area, as well?

Vass: Correct. Currently we now own our own buses—we lease them—and we pick up all of our own students. So, sadly, we do have two buses following behind each other often in the rural routes, the elementary stopping to pick up their students and the high school stopping to pick up theirs.

Pogue: Were there any other issues beside the issue of time travel and after school, extra-curricular issues?

Vass: No, we had already been running shuttles for our high school students, and that continued.

Pogue: As far as property taxes, now, when you get your tax bills, if you're in Carthage or Dallas...Let's take Dallas City, because that's where you're from; you have a tax bill for the elementary, as well as Illini West?

Vass: Correct.

Pogue: Did that cause any issues when that came out?

Vass: Yes. I mean, always, no one wants to pay more taxes. So that did cause a little...I think our superintendent...We as board members, even as Committee of Ten when we initially did it, had some very good slide presentations to show people how to interpret their tax bills, so that when they started looking at that they weren't just thinking, Oh my gosh, I'm paying more.

Sadly, in the state of Illinois anyway, everyone is slowly learning that public education is not free, and taxes are a part of what we have to pay.

Pogue: Do you, as the Illini West board, discuss the issue of the tax levy with the other three boards and have any—

Vass: I'm sure our superintendents have had discussion. As boards, we have not met to discuss that. We all operate separately, in our own entities.

Pogue: You talked about the state funding. Were you able to get all your incentive money that was allowed by law?

Vass: Yes, yes, though, I don't know that it was any of our incentive money that was delayed in paying, but just our general state aid funding was delayed slightly. As always then, you have more mandated mandates that have to be done and, of course, less funding to do those.

Pogue: Because some of the money was paying \$4,000 for certified staff, did Illini West have to make any adjustments, once the state incentive money ran out? Once that was gone and salary differentials and all that, were there any needs that Illini West had to take, because the incentive money was not there anymore?

Vass: Fortunately, we were lucky that our current superintendent is very, very good with our money. In looking ahead, we always tried to work within the means we had, not using that incentive money to hold our budget up. So, like a lot of schools, we've had to make some tough decisions and making some changes, but we are still fortunate that we are very sound financially.

Pogue: You indicated that the enrollment is down a little bit. How much is it down from when the Illini West District was created?

Vass: I would say we're down about ninety students.

Pogue: Was that anticipated?

Vass: Yes, as Committee of Ten, when we were doing our slide [presentation], educating people about what was happening within our local community school districts, we had projected that we would see a slight decrease.

Of course, some things you can't fully project, not knowing the economy, not knowing the job situations in the communities and stuff. But we did anticipate a slight decrease, though we've also been lucky to have other people moving into our district. So, in some regards, I think if I could look back, I don't think it's dropped quite as much as we had anticipated.

Pogue: You talked about state funding, the impact of delayed payments and the loss of state aid. How harmful have the transportation reductions been? Since you were, I guess, contracting out with the elementary, did you not really see that?

Vass: Exactly. We were paying a rate to transport our students. As they changed that transportation formula... For our district, the size that it is, it is hard to anticipate, project, what you might need or not need. It's my fear that we are able to run shuttles, which help our parents whose students do not drive for the after school events and

such. That's something that could suffer, is the extra transportation that we're able to do.

Pogue: Because the elementary districts then got cut on transportation, did they talk to the Illini West board about changes in the contract?

Vass: No. They just simply...It came time for them to renew or not renew, and they just simply did not want to renew. They were not willing to really hold any discussions, per se, on possible incentives or changes to continue.

Pogue: As far as grant reductions, did Illini West deal with any of that from the state?

Vass: Well, yeah, all schools have. It's like anything; they have all these mandates, and they don't...Each year they're giving you less. Special ed [education], there's just a lot of areas that they've slowly cut, and we've just had to slowly tighten what we do.

Pogue: As far as the economy—you talked a little bit about that—how has the economy in Western Illinois, and particularly in this district, impacted Illini West?

Vass: Well, we have a large portion that is a low economic portion of our district. I think, in some regards, there are benefits just as much as there are pros and cons to that. But we do have a lot of our students that come from low economic homes.

So, like anything, it's when the gas prices go up, it's harder to transport, to go to ball games, to go to extra-curricular things, lunches. There's a lot of areas that it does put a strain. Our book fees, our driver's education fees, we try to be conscious of that and keep them in an affordable range.

Pogue: As relates to turnover, let's talk first about the administration. Has that been the same since the creation of Illini West?

Vass: No, we are on our second superintendent.

Pogue: Was that person in the district when the transition took place?

Vass: No, she worked as a superintendent for a neighboring district.

Pogue: As far as board turnover, I imagine that, when Illini West was created, you had representation from the three former districts. Has that changed?

Vass: I feel like it's changed minimally. After the first two years, we had a teacher; she's a teacher in the elementary district; she has small children, and she elected not to run for Carthage. So, we had a little turnover with that spot. Then, just now, we've changed seat selection in a Carthage spot. Then Dallas City, just now, this last year, with Mr. Clifton leaving and filling that spot again. So, I'd say, longevity-wise, it would just be normal to me, as people run. You feel like you've accomplished what you can, and you go. I don't think it's been excessive.

Pogue: To review for our listeners, is your board set up in a unique way, as far as geographical regions, or are they the traditional congressional townships?

Vass: We have two representatives from each of the three elementary districts, and then we have one person at-large.

Pogue: So when the ballot comes out, people that are living in the Dallas City old district, they could have up to two representatives.

Vass: Well, two people on the board represent, correct. But they're only identified as either Dallas City Elementary, La Harpe Elementary or Carthage Elementary, as far as their location.

Pogue: Does the candidate at-large run as an at-large candidate?

Vass: Yes. That person can come from any of the three districts, whoever receives the most votes.

Pogue: Have you had a case where you've not had enough representatives to run from La Harpe, Dallas City or Carthage?

Vass: Thankfully no, not at this time.

Pogue: If there is a resignation from the board, and that person is from La Harpe, does that mean that the replacement must come from La Harpe?

Vass: Yes. We had that happen with Mr. Clifton. He resigned before his term was done, and Beth Pence... We had people apply from Dallas City, who were interested in serving; we interviewed them, and then we selected someone to fulfill the rest of his term.

Pogue: Concerning staff assignments, you had three unit districts, and then you broke into three elementary and one high school. You had the movement from teachers... Did they have the option to come to Illini West or stay?

Vass: Yes. They had the option, within what was available to them. Now, Dallas City had deactivated [shut down] their high school, back in 1999, and we tuitioned our students to Nauvoo.

At that time, the Dallas City teachers made that transition into the Nauvoo district, the ones who could. So, we had no high school teachers coming in to our convergence. The only high school teachers that we had to worry about blending were the Carthage and the La Harpe teachers.

Pogue: Were there any issues tied to seniority or anything else that was kind of unusual, because of going to a conversion method?

Vass: No, I think we just had to establish what that seniority list was. The pay scale, we went with the highest, which was Carthage. So everyone coming knew that they would... And the Carthage teachers would then stay with what their pay scale was. So, I believe, for La Harpe, that was a slight pay increase for them.

Pogue: That means that the Illini West Board sets the salaries for the teachers at Illini West, and Carthage Elementary sets the salary—

Vass: Correct, once we started. The Illini West, though, we went with what the Carthage High School had started. That was our base. But now we all four serve separately.

Pogue: And are the salaries still somewhat comparable?

Vass: Yes.

Pogue: With the blending of people, were there any issues as to whom was coming to Illini West from the support staffs?

- Vass: Again, this only pertained to La Harpe and Carthage. Dallas City, our elementary stayed as it was. I think everyone was operating modestly, so there really were not any issues. In fact, we had to advertise for new staff.
- Pogue: On salaries there, were you using the same idea of taking the—
- Vass: Carthage, they're non-certified; we're unionized. So, again, we went with their contract base.
- Pogue: And are your support staff now unionized too?
- Vass: Yes.
- Pogue: Is it wall-to-wall, or is it a separate?³ Are they part of the teacher's union?
- Vass: No, they are not. It is a separate union.
- Pogue: Does Illini West have any third party contracts to operate anything? You hire your own bus drivers, you hire—
- Vass: Correct. Now we have our own staff, yes.
- Pogue: Are your cafeteria employees your own people?
- Vass: No. With the cafeteria, that's the one...Before, with the buses, we had that issue, but our cafeteria, that's part of our lease. Those are actually employed by the Carthage Elementary. And through our lease agreement, we support part of their wages.
- Pogue: So they're employed by Carthage Elementary? You didn't have any other issues with special education co-ops or anything like that? You just stayed right where you were?
- Vass: Correct, correct. We also house the West Central Special Ed Co-op [Cooperative] in our buildings too.
- Pogue: One of the goals, by having a conversion high school, was to have advanced courses, as well as stronger special education and

³ Wall-to-Wall means that both the district's licensed employees and classified employees are covered by the same contract and represented by the same bargaining agent.

remedial services. Have you been able to do that and maintain it, even with the loss of state aid?

Vass: Well, that has definitely been a hard thing to overcome. This next year, we're getting ready to implement an eight-block schedule. I believe then that we'll start to see a little more expanding.

Our biggest handicap still is the size of our building. Because we are technically un-housed and we lease our building and we have over half of our classrooms outside in portable classrooms, it just kind of gets in our way with what we're wanting to do.

Then, of course, with the funding changing to the negative each year, that makes it harder also. So, I really don't think that we've been able to expand as full as we would like, but I'm hoping with the implementation of the eight-block that we can see at least some gain there.

Pogue: Could you describe what the eight-block means?

Vass: Our students before had about forty-two minutes of instructional time, then they would have some passing time, and they would be in a class again. Now, with the eight-block, they have a ninety minute instructional time. So we have an "A" and a "B" day. We have four classes on "A" day. Then on "B" day we have four classes.

So, now our students have the opportunity, in that ninety minute span, to be with their instructor. It is my hope that, through using different teaching strategies, that they can get into their classwork, their lecture, they can get into their labs, and then they have twenty minutes, at the end, where they are still with their teacher, so that if there is any problems, they can go directly to that person, just saving that time when they're home and maybe get confused.

That forty-two minute span, especially in our science classes, in our food prep classes, any of those that require labs, it's really hard to really physically get much done. Now they'll have that opportunity to be able to work at a pace that will encompass

everyone, hopefully, and have that extra instructional time on the end.

Pogue: Does busing help you have a longer day with students here in the building, or is it just strictly the re-vamping of the curriculum?

Vass: It's re-vamping of the curriculum and the scheduling of our day. It's still basically starts and ends at the same time.

Pogue: Then, dealing with extracurricular activities and conference alignment, did you anticipate that with a new high school, a larger high school, you'd be able to add more sports? Or is it, basically, you were able to keep what sports you had by having more participants?

Vass: Actually, we were able to expand a little bit. We have the bass fishing; we have the skeet shooting; so we've actually expanded.

The other side of it is that we've also been handicapped, as a lot of other schools have, because [with] co-ops, consolidations, our conference has changed dramatically. Our travel time has expanded in that regard.

You'd need to interview our athletic director to be properly educated in all, but every year it's been an issue of people dropping out of our conference, people joining our conference, some of them partially for football. It's constantly every year, our athletic director...It's just constant moving. It's not just Illini West; it's a lot of school districts, as they're forced to co-op with other schools for their extracurricular.

Again, then that lessens the pool of people, locally, that you have to play. So then you have to broaden that circle, in order to fill your schedule. I would say that that's been a very tiresome job for Mr. [Joey] Dion [athletics director].

Pogue: We've talked about the tax levies. Has the issue of not having a high school impacted the now three feeder districts or elementary districts?

Vass: Educationally, I guess. Is that what you're asking?

Pogue: Right. Are there any change that... You talked about some of the changes and conflicts with the transportation and the like, but were there any in the now two tax levies? Were there any impacts, negatively or positively, because the K-8 are just focusing on K-8 issues?⁴

Vass: I think where the negative impact is, is just people do not want to have to pay more. So they look at it as just more money out of their pocket. It's really hard sometimes to constantly educate people on what we have and what we need.

In Dallas City, in some regards, we were fortunate that we de-activated, and our elementary district was able to concentrate on our elementary. At one time, out of the three, we probably had the best elementary.

Now La Harpe has been able to concentrate on their elementary, and they just re-did their high school. Again, they are also now on a very competitive level with their building and being able to serve their students with technology and everything.

Sadly, those students, when we come to our Carthage building, fall off a cliff. That's just... The problem that we have is educating people that now we have that in Dallas City; now we have that in La Harpe; don't we want that for our high school?

Then, Carthage students, I think their parents look at it as like... They want to keep it in Carthage, so they're happy with what it is. It's just a... Yeah, that's where the conflict is.

Pogue: Now you are kind of like the issue with the dual district and the high school district, you have three feeder systems. And you're now having to coordinate math, language arts, science. What's being done in La Harpe and Dallas City and Carthage? Is it similar in preparing them for their first year at Illini West?

Vass: We've been fortunate that our junior high students or teachers, I think they regularly have meetings where they come here to the

⁴ K-8 centers are schools in the United States that enroll students from kindergarten/pre-K (age 5-6) through 8th grade (up to age 14), combining the typical elementary school (K-5/6) and junior high or middle school (6/7-8).

high school, our feeder districts do, and they work on curriculum and aligning it.

Of course, the state sets the standards that we all have to do, so we all work towards that. Has it been seamless? No. We've had hiccups and things along the way, but again, we're just working on it as best we can (laughs).

Pogue: You have talked about some of the issues tied to conversion. How did the students from the three communities adapt or adjust, coming to a new building?

Vass: Again, in Dallas City, we were already transitioned, because our high school students were used to going to another community for school. Our son graduated from Nauvoo Colusa High School, but our daughter was the first in the first freshman class. I think for them the transition was a little easier than probably for the La Harpe students.

Then again, even for the Carthage students, who had to get used to a lot of other new faces...I know we changed how we do graduation, from valedictorian and salutatorian to summa cum laude, where we give all students the recognition for their grade point average. Bringing the three together, it was too hard to try to select just one, after each had been on a separate schedule for the three previous years.

Pogue: Did the regional office help the new district?

Vass: I confidently feel that they have been very helpful to us. Any time we've had a question, any time we've had a concern, they've been a great resource for our administrators and for us. Basically they have also went through some changes the last couple of years. Even through those, I still felt that they were always as helpful as they could be.

Pogue: Besides the regional office, did you have any other assistance in this unique way to reorganize, once approval was done? Did the State Board of Education provide any assistance?

Vass: No. No, really it was just our elected board and community members. Our Committee of Ten had worked hard in trying to

research and establish a baseline of needs and concerns. Then, once our board was elected, before we actually started serving, we started meeting, trying to strategize to implement those things.

Pogue: Have there been any new reorganization talks in this area, now that this kind of conversion was done? You talked about Nauvoo, and I know Nauvoo has been looking at—

Vass: I do know that our administrator and a board member attended a couple of their meetings and expressed willingness if they were, because initially Nauvoo was a part of our convergence. The first time we did it, it was four communities in our convergence, and Nauvoo was our fourth.

When it failed, and it failed drastically in the Nauvoo District, their people elected not to be a part of it again. Now they're having to look at options that they have. So they have expressed an interest, and I know that we have attended some meetings. But that's as far as it has gone.

It's hard to change. It's hard for people to realize when they have to change. I think that's the biggest obstacle we've just experienced. Again, I'll go back to Dallas; because we had already transitioned, I felt like that was a little easier for us, versus even the Carthage and La Harpe District just learning.

Pogue: As we deal with some of the things that were stated in the referendum, we talked about student activities, more sports. Were you able to do more on the student activity side and the fine arts side, because of being a larger high school?

Vass: Yeah, I definitely think, again because our students went to Nauvoo, their population was less. Academically, that's where I have seen the clubs and things that we've been able to expand into, for our different students.

Our FFA has been real strong, again because of the viability of numbers, but also, just with our upper level students, we just had a group that participated with robotics and everything. So those are definitely options that we never would have had as a smaller school.

Pogue: Were there any increases in other vocational kinds of classes, or is it just being able to have enough enrollment to keep those?

Vass: Well, a lot of what we've faced in our vocational—and, again, it's the confines of our building—our shop area here is very, very antiquated; it's very old. There are limitations of what can be done.

Our FFA program, we were able to build our own greenhouse, and there were things there that we were able to grow. But, again, we just have limitations. It's the confinement of our campus that we are in.

So, I feel like we could expand more if... Technology-wise we're limited. When you start looking at a lot of the CAD [computer aided design] programs and all those things, through industrial arts, that need the technology to be able to support it, we just have definite limitations as to what we can provide and do.

Pogue: I just have a few more questions. Is Illini West doing any cooperative types of things with the other high schools around it, such as shared teachers, shared courses?

Vass: We haven't previously. That's not to say that that won't happen as it progresses. Right now, this next school year, we have the possibility of sharing a position with West Prairie, a part time position. We did share band with Carthage Elementary, but that's limited. We sent our Industrial Arts, we had... Hamilton, I guess, has a program that we did send some students to, but I don't think that that was anything that Carthage wasn't already doing.

Pogue: Our next to last question deals with how the community now feels about reorganization. Obviously, they've been involved with some referendum issues, tied to bond sales and a new high school. Forgetting the issue of the building, what are their feelings toward what has been offered to high school age students?

Vass: I think, mostly—again I speak from the Dallas City community—when our students were tuitioned to Nauvoo, we had no board representation. We really had no say in the direction our students went.

I think that they're happy to have more ownership in what happens with our high school students. But there is always that conflict or rub anytime you have three communities that come together. Parents are as competitive as students are for placement, whether it be in class rank or on the basketball court or the football team. But I don't know that that's maybe anything out of the ordinary in a bigger school our size.

Pogue: As part of the referendum, there was always the concern that Carthage was the big person on the block and that would limit the opportunities for extracurriculars for students coming from La Harpe and Dallas City. Has that been the case?

Vass: Oh, I think people still have those concerns, but I know from personal experience...My niece, who is a graduated senior this year from Dallas City District, was the head drum majorette. She's on the baseball team; she's on the dance team. I don't think that she's ever felt contained or restricted from doing or achieving something she wanted. So, definitely the opportunity is there.

I'm not going to say though that some people still don't have that stigma of "Carthage rules." I think you're always going to...Mostly though, I think it's with the parents; it's not really so much with our students. I think it's just hard for adults to let go of the "Blue Boy pride" or the anti-Blue Boy, you know, if you lived in one of the other districts.⁵ I think it's really more the parents than it is the students.

Pogue: Here's our last question. There are some unique challenges for conversion districts. In doing that, you were kind of a pioneer in Illinois, compared to the more popular methods of reorganization, such as consolidation, annexation or deactivation. You talked about deactivation in Dallas City. When you look at it, what are the biggest challenges, if you go conversion?

Vass: Well, I'll tell you, we really looked at it a lot, and we learned a lot from our neighbors, who were in Media, Union and Stronghurst [Illinois]. A couple years before, they had a very large vote. I think they even wanted to encompass Roseville, at one time, with that

⁵Blue Boy is the Carthage School District mascot.

consolidation vote. Roseville was out of it, and then it became those three communities. We saw quickly how the board was formed. It all became one district and some tough decisions had to be made about buildings and such.

So, when convergence came to us... Actually I have to say that Mr. Langley, Charles Langley, who was our superintendent at Dallas City, he is the first person I know of that heard a bit, learned about it, presented it to us. His hope was then [to keep] that local authority active in your elementaries. I have to say that that is what sold it for our districts.

They saw in the Stronghurst District where suddenly students were being bussed much further than what they had thought they would [be], and their transportation ran differently, where we locally have control over our younger students still. It's just our high school students that are being bussed. That's why I preferred the convergence over consolidation.

Pogue: Janet, I want to thank you for sharing an update on the six years that conversion has been in place here at Carthage. Is there anything else that you would like to add, as we conclude?

Vass: No, I think we've covered everything. It's just, like I said, it's like anything; it just continues to change, and sadly, all schools are confined by the limitations of funding that we receive. We have struggles that are the same as everyone else.

Pogue: Well, thank you again for being in our follow-up on the topic of Illinois school reorganization.

Vass: Thank you.

(end of interview)