

Schools increase outsourcing to educational services centers

After many failed levies, Springboro considers using the educational services center even more.

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SPRINGBORO — Butler County's Lakota Local Schools district — Ohio's seventh largest — contracts with the Warren County Educational Services Center for the supervisors overseeing its gifted programs.

This is just one service the center provides to 14 school districts in six counties, including the Miamisburg and Preble Shawnee districts' occupational and physical therapy programs.

Today, March 9, the Springboro Board of Education will consider whether to shift more work to the center to cut costs.

"That's the nature of our business model," said Tom Isaacs, assistant superintendent at the Warren County center. "We have to be able to do it for less than they can do it themselves or they will do it themselves. We will typically sell a school district almost any service they would request."

The Springboro district, rated Excellent with Distinction by the state, laid off 30 employees and closed a school as part of its cuts last year in the aftermath of voter rejection of four consecutive levies.

Before returning to voters, the board is reviewing potential savings through contracting services, including those offered by the service centers, rather than hiring staff.

"I want to make sure that in these times we really are looking at all the different avenues," board member Don Miller said during a Feb. 23 work session as members decided to outsource more services.

School districts often have contracted with Educational Services Centers for special education services, such as a school for 50 disabled kindergarten through 12th grade students in the former Laura Farrell Elementary School in Franklin. Currently, 10 area school districts pay the center \$129 a day per student to attend the school, which operates on a \$1 million budget.

"School districts are on tough times and need to find ways to save dollars," Isaacs said. "The largest amount of our business has to do with our ability to save them money."

Unlike Springboro and other school districts, the Warren County center is nonunion. It pays its employees less than any district. The Springboro district would save a minimum of \$3,000 a year

at the entry level, more than \$11,000 for the most experienced teacher with a bachelor's degree, according to a recent comparison of salary ranges.

Formerly called County Offices of Education, Ohio law renamed them Educational Services Centers in 1995. While continuing to provide some services to local school districts through state funding, the centers now provide other services through contracts with districts.

The Montgomery County Educational Services Center provides a range of services in nine counties, including hearing or vision intervention services to the Wayne, Carlisle, Springboro and Franklin districts in Warren County. "They come to us because we have quality staff here and they can get the service probably cheaper than they can do it themselves," said Don Shearer of the Montgomery County center.

Miamisburg schools contract with the educational service centers in Montgomery and Warren counties. "We annually evaluate the services offered by the ESCs, and contract services based on meeting the needs of our students, while being the most fiscally responsible," said Marcia Watts, assistant superintendent and director of Pupil Services in Miamisburg.

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