

Building Stronger Partnerships for Bennett's Future Success

Operational Sharing Agreements Continue to Expand Opportunities While Maintaining Bennett CSD's Independence

Operational sharing agreements continue to expand opportunities for students while maintaining Bennett Community School District's independence and long-term stability.

Operational sharing allows districts to collaborate in ways that strengthen educational opportunities, improve efficiency, and provide additional support for students and staff. By working together, schools are able to share expertise and resources while continuing to serve and preserve their local communities.

When I was hired as the shared superintendent for Calamus-Wheatland Community School District and Bennett Community School District, my goal was to help ensure that both districts were systematically positioned for success over the next 15 years. Over the past several years, we have worked intentionally to establish operational sharing agreements that strengthen both districts and help create a more stable and sustainable future for our students and communities.

Recently, Midland Community School District approached Calamus-Wheatland CSD about operationally sharing multiple positions. In order to explore that opportunity, we first needed to ensure that Bennett CSD would continue to be well supported. Because of that, we looked for ways to strengthen Bennett's existing partnerships and create a structure that would continue to benefit our students and community.

Over the past two years, we have intentionally increased operational sharing discussions and opportunities with Tipton CSD. Sharing the superintendent with Tipton CSD instead of Calamus-Wheatland CSD creates approximately \$20,000 in savings for Bennett CSD and also provides a more natural transition for many of our students. It creates a stronger regional partnership while allowing each district to build operational relationships that best support their students and communities, similar to the partnership between Durant CSD and Wilton CSD.

In the past, some concerns have been raised about whether Tipton CSD would truly want what is best for Bennett CSD. There are several important reasons why this partnership is beneficial for both districts.

Why Operational Sharing?

Operational sharing is a program supported by the State of Iowa that allows school districts to work together while still remaining independent districts. These partnerships can provide several benefits for students and communities:

Expanded Opportunities for Students

Sharing staff and expertise across districts can help increase academic, extracurricular, and support opportunities for students.

Responsible Use of Community Resources

Operational sharing allows districts to work more efficiently by sharing positions, services, or resources instead of duplicating them in each district.

Stronger Regional Collaboration

When neighboring districts work together, it strengthens relationships between schools and communities and helps ensure long-term stability for rural districts.

Maintaining Local Identity and Control

Even while sharing certain operational roles, each district continues to operate independently with its own school board, leadership, and community identity.

First, Bennett CSD currently receives approximately \$200,000 in operational sharing revenue, which helps support programs and operations without placing additional burden on local taxpayers. As Tipton CSD continues to grow its own operational sharing opportunities, it also stands to benefit. Operational sharing provides meaningful financial support while allowing districts to remain independent, since districts must remain separate in order to participate in these partnerships. Bennett CSD will continue to operate as its own school district with its own board of education and community identity.

Second, Bennett CSD is already operationally sharing maintenance and operations with Tipton CSD, and together we are working on a 15-year facility plan that will help Bennett be proactive in maintaining and improving its facilities.

Third, operational sharing can create simple but meaningful efficiencies. One example is transportation. By working together, districts may be able to reduce the number of spare buses that must be kept on hand. Instead of each district maintaining extra buses for rare situations, districts can support one another when a need arises. If a bus driver becomes sick and substitutes are not available, districts can work together to ensure students are still transported safely and on time. This type of collaboration allows districts to be responsible stewards of community resources while continuing to prioritize student safety and service.

Finally, the more successful school districts are across our local area, the stronger our overall communities become. When districts support one another, it benefits students, families, and communities throughout the region.

As Tipton Superintendent Brandon Borseth shared:

“Strong communities promote and maintain strong relationships. Sharing a superintendent between Bennett and Tipton is another step toward strengthening both communities and both school districts. A strong Bennett CSD means a strong Tipton CSD, and a strong city of Tipton means a strong city of Bennett. I have had the honor of getting to know Bennett through the excellent secondary students that I get to interact with at our middle and high schools. I could not be more excited to learn and grow now with the educators at Bennett as well as our youngest students. This is more than financial, this is about building stronger students, stronger communities, and a more powerful future.”

While I am personally saddened by this transition, I truly believe this partnership will provide long-term benefits for the Bennett community. It creates a stronger system of support for our students, increases opportunities for collaboration among staff, and helps position the district for long-term stability. Most importantly, it allows us to continue focusing on what matters most: providing the best possible opportunities for Bennett students.

By working collaboratively with neighboring districts, we can help ensure that Bennett Community School District remains a strong school district and community for many years to come.

Please feel free to reach out to me if you have any questions.

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