

Nankin Mills: A School District In Crisis

By LEONARD POGER
Westland Observer Editor

The current Nankin Mills School District crisis was on the verge of its present status for more than a decade. Merging the district of 1.25 square miles in the north-central section of Westland has been talked about since Supt. Hartan Hudgins came to the community in 1955.

Then, as now, the Nankin Mills senior high school students, without a building of their own, attended school in the Livonia School District while the Nankin Mills school board paying their tuition.

Livonia has continually said that it would continue to take the Nankin Mills students as long as it had space for them. But last month, the board in Livonia, threatened by a recall vote of six of its seven members by angry parents, agreed to not accept any more Nankin Mills students after the end of September. Those now in the Livonia high school classes and those to enroll next September will be allowed to continue attending until graduation.

FACED WITH THE problem of making available a high school for its tenth, 11th, and 12th graders, the Nankin Mills Board decided recently to try to have the Michigan Dept. of Education accomplish what was proposed by local school officials for many years—dissolve the district and have its land divided along the Hines Parkway between the Livonia and Wayne Community districts.

Livonia would get the half of the district north of the parkway with Wayne getting the property south of the parkway. There are three elementary schools in the north section and two elementary and a junior high, with students attending staggered sessions in the south portion.

Although it was clear from the financial standpoint that Nankin Mills could never support its own independent high school, there never has been a strong public push to divide the district or to merge it entirely with either Livonia or Wayne.

THE NANKIN MILLS school board in the past has indicated that it would favor the entire district taken in by the Livonia system. But the board has repeatedly opposed taking in any part of the smaller district, saying that it has enough ground and building problems without adding any new property to its district.

The Wayne Community district, which also has its own growth problems, has on two separate occasions pointed out while it is opposed to taking in the entire Nankin Mills district, it would be willing to accept the south half.

"It should be made clearly understood that the board of education (in Wayne) is not seeking this annexation but recognizes that school districts must take some responsibility to assure educational opportunities for all children," the board's resolutions have said.

The issue is clouded by an annexation attempt by Livonia city officials to annex a parcel of Westland (the Nankin Mills) property which included the proposed Westland Shopping Center, which opened

in 1965 and now has a property assessment of more than \$10 million.

Nankin Township officials followed Livonia's land steal, initiated in 1963, which led to an attitude of "if we can't have the part of Nankin we want, we don't want any part of it," in reference to the Nankin Mills school problem.

The Livonia system already includes two large portions of Westland and has 4,000 Westland students enrolled in its schools.

THE PROPOSAL to split the Nankin Mills district between its neighbors nearly came to a vote in 1966 but political maneuvering behind the scenes, part of the unsuccessful annexation move of 1963, resulted in the Wayne County Intermediate School Board in recommending a plan to have Wayne Community take in the entire smaller district.

This was scheduled for a vote in December, 1966, but the election was cancelled the month before by the Wayne Community board. The reason was that a technical error was found in another school merger election set for the same day. The county agreed not to jeopardize the other election proposals in either of the county and called off all the elections.

Nankin Mills, faced with a classroom shortage in its junior high, then moved ahead to have voters pass on a \$ million bond issue at a special election on June 29, 1967. This election was also cancelled when the state department of education ordered the district to resolve its reorganization problem first.

Another election was held last Dec. 10 on the question of merging the smaller district with the larger Wayne Community system. Wayne reiterated its opposition to accepting the entire district.

To no one's surprise, the pro-financial plan was defeated by voters in both districts.

A 1965 REPORT made by a University of Michigan survey team showed that the Nankin Mills district, made up entirely of homes, with the exception of the Hawthorne Valley Golf club and two gas stations, would never have the tax base to support a school system, let alone a new high school.

The study said: "Even with the addition of \$4 million or \$5 million to the present state equalized valuation of the district, the estimated valuation per student will continue to decline to something less than \$8,000 by 1970-75. (The level is now \$6,808, not counting the nearly 500 students attending high school in Livonia and just under \$6,000 per student if those 500 are included.)"

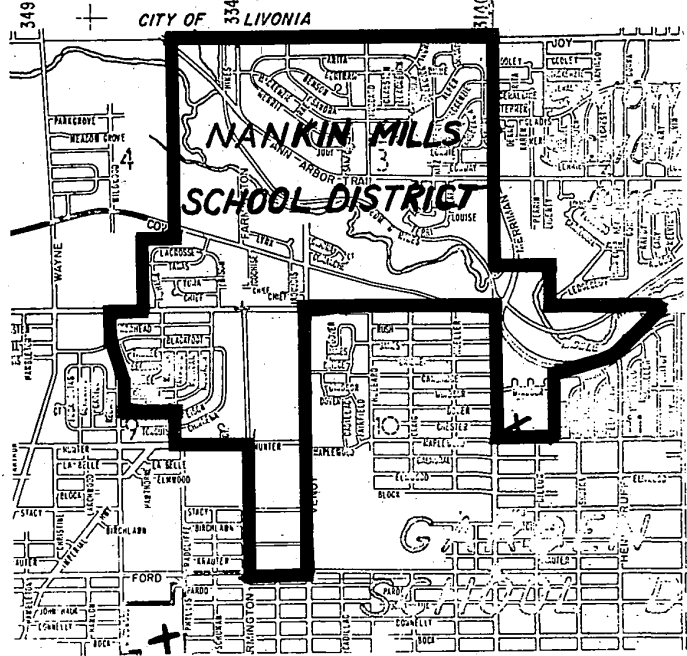
"The Nankin Mills district must find a permanent solution to the problem of secondary education for its youngsters."

On the basis of comparative data for neighboring districts, it would seem that Livonia would be in the best position to receive Nankin Mills.

"It should be made clear, however, that the addition of Nankin Mills to Wayne or Livonia would have the effect of depressing the amount of taxable wealth per child in either district."

A recent study made by the Nankin Mills school administrators pointed this out in more graphic terms. The district, with an estimated tax base of \$22,277,540, has \$13,366,524 in the north half, with \$9,911,012 in the south half. However, since the tax base goes more students.

Last September, there were 2,238 students living north of the parkway, with 1,585 in elementary schools, 373 in junior high and 280 attending high school in Livonia on a tuition basis. In the south portion of the district, there were 1,521 students, 974 in elementary schools, 349 in junior high, and 200 in Livonia high school.



On the tax situation, there are little differences between the three districts.

Nankin Mills is now levying \$30.80 per \$1,000 of state equalized valuation for operational purposes, compared to \$30.50 in Westland and \$28.90 in Livonia.

WHAT WOULD HAPPEN to the valuation behind each pupil if the Wayne and Livonia districts accepted the Nankin Mills district?

In Livonia, according to the figures compiled last fall by Nankin Mills, Livonia would have its tax base grow from \$480,255,036 to \$502,621,560 but its tax base behind each pupil would drop from \$14,389 to \$13,854 if it accepted the north half of the smaller district.

If Livonia took in the entire district, the valuation behind each student would drop even further, down to \$13,532. Wayne Community officials are looking at figures which show the same effect in their district.

If Wayne accepted the south half of the smaller district, the tax base would grow to \$199,477,075 but the valuation per pupil would drop from \$9,420 to \$9,171. If Wayne took in the entire district, the entire 3,800 students would drop the new system's valuation per student to \$8,858.

Dr. Conner said that the two primary users of the closed circuit television system would go to "help relieve the inflexibility of the physical plant (building) and permit wider use of presentations made by resource people who can spend only limited time meeting class groups."

Why can't Nankin Mills build its own high school?

A STUDY was made on this question and results showed that "construction and staff costs of a high school program are prohibitive. Our construction projections indicate that the high school population would probably not exceed 600 or 700 students."

It is doubtful that the North Central Association (which is an accrediting agency for high schools and colleges) would approve or accredit a high school for this limited student population. The state board of education must also approve the

creation of a high school district. A minimum of 10 additional mills (\$10 per \$1,000) would be required to properly staff and operate even a very limited program."

There have been public and private comments over the years about "Livonia school district taxpayers paying to educate Westland children and they can't Westland, now that it's a city, form its own district?"

It sounds simple but under existing state laws, it would be virtually impossible.

School districts are separate governmental agencies just as the municipal government is separated from the county and

ship, and well into Washtenaw County.

Under present state laws, consolidation of all the school districts and cities are never identical (with the exception of Detroit).

For example, the city of Westland includes all of the Nankin Mills district and parts of seven other districts. These include Livonia, Wayne Community, (the largest portions), and small sections of Garden City, Taylor, Cherry Hill, Inkster, and Romulus School Districts.

PLYMOUTH is another good example of this problem. The city of Plymouth occupies a small part of the Plymouth Community School District which includes through Plymouth Township, Canton Town-

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Overcrowning Stirs Parents

By DWIGHT JARRELL

More than 40 parents held a meeting of their own recently in the hallway outside the council rooms of the Livonia Board of Education while the latter was still in session and threatened recall action against six of the seven members of the Board.

The 40 are part of a group of irate parents whose children, some 160 of them, are presently attending ninth grade at Lowell Junior High School but next fall in the tenth grade face transfer to Franklin High School and McKinley Elementary School on half-day schedules.

THE ANGRY PARENTS blame the move, and similar ones in the past, on overburdening of Livonia school facilities by students from outside the district.

More than 200 Nankin students pay tuition to attend school here and the protesting parents argue that tuition students are more privileged than their own in the Board's considerations of full-day schedules and assignment of schools.

The parents of the Lowell ninth graders point out that their children have been shuffled by the Board from school to school, often on half-day schedules, since the seventh grade.

To date, they have attended four schools.

THE PARENTS CONTEND that in their nomadic schooling, the children have missed out on numerous educational advantages and opportunities either because of a lack of facilities or the shortened school hours.

They also said that the faculty is "waiting to see what will happen" on the proposed reorganization of the district and adopting a status-quo attitude. No mass exercise of teachers is expected by the principal.

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Closed Circuit TV Approved

Wayne Memorial High School, which serves the south end of the Westland community, will get a closed circuit television system in the near future.

The Wayne Community Board of Education, whose district includes Westland, approved the spending of \$700 to help buy the equipment.

The school's Student Senate has said it will contribute \$1,000 toward the project, designed to be used in the instructional program, the board was told.

The board's action to buy additional equipment to be used with existing facilities at the high school came after a report and recommendation from Dr. Orval Conner, assistant superintendent for instruction and curriculum, and George Bell, Wayne Memorial principal, who was added in the presentation by

Resolution Declares School Emergency

Following is the text of the resolution adopted by the Nankin Mills Board of Education declaring an emergency in the district:

"WHEREAS, after complete, thorough and detailed discussion thereon, this Board has come to the conclusion that the financially distressed situation of this School District is so acute as to warrant drastic action, and

"WHEREAS, this District has been informed that, after the school year 1968-69, it will have no place to enroll its high school students, and

"WHEREAS, this District, currently operating on the provisions of Section 2 of Chapter 4 of the Michigan Finance Commission, is presently operating on several sessions, and

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School Crisis Blamed On Law

Blame for the crisis the Nankin Mills School Board finds itself in now was attributed to state law which is incomplete in regard to school district reorganization.

This was the comment of Westland City Councilman John Markes, of 8425 Trent Drive, who is a resident of the Nankin Mills district.

When asked by the Observer for his feelings about the school district's perplexing crisis, Markes said: "The current situation that we find ourselves in is one that possibly could have been avoided had the state act included provision for state action to determine the fate of the district—should the provision for determination by the people to do so."

Markes was referring to a K-12 law adopted several years ago to encourage consolidation and reorganization of non-high school districts, such as Nankin Mills, to have all of the school systems in the state operating on a kindergarten-through-12th grade program.

The law allows public elections to resolve the reorganiza-

tion problems but does not provide any solutions if the reorganization proposals are rejected in elections.

"The law is all new reads," Markes continued, "requires action, provides that the times, places, and manner of conducting elections and yet it says nothing at all that even vaguely suggests what will happen should the election results fail to give direction to the legislature."

"The failure of the State Legislature to complete the act makes compliance of the law by a school district impossible. I agree that the legislature should be petitioned to make a determination as to the partitioning of the district if the law they enacted is to be observed."

"As much as I would rather see the people be afforded another opportunity to exercise self-determination, time is running out."

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Bill Gives Hope To Schools

The Nankin Mills Board of Education is keeping a close eye on the Friday slot of the week's calendar.

That is the deadline for the House of Representatives in the State Legislature to report bills out of committee. Of obvious interest to the Nankin Mills School Board is a bill in the House of Education Committee which would enable the board to resolve the current reorganization crisis.

At present, the state law allows for reorganization of school districts without a public vote. But no more than 90 per cent of the land of a district can be attached to a neighboring district.

Nankin Mills board members are watching with interest a bill which removes the 90 per cent figure.

If the bill is reported out of committee and eventually approved, the way would be paved for the splitting of Nankin Mills between the large Livonia and Wayne Community districts.

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