

THE
GRASSROOTS
HANDBOOK
AGAINST
SCHOOL
CONSOLIDATION

VOTE
NO

A COMPILATION AND SUMMARY OF RESEARCH STUDIES, DOCUMENTATION, AND POSITIONAL STATEMENTS PERTAINING TO THE PROPOSED CONSOLIDATION OF THE VALDOSTA AND LOWNDES SCHOOL SYSTEMS.

THE TRUTH
ABOUT
UNIFICATION/
CONSOLIDATION
OF THE
VALDOSTA/
LOWNDES
SCHOOL
SYSTEMS

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VALDOSTA, GEORGIA

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VOTE NO TO CONSOLIDATION!

THE GRASSROOTS HANDBOOK AGAINST SCHOOL CONSOLIDATION

THE TRUTH ABOUT UNIFICATION/CONSOLIDATION OF THE VALDOSTA/LOWNDES SCHOOL SYSTEMS

By David E. Mullis, J.D., LL.M.

October 12, 2011

Purpose: This handbook is written to help the citizens of Valdosta, Georgia consider all relevant facts in deciding whether to vote to dissolve the Valdosta City School charter. This is probably the most important decision facing Valdosta citizens since Court ordered desegregation in the early 1970's. If Valdosta citizens choose to give up their charter, there is no return to an independent school system. Current law will prohibit it. For this reason, it is imperative that the citizens know all of the facts in making this decision.

The most recent studies are clear that the burden of proof that unification/consolidation is in the best interest of the children and the community falls directly on the proponents of consolidation. They show that it is dangerous for the community to agree to unify based upon gross oversimplifications. After reviewing all of the relevant evidence presented, it is clear that the consolidators have not carried this burden and that their entire agenda is being pushed based upon false and misleading statements. To the contrary, the evidence shows that in the specific case of Valdosta/Lowndes, consolidation would be detrimental to the education of our children. The proof of this follows

I. Opening Statement Against Unification/Consolidation

All of the statistics and reasons claimed by Community Unification for Educational Excellence, Inc. (CUEE) in favor of unification of the Valdosta and Lowndes school systems are related to the issues of poverty and diversity of the community not education. Integration of the school systems was forced by the Federal Courts in the early 1970's in Valdosta, Georgia. Since that time the school systems have tended toward re-segregation because the state cannot dictate where people live. If the two school systems unify at this time, the Justice Department will force racial diversity to nearly equal proportions of minority and non-minority students. However, as is seen in Dougherty County, the population tends to move to re-segregate.

The problems raised by CUEE will never be addressed at the educational level. It must be addressed at the community level. I would like to see how many of CUEE's members and supporters live in a racially integrated neighborhood. I live in a racially integrated neighborhood. I attend a racially integrated church. My children attend racially integrated schools. My friends are racially diverse as well. Therefore, having a group of individuals like CUEE, the most of whom live segregated in their rich country estates, come to the community pleading for racial diversity in our schools is to say the least, hypocritical.

Until we address, personally and as a community, the problem of segregation in our community, we will continue to have segregation issues in our schools. If racial desegregation did not work in the 1970's what makes anyone think it will work now through unification/consolidation. If we truly want to resolve the racial diversity problems in our schools, then we need to resolve the racial diversity in our community. This comes from the socio-economically advantaged reaching out with their resources to help relieve the poverty and its sister, apathy, in the socio-disadvantaged communities.

The Valdosta and Lowndes County School Systems each offer excellent educational opportunities for all students who attend. Historically, the Valdosta School System focused on the quality of education that typically produced some of the top students in the region. However, in the past five (5) years, the Valdosta City Schools have taken dramatic steps forward toward the success of all students including the disadvantaged by implementing leading edge nationally proven educational reforms. As a result, all NCLB assessments have risen steadily and significantly over the past five years and will continue to do so. The Valdosta City Schools have taken further steps recently by becoming a Race to the Top school system (**Some of our educators are on the top committees in Georgia studying and implementing current leading edge national and state educational reforms**).

Race to the Top, abbreviated **R2T**, **RTTT** or **RTT**, is a \$4.35 billion United States Department of Education competition designed to spur reforms in state and local district K-12 education. It is funded by the ED Recovery Act as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 and was announced by President Barack Obama and Secretary of Education Arne Duncan on July 24, 2009. States were awarded points for satisfying certain educational policies, such as performance-based standards (often referred to as an Annual professional performance review) for teachers and principals, complying with nationwide standards, promoting charter schools, and computerization. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Race_to_the_top). Race to the Top funding will most likely be lost under a unified school system.

Under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (formerly No Child Left Behind (NCLB)), schools are now graded on the performance of all students (i.e., no child left behind) including the socio-economically disadvantaged (poverty/low income level), students with limited English proficiency (LEP), and children with disabilities (SWD). The concept of

NCLB is that the test requirements will become progressively higher over 12 years until the requirement of 100% proficiency for all students has been met in school year 2013-2014. This method ignores the problems associated with social and community ills and with peer pressures placed on students from low income areas encouraging students from these areas to under-perform, and focuses solely upon the goal of 100% proficiency for all students. For this reason, the federal government has now allowed for waivers to be sought by states to relieve them of this unrealistic goal.

In other words, we can offer a great education, provide incentives for students to perform, make modifications to education to help students succeed, and provide technical help, but if the child is homeless, left home alone for long periods of time, living in a high crime area, living in a home with substance abuse, or just downright defiant, there is only so much the school can accomplish in helping these students succeed. Good parental, home and community environments are critical to the success of underprivileged children.

Therefore, CUEE and the Chamber of Commerce's efforts are focused on the wrong methods of improving our school statistics. Unification will not accomplish any of their stated goals, but will create an enormous financial burden on the community and its families during this time of recession and high unemployment. The business community and volunteer organizations should instead focus on providing educational awareness and success clinics in low income areas. They should organize efforts to reduce poverty by bringing in industry with good wages and sponsoring basic community literacy and vocational training and tutoring. They should focus on programs to promote the value of education. They should organize drug awareness and rehabilitation programs in low income areas. They should focus their efforts in decreasing poverty. They should focus on encouraging community diversity. If they will do this, the educational problems will take care of themselves in good systems like Valdosta and Lowndes.

However, CUEE and the Chamber have insisted on pushing forward with their unification agenda despite the certain negative effect it will have on the community and the education of our children. They deny there will be any negative effect, but they have no personal accountability if they are wrong. They ignore all relevant studies and dismiss the results as being misleading. Then they state their own misleading and false assertions and claim them to be FACTS.

The FACTS offered by the Lowndes County Board of Education (LBOE) show that if consolidation wins at the polls, there will be no gain in academic achievement, but instead there will be less student participation (e.g., an increase in student dropout rates and less student participation in school programs and in class), an increase in expenses, a loss of state revenues, the loss of equalization revenues, a possible loss of SPLOST funds, a 42% increase in property taxes for the County and 23% increase for the city and still be \$3 million short of paying for just the first item on the consolidators wish list for cost per child equalization.

The Federal Justice Department will dictate racial diversity, where kids go to school and the amount of busing required for our community, not CUEE. Because of budget constraints, there will have to be a layoff of teachers, administrators and support staff, all during an economic recession worse than seen in our life time with an enormous unemployment rate. Consolidation would be devastating to our two currently financially sound school systems and to the community as a whole if done at this time. The losers in this consolidation will definitely outweigh the winners.

In short, the consolidation effort began as a desire by the Chamber of Commerce to increase economic development by increasing academic achievement and decreasing the cost of education. Instead, all credible evidence shows that whether to consolidate or deconsolidate must be determined on a case by case basis and that in the case of Lowndes/Valdosta, consolidation at this time will result in no increase in academic achievement, a decrease in student participation, a dramatic increase in costs (such as transportation, salaries, benefits, software, legal fees, etc.), a corresponding increase in taxes and rents, the loss of jobs, and an overall hindrance to economic development considering that the increased property taxes alone will keep businesses from moving to Lowndes County/Valdosta area. All are just the opposite of the initial stated goals of the Chamber of Commerce and CUEE.

The information provided by the Lowndes County Board of Education (LBOE) is consistent with the information provided by the Valdosta Board of Education (VBOE) in showing that this consolidation will have the opposite effect than the stated goals of the consolidators. The consolidators have offered absolutely no evidence to refute the evidence provided by the two school boards. They have not even offered any evidence to support their own absurdly false and misleading information that they hold out as "FACTS." They merely declare all of the evidence against them to be misinformation and their own misinformation to be fact. Don't be fooled. Knowledge is power. Make the consolidators prove their case. Get the word out. Vote No to Consolidation.

II. The Evidence Against Unification/Consolidation

The following is a list of the most relevant evidence concerning whether it is in the best interest of the children and the community of Valdosta/Lowndes to unify/consolidate the Valdosta and Lowndes County School systems and a list of community leaders and organizations renouncing the effort of CUEE and the Chamber of Commerce to unify the two school systems.

1. The NEPC Study: A recent study issued February 2011 by the National Education Policy Center (NEPC), School of Education, University of Colorado at Boulder in conjunction with Ohio University, **Consolidation of Schools and Districts: What the Research Says and What It Means**, by Craig Howley, Jerry Johnson, and Jennifer Petrie, shows that "decisions to deconsolidate or consolidate districts are best made on a **case-by-case basis**. While state-level consolidation proposals may serve a public relations purpose in times of

crisis, they are unlikely to be a reliable way to obtain substantive fiscal or educational improvement.”

The first listed recommendation by this study is to “**Closely question claims about presumed benefits of consolidation in their state. What reason is there to expect substantial improvements, given that current research suggests that savings for taxpayers, fiscal efficiencies, and curricular improvement are unlikely?**” The study states that the assumptions behind claims just like those asserted by CUEE “are most often **dangerous oversimplifications,**” and that “In many places, schools and districts are already too large for fiscal efficiency or educational quality; deconsolidation is more likely than consolidation to achieve substantial efficiencies and yield improved outcomes.” Other studies show that in a smaller school system, administration is more efficient as is shown by the rock solid financial stability of the Valdosta School System, the graduation rates are higher, individual student achievement is higher, children have more opportunity for leadership positions, and the scores are higher. SEE ATTACHMENT 1.

2. The Carl Vinson Study: The Valdosta/Lowndes Chamber of Commerce hired the only study performed on the pros and cons of school unification in Valdosta/Lowndes and on the five most recently unified school districts in Georgia was performed by the Carl Vinson Institute of Government in 2008 at the request of the Valdosta/Lowndes County Chamber of Commerce: **A Study of the Potential Impacts of a Single versus Multiple Schools Systems in Valdosta-Lowndes County,** Governmental Services and Research Division, Carl Vinson Institute of Government, Fanning Institute, University of Georgia 2008.

The Chamber of Commerce and CUEE for the most part ignore this study because it does not say what they thought it would say. This study was for the most part inconclusive as to whether Valdosta/Lowndes would make any gains by consolidating their school systems and failed to recommend whether the systems should or should not unify. However, it is a reliable source of relevant data and review of studies and history and has proven very useful in disproving all of CUEE’s false assertions in favor of unification. This study (as well as the Boulder, CO study, above), states that mid-sized school systems are more efficient than small and large districts. The Carl Vinson Study establishes that an efficient mid-sized system would contain between 1500 and 6000 students with the optimum being between 2500 and 5000. These mid-sized school systems are the most efficient while school systems with fewer than 1500 students and those in excess of 6000 students are least efficient under the theory that the larger the school system above 6000, the greater the inefficiency. (Pg. 30).

The Carl Vinson Study clearly shows that both Lowndes and Valdosta school systems are large enough to have already maximized their incentives from the State. (Pg 18). The Valdosta School system is approximately 7,700 students and the Lowndes School system is approximately 11,500 students. Combining these two school systems will result in a highly inefficient large system of 18,000+ students. This is significantly over the largest mid-sized district of 6,000

students. (Actually, the studies show that the most efficient school systems are between 2500 and 5000 students). SEE ATTACHMENT 2.

3. School Boards: The **Lowndes County Board of Education (LBOE)** and the **Valdosta Board of Education (VBOE)** have conducted their own studies of the effects of consolidation and have concluded that the unification of the systems will come with an enormous price tag that will result in a significant rise in tax millage rates to the maximum allowed by law and still have to lay-off teachers, administrators and staff to balance their budgets. Furthermore, they note that no evidence exists to show that an increase in academic performance will result from a unified system, but evidence does exist to show the likelihood of a decrease in student participation. This is supported by the Carl Vinson Study. (Pg.18).

4. School Board Resolutions: Both school boards have issued statements against the consolidation of the schools at this time.

Valdosta Board of Education Releases Official Position on Consolidation/Unification

The **Valdosta Board of Education** released the following statement during their work session on Monday, August 29. Ms. Vanessa Flucas, District 2, read the statement before the standing-room only crowd that erupted into applause when she encouraged the community to "vote NO" when casting their ballot on consolidation of the Lowndes County and Valdosta City School Systems. The statement is below in its entirety.

The Valdosta City School Board opposes consolidating the Valdosta City and Lowndes County school systems at this time. This Board feels that a decision to merge the two systems should be a collaboratively planned effort between the two school boards and citizens of both the city and county, along with those who have the best interest in educating all the children of our area.

The Valdosta City School Board is proud of our school system. We have an organization that has been both academically and fiscally mindful of the needs of our students, and are committed to excellence. We have strong, highly qualified leaders, teachers, and staff in place and through their effort; our students are showing continuous growth and improvement. Our board will continue to support our students, leadership, teachers, and staff in improving the education for the children in our community.

We encourage the community to vote NO to consolidation at this time, and ask that those who desire consolidation come together with the two systems to discuss and plan the true feasibility of Valdosta City and Lowndes County eventually merging at a future time. Ultimately, this decision must be acceptable by both school systems and city and county residents.

We welcome you to come out to one of three planned forums with the Valdosta City Schools to witness our commitment and to answer any questions you may have on this serious topic. These forums will be September 8, at Valdosta High School (PAC), September 20, at Valdosta Middle School, and October 25, at J.L. Lomax Elementary School.

As always, we appreciate the trust you have placed in us as the Valdosta City School Board and will continue to work toward constant strides for educational excellence in our schools.

<http://gocats.org/content.asp?pid=86&id=1824>

A RESOLUTION OF THE LOWNDES COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION

WHEREAS, the Lowndes County Board of Education, Valdosta, Georgia, met on August 30, 2011, to discuss positions regarding the consolidation of the Valdosta City School System with the Lowndes County School System:

WHEREAS, the Valdosta City School System met in session on Monday, August 29th, 2011, to adopt a formal position opposing consolidation of the Valdosta City School System with the Lowndes County School System:

WHEREAS, virtually no increase in academic achievement has been identified as the result of efforts to consolidate school systems:

WHEREAS, the consolidation of school systems has consistently led to an increase in the tax burden on the taxpayers in the newly consolidated school system. Financial claims about widespread benefits of consolidation are unsubstantiated by research:

WHEREAS, school consolidation proposals appear to serve a public relations purpose in times of a fiscal crisis, rather than substantive fiscal or educational purposes:

BE IT RESOLVED, the Lowndes County Board of Education fully supports the position taken by the Valdosta City School System opposing consolidation:

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the Lowndes County School System respects the autonomy of the Valdosta City School System and will continue to work cooperatively with them to provide the highest quality of education for students in both school systems:

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, any effort to consolidate the Valdosta City School System with the Lowndes County School System must be initiated through the efforts of the educators and parents of both the city and county school system. Further, all citizens, city and county, must be granted the opportunity to participate in any election to consider the consolidation of the Valdosta City School System with the Lowndes County School System.

<http://www.lowndes.k12.ga.us/education/components/docmgr/default.php?sectiondetailid=11497&fileitem=15484&catfilter=ALL>

5. The Valdosta City Council has issued a statement against the consolidation of the schools at this time.

On October 6, 2011 the Valdosta City Council met and approved the following position statement opposing the current push for consolidation or "unification" by CUEE and supporting the position of both school systems.

Position Statement on School Consolidation

WHEREAS, the subject of school consolidation has been discussed for many years in Valdosta and Lowndes County at various community meetings, retreats and has been formally studied on more than one occasion; and

WHEREAS, the City of Valdosta does not oppose the concept of consolidation; and

WHEREAS, most school systems or government consolidations have directly involved the governing authorities themselves from the outset of the effort; and

WHEREAS, most consolidations provide a specific and detailed plan by which voters can make an educated and informed decision; and

WHEREAS, most consolidations have an agreed upon charter which spells out details of the consolidation plan so that an informed vote can be made; and

WHEREAS, most consolidations are voted on by all of the citizens affected by the decision; not just a portion of them; and

WHEREAS, voters in unincorporated Lowndes County, Hahira, Lake Park, Dasher, and Remerton will not be allowed to vote; and

WHEREAS, there are many unanswered questions such as representation, number of school board seats, school districts, continuance or elimination of programs, use of facilities, potential tax consequences, for which there are no answers and no specifics on which to base an informed decision; and

WHEREAS, both the Valdosta and Lowndes school systems are financially viable and well managed by elected boards and competent staff; and

WHEREAS, any plan of consolidation should be built from the ground up, involving and including all stakeholders and affected parties in the process; and

WHEREAS, the Mayor and City Council are strong advocates of the right of citizens to vote, however the absence of knowledge as to the consequences of voting for a plan that does not exist could be severe; and

WHEREAS, if the citizens of Valdosta vote to give up the Valdosta City School System Charter, with no details or plan upon which to base an educated vote, under Georgia State law the city voters will not have the right to vote to re-create the city school system if they do not like the plan that will be eventually created and implemented; and

WHEREAS, the Mayor and Council believe that when asked to vote for something as important as school consolidation, all voters of the city and county should be allowed to vote and a specific plan to include implementation should be presented to them to vote upon.

NOW, THEREFORE, the Valdosta City Mayor and Council, while not opposing the concept of consolidation and strongly favoring the right of all affected citizens to vote, hereby opposes the current proposal because there is no plan and one half of the community is prohibited from voting on a decision that affects the entire community and its future.

Approved this 6th day of October, 2011.

6. The Valdosta-Lowndes NAACP has issued a resolution against the unification of the school systems.

The **Valdosta-Lowndes NAACP** is a member of the Valdosta Chamber of Commerce. We oppose school consolidation. Our reasons are simple: there is no credible research to indicate consolidation will improve student achievement, retain teachers, save money, enhance education, or improve graduation rates.

On its webpage CUEE uses the Chattanooga school system as a model for Valdosta, even though the two cities have vastly different issues. (It was surprising to read CUEE's new paid "education expert" say that CUEE does not use Chattanooga as a model, yet there it is on their webpage). Chattanooga schools consolidated in 1995. Today their Mayor is pushing consolidation of the city and county governments. Civil rights activists are mobilized because they rightly see the agenda as a way to dilute minority representation in that county, the same issue the Valdosta NAACP has regarding school consolidation. There are 4-5 minority seats on the VBOE. If we consolidate we'll go to a system in which minority voters would be represented by 1-2 seats. In Georgia, consolidation of government is being aggressively pursued in several places, and civil rights activists are mobilizing because it is seen as an agenda to dilute minority voting power in Georgia. I encourage readers to research online news articles by Patrick Davis, of the Macon Examiner, on this issue.

No Child Left Behind was passed with US Chamber of Commerce backing. Under NCLB, test cheating scandals multiplied, push-outs of poor test takers occurred to artificially raise school test scores, and special education students were unfairly placed in alternative schools in order to remove their test scores from their home schools. Alternative school is only supposed to be a place for children with discipline problems. The US Chamber of Commerce position on NCLB does not enhance any Chamber of Commerce's credibility on any public school issue, including consolidation.

CUEE paid college students \$9-\$11 per hour to collect petition signatures. CUEE could have set up a tutoring center with that money. If every CUEE supporter in the Chamber of Commerce, including South Georgia Medical Center, started paying their employees a Living Wage, our children would benefit from more time spent with their parents, and that would have major benefits for student achievement. I have never heard a single business leader in Valdosta promote a Living Wage for parents who are working 2-3 jobs at low wages in order to support their families. But these business leaders will pay \$9-\$11 per hour and hundreds of thousands of

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dollars to collect signatures or pay a self-proclaimed education expert to tell us how business leaders know what is best for our children. It does little to enhance CUEE's credibility when these kinds of issues are considered.

Our branch was invited to the Chamber of Commerce event "Do You Love Valdosta." We suggest that if you love Valdosta, dismantle CUEE and vote against school consolidation.

Leigh Touchton, President

Valdosta-Lowndes NAACP
610 Mack Drive
Valdosta, GA 31602

7. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference of Valdosta/Lowndes County has also taken a position against the unification of the school systems.

A letter from Rev. Floyd Rose received October 8, 2011

On behalf of the Valdosta-Lowndes County chapter of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, this letter comes to express our opposition to the consolidation (unification) of the Valdosta and Lowndes County school systems. We have heard nothing to suggest that the consolidation of the two systems will improve the education of the children in either system, and/or that the consolidation will decrease the costs to the tax-payers. In fact, it appears that the exact opposite will be true.

Floyd Rose
President

8. The Valdosta Daily Times has taken the position that they support the concept of school unification but that they cannot support the current referendum to dissolve the Valdosta school charter because there has been no planning whatsoever and the result will be chaos.

September 4, 2011

Times: Unification reconsidered

The Valdosta Daily Times

VALDOSTA — The school unification debate has taken some ugly turns since signatures were verified a few weeks ago for a Nov. 8 referendum vote. Passions are high. People are uncertain what school unification will mean. People in both school systems fear for their jobs and livelihoods. Parents worry about the academic futures of their children.

Last week, rather than inspire a more rational approach to school unification, a Times editorial unintentionally fanned the flames by questioning whether race plays a role in

how some people view the issue.

Since this question was posed in an editorial about the Lowndes County Board of Education's opposition to unification, some people believed The Times had portrayed the school board members as racists.

This was not our intention. We apologize. We were only referring to a racial reality that can cloud the real issues in a school consolidation debate.

Misreading of intentions can happen in the face of the unknown and, unfortunately, the unknown is what our community faces with this effort for school unification.

The Times has supported school consolidation for several years. It has been listed daily on our Opinions page ever since this paper adopted the concept of an annual list of Editorial Objectives. While many items on that list have come and gone, school system consolidation has returned year after year.

We believe school unification would best serve Valdosta-Lowndes County. With the community focused on one school system, we believe unification would increase our children's academic potential. One school system would send a more welcoming message to industries looking to locate here. It would be better to consolidate our school systems as a community rather than the Justice Department one day doing it for us.

We still believe in school unification, but we can no longer support the current effort.

For the past several weeks, readers have asked us how unification would work. Would it change millage rates? Would students be bussed cross-county? Who would lose or keep their jobs? When would Valdosta City Schools dissolve its charter and the Lowndes County School System take over? What are the estimates on cost savings? Would it be more efficient? What happens Nov. 9, the day after the election?

We've asked these questions, too. No one can answer them.

The organization that worked to place the issue on the ballot has not offered satisfactory answers. Community Unification for Educational Excellence has admirably spent time proposing ways to increase academic performance if the systems are unified. But CUEE has yet to present a recommended plan for how the merger would work.

If the referendum passes, the school boards will decide how unification would proceed. And both school boards are opposed to unification.

It is this prevailing sense of the unknown that has spurred The Times to oppose the Nov. 8 referendum.

There are too many unanswered questions. There are too many uncertainties at this point. There has to be a better way to present this to the voters.

A vote for unification in this climate is a vote for chaos.

9. www.VoteNoForTheChildren.com – Please log onto this website everyday to follow the latest and best evidence circulating in the community on the issue of unification/consolidation. CUEE has been rolling out a campaign of misinformation using forums, emails, newspapers, televisions, radios, billboards and who knows what else will be rolled out. VoteNoForTheChildren.com analyzes each new CUEE misrepresentation, exposes its errors and explains the truth as well as posts the most relevant evidence presented to date on this issue.

III. Public Policy Points to No Consolidation.

We are currently in one of the worst recessions to face our country and community in several decades. The result is a reduction in property values, an employment rate in excess of 10%, and a reduction in state funding for education. Consolidation of the school systems at this time will result in further loss of state funding for education, a heavier burden on property owners through increased taxation, the resulting increase in rents to the poor populations, and an increase in unemployment resulting from lay-offs in the newly unified system. Furthermore, the resulting increase in property tax rates will hinder the economic development of Valdosta/Lowndes County by making the area less attractive for job creating industry to relocate here or for existing industry to stay. After all of this enormous expense there will be no increase in the academic performance as a result and the likelihood of less student participation.

Despite all of the evidence showing that the result of consolidation/unification in Valdosta/Lowndes at this time will have the opposite result of the stated goals of the consolidators, CUEE and the Chamber have chosen to ignore the real evidence and have continued full speed ahead to place this referendum on the ballot and have resorted to saturating the voting population with false, misleading and deceitful statements of their reasons for unifying/consolidating the Valdosta and Lowndes school systems. They dismiss the real evidence calling it misinformation and fail to offer any evidence whatsoever to support their so called FACTS about unification. They continue to speak in terms of dangerous oversimplifications that have nothing to do with Valdosta/Lowndes' specific case.

CUEE and the Chamber brought in a former superintendent of Troup County to show that consolidation would be good for our community. This is an example of a dangerous oversimplification. This analogy fails the case by case requirement of the **NEPC and Carl Vinson Studies** and other recent studies on the issue of consolidation of school systems. Valdosta and Lowndes each have sound fiscal policies and revenues, excellent educational programs, new buildings with more to be built in the near future, state of the art classrooms, and quality teachers. Troup County had four separate districts at one point and went through two consolidations. Troup County had poor school districts with buildings in total disrepair and the need to consolidate its rural and intercity districts into the County district for fiscal reasons.

Unlike the situation with Valdosta/Lowndes, the LaGrange mayor, city council and School Board voted to give up its charter. The referendum was placed on the ballot and passed. In Valdosta/Lowndes both school boards agree that unification/consolidation is not in the best interest of the children or the community at this time. The City Council and the Valdosta Daily Times each agree that unification/consolidation is not in the best interest of the children or the community at this time.

The main reason for the Troup County consolidation was poor fiscal shape of some of the districts. This does not exist in Valdosta/Lowndes with both schools in excellent financial shape. Unification at this time will undermine the excellent financial shape of the schools. Finally, the resulting school district is 12,500 students in Troup County and we will be almost 18,000 students in a unified/consolidated Lowndes district.

IV. Exposing CUEE's Campaign of Misinformation and Setting the Record Straight.

Because CUEE and the Chamber of Commerce have spent an enormous amount of time and money deceiving the Valdosta community of the need for it to revoke its school charter because of what it purports is a bad report card for the Valdosta School System, it is important that we challenge the misinformation of CUEE with the actual evidence that exists. To summarize the real significance of these statistics I am quoting a portion of an article written by Robert Niles, founder and editor of ThemeParkInsider.com, published October 9, 2011 by The Huffington Post (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/robert-niles/public-schools_b_1002466.html).

"My two children, ages 14 and 11, attend their local public schools, and have since kindergarten. Why do I send my children to public schools?"

1. Public schools work.

Every year, millions of American children graduate from public schools across the country, having completed the toughest curricula in our nation's history, surpassing standards that get tougher by the year. In our public schools, students can learn calculus, analyze complex themes by Nobel Prize-winning authors, study advanced chemistry, biology and physics, program computers, and perform music and dance in international competitions in front of crowds of thousands. Every year, public school students learn, graduate and go on to the world's best colleges and the world's most competitive jobs.

But what about all those news stories about bad test scores and failing schools? Aren't many kids falling behind?

It's true that we've got a huge gap between students in our country -- one that grows with each grade level as kids advance from kindergarten into high school. But that's not because we have an education problem in America. It's because we have a large, and growing, child poverty problem in our country.

The children whose parents can afford to send them to school with money for lunch, and who have the ability to help them with their increasingly difficult homework at night, typically thrive in the public schools, as they always have. But those aren't the majority of kids anymore in many districts.

If public education were broken, and our schools no longer had the ability to teach, then why is it you never find any of these "broken" schools in affluent communities? I wrote about this issue last spring, when I showed how the schools in my hometown of Pasadena, California were out-performing the California average in all major demographic categories -- white, black and Latino, poor and non-poor -- but the district's overall test score average was below the state average because the Pasadena schools have a far above-average percentage of economically-disadvantaged children attending them.

When we raise academic standards and increase homework requirements, we widen the gap between students whose parents studied algebra, geometry and calculus -- and can help them with that homework -- and those who don't have parents like that, or any parent at home, to help them.

Yet even students facing immense home challenges -- single parents, foster care, parents working multiple jobs who are rarely home, parents who can't speak English or who didn't complete school themselves -- are still learning and advancing in our public schools, even if they continue to trail those students who have the advantage of living with educated parents who earn a living wage, or better. Test scores in all socio-economic categories continue to rise in our country. Our public school teachers are doing their jobs. Our schools just need *more* teachers, and more resources to help close the gap between those children whose birth gave them a head start -- like my kids -- and those whose birth didn't."

With this in mind, let's analyze the assertions made by CUEE in support of school unification. CUEE's attack plan can be divided into the following three categories:

(1) **Its indictment of Valdosta High School** - CUEE uses two year old statistics from 2009-2010 to make its case, completely ignores the history of progress made by the Valdosta City Schools, completely ignores the implementation of VECA, AID and other programs recently implemented to attract students who would be 1st generation college students, and has failed to identify any specific program they believe should be implemented to improve student participation and achievement. They merely waive the banner of unification as a magic pill that will fix all societal ills. The Carl Vinson Study clearly establishes that unification is not a magic pill.

(2) **Its promise of the benefits of unification/consolidation** - CUEE makes numerous assertions of the benefits of unification. Unfortunately, their promises are not supported by any known studies and are refuted by their own Carl Vinson Study.

(3) **Its promise of what will not happen as a result of unification** – CUEE speaks as if it can read a crystal ball and tell us what will not happen. Unfortunately, CUEE’s assertions of what will not happen are not supported by any evidence and are expressly refuted by Georgia law and their own, Carl Vinson Study.

Keep in mind that **the consolidators have no personal accountability** for their false and misleading claims. If they say taxes will not rise, and the taxes do in fact rise, we have no remedy against the consolidators. Therefore, they are inclined to say whatever is necessary to get their referendum passed regardless of the truth of the statements. Accordingly, below is a list of the CUEE statements followed by the evidence showing its statements and assertions to be false and/or misleading.

A. CUEE's Indictment of Valdosta High School

1. CUEE STATEMENT: Valdosta High School has failed to meet state standards for five consecutive years.

This fact is true, but the implication is false, and therefore, the statement is misleading. CUEE quotes this statistic as its best item of proof that the Valdosta School System is a failure.

The Simple Truth: According to the Georgia Department of Education, the failure of a school to meet AYP does not mean that the school is a failure or a bad school. It means that some subgroup (typically the poor, children with limited English proficiency and children with disabilities) has failed to perform at a level dictated by No Child Left Behind (NCLB). The higher the concentration of the poor and disabled, the more likely the school will not meet AYP. Also, the stated goal of NCLB is that by 2013-2014, all children will meet the required performance level. This means that every year it is harder to meet the increasing performance requirements. Eventually, it will be impossible for any school to meet AYP and NCLB will have to be modified or rewritten. For this reason, NCLB, which has expired, is currently being reauthorized and waivers are being authorized by the United States Department of Education.

It is clear that poor AYP results are often related to economically disadvantaged students, students with limited English proficiency and students with disabilities and are not related to whether a school system is consolidated or not. It is very misleading for CUEE to use this statistic to substantiate the need to unify/consolidate the Valdosta and Lowndes school systems. The fact that CUEE uses this as the number one statistic to indict the Valdosta school system proves that CUEE does not have any real evidence to support their claim that Valdosta/Lowndes would be better off as one unified system.

According to the Georgia Department of Education, **a school that did not make AYP is not a failing school and it does not mean it is a bad school!** See the following link: (<http://public.doe.k12.ga.us/DMGetDocument.aspx/USING%20THE%20AYP%20REPORT.pdf?p=6CC6799F8C1371F656579617686FF1396D2AC7E9AE1778988C94FB7704945592&Type=D>). **It is usually indicative of a high concentration of children at risk in the district** (Valdosta City Schools student body consists of approximately 78% from low income/poverty communities).

The Technical Truth: According to the Georgia Department of Education (<http://www.gadoe.org/ayp2009.aspx>), AYP is one of the cornerstones of the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. It is a measure of year-to-year student achievement on statewide assessments. NCLB requires all states, including the State of Georgia, to establish state academic standards and a state testing system that meets federal requirements. NCLB significantly raises expectations for states, local school districts, and schools in that all students will meet or exceed state standards in reading and mathematics within twelve years. NCLB requires all States, including the State of Georgia, to establish state academic standards and a state testing system that meets federal requirements. Under No Child Left Behind, children who attend public schools that have not made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for two or more consecutive years and have thus been designated for Needs Improvement have the option of moving to a higher performing public school. Under the federal No Child Left Behind Act, children in schools that have been in Needs Improvement status for two or more years may receive supplemental services that include before- and after-school tutoring or remedial classes in reading, language arts, & math. Ensuring that No Student with Disabilities is left behind under No Child Left Behind, all students, including students with disabilities, must meet Georgia's proficient level of academic achievement by 2013-2014. Under No Child Left Behind (NCLB), all students, including students with limited English proficiency (LEP), must meet Georgia's proficient level of academic achievement by 2013-2014.

To make AYP, each school and district must meet the following criteria:

- **95% Participation:** Each school, as a whole, and all student groups with at least 40 members must have a participation rate of 95% or above on selected state assessments in Reading/English Language Arts and Mathematics.
- **Annual Measurable Objectives:** Each school, as a whole, and each student group meeting the minimum group size must meet or exceed the State's Annual Measurable Objectives (AMO) regarding the percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced on State assessments in Reading/English Language Arts and Mathematics. For AMO, the minimum group size is 40 or 10% of the students enrolled in AYP grades, whichever is greater (with a 75 student cap).
- **Second Indicator:** Each school must meet the standard or show progress on a Second Indicator. For Second Indicator, the minimum group size is 40 or 10% of the students enrolled in AYP grades, whichever is greater (with a 75 student cap). (<http://public.doe.k12.ga.us/ayp2009.aspx?PageReq=FAQSAYP2009>).

Georgia uses the Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT) as the AYP assessment tool for the elementary and middle school grades, the Georgia High School Graduation Test (GHS GT) for high school, and the Georgia Alternate Assessment (GAA) for the most severely cognitively impaired students.

Again, **a school that did not make AYP is not a failing school and it does not mean it is a bad school!** See the following link:

(<http://public.doe.k12.ga.us/DMGetDocument.aspx/USING%20THE%20AYP%20REPORT.pdf?p=6CC6799F8C1371F656579617686FF1396D2AC7E9AE1778988C94FB7704945592&Type=D>).

Under NCLB, if one subgroup does not meet all of the objectives required for meeting Adequate Yearly Progress, the entire school does not meet AYP. For all its benefits, No Child Left Behind does lead to the “labeling” of schools, fair or not. The more relevant inquiry is not whether a school or school system meets AYP, but rather why is a good school not meeting AYP.

For the past 8 years, VHS has made AYP two times and Lowndes High School has made AYP only 3 times—neither high school has made AYP in the past two years.

Valdosta High School is accused by CUEE of failing to meet AYP for five consecutive years. The truth is that out of the last 8 years, Valdosta High School met AYP two years, Lowndes met it three years and the following most recently consolidated school systems have made AYP very little. Troup County, Ben Hill County, Dougherty County have met AYP zero of the past eight years. Upson County made AYP two out of eight years, and Ware County made AYP one out of eight years.

In summary, the unified/consolidated school systems have had little success in meeting AYP, while many two school district counties have met AYP. It is clear that AYP results are related to economically disadvantaged students, students with limited English proficiency and students with disabilities and are not related to consolidation/unification of school systems. In 2011, only 30% of high schools in Georgia made AYP. Valdosta High School is one of 375 schools in the state of Georgia that is considered in Needs Improvement—the majority of these are high schools. Most recently in our district, J. L. Newbern and Southeast were also Needs Improvement schools, but were able to make AYP and come off the Needs Improvement list. Newbern has made AYP for 2 consecutive years and SE has made AYP for 3 consecutive years.

It is very misleading for CUEE to use this statistic to substantiate the need to unify/consolidate the Valdosta and Lowndes school systems. The fact that CUEE uses this as the number one statistic supporting unification/consolidation proves that CUEE does not have any real evidence to support their claim that Valdosta/Lowndes would be better off as one unified system.

2. **CUEE STATEMENT: The graduation rate for Valdosta High School is in the low 50% range based on the new standard for reporting graduation rates.**

This statement is completely false. The only statistics available on this issue are 2009-2010 school year. Under these statistics, the diploma rate for Valdosta was 53.06%. The statistics for 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 are not yet published. However, the Valdosta Board of Education has released its 2011 statistics showing that Valdosta High School’s graduation rate based on July 2011 data is 76.5%. However, pursuant to the advice of the Georgia Department of Education, Valdosta set up its Alternative School independent of the High School. Valdosta has since decided that this treatment is not best for the students and is in the process of

reincorporating the Alternative School with the High School. Once this is reincorporated, the graduation rate for 2011 will be 69.1%. This may be the “New Standard” that CUEE references, but the figure is 69.1% not 50%.

The **Carl Vinson Study** states that graduation rates have historically been difficult to measure because schools have not always been consistent or accurate in the way they document students who leave school for various reasons (e.g., transfer to another school, moving away from the community, dropping out, etc.). For this reason, graduation rates have historically shown much more variation among schools than may actually be the case. (Pg 16).

Below are the latest data **from 2009** for graduation rates based on the federal adjusted cohort rate. This data has not been released for 2011; thus, the reported data below is 2 years old.

System Name	2005 9th Grade Enrollment	2009 Diplomas Awarded	Diploma Rate	Graduation Rate Reported	Difference in % Points
Richmond	3499	1529	43.70%	70.40%	26.70
Dougherty	1516	752	49.60%	75.40%	25.80
Thomasville City	242	125	51.65%	74.90%	23.25
Ware	638	346	54.23%	76.40%	22.17
Atlanta City	4332	2033	46.93%	68.90%	21.97
Brooks	233	115	49.36%	69.70%	20.34
Troup	1182	683	57.78%	76.30%	18.52
Valdosta City	686	364	53.06%	71.50%	18.44
Cook	283	161	56.89%	69.40%	12.51
Berrien	276	159	57.61%	70.00%	12.39
Lowndes	780	541	69.36%	81.70%	12.34
Echols	58	42	72.41%	75.00%	2.59

In 2011, Valdosta High School’s graduation rate based on July 2011 data on AYP report is 76.5%--the district graduation rate is 69.1%, which includes additional students attending the alternative school—the final 2010-2011 graduation rate for AYP will not be reported until October 2011. The Federal Adjusted Cohort Graduation rate will not be released by the Governor’s Office of Student Achievement until December 2011 or January 2012.

CUEE also likes to state that the graduation rate for African American students is less than 50%. However, **the current graduation rate for African Americans in the Valdosta School System is actually 71.6%, not less than 50% as claimed by CUEE.**

When you compare Valdosta City School's federal adjusted cohort graduation rate in 2009 with other districts of similar demographics, we are performing as well as or better.

3. CUEE STATEMENT: Georgia ranks near the bottom in the United States in student performance.

CUEE continues to insist that a reason for education reform is that Georgia ranks near the bottom in the nation in education. This also is a deception used by CUEE to try to demonstrate a need for reform when one does not exist. The CUEE website states that Georgia is ranked 46th. Then they say 47th or 48th when speaking publicly. I'm not sure they know exactly. However, what does this statistic really mean. It appears that this ranking is based upon SAT scores.

Dr. John D. Barge, State School Superintendent for Georgia issued a press release on September 14, 2011 showing a slight decrease in SAT scores in the most recent studies. However, the Georgia participation class of 2011 was 80%, a six percent increase from last year, placing Georgia 5th in the nation in the percentage of high school seniors taking the SAT. The State Superintendent stated that "As the number of SAT takers in Georgia has increased 18 percent among all students and 19 percent among public school students since 2007, score declines like Georgia has experience can be expected." What is encouraging is that the 2011 SAT report shows that African-American and Hispanic students in Georgia's public schools are outperforming those subgroups nationally. Furthermore, the report shows that "the achievement gap" in Georgia, which is the difference between SAT scores of whites and other races, is 41 points smaller for African Americans nationwide and 88 points lower for Hispanics nationwide.

Georgia encourages all students to take these tests, not just the college prep students like the higher ranked states do. If the ranking of Georgia is as important as CUEE claims, then why did it go to the state ranked 43rd in the nation and the school district ranked 95 out of 135 in reading proficiency to find the model that it contends will save our system? And, why did it hire the national expert on education reform involved in that reform disaster to lead its efforts at reform in Valdosta and Lowndes County?

The statistics raised by CUEE to support their need for education reform demonstrate a need to address poverty issues in Valdosta/Lowndes County, not the need for education reform. Without a need for education reform, there is no need to consolidate the schools. CUEE knows this, and therefore, continues to manipulate and distort the relevance of these statistics to further its agenda. CUEE likes to state that the facts are clear and the studies agree with them, but they never cite any authority for this assertion.

4. CUEE STATEMENT: More than 60% of the high school students in Valdosta failed the state exams in Math; 40% failed the state exams in Science. These numbers are even higher when looking at economic-disadvantaged students.

This statistic is based upon the Math 1 and 2 tests that were tests new to the State of Georgia and the Valdosta system and were administered for the first time in 2009-2010.

Therefore, a better guide to math data is to look at **AYP/GHSET** math data. In 2011, based on July 2011 AYP reports, **74.6% of VHS students passed math.**

For science (Biology and Physical Science), the percent of students failing the EOCT is **36% and 34% respectively (not 40%). This was a decrease from the previous year of 46% not passing Biology and 43% not passing Physical Science.**

5. CUEE STATEMENT: 22% of the 8th Grade students in Valdosta failed the state exam in Math; 46% failed the state exam in Science.

The data for math is correct for 2009; however, the failure rate was only 5% lower than the Georgia average. **Valdosta decreased its failure rate by 3% in 2010-2011—81% of 8th grade students passed the CRCT in math, with 19% failing.**

In 2009-2010 based on Georgia Report Card Data, **38% of students (not 46%) in 8th grade failed the state exam in science, only 3% lower than the state average in science.**

6. CUEE STATEMENT: 19% of the 3rd Grade students in Valdosta failed the state exam in Math; 30% failed the state exam in Science. Research shows children who perform at grade level by the 3rd grade are more likely to graduate.

Georgia's failure rate on the CRCT Math for 3rd grade was 20%--so Valdosta City Schools performed higher than the state in 2009-2010. **In 2010-2011, 84% of our students passed math in 3rd grade, a decrease of 3% in the failure rate from the previous year.**

For the current school year **2010-2011, the failure rate on the CRCT Science for 3rd grade decreased by 2% over the previous year. Our pass rate was 72%.**

Our pass rate for reading, which is a better predictor of graduation rate in 3rd grade, shows that 95% of students in 3rd grade passed the CRCT in 2010-2011.

7. CUEE STATEMENT: Approximately 34% of our graduating students last year required remediation when entering college.

This is false. The data referred to by CUEE is for 2009. In 2009, 34% of Valdosta's graduating students entering college required remediation. However, since those statistics were reported, Valdosta has become a Race to the Top school system and has implemented Early College (VECA) and Advancement by Individual Determination (AID) programs, which are two leading edge programs designed to attract and develop students that would be 1st generation college students with more rigorous educational preparation. The Race to the Top status and these newly instituted programs would likely be lost in unification/consolidation due to loss of Federal funding.

Below is the 2009 chart showing how Valdosta students performed in college in comparison to other Georgia school systems with similar demographics in terms of percentage of college students needing remediation:

System	Percentage of Graduating Class to Enter College	Percentage of Students to Enter College Requiring Remediation
Georgia	43.7	23.8
Valdosta City Schools	32.7	34.3
Lowndes County Schools	42.4	21.0
Brooks County Schools	29.9	55.3
Berrien County Schools	40.6	34.2
Bibb County Schools	43.4	49.2
Atlanta Public Schools	30.7	47.5
Dougherty County Schools	48.5	42.7
Troup County Schools	29.3	25.6

B. CUEE's Promises of What Will Improve in Unification.

8. CUEE STATEMENT: Only 21 out of 159 counties in Georgia still have a divided school system.

According to the **Carl Vinson Study** hired by the Chamber of Commerce, consolidation of schools was a movement of the late nineteenth century born out of a switch from rural farm communities to urban industrial communities. The idea was that a consolidated system could be structured similar to industrial organizational structures to achieve economies of scale which would thereby make the school more efficient. As a result between 1950 and 1980, the number of school districts in the United States fell from 83,642 to 15,987. Much of this decline was made possible by the decline in farm population and increase in population density, which has made it easier to take advantage of scale of economies. (Pg. 17).

Reflective of the opinion that Georgia may already have too many school districts for efficient governance, the Georgia Constitution prohibits the creation of any new school districts. Therefore, if a city school gives up its charter, it can never get it back. The Georgia Department of Education does not have an official policy for or against consolidation. (Pg. 17).

From 1980 through 2005, the number of school districts in the United States only fell from 15,987 to 14,205. Thus, the number of districts continues to decline, but much less rapidly. In the 1980's, conventional wisdom about school size changed based upon the study of educational costs as a function of school size yielding a U-shaped curve in which both the very small and the very large schools were the most expensive to operate. The medium sized schools were found to be the most efficient. (Pg. 17-18).

Both Lowndes and Valdosta have already met the state minimum enrollment for each type of school in their respective districts to maximize full state funding to the schools. The consolidation would result in the loss of some state funding due to the unified district not being able to claim a double portion. (Pg. 18).

According to the study, while school district consolidation has historically been motivated, in part, by a desire on the part of educational and political leaders to achieve schools of sufficient size so as to allow for more educational opportunities for students, this motivation would not seem to be particularly relevant to the Valdosta-Lowndes situation in that both school districts are of sufficient size to afford such opportunities. Thus, the relevant question would be whether the unification/consolidation of Valdosta/Lowndes would result in a district that is too large rather than too small. (Pg. 18).

The Lowndes County Board of Education has clearly shown that the size of the unified district coupled with loss of revenues would result in tax millage rates to rise to the maximum 21 mills and there would still be a deficit. The Carl Vinson Study showed that **mid-sized districts between 1500 and 6000 students are the most efficient** and that systems with fewer than 1500 students or more than 6000 students were the least efficient. (Pg. 30). The implication is the larger the district, the less the efficiency. **A unified Valdosta/Lowndes district would be approximately 18,000 students.** This lack of efficiency is demonstrated by the LBOE analysis that shows **the cost of unification will increase the \$45.7 million needed to run both systems independently to \$58.8 million to operate one unified system plus still have a deficit of \$3 million.** This evidence is consistent with the Carl Vinson Study showing that larger school systems are less efficient to operate than mid-sized systems.

9. CUEE STATEMENT: Unification combines our resources and gives the unified school system the ability to introduce new academic programs (i.e. magnet schools) or expand successful ones (i.e. Early College, IB and Pre-K) so all students can benefit.

The evidence is actually just the opposite. **The Carl Vinson Study** (Pg. 74) concluded that **consolidation may result in fewer programs** and services or declined parental involvement in or comprehension of school programs, policies, and procedures. Actually, because of the costs of unification, the costs of administering the International Baccalaureate (IB) program for the entire district will most likely result in the cancellation of this and other programs.

According to the United States Department of Education, "...the term 'magnet school' means a public elementary school, public secondary school, public elementary education center, or public secondary education center that offers a special curriculum capable of attracting substantial numbers of students of different racial backgrounds." Magnet schools tend to be much smaller student bodies with the most successful being less than 100 students in the graduating class.

In the past year, the Ware County Board of Education voted to close the Ware Magnet School, which was a top ranked school in Georgia, because of funding issues. This decision was placed on the ballot as a referendum. Citizens in favor of Magnet Schools objected and conducted a grassroots attempt to stop the closure. The WBOE stated that if it kept Ware Magnet open, it would have to make cuts to district arts, athletics and ROTC programs and raise school taxes 20%. (Florida Times Union, July 18, 2010, at Jacksonville.com). The vote was 67% in favor of closing the Magnet School despite the school's academic success. (Jacksonville.com, July 20, 2010).

Furthermore, as a side note, the 2008-2009 Report Card for Ware Magnet School from gaosa.org shows that the state racial profile was 46% white, the Ware County profile was 57% white, but the Ware Magnet School profile was 68% white. Conversely, the state profile was 38% African American, the Ware County profile was 37% African American, but Ware Magnet School was 19% African American. Not a good result for an organization like CUEE that pushes for racial diversity on one hand and pushes for magnet schools on the other hand.

The LBOE has stated that to meet all of the wish list of CUEE and its educational reforms, the tax rate would have to be raised to 28 mills. This is clearly a point where desire runs away from practicality.

10. CUEE STATEMENT: Property values in Valdosta will go up over time instead of continuing their downward trend.

According to the **Carl Vinson Study**, the percent change in residential property values between incorporated areas and non-incorporated areas was almost identical between Valdosta/Lowndes (a non-merged community) and Troup County (a merged community). The study held that it is impossible to conclude that school district mergers impact the relative investments or values of residential property. (Pg. 55)

11. CUEE STATEMENT: Research shows unification brings a community-wide focus to improving test scores and graduation rates.

According to the **Carl Vinson Study**, educational governance is linked to larger issues of student performance, youth development, the vitality of neighborhoods, and the relative ability of disadvantaged households to have equal access to the opportunities that a quality education can offer. They recognize that a change in educational governance cannot by itself address all of the challenges that face the local school system. There is no magic bullet to consolidation itself. The study suggests further study and ultimate implementation of educational programs and policies that will help to increase graduation rates, improve student achievement, and reduce the causes of alienation from the educational system by both disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students. (Pg. 9). This is exactly what the Valdosta and Lowndes systems have done and continue to do. Consolidation of the systems would accomplish nothing toward this goal.

12. CUEE STATEMENT: Teachers and principals will benefit from more professional development.

CUEE has presented no evidence that professional development is better in a unified system or that it is even related to unification. LBOE estimates the cost of the professional development sought by CUEE would initially be at least \$1.5 million.

13. CUEE STATEMENT: More parents will become involved in a unified school system.

The **Carl Vinson Study** concluded just the opposite stating that consolidation may result in fewer programs and services or **declined parental involvement in or comprehension of school programs, policies, and procedures.** (Pg.74). Large impersonal systems typically result in the opposite. There will most likely be **less parent and student participation.**

14. CUEE STATEMENT: Tax dollars will be spent more efficiently and duplication eliminated.

There is no evidence to support this. The **Carl Vinson Study** did not make this conclusion. According to the study, while school district consolidation has historically been motivated, in part, by a desire on the part of educational and political leaders to achieve schools of sufficient size so as to allow for more educational opportunities for students, this motivation would not seem to be particularly relevant to the Valdosta-Lowndes situation in that both school districts are of sufficient size to afford such opportunities. Thus, the relevant question would be whether the unification/consolidation of Valdosta/Lowndes would result in a district that is too large rather than too small. (Pg. 18).

The Lowndes County Board of Education has clearly shown that the size of the unified district coupled with loss of revenues would result in tax millage rates to rise to the maximum 21 mills and there would still be a deficit. The Carl Vinson Study showed that **mid-sized districts between 1500 and 6000 students are the most efficient** and that systems with fewer than 1500 students or more than 6000 students were the least efficient. (Pg. 30). The implication is the larger the district, the less the efficiency. **A unified Valdosta/Lowndes district would be approximately 18,000 students.** This lack of efficiency is demonstrated by the LBOE analysis that shows **the cost of unification will increase the \$45.7 million needed to run both systems independently to \$58.8 million to operate one unified system plus still have a deficit of \$3 million.** This evidence is consistent with the Carl Vinson Study showing that larger school systems are less efficient to operate than mid-sized systems.

15. CUEE STATEMENT: School millage rates will be the same for the city and county residents.

Yes, but it will be the same for city and county at a much higher rate than before unification/consolidation. LBOE has calculated the millage rate needed to pay for the cost of consolidation at the maximum allowed by law without a referendum, which is 21 mills. The millage rate in Valdosta is currently 16.98 mills and the millage rate in Lowndes County is currently 14.7 mills. LBOE states that CUEE's entire wish list of educational reforms would require a millage rate of 28 mills.

This is the only issue in which CUEE uses data from its own Carl Vinson Study, and then they quote the study out of context as saying something it does not say. CUEE has tried to pretend a tax increase will not happen and on October 12, 2011 circulated a memo claiming to state the truth about school taxes. This is anything but the truth.

First, CUEE states "The Lowndes County Board of Education and others continue to circulate a document that says school unification will cause a significant increase in the school millage rate for city and county residents based on numbers cited by CUEE. This is not accurate as CUEE has not released or conducted a study that recommended a tax increase." Again, CUEE either fails to understand what the LBOE said or it is being deceitful. The LBOE was referencing the current budget of the Lowndes County school system coupled with the cost of implementing the programs in the way asserted by CUEE. It never said that CUEE recommended a higher property tax. It merely stated that considering the current school budget, the cost of unification including the implementation of racial diversity plans, the millage rate will have to be increased to 21% and there would still be a deficit.

Second, CUEE states "In fact, if you were to use the "estimated" school millage rate referenced during the Lowndes County public forum (21.0 mills), a unified school system would generate \$13 million more than what both school systems collect today in from their current millage rates." This is true, but CUEE ignores that fact that the LBOE also stated that the unification of the two systems will result in expenses that begin at \$16 million (just to meet the first item on CUEE's wish list for cost per student equalization), which would leave the County at a \$3 million deficit.

Third, CUEE states "By looking at what other communities experienced, the millage rate for a unified school system is typically close to the average millage rate for the city and county school systems prior to unification." I see that once again, CUEE states no evidence to support this assertion. What is in fact known is that Troup County School System currently has a millage rate of 18.85 mills which is down from a millage rate of 19.35 mills in 2004. Considering that a unified Lowndes County School System would be about 18,000 students as opposed to the 12,500 students of Troup County and considering that the Carl Vinson Study shows that the larger the school system over 6000 students, the less efficient it becomes, the estimated millage rate of the LBOE definitely will have to be larger than Troup County's millage rate, and therefore, the evidence supports the findings by the LBOE, which holds the unique position of knowing its own budget better than anyone else, especially CUEE.

Fourth, CUEE states “This fact is also referenced in the recent study by the University of Georgia’s Carl Vinson Institute, which says “city residents can expect a slight decrease in their school millage rate (16.98 mills) while county residents can expect a slight increase in their school millage rate (14.70 mills).” So, now CUEE decides to quote the Carl Vinson Study when it has ignored it on all other issues. However, CUEE in typical fashion has pulled this statement out of context and has used it to state something it did not state. The Carl Vinson Study made no conclusions on what would happen in the case of a Valdosta/Lowndes unification. In fact, the study claims not to be able to make definitive conclusions on any issue due to so many unknown variables. What the study actually said on this point was “**if we assume that tax rates will be equalized in a merged school system, the likely impact would be that students in Valdosta would have less property tax value support per student than is currently the case, while students in Lowndes County would have more property tax value support per student than is currently the case. Similarly, property owners in Valdosta would likely experience a slight tax increase, while property owners in unincorporated Lowndes County would experience a slight tax decrease.**” (Pg. 56). The Carl Vinson Study clearly states that it cannot predict the future governing decisions of the LBOE in a unified system. Therefore, this study cannot be used as a rebuttal to the estimates made by the LBOE who alone holds the relevant budgetary information and will alone be making the governing and educational decisions of the unified system.

Furthermore, LBOE has issued a response to CUEE's memo as follows:

SEE NEXT PAGE FOR RESPONSE

The Real Cost of Consolidation

On October 12th, the **Vote Yes 4 Our Children** campaign issued a press release refuting Lowndes County Schools' calculations regarding property tax increases. They claim that substantial increases will not occur and note that an increase to 21 mills would generate \$13 million more than what both systems collect with today's millage rates; however, CUEE fails to take into account their own educational proposals and additional costs. Lowndes County Schools' calculations are based on CUEE's costs.

Part of CUEE's proposal includes raising Valdosta City School System's expenditures per student to the same level of the Lowndes County School System. CUEE points out that city schools spend \$10,579 per student, while county schools spend \$12,746 per student. Consequently, same per pupil expenditures would be achieved at the cost of \$2,167 per each student in the city school system, increasing funding needs **\$16,083,474** annually.

Lowndes County Schools has stated that an increase to 21 mills would be required (the legal limit). While CUEE has noted that this increase would produce \$13 million more in revenue, they fail to note that just **one** of their educational proposals would cause the school system to accumulate **\$3,083,474** in debt. *The increase of \$13 million in revenue does not cover the \$16,083,474 increase in per student expenditures.*

There are also other costs associated with consolidation as identified by CUEE. These costs include, but are not limited to, the construction of new schools (costing over \$200 million), as well as recommended professional development that adds up to about \$1.5 million annually. CUEE's school configuration proposal states that no elementary school should exceed 300-400 students. Currently, only one elementary school, out of both systems, has less than 400 students. The other 11 elementary schools range from 550-1,156 students. CUEE's model would require the construction of 7 elementary schools, for a total of 19 in the community. In addition, their model suggests building **one** or **two** more high schools.

CUEE calculated a new millage rate of 15.84 mills by simply adding both current rates together and dividing by two—a false method for calculating millage rates. The consolidated tax digest must be used in computing the new millage rate, which is what Lowndes County Schools used. While CUEE estimates a consolidated millage rate of 15.84 mills, the official consolidated rate (based on the consolidated tax digest) is 16.317 mills; however, this millage rate is based on current expenditures alone, with no increases calculated. Basically, CUEE's millage rate estimation is **\$1,337,559** short of what the mandatory consolidated millage rate would be, without consideration of cost increases.

So, in actuality, an increase to 21 mills does not cover the consolidation costs indicated by CUEE, as well as those not anticipated by CUEE that have been identified to date (salaries, transportation, legal fees, and technology changes).

Tax increases will range from **23%-42%**.

Visit www.lowndes.k12.ga.us for more information.

SEE THE ORIGINAL LBOE HANDOUT ON REAL COST OF CONSOLIDATION, BELOW.

The Real Cost of Consolidation



2011

Current Local Revenue



Lowndes County
Millage Rate: 14.70 mills
1 Mill= \$1,404,831.00
Total Local Revenue:
\$20,651,018.00



Valdosta City
Millage Rate: 16.98
1 Mill= \$1,476,538.00
Total Local Revenue:
\$25,071,615.00

Current Local Revenue for Both Systems: **\$45,722,633.00**

CUEE's consolidated proposal requires an **additional 5.74 mills** (\$16,083,574.00) to remain at the same level of expenditures per student. To meet these requirements, the millage rate would be raised to 22.07 mills. State law restricts the maximum millage rate to 21 mills.

Consolidated Tax Data with Maximum Legal Millage Rate

Consolidated Millage Rate
21.00 mills

Consolidated per Mill Value
\$2,802,088.00

Total Consolidated Local Revenue
\$58,843,848.00

The system would fall **\$5,418,011.00** short of meeting CUEE's claimed major instructional needs and other identified expenditures to date.

The millage rate will escalate to the maximum legal limit, thus increasing taxes for all—city and county.

Ask Yourselves:

Would a tax increase attract more businesses?

or

Would some businesses relocate due to increased taxation?

There are also other costs identified by CUEE, as well as costs associated with consolidation, that are not included in this plan.

The Real Cost of Consolidation

So, what happens to **your** property tax?

Formula

To calculate your property tax, multiply your taxable value by the millage rate (with a .0 before it).

Current School Tax

Lowndes County	
Taxable Value	\$89,972.00
Multiply by Millage Rate	x <u>.01470</u>
Current School Tax	\$1,322.59

Valdosta City	
Taxable Value	\$89,972.00
Multiply by Millage Rate	x <u>.01698</u>
Current School Tax	\$1,527.72

Consolidated School Tax

Taxable Value	\$89,972.00
Multiply by Millage Rate	x <u>.02100</u>
Consolidated Tax	\$1,889.41

Taxable Value	\$89,972.00
Multiply by Millage Rate	x <u>.02100</u>
Consolidated Tax	\$1,889.41

$$\$1,889.41 - 1,322.59 = \$566.82$$

$$\$1,889.41 - 1,527.72 = \$361.69$$

42% Tax Increase

23% Tax Increase

Consolidation will increase the costs of:

- Transportation
- Software
- Benefits
- Legal Fees
- New Classes
- Technology
- Salaries
- Per Pupil Expenditures

Consolidation will decrease:

- Federal Funding
- State QBE Funding
- New Schools
- Salaries
- Equalization Funding
- Teachers
- Administrators
- Support Staff

One important key to consolidation is the demand and need for more money. Consolidation will cost more, and we, as taxpayers, will be expected to pay the bill.

Visit www.lowndes.k12.ga.us for more information.

16. CUEE STATEMENT: Diversity in our public schools will improve.

All of the statistics and reasons claimed by Community Unification for Educational Excellence, Inc. (CUEE) in favor of unification of the Valdosta and Lowndes school

VOTE NO TO UNIFICATION/CONSOLIDATION!

The Grassroots Handbook Against School Consolidation

The Truth About Unification/Consolidation of the Valdosta/Lowndes School Systems

systems are related to the issues of poverty and diversity of the community not education. Integration of the school systems was forced by the Federal Courts in the early 1970's in Valdosta, Georgia. Since that time the school systems have tended toward re-segregation because the state cannot dictate where people live. If the two school systems unify at this time, the Justice Department will force racial diversity to nearly equal proportions of minority and non-minority students. However, as is seen in Dougherty County, the population tends to move to re-segregate.

The problems raised by CUEE will never be addressed at the educational level. They must be addressed at the community level. I would like to see how many of CUEE's members and supporters live in a racially integrated neighborhood. I live in a racially integrated neighborhood. I attend a racially integrated church. My children attend racially integrated schools. My friends are racially diverse as well. Therefore, having a group of individuals like CUEE (the most of whom live segregated in their rich country estates) come to the community pleading for racial diversity in our schools is to say the least, hypocritical.

Until we address, personally and as a community, the problem of segregation in our community, we will continue to have segregation issues in our schools. If racial desegregation did not work in the 1970's what makes anyone think it will work now through unification/consolidation. If we truly want to resolve the racial diversity problems in our schools, then we need to resolve the racial diversity in our community. This comes from the socio-economically advantaged reaching out with their resources to help relieve the poverty and its sister, apathy, in the socio-disadvantaged communities.

The Carl Vinson Study shows that a more equal racial diversity tends to increase school performance for blacks including graduation rates (based on data that would suggest that the two school systems have different socio-economic status levels), but would decrease the overall performance of the system. (Pg. 29). It is worth noting that Troup County has a nearly equal racial balance while Valdosta is 75% African American, and yet Valdosta and Troup County are basically equal in all performance results for the State of Georgia. Unification/consolidation has not gained any ground for Troup County in the area of academic performance as a result of racial equalization.

Furthermore, there are only two ways that racial diversity can be accomplished: one is for the races to live diversely (this is not likely since there is no way to control where people live); the other would be to bus students away from neighborhood schools into different attendance zones. Of course there is nothing to stop families from moving to attend schools that they perceive as a better quality school once those attendance zones are drawn.

There is nothing about unification in and of itself that will result in diversity within the public schools. (Pg. 29). The **Carl Vinson Study** considers two approaches. One in which the attendance zones remain the same and one in which the attendance zones are redrawn. (Pg 45).

The study also determines the Dissimilarity Index in Valdosta. The dissimilarity index measures whether one particular group is distributed across census tracts in the metropolitan area in the same way as another group. A high value indicates that the two groups tend to live in different tracts. D ranges from 0 to 100. A value of 60 (or above) is considered very high. It means that 60% (or more) of the members of one group would need to move to a different tract in order for the two groups to be equally distributed. Valdosta has a dissimilarity index of 61.5 in the 2000 census. This means that in order to equalize the racial makeup, 61% of the students in the Valdosta school system would either have to move (not likely) or will have to be transported to another school. In other words, approximately 60% of the students in Valdosta will have to be bused to obtain equality. (Pg 40).

The next question is whether the new unified district would have to move students in such a way as to reduce the dissimilarity index. The answer is yes. The Federal Justice Department will oversee this process beginning the day after the vote to dissolve. Dr. Jenkins the superintendent of Troup County when LaGrange voted to give up its charter stated that within a couple days of the vote to dissolve, he was contacted by attorneys of the Federal Justice Department giving him 12 months to propose a racial diversity plan. Troup County lawyers had to negotiate for 18 months to propose such a plan. Likewise, in Lowndes County, a consolidated district will have to create new attendance zones subject to approval of the Justice Department.

Therefore, it is certain that a unified school district in Lowndes County will have to **bus students in mass** to comply with Justice Department demands. According to the Lowndes County Board of Education, this will result in a significant increase in transportation costs and will put children on buses for longer portions of each day.

* On a side note, CUEE is now running a political radio advertisement on the local Hip Hop station designed to convince African American voters that they need to vote yes for unification of the two school systems to keep Martin Luther King, Jr.'s dream alive. The voice on the ad is not identified, but it is clear that CUEE used an African American male's voice that sounds like the African American actor, Morgan Freeman to make this pitch. There is documented evidence of a political group using Mr. Freeman's voice by an impersonator to give the appearance that Mr. Freeman endorses this cause. Here are two news sources about this deception by the political group:

<http://politicalticker.blogs.cnn.com/2010/11/01/morgan-freeman-in-middle-of-campaign-ad-controversy/>

http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-503544_162-20021412-503544.html

Maybe Mr. Freeman did lend his voice to CUEE's cause, but I would think that he would identify himself if that was the case.

Furthermore, everyone I know in the African American community is outraged that CUEE would hijack Dr. King's message for the sake of deceiving the public into thinking that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s organization is promoting this unification. For those who want to wage a complaint, you should direct your complaint to:

The King Center
449 Auburn Avenue, NE
Atlanta, GA 30312

Key Contacts:

General Information — (404) 526-8900; information@thekingcenter.org

website: <http://www.thekingcenter.org/>

It appears that this is yet another deceptive marketing tactic used by CUEE to trick the African American community into believing that Morgan Freeman and The King Center endorse this effort by CUEE to unify the school systems.

17. CUEE STATEMENT: More money will come into the system from foundations and the private sector.

CUEE has presented no evidence that more money will come into the system from foundations and the private sector. There is no evidence of this in the **Carl Vinson Study**. There are no studies of foundations and private sector funds available to Valdosta/Lowndes as a result of unification/consolidation. Certainly, LBOE, VBOE and the Carl Vinson Study show that less will come in from the state. This could place the school systems at the mercy of the private sector. More than likely, since the school system cannot print money, it will have to lay off employees to stay within budget. The LBOE has clearly stated that based upon its financial projections, employees including teachers will have to be laid off as a result of the total costs of consolidation.

18. CUEE STATEMENT: Unification means a better qualified workforce that will help bring more jobs, more business and industry for the future.

The **Carl Vinson Study** was unable to find any studies that specifically identified or estimated the contribution that school system structure might make to economic performance. While there does appear to be some relationship between school system structure and student achievement, the fact that **most empirical studies find little to no relationship between achievement test scores and later labor market success** makes it difficult to extrapolate meaningful economic impacts from these findings. Similarly, while there does appear to be some relationship between school system structure and school system costs, given the size of the Valdosta-Lowndes systems and the uncertainty regarding the expected revenue/cost structure for a new merged school system, extrapolating meaningful economic impacts from this relationship is also not likely to be feasible. (Pg. 79)

CUEE continues to have its members and supporters write letters stating that the community should vote to unify the school systems because the businesses need a better qualified workforce. Greg Justice (director of manufacturing for Regal Marine Industries, Inc. in Valdosta) asks “Which comes first, the chicken or the egg?” Mr. Justice stated at the CUEE meeting that Regal Marine chose Valdosta/Lowndes County to operate a plant because the wage structure was low. He then postulated, “which comes first, the chicken or the egg?” to state that the wages are low here because a qualified work force does not exist. He proposes that education must come first and then the wages will rise. I’m not sure which one is the chicken and which one is the egg, but I would suggest that if Regal Marine raised their wages and they would attract a more qualified work force.

Mr. Joe Cordova, a retired vice president of Georgia Power Company, wrote “During my 41 years with Georgia Power, I saw firsthand the difficulties local employers face when trying to find high school graduates that have the basic skills required for a job. Unfortunately, our community continues to struggle with developing a qualified workforce. This issue is real and impacts the growth and development of our community.” I know for a fact that there is a long line of qualified applicants seeking to be employed by Georgia Power because of the fair wages they pay, but there is no position for them. When I graduated from college in 1981, I applied to Georgia Power, but did not even get an interview. I have known several over the years who likewise could not get an interview because there were no positions available.

I would challenge Mr. Justice and Mr. Cordova, and the others writing and saying the same talking point, to provide to the community a list of all the jobs in our community that remain unfilled because there is not a qualified workforce along with the wages each position pays. I speak to qualified workers every day that cannot find employment or cannot find employment that will pay more than they make on unemployment. I and the rest of the community would gladly post and distribute this list to qualified applicants.

19. CUEE STATEMENT: Planning is under way on what the goals of the unified system should be.

There has been no effective planning and clearly no relevant or practical goals have been developed by CUEE or anyone else.

C. CUEE's Promise of What Will Not Happen in Unification

20. CUEE STATEMENT: Football and other athletic programs will continue to operate in a unified school system as they do today. The Vikings versus the Wildcats tradition will continue!

This could be true, but it is not guaranteed. It is possible that at some time after giving up its charter, Valdosta High School could cease to exist. Ware County eliminated Waycross High School. Sumter County eliminated Americus High School. Dougherty County kept the

individual high schools. Troup County eliminated some, kept some and created a new one. The Carl Vinson Study agrees that it cannot predict the actions of the Board of the unified Lowndes District. (Pg 15).

21. CUEE STATEMENT: Bazemore-Hyder Stadium cannot be sold without approval of the newly elected Valdosta-Lowndes County School Board.

Bazemore-Hyder Stadium will mostly likely have to be sold because the new unified school system will not be able to afford to maintain two stadiums even with the significant increase in tax revenues. The sale of Bazemore-Hyder Stadium by the unified Board will mark the end of Wildcat football and its history.

22. CUEE STATEMENT: Children will not be bussed all over the county.

It is impossible to obtain racial diversity without the abandonment of neighborhood schools, the realignment of enrollment zones and the busing of students within those zones. There is nothing about unification in and of itself that will result in diversity within the public schools. The Carl Vinson Study considers two approaches. One in which the attendance zones remain the same and one in which the attendance zones are redrawn. (Pg 45). The study also determines the Dissimilarity Index in Valdosta. The dissimilarity index measures whether one particular group is distributed across census tracts in the metropolitan area in the same way as another group. A high value indicates that the two groups tend to live in different tracts. D ranges from 0 to 100. A value of 60 (or above) is considered very high. It means that 60% (or more) of the members of one group would need to move to a different tract in order for the two groups to be equally distributed. Valdosta has a dissimilarity index of 61.5 in the 2000 census. This means that in order to equalize the racial makeup, 61% of the students in the Valdosta school system would either have to move (not likely) or will have to be transported to another school. In other words, approximately 60% of the students in Valdosta will have to be bused to obtain equality. (Pg 40).

The next question is will the new unified district have to move students in such a way as to reduce the dissimilarity index. The answer is yes. The Federal Justice Department will oversee this process beginning the day after the vote to dissolve. Dr. Jenkins the superintendent of Troup County when LaGrange voted to give up its charter stated that within a couple days of the vote, he was contacted by attorneys of the Federal Justice Department giving him 12 months to propose a racial diversity plan. Troup County lawyers had to negotiate for 18 months. Likewise, in Lowndes County, a consolidated district will have to create new attendance zones subject to approval of the Justice Department.

Therefore, it is certain that a unified school district in Lowndes County will have to bus students in mass to comply with Justice Department demands. According to the Lowndes

County Board of Education, this will result in a significant increase in transportation costs and will put children on buses for longer portions of each day.

23. CUEE STATEMENT: Teachers will not lose their jobs, tenure or their pension. It won't happen!

The Valdosta School System has typically had smaller student to teacher ratios (i.e., smaller class sizes) than the Lowndes County School System. In a unified system, the county will either need to add more teachers (more consolidation costs) or more likely due to budget constraints, eliminate approximately 40 teacher positions and raise Valdosta's class ratio up to meet Lowndes' class ratio.

CUEE often cites Georgia law to prohibit the firing of teachers after consolidation. This is simply not true. The County has the right to hire and fire under reduction in force laws. The LBOE probably cannot decide to fire only Valdosta teachers, but it could terminate teachers across the board from both school systems. Dr. Jenkins, the Troup County superintendent during consolidation stated that the County fired teachers from the LaGrange School Systems after the consolidation. He stated that he worked to get a law passed that would prohibit the unified system from retaliating against the dissolved systems' teachers and that all teacher firings would have to be across the board. I have not found the law to which Dr. Jenkins refers, but I will assume it to exist. However, this does not stop the LBOE from eliminating teaching positions across the board. The Lowndes County Board of Education has clearly stated that based upon its economic evaluation to date, there will have to be teacher, administrator and staff layoffs to bring the budget in balance. The **Carl Vinson Study** shows that in a study of 8 school consolidations in Oklahoma, 38% of the schools had a reduction in teaching staff.

The relevant laws governing teacher terminations or suspensions in Georgia are listed below.

§ 20-2-940. (Effective until January 1, 2013. See note.) Grounds and procedure for terminating or suspending contract of employment

(a) *Grounds for termination or suspension.* Except as otherwise provided in this subsection, the contract of employment of a teacher, principal, or other employee having a contract for a definite term may be terminated or suspended for the following reasons:

- (1) Incompetency;
- (2) Insubordination;
- (3) Willful neglect of duties;
- (4) Immorality;
- (5) Inciting, encouraging, or counseling students to violate any valid state law, municipal ordinance, or policy or rule of the local board of education;
- (6) To reduce staff due to loss of students or cancellation of programs;**

- (7) Failure to secure and maintain necessary educational training; or
- (8) Any other good and sufficient cause.

§ 20-2-943. Powers of local boards of education under this part

(a) In exercising its powers in the enforcement of due process under this part, a local board of education shall be authorized:

(1) Under Code Section 20-2-940 to:

- (A) Terminate the contract of the teacher or other school employee;
- (B) Suspend a teacher or other school employee without pay for a period of time not to exceed 60 days. In such event, the teacher or employee shall provide no services for the school system and shall receive no compensation but shall be considered an employee on suspended status; or
- (C) Reinstate a teacher or other school employee in the event the teacher or school employee has been temporarily relieved from duty in accordance with this part;

(2) Under Code Section 20-2-942 to:

- (A) Nonrenew a teacher's or other school employee's contract;
- (B) Renew a teacher's or other school employee's contract; or
- (C) Demote a teacher or other school employee from one position in the school system to another position in the school system having less responsibility, prestige, and salary.

(b) Nothing in this part shall be construed as depriving local boards of education and other school officials from assigning and reassigning teachers and other certificated professional employees from one school to another or from assigning and reassigning teachers to teach different classes or subjects.

HISTORY: Ga. L. 1975, p. 360, § 4.

24. CUEE STATEMENT: If the referendum passes, both School Boards will appoint people to a committee that will create a plan for a county wide school system.

There is no requirement for a committee. The transition will be a unilateral decision of the Lowndes County Board of Education. The only requirement is that the County must “arrange” for the operation of the City schools. The LBOE attorney has already indicated that

the Board believes its fiduciary duty to manage the finances of the unified school system will necessitate the taking over of the Valdosta System as soon as possible.

The relevant laws governing dissolution of an independent school charter in Georgia are listed below.

§ 20-2-370. Referendum on repeal of special school law and consolidation of systems

Whenever the citizens of a municipality or independent school district authorized by law to establish and maintain a system of schools by local taxation in whole or in part are operating a system of public schools independent of the county school system and wish to annul their special school law and become a part of the county school system, they shall present and file with the governing authority of the city a petition signed by one-fourth of the qualified voters of their territory; and the governing authority shall then submit the question at an election to be held in accordance with Chapter 2 of Title 21. A majority of those voting shall be necessary to carry the election. Only qualified voters residing within the municipality or district for six months prior to the election shall vote. An election shall not be held for the same purpose more often than every 12 months.

HISTORY: Ga. L. 1926, Ex. Sess., p. 40, § 1; Code 1933, § 32-1201; Ga. L. 1982, p. 3, § 20, Ga. L. 1998, p. 295, § 3.

§ 20-2-371. Proceedings when vote favors repeal and consolidation

When the results of an election held under Code Section 20-2-370 are declared and published in favor of repealing such independent school system, making the territory included in the system thereby to become a part of the county school system, such independent or local school system shall continue to function under its local laws, organizations, and regulations until the county board of education shall arrange for the operation by them of such school or schools within the local system as a part of their public school system.

HISTORY: Ga. L. 1926, Ex. Sess., p. 40, § 2; Code 1933, § 32-1202.

§ 20-2-372. Effect of repeal and consolidation

Where any local or independent system is repealed by and in the manner provided in Code Sections 20-2-370 and 20-2-371, the territory formerly included in such independent system shall become and constitute a school district of the county in which it is located and shall enjoy the same privileges and shall be governed by the same laws as other school districts in the county, including the authority to levy local taxes for school purposes; provided, however, that the rate for such taxation shall not exceed the rate allowed by law to other similar school districts.

HISTORY: Ga. L. 1926, Ex. Sess., p. 40, § 3; Code 1933, § 32-1203.

25. **CUEE STATEMENT: Nothing changes until both School Boards agree upon this plan that will ensure a smooth transition to a unified school system. State law says so.**

This is strictly a unilateral decision of the LBOE (see above). **The Carl Vinson Study** shows that they could not predict how a unified district would choose to govern the education system in the future.

26. **CUEE STATEMENT: A new county wide school board will be elected that represents all citizens, including minorities.**

The minorities currently hold 4 of 9 board seats (44%). The minorities would likely only hold 2 of 7 seats in the new County System (29%). The result would be a reduction of the ability of minorities to represent and protect their interests in a unified system by at least 15%. The NAACP resolution highlights that if Valdosta/Lowndes unify/consolidate, “we’re going to a system in which minority voters would be represented by 1-2 seats.” Therefore, the unification of the two systems will reduce the minority representation on the board, thus jeopardizing the diversity alleged as a benefit of consolidation.

SEE ATTACHMENTS SHEET BELOW

ATTACHMENTS

1. **The NEPC/Boulder, Colorado Study**

Below is the Executive Summary of this study. You can find the full report at the following web address:

<http://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/consolidation-schools-districts>

2. **The Carl Vinson Study**

You can find the full report at the following web address:

<http://www.chamberorganizer.com/valdostachamber/docs/Study%20Final%20report.pdf>