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GOP gubernatorial candidate Jeanne Ives says U46 too big, needs to be reduced

BY RAFAEL GUERRERO

Just as some school districts are too small and should be consolidated to increase efficiencies so too should the state's two largest school districts be reduced in size, gubernatorial candidate Jeanne Ives said.

"Chicago (Public Schools) and Elgin (School District U46) are too big, too large in their number of students or their geographical area," said Ives, a District 42 state representative running against Republican Gov. [Bruce Rauner](#) in the March primary.

When districts are that large, local control is diminished and inefficiencies are more likely, she said.

Ives, of Wheaton, has made an issue of school district size, saying that a third of the state's 800-plus districts have 600 students or less and are too small. If all elementary school districts were to merge with neighboring high school districts to create unit districts, not only would there be a uniform vision for all of the grades from kindergarten to 12, there would be a cost savings for taxpayers, she said.

Consolidated districts would reduce administrative costs, improve student performance and reinforce local control, Ives said.

"At some point, (small districts are) a waste of resources," she said.

How U46 or the Chicago Public Schools system could be reduced in size is something she didn't address.

Ives has a supporter in U46 school board member Jeanette Ward, who said she generally agrees with Ives' position that all districts become K-12 unit districts and that U46 might benefit were it to be divided into smaller districts.

"In U46, (downsizing) might make it more responsive," Ward said. "When one gets too big, it gets difficult to be responsive ... big districts get to be unwieldy."

However, Ward said such a change would likely take years to accomplish.

Ives is not the first to suggest that U46 should be made smaller. Over the past two decades, the topic has been broached by various groups.

In 2004 and 2005, Bartlett, Carol Stream and Wayne residents considered and abandoned the creation of a separate school district. In the late 1990s, Bartlett residents briefly considered trying to establish their own district after Bartlett High School opened as U46's fourth high school.

Board member Traci O'Neal Ellis said she found it odd that Ives would advocate consolidation for many districts but then would split up Chicago schools and U46. She said the representative's comments were too vague and more likely "a political soundbite."

"It's hard to understand what she's talking about," O'Neal Ellis said. "What will downsizing do? What problems has she identified? And how will the problems (be fixed)?"

U46 officials declined to comment on Ives' remarks.

U46, based in Elgin, is made up of 11 communities in Cook, DuPage and Kane counties.