

ARKPORT-CANASERAGA

Merger talks called ‘inevitable’

Districts cite current economic climate, say discussions will take place

By Al Bruce

The Evening Tribune

Arkport and Canaseraga school boards will hold several meetings next month to explore questions their communities have about the potential reorganization of the two schools into a single district.

Voters in the two districts “expressed overwhelming support (for) a study of the pros and cons of reorganizing the two districts in budget ballots last May: 77 percent of Arkport residents and 81 percent in Canaseraga favored the action,” according to letters being mailed this week to residents of the districts.

Residents two years ago voted to end a study of proposed merger with Alfred-Almond, Arkport and Canaseraga.

Since then, “the possibility of combining Arkport and Canaseraga school districts has been the subject of discussion and debate in the two communities,” according to the letters from Canaseraga Schools Superintendent Chad Groff; Canaseraga School Board president Richard Kinney; Arkport Superintendent Jesse Harper, and Arkport school board President Patrick Flaitz.

“In an economic climate marked by increasing education costs, decreasing state aid and a property tax levy cap that limits how much local revenue can be raised and declining student enrollment, the subject is natural and inevitable,” the letter said.

The “joint public information-questionand- answer session will be held at 7:30 p.m. Thursday, March 9 in the Canaseraga small gymnasium.

Meetings to discuss sports consolidation of the two schools will be held during the Arkport school board meeting at 6 p.m. Wednesday, March 22 and at 7 p.m. Thursday, March 23 during the Canaseraga board meeting.

“There is much to consider before undertaking a reorganization,” said the letter announcing the March 9 meeting: “Will (the reorganization) save taxpayers money? Will it expand academic and extracurricular opportunities? What does each district stand to gain or lose? Will it bring in additional state aid? (Yes, it’s called “reorganization” aid.) What are the many steps involved?”

The two school boards also last week “shared information about plans to explore merging all Arkport and Canaseraga sports teams beginning with the 2017-18 school year” this September.

“Participation numbers in both school districts have dropped during the past five years,” the separate sports letter continued. “Both districts have been working together to join athletic teams to provide student opportunities. These merged teams have offered athletes the chance to compete together when there would not have been a team without the combined effort.

“Each year, during student sign-ups, it is questionable whether we will be able to field teams in each sport. Bringing our athletes together will increase the likelihood of having a team available and in some cases three levels of a given sport.”

“The combined varsity boys’ basketball team last year was an overwhelming success from the perspectives of opportunity and team-bonding,” Groff said. “The athletes from each school district came together, worked hard and had a great time.”

The superintendents invited “the school communities to participate in an online survey about this proposed sports merger so residents can share questions, comments and concerns,” the letter said.

The superintendents said they “will present some possible structures and procedures for the consolidation” during the March 22 and 23 meetings.

Arkport Central has 450 enrolled students and Canaseraga 235.