

Merger **FAQS**

Background:

The possibility of combining Arkport and Canaseraga has been under discussion in both school districts since May 2016. The process of studying a possible merger officially began in December 2017, when an advisory committee comprised of volunteers from both districts began to meet with education consultants Castallo & Silky. The final merger study report was submitted to both boards of education in June, and the New York State Education Department approved the report the following month.

In community meetings this summer, residents have asked important questions, some of which are answered below. We will continue to answer questions on the Arkport and Canaseraga CSD websites as we receive them.

Q Why is it even necessary to discuss a merger?

Student enrollment in both Arkport and Canaseraga has steadily declined in recent years, and that trend is expected to continue. Since the 2012-13 school year, the number of Arkport students has decreased by more than 11 percent, and Canaseraga's student population has dipped by about 4 percent. Dwindling enrollment impacts the amount of financial aid a district receives from the state, which can lead to hard decisions: Reduce the educational program or increase

local property taxes? Both Arkport and Canaseraga have had to endure painful budget cuts over the past 10 to 15 years.

Q How will the school buildings be utilized if we merge?

Students in grades PK-6 would be taught in Arkport and Canaseraga elementary classrooms; grades 7-8 would be located in Canaseraga; and grades 9-12 would be at Arkport.

Q How will merging the districts affect the amount of time students ride the bus to school?

If a merger is approved, the newly formed district will hire a consultant to conduct a full transportation analysis. By rerouting buses and possibly adding some extra bus runs, the district will keep ride times equal to or less than the current 60-minute maximum.

Q Why is it being recommended that the merged district house a combined middle school (grades 7-8) in Canaseraga?

The Arkport school building cannot logistically accommodate all 312 students projected to make up grades 7-12 in the 2019-20 school year. Although the building has housed student populations that large in the past, today's schools require more differentiation in services (e.g., special education classrooms, art rooms, etc.). Jamming everyone

under one roof would disrupt the lives of students, faculty and staff by causing overcrowded classes and requiring teachers to share rooms. By moving the middle school to a different location, the merged district would not only avoid that logistical dysfunction, but also allow students in grades 7-8 to begin to exercise some independence in their own space, rather than be wedged between the elementary and high school grades.

Q Can you guarantee students in grades 7-8 will have the same extracurricular opportunities they have now?

In a word, yes. The district would be committed to providing all current opportunities, regardless of where a student is housed. If that means busing students to Arkport for some activities, the district will do so.

Q How would a merged district increase opportunities for students?

Over the past 10 to 15 years, both districts have lost numerous courses due to declining enrollment, including some higher-level math and science offerings, business electives such as accounting, and arts classes. By merging, Arkport and Canaseraga would hope to gain what's been lost. The merged district also would look to expand further by adding new classes that match student interests, language instruction at the elementary level, flexible grade configurations and more.

Canaseraga

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Q What will happen to tax rates?

Conservative projections put the tax rate of a merged district below \$18 per \$1,000 of taxable property value. Currently, Arkport's rate is \$21.03, and Canaseraga's is \$18.70.

Q How long can the newly formed district sustain that tax level?

One of the major priorities of the newly formed district will be to sustain that tax level for as long as possible. To that end, the Arkport-Canaseraga Board of Education would develop a financial plan to ensure the merged district's long-term fiscal stability by finding the necessary efficiencies to offset the decrease in merger incentive aid from the state over the next 15 years.

Q What happens if the merger doesn't pass?

Both districts would

What financial incentive does New York state offer merging school districts?

School districts that reorganize qualify for additional operating aid and building aid from the state. For the first five years, merged districts' calculated state aid is increased by 40 percent, then reduced by 4 percent each year until it is phased out, thus providing a total of 14 years of additional operating aid. Also, for newly reorganized districts, the computed state aid for building projects is increased by 30 percent, up to a maximum of 95 percent of the approved cost.

Source: *New York State Education Department, NYSSED.gov*

continue to graduate students. Both districts also would continue to make hard decisions about how best to balance budget constraints and student offerings. This would likely lead to a continued decrease in opportunities for children on both campuses.

Q What's the timeline?

After both boards of education agree (no later

than Aug. 23) to hold straw votes in their respective districts, **there will be a last community meeting in each district: Sept. 25 in Arkport and Sept. 26 in Canaseraga.** Then residents would vote on an advisory referendum, or straw vote, on **Oct. 9.**

If the straw vote is successful, the districts would then ask the state education commissioner to authorize an official merger vote on **Nov. 12, 2018.**