



MERGER UPDATE

CANAJOHARIE & FORT PLAIN CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Canajoharie, Fort Plain merger vote scheduled



SAVE THE DATE

Advisory Referendum / Straw Poll Vote:
Thursday, March 6, 2025

Time: 11 a.m. to 8 p.m.
Location: Fort Plain CSD
Harry Hoag Elementary
School Library

Time: Noon to 8 p.m.
Location: Canajoharie CSD
East Hill Elementary School
Library

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QR CODE TO THE FEBRUARY 26 AT 6 PM VIRTUAL MEETING.

LINK WILL NOT CONNECT UNTIL THE MEETING TIME.



On March 6, Canajoharie Central School District and Fort Plain Central School District residents will cast their votes in a straw poll to gauge community support for a proposed merger of the two districts.

This vote was put in motion when the districts' boards of education approved of holding a straw poll of the two communities on Jan. 16.

The merger feasibility study process, which began in June 2024, explored the state of each district from a variety of perspectives and the potential benefits of combining them. This could include enhanced instructional and extracurricular opportunities for students, ensuring long-term financial stability and greater ability to attract top-tier faculty and staff.

If the March 6 straw poll indicates community support for the merger – via a majority vote in both school districts – a binding vote will be held in late April. If both communities again approve the idea of merging in that vote, the new district will begin operations on July 1, 2026, with a newly elected board of education.

MERGER FEASIBILITY STUDY PROCESS

Public input was a top priority throughout the merger feasibility study process. Public meetings and surveys were two of the primary ways of gathering this feedback.

In October, Canajoharie and Fort Plain residents and students from both districts shared their thoughts about a potential merger during focus groups. Such benefits as expanded courses, enhanced educational and enrichment opportunities and a larger, more diverse student body were cited as positives. Students specifically

expressed their enthusiasm about improved extracurricular activities, greater educational resources and more competitive sports teams.

Financial benefits, which would include 14 years of additional state reorganization aid, were also noted.

Expressed concerns included transportation logistics, staff dynamics, how to blend two distinct school cultures and maintaining the small-school “feel.”

MERGER DISCUSSIONS: OUR HISTORY

Merger discussions and the concept of shared services between the Canajoharie and Fort Plain districts are not new; similar discussions, primarily motivated by declining populations, have taken place over the past decades. To this end, the districts already collaborate on athletic programs and extracurricular activities, such as a shared drama club.

LEARN MORE

Entertaining the possibility of a merger can be complex and emotional. To help with this important decision, this newsletter includes study highlights, frequently asked questions, a timeline of events and other useful information for making an informed decision when voting.

Please contact the district superintendents or the merger feasibility committee members listed at this resource webpage with questions you may have, bit.ly/cfpmergerresources.

As the March 6 vote approaches, the districts will continue to engage with the community to ensure all voices are heard and concerns are addressed.

At 6 p.m. on Feb. 26, the districts will be hosting a virtual informational meeting. The public may use the link bit.ly/cfpmergerforum to access the meeting.

MERGER STUDY HIGHLIGHTS

Working with community members, staff and students from both districts, consultants Leadership Solutions Advisors LLP prepared a merger feasibility study for the Canajoharie and Fort Plain districts. The study looked at:

- The strengths and areas for improvement in each district’s educational program, including academics, extracurriculars, athletics and enrichment opportunities.
- The challenges they face—from declining enrollment over time to difficulty attracting and maintaining essential staff, including new teachers.
- The opportunities if the two districts merged to enhance the educational experience, supports and community connections and prepare students for the world and workforce of today and tomorrow.

While the proposed merger of Canajoharie and Fort Plain school districts aims to address challenges, such as declining enrollment and limited resources, the report suggests that combining the two districts could also create a unified educational system that supports excellence, equity and sustainability.



EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES

- **Curriculum and Programs:** Both districts offer strong foundational curricula and student support services. A merged district could expand access to advanced courses, career and technical education (CTE), dual-enrollment opportunities and extracurricular activities.
- **Special Education:** Collaborative resources could improve special education services, reduce out-of-district placements and foster equitable access to programs.
- **Class Sizes:** Preserving small class sizes that promote positive relationships and individualized support is a top priority within the community. This could be achieved in a merged district with thoughtful planning and use of existing and new financial, staffing, facilities and professional development resources.

WHAT’S NEXT IF THE MERGER IS APPROVED?



If approved ➡

1

June 2024 to January 2025

Districts must conduct a feasibility study and submit it to the state Education Department before merging. Consultants Leadership Solutions Advisors LLP worked with a committee of staff members and district residents and also met with students to conduct this study on behalf of the districts. The study was submitted to the New York State Education Department in December and presented to both boards of education.

2

January 2025

After reviewing the merger study, the Canajoharie and Fort Plain boards of education agreed to put the merger to a public vote.

3

March 2025

A straw poll, or advisory referendum, is scheduled for March 6, 2025. All eligible voters in both school districts will have the opportunity to cast ballots on the merger question. The purpose of this vote is to learn whether the communities support the merger.

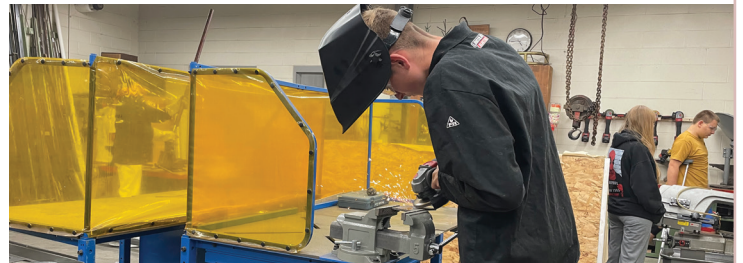
ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

- **Economies of Scale:** The merger offers opportunities for economies of scale in facilities management, transportation and food service operations.
- **Staffing:** Unifying instructional staffing could create specialized roles to better support curriculum development, technology integration and student services.
- **Facilities:** Leveraging facilities across both districts could maximize efficiency and expand community engagement.

FINANCIAL STABILITY

- **Fiscal Position:** Both districts maintain strong fiscal positions, supported by balanced budgets and reserves. However, rising expenditures highlight the need for strategic financial planning.

- **Financial Incentives:** The merger would unlock significant financial incentives, including state reorganization aid of approximately \$56 million to be used to offset costs over 14 years.
- **Operational Efficiencies:** Streamlining operations and reducing redundancies would create a sustainable framework to support long-term growth.



4

Binding Referendum

If the straw poll passes in both districts, the state Education Department will schedule a final vote. All eligible voters in both school districts can vote on the measure. If a majority of voters in both districts vote yes, the districts will merge. A vote date will be determined pending the outcome of the straw poll.

5

Board Membership Vote

If the merger is approved, voters will have the opportunity to elect a new combined Board of Education to govern the merged district. A vote date will be determined pending the outcome of a binding referendum.

6

**New District Begins:
July 2026**

The merged district would begin operations on July 1, 2026.



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VOTE INFORMATION

WHO CAN VOTE

To vote, an individual must be at least 18 years old, a U.S. citizen and a resident of the district for at least 30 days prior to the vote.

ABSENTEE BALLOTS

Early voting/absentee ballot applications can be requested in-person or by calling District Clerk Becky Smith, 518-993-4000, ext. 1000, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday, except holidays.

Applications for an early or absentee ballot must be received by the District Clerk no later than February 27, 2025 if the ballot is to be mailed to the voter, or no later than March 5, 2025 if the ballot is to be delivered personally to the voter.

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Dated Material. Important for district residents. Please send any address additions or corrections to the Superintendent's Office at Fort Plain CSD.

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MERGER FAQ

WHAT IS THE PROCESS FOR DECIDING ON A MERGER?

The first vote, a straw poll, will be held on March 6 at each school district. Locations and polling times are indicated throughout this newsletter. Residents will vote in their home district. If a majority of voters in each district say "yes" to a potential merger in this poll, a second, binding vote on the merger will be set by the state Education Department.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO STAFF IF A MERGER TAKES PLACE?

If a merger occurs, the newly elected Board of Education will first hire the new Superintendent of Schools. Other staffing decisions will then follow the typical process of any district, with the new superintendent working within a process to make staffing recommendations to the Board of Education during a transition process. Generally, staff from both districts will merge into a single seniority list based on their certifications and appointments in current districts.

WILL PEOPLE LOSE THEIR JOBS?

It is anticipated that scaling of staff would happen over time through resignations and retirements, along with the forecast of declining enrollment. When employees resign or retire in certain content areas and positions, the merged district could choose to leave those positions unfilled if the educational needs at the time can be met with regard to enrollment.

WILL BUILDINGS IN EITHER DISTRICT BE CLOSED?

If a merger occurs, the newly elected Board of Education will make the final decisions about building configurations and programs during the transition period. These will be made based on the recommendation of the newly appointed superintendent. Historically, in similar district mergers, elementary school students would remain in their current "neighborhood" community schools. Nothing in the recent study suggests a benefit to consolidating elementary schools at this time.

WILL MY CHILD'S BUS RIDE BE LONGER?

If a merger occurs, bus routes and transportation logistics will need to be carefully planned during the transition process to minimize distances and durations of bus routes.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO MY TAXES?

The Canajoharie and Fort Plain districts have similar tax rates across their respective towns. Because of this, a merger is unlikely to result in significant tax increases.

Long-term impacts depend on the merged district's financial planning. With the additional aid money the new district should be able to stabilize the tax increases over the next 15-20 years.

Tax increases are based in part on the budget set by the Board of Education each year. As happens in annual budget votes each May, Canajoharie and Fort Plain voters would continue to have the ability to approve or reject any budget proposed by their combined school district following a merger.



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