

Merger Committee holds first meeting in March

LIVINGSTON MANOR — The Livingston Manor and Roscoe Central Schools Merger Study Advisory Committee met for the first time on March 1 in the Livingston Manor auditorium. About 40 people attended the in-person meeting, with roughly the same number tuning in via a livestream, to hear more about the merger study process that began in January. [Area residents are also invited to fill out a public opinion survey to share their thoughts about the merger proposal.](#) To access the survey, click the link or scan the QR code shown here.



Presentations by consultant, SED

Consultant Alan Pole of Castallo & Silky LLC spoke to the committee and the audience about the merger study process, followed by a presentation from the state Education Department about the legal requirements for districts to merge. Committee members introduced themselves and spoke about their connections to the two school districts, and Pole thanked them for volunteering. “You have been chosen to undertake a really important responsibility,” he said.

Why merge? Why not?

The proposed merger between Livingston Manor and Roscoe central schools is a centralization merger. In this type of merger, both districts are dissolved and a brand-new district is created. Pole spoke about the challenges and benefits of merger. Benefits include making a school district more efficient or cost-effective, the ability to provide more opportunities for students, and financial incentives from the state. Challenges include a loss of local identity, uncertainty over board representation, and general resistance to change.

What is a merger study?

The merger process includes several required steps and opportunities for the communities to provide feedback. The first phase is the study phase. The merger study will collect factual data about each school district related to areas such as transportation, academic programs, extracurriculars, staffing, budgets, and enrollment numbers. The study will also provide recommendations for how a merged district could be organized.

The merger study is non-binding, meaning that district leaders and the community may not choose to follow its recommendations, Pole explained. “The fact that a study is occurring doesn’t mean a merger is happening,” he said. The study will be compiled by Castallo & Silky, with the input of the Merger Study Advisory Committee.

The Merger Study Advisory Committee

The committee is made up of community members, employees and students from each district (nine from each district, for a total of 18 committee members). The committee will hold a series of meetings between March and July. All meetings are open to the public and will be livestreamed for those who cannot attend in person. The next meeting is scheduled for 6 p.m. Tuesday, April 26, at Roscoe CSD. The building will be open for tours starting at 5:15 p.m. Meetings will alternate between the two school buildings.

From study to vote(s)

Once the study is completed, it must be submitted to the state Education Department for review before it can be presented to the community and the boards of education of both districts. It is expected that the study will be presented to the boards in early fall. At that point, the boards of education will decide whether to put the question of merger to a public vote. The voting process happens in two phases: first, an advisory referendum (or “straw poll”) is held to gauge public support. If there is support for the merger, the state Education Commissioner will call for a binding referendum, and residents of both districts will vote a second time. The result of the second vote is final — if a majority of voters in both districts vote “yes” on the proposal, the districts are merged.

Learn more about merger

Both school districts are sharing the same information about the proposed merger. Materials can be found on the [Roscoe CSD school website under the “Community” menu](#), and on the [Livingston Manor school website under the “District” menu](#). In addition, materials from each meeting are shared in a [public Google Drive folder](#). Materials in this folder can be viewed from any web browser, even if the user does not have a Google account. Of the process, consultant Alan Pole said, “It’s done out in the open; it’s done in the light of day.” Community members with questions are encouraged to contact their district office or speak with someone on the merger committee to learn more. Residents may also fill out an online, voluntary, anonymous survey about the proposed merger, which can be accessed here:

<https://forms.gle/dYZ5oyaaDtcTYBSp6>