

Questions from the 17 January 2024 meeting in Milligan:

Will there always be 3 members from the original E-M district and 3 from the original Friend district? If not, how long will the 3-3 last?

For a minimum of 2 years, the board will be a 3-3 split. Two members from Friend and one member from E-M will have 2-year terms. The outcome of that election could change the make-up of the school board. We did investigate having wards, but wards are based on population, so that would not guarantee an even 3-3 distribution of board members from the original E-M and Friend districts.

Why are we so easily splitting back to 2 sites when we closed Milligan so easily to get all teachers/students at 1 site?

Closing the Milligan site was due to a multitude of reasons. Those included costs associated with keeping the building open for less than 50 students and having the elementary grades in the same building. By moving everyone to one site, we were able to have the elementary in the same building and not replace the 6th grade teacher (who was leaving at the end of the year.) We were able to utilize some of the current 7-12 teachers who had the extra time in their schedule to complete the 6th grade schedule. Our main goal for a few years was to have the K-5 together.

What will be done about asking for a specific elementary teacher over the other? How many times in elementary?

A parent may request a teacher, but that does not mean that the request will be granted. Many different aspects will be taken into consideration when looking at class placement in the elementary (academic performance, behavior, relationships with peers, etc).

If football practice is in Friend, can we build a locker room at the field site?

This is an undertaking that will take some time. One of the main priorities revolves around academics and making sure that both buildings are getting the attention and resources necessary for upkeep. This type of project would not be an immediate priority.

What will preschool/daycare look like?

It has been agreed upon that upon consolidation, preschool will take on a different look at the Exeter site as compared to what many are used to. Both sites will have a 3 year old preschool session in the morning and a 4 year old preschool session in the afternoon. This allows for more structure as well as increasing the numbers of children we can serve.

Questions from the 23 January 2024 meeting in Friend

What happens if we don't consolidate? When would the state step in?

This is a question that has a lot of what ifs attached to it. This has been the case in other states where political pressure has made the push for school consolidation. This could happen in the state of Nebraska when you look at the push to lower property taxes around the state.

What would the new graduation requirements be? How would valedictorian and salutatorian be determined? Would there be two from each school since there are different requirements/standards right now?

We would take a look at the graduation requirements of both districts. There are many similarities between the two and this falls within the realm of administration coming to an agreement to present to the school board.

Some school districts have moved away from a Valedictorian and a Salutatorian to embrace a college/university approach by honoring the top 10% of the class with the titles Suma Cum Laude, Magna Cum Laude, and Cum Laude. Once again, this is an administrative decision that would be presented to the school board.

Currently, Exeter-Milligan recognizes graduates in the following fashion:
Graduates wearing medals with blue ribbons attained a GPA of greater than 95
Graduates wearing medals with white ribbons attained a GPA of 90 through 95.

This and many other items are included in a discussion/tenants document that will be developed once the consolidation is approved.

Why can't we use one school? Couldn't we possibly build a new school that could be "neutral"? Has there been a study for the cost of this?

Summerland is a fairly new consolidated school northwest of Norfolk. Four years ago, they passed a bond to build a new school in a neutral spot to serve the towns of Orchard, Ewing, and Clearwater. That school cost the taxpayers \$34.4 million in 2020. Doing the same thing would now cost the taxpayers of the consolidated district even more. With rising construction costs, the new construction can cost around \$50 million.

We would be neglecting an addition to the Friend building that is only a little over a decade old with a very nice gym that even C-1 districts would love to have. At the Exeter site, an addition in 2016 added 16,000 sq ft of space that will be utilized for pre-school as well as specials including art and music.

There has been no study on this, but neither board is interested in pursuing this option when we have two buildings that currently have students.

How does the district plan to save money if the consolidation only eliminates a superintendent and does not close any facilities?

As explained in the agreement, some positions will not be filled over time through attrition and retirements.

What is the plan for the old Exeter High School building? Will the new district be required to demolish or update this building?

The plan is to not use the old building in Exeter. One option the E-M board has discussed is the demolition of the building. A final decision will be made at a later date with the cost of the possible demolition paid out of the existing E-M Special Building Fund. The demolition is not a part of the consolidation petition.

Will we have only one high school football field with all the games in Friend? What is the plan for the Milligan football field?

The plan is to continue sharing football games between Friend and Milligan.

When is the plan for the consolidation to be complete?

The goal is to have the 2025-26 school year be the inaugural year for the consolidated district.

What does the future of the preschool look like? Who will be in charge of it?

Each principal at each building site would be in charge of the day-to-day functioning of each preschool.

What will the food program look like as EM does not participate in the federal lunch program?

We are in the beginning stages of discussion on what it would cost the consolidated district to run a lunch program apart from the federal government. We are currently looking at costs and weighing the pros and cons of not participating in the federal lunch program. With all this in mind, we are currently leaning towards not participating, with a final decision to be made after the April 2024 consolidation vote.

How will the new school locations as part of the consolidation affect the coop agreement that is currently in place?

The coop agreement will be superseded by the consolidation agreement. Once the consolidation agreement is approved, there will not need to be a cooperative agreement.

What is the plan for the AD position? Who will be in charge of athletics/activities?

We currently have two ADs—one for each school. As we go through the process of consolidation, we will address whether the need for two ADs is necessary. We will have discussions with personnel to gain an understanding of their intentions. With any employer, staff can retire or choose to take a different position. This can happen in schools and it is difficult to answer this question with certainty when we do not know every employee's intentions.

What decisions will get made about Homecoming? Prom? Will each town get a chance to host or will this be left up to the students?

In the past, students have been allowed some choice on these matters. This is a topic for discussion on continuing this arrangement as EMF.

Friend has more elementary students so what is the logic behind busing all of our students to Exeter? Then Exeter busing the Middle School students to Friend? You have to bus the elementary back at the end of the day to Friend...Then you have Exeter Middle students that may or may not go out for sports, so are we making a trip after school and then one after practice? Just trying to understand why we are having so many young kids on the bus every day.

With any major change, there is a "give and take." To provide more opportunities for our secondary students, changes need to be made. Space and functionality are a part of making these changes. We cannot fit all staff and students into one building. Two buildings are necessary. We also looked into the idea of a Middle School model at the Exeter site, but loss of instruction time was an issue due to teachers traveling during the school day. To create the most opportune environment with the least loss of instruction, it made sense to have the Exeter site be the K-5 building and the Friend site be the 6-12 building. Exeter-Milligan has been dealing with student transportation in this fashion for over 20 years. Other districts throughout the state of Nebraska do this same thing with an elementary school in one town and a secondary school in another. See Howells-Dodge (7.5 miles), Wilcox-Hildreth (8.5 miles), High Plains (11.7 miles), Diller-Odell (11.6 miles), Central Valley (13.9 miles), Boyd County (two elementaries 10 and 13.2 miles respectively), Bruning-Davenport (18 miles) and Elmwood-Murdock (6.3 miles). Median distance: 11 miles
Distance from Friend to Exeter: 9 miles

What are the annual costs to maintain the Milligan location considering there are no classes held there?

The process has started to transfer ownership of the Milligan site to the Village of Milligan. Once that is complete, the school will no longer be responsible for the site. A finite amount of funds from the current E-M Special Building Fund will be set aside to help defray the costs associated with the maintenance and upkeep of the building site.

Does the Friend site have the capacity to hold all of Pre-K through 12th grades at the consolidated enrollment?

With current levels of staff and students, no. Over the last 20 years, the amount of room it takes to educate students has increased as programming changes have taken place.

If the Milligan site is not used for educational purposes, what would be the plan for that site?

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At the Exeter location, will the old High School building be used for any classes? If not, what is the plan for that building?

The plan is to not use the old building in Exeter. One option the E-M board has discussed is the demolition of the building. A final decision will be made at a later date with the cost of the possible demolition paid out of the existing E-M Special Building Fund. The demolition is not a part of the consolidation petition.

Questions from the February 27, 2024 joint meeting in Friend

How will school lunches work? Will we still be a part of the federal food program?

As stated before, we plan to evaluate the pros and cons of participating in the program. Right now, we are leaning towards not participating.

Has there been a study to determine if students will opt out of the district due to the consolidation?

Neither school has completed a study to determine if there are students who would not attend the new consolidated district. Through informal conversations, we have not been informed of any students who plan to do so.

Will EMF still be a part of the Pioneer Conference?

For the foreseeable future, yes. We have officially applied for membership in the Southern Nebraska Conference (schools include Sutton, Superior, Sandy Creek, Thayer Central, Centennial, Heartland, Fillmore Central, Milford, David City Public, Wilber-Clatonia, Fairbury, and Tri-County). We will know more after the EMF consolidation vote in April.

Please share more specific information on the Exeter site elementary building upgrades. I have heard that people are concerned about the shape the building is in.

The Exeter site elementary was built in 1965. Following are a few of the major building updates/upgrades:

- Sprinkler system added in 2016
- Updated wireless internet access points - summer of 2018 and summer of 2024
- Replaced student furniture/desks for grades 3-5 over a 3-year period - 2018-2020
- LED lighting and ceiling replacement - 2019
- Updated all bathrooms - summer of 2020
- HVAC (replace original boiler and window AC units with central heating and air) - summer 2024
- Flooring - continuous as needed
- Each classroom has a SMART board

What about safety and security at Exeter? Is there a police presence within the school?

There are surveillance cameras in and around the entire campus. The door access system was upgraded in the summer of 2023. Visitors must "request access" via a visual intercom system to enter the building. The Village of Exeter employs a part-time police officer and we have a working relationship with this officer. He visits the school on occasion and is willing to work with the school whenever needed. E-M also contracts with Providence Working K-9s to perform random security checks three times per year. These security checks are utilized to discover more than illicit narcotics but also include checking for the presence of alcoholic beverages, commonly abused medications, and firearms.

Will Exeter be changing their current policy in regard to their police force? Many families are concerned with the lack of police in Exeter and response time incase of a situation.

A police force in Exeter is not within the realm of the school district's control. However, there are options that can be explored in terms of having a more regular law enforcement presence at the Exeter site. Examples are addressed in the previous questions.

Are both boards on board with making consolidation happen?

These two districts have never gotten to this point before. We are mere weeks away from the vote. If either of the boards were not willing to diligently explore and put valuable time and resources into this decision, we would not be to this point in the process.

Would both school boards consider having this put on the November ballot for every taxpayer to have a say, anonymously and without fear of repercussion?

Both school boards entertained this idea but discovered this was not an option after consulting legal counsel. Patron-to-patron consolidation is by petition, which has certain problems and is rarely used. The board-to-board process is by far the simplest and most direct way to reorganize school districts. Stated in LB 79-441

Because the United States is a representative democracy, your school boards are your representatives in this democracy. Their decision determines the path of the school districts. Very similar to our House of Representatives or Nebraska's unicameral.

I think you would get more support if you kept pre-K through 5/6 at their own schools and then consider having junior high in Exeter and high school in Friend. Would you reconsider this?

The focus of the administration and the school boards has been on instructional time. In having a Middle School at the Exeter site, we would share some teachers with the HS and would need to have more drive time between the buildings. This was stated in the Friend meeting on February 27th. It is the administration's goal to minimize the amount of instructional time lost. As addressed in the curriculum study, when E-M had teachers traveling between sites for the elementary, an equivalent of 1.0 FTE was lost due to travel time for the teachers.

Will staff be given an increase in pay if they are having to drive to a different location?

Friend and EM have shared teachers in the past and have not paid extra for transportation between districts. When E-M consolidated in 2002-03, this was not an issue.

How do you plan to better the education in our elementary schools if we combine? Will block scheduling be done?

We are already starting the process of school improvement as EMF with shared professional development. Both districts have worked to align curriculum and make changes to improve instruction.

Over the last few years, there has been a movement away from block scheduling. While a modified block schedule could be considered, block scheduling is difficult with some types of classes. A true block schedule will not be used. Mr. Anderson was a part of an administration who did away with block scheduling at a previous school.

All of the pros have been discussed. What about the cons? There will be a potential for negative community impact, has this been taken into consideration? If you take youth out of a community for example, taking the elementary out of Friend, you risk losing your community because young families will choose a town that has an elementary. Another Ex. Decreased property/home valuation.

One of the cons involves the loss of a long-time identity with mascot and colors.

In looking at other communities that have experienced consolidation, data to back up this argument does not seem to exist.

For example, Howells-Dodge has been consolidated for 12 years (effective June 2012). The town of Dodge has the elementary school. Their community population has only dropped by 1 person between the last two censuses. Howells, who holds the secondary school, has kept their population exactly the same between censuses.

In looking at other communities, it seems that the location in terms of Lincoln and Omaha (or the I-80 corridor) affordable/available housing and jobs tend to be more of the difference maker for town populations than the location of the elementary school.

In a study completed by Ben Winchester from the University of Minnesota Extension, the top three reasons for rural area brain gain were a slower pace of life, safety and security, and low housing costs. This report can be accessed by [clicking this link](#).

Questions from the March 4, 2024 meeting in Exeter

Could someone please address the rumors about the potential addition on the Exeter Elementary Building? I haven't heard any discussion on it at the previous meetings I've attended so I was curious if it was true. If so, how big? How will it be paid for?

The E-M board has discussed at regular meetings the need for more space for the elementary without using the old high school. DLR is assisting the board with a plan for maximizing space and minimizing costs. The goal is to have a plan to share at the March board meeting. E-M has planned for future projects and has enough flexibility in the special building fund to pay for the space.

If we are trying to get ahead of the curve, why not just consolidate with FC?

This was addressed after the feasibility study with Fillmore Central. After careful consideration, the board decided it was not in the best interests of the students and staff to consolidate with FC.

Given the current proposal to have 2 separate half day 3 year old programs and 2 separate half day 4 year old programs, have the boards considered the option of having 1 3 year old program and 1 4 year old program with the option of full day for each? Are enrollment numbers to large now to support such an option with current staff?

Preschool classrooms have a max of 20 students. The current E-M classroom is at capacity with the combined age groups. Some students attend part-time due to the enrollment caps in place by NDE. By splitting the age groups, we can maximize the number of students during the given amount of time.

Is this merger an opportunity to thoughtfully consider school day start times for high school students? There is an accumulating body of research indicating that delayed start times are related to improved academic outcomes (test scores, etc.) and improved emotional outcomes? Worth considering I think.

This has been a discussion item amongst the administration. The balancing act of extra-curriculars comes into play. Also, with the movement of students, it wasn't prudent to have a later start time for grades 6-12.