



**Mercer County District  
Comment Analysis  
10/6/2021**

The Comment Analysis Summary is intended to identify and represent the prevailing themes collected through the comments gathered in the community survey. A major theme is identified as a result of having multiple participants referencing similar issues or concerns. Supporting comments are included verbatim within each theme.

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## **Respondents expressed concern about how long students would spend on the bus.**

I am nervous about a young child riding on a bus from either New Boston or Aledo to the new Joy building. I like having all students in one elementary building, but I am nervous about the busing.

I feel if we are trying to attract people to our district we need to operate both schools. I think if we keep both schools open if people want to live in a school district where their child can stay in town for all their school career this plan would fit best for them. If someone moves to the western area of the district having both schools would continue to help students have a shorter bus ride if they are still in elementary school.

I would be a bigger supporter of consolidation if it wasn't centrally located. I feel the schools need to be in Aledo, as we have the medical and law enforcement close by. Some elementary students are already on the bus for an extended period of time. How much longer would they be on the bus if they had to travel even farther? The majority of staff would have farther commutes. What is the benefit of having it in Joy other than appeasing the minority that live in the western part of the district?

I would like for bussing to be make consideration for our children. I am not opposed to combined grade school option, but I feel more modes of transportation would be a must. Having a more direct route to the school for children and eliminating prolonged travel for these kids. It is not fair to subject a child to being up at 5 a.m. and be fully capable and prepared for a full school day. This is a must for our children.

You should not bus little kids that far from New Boston or Aledo. They should stay where they are, and fix what needs to be fixed.

Young children should attend a neighborhood school. Should not spend long periods riding the bus.

Some kids would be on a bus for a really long time, a more local elementary school, i would guess would be better.

Between busing schedules and regular maintenance I feel this is the best in the long run.

I am mainly concerned about the long drive on the school bus for many kids. However, the logical answer would be to consolidate. A commute is not uncommon in many areas of the world and children do adjust well.

I do not support a new school in Joy because it would mean busing a vast majority of elementary students. No reason to do this for children this age. People live in New Boston and Aledo knowing their children can go to school in town. If you live elsewhere that is your choice but it means your child is bussed or driven. You factor that in when you decide where to live. Unfair and unnecessary to change that situation now.

My only concerns on a central Elementary School would be the amount of time the little ones would be on the bus.

I would only support option 1 if: 1. no jobs were lost due to only having one school. 2. class sizes remained small to best serve our elementary students and their individual needs. 3. bus times were limited so young kids didn't spend hours each day on the bus.

While it would of course be more convenient for us to have our kids continue going to apollo, I would support either option as we currently utilize (and appreciate) the school bus routes offered to our children. Assuming this would not change, we would support either option.

There needs to be a school in a half way zone. The Eliza kids are on the bus for over a hour. The busses aren't equipped with a/c or even proper heat. One little heater under a seat isn't enough for the bitter winters we have. Find a centralized location for the grade school and find away to provide proper heating and cooling in the classrooms not just the office and library. Give them more then 25-30 minutes to eat.

I think putting little ones on a bus for the amount of time they would need to be isn't the best option. I was a former sub in the district and have been in both buildings I feel that combining them would put the students in a better position to move on to Junior High. Even though a great deal of the same curriculum is taught in both elementary schools things are very different. Since our education system is built on building blocks I think having all our teachers on the "same page" really benefits the students in the long run.

What would happen to the empty buildings if the consolidation happens? How could we utilize these spaces for the benefit of the district? How will bussing be affected by consolidating? By consolidating, would the intermediate then become a junior high? If the other schools need updates, how will we afford these updates if we only focus on the elementary schools?

I support a consolidated elementary school at the Joy location which is centrally located in the district and could help to alleviate long bus time problems.

As someone who used to ride a bus 1 hour in morning and 1 hour in evening I would support to keep both buildings open. I appreciate that both sides of the district have an elementary school where bus times are minimal and for some kids non- existent. If buildings were to merge minimal kids would be within walking distance to schools and more kids bussed for potentially longer routes.

Closing the elementary schools would possibly increase transportation costs as more students would have to be bused and the younger kids would be on the bus for long periods.

## Residents are concerned about the cost of transportation.

What is the estimated cost of busing New Boston and Aledo elementary students to Joy?

Concerns: bussing for 1 big campus versus 2 (time & cost) With 1 building in Joy most students in the district will have to travel to get to school Positives: It would benefit curriculum and RTI at grade levels to have all teachers together with coaches and interventionists Question: Would the Junior High building be updated or knocked down and a new building built?

Obviously operating fewer buildings is cheaper, but it may not be the best for our families and communities. Even large school districts have small local elementary schools. The second option will keep young children in their smaller hometown schools (or nearest) and is more convenient for the majority of the families. Joy is not centrally located by population. Many parents drive their kids to both elementary schools now-more bussing would be needed if all were pushed out to Joy. The schools can stay on the same curriculum just as they can from one classroom to another. Technology is available to keep communication between schools the same. It seems to me that both elementary schools are able to meet the needs of our young children with the upgrades planned. Leaving NB and Apollo as vacant building is another negative result of option one.

There are other costs not listed here. Bussing all kids to new school. Option one sounds best but. My taxes are already \$2300 on a single family home. I don't want any more taxes.

Sherrard has a very good platform using two grade schools and an intermediate, I would like to see our district modeled as theirs. Also a centrally located school is not going to solve bus times or transportation issues which is a problem a lot feel now, I don't know the numbers but seems bussing and transportation should be considered, as in amount of time for routes and the expense for each 17 million dollar option. I personally think it makes sense to add a gym and classrooms to high school and bring 7th and 8th to the newly expanded high school, leaving grade schools and intermediate alone.

Closing the elementary schools would possibly increase transportation costs as more students would have to be bused and the younger kids would be on the bus for long periods.

I can't answer this question without more questions... 1. Do the old buildings continue to have some form of maintenance completed if a new building is constructed? Are the buildings still heated to keep pipes from freezing, lawns mowed, etc. or are the buildings immediately sold or shut down entirely? 2. Is there any possibility of a sale of the buildings to offset the costs of a new building? 3. If consolidated, how do transportation costs change and is that part of the savings/cost? 4. What are the ongoing vs one-time costs of these two options? 5. Why can't both schools agree to the same curriculums/consistent programming now if they share the same Superintendent? Why would this change with a new building? 6. The current situation would show either there is insufficient funding/staff/planning for building maintenance. How do these two options address those issues?

## **Respondents feel there is disconnect between the schools.**

I taught school for 15 years at Apollo. The two elementary buildings cause division and curriculum chaos. We are not really United. The buildings need so much structural attention and faculty needs to mesh!

Not only does this make sense financially, this would help the disconnect between the two elementary schools. New Boston and Apollo run VERY differently. New Boston being the superior. We set our kids up to fail if we do not adhere to a fluid teaching plan. (Some Apollo teachers have chose not to adhere to the new curriculum/teaching plans that cost the district a LOT of money) Also, socialization it makes sense for our kids, teachers, parents to start out together as we end together. No more awkward 5th grade and or 6th grade year where the kids get combined and don't know who the other kids are. I believe this choice should be an easy one, and in doing so adhere to New Boston's way of doing things. As their numbers are significantly better than Apollo's (reading, writing, math) Mr. Busch should stay the principal and Mr Fluett can step into retirement.

As a teacher within the district, it would be wonderful to collaborate with other grade level teachers and be on the same page with vocabulary and curriculum. Having different administrators in the 2 elementary buildings, where some grade levels/teachers use parts or all of the curriculum and some do not.

I think putting little ones on a bus for the amount of time they would need to be isn't the best option. I was a former sub in the district and have been in both buildings I feel that combining them would put the students in a better position to move on to Junior High. Even though a great deal of the same curriculum is taught in both elementary schools things are very different. Since our education system is built on building blocks I think having all our teachers on the "same page" really benefits the students in the long run.

I think business prek -5 should be kept to as much of a minimum as possible. I also am not in favor of prek being moved to joy and bussing all of those kids to and from. I think dual locations although more expensive is a much better school option for children. I think having a consistent curriculum shouldn't be an issue because there are 2 buildings. With training options etc the way they are now i think it is more than feasible to have consistent training across all buildings.

Consolidating is the best possible route to ensure our students have equal access to educational experiences.

## **Some respondents expressed concerns over the appearance of the schools.**

Grade schools already nice. Do needed must do improvements but focus on high school. It frankly looks old inside. A nicer school with more educational opportunities is better for kids in their last 4 years obviously but also an appeal to people who would consider moving to our community and commuting to jobs out of Aledo. A nicer high school could have an extraordinary impact. Frankly our high school kids need a nicer school / more education and class options. It would make it seem about like new with work that is proposed.

I've stressed this in all my previous comments, but the high school is of the greatest need to receive funds for renovations and improvements. Six year old students don't know what they have compared to their neighboring district counter parts. However 16 year old students see what their facilities are compared to other districts and can't help but desire something better.

There is no question that both the elementary schools and the high school could use some upgrades. However it is my opinion that given the number of students it serves and the vast multitude of events that take place there that the high school is the greater priority. I feel that an upgraded modern high school will serve more as an attractant to out of state/area families looking to relocate to west central Illinois than a new elementary school in Joy. Not that a new Joy facility wouldn't, but that an upgraded high school with a large entry and commons for cafeteria use and more spacious and efficient offices coupled with new athletic facilities could be a deciding factor in choosing which community they select as their new home. Specifically the advantage we would have over Rockridge and Sherrard is that the building is in a major town in the area with several services available where their districts do not.

Mercer County High School is the most inefficient use of space of all of the district buildings. Compared to the other schools in the area that we are "competing" with for families that relocate from out of the area, it is incredibly inferior in terms of functional space in the entry and cafeteria. It is my opinion that MCHS has one of the worst set ups in terms of cafeteria space and efficiency as well as entry/commons/office space of any school of comparable size that I've seen. I've never been in a school that crams 4 people in as tight of a space as we do here in the high school office. The traffic patterns for people attending home sporting events in the gymnasium create mass congestion in a small area at the entry point of the home bleachers. Nearly half of the student body is involved in body conditioning PE classes, which leads to over crowding in the weight room facilities. Supervision in the locker room areas and weight room areas are disastrous for any one person in charge. Locker facilities should be wide open spaces with lockers lining the perimeter walls for proper supervision. An auxiliary gymnasium would be tremendously beneficial to the district as it would provide a space on campus for multiple sports teams to practice simultaneously without travel across town or to Joy. It will also provide both the general PE and the Body Conditioning classes the capability to use gym space simultaneously. This auxiliary gymnasium will only be possible with the addition of a artificial turf football field so that the open spaces used for practice can be build upon for the new gym/weight room/locker room complex. Field turf would also serve the district and community in many other ways than just the football program.

## Respondents expressed concerns about taxes.

Why don't you ask parents to buy bonds to help with costs? I'm sure many parents would choose to do this.

If the referendum could be written to use sales tax instead of real estate taxes I would be all for it. Our real estate taxes are already way too high. Let's let the renters help pay for their schools.

I feel we need to seek out a sales tax increase to create funds. We own multiple rentals in the district and our taxes are increasing all the time. I don't have a problem paying a little more but would like to possibly add sales tax as another income possibility.

Land owners would be more significantly impacted.

As landowners, we pay too much to support everything. Farmers are being asked to pay more, again. We are a rural community, why hit the farmers all the time.

You currently get 80% of my property taxes to run the schools, and you want to borrow more money and increase the property tax further. I do not support an increase to taxes in any way shape or form. If you can't run the school on 80% of my current property taxes increasing it further isn't going to help you understand that you need to stay within your budget.

Our taxes are high enough, with low cost of living increases...I do not support a high tax hike

Why don't you sell bonds first before referendum?

please do whatever is suitable without raising our taxes

Need to know what projects would be taking place and how it would effect the district and employees. What would the cost be to district and to the taxpayer.

WE ARE ALREADY THE SECOND HIGHEST PROPERTY TAXED STATE IN THE COUNTRY!!!! My taxes are OUTRAGEOUS already and we are VEHEMENTLY AGAINST another increase!!! STOP THE INCREASES NOW!!! And now you want another? This is why Illinois is on a continuous population decline.

I support raising taxes to update schools once I see a plan that is strategic and addresses the underlying issues with current maintenance funding, staff, and planning. I would never support giving more money to anyone if the underlying issues have not been addressed. All these plans do is buy the district time until new buildings become outdated - the intermediate school is only 20 years old and is \$1M behind in updates. How did this happen and why won't a new building be the same situation?

As you well know, interest rates may well jump to historically high levels in the next few years. I assume you have included transportation costs in the elementary numbers. It seems as if you have decided on this (elementary improvement) already.

. I am opposed to supporting a referendum to which property taxes would be increased to fund this program. Over the past 10 years property taxes have doubled. Currently, without a referendum

increasing property taxes, our taxes continue to be raised a percentage each year. . It is time to search for a more equitable program to finance school updates/improvements. Why not look at achieving financial goals that would be shared by all residences of Mercer County. Suggestions: Local fuel tax, sales tax, vehicle tax, etc.