

Frequently Asked Questions About Saving Our Elementary School

Q: Is this the only vote that the town will have on the withdrawal process?

A: No, the 22 step withdrawal process outlined and overseen by the Maine Department of Education, starts with the vote to create the withdrawal committee and provide funds for the withdrawal expenses (legal, educational consultation and communication to the community) and ends with the town voting on the proposed withdrawal agreement. You can see the entire process here

https://www.maine.gov/doe/sites/maine.gov.doe/files/inline-files/Withdrawal_Agreement_Infographic.pdf

Q: Who would be on the withdrawal committee?

A: The committee, per state requirements, would have: one selectman, one member of the general public, one member from the group filing the petition and one of the Albion representatives from MSAD 49 School Board. The Albion Selectboard would oversee the committee appointments process.

Q: What does the withdrawal committee do?

A: The committee along with a lawyer (Daniel C. Stockford who has handled over 20 successful withdrawals) negotiates with MSAD 49 leadership and creates the terms and conditions for the withdrawal (what we get from the district). You can see other withdrawal agreements here:

<https://www.maine.gov/doe/schools/structure/withdrawal/list>.

Q: How long does the withdrawal process take?

A: Typically at least two years, AND then there is another year for transition, so **3 total years**. The transition year is if the town approves the agreement with MSAD 49, you don't leave the district for another year, so the town has time to elect a town school board and get the school unit in place.

Q: Do members of the withdrawal committee get paid?

A: No, it's public service to the town.

Q: Can the town afford to be a local school unit?

A: We've hired a current superintendent to help us build multiple financial models, based upon current student enrollment, special education, transportation and all other associated costs. The models show that we can afford to run our own local school unit at the current funding level. Part of the withdrawal process will be to get more information from MSAD 49 that might impact the model for better or worse. If it's worse then we would seek guidance from the town on proceeding or stop the process.

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Q: Who would oversee our local school district?

A: Albion would have an elected school board (3 members) who would hire (as required by law) a superintendent, typically part time, to run our local school unit. The school would have a teacher/principal. The costs for administration would not be anymore than we fund now for leadership from our local taxes and state subsidy. We would of course welcome and encourage as many of the current teachers to stay in our school as wanted to stay. Teachers are the HEART of any school. Many teachers in Maine are looking to join locally run small schools.

Q: Why is the town interested in exploring local control?

A: Small towns that lose their elementary school, face huge challenges as a town keeping families and attracting families (future residents) to the town. Property and home valuations sink and taxes rise. Keeping our school open (which is the highest academically performing school in MSAD 49) and having school choice options for middle and high school keeps our town intact for current and future residents.

Q: Why does MSAD 49 want to close our elementary school?

A: They want to consolidate all elementary schools as part of the new school construction project to make it easier to run the district and manage one building instead of three.

Q: When did the school board vote to close Albion Elementary (as well as Fairfield Primary and Clinton schools)?

A: On March 18th 2021, the board voted, and Albion School Board Members voted against the motion.

Q: Why are we holding the vote to investigate leaving MSAD 49 now?

A: The school district will hold a vote this coming November to accept the state funds for the new school and also see how much local voters will raise to pay for the new school. If we do not start the withdrawal process BEFORE the district wide vote, we cannot make a solid legal claim for withdrawing.

Q: What if the Albion referendum on June 10th 2022 *does not pass*?

A: If our referendum fails to pass, MSAD49 will move to close our school as soon as they can. After the Albion school is closed, it would be almost impossible to reopen it as a school. Our town will be forever changed, and not for the better.

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Q: Is the Albion School unsafe or in bad shape?

A: No, while the building is not new Albion's Code Enforcement Officer, Select Board Chair, Principal, and consulting superintendent toured the facility several weeks ago and found a school (inside) in great repair, bright, and very conducive to learning. Additionally the Albion CEO reviewed the architectural study that was done several years ago and didn't find the level of concerns that were raised in that report.

Q: Will taxpayers get a large cost saving with the proposed new school consolidation?

A: No, not without laying off staff or canceling more programs at all schools. Staff make up 85% of any school budget. Buildings and transportation make up the rest. The savings that the MSAD 49 talks about is about not paying to maintain old buildings, by having a new building, but even with state funding of the new school, the district will still have to purchase land and raise money (amount not yet known) for aspects of the new school.

Q: What about transportation if we have our own local school district?

A: Typically all withdrawal agreements include providing means for the new or old district to provide busing/transportation for students. Additionally if we had school choice, we would have agreements with the public schools or state approved academies (Erskine, etc.) for transportation. When school choice is offered by a town, typically the town's school district arranges for transportation.

Q: How might this impact my property taxes?

A: An increase in property taxes for education (70%+ of every property tax bill) will continue to go up if we stay in MSAD 49, unless they have mass staff reductions at all schools and cut more programs. Currently MSAD 49 is running the district at almost the lowest level of spending, so cutting more staff and programs would negatively impact students. If we have local control, we have more input and accountability for any future local tax increases. We are faced with two options, we can send our local tax dollars out of our town and lose the benefits of having our own elementary school, or we can keep our tax dollars in our town and have options that will benefit students, residents, and property owners. Finally if we run our own school district we will have more control over how our local tax dollars are spent.

Q: What about special education for Albion students?

A: All school districts are responsible for providing services to enrolled students that ensure that children with disabilities are identified for timely evaluation and if eligible, provide appropriate services in the least restrictive setting. The state provides additional

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funding to districts for special education services. It is too soon in the withdrawal process to answer any specific questions on Special Education, except to let the public know that we understand that it's a concern for some parents, and we take that concern very seriously, and will work to have an agreement and services that are legal and fair to students and families.

Q: What would school choice look like?

A: The plan is to continue to send any student who wants to go to MSAD 49 after elementary school, but also get agreements in place with local districts, academies, and charter schools as well.

Q: Do we think it's a win for MSAD 49 to get a new school?

A: Yes, it's great for Fairfield and Benton, but not great for Albion. While we can say that we are part of the MSAD 49 community, the reality is that without the votes from other towns within the district or on the school board when it comes to issues that impact our town directly, we are at the mercy of the larger towns in MSAD 49.

Q: How is public education funded?

A: The state determines based upon the property values in the town, how much the town has to fund for public education, then if the town cannot properly fund public education, based upon a per student spending and a very complicated state model, the state will give the town additional funds for public education costs. In the last school budget the state said that Albion had to pay a little over 1 million in local funds, the district added an additional \$600,000 to that so our local tax for the school district was \$1.6 million. Then the state contributed an additional \$2.5 million to MSAD 49 because of Albion. As a local district we would also get state funding to help run our school.

Q: Could we join another school district?

A: Yes, but we have to withdraw from MSAD 49 to do that.

Q: How can I support this undertaking?

A: Vote and support the effort. If the vote passes, look for information on who to contact. Thank you for your consideration and time.

Q: Is this a lot of work, and is it worth it?

A: Yes and yes - providing good options for our students, community members and future of the town is worth it.