

**Center Moriches Union Free School District**  
**and**  
**East Moriches Union Free School District**

***Evaluation of Shared Services***

Submitted by: Center Moriches Administration  
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## Shared Services Evaluation - Center Moriches and East Moriches

### Introduction

While all public schools across the New York State are facing challenging times in terms of meeting the need for higher academic standards with limited new financial resources, none are feeling the crunch between these two forces more so than the state's smaller districts. Even in the best of times, small school districts, such as the **East Moriches Union Free School District** and the **Center Moriches Union Free School District**; while enjoying advantages of vibrant community interaction, citizen leadership, safety, and small class size, have suffered from a small and limited tax base and the absence of "*economies of scale*" that a large student population typically produces.

Compounding the problems of their relatively small is the fact that each of these districts is somewhat poor when comparing them to many of their neighboring schools in the south shore region of Suffolk County. Yet, they must compete with their wealthier neighbors in terms of employee salaries and benefits in order to acquire and retain the highly trained staff that is necessitated to achieve higher academic goals. This coupled with the higher standards set by both New York State in the form of NYS Board of Regents regulations and the Federal government in the form of *No Child Left Behind* legislation coupled with the declining resources in the form of operating aid provided by the state, the condition for many of the state's small and poorer school district's is reaching crisis proportions.

It is this set of circumstances that led the boards of education of the **East Moriches Union Free School District** and **Center Moriches Union Free School District** to evaluate the benefits of sharing services if the proposal made in the merger study cannot be enacted. Specifically, both districts have typically experienced a level of operating aid that is smaller than the annual rise in operating costs. This de facto reduction in state support relative to the increases in fixed operating costs for salaries, benefits, electricity, and fuel, to name a few, means two things:

1. More taxes will have to be collected locally to cover the shortfall and/or
2. The school districts will be forced to eliminate program offerings to children.

It is the absolute goal of both organizations to ensure that these two scenarios are only considered as a last resort. To meet this objective, all elements within the budgets of each district, that is similar in nature, will be evaluated with the sole purpose of impacting our respective students as little as possible. The topics to be evaluated in this study will include personnel, Instructional programming, co-curricular offerings, transportation, facilities, technology, and *economies of scale*.

## **Considerations for Sharing of Services**

Today, schools are required to provide an extensive array of services to meet the unique needs of all students and to prepare them to successfully meet the personal and social challenges of a rapidly changing world. Maintaining a strong financial base is necessary to achieve this effort

Small school districts, particularly those, which are not wealthy, have difficulty in providing the breadth of educational programs and variety of opportunities which currently are available in larger districts. To combat this dilemma, smaller districts must remain ever more vigilant when it comes to making wise financial decisions.

Sharing services creates the potential for school districts to operate more efficiently and economically by:

1. Permitting a more cost-effective administrative organization;
2. Eliminating duplication by pooling resources for facility upkeep, equipment usage ,technology advancements and back-up of data, supply and material purchasing, and staffing utilization;
3. Coordination of transportation in the most effective and cost efficient manner as possible.

## **Difficulties in Achieving the Desired Results**

While it is widely accepted that sharing services may result in significant educational and financial benefits, it is also impossible to ignore that there are local issues that must be overcome to create the best results. The local concerns often include, but are not limited to:

1. A fear of losing local identity;
2. The perception that the communities are incompatible and that one district will benefit more from the shared services than the other;
3. Changes to staffing might actually result in higher overall expenses despite assurances otherwise;
4. A fear that jobs security will be lost by local school district employees;
5. The natural tendency to resist change and the reluctance to give up “what is” for “what might be”.

Therefore, as with all other local school district decisions, the advantages and disadvantages of sharing services must be carefully, honestly and objectively considered, and an unbiased determination reached that will best serve the present and future educational needs of the students and their communities.

## Personnel

While there is no doubt that merging **East Moriches Union Free School District** and **Center Moriches Union Free School District's** would provide the greatest opportunity to reduce some personnel expenses there are still a few positions that could be shared and result in some savings.

Joint Purchasing Agent - The amount of time and energy that this individual dedicates towards ensuring the best possible pricing is secured by each individual district could be better served by applying their efforts to both districts. The establishment of RFP's, bids and quoting of services and purchases is a task that can be done once and applied to each district independently. Because this individual needs to be supported by an individual within each district it is estimated that the savings to each district could total .5 FTE. Depending on the rate of pay and the benefits that would be utilized by this individual, savings would be in excess of \$30,000 per district, per year.

Custodial and Grounds Supervisor (and support staff) – Both districts employed supervisors for their respective schools for each of these categories – totaling 4 FTE's. It is believed that these responsibilities can be completed just 2 individuals, thereby resulting in a reduction of 2 FTE's. The relatively close proximity of the two districts coupled by the small staffs that each supervises makes this benefit very attainable. On average, each of these individuals earns \$60,000 with their accompanying benefits roughly \$25,000. Each district could stand to save approximately \$85,000 by combining their respect needs. As for the support staff that both the custodial and grounds supervisors have at their disposal there seems to be little room for further consolidation. Both districts employ a limited number staff in these civil service positions and very little if any savings would be generated by sharing their services. In fact, cost might actually increase due to the lost time “commuting” between the two districts and the time needed to set up and shut down their activities. In addition, several of the part-time employees might actually need to be made full-time with the additional expectations that would be placed on them, resulting in a much higher benefit cost. (It is important to note that since the initial study was filed with the state in January 2008 the **Center Moriches Union Free School District** decided to consolidate the two supervisor positions that it had for the Custodial and Grounds staff into one, thereby resulting in an \$85,000 dollar savings for the district.)

State and Federal Compliance Officer – Currently there is a duplication of services in each of the two school districts. Although there are an ever-increasing number of mandates that must be adhered to, both districts could benefit from the combining of resources when it comes to meeting the mandated requirements that are placed upon them. Some of the many requirements of this position include; AHERA & Triennial Asbestos Inspections, AVI (annual visual building inspections), Boiler Inspection Certificates, Building Condition Surveys, Building Fire Code Emergency Egress Plan, Dept. of Environmental Conservation (Septic permits), Emergency Management Plans, Maintenance of MSDS documents, NYSDEC, PERMA/NYSIR requirements, Fire Inspections, SCDOH Permits, Fuel Tank Permits, etc. Due to the sensitive nature of these responsibilities both district could benefit from sharing personnel to satisfy these requirements. While there may be no “net savings” at year’s end, the districts would gain the by not having to do everything independently of each other and the individuals would be able to hone their skills on a particular segment of the requirements.

CIO and Technology Support Staff – Both districts are currently employing their own CIO (chief information officer) and technology support staff, which represents a complete duplication of services. While it is recognized that the data that is managed by the CIO is of critical importance to the respective districts, it is also known that this responsibility is not full-time in nature. Therefore, these individuals are often “off task” performing duties that can be performed by lower level employees. This work is often completed in districts that are much larger than the combined numbers in **East Moriches** and **Center Moriches**. While it may be difficult to envision sharing this service due to the sensitive nature of data, each full-time FTE costs the districts in excess of \$100,000. This same dilemma holds true with respect to the technology support staff. Both districts are forced to employ staff members that are capable of addressing all of the districts needs. This results in both districts paying a premium for their support staff. It is believed that the districts would be able to share the expertise of several support staff without duplicating their services. This would allow the district’s to reduce the number of highly qualified staff members and replace them with staff members who aren’t as high on the pay scale. Depending on the overall capabilities of each of the current staff members the savings could be in the neighborhood of \$10,000-\$15,000 per district.

Student Support Staff - A review of all other support staff, including instructional, shows little or no opportunities to share services. Both districts currently schedule their staff according to

their actual needs and are only realizing the expense for the FTE's that are needed. While there would be no financial gain realized by either of the districts as a result of sharing staff in this category it is recognized that there are other, non-measurable benefits to this approach. First, with the assurances of a larger employment commitment it is less likely for employees to move on to other districts. This continuity of staff helps in maintaining a higher degree of expectations for all staff members. Additionally, the students begin to create common expectations, which will allow the them to better and quicker integrate to with each other if/when they opt to attend the **Center Moriches Union Free High School** in the future.

## Instructional Programming

Both districts are committed to providing the absolute best for each of their students in respect to their instructional experiences. While it has already been touched upon that there are little or no opportunities to share staff in the instructional environment, some benefits can be capitalized on. Both districts are very committed to providing their staff with extensive professional development opportunities and might be able to share resources if a common approach can be achieved. Both districts are utilizing a good portion of their grant funding to assist teachers and provide them with additional tools to help them succeed. Provided there are no "seat" restrictions in place, for participation in the Professional Development opportunities, both districts could double their efforts by simply sharing and communicating the events. It should be an easy benefit to both districts but agreeing on the instructional approach has kept this from being a viable option to date. **Center Moriches** has in fact invited other neighboring district to participate in a professional development consortium and has had great success, but **East Moriches** has yet to join. There is hope that these offers will be continued to be made to **East Moriches** and that a common ground can be found in training of staff, thereby creating a shared vision.

## Co-Curricular Offerings

Both districts provide their students with a wide variety of co-curricular activities, and in fact, already share one in the form of the Middle School Football Team. While many of the activities are available at both schools there are quite a few that are unique to each of them. A full list of opportunities follows:

<b>SPORT</b>	<b>East Moriches</b>	<b>Center Moriches</b>
Football***	X	X
Boys Soccer	X	X
Girls Soccer	X	X
Boys Basketball	X	X
Girls Basketball	X	X
Baseball	X	X
Softball	X	X
Boys Volleyball	X	X
Girls Volleyball		X
Wrestling	X	X
Track		X
Boys Lacrosse	X	X
Girls Lacrosse	X	X
Cross Country	X	
JV Tennis		X
JV Golf		X
JV Cross Country		X
<b>MUSIC PROGRAMS</b>		
Chorus	X	X
Band	X	X
General Music	X	X
Strings	X	
Lessons	X	X
<b>CLUBS</b>		
Book Buddies	X	
Computer	X	
Math Olympiad	X	
Mathletes	X	
Newspaper	X	X
Scrabble	X	
Technology	X	X
Drama	X	
Environmental	X	
Writer's Workshop	X	

Peer Leaders	X	
Student Council	X	X
National Jr. High Honor Society	X	X
Grade Level Senate		X
Yearbook	X	X
French		X
Spanish		X
Instrumental		X
Vocal		X
Art	X	

\*\*\* As stated, the M/S Football team is the only program that is shared.

In addition to the financial benefits that can be found with sharing services is the opportunity to increase the offering at each of the respective schools. Since there are several co-curricular activities that are available at one school and not the other - they are the ones that present the greatest scrutiny. Within the athletic program offerings girls volleyball, track, cross country, JV tennis, JV golf, and JV cross country hold the most potential of benefit. By combining the programs between the two schools there would be no need to hire any additional staff as the expenses are already being absorbed by one district or the other.

It is important to note that there are several issues that would need to be addressed before proceeding with combining the programs. First, the issue of program size would need to be considered. It would serve neither of the districts well to increase the team's size to the point that it negatively impacts playing time. Second, the logistics of transportation would have to be considered. If the only practical way to incorporate these two programs is by providing transportation to and from the neighboring schools then it is not likely to succeed, as the financial impact would be too great. But if the parents would be willing to provide the necessary transportation, it very quickly becomes worth consideration, and one that would provide direct benefit to the students in each of the Middle Schools.

The same concerns and benefits would hold true for the music and club programs. In addition to the above mentioned "pros and cons" would be the benefit of fostering positive relationships between the **East Moriches Union Free School** and the **Center Moriches Union Free School** districts. As stated repeatedly within the Merger Study, the long term success of each of the two districts may very well be tied to each other. **Center Moriches** relies heavily on the tuition monies that are received from **East Moriches** for the education of their High School students and **East Moriches** benefits tremendously on the savings that are generated by having students opt to

attend **Center Moriches** in lieu of the much more expensive program at Westhampton Union Free School District.

## Transportation

While neither district owns and operates its own transportation fleet, each has utilized a bid process and has been with their respective carriers for decades. This long standing commitment to their carriers has allowed them to create solid relationships that create substantial monetary benefits that cannot be overlooked. Throughout the years Adelwerth Bus has provided the **Center Moriches Union Free School** district with bids that are less than any other responder. In addition, they have donated their services periodically to help the district extend “goodwill” throughout the year, by donating the buses that take the students to/from the many local holiday parades or when the service and honor societies visit the senior facilities during the Thanksgiving and holiday seasons.

**East Moriches**, which has contracted with Laidlaw Transportation, also has utilized a bid process to secure contract busing for student transportation. The “goodwill” that is experienced by **Center Moriches**, with their bus carrier, is also present in **East Moriches’s** relationship with Laidlaw Transportation. Absent of all students attending **Center Moriches**, there are no savings that can be attained by sharing this part of the contract relating to student busing.

Special Education transportation is one area that desires serious consideration in determining if the sharing of services can be beneficial. Each district currently transports several of its children to out-of-district placements. These children are typically transported in vans or mini-buses, sometimes with the support of an aide, and the expense is calculated on an hourly basis. Therefore, savings can be generated in one of two ways; first, reducing the amount of time needed in transporting these students and second, utilizing buses to full, 100%, capacity.

**Center Moriches** has developed a very extensive Special education program that substantially limits the number of students that they send to locations outside of the district and in the cases that they do the vehicles are already at capacity. Therefore, it is difficult to attain any savings at this point. The fact that **East Moriches** does not have the same in-house programs as **Center Moriches** causes them to have to send more students to out of district placements and that some of their vehicles are not at capacity is not relevant. The dynamic nature of Special Education placements makes this expense one that should be reviewed often. **East Moriches** does have an opportunity to reduce a small portion of its transportation costs by utilizing the extensive Special Education classes that are available to out of district students in **Center Moriches**. By enrolling their

students in a program in their neighboring community the amount of time their students would be required to be transported would be severely reduced, thereby reducing their expenses. It is important to note that any savings that would be generated would be reduced by roughly 50%, the transportation aid that each district receives in the following year of the expenditure. It is also worth noting that, in the future, as opportunities do become available to share vehicles the savings may not be worth it when a cost analysis is done comparing it to the additional time students are required to spend commuting. As we are dealing with students with high needs this additional time could very quickly become counter-productive to the educational experience.

## **Facilities**

In respect to the sharing of services related to the facilities, there doesn't seem to be any savings available. While it would be beneficial to the **Center Moriches Union Free School** and **East Moriches Union Free School Districts** to only allow outside organizations to use any one building at a time there doesn't seem to be a practical way to accomplish this under the given situation. Both districts have created environments where the community is welcomed to utilize the facilities frequently. This privilege inevitably leads to the need for additional staff being needed to help maintain the buildings "after hours". Lessening the number of buildings that are open and available to the community could most certainly lead to savings in labor, supplies and utility expenses. It is recommended that each district carefully monitors the building use activity in the respective districts to determine if this option has any merits in the coming years.

## **Technology**

Streamlining functions and eliminating the need for duplication of services should be looked at as an opportunity to reduce costs. Quite simply the cost to maintain two completely independent systems is ineffective and costly. By combining a few technology-related services such as central file servers, internet services, and support technicians the cost of such services could be substantially reduced. This proposal had been made multiple times by the **Center Moriches Union Free School District** to **Moriches East Union Free School District**, but has never gained any traction. While it is understandable that a district would be apprehensive about “losing” a certain amount of control over their own data, a system could be developed, in a cost effective manner that would ensure the same unrestricted access that each district currently enjoys, continues. Such a shared service would allow for disaster recovery, data and application housing and back-up at a central location; supported and maintained by a single set of technicians - thus allowing for these services at a substantially reduced cost. This concept of “*economies of scale*” is the most realistic opportunity for each of the districts to attain financial savings.

## **Economies of Scale**

The greatest likelihood for the districts to achieve substantial savings lies within the concept of “economies of scale”. As independent school districts **Center Moriches UFSD** and **East Moriches UFSD** are potentially limited by vendors who respond to their RFP’s and quotes for work since they are each relatively small schools, located on the east end of Long Island. On the other hand, by combining their needs more comprehensively they should be able to receive better pricing for services. On the facility side of operations there are many services that are mandated that should be explored, including; AHERA and triennial inspections, annual visual building inspections, boiler inspection certifications, building condition surveys, elevator inspections, permitting for general septic discharge, and playground safety inspections that should be explored. In addition, all of the vendors who perform services within the districts should be examined. There is in all likelihood savings that could be realized if contracting services were combined such as, electrical, plumbing, HVAC, cesspool, roofing, pest management, duct work and vent cleaning, refuse removal and boiler maintenance, to name a few.

While it is recognized that each district may need to compromise on which the mutually agreed contractors will be (and also potentially sacrifice some long standing relationships) the financial value cannot be ignored and a comprehensive review of all services should be completed before ruling out this cost saving measure. This dilemma will exist in reviewing any of the shared purchasing savings that may exist throughout the districts, but cannot be summarily dismissed as impractical.

When looking at the instructional component of each of the districts, a review of the BOCES Shared Services agreement is a good starting point. Since BOCES pricing is in many cases tied to student enrollment, it is worth consideration to petition ESBOCES to see if they would recognize **Center Moriches Union Free School District** and **East Moriches Union Free School District** as a composite entity for the purpose of acquiring some of their services. Some of the areas that have been identified for potential savings are; Library Automation, Data Warehousing, New York State Curriculum and Assessment Services (NYSCAS), Reading Recovery Continuing Contract, Model Schools Participation, On-site Staff Developers, IEP Direct Maintenance Fees, IEP Direct Annual BOCES Support, Guidance Direct Annual Support, Centris Sync Set-up Fees, Centris Sync Initial Set-up, and Centris Sync Annual License/Maintenance.

By petitioning BOCES and working together, opportunities to find mutual savings will present themselves. In fact, one of the proposed shared services through BOCES that has led to genuine savings is the concept of On-site Staff Developers. While BOCES is not the provider it was agreed to form a professional development consortium. In essence, the two districts agreed on a common goal for their Elementary programs and agreed on sharing a consultant to help them reach their objectives. Each district took turns “hosting” the event until the concept was adopted in each of the home districts. This approach is the cornerstone to maximizing the available benefits afforded to neighboring districts with common goals.

## Summary – Final Comments

Every attempt has been made to identify and quantify the savings that each of the two districts, **Center Moriches Union Free School** and **East Moriches Union Free School** could realize from sharing a variety of services. Since a number of the recommendations have long-term and far-reaching consequences, the final decision of which services can be shared remains one that must be heavily weighed by each of the districts. While many of the decisions can be made without the direct input of community members, some would require a shift of philosophy and a greater degree of alignment between the two curriculums.

There are definitely financial benefits that can be attained by pursuing shared services. By sharing the employment of a few critical staff members, multiple benefits, not the least of which is financial, can be gained. In respect to the three personnel areas that have been identified, the common thread among them focuses on increased productivity and minimizing the duplication of services. While this would result in less direct oversight of these individuals, it is believed that the very nature of these positions would keep them “on task”. The opportunity to gain any financial benefits from the sharing of instructional programming seems to be limited to creating a professional development consortium. Even though previous attempts on this front have not been successful, the ongoing pursuit of this savings should be considered.

Both districts have already recognized the potential benefits of sharing Co-curricular activities as shown by the combined Middle School football program. The goal for both districts should be to maximize the educational experience for each of their students while at the same time looking for taxpayer savings. While there are many of the same activities available at each of the schools there are enough to consider sharing student participation in some. An area that does not seem to have any savings potential would be transportation. This is due to the fact that **Center Moriches** and **East Moriches** school districts do not send any of their out-of-district students to the same programs. This option should be continually explored on a yearly basis as student’s placements change throughout the year. A review of the use of each district’s facilities also reveals no noticeable opportunities for savings.

With respect to technology there are definitely opportunities for savings if both of the districts can agree on the protocol for storage of data and the creation of a shared “back bone” infrastructure. While it is difficult to relinquish complete control over the data system, this

approach coupled with “shared support staff” should be further discussed. Each district has the very real opportunity to benefit from the concept of “*economies of scale*” when looking at technology. It is this concept, “*economies of scale*” which seems to offer both district’s the best opportunity for savings and could be even more magnified if combined with a shared purchasing agent.

In light of the current economic condition there is no doubt that districts will be forced to explore savings in new areas. The **Center Moriches Union Free School** and **East Moriches Union Free School** District both are fully aware of this fact and are trying to remain pro-active in their approach, as indicated by their investment of time and energy into this shared service review. A creative approach and bold proposals will be critical in small districts chances of survival and even more important in terms of maintaining their important school traditions. While the number of opportunities that these districts have capitalized on is small, the sharing of services is so important that the conversation must continue into the future.