

PARTICIPANT GUIDE

A Community Conversation About The Future of Eastford Elementary School and The Future for Eastford High School Students

The kind of discussion you are here to have tonight might be quite different from discussions you've had in the past. A Community Conversation is a particular kind of talk. It is the kind of talking that people do when they realize that they are responsible for making decisions and choices that will not only make things better, but will also have costs and consequences.

This Community Conversation is designed to bring together a diverse group of community members to talk through issues and ideas. Participants include parents, students, educators, taxpayers and people of different ages, races, and occupational backgrounds. We could have a great discussion, sharing opinions, personal experiences, and favorite solutions. But we will go beyond that and work together to try to understand the problem and find solutions that will be best for everyone. It means working on this problem as if solving it is up to us and no one else.

Most of our discussion will occur in small groups with a moderator whose job is to keep the discussion focused and moving along in a way that works well for everyone. Your job is to think and talk through the following:

- *A general discussion about THE FUTURE OF EASTFORD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL and THE FUTURE FOR EASTFORD'S HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS, using the introductory presentation as a conversation starter*
- *How we can reach our community goals?*
- *How to follow up on this conversation?*

The structure of the conversation is as follows:

General discussion about *THE FUTURE OF EASTFORD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL and THE FUTURE FOR EASTFORD'S HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS*

Group orientation

- Introductions
- PowerPoint discussion starter
- General discussion

Summary of General Discussion

Next steps discussion

What should be our approach to *THE FUTURE OF EASTFORD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL and THE FUTURE FOR EASTFORD'S HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS?*

Eastford Elementary is the school for Eastford's PK-8 students, while the high school students travel out of town to Woodstock Academy, Killingly Agricultural Center, Ellis Technical, ACT Magnet and QMC Magnet.

There are two important topics related to our children's education that the citizens of Eastford must address. The first relates to our approach towards educating our PK-8 students, which is currently accomplished at Eastford Elementary. The trends in Eastford show the PK-8 student population declining, educational expenses increasing, state aid to education decreasing and a building that will continue to require maintenance. If Eastford chooses to continue to maintain Eastford Elementary costs must rise for local taxpayers. There may be ways to limit the degree to which taxes will rise through multi-age groupings, flexible staffing, cooperative contracts with other districts, outsourcing tasks, and other strategies. Alternatively, Eastford could partner with another district for PK-8 education and costs would be lower. With the second option students would travel to another town for their schooling and Eastford would no longer have a school in town.

The second issue facing Eastford is the high school choices afforded our students. Currently most high school students attend Woodstock Academy and there have been questions as to whether this is the best option for our students. While many students do very well at Woodstock Academy, it may not be the best choice for some students who are pursuing a vocational rather than college-bound track. In addition, recent changes at Woodstock Academy such as the increase in boarding students, the consideration of a different athletic league, and the acquisition of the South Campus have left some parents wondering if the needs of their children are being adequately considered.

QUESTION A: WHAT SHOULD BE OUR APPROACH TO THE FUTURE OF EASTFORD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL?

Can Eastford continue to afford the PK-8 school? With student numbers declining, educational expenses increasing, and state aid decreasing can our budget continue to support the school?

To help you and your neighbors talk through these questions and decide what's most important to you—as an individual and as a community—we've created two approaches to Eastford Elementary's Future. Which would make the most sense for Eastford, and why?

Approach 1: Partner with another district for PK-8

- People who like this approach would:
 - Understand that to sustain the quality of education at Eastford Elementary local taxes must increase
 - Feel that the tax increases required are too great for local residents
 - Believe that there are advantages to having more cultural and educational opportunities if Eastford's PK-8 population were combined with another district.
 - Believe that the economies of scale allowed through partnering with another district will provide the best education for all students

Approach 2: Maintain Eastford Elementary School

- People that like this approach would:
 - Understand that to sustain the quality of education at Eastford Elementary local taxes must increase and believe that Eastford citizens support a tax increase to sustain the school
 - Recognize that there are creative ways to manage costs (e.g. multi-age groupings, flexible staffing, cooperative contracts with other districts, outsourcing tasks, etc.)
 - Understand that the building will continually require maintenance.
 - Be convinced that it is important to maintain a local PK-8 school

QUESTION B: WHAT SHOULD BE OUR APPROACH TO THE FUTURE OF EASTFORD HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS?

Is Woodstock Academy still the best educational choice for Eastford's high school students or should we consider other options? Does Woodstock Academy adequately prepare non-college-bound students for careers? Are Eastford's students' needs fairly considered by Woodstock Academy when making decisions about athletics, boarding/day student ratios and other important choices?

To help you and your neighbors talk through these questions and decide what's most important to you—as an individual and as a community—we've created two approaches to the Future for Eastford's High School Students. Which would make the most sense for Eastford, and why?

Approach 3: Maintain Woodstock Academy as the Primary Designated High School

- People that like this approach would:
 - Feel that Eastford high school students receive an excellent education at Woodstock Academy
 - Consider the cost to taxpayers of providing buses to additional high schools too great
 - Believe that the career clusters/technology education as well as the college preparation program at Woodstock Academy are adequate for Eastford students
 - Believe that Eastford's representation on the Woodstock Academy Board of Trustees and its long-term relationship with the Academy provide adequate assurances and transparency related to finances and governance.

Approach 4: Expand or replace the designated high school(s) to which Eastford pays tuition and transports students

- People that like this approach would:
 - Want more school choice for Eastford's high school students
 - Want more options for students with a particular profile.
 - Believe Woodstock Academy treats Eastford's students unfairly in financial and resource allocation issues
 - Feel another designated high school would communicate more effectively with Eastford's students and their parents

Next Steps:

What would you like to see happen to follow up on tonight's conversation? Is there anything that you as individuals might do, or do differently, as a result of tonight's conversation?

What would you like to see happen to follow up on this conversation?