

## Harley, Allendale Columbia schools scheduled to merge

### Boards looking to leverage strengths

#### Will Cleveland and Justin Murphy

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After years of discussion, the Harley School and Allendale Columbia announced Tuesday they will combine all operations beginning in July.

The full merger will not take effect from the perspective of students until 2020-21. Before then the school leaders will need to make a host of decisions regarding facilities, curriculum, leadership and a name for the new joint operation. Harley, the larger of the two, will be the lead entity.

The boards said the proposed merger leverages the strengths of each school to “create a unified organization that is positioned to excel for the next century.”

“It’s been a topic of interest on and off at the board of trustees level for at least a generation,” Harley Head of School Larry Frye said. The current round of discussion began this winter, he said.

Harley and Allendale Columbia had Pre-K-12 enrollment of 480 and 411 in 2017-18, respectively, compared to 521 and 446 a decade earlier, according to state data. Both also offer nursery school programs.

Frye acknowledged the general difficulty of declining enrollment in the region for both public and private schools but said that was not the driving factor. “The schools really have complementary strengths, and this is an opportunity to make a truly world-class institution,” he said.

During the 2019-2020 school year, the school campuses will continue to operate individually. Students currently in grades 11 and 12 will graduate from their current schools as planned. Both campuses will be in use in 2020-21, but Frye said it is yet to be decided how they’ll be configured — for instance, if one

will be an elementary school and the other a secondary school.

“We need to go into a collective process with as many stakeholders as possible to think about what things will look like five or 10 years from now,” he said.

Harley was founded in 1917 while Allendale Columbia was founded in 1890. They have had combined athletic programs for 47 years and also do joint homecoming and prom, among other things.

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**Allendale Columbia was founded in 1890.**



**The Harley School was founded in 1917 .**  
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