



MTRSD/HRSD
SUSTAINABILITY PROJECT
PROGRESS UPDATE
OCTOBER 2024



2Districts8Towns



Thanks to Charlemont

The Community Compact Grant would not be possible
without their partnership

We're here to hear from you

**There's no preferred solution and any
final decision will be up to the town voters**



2Districts8Towns

Support ongoing study and analysis of the operating and organizational structures of the two Regional School Districts

In doing so...we aim to:

Deliver the highest quality educational experiences for students in the 8 towns while reflecting the fiscal realities of our towns/residents.



Challenges



Our region, like many rural areas across the northeast, faces educational and fiscal challenges associated with:

- ✓ declining enrollment
- ✓ rising operational costs
- ✓ relatively flat state aid
- ✓ increasing needs of our student body

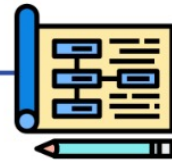
We must continue to explore options and opportunities – in light of these challenges - to ensure our students receive a **high-quality set of educational experiences** (academics, co-curricular, services and supports) they need to ensure success in college, career and life

Approach



1. Study

Gather research, baseline data on the Districts and input from staff, students, families and communities



2. Plan

Analyze and synthesize inputs to develop aspirations and priority options that lead toward a preferred future.



3. Engage

Solicit input on options through additional engagement with all constituencies and work to create consensus.



5. Sustain

Use feedback systems to support continuous improvement.



4. Act

Initiate and implement selected (best) strategies.

ANALYSIS
PROJECTION
OPTIONS
MODELING
ENGAGEMENT



Steering Committee



Ashfield

Greg Lilly (MTRSD Athletic Director and former Ashfield School Committee Rep)

Buckland

Paula Consolo (Buckland Finance Committee)

Charlemont

Lindsey Sall (Parent)

Colrain

Jenny Van Wyk (Parent)

Hawley

Ellen Purinton (Business Owner)

Heath

Tucker Jenkins (Police Officer)

Plainfield

Open

Shelburne

Paul Hollings (Community Member)

School Committee, Administration, Mary Lyon Foundation and BERK 12 Members

Kristen Baker (Mary Lyon Foundation)

Robin Pease (MTRSD/HRSD Facilities Director)

Sheryl Stanton (MTRSD/HRSD Superintendent)

Martha Thurber, Chair, MTRSD School Committee

Elizabeth Van Iderstine, Chair, HRSD School Committee

H. Jake Eberwein, Project Manager, BERK12

Advisory Teams



Educational Quality

Academics
Vocational Opportunities
School Activities



Finance

School Costs
Financial Models
Town Contributions



Community Outreach

Publicity
Engagement Opportunities
Digital Media
Surveys and Feedback



Facilities

Buildings and Grounds
Maintenance
Operations

◆ Reports

Reports	Status
<u>Regional Agreement</u>	Published
<u>Enrollment</u>	Published
<u>Historical/Literature</u>	Published
<u>Community Outreach</u>	Published
<u>Facilities</u>	Published
<u>Early Childhood</u>	Draft Published
Finance/Personnel (Transport, CBA, Tech)	Draft (Parts I & III) Shared and discussed by Advisory
Education	Draft report shared with advisory team.
Special Education	In Process
Progress Report	Published

Tradition and Pride

Enrollment

Finance

Efficiency

Education

Perception/Identity



Baseline Reports



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- ✓ History and Literature
- ✓ Enrollment
- ✓ Community
- ✓ Facilities
- ✓ Finance
- ✓ Personnel
- ✓ Education

History and Literature

- There has been an ongoing (70 years) need and willingness to consider, plan for, and make substantial changes to the regional public education system.
- A common theme among many prior reports is the reconfiguration of elementary schools (consolidation, reorganizing grades, organizing in a single facility).
- While many studies have yielded some successes (depending on perspective) many have failed to realize full recommendations based on resistance from varied stakeholder groups (families, towns, school staff, school committees).

Enrollment

	PreK-12 Enrollment		
	2000	2024	Decline (%), 2000-2024
Mohawk Trail RSD	1,719	806	53.1%
Hawlemont RSD	155	56	63.9%

- Franklin County population is declining, as the 8-town population ages and births slow
- Combined HRSD and MTRSD enrollment decline is greatest at the high school
- Out-migration (students leaving the districts) has increased with the transition from grades 8-9 as the most common “jumping off” point for students
- Overall, fewer resident students of the 8 towns are choosing to attend the local public schools
- More students choice out than choice in
 - MTRSD 109 choiced out - 101 choiced in
 - HRSD, 37 choiced out - 14 choiced in

Enrollment

- Vocational education has become a bigger draw for students
- Class size is generally small ranging from about 6 to 20 in elementary school, about 20 in middle school, and from 5 to 18 in a wide array of high school classes
- Overall load for teachers is low, particularly in grades 9-12
- The needs of students are increasing
 - Increased numbers of students identified as low income, English language learners, and students with disabilities
- Enrollment is projected to continue to decline into the future
 - If birth patterns and out migration continue, we anticipate another 13% enrollment loss by 2030

Community Outreach

- Many of the districts' strengths revolve around being a small, rural district.
 - Small class size, caring teachers, strong peer/adult connections
- Academic quality and rigor are important components of a high-quality education and student retention
- Declining enrollment is a major challenge, particularly at the high school level

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SESSION

The BERK12 consulting team needs your feedback for a study about the future of the Mohawk Trail and Hawlemont school districts. We will provide a short overview of the project plan and an opportunity for community stakeholders to share insights and perspectives about the districts and schools.

Families (parents, caregivers, students, grandparents, alumni, others...) and community members who care about the quality of public education in the region are strongly encouraged to attend.



HELP SHAPE THE FUTURE OF YOUR SCHOOLS

The BERK12 consulting team needs your feedback for a study about the future of the Mohawk Trail and Hawlemont Regional School Districts. Families (parents, caregivers, students, grandparents, alumni, others) and community members are strongly encouraged to attend one of four upcoming COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SESSIONS. We will provide a short overview of the project plan and an opportunity for you to share insights and perspectives about the districts and schools.

You should come to one of the sessions if you:

- are concerned about declining enrollment in the Mohawk Trail and Hawlemont districts
- want to share your thoughts about the strengths and challenges of the schools
- have kids in the schools and want to help shape the quality of their education
- are a community member who cares about high quality, cost-effective education
- want to help form a vision for where the districts should be in 10 years

ZOOM OPTION IS AVAILABLE FOR ALL SESSIONS

<p style="font-size: 0.7em; margin: 0;">APRIL</p> <p style="font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold; margin: 0;">9</p> <p style="font-size: 0.7em; margin: 0;">COLRAIN CENTRAL SCHOOL Library, 6-7:30 pm snacks & childcare provided</p>	<p style="font-size: 0.7em; margin: 0;">APRIL</p> <p style="font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold; margin: 0;">11</p> <p style="font-size: 0.7em; margin: 0;">SANDERSON ACADEMY Cafeteria, 6-7:30 pm snacks & childcare provided</p>
<p style="font-size: 0.7em; margin: 0;">APRIL</p> <p style="font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold; margin: 0;">24</p> <p style="font-size: 0.7em; margin: 0;">MOHAWK TRAIL REGIONAL SCHOOL Superintendent's Conference Room, 6-7:30 PM snacks provided</p>	<p style="font-size: 0.7em; margin: 0;">APRIL</p> <p style="font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold; margin: 0;">25</p> <p style="font-size: 0.7em; margin: 0;">HAWLEMONT SCHOOL Cafeteria, 5:30-7:00 PM dinner & childcare provided</p>

REGISTER TO ATTEND AT:

[HTTPS://WWW.SURVEYMONKEY.COM/R/REGISTER-2D8T](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/register-2d8t)
If you are attending virtually, the Zoom link will be forwarded to you when you register.







- The district's financial challenges are a concern
 - Stakeholders expressed concerns about rising taxes and long-term fiscal sustainability
- There is a desire to have more vocational and technical educational offerings
 - High interest in pathways and options for non-college bound students
- Elementary schools are highly valued but there is recognition among some that consolidation or reconfiguring grade spans may be needed
- While there are negative perceptions about MTRSD and HRSD, staff and students have more positive perceptions

Facilities

SCHOOL	Grades	Built	Last major renovation	2016-17 enrollment	2023-24 enrollment	Condition Rating	Capacity Rating	General Environment
Buckland-Shelburne Elementary	PK-6	1958	1998-99	259	266	1	Under	1
Colrain Central School	PK-6	1952	1996	112	103	1	Under	1
Heath Elementary School	PK-6	1996		29	closed	1	Under	1
Mohawk Trail Regional School	7-12	1967	1998	422	299	1	Under	1
Sanderson Academy	PK-6	1997		143	138	1	Average	1
Hawlemont Regional School	PK-6	1901	2003	105	56	1	Under	1

- The buildings serve as important community centers and are points of town pride
- The buildings are well kept and maintained but are well under capacity and will need ongoing capital investments
- While buildings have available spaces, some of these have been repurposed to meet contemporary educational needs such as: special education, therapy, ELL, counseling, breakout for tiered intervention rooms
- Geography, distances, capacity, and physical needs will inform any reorganization
- School closures must be carefully considered (culture, politics, emotions) but are a significant way to create efficiencies (economies of scale), align efforts, ensure access, and save money
- Construction costs have risen with inflation, so renovation/new construction projects will have to be carefully studied
- Larger investments in existing buildings will be needed if students consolidate into fewer schools or a single campus

Finance

- HRSD and MTRSD reflect the fact that rural districts (with smaller enrollments) are more expensive to operate
- Operating costs are increasing at a rate that far outpaces additional revenue from the State, forcing towns (property taxes) to cover increases
- Despite stagnant revenue, the districts have worked hard to contain operating cost increases and assessments to the towns
 - From FY18 to FY25, assessments in MTRSD increased about 3.3%/year, while HRSD increased 3.9%/year
- While overall assessments have been reasonably contained, assessments to individual towns have been much more volatile
- Towns have limited excess levy capacity
- School choice and tuition have historically generated more revenue than expenses, but ongoing outgoing migration patterns are concerning
 - Retaining current choice out/charter students would save \$1.2 million

Personnel

- The Districts employ about 273 people: 70% of total budget
- The Districts share administrative positions and contract with third-parties for Technology and Transportation
- Consistent with rural trends, the Districts have a larger ratio of teachers to students (fewer students per teacher) than state average
- The Districts generally retain staff (high on the step scale); most teachers have a master or higher (84%)
- Understand areas where the Districts vary from state averages

Education

- Each school has unique strengths but a lack of consensus on the district's identity and focus has created challenges
- The curriculum for grades K-5 at the elementary school is research-based, evidence-driven, and well-aligned
- There is room for growth and improvement within the grade 6 model
- There is variation in MCAS scores across the districts' elementary schools
- In elementary classrooms, it's common to have multiple adults, such as a teacher and a paraprofessional, supporting student learning but student performance data often does not show a clear impact from this individualized support
- AP and SAT data for the district are positive
- A reassessment of college and career readiness opportunities is necessary to better match student needs and interests

Other Areas of Inquiry

- REGIONAL AGREEMENT
- TRANSPORTATION
- EARLY CHILDHOOD

From Ideas to Models



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Getting to 5

177

Universe of Possibilities

Generated by BERK12, Steering Committee, School Committees, Engagement with Students, Staff, Families, Town Officials and Communities, Historical Efforts, and Best Practices

56

Filter One

Do the Ideas Truly Affect Sustainability?

56

Filter 2

Rated By Ease and Impact

27

Rated by Impact

Educational Quality,
Operating Efficiency, Finance,
Feasibility

5

Most Promising Options/Ideas

Five Options/Ideas
to Model

14

Other Options/Opportunities

Supportive Ideas That Can be
Implemented by
Administration/School
Committees



SUPPORTING IDEAS AND OPPORTUNITIES

As the Steering Committee has engaged in the “option winnowing” process, there were a significant number of ideas and opportunities raised by the community and the Steering Committee that were not substantial enough to model as stand-alone operational options. However, the Steering Committee does believe it will be critical to further assess these factors – individually and in combination – and integrate them, as appropriate, into the modeling exercise or refer them to the administrative team and School Committees for potential implementation regardless of the outcome of this project.



Examples

- Review all staffing and positions to maximize efficiency and reduce costs, ensuring a high-quality education
 - Focus where staffing appears significantly out of line with state averages
- Emphasize academic quality and rigor across all grades
 - Expand opportunities for advanced coursework, multi-disciplinary courses and hands-on learning experiences
 - Scale unique programs (such as Hawlemont's HAY agricultural program) across district schools
- Increase career and technical course options and pathways
 - Eliminate the current "block" schedule and align the middle school and high school schedules
- Increase marketing and outreach, actively market programs and services to attract and retain students
 - Explore extracurricular activities and specialized programs such as career and technical education pathways or innovative programs



Highest Rated Ideas for Modeling

- Idea 1 No Change
- Idea 2 Districts Merge
- Idea 3 Move 6th Grade to MTRS
- Idea 4 Move Grade 6
to MTRS and close one or
more schools
- Idea 5 Single Campus

Model 1 No Change

Examine the *status quo* with projections into the near future

Opportunities

- No School Closures
- Operational schools: 5
- Towns retain schools



Challenges

- No movement towards sustainability, efficiencies, or alignment

Model 2 Merge MTRSD and HRSD

Examine merging MTRSD and HRSD into one district to become a PK-12 regional school district with 8 towns

Opportunities

- Operational schools 5
- No schools close
- Limited reduction of administrative oversight misalignment/inefficiencies
- No change in travel



Challenges

- Very limited efficiencies/savings and alignment achieved
- Ongoing facilities and capital investments needed
- Regional agreement/governance

Examine creating a 6-8 middle school at MTRS with all elementary schools becoming PK-5; modeled two ways;

1. Maintain HRSD and MTRSD as separate districts
2. Merge the two districts into a single PK-12 district

Opportunities

- No school closures
- Operational schools: 5
- Some limited efficiencies
- True middle school (6-8)
- Stronger relationship with grade 6 families at MTRS Enhanced
- 6th grade experience

Challenges

- Slight change to travel
- Limited efficiencies and alignment
- Ongoing facilities and capital investment needed
- Regional agreement/governance

Model 4 Move grade 6 students to MTRS

Examine creating a grade 6 – 8 middle school and options for closing one or more elementary schools

1. Close 1 elementary school, TBD
2. Close 2 elementary Schools, TBD
3. All elementary schools consolidate on the BSE site (Colrain, Sanderson, and Hawlemont close)

Opportunities

- Reduction in operational/capital costs
- Class size balancing
- Use of closed buildings for alternative purposes
- Closer alignment of elementary programming
- True middle school (6-8)
- Stronger relationship with Grade 6 students/families
- Enhanced 6th grade experience
- Elementary school closures could be strategic by location and physical condition

Challenges

- Some towns no longer have an elementary school
- Changes (potentially longer) travel times for some students
- If BSE becomes the district elementary school, it will need significant capital upgrades

Model 5 Single Campus

Examine creating a single PK-12 campus at MTRS

Opportunities

- Maximum efficiencies
- Maximum alignment of and access to services
- Class size balancing
- Reduction in operational costs
- Larger student cohorts
- Enhanced academic and extracurricular experience
- Alignment of programming, curriculum, professional development, support services, etc. by grade span
- Relationship between elementary and secondary levels strengthened
- Use of closed buildings for alternative purposes

Challenges

- Towns no longer have elementary schools
- Changes (potentially longer) travel times.
- Need for facilities investments (renovation or construction) resulting in capital liability

How will we know?



2 Districts 8 Towns



Modeling Questions

Modeling Questions

- ✓ What is the impact of the model on the following?
 - Finances
 - Teaching and learning
 - Student experience
 - Transportation
 - Family experience
 - Faculty/staff experience
- ✓ What are the implications of the model for staffing?
- ✓ Will the new model assist in retaining and attracting students to the district (is there any anticipated impact on enrollment)?
- ✓ What specialized programming or access to services and supports could be added (or scaled) in the model?
- ✓ Does the reconfiguration help to strengthen the district's identity?
- ✓ What are the facilities implications of the models?
- ✓ How, if at all, can the models be pursued in a staged (phased in) approach over time?

Using the four domains, questions and prompts





**Are you interested in a progress update
of the Sustainability Study for our schools?**

The Mohawk Trail and Hawlemont Regional School Districts and the BERK12 research team invite you to hear about progress and next steps toward creating a more sustainable future for the districts' schools and member towns.

Please plan to attend this virtual update
Thursday, October 10, 2024, 7- 8:30 pm

[CLICK HERE](#) or scan QR code for Google Meet link
or to join by phone call: 1 505-636-0084
When prompted, use PIN: 981 448 988#



Our region faces educational and fiscal challenges due to declining enrollment, rising operational costs, relatively flat state aid, and increasing needs of our student body. Information presented by Jake Eberwein of BERK12 will focus on research in the areas of educational quality, facilities, finance, and enrollment trends, and data gathered through surveys and community meetings.

Visit 2districts8towns.org to access monthly updates, reports, and historical information.

Please Join Us!

- [VIDEO LINK](#)
- JOIN BY PHONE
 - Call: 1 505-636-0084
 - When prompted, use PIN: 981 448 988#

Thank You!

PLEASE REMEMBER:

There's no preferred solution and any final decision will be up to the town voters!

This is a community process. We are at the beginning. Any approved changes will take time to develop and implement!