

STRPB Regionalization
More Educational Opportunities For Each Tax Dollar Spent
It's Time To Do Something Different!
Our Present Model Is Not Sustainable!

Across the country, student enrollment has been declining for decades. Franklin County, like almost all counties in Massachusetts, is no exception. Over the past 20 years, the county's PreK-12 enrollment has declined approximately 4,000 students. Residents who have lived here for decades have witnessed the reduction/elimination of course offerings, student centered programs, sports teams, extracurricular activities and staff.

The negative educational impacts become increasingly more challenging as declines continue, hence, schools struggle to support programs without a critical mass of students. In particular, when students move to subject content learning at the middle and high school levels, it is vital to have more students in the classroom and programs to support and sustain the curricular and extracurricular opportunities.

The students get less, but the taxpayers pay more! This trend prompted the formation of the Six Town Regionalization Planning Board (STRPB) to address sustainability of educational programs and opportunities and financial affordability for the towns. STRPB members are friends and neighbors throughout your six towns. They dedicated hundreds of hours exploring the feasibility of regionalization on behalf of all our students. After 5 years of research, they concluded the benefits for students, staff

and our communities would be significant. Consider the following benefits to regionalization:

Elementary Schools (class instruction)

- All elementary schools would remain open
- More elementary school teachers within the district
- More opportunity for teacher collaboration

Middle and High Schools (subject area instructions)

- Stronger long-term programming sustainability
- More course offerings
- Access to specialized staff
- Multiple peer cohorts
- Expanded student engagement in classroom learning activities
- More teachers in subject area departments means more overall teacher experience and approaches to learning
- **Robust Performing Arts:**
 - Opportunity to perform in larger groups with expanded repertoire
 - Playing in a band with 50 students (covering all instrumental parts) is a more robust experience than a band with 20
 - Larger live theater productions
- More students to promote school spirit and organize events
- Unique student-centered club offerings (i.e., mock trial, debate, robotics).

Staff:

- Combined talented staff to share best practices to support student learning
- Engaging professional development through multiple perspectives
- More certified teachers in content area to guide department meetings
- Unified support staff to address emotional and social needs of students
- Offer existing courses/programs and develop new ones of interest to students
- Greater flexibility in distributing extra-curricular activities amongst staff, thus reduce pressure on staff to assist in student activities

Communities:

- Costs spread over a larger taxbase
- More predictability in assessments (based on a 5-year rolling average to avoid spikes)
- Administrative efficiencies - remove redundancies. For example, two key Central Office positions cost taxpayers approximately 1 million dollars in salaries and benefits over a three-year period)
- Utilize the salaries of Central Office positions to supervise a larger staff, oversee policy, conduct HR, payroll/benefits, engage more communities, and promote more programs and services that benefit students

- More value for the tax dollar

Next Steps:

- In the Fall, voters will be asked to vote on two proposed regional agreements: a Six Town Agreement (Bernardston, Gill, Leyden, Montague, Northfield and Warwick) and a Five Town Agreement (all towns except Warwick)
- If one passes, upon the approval of the Commissioner of Education, the Selectboards in each town, along with current school committee members from that town, will appoint residents to serve on the Great River Regional School District (GRRSD) Committee for a two-year period
- They will be charged with “setting up the new district” according to DESE regulations and state laws.
- The GRRSD will become operational on July 1, 2028

This is an amazing opportunity to create something special and exciting to serve the next generation of students. It takes courage and a leap of faith to move from the known to the unknown. We did it before (in the 1950s/60s) with a long-term benefit for our communities and students. We can do it again and give our students the educational experience they deserve.

