



# 2Districts8Towns

## MINUTES: 2D8T STEERING COMMITTEE

DATE: Thursday, February 15 at 5:30 pm

LOCATION: (Superintendent's Conference Room at Mohawk Trail Regional School and remotely via GoogleMeet)

### ATTENDING:

Paula Consolo, Buckland

Jenny Van Wyk, Colrain

Paul Hollings, Shelburne

Martha Thurber, Chair, MTRSD School Committee

Elizabeth Van Iderstine, Chair, HRSD School Committee

Jake Eberwein, Project Manager, BERK12

### Remote attending:

Judy Coles, Plainfield

Ellen Purinton, Hawley

Robin Pease, MTRSD Facilities Manager

Mary Nash, BERK 12

Brendan Sheran, BERK 12

Judy Rush, BERK 12

Meeting called to order 5:45 pm – adjourned at 7:17pm

February 3, 2024 meeting minutes approved as written.

The BERK12 Project team shared a [slide deck](#) to frame their meeting remarks.

- Discussion of the initial Steering Committee survey (Jake Eberwein)

Jake has [presented](#) to Ashfield and Heath town meetings with the Selectboards since our last meeting. SurveyMonkey with [7 survey questions](#) is being disseminated to the finance committee and select board.

Summary of the responses to the steering committee survey so far (Mary Nash)

Strengths: people in the community, geography, facilities, athletics, close-knit supportive community.

Education: capstone project, curriculum redesign, small classes, uniqueness and traditions of the elementary schools.

Non-negotiables: Athletic director, arts/music/theater program, transportation, Spanish (with a request for starting earlier), district independence.

Challenges and Weaknesses: academic opportunities for advanced coursework – i.e. not enough AP courses, elementary coursework not challenging enough, students leaving for private/charter/tech schools, lack of racial and cultural diversity.

Options: slow the negative perception, consolidate all schools on the site, eliminate block schedule to align middle and high, exit interviews with choice-out students, outreach to homeschool families, consider preschool efficiency.

10-year goals: financial sustainability, more students here and staying, upgraded facilities where needed, focus on highest quality opportunities, continue to build and support the athletics, make it attractive to the highest-achieving students.

Considerations: socioeconomic health of the town, timeline sensitivity, gathering information from all members of the town – not just school-aged families, what can we learn from the Heath School closing and its repercussions.

Questions from the survey: How do we compare with other school districts, a list of what the districts need, what and where are the leaks in the student system? How does the difference in the socioeconomic status of the towns impact planning? Where do Heath students go now, and what are the impacts?

Informational requests and comments for future discussion were raised by the attendees:

1. Heath Elementary School: Clarifying questions were raised about the history of the closing of the Heath Elementary School building. Martha Thurber gave a brief overview, summarized here. Heath students were tutored for 5 years to Hawlemont, and then in 2023 these students were reassigned to the home school of Colrain Central School. Currently, 9 of the 60 Heath students are attending Colrain, while the majority are choosing to stay in Hawlemont, and others choice into Rowe Elementary School.
2. DESE student attending report was requested so that we can understand where the leaks are in the student enrollment.
3. Is the location of the physical building important to building community?

Next steps: send out a survey to parents who have sent their students out of district via choice.

**Action items:**

Share student enrollment information.

Generate a QR code on a flyer to post in public areas (library, school, town hall, etc.).

Disseminate Rural Aid Bill documents.

• Progress Report/Key Upcoming Initiatives (Jake Eberwein)

-Stage 1 Workplan: Process Organization, information collecting, community outreach, Historic and Literature review. The timeline aims to finish this before the end of the 2023/24 school year in June 2024.

-Current tasks in February/March 2024 from Berk12: Historic lit review (Rob), Engagement at town meetings and schools (Mary), Educational “Look” (Judy/Brendan), Enrollment updates (Mark), Data organization, Finance/Buildings (Abrahams Group).

• Discussion of Subcommittees (Martha Thurber)

Through these subcommittees, we may be able to include wider community participation in this process. The following subcommittees were identified, and volunteers to spearhead each group are listed below.

- Education (quality) – Jenny Van Wyk, an Educator at Mohawk Trail (Martha will work to recruit a participant)
- Finance – Paula Consolo, Judy Cole
- Operations (transportation, facilities, technology) – Robin Pease
- Community Engagement/PR – Paul Hollings, Ellen Purinton, Mary Nash. Suggestion for recruiting students for this committee.

• Other Updates

– Legislation: Rural Aid and other pending bills (Martha Thurber)

The bill was voted favorably out of the joint education of the legislature. It was voted out with a redraft (no information is currently available).

Next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, March 21 at 5:30 pm (Superintendent’s Conference Room at Mohawk Trail Regional School and remotely via GoogleMeet).

Submitted By: Jenny Van Wyk