



2Districts8Towns

Welcome Steering Committee

February 3, 2024

Agenda

- 12:00** **Lunch and Introductions**
- 12:30-12:45** **Introduction (Sheryl Stanton)**
Current Issues
Rural Schools Report
History of Sustainability Work in the Districts
- 12:45-1:00** **Introduction of BERK 12 (Jake Eberwein)**
Who is BERK 12?
2D8T Workplan
Steering Committee Role
Elect Co-Chairs
- 1:00-1:45** **Guided Discussion (Jake Eberwein)**
Strengths/Opportunities/Considerations
Subcommittee recommendations
- 1:45-2:00** **Wrap-up**

Current Issues

- Declining enrollment has meant no increases to Chapter 70 funding beyond 30 or 60 per pupil since 2008
- Historically, towns have made up the difference, however;
- The Student Opportunity Act (SOA) has shifted the burden of funding deficits in the Chapter 70 formula to the towns through increased minimum required contributions
- FY23-FY25 Minimum Required Contributions

	Required Local Contribution	Chapter 70 Aid <i>Reflects Penalties, where applicable</i>	% Chg	Required Net School Spending <i>Aid + Local Contribution</i>
FY08	5,769,493	6,204,233	2.8%	11,973,726
FY09	5,721,445	5,603,580	-9.7%	11,983,578
FY10	5,820,331	6,136,890	9.5%	11,957,221
FY11	5,807,577	5,778,373	-5.8%	11,585,950
FY12	5,977,059	5,809,394	0.5%	11,786,453
FY13	6,107,017	5,850,194	0.7%	11,957,211
FY14	6,294,792	5,874,244	0.4%	12,169,036
FY15	6,365,060	5,897,844	0.4%	12,262,904
FY16	6,523,226	5,921,294	0.4%	12,444,520
FY17	6,433,157	5,973,434	0.9%	12,406,591
FY18	6,364,738	6,001,454	0.5%	12,366,192
FY19	6,399,727	6,028,994	0.5%	12,428,721
FY20	6,438,287	6,056,894	0.5%	12,495,181
FY21	6,461,323	6,056,894	0.0%	12,518,217
FY22	6,376,119	6,081,374	0.4%	12,457,493
FY23*	6,617,874	6,131,054	0.8%	12,489,228

	FY 23	FY24	FY25
MINIMUM CONTRIBUTION (TOWNS' TOTAL)	\$6,617,874	\$6,907,293	\$7,258,681

What Does It All Mean?



In 2018, our Chapter 70 aid was 6,001,454 dollars with a foundation enrollment of 934 students. In 2023, it was 6,131,054 dollars with a foundation enrollment of 828 students.



As a hold harmless district, the only Chapter 70 aid increase allocated to the district has been the 30 or 60 dollar per pupil increase per year



In FY24 budget includes the following increases

- 4% in salary and benefits \$650,248
- 7% in maintenance and operations \$126,940
- 14% in school choice, charter, and out of district tuition \$311,222
- 16% in transportation \$232,171



We reduce the budget through staffing and programmatic reductions

**“Death Spiral”
Reductions
lead families to
make
alternative
choices for
where to send
their children.**



We increase assessments to the towns

Towns are overwhelmed by the increase
Caught between supporting the schools and balancing their budgets
Contentious relationships between the schools and town leaders may develop



Mohawk Trail Regional
Gateway Regional
MASC Day on the Hill '23

Support
Rural Schools!

Rural Schools Report *The Issues*

- Districts with very low student enrollments cost substantially more to fund on a per-pupil basis than typical school districts.
- Districts with 1,300 students or fewer cost 16.7% more to operate than the state average and small K-12 regional school districts cost 22.7% more to operate than larger ones. By under-calculating their operational costs, these districts receive insufficient Chapter 70 aid.
- School districts in sparsely populated areas have substantially greater student transportation costs and have limited potential for consolidating schools due to long travel times.
- Between 2012 and 2020 rural districts lost 4,232 students or 13.9% of their enrollment. Over the same period, the state's total enrollment declined by 4,541 students or 0.5%.
- School districts that have experienced years of declining student enrollment remain saddled with high per-pupil legacy costs.
- Average employee and retiree benefits costs for the 31 districts with the highest decline in enrollment was \$1,021 per- pupil or 34.1% greater than the state average.

Rural Schools Report *The Solutions*

- 60 million annual appropriation for rural and declining enrollment districts
- Review the Chapter 70 aid formula
- Full reimbursement for regional transportation and no penalty for transporting students under 2 miles
- Reimbursement of extraordinary transportation relief
- 90% reimbursement for MSBA reimbursement in rural areas
- Study unique issues of Special Education in rural areas
- Special Education extraordinary relief fund should be made available for rural districts where in district rates are over 20%

History of Sustainability Work in the Districts

- 2007 Report
- 2015 BEST Report
 - Close Heath
 - Move grade 6 to MTRS
 - Close Colrain
- Phase I with MARS
- Phase II with BERK12

Why Are We Here

- The issues we face are systemic
 - Flawed Chapter 70 Funding
 - Enrollment based
 - Assumption of growth within the towns
 - Small schools do not have the economies of scale
 - Lack of legislative and DESE awareness and/or willingness to address facing issues facing rural communities
- BUT
 - There may be some solutions for us to consider to
 - Offer a broad range of programming our families and community expect
 - Improve our efficiency and fiscal sustainability



We  the
Rural Schools
Commission!