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LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY STUDY UNDERWAY IN MOHAWK TRAIL/HAWLEMONT DISTRICTS

March 1, 2024 -- Berkshire Educational Resources K12 (BERK12) is working with the Mohawk Trail and Hawlemont regional school districts to conduct an ongoing study and analysis of the two districts as they seek ways to ensure their long-term sustainability. The project, branded as 2districts8towns, encompasses the Western Massachusetts towns of Ashfield, Buckland, Charlemont, Colrain, Hawley, Heath, Plainfield, and Shelburne.

The purpose of the study is to identify the best options for providing a high-quality education that prepares students for future success in college, career, and life while considering educational and fiscal opportunities, challenges, and options. Like many rural areas across the Northeast, the region faces challenges associated with declining enrollment, rising operational costs, relatively flat state aid, and increasing student needs. The study builds upon previous data collection.

“Our communities care deeply about our schools and want the best possible education for our youth,” said Sheryl Stanton, superintendent of Mohawk Trail/Hawlemont Regional School Districts. “I’m proud of the work the community has done over the last two decades and am excited and hopeful about identifying the best possible options for a sustainable future for our districts through the BERK12 study.”

The first stage of work focuses on collecting data on current educational programming, enrollment, fiscal conditions, and building infrastructure. Additionally, over the next few months, BERK12 consultants will engage with the community by meeting with teachers and administrators, students, school committees, select boards/finance committees, family members, and community members to provide an overview of the project plan and gather their perspectives about the districts and schools.

Following the data collection and community engagement efforts, BERK12 will present potential operating models that offer a more sustainable future for the schools and member towns. These models will then be presented and discussed in community settings throughout the eight towns. By early 2025, BERK12 will generate a final report that identifies preferred models for moving forward and recommended next steps.

A steering committee has been formed to provide ongoing guidance and oversee the work. The committee will be assembling advisory teams in the areas of community outreach, educational quality, and finance. Community members interesting in serving on advisory teams can submit their names through the website (2districts8towns.org).

Community members are encouraged to learn more about the study by visiting the project website and social media pages and attending upcoming outreach meetings. The 2districts8towns website provides past and current presentations and reports, a full schedule of upcoming community engagement meetings, a list of steering committee members, links to the project’s Facebook and Instagram pages, and other relevant project information.

For more information, contact project manager H. Jake Eberwein, jeberwein@gmail.com.