



SHAPING THE FUTURE OF OUR SCHOOL DISTRICTS, TOGETHER.

2 DISTRICTS 8 TOWNS STEERING COMMITTEE

Ashfield, Buckland, Colrain, Heath, Plainfield, Shelburne
Mohawk Trail Regional School District

Hawley, Charlemont
Hawlemont Regional School District

2Districts8Towns.org

OUR COMMITTEE REPRESENTS YOU IN THE WORK WE ARE DOING. Our goal is to ensure that all students in the 8 towns are provided with a broad array of high-quality educational opportunities that prepare them for success (college, career, and life) in whatever path they choose after high school – and to do so in a sustainable way that our rural towns can afford.

WHAT AND WHO IS THE 2 DISTRICTS 8 TOWNS (2D8T) STEERING COMMITTEE?

In 2023, the Hawlemont and Mohawk Trail Regional School Committees applied for and received a grant to support ongoing study and analysis of the operating and organizational structures of the two regional school districts. In early 2024, the Steering Committee was formed to work with a research team to advance this study and explore potential options and opportunities.

→ Fact: Our Committee has volunteer representatives from each town. We are town officials, school staff, and community members who are committed to excellence in education in our community. We represent you: residents, parents, taxpayers, school employees, and students.

WHY IS THIS STUDY NEEDED?

To address these challenges:

- From **1997 to 2024** enrollment in our two districts has dropped **59%**, from **1,880 to 780** students. While the drop in enrollment is slowing, further declines are expected.
- Meanwhile, both districts have faced **rising costs** in operations, transportation, technology, employee benefits, and special education. However, we have not received additional funding from state education aid, which is tied to enrollment. We have had no meaningful increase in 20 years. As a result, towns (taxpayers) bear an increasing share of school costs.
- As enrollment drops and the **needs of our students increase**, the imperative to offer a range of high-quality programs and supports becomes more challenging.

WHAT ABOUT PAST STUDIES? HAVEN'T WE ALREADY DONE THIS?

This study will continue the analysis started in 2023, while **building upon historical efforts** conducted by former working groups over the last two decades. This previous work serves as a foundation towards addressing the rising urgency of challenges we face today. All former studies can be accessed [HERE](#).

WHAT IS THE TIMELINE?

The study has launched with early and ongoing **community outreach and engagement**. As data is analyzed, models created, and promising options generated – findings are expected to be shared in early 2025, in time for annual town meetings in the spring of 2025.

HOW IS THIS STUDY DIFFERENT?

Our study will be completed in four steps. They are:

- **Engagement with community:** Through outreach events, surveys, website/social media, and informational briefs – our Committee wants to hear from a wide range of stakeholders. Your voice is foundational to informing the options to be considered.
- **Analysis & projections:** We are conducting a full review of district data (finance, buildings, educational indicators, enrollment, and more). We will use historical and current conditions to project into the future.
- **Options:** We will generate the universe of possible solutions and ideas, evaluate these solutions, and identify the most promising options.
- **Model:** We'll run the most promising options through rigorous modeling to better understand the educational, fiscal, and facilities implications into the future.

Our aim is to emerge with viable alternatives/solutions (potential future plans) that ensure the highest quality schools that are fiscally sustainable for our towns and will be supported by the community.

WHO IS ON THE STEERING COMMITTEE?

Co-Chairs:

Martha Thurber, Chair, Mohawk Trail School Committee

Elizabeth Van Iderstine, Chair, Hawlemont School Committee

Members:

Greg Lilly, Ashfield, MTRSD Athletic Director

Paula Consolo, Buckland, Finance Committee

Lindsey Sall, Charlemont Parent

Jenny Van Wyk, Colrain, Parent and Educator

Ellen Purinton, Hawley, Community Member

Elizabeth Finn, Heath, Parent

Judy Cole, Plainfield, Select Board

Paul Hollings, Shelburne, Community Member

Robin Pease, Mohawk Trail/Hawlemont Director of Facilities and Transportation

Kristen Tilona-Baker, Executive Director, Mary Lyon Foundation

Sheryl Stanton, Mohawk Trail/Hawlemont Superintendent of Schools

HOW CAN I HELP?

The **2D8T Steering Committee** is in the process of assembling advisory teams in the areas of Community Outreach, Educational Quality, Finance, and Facilities. These teams will support, advise, and provide feedback to the Steering Committee. If you are interested in volunteering or learning more, drop us a note [HERE](#).

Research Team/Consultants: Massachusetts Association of Regional Schools (MARS) | New England School Development Council (NESDEC) | Berkshire Educational Resources K12 (BERK12) | Abrahams Group | Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

Do you want to learn more about our work?
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