

# Towards Collaboration & Regionalization, *in the Berkshires*

## RSDPB

8 Town Regional School  
District Planning Board

## BERK12

Berkshire County Educational  
Resources, K-12

MASC  
November 4th, 2022

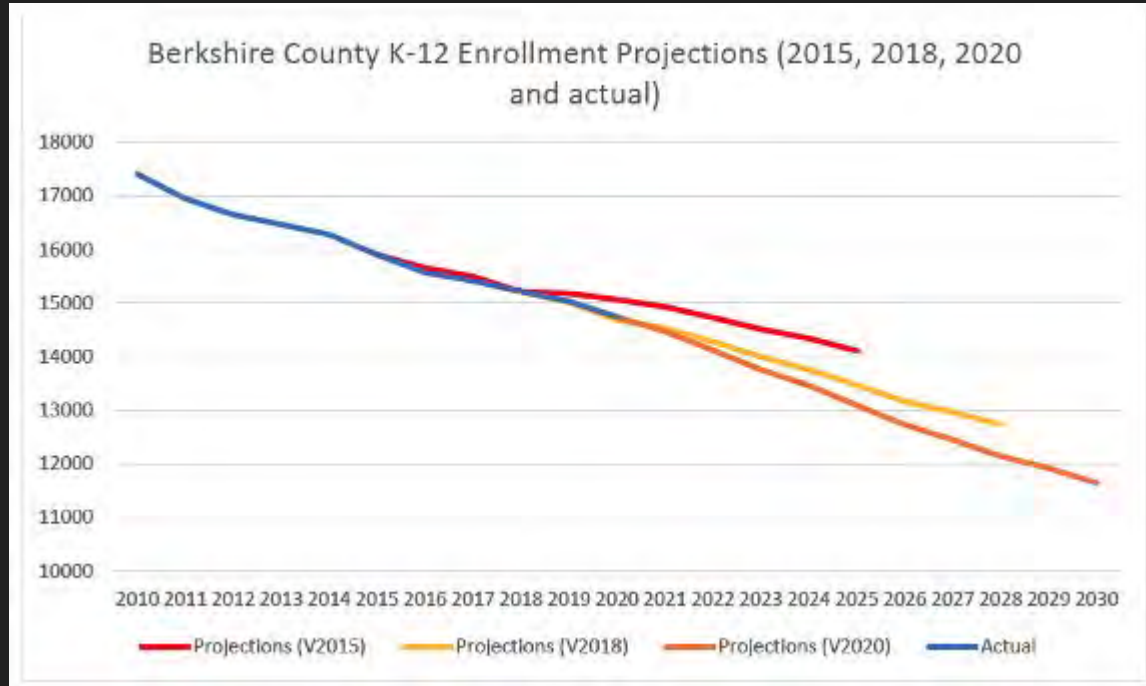
# Presentation Outline

- I. **Introduction:** Bill Cameron, *Chair of BERK12*
- II. **BERK12 Overview:** Jake Eberwein, *Project Manager for BERK12/RSDPB*
- III. **Collaborative Efforts:** Brendan Sheran, *Project Facilitator for BERK12*
- IV. **Regionalization in South County/RSDPB:** Lucy Prashker, *Chair of RSDPB*
- V. **Questions/Discussion:** *Throughout*



# I. Introduction, Setting the Stage (W. Cameron)

How and why we came to be....our common problem.

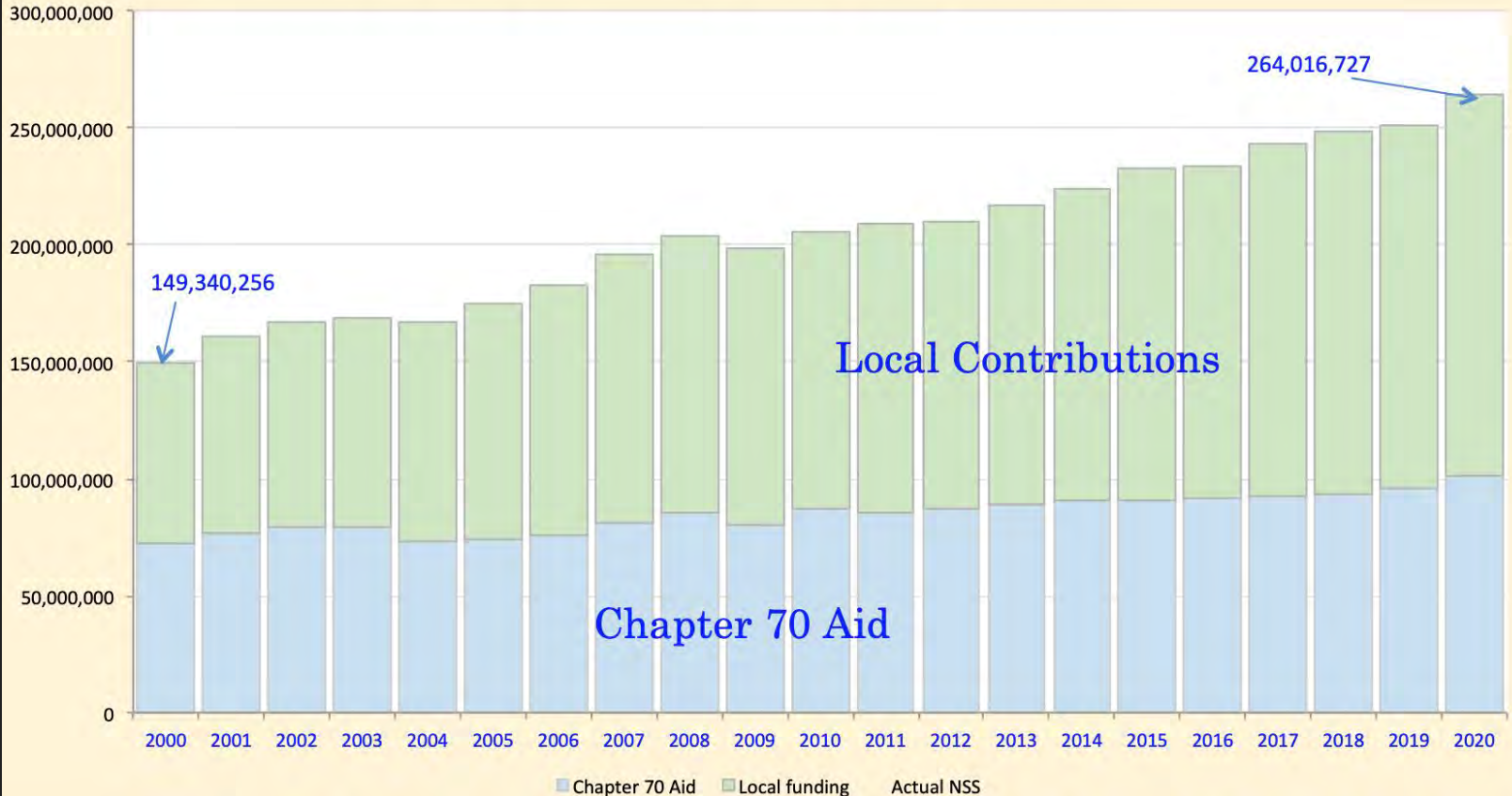


# Common Regional Challenges:

1. A sharp decline in student **ENROLLMENT**
2. Rising **OPERATIONAL COSTS** (i.e. benefits, special education, technology, unfunded mandates, deferred maintenance),
3. Declining/**FLAT REVENUE** leading to additional financial burden to towns and municipalities, with some at or approaching their levy ceiling,
4. Reductions in the diversity and **RANGE OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS** and supports available to students in response to rising costs that are outpacing state aid and local contributions.

***We care about the future of our children and our region.***

# Berkshire County School Districts' Combined Funding, 2000 - 2020 Chapter 70 Aid (Foundation Aid and Hold Harmless Aid) and Local Contributions (Required and Above Required) - unadjusted dollars



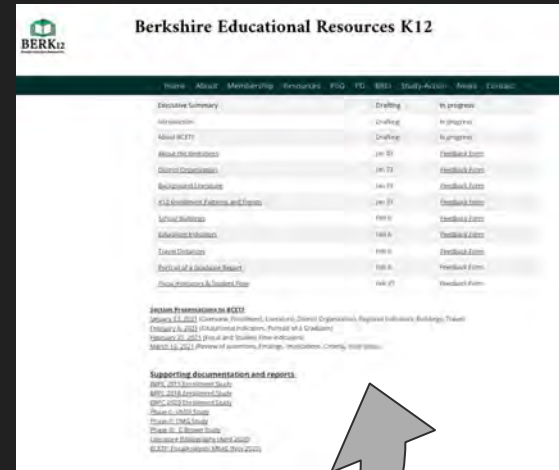
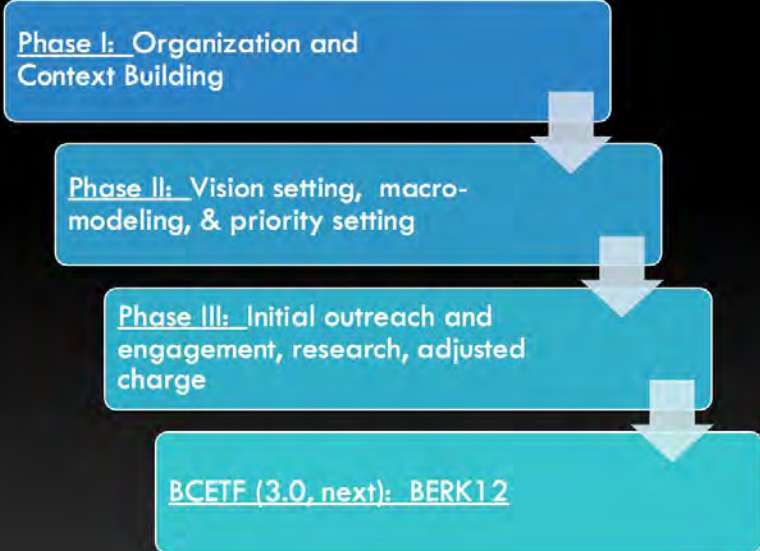
BCETF to....



Work to date:



A brief history of why we formed, & where we've been.



# How we pay for all that has been/is happening:

- DESE
- EOE
- DOR
- Barr Foundation
- Local Foundations
- District/Town Contributions
- Banks
- Donations
- Local social service agencies
- MTA
- MASC
- BCC/BRPC - as fiscal sponsors
- Berkshire Workforce Board
- Legislative Delegation (earmarks)
- District Agreements (for services)



## II. BERK12, Overview (J. Eberwein)



*The less I know the better.*  
~Tame Impala



Greater fiscal efficiency

Greater educational effectiveness

Greater access, opportunity & equity for students

**if we are  
successful:**

The highest quality education...across the Berkshires.

# 1. Educational Quality

Can we improve educational access, opportunity, and outcomes (Quality)?

# 2. Financial Systems

Can we finance our schools in a way that stabilizes (or reduces) local burden, and/or leads to new educational investments (that raise quality)?

# 3. Public Outreach

How to we engage the public to inform, involve, and empower (convince)?

# 4. Sub-Regional

Can we incrementally demonstrate possibility through pilot projects?

## .....IMAGINE IF...

- All kindergarteners arrived ready to learn as a result of ready access to high quality early childhood programming
- We shared a common curriculum, and it was research validated as the highest quality?
- Teachers regularly and systematically connected and collaborated across districts (by grade span, content area, etc.)
- We offered comprehensive summer and out-of-school time programming? And....we offered consistent transportation to ensure student access?
- Vocational education and career pathways were offered consistently across our region? Every student had local field experiences?
- Regionally, we supported teacher recruitment, mentoring and induction, and leadership training ladders?

## .....IMAGINE IF...

- Our students could move between buildings (physically and/or virtually) to access educational & enrichment opportunities?
- We hosted specialized student support services county-wide (special education, ELL)?
- We held a shared collective bargaining agreement?
- We hosted a research, resources, and grants department across our region?
- We shared highly trained instructional coaches across our region?
- We shared facilities, food, transportation, IT, back-office services?
- Our community partners were integrated into our schools equitably & consistently?
- Every student who graduated reported, “I was valued, I was engaged, I was ready.”

Fiscal pressures .  
Inequities across districts .  
Limited educational opportunities .  
Redundancy in roles/functions .  
Gaps in roles/functions .  
Competition by Choice .  
Lack of alignment .  
Professional Isolation .  
More burden on local tax .

WE  
ARE  
HERE



A BETTER  
FUTURE?

- Greater Efficiencies
- \$ Savings
- New \$ investments
- Greater opportunities
- Capacity
- Regional alignment
- +Student outputs
- +Community conditions

Do we have a compelling value proposition?



# MISSION

*Our mission is to support Berkshire County school districts and educators by collaboratively offering solutions to short and long-term issues, in order to promote high quality public education, which all children deserve, regardless of background or circumstance.*

Why we (BERK12) do what we do:

- Help schools make better what currently exists.
- Explore what could be.



**Increase District Capacity** - provide all children with a broad array of high-quality and developmentally appropriate educational opportunities that will enable them to successfully complete postsecondary degrees and/or become productive members of the workforce and citizens in a democratic society.



# BCETF to BERK12

We moved from a research/think tank approach to one focused on subregional and collaborative solutions.

Our Work Platform



1

## **Public Outreach/Engagement/Advocacy**

- Branding, Notification, Awareness/Data

2

## **Collaborative Projects/Actionables**

- PoG, BRLI, PD/PLN, Rural Innovation, Study-Action



3

## **Research/Modeling/Advising (Feasibility and Facilitation)**

- RSDPB





# Public Outreach/Engagement/Advocacy

- Hundreds of public meetings
- Surveys
- Focus groups
- Articles & Press releases
- Monthly updates
- FAQs
- Presentations
- 1:1
- Videos/Products
- Viewbook

## BERK12, Brochure-Viewbook Preview

The image displays a preview of the BERK12 brochure-viewbook. It features several pages with a green and white color scheme. The top page is the cover, which includes the BERK12 logo, the title "BERKSHIRE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES K12", a scenic landscape photo, and the year "2022". Below the cover, there are three smaller pages: "About BERK12", "Portrait of a Graduate", and "Regional School District Planning Board". Each page contains text and images related to the organization and its mission.

# Public Outreach/Engagement/Advocacy: DASHBOARD!



CATEGORY:

Any



## MCAS EXPLORER

### Assessments

View historical MCAS data across the state and analyze item-level data.



## ENROLLMENT

### Summary

Displays enrollment trends and enrollment history by demographics.



## FINANCE

### Summary

Overview of Town and School District Finance Trends



## ACADEMICS

### Summary

Summary data of high school achievement, outcomes and post-high school plans for graduates of Berkshire County high schools.

# Public Outreach/Engagement/Advocacy: DASHBOARD!



It's been a team effort!

OVER THE  
LAST YEAR+

THANKS!

H. Jake Eberwein, *Project Manager*

Mary Nash, *Evaluation & Outreach*

Ken Roche, *Research/Strategy*

Sarah Carleton, *Research/Data*

Rob Putnam, *Research/Education*

Frank Cote, *CVTE*

Rich Labrie (Transportation), *MARS (Regionalization)*

Emilia Eberwein, *Data/Analysis*

Hanover Research, *Research/Literature*

Bill Ballen, *Special Education/Collaboratives*

Mark and Matt Abrahams, *Finance*

Topic Specific Consultants (i.e. Massini, Shaw, Tupper, Gubin)

Catherine McKeen, *Administrative/Financial Management*

Andy Brown, *Community Engagement/Communication*

Brendan Sheran, *Project Coordinator (BRLI, PoG)*

BRLI & PoG, a variety of roles

Berkshire Community College & Berkshire Regional Planning

Berkshire County Superintendents Roundtable + ESE/DOR/Networks

BERK12:

Jake Eberwein, *Project Manager*

Brendan Sheran, *Project Coordinator (PoG, BRLI, AOT)*

Bill Ballen, *FC191-District Liaison*

Mary Nash, *Evaluation & PR*

Catherine McKeen, *Administrative/Financial Management*

RSDPB:

Rob Putnam, *Research/Education*

Frank Cote, *CVTE*

Rich Labrie, *Transportation*

Mark and Matt Abrahams, *Finance*

Ken Roche, *Research/Strategy (limited)*

Russell Dupere, *Legal*

General:

Topic Specific Consultants (i.e. Barr, TLA, MARS)

Berkshire Community College & Berkshire Regional Planning

Berkshire County Superintendents Roundtable + ESE/DOR/Networks

...yet, leadership matters!

### III. Collaborative Efforts (B. Sheran)



To prepare every student to move confidently toward their next steps in college, career, and life.

## Portrait of a Graduate

- **Phase I:** Visioning, Community and Educator Engagement
- **Phase II:** Pilot Signature Experiences, Asset Mapping, Shared Outcomes
- **Phase III:** Professional Development, Embedding Competencies in Teaching and Learning, Threading Throughout School and District





## COMMUNICATOR

I will communicate effectively and with purpose to different audiences in a variety of settings.

- Writes and speaks clearly
- Listens to understand and reflect
- Collaborates in a variety of ways with others
- Evaluates, creates, and shares information responsibly



## CITIZEN

I will empower others, serve my community, and better the world.

- Treat others with kindness and dignity
- Practice civic awareness and engagement
- Work to build greater equity and justice
- Explore and respect other cultures, traditions and values

BERKSHIRE  
**Portrait  
of a  
Graduate**



**To prepare every student  
to move confidently toward their next steps in college, career, and life.**



## PREPARED INDIVIDUAL

I will develop the academic foundations to thrive in future educational pursuits, career, and life.

- Masters and applies core content knowledge
- Develops and applies new skills
- Uses technology to learn and to work



## LIFELONG LEARNER

I will actively pursue lifelong learning so that I can embrace opportunities and adapt to changing circumstances.

- + Resilient
- + Resourceful
- + Curious and open-minded
- + Reflective



## CRITICAL THINKER

I will think deeply and creatively in order to solve difficult and complex problems.

- Takes intellectual and creative risks
- Develops original ideas, methods, and interpretations
- Manages and organizes new ventures
- Identifies and analyzes patterns and their deeper meanings and implications

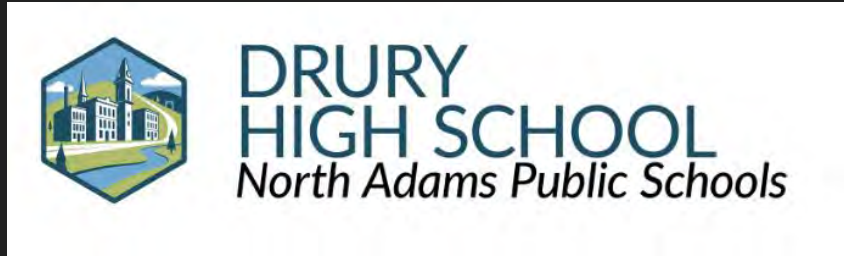


## RESPONSIBLE PERSON

I will demonstrate personal responsibility through my words and actions.

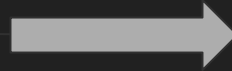
- Acts with intention
- Continuously develops strong work ethic
- Manages time and resources
- Sets goals and achievement plans

# Our Partner High Schools On This Journey!





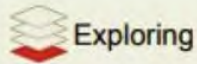
**Berkshire Remote  
Learning Initiative  
(BRLI)**



**Berkshire Resources  
for Learning and  
Innovation (BRLI)**

- Initial focus on responding to the Covid-19 pandemic - supported districts to adopt a common Learning Management System (Canvas)
- Evolved to more broadly focus on effective practices with educational technology - drop in sessions, PD, support
- Ed tech effectiveness audit and resource allocation study
- Ed Tech Champions - a network of district ed tech leaders meet monthly to share ideas and explore problems of practice

## What are the stages?



### Exploring

**Looks like:** Limited use of individual technology tools, with minimal organization wide structures.

**Focus on: Increasing comfort with technology**

Find ways to motivate everyone within your organization to adopt and implement effective edtech tools and processes.

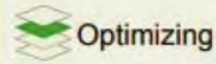


### Your Stage: Hacking

**Looks like:** Widespread adoption of technology with the hope of driving improved outcomes or solving immediate problems, but unstructured, disconnected, or inefficient processes. Often described as the "Wild West."

**Focus on: Organizing**

Take control of edtech processes, including requests, vetting, implementation, and use across classrooms. Establish an edtech system of record to organize and evaluate your digital inventory.

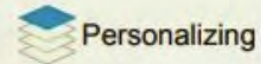


### Optimizing

**Looks like:** Established and practical processes for edtech procurement, management, compliance, and knowledge-sharing. Strong focus on maximizing time and investments across the organization.

**Focus on: Streamlining**

Make edtech processes more efficient and align investments to increase understanding of your edtech's impact on student outcomes through the use of rapid-cycle analytics.



### Personalizing

**Looks like:** Highly organized and streamlined processes for rapidly evaluating interventions, practices and tools to improve implementation, budget and instructional decisions, and drive better outcomes for all students.

**Focus on: Analyzing**

Analyze results for continued opportunities to improve edtech spending, usage, decision-making and impact on student achievement.



## EdTech Spotlight: Berkshire Resources for Learning and Innovation (BRLI) – Goals 1 and 3 Update

How can technology **foster connections and teacher collaboration and provide relevant and engaging professional development (PD)** across 8 school districts, 31 schools, 10,000+ students, and over 1000 full time (FTE) teachers?



In **October 2021** the Department's Office of EdTech featured the Berkshire Remote Learning Initiative (BRLI), now renamed **Berkshire Resources for Learning and Innovation (BRLI)**, in an **EdTech Spotlight**. We provided an overview of the project and its three main goals. This month's EdTech Spotlight is dedicated to further exploration of goals 1 and 3, which support work in the 8 BRLI districts in Berkshire County: Berkshire Arts and Technology Charter Schools (BART), Berkshire Hills, Lee, Lenox, Mt. Greylock, North Adams, Pittsfield, and Richmond.

- Priority:** Test promising solutions for ongoing and evolving challenges in rural K12
- GOAL 1:** Foster strong connections between local school districts
- GOAL 2:** Provide robust support for K12 learning across multiple modalities
- GOAL 3:** Facilitate teacher collaboration & professional development in virtual spaces



"BRLI helped connect Berkshire County in a way that we hadn't before. These districts had made a concerted effort to implement common solutions to shared problems and then formed teams and funded leaders to collaborate, share, and grow as a team. BRLI's been instrumental in supporting Berkshire educators as we shift back from the pandemic and look at what we've learned and how these skills will accelerate learning and meet our students' college and career readiness goals!"  
Howie Marshall, PD Coordinator for Teaching & Learning, Pittsfield Public School

**The Role of the Champion:** A network of site-based technology leaders in each district who learn, plan, and problem-solve as a cohort while supporting the use of technology and modeling among their peers.

### HOW THE ROLE OF THE CHAMPION EMERGED

#### GOAL 1: FOSTER STRONG CONNECTIONS BETWEEN LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS

BRLI districts believe the use of technology as a complementary set of teaching tools enhances student learning, creates opportunities in a geographically large region, builds connections across schools, and strengthens professional networks and resources. Despite this belief, each district has experienced barriers to consistent and

Please note: DESE is providing this information as a service to educators, schools, and districts and may **revise or supplement it from time to time**. The publication of this information does not constitute an endorsement or recommendation by DESE of any resource, product, curriculum, or system. DESE welcomes comments, additional information, and suggestions; please contact [k12tech@mass.gov](mailto:k12tech@mass.gov).

# Professional Development and Learning



- Countywide PD Day (election day) - over 1100 educators registered in over 50 workshops
- Designed to support content and pedagogical knowledge, teacher licensure requirements
- Cross district learning fosters connections and relationships
- Working with partner districts on shared PD opportunities
- Professional Learning Networks (PLNs)
- Study-Action Teams
- Pilot organizational projects (museums and cultural institutions)

## What we believe...

- **Supporting educators** is critical.
- **Working together** maximized opportunities to share effective practices and innovate.
- **Fostering networks** and peer to peer exchanges allows more access to resources.
- **Honoring teachers** as leaders and experts builds capacity.

## IV. 8 Town RSDPB, Regionalization (L. Prashker)



8 TOWN REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT PLANNING BOARD

# THE EIGHT TOWNS WE SERVE



Our corner of the Berkshires



# In the beginning...

- RSDPB formed March 2020 (one meeting before pandemic struck)
- 24 member composition determined by statute
  - 3 members from each of the 8 towns with one of the three a school committee member
  - Representation on board does not reflect relative size of towns/districts
- Over last 2 ½ years –
  - Over 140+ public meetings, including full board and subcommittee meetings (Finance, Operations, Educational Quality, Community Outreach, Project Management)
  - Six sets of research consultants (MARS; NESDEC; Jake Eberwein/BERK12 Team; Hanover Research; transportation consultant; OPEB consultant); dozens of detailed research reports and presentations (8towns.org)
  - Tremendous resources/effort invested in a comprehensive study of what has never been done before in Commonwealth: merger of two regional school districts



# First Phase / Baseline Analysis (2020)

- Analysis of two districts as they are now / Projections if no change to current models of operation in face of:
  - Dramatically declining enrollment
  - Rising operating costs
  - Flat state aid
  - Increasing student needs
- Conclusion: **Current model not sustainable.**
  - Either programs/teachers will need to be cut or
  - Town assessments will need to rise at increasingly higher rates
- **VOTE:** Board determined to continue study with deeper dive of what might be possible (12/2020)

# Options Considered / Model Selected

- Approval of work plan to consider three broad options : full preK-12 regionalization, merger of just high schools, formalized collaboration
- Research Team's Report (on 7 scenarios) and Recommendation: merging the Berkshire Hills Regional School District and the Southern Berkshire Regional School District into a single preK-12 district, maintaining all existing elementary and middle schools as they are, but creating a new merged 9-12 high school to be built on the Great Barrington campus.
  - Educational benefits for students
  - Richer/deeper supports for teachers
  - Efficiencies/Economies of scale for taxpayers
- 3 Facilitated Deliberative Sessions with union representation from both districts and Superintendents
- **4/26/2022 VOTE:** Selection of merger model recommended by research team for further study and development (vote 16-6)

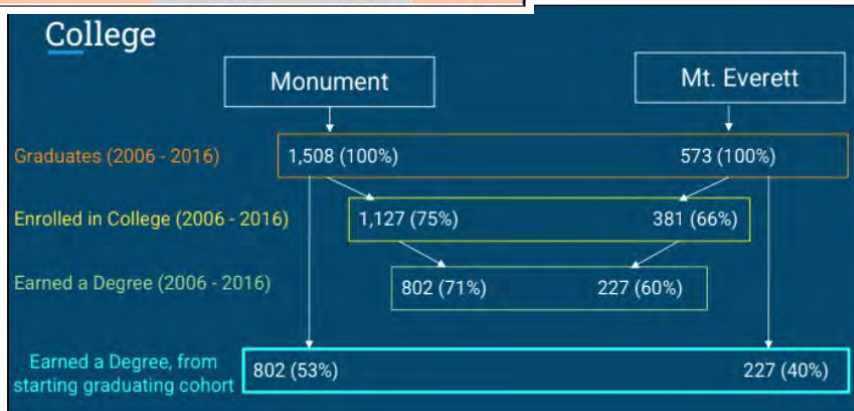
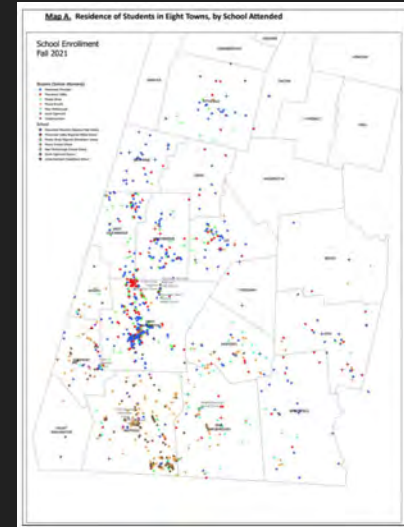
# Lots of research reports...visit our website

## School Capacity, 2022 and 2030

District	School	Grade Start	Grade End	Enrollment Capacity	2022 Enrollment (w PK)	2022 % capacity	2030 Enrollment (no PK)	2030 % capacity
Berkshire Hills	Muddy Brook ES	PK	04	525	327	62%	254	48%
Berkshire Hills	Monument Mt Reg'l High	09	12	700	512	73%	430	61%
	W.E.B. DuBois	05	8	500	349	70%	257	51%
					<b>1188</b>		<b>941</b>	
ire	New Marlborough Central	PK	04	150	66	44%	45	30%
ire	South Egremont	K		21	13	62%	10	48%
ire	Undermountain	PK	5	700	250	36%	179	26%
ire	Mt Everett Regional	6	12	650	304	47%	203	31%
					<b>633</b>		<b>437</b>	
<b>CITY</b>				<b>3246</b>	<b>1821</b>	<b>56%</b>	<b>1378</b>	<b>42%</b>

## STUDENT/ALUMNI'S top benefits and concerns (they were asked to choose 3)

Top 3 benefits (green) and concerns (peach)	Full regionalization (n=99)	Combined HS (n=108)	Collaboration (n=94)
More funding available for new school construction or renovation	32%	33%	Not a choice
More extensive course selection	24%	33%	Not a choice
Possibility for collaborative course offerings	Not a choice	Not a choice	33%
Larger and more diverse student body	26%	31%	Not a choice
More options for clubs, activities, sports	23%	31%	Not a choice
Expanded CVTE	24%	23%	27%
Schools and districts maintain identity	Not a choice	Not a choice	37%
Average class size (# in a course together)	31%	36%	Not a choice
School size (total number of students)	26%	25%	Not a choice
Longer travel to school	25%	33%	Not a choice
Towns/taxpayers bearing the costs of separate districts	Not a choice	Not a choice	36%
Collaboration often informal, voluntary, inconsistent	Not a choice	Not a choice	31%
Getting the collaboration up and running	Not a choice	Not a choice	30%



# Work happening now

- Educational visioning (focus on 9-12/CVTE)
- Drafting 8 Town Regional School District Agreement
- Deeper dive into transportation possibilities
- Fiscal Analysis (Assessment modeling/OPEB study)
- Additional Community Outreach
  - Community forums
  - Meetings with school district staff
  - Student forums
  - Parent forums
  - Monthly Updates
  - Products (videos/posters)



## 8 TOWN REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT PLANNING BOARD



### WHO WE ARE

The Regional School District Planning Board is a group of volunteer community members from the eight member towns of the Berkshire Hills Regional School District and the Southern Berkshire Regional School District.

### THE EIGHT TOWNS WE SERVE



### OUR GOAL

Our goal is to provide all children within the 8 Towns with high quality educational opportunities that will enable them to succeed.

Can our districts do better together?

GET THE FACTS. BE INFORMED. YOU DECIDE.  
LEARN MORE AT [8TOWNS.ORG](http://8TOWNS.ORG)

Challenge.



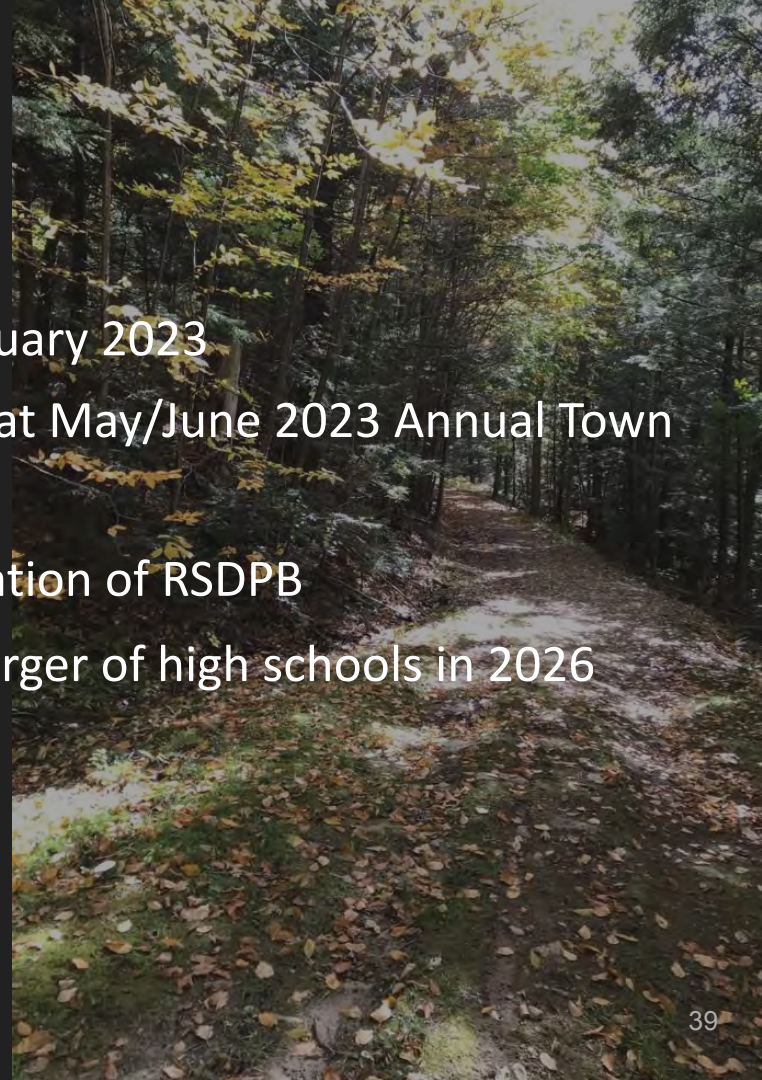
**“Where are the computers when we need them?”**

# Challenges

- Regional Agreement with 8 towns
  - School committee composition
  - Agreement on new assessment methodologies for operating and capital budgets, including new school
- Skepticism of educational and fiscal benefits of merged district
  - Decades-long history of failed efforts to explore merger of the two districts
  - Is this time different?
- Timing / MSBA process for new school in Great Barrington
- Feelings / “difficult dynamics”
  - Fear of “loss of Identity” / “culture” / smaller district being “swallowed up” by larger district
  - Historical distrust / rivalry between districts
- Misinformation

# What's ahead?

- Vote on recommendation targeted for January 2023
- Question put to the voters in the 8 Towns at May/June 2023 Annual Town Meetings
- Transition: Would be 3+ years from formation of RSDPB
- MSBA partnership: Possible physical merger of high schools in 2026



# Lots of available resources at:

The screenshot shows the homepage of the 8 Town Regional School District Planning Board. At the top is a colorful circular logo with the text "8 TOWN REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT PLANNING BOARD". Below the logo is a navigation menu with links for "WHO WE ARE", "MEETINGS", "RESOURCES", "NEWS", and "CONTACT". A search bar is located on the right. The main content area features a large image of a young child holding a colorful paper airplane. Below the image are sections for "FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS", "FACT BRIEFS", "WHO WE ARE", and "WHY WE EXIST". There is also a "News from Our Project Manager" section with several bullet points. At the bottom, there are three calendar-style boxes for upcoming meetings: "RSDB Community Outreach Subcommittee Meeting" on Nov 10, "RSDB Full Board Meeting" on Nov 16, and "RSDB Finance Subcommittee Meeting" on Nov 30.

The screenshot shows the homepage of Berkshire Educational Resources K12. At the top is the BERK12 logo, which features a green book icon. The main header is "Berkshire Educational Resources K12". Below the header is a navigation menu with links for "Home", "About", "Membership", "Resources", "PoG", "PD", "BRLI", "Study-Action", "News", and "Contact". The main content area features a large image of a diverse group of students smiling. Below the image is the title "Meeting the Challenges of Providing High Quality Education" and the tagline "Greater Efficiencies | Greater Access, Opportunity, and Equity | Greater Effectiveness". There is a section titled "Our New Mission" with a paragraph of text. Below that is a circular graphic with the text "LEADERSHIP SKILLS TRAINING EDUCATION". At the bottom, there is a section titled "Why We're Changing" with a paragraph of text and a circular image of a student looking at a screen.



# Questions & Discussion



# For more information:

Visit:

[BERK12.org](http://BERK12.org)

[8Towns.org](http://8Towns.org)

Email us at (in order of appearance):

[williamcameron@hotmail.com](mailto:williamcameron@hotmail.com)

[jakeeberwein@gmail.com](mailto:jakeeberwein@gmail.com)

[bsheran@pittsfield.net](mailto:bsheran@pittsfield.net)

[lprashker@cainhibbard.com](mailto:lprashker@cainhibbard.com)