

**Turn Around Plan
for
Gill Montague Regional School District**

Report of the Superintendent of Schools of Gill Montague Regional School District

submitted to:

The Department of Education and the State Board of Education
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Table of Contents

Introduction

Executive Summary

Key Findings and Key Recommendations

Narrative

District Leadership

Superintendent leadership

School Committee leadership

Educational leadership

Educational Improvement

Overview

Elementary schools

Middle school

High school

Special programs

Fiscal Analysis

Overview

Effects of joining the GIC

Chapter 70 Aid and District Assessment Trends

School Choice and Charter Trends for GMRSD

Appendices

Goal A Resolve Elementary Configuration Question

Goal B Create an Educationally Sound and Fiscally Sustainable Budget

Goal C Restore Elementary Educational Programs and Services

Goal D Improve Elementary Education

Goal E Restore Middle and High School Programs and Services

Goal F Improve Secondary Education

Goal G Re-organize Central Office and Educational Administrative Staffing

Appendix A Elementary Configuration Motion

Appendix B Prioritized Goals of the Gill Montague Regional School Committee

Appendix C Key Considerations

Appendix D Possible Legislative and Regulatory Strategies to Increase Aid to Struggling Districts

“The best education for the best is the best education for all”
Robert Maynard Hutchins

Introduction

At the State Board of Education’s meeting on June 26, 2007, the Gill Montague Regional School District was determined to be ‘underperforming’, and to be in need of formal state intervention to guide, support and monitor the development and progress of the district’s improvement efforts.

In October of 2007 a three-member team of independent evaluators examined the district’s leadership capacity and governance practices, assessing the strengths of the Superintendent, the School Committee, key central office staff, and building-level leaders. Their District Leadership Evaluation report was provided to Gill Montague Regional School District in November of 2007.

Since that time, the district has been very actively engaged in evaluating the recommendations of the report, and in performing an internal review of educational, governance and fiscal goals and strategies. The outcome of that process is this Turn Around Plan.

This is, like all good planning documents, a work in progress. It will be presented to the District School Committee on January 29th, and published to the school community the next day. It is my hope that it accurately represents our current school improvement efforts, our hopes, our plans, and our needs.

The report of the District Leadership Evaluation team was invaluable in terms of identifying key initiatives that we need to focus on. The report has had a galvanizing effect upon both school committee and administration. Although not every recommendation was supported by every reader, the outlines of our action plan are clear; we need to resolve the elementary configuration question, stabilize district educational leadership, develop a sustainable budget for FY09 and beyond, re-build confidence among the public and with our member town officials, and turn our considerable energies to the process of educational improvement in every school.

This document will also serve as a starting-point for further development of school improvement strategies, an explanation of and support for our educational budget for FY09, and a monitoring instrument to keep us on-track with our improvement efforts.

Executive Summary

Although by state standards the Gill Montague Regional School District has been labeled under-performing, we think that it is as accurate to say that we are under-resourced, and that we have been performing well with the resources that we have. The reality is that if additional fiscal resources are not found, the education we can deliver to our students is in danger of becoming chronically (and tragically) below both state and local standards for adequate and appropriate education.

The District Leadership Evaluation Report of the DOE monitoring team cites our district for lack of leadership in resolving the elementary configuration question. We have taken significant and effective steps in the last three months to move forward on this most difficult issue. We are determined to continue that progress, in order to free our leadership to devote our time to our educational issues.

The great majority of other recommendations put forward by the visiting team has to do with central office curriculum coordination, alignment with standards, and professional development, all of which are dependent upon additional resources coming to the district. We know what we need to do, we know how to do what needs to be done, but we lack the positions and sufficient personnel to get the job done. Everyone in the district, from paraprofessional to superintendent and including our school committee members – and especially our teachers and front-line administrators – have been making what can only be described as heroic efforts to deliver quality education to our students.

We have educational vision, sound methodology, innovative programming (particularly at the elementary level), and have the potential to become a statewide model for outstanding education in the midst of a troubled and economically depressed community. The adoption of the Responsive Classroom model throughout our elementary schools is an example of this: this program allows teachers to establish an effective learning environment, and to encourage the development of motivated and responsible students, preconditions for all significant educational progress and achievement.

We are partnering with our towns, with the state, with private agencies, and with educational visionaries to provide the best that we can for our children. Efforts that have been made have been effective, because we take our mission seriously. We are mapping curriculum, aligning standards, and are already seeing significant jumps in student achievement. The help that the state has already provided, through grants and technical assistance, has been invaluable.

Our towns have done their part in funding education. Assessments to our member towns have averaged over 9.5% annual increases over the past nine years, all while Chapter 70 Aid has increased at an annual rate of less than 1%. Even adjusting for declining enrollment, it is clear that state aid (even on a per pupil basis) has fallen (in inflation-adjusted dollars) while student needs and local assessments have increased dramatically. This cannot continue without dire consequences.

On the fiscal side, we have done what few have to date. We have done the difficult things, have used the tools the state and legislature have provided us, all to improve education. We were one of the first districts to join the state GIC health insurance plan. We have begun the process of elementary consolidation. These two measures, significant as they are, will at best buy us one year or two of modest restoration of educational programs and services before we are again faced with double-digit local assessment increases just to maintain level-services budgets. This is a formula for creating chronically under-funded and under-resourced schools, and for undermining local support of schools.

Meanwhile, the 'perfect storm' of diminishing resources continues to plague the district. Losses of state revenue to the district through school choice charges, charter school tuition charges and under- and un-reimbursed special education tuition and transportation costs continue to undermine our ability to recover financially.

What is to be done?

On the fiscal side, we will use the gains in FY09 generated by our entry into GIC to restore some of the needed educational services and programs for our students. We will work diligently to convince our towns to fund an inflation-indexed budget for FY09, in order to make this happen. We will continue the process of elementary consolidation, in order to make the best use of the resources that we have.

On the educational side, we are partnering with the Northeast Foundation for Children to extend the Responsive Classroom model throughout the district. We are collaborating partners with the authors of our new math curriculum, Houghton Mifflin's Math Expressions, during the next several months. We are a founding district partner for the Data Warehouse project, designed to allow schools and teachers to use data to inform instruction. We are actively exploring the Expanded Learning Time initiative, both at the elementary and middle school levels. We are partnering with Educators for Social Responsibility to design an advisor/advisee program for our high school students. We began a 9th Grade Academy this year, and will extend that model to 10th grade next year. We are a pilot site for Galileo software, designed to align assessment and instruction with standards. And so on.

Meanwhile, despite our best efforts, over 35% of the young men of the Class of 2007 cohort dropped out of high school, while 38.9% of our low-income students did the same. In a factory town that has lost many of its factories, in an area where education is the key to any kind of well-paying job, where will these students go? How will they make their way? Our high school MCAS scores show that we're doing a good job with the students who stay in school. What of those who leave?

We need help, and we will request it, and accept it, from any source that we can find. The gains from entering GIC need to go to restoring educational programs and services to students. The needs listed in the DOE monitoring team report – math and ELA coaches for teachers, central office coordination, strategic planning – we're hoping that these needs can be funded by the DOE.

Any solution put in place must at least show the possibility of being fiscally sustainable. For this, legislative relief may be needed. Mechanisms could be designed to bring significant additional state aid to under-resourced and therefore underperforming districts in economically troubled regions. Means could be found, if the problem is recognized in all its seriousness and severity. An initial listing of ideas is included as Appendix D: Possible Legislative and Regulatory Strategies to Increase Aid to Struggling Districts.

We thank the state monitoring team for its visit and its findings, and we thank the state – and the Board of Education - for taking the time to take a serious look at our educational and fiscal situation. This report is long, and detailed. To borrow a very good line, we did not have the time to write a short one.

Conclusion: The crisis facing the Gill-Montague Regional School District is driven by a lack of educational resources. This lack of resources in a high-needs district is the primary factor that has precipitated a leadership and fiscal crisis.

Key Findings

- 1) Our district has joined the GIC. This will enable us to restore some educational programs and services in FY09.
- 2) The school committee has begun the process of elementary consolidation.
- 3) The district is involved in collaborative fiscal planning with our member towns.
- 4) Meaningful, research-based and data-driven educational improvement efforts are already well underway in all of our schools. Continued progress has been hampered by fiscal crisis and staff cuts. In spite of that, significant gains in student performance have already been noted.
- 5) Revenue losses generated by school choice and charter programs are offsetting gains from elementary consolidation, administrative reorganization, and other available cost efficiencies.

Key Recommendations

- 1) That our educational partners (DOE, legislature, member towns) find a way to guarantee a inflation-indexed budget for FY09 in order to stabilize district educational planning, and enable us to hire needed positions this spring, rather than in the fall, after a potentially long and discouraging budgetary process.
- 2) That the DOE guarantee funding for those educational improvements detailed in the report of the DOE monitoring team, including math and ELA coaches at all grade levels and in all schools.
- 3) That the DOE provide immediate funding for a strategic planning position, to enable us to analyze the sources of our high drop-out rate, and to initiate a sound strategic planning process, building on efforts already underway in our district.
- 4) That the DOE fund a Summer Professional Development Institute for our high school teachers, to enable them to plan together with Educators for Social Responsibility to implement a meaningful and effective Advisor / Advisee program, in order to combat our high drop-out rate.
- 5) That the DOE provide funding for time for teachers to work together to align curriculum with standards, and to create authentic assessments linked to standards and benchmarks.
- 6) That the DOE provide funding for exploration of new program development to combat our high drop-out rate, including, but not limited to: technical training (health services, information technology, protective services, performing arts) for 11th and 12th grade students; Project Lead the Way pre-engineering curriculum; and other appropriate motivating, career-relevant and involving curricular reform efforts.

Narrative

The District Leadership Evaluation (DLE) Report of the DOE monitoring team lists two recommendations for the school committee, and eight for central office, focusing primarily on two elements: district leadership and educational improvement. Our Turn Around Plan focuses on these two elements, and adds a third: building the fiscal capacity needed to sustain educational quality and to fund necessary educational improvements.

A. District Leadership

Superintendent leadership

The school committee has unanimously supported the extension of the superintendent's contract for another year. The chair of the school committee has applied for a 'critical needs' waiver for SY08-09 for the current superintendent, and the DOE has granted that waiver. The superintendent has indicated a willingness to stay through SY08-09, and is engaged in negotiations with the school committee.

Both the school committee and the superintendent feel that this district leadership team have made substantial progress towards resolving long-standing district issues and all are committed to working together for another year. We feel that maintaining our current forward progress is crucial to the recovery of our district, and that stability at the superintendent level will greatly contribute to this effort.

It is the intention of the district school committee to initiate a search for a long-term superintendent in December 2008, with the goal of having that person under contract beginning July 1, 2009. This will provide the stable leadership at the superintendent level that the district needs.

School Committee leadership

The school committee has made significant progress in resolving its most difficult and troubling issue, that of elementary school configuration. Following a goals-setting workshop in October, the school committee identified resolving this issue as its number-one goal. Since that workshop, the school committee has made three significant successful votes on this issue:

- 1) The school committee voted to amend the Regional Agreement, to change the process by which a school may be closed, reducing the voting threshold at the school committee level from an eight-out-of-nine threshold to one requiring a 2/3 majority. They added a provision to the amendment requiring a confirming majority vote at town meeting. The effect of this amendment should be to make it somewhat easier to close a school when necessary. This amendment has subsequently been approved at special town meetings in both Montague and Gill, and will be forwarded to the DOE for approval.
- 2) The school committee voted, as a matter of district policy, to raise the threshold for moving grade levels from one district building to another, from a simple majority vote of the school committee, to a 2/3 majority. The effect of this policy change should be to make it less likely that a vote to move classrooms from one building to another will be reversed at a future date.
- 3) The school committee voted by a margin of 8/9 on December 11, 2008, to move all 1st and 2nd grade classrooms from Hillcrest to Sheffield by September 2008, thus beginning a process of educational consolidation at Sheffield. The same motion included a provision to close Montague Center School by September of 2008, if an educationally-viable and fiscally-sustainable plan to keep the school open is not brought forward by a specific timeline set; and to close Montague Center School by September of 2009 if the plan brought forward cannot be realized. The school committee is currently developing criteria by which plans will

be judged. Two community groups have indicated that they will bring preliminary plans to the school committee in March. *The motion of the school committee is included as Appendix C.*

Educational leadership

Staffing cuts over the past several years have led to the less-than-ideal situation described in the DOE report: schools with shared principals, principals with significant central-office duties and responsibilities, and central office with insufficient capacity (positions) to provide consistent and thorough educational leadership.

We engaged in administrative re-organization in the summer of 2007, trying to build central office capacity while absorbing district-wide budgetary cuts resulting in the loss of 8.5 positions. This has been a patchwork solution at best, and will not meet the district's long-term needs.

Our Turn Around Plan, dependent upon adequate funding, provides for the restoration of full-time principals at each school (with the exception of Montague Center School), the restoration of curriculum coordination capacity in central office, and additional administrative adjustments necessary to free educational administrators to focus on educational quality and improvement:

- 1) Assistant Superintendent for pre-K 5: This new position will be an expansion of the current half-time Director of Teaching and Learning pre-K-5 position. In addition to the normal duties of a curriculum coordinator (program, professional and curriculum development), this position will oversee all transition planning for the elementary school re-configuration, evaluation and supervision of elementary principals, and planning for the Expanded Learning Time initiative.
- 2) Principal for consolidated Sheffield: Sheffield Elementary will be absorbing, at minimum, five classrooms of 1st and 2nd grades from Hillcrest. If Montague Center closes, an additional three classrooms will come over. This position is currently shared by two individuals who also have additional central office and counseling responsibilities.
- 3) Principal for Hillcrest Elementary: the principal for Hillcrest has also been serving as district elementary coordinator for ELA, and has shared the Title I position with our grants-writer. With a smaller number of classrooms to manage (pre-K and Kindergarten only), this position will also be able to oversee community liaison duties for early education.
- 4) Principal for Gill Elementary: the principal for Gill has also been functioning as the principal for Montague Center School. Of the two, Gill is the larger by far, with the broadest grade-span, and also incorporates an elementary autism program. This will become a full-time principalship at Gill, with the possible addition of additional functions within the building.
- 5) Teaching principal for Montague Center School: if Montague stays open for the 08-09 school year, a teaching principal should suffice. This is our smallest school by far, with the fewest number of low-income and special education students.
- 6) Principal for Great Falls Middle School: the middle school has been without a designated principal this year. Restoration of this position will provide needed leadership within the building, and a clear chain-of-command for teachers, students, parents and administration.
- 7) Principal for Turners Falls High School: the high school principal has been functioning as the principal of secondary education. Oversight of two very different schools within the same building has made it more difficult to focus on the needs of high school students and teachers. This should rectify that.
- 8) Curriculum coordinator for the middle school and high school: this position is yet to be defined. By restoring a principal to both the middle and high schools, and providing a shared disciplinarian for both schools, we will be returning administrative staffing in this building to

- what we had a few years ago. Although both principals will be helping to lead and coordinate program and curriculum development, we will still probably have a need for additional central office oversight and planning.
- 9) Nursing services supervision: we are currently applying for a grant which will allow us to fund a .5 Nurse Leader position, to help oversee all health and nursing services within the district.
 - 10) Special education team leader: our Director of Special Education is currently overseeing all special education and related services within the district. The addition of a SPED team leader to conduct team meetings and monitor IEPs will allow the director to focus more strongly on program evaluation and revision, grants and reimbursement funding, and supervision of special programs (autism, behavioral, life skills) within the district.
 - 11) Technology and data management: our grants-writer is currently also functioning as our director of technology. By establishing management-level positions for technology and educational database management, we will free this position to focus more strongly on grant-seeking and grant-writing, coordination of Title I services, and new program development.

Although we are still evaluating the best configuration for some of these positions, the overall outline is clear. For the most part we are re-defining positions and assigning responsibilities more appropriately. All of the above can be accomplished with the addition of approximately 2-1/2 positions, at least .5 of which will be grant-funded.

In order to retain highly qualified administrative staff, we are conducting a countywide compensation survey, to determine the average per-diem salary for positions equivalent in scope and responsibility to these. Our intention is to tie our administrative salaries to these averages, so that we do not lose experienced and effective administrators to other districts.

If we are able to fund and implement this staffing plan, we will be able to provide “stable, focused and effective administrative and academic leadership in schools”, as called for in the DLE Report.

B. Educational Improvement

Overview

A continuous series of staffing cuts from FY02 to FY08 has severely impeded the district's ability to provide necessary educational services and programs to our students. Precipitated initially by cuts in Chapter 70 Aid in FY04, staffing has declined by over 29.5% during that period, according to DOE data. Although enrollment was falling by almost 18% during the same period, the rate of loss of educational positions is almost double that of student enrollment losses.

Percent Changes, In-District Enrollment & Teacher FTE's in GMRSD, FY02 - FY07								
Group	FY02	FY03	FY04	FY05	FY06	FY07	% change, FY02 - FY07	state average
In-District Enrollment Students (FTE's)	1,412	1,417	1,247	1,200	1,211	1,165	-17.5%	-5.3%
Teachers (FTE's)	143	119	96	111	104	101	-29.5%	-7.2%

Educational improvement in each of our schools must consist primarily of two elements: restoration of basic educational services to students, and provision of effective professional development and training to teachers. In addition, the development of new and innovative programming to meet the needs of students who are at risk of dropping out is essential.

Elementary schools: educational improvement

Overview

Our recent experience with research-based and data-driven educational improvement programs is promising. We are now in our last year of our Reading First grant, and the gains noted are significant, and well above state averages. This is a demonstration that a little bit of help from the state to a district like Gill-Montague goes a long way in terms of improved student performance.

Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBLS) Assessment results						
percent of students in low-risk category (e.g. reading at or above grade level)						
grade level	Gill-Montague			All Reading First schools		
	2004	2007	% gain	2004	2007	% gain
Grade 1	34.0	71.7	37.7	49.9	65.0	15.1
Grade 2	48.0	47.4	-0.6	41.2	59.1	17.9
Grade 3	19.0	61.4	42.4	36.7	53.9	17.2
Grade 3 (low income)	16.0	63.0	47.0	29.4	48.4	19.0

Gains like these will likely be lost if our efforts cannot continue to be supported. In addition, this kind of literacy skills support needs to be extended beyond Grade 3 in order to provide the help that our struggling students need to achieve their learning potential.

The strategic planning chart **Goal C: Restore Elementary Educational Programs and Services** in the appendices details positions needed, estimated costs and current funding status.

Extension of Responsive Classroom model to all schools and teachers

We are currently in our 5th year of development of Responsive Classroom programming in our elementary schools. Approximately half of our faculty have been trained to the RC-1 level, about one-third have been trained at the RC-2 level, and three teachers are currently being certified as

Responsive Classroom Certified Consulting Teachers. This certification will enable them to act as coaches and trainers for RC-1 within the district.

During SY08-09, our plan is to have all teachers become more knowledgeable about Responsive Classroom strategies beyond Morning Meeting, including differentiated instruction, classroom management, parent communication, and pro-active modeling of academic expectations.

We also hope to work with the Northeast Foundation for Children to create a continuous monitoring and progress tool to measure the impact of Responsive Classroom methods on student achievement, student engagement, and student motivation to stay in school.

This on-going joint project between GMRSD and NEFC has been funded entirely through donations of training and consulting time and materials. In addition, NEFC made an unrestricted gift to Sheffield Elementary School of \$10,000 this year, to be used to further school improvement goals.

Implementation of Math Expressions curriculum to improve math achievement

GMRSD has adopted Houghton Mifflin Math Expressions as our K-5 core math curriculum. This is our first full year of implementation of this NCTM approved, scientifically based curriculum. One of the authors of the curriculum, Dr. Steven Smith, will be in residence at GMRSD from March through June of this year, working directly with our teachers to help them with effective implementation. His time is being donated to the project. We are developing power standards (Douglas Reeves) to connect Math Expressions to Massachusetts math frameworks.

During Mr. Smith's time here, we plan to identify and begin to train a Math Expressions coach for our teachers. That coaching position needs to be added to our budget for at least the next two years.

Expansion and extension of reading and literacy initiatives

The Reading First grant and program has been very helpful in raising students' literacy performance. The grant has enabled us to provide literacy coaching to classroom teachers, and has supported Tier I, II & III support services. We have adopted Houghton Mifflin Reading as our district-wide K-5 core curriculum.

Although the intention of grant programs like this is that the district will at some point be able to assume fiscal responsibility for these services, the fiscal realities of our district make it problematic at best. In addition, this grant has demonstrated real gains, and has made us realize that we need equivalent efforts to address literacy needs at all grade levels.

We need to continue the Reading First activities, and we need to add reading specialist positions at both 4th and 5th grade levels.

Mapping and alignment of elementary curriculum

We are engaged in identifying and prioritizing power standards (Reeves) for Math and ELA K-5, determining which standards meet the criteria of (1) endurance of key skills students must display, (2) leverage that associates one standard with success in other standards and (3) standards that are essential for the next level of instruction. These power standards will be completed for K-5 Math by February 1, 2008 and ELA by May, 2008 and will also be converted to "child-friendly" language for posting in every classroom matched with lesson objectives.

This is our first major step in a broader initiative to map and align all curriculum K-5, including the creation of child-friendly rubrics and assignment expectations that will continue as part of teacher professional development in 2008-2009 and 2009-2010.

Exploration of Expanded Teaching and Learning Time models

We have just joined the 2009 ETLT Cohort, partnering with DOE and MASS 2020 to explore this very promising idea. We will be submitting a preliminary plan in July 2008, we will be applying for a planning grant for August of 2008, and plan to have a preliminary plan by December 2008, followed by a final plan in July of 2009. The Principal of Sheffield, Robert 'Chip' Wood, sits on the Governor's ETLT Sub-Committee of the Readiness Panel, and is heading up our ETLT planning efforts.

Middle school: educational improvement

Overview

Great Falls Middle School is currently in Year Two of Corrective Action under No Child Left Behind regulations, and has been designated a Commonwealth Priority School. This has brought significant aid and technical assistance from the DOE in the form of outstanding training and professional development activities for our teachers.

Under the guidance of Eve Laubner from the DOE, three measures were taken to improve student math achievement:

- 1) Adoption of a new math curriculum, Connected Math II;
- 2) Implementation of full standards-based instruction, including lesson-planning and assessment; and
- 3) Increasing mathematics time-on-learning for middle school students from 55 minutes per day to an average of 77.5 minutes per day, by adding a math applications class for all students (45 minutes every other day).

The result of this intervention can be seen in the chart below. Although scores for 7th grade students were not as marked, improvement was shown in every content area for those students as well.

Great Falls Middle School: Gains in MCAS Scores, 2006 - 2007 (percent of students scoring in each category)				
Grade	Performance level	Year		One-year Gain
		2006	2007	
Grade 8 ELA	Advanced	2	10	8
	Proficient	63	62	-1
	combined percentage	65	72	7
Grade 8 Math	Advanced	3	16	13
	Proficient	29	41	12
	combined percentage	32	57	25
Grade 8 Science & Technology	Advanced	0	3	3
	Proficient	29	38	9
	combined percentage	29	41	12

Positions needed

In order to maintain this kind of educational progress, it is essential that technical assistance and time for teacher planning be maintained and expanded. We need to add a Math Specialist position at the middle school in order to provide targeted instruction to students in the warning and needs improvement categories on MCAS. A math coach would also assist teachers in examining student performance data and coach them on how to effectively use formative and summative assessment data to guide and inform standards-based instruction.

This spring we will begin to strategize on how best to expand our current 77.5 minutes per day on math to the state recommended level of 90 minutes per day.

Curriculum mapping and alignment

In the summer of 2007, under a grant from the DOE, Fresh Pond Consultants spent three days with our middle school teachers, teaching curricular mapping techniques in all content areas. This was so successful that we are now replicating that effort at the high school level. By the end of this year, all middle school courses and most of our high school classes will be mapped and aligned with state standards.

Curriculum maps are a living document; success of this initiative depends on our providing our teachers planning time to discuss, review and adapt their maps.

Literacy initiative

Under a DOE Secondary Reading Grant, middle school educational staff have been trained in the research-based Sedita literacy program. We now have a literacy team at the middle school led by our Director of Teaching and Learning 6-12. In addition, two teachers have received coaching training and will work with other teachers to deepen their effectiveness with this methodology. Together we have developed a framework for guiding the development of a school-wide literacy model aimed at improving adolescent literacy for all students.

This grant has provided opportunities for teams of teachers and administrators to strengthen their classroom practices and advance their professional development. We need to maintain this educational momentum, in order to continue to improve teaching skills and student achievement.

Incorporation of 6th grade into middle school

We had a very smooth and successful transition moving the 6th grade from Sheffield Elementary to Great Falls Middle School this year. Key educational decisions (e.g. maintaining self-contained 6th grade classrooms, devoting a wing of the middle school to the 6th grade team) and student-centered planning by teachers and administrators working together were the keys to this transition.

Introduction of power standards

Using the methodology described by Doug Reeves, middle school staff are engaged in identifying and prioritizing standards in each content area, to enable teachers and students to focus on power standards. Our next step will be moving into standards-based assessment and improving our ability to differentiate instruction in the classroom.

High school: educational improvement

Overview

Since the visit of the monitoring team, the DOE has released data on graduation rates for the Class of 2007 cohort. This data shows that the four-year dropout rate for Gill-Montague is far in excess of the state average, and is particularly high for low-income students, special education students, and young men of all categories.

Drop-out percentage rates for the Class of 2007 (four-year cohort)				
<i>Group</i>	<i>All</i>	<i>low-income</i>	<i>males</i>	<i>SPED</i>
State Average	9.4	17.8	10.8	16.1
Gill-Montague	22.7	38.9	35.2	27.3

District MCAS scores demonstrate that high school students who stay in school at Turners Falls High School are achieving at or above state standards. Finding institutional solutions to our high drop-out rates will, we believe, improve learning conditions for all students. This will be a primary focus of our improvement efforts at the high school level.

Reconnecting Youth

We have doubled the size of our Reconnecting Youth program this year, but still have a waiting list for it. It is an elective, targeting at-risk 9th and 10th grade students. Our plan is to double the sections offered again next year. This will require additional staffing. A brief description of the curriculum from the RY website:

Reconnecting Youth: A Peer Group Approach to Building Life Skills (RY) is an 80-lesson curriculum that has been proven effective in helping high-risk youth in grades 9-12 raise their GPAs and manage their anger, while decreasing drug use, depression, and suicide risk. The research-based RY curriculum is divided into four major units: Self-Esteem Enhancement, Decision-Making, Personal Control, and Interpersonal Communication. It is unique in that it is a comprehensive, sustained, semester-long intervention that integrates small-group work and life-skills training models to effectively enhance the personal and social protective factors of high-risk youth.

9th Grade Academy

We began our Academy initiative this year with the 9th grade. We have a team of five teachers (four core subject area teachers and one special education teacher) who work with all 9th grade students. The 9th Grade Academy team leader is reviewing all data associated with this group on an on-going basis, including attendance, grades and discipline records, in order to evaluate the effectiveness of this program. We will follow this cohort, examining data for indicators of success. We plan to extend this program to a 10th Grade Academy during SY08-09, building on our successes this year.

Advisor / Advisee Program

Six teachers and the high school principal will receive training on February 29th from Educators for Social Responsibility on implementing a comprehensive Advisor / Advisee program for all high school students. This initial training is being funded by a local grant. We would like to extend this training to all high school staff this summer. ESR's recommendation is for three full days of training prior to implementation, with additional supports during the first year. The cost of this training (consulting fees plus stipends for teachers) is approximately \$30,000.

Curriculum mapping and alignment

Curriculum mapping efforts described above for the middle school are being extended to the high school this year.

Literacy initiative

The Sedita literacy initiative described above for the middle school is also being extended to the high school. We need funding for professional development for high school teachers for this program.

Power standards

We are in the process of Identifying and prioritizing power standards in all curricular areas in the high school.

Special programs: Educational Improvement

We have begun a review of all of our special programs, including, but not limited to: our behavioral programs at the elementary, middle and high school levels; our elementary autism program; delivery and monitoring of special education and 504 programs; capacity to deliver effective diagnostic and intervention strategies at all levels; and central office capacity to monitor, evaluate and administer effective special programs.

We are engaged in exploring possibilities of establishing collaborative programs with neighboring districts, in order to provide more cost-effective and more educationally-sound special programs to our neediest students.

C. Fiscal Analysis

Overview

In the *Preliminary Report on Current Fiscal Conditions in Massachusetts School Districts*, published this month by the Office of Strategic Planning, Research and Evaluation in the Office of School Finance, the study concludes with a section worth quoting at length:

Conclusions and next steps

State data suggests that many districts across the state are experiencing difficulties in shouldering the cost of educating their students. The average district spends 18 percent above the amount assumed by foundation budget, suggesting that the foundation budget alone may not be sufficient to provide an adequate education to all students. Many districts also experienced cuts in state aid for education in the early 2000s and are just now beginning to regain the ground they lost at that time. And declines in overall enrollment coupled with shifts towards more costly to educate students within the enrolled population have added to districts' fiscal challenges in recent years.

In most cases, districts have managed to maintain total spending by increasing local contributions to school funding, but spending on instructional services has declined as a share of total expenditures because of pressure from rising fixed costs. At the same time, increasing expectations for districts, schools, teachers, and students have made the educational task of districts all the more challenging. At a time when districts need to be moving forward quickly to address their students' educational needs, they are hard-pressed to maintain their expenditure levels, let alone increase them to meet higher expectations.

The assumptions behind the foundation budget appear to have grown out of alignment in the 15 years since they were established, particularly in the areas of health insurance, special education, and teacher salaries. In addition, the foundation budget has not been updated to consider the potential increased costs that might be associated with recent changes in the Commonwealth's education reform strategies.

The current state-wide foundation budget is \$8.4 billion. Some short-run increase in this funding level is likely necessary to address the rising cost of education in the Commonwealth. Beyond that, the Board may wish to recommend a detailed study to update the foundation budget formula to ensure that it provides an adequate level of fiscal resources for both current and future needs.

While the state continues to work toward a sustainable long-range funding plan, it will need to continue other initiatives to ensure that it is making the best use of its existing resources. Examples include:

- Providing incentives for local participation in the state health insurance and pension fund programs, to help bring the cost of these programs under control.
- Expanding the use of educational collaboratives and other regional entities to more efficiently provide services such as special education transportation, professional development, and specialized education programs.
- Helping districts to identify and adopt instructional practices and models that have been proven effective at improving student outcomes at a reasonable cost.
- Addressing the inefficiencies and lack of capacity created by the large number of small school districts in the state. Currently, 284 of the state's 328 operating districts have fewer than 5,000 students.

The state is expected to increase its commitment to Chapter 70 funding this year despite tight fiscal conditions statewide and the prospect of slow economic growth. These additional resources will help to alleviate these challenging fiscal conditions. But the solution is not more money alone. Additional financial resources should be coupled with better district business practices and new ideas for ways to conserve resources if they are to have maximum impact. Furthermore, the state will need to provide support, leadership, and information to school districts to help them serve their students as effectively and efficiently as possible. Bringing all these resources to bear will allow districts to provide an adequate education to every child and allow the state to reach the vision and promise of education reform.

We agree with most of this analysis, and the conclusions cited. It bears noting, however, that we are just such a struggling district as is described; that we have already joined GIC and calculated the resulting savings; that we are initiating a collaborative study with our member towns on how to

produce and maintain a fiscally-sustainable and educationally-sound budget; that we are actively engaged in local studies and efforts to establish collaboratives to minimize costs on transportation and special education; that the state has in fact supplied us with technical assistance to 'adopt instructional practices that have been proven effective at improving student outcomes at a reasonable cost', and that we have done so; and that the efficiencies gained from district and school consolidation may turn out to be less than expected. In spite of all that, as this report and the following fiscal analysis shows, further relief will be necessary if our district is going to be able to provide the education our students need and deserve.

Effects of joining the GIC

Joining the GIC has had three clear benefits:

- 1) Since GIC rate increases are significantly below the annual increases of our current self-insured group, it will 'stop the bleeding' from double-digit increases in district health insurance costs over the last several years (the increase in FY08 was 18%). Although this is not an actual savings in the budget that can be used for educational purposes, it is a bill that does not have to be passed on to our member towns.
- 2) Since the GIC rates are significantly lower than our current rates, we will enjoy a one-year drop in actual health insurance expenditures, which should allow us to restore some educational programs and services.
- 3) Since GIC rate increases are comparatively stable and manageable, it should make our budgetary planning process more predictable and consistent in the future.

Calculating the net gain to the district for FY09 cannot be accurately done for a few more months. GIC rates are due to be published in March, the sign-up period for our district does not take place until May, and the costs of exiting our present group are still being calculated and negotiated.

The problem here is one of timing. We can only use the dollars gained through joining the GIC if we are able to get the equivalent of a level-services budget passed by our towns (our preliminary budget is set at 5.49%). In addition, for the reasons listed above, we will not have an accurate account of actual savings until much later in the budget cycle.

Educational planning needs to take place now for next school year. Hiring for key new positions should begin at once. And yet, without the guarantee of a bottom line on our budget, and without an accurate calculation of net gains from entering GIC, we cannot in good conscience advertise and hire for positions whose funding is uncertain.

Nevertheless, our hope is that net gains will be sufficient to restore a few hundred thousand dollars' worth of educational programs and services, and that our towns will support the budget that makes this possible.

The revenue picture: local assessments and Chapter 70 State Aid

As the following chart and analysis show, our member towns have continued to fund our district schools during a time of flat or declining state aid.

Chapter 70 Aid and District Assessment Trends, FY00 – FY08

Comparison: Increases in Chapter 70 State Aid and Local District Contributions to Gill Montague Regional School District, FY00 through FY08 (does not include debt portion of budget; does not include Excess & Deficiency funds used to offset assessment increases)									
Fiscal year	Combined: state aid and district contribution			Chapter 70 State Aid			District contribution (Gill and Montague combined)		
	state and towns combined	+/-	% diff.	Chapter 70 Aid	+/-	% diff.	assessment	+/-	% diff.
FY00	10,755,474			6,076,058			4,679,416		
FY01	11,553,970	798,496	7.4	6,335,058	259,000	4.3	5,218,912	539,496	11.5
FY02	11,892,094	338,124	2.9	6,419,909	84,851	1.3	5,472,185	253,273	4.9
FY03	12,598,756	706,662	5.9	6,450,351	30,442	0.5	6,148,405	676,220	12.4
FY04	12,127,931	-470,825	-3.7	5,837,026	-613,325	-9.5	6,290,905	142,500	2.3
FY05	12,188,733	60,802	0.5	5,837,026	0	0.0	6,351,707	60,802	1.0
FY06	12,749,826	561,093	4.6	5,898,326	61,300	1.1	6,851,500	499,793	7.9
FY07	13,628,950	879,124	6.9	6,225,637	327,311	5.5	7,403,313	551,813	8.1
FY08	14,509,150	880,200	6.5	6,375,223	149,586	2.4	8,133,927	730,614	9.9
totals	112,004,884	3,753,676	34.9%	55,454,614	299,165	4.9%	56,550,270	3,454,511	73.8%
avg. annual % change	4.36%			0.62%			9.23%		

Analysis

In the nine-year period spanning fiscal years 2000 through 2008, Chapter 70 State Aid to the Gill Montague Regional School District has increased at an average annual rate of only .62%. During that same period, combined local contributions (assessments) from GMRSD's two member towns, Gill and Montague, have increased at an average annual rate of 9.23%. The district's combined revenue from these two sources (state aid and local assessment) has increased at an annual average rate of 4.36%. This increase is generally in line with the inflation index used to set Chapter 70 Aid increases at the state level – the municipal implicit price deflator.

Note: in order to draw comparisons that are consistent and valid across this time period, both debt payments and assessment offsets from district Excess & Deficiency have been removed from these calculations.

School Choice Trends for GMRSD

As the following chart and analysis show, school choice tuition costs out of the district have risen significantly since the FY04 fiscal crisis and resultant staff cuts.

School Choice trends for Gill Montague Regional School District: 1996 - 2008						
Fiscal Year	Receiving		Sending		Net effect	
	FTE Pupils	Tuition	FTE Pupils	Tuition	net FTEs	net dollars
FY96	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0
FY97	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0
FY98	0.0	0	2.0	15,815	-2.0	-15,815
FY99	0.0	0	9.4	35,598	-9.4	-35,598
FY00	14.2	63,880	33.5	153,345	-19.3	-89,465
FY01	36.1	187,725	38.4	256,972	-2.3	-69,247
FY02	48.5	292,286	57.2	356,825	-8.7	-64,539
FY03	65.2	411,629	76.6	450,736	-11.4	-39,107
FY04	62.7	349,137	108.0	613,980	-45.3	-264,843
FY05	66.9	473,516	109.5	669,987	-42.6	-196,471
FY06	67.0	396,478	135.4	807,732	-68.4	-411,254
FY07	74.5	517,946	150.5	901,234	-76.0	-383,288
FY08 (est)	66.0	455,668	157	956,717	-91.0	-501,049
totals	501.1	3,148,265	877.5	5,218,941	-376.4	-2,070,676

Analysis

The latest DOE tally shows students choicing-in and choicing-out of GMRSD in this school year: 157 students currently choice-out to other districts, and 66 students currently choice-in to GMRSD from other districts. The net loss to our district is 91 students. This imbalance results in a deduction from our Chapter 70 Aid of 5,000 per student, for a total 'loss' of \$501,049.

The loss of Chapter 70 Aid in this school year is the largest since the School Choice program was instituted, and reflects a worrisome trend of increasing numbers of students choicing-out and chartering-out of Gill Montague schools.

The number of students opting to choice-in to Gill Montague has remained relatively steady since FY03 – in the range of 65 to 75 students each year. The number of students choosing to choice-out to other districts saw a significant increase during the period in which Chapter 70 Aid was reduced significantly to GMRSD (a reduction of 9.5% in FY04, followed by flat funding in FY05). This loss is probably due primarily to significant reductions in staffing at all levels that were enacted during that period as a response to revenue reductions. The charter trends below may reflect the same cause.

Charter School Trends for GMRSD

Charter School Enrollment, Tuition, Reimbursement and net loss GMRSD FY99-08				
Year	Enrollment	Tuition	Reimbursement	net loss to district
FY05	22.83	180,690	135,161	(45,529)
FY06	24.60	249,548	149,928	(99,620)
FY07	26.68	262,018	106,943	(155,075)
FY08	34.00	382,980	163,020	(219,960)

Goal A: Resolve elementary configuration question

Objectives:

- Establish broad grade-span configuration for all district elementary schools
- Consolidate educational resources at Sheffield
- Explore viability of establishing pre-K/K early education center at Hillcrest or Sheffield
- Explore viability of Montague Center School continuing as a K-5 elementary
- Free district leadership to focus on educational and fiscal issues
- Re-establish leadership credibility in eyes of community and towns

Action steps	Timetable and estimated costs			Funding source	Status	
	SY07-08 (immediate)	SY08-09	SY09-10			
A. Change processes by which: a) school buildings are closed; and b) grade levels are transferred.						
1	Amend regional agreement to lower threshold for closing a school from 8/9 at school committee level, to a 2/3 school committee vote followed by majority votes in each town.	approved by school committee; approved at Montague Town Meeting on 1/23/08; approved at Gill Town Meeting on 2/25/08. Being submitted to DOE for final approval.				
2	Amend district policy to raise threshold for transferring grade-levels from building to building within a member town from simple majority to 2/3 majority, in order to reduce likelihood of subsequent reversal of vote.	approved by school committee				
B. Initiate a plan to consolidate elementary education in Town of Montague at Sheffield Elementary.						
1	Move all 1st & 2nd grade students from Hillcrest to Sheffield, to establish broad grade-span configuration	planning	to begin 8/1/08	voted by school committee		
2	Perform architectural study to determine costs of making 'old' side of Sheffield Elementary fully accessible	25,000		Town of Montague?	requesting	
3	Perform architectural study to determine costs of making 'old' side of Sheffield Elementary appropriate for pre-K and K					
C. Create a process and a plan to determine future of Montague Center School						
1	Plan for possible transfer of MC grades 1-3 to Sheffield and K to Hillcrest	planning	by 9/1/08?	by 9/1/09?	district	in process
2	Implement process to determine viability of MC plans	timelines set				criteria being set
3	Review plans according to set timeline, school committee makes final decisions	review initial plan	review final plan	MC closes or expands		two groups will submit plans
D. Explore viability of establishing Early Education Center at Hillcrest or Sheffield						
1	Review suitability of Sheffield building for pre-K and Kindergarten students					will plan
2	Review educational merits of each plan					

Goal B: Create an educationally sound and fiscally sustainable budget for FY09 and beyond

Objectives:

- Find cost economies for FY09 budget and beyond
- Work with member towns to forecast sustainability of future budgets
- Identify strategies for increasing school revenue streams

Action steps		Time Frame	Estimated (cost) or savings	Status
A. Create room in FY09 budget for restoration of educational programs and services				
1	Join GIC to reduce health insurance costs	Aug-Sept 07	TBD	done
2	Regain lost economies-of-scale through elementary school building consolidation	FY07 - FY09	TBD	in progress
3	Negotiate teachers' contracts within budget parameters	current	TBD	in progress
4	Reduce out-of-district SPED costs through increased monitoring	FY07 - 08	TBD	on-going
5	Explore possible collaboration with neighboring districts on special programs for middle and high school students	current	TBD	beginning discussions
B. Develop inflation index-linked budget for FY09				
1	Calculate net savings through GIC	current	TBD	GIC rates set in March, sign-up in May
2	Estimate net changes in revenue streams	current	TBD	estimating
3	Determine net savings available for restoration of educational programs and services	current	TBD	on-going
4	Issue preliminary budget		5.49% increase	voted at sub-committee on 1/24
5	Calculate net assessment to member towns	March	TBD	TBD
C. Work with member towns to develop 5-year fiscal sustainability plan for school district and towns				
1	Secure funding for study	Dec - Feb 2008	10,000	passed at Town Meeting
2	Determine scope of work	Dec - Jan 2008		RFP issued
3	Hire consultant to do study	current		interviews scheduled

Goal C: Restore elementary educational programs and services

Objectives:

- To provide sufficient academic support to students to enable them to achieve their potential
- To provide sufficient social and emotional support to students to overcome obstacles to learning
- To provide appropriate academic coaching to teachers to increase their ability to help students improve understanding of core academic subjects
- To increase time-on-learning in music, art and PE in order to educate ‘the whole child’
- To provide computer technology learning experiences to elementary students
- To plan for introduction of foreign language and specialist science instruction to elementary students

Action steps		Timetable and estimated costs			Funding source	Status
		SY07-08 (immediate)	SY08-09	SY09-10		
A.	Restore elementary educational programs and services (three-year phase-in)					
1	Hire .5 counselor-specialist, to allow Sheffield administrators to oversee district-wide preK-5 curriculum, program and prof. development	15,000	25,000	25,000		
2	Hire additional .5 ELL teacher, to address immediate unmet needs of ELL students	10,000	25,000	25,000		
3	Hire additional school psychologist, for testing, diagnostic and clinical intervention services to preK/K and 1-5 students	0	50,000	65,000		
4	Provide full-time nurse for Gill Elementary (increase from .5 FTE)	0	25,000	25,000		
5	Provide additional art, music and PE instruction	0	50,000	50,000		
6	Hire math coach for Math Expressions curriculum	0	50,000	60,000		
7	Hire reading coach (replacing Reading First grant position)	0	50,000	60,000		
8	Hire computer technology teacher for elementaries; train teachers in Galileo	0	50,000	50,000		
9	Purchase new computers lab for elementaries	25,000	0	0		in process
10	Provide science specialist (physical and environmental)	0	0	50,000		planning stages
11	Provide foreign language instruction	0	0	50,000		

Goal D: Improve elementary education

Objectives:

- Extend Responsive Classroom model to all elementary classrooms and schools
- Establish Math Expressions as core math curriculum
- Maintain and expand reading and literacy initiatives
- Explore Expanded Learning Time models
- Map and align elementary curriculum

Action steps		Timetable and estimated costs			Funding source	Status
		SY07-08 (immediate)	SY08-09	SY09-10		
A. Extend Responsive Classroom model to all elementary classrooms and schools						
1	Continue process of training all teachers in RC-1 & RC-2	20,000			all services and consulting donated by NEFC	5th year
2	Certified district Coaching Teachers train staff in RC-1		TBD			planned
3	Working with NEFC, develop rubrics and monitoring tools for student achievement			TBD		joint project
B. Establish Math Expressions as core math curriculum						
1	Implement ME district-wide (materials)		10,000	10,000		first year
2	Collaborate with authors to train teachers	40,000			donated time	about to begin
3	math coaches continue to help teachers implement		50,000	50,000		
C. Maintain and expand reading and literacy initiatives						
1	Last year of Reading First grant	85,000			state grant	evaluating
2	Hire reading coach to continue support of literacy teaching		50,000	50,000	TBD	
3	Hire 1.5 reading specialists to support student literacy in 4th and 5th grades		75,000	75,000	TBD	
D. Map and align elementary curriculum, identify power standards						
1	complete mapping and alignment for math and ELA	in progress			staff planning time needed	complete by end of year
2	identify power standards, convert to child-friendly language	in progress				on-going
3	Develop rubrics and academic expectations linked to maps and standards					planning
E. Explore Expanded Learning Time models						
1	join 2009 ELT Planning Cohort	joined				forming planning team
2	Develop initial planning grant		August 2008		DOE and MASS 2020 funded	
3	Submit final plan		July 2009			

Goal E: Restore middle school and high school programs and services

Objectives:

- To provide sufficient academic support to students to enable them to achieve their potential
- To provide sufficient social and emotional support to students to overcome obstacles to learning (restore counseling staff)
- To provide appropriate academic coaching to teachers
- Extend the 9th Grade Academy concept to 10th Grade
- To establish programs that will encourage and enable students to stay in school until graduation

Action steps	Timetable and estimated costs			Funding source	Status
	SY07-08 (immediate)	SY08-09	SY09-10		
A.	Restore middle school and high school educational programs and services to students (three-year phase-in)				
1	Add math/science instructor at high sch.		50,000	50,000	
2	Add teacher to 8th grade team		50,000	50,000	
3	Provide MS/HS summer school programs		10,000	10,000	
4	Add middle school guidance counselor		50,000	50,000	
5	Add 9th and 10th grade team leaders		5,000	5,000	
6	Add middle school math specialist		50,000	50,000	
7	Add high school career / guidance counselor		50,000	50,000	
8	Add middle school reading specialist		50,000	50,000	
9	Provide peer mediation coordinator		20,000	20,000	
B.	Provide professional development to teachers to improve teaching effectiveness				
1	Galileo Software training for all teachers		10,000		ready to go
2	Galileo software trainer / coach		10,000		ready to go
	Stipends and training for academic coaches		20,000	20,000	
3	Responsive Designs training		12,000	12,000	plan summer professional development institute for teachers at GMRSD
4	Collins Writing Program training		TBD	TBD	
5	Sedita Literacy training		5,000	5,000	
6	Advisor / Advisee training through Educators for Social Responsibility		12,000	5,000	

Goal F: Improve secondary education

Objectives:

- Continue and expand Academy and Advisor / Advisee initiatives in high school
- Extend Developmental Designs model to middle school classrooms
- Maintain and expand reading and literacy initiatives
- Explore Expanded Learning Time models
- Map and align middle school and high school curriculum

	Action steps	Timetable and estimated costs			Funding source	Status
		SY07-08 (immediate)	SY08-09	SY09-10		
A.	Continue to train teachers in curriculum mapping to align curriculum and assessments with standards					
	2	Map additional courses and put on-line				
	3	Vertical mapping by content area 6-12				
B.	Expand 9th Grade Academy to 10th Grade					
	1	Evaluate this year's introduction of program to 9th grade				
	2	Re-negotiate schedules and duties to allow time for team planning				
	3	Identify and train 10th grade teachers on Academy model				
C.	Maintain and expand Reconnecting Youth drop-out prevention program					
	1	Add math and science sections for 9th grade repeaters				
	2	Add additional section of Reconnecting Youth				
	3	Analyze reasons for high student drop-out rate				
		Design programs to motivate and involve students at risk of dropping out				
D.	Train all staff in use of Galileo Software to improve continuous assessment and remediation of students					
	1	Implement coaching and data specialist position to train staff				
	2	Align instruction with standards & benchmarks in ELA & math				
	3	Evaluate 2nd year cycle - consider extending to high school				
E.	Continue Literacy initiative for MS and HS staff					
	1	train middle school coaches				
	2	generate implementation timetable with team - set goals				
	3	incorporate Sedita literacy model into Directed Reading classes				
	4	consider replication at hs level				
G	Advisor / Advisee High School program					
	1	initial planning with Educators for Social Responsibility	Feb. 29th			
	2	Summer PD for whole faculty		30,000		
	3	Find time in schedule for activities				

Goal G: Reorganize central office and educational administrative staffing

Objectives

- To provide significantly increased central office capacity to design, implement and monitor curriculum development, professional development, and new program development.
- To increase district capacity to provide effective supervision and evaluation of teachers in all district schools.
- To provide district capacity to engage in long-term strategic planning, focusing on leadership, educational achievement, and fiscal sustainability.
- To improve district ability to manage data, technology and train staff
- To stabilize district leadership team and retain highly qualified district administrators
- To provide full-time principals at each school

Action step		Time Frame	Estimated added cost	Status
A. Plan educational administrative staffing for SY08-09				
1	Hire superintendent for FY09	Jan. 08	TBD	waiver requested
2	Determine administrative staffing plan for SY08-09	Dec. - Feb. 08	-	in progress
3	Create pre-K-5 Assistant Superintendent position	Jan. 08	40,000	in progress
4	Hire principal for consolidated Sheffield Elementary	Jan. 08	-	in progress
5	Hire principal for Hillcrest Early Childhood Center	Jan. 08	-	in progress
6	Expand Gill Elementary principal position to full-time	Jan. 08	TBD	
7	Create teaching principal position for Montague Center		10,000	
8	Determine administrative staffing for MS/HS	Jan. 08	-	in progress
9	Review administrative needs of PPS and SPED	Jan. - Feb. 08	TBD	
10	Hire all administrative staff for MS/HS	Feb. 08	-	
11	Add .5 FTE nurse/leader position			
B. Re-do all administrative contracts				
1	Write job descriptions for new / changed positions	Feb. 08	-	
2	Perform county-wide compensation survey	Jan. 08	-	in progress
3	Determine cost of indexing admin salaries to county average	Jan. 08	TBD	
4	Negotiate contracts indexed to county average	Feb. 08		
C. Add central office capacity to manage data, technology and IT training of staff				
1	Determine optimal central office staffing for IT	Feb. 08		beginning
2	Write job descriptions for new / changed positions	Feb. 08		
3	Negotiate contracts / hire new as needed	Feb. 08	TBD	

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Appendix A: Elementary Configuration motion passed by School Committee on 12/11/07

Elementary Configuration

In order to implement a K-5 elementary broad grade span configuration by September 2009 and in order to increase the equitable distribution of resources across the district, promoting equal access to services and programs for all students, we/I make the following motion:

1. Move grades 1 and 2 from Hillcrest to Sheffield by August 2008. Pre-K and K will remain at Hillcrest.
2. Close Montague Center School by August 2008 and move K to Hillcrest and grades 1, 2 and 3 to Sheffield, unless the school committee approves an alternate plan as provided in paragraph 5, below.
3. Move all K in the town of Montague to Sheffield by August 2009, provided adequate facilities are available, unless the school committee approves an alternate plan as provided in paragraph 5, below. To accomplish the K transition, the school committee will immediately appoint a building planning committee to assess the cost for necessary renovations to Sheffield. The SC is committed to a K-5 grade span and will actively seek funding for these necessary renovations in order to fully implement this plan.
4. Immediately research appropriate alternative educational uses for any unused portion of the Hillcrest building. This may include a SPED collaborative, retaining Pre-K, ECH Learning Center, housing Admin offices etc... We will also actively pursue other collaborations with the town of Montague.
5. Any community group can form a committee to research and present an alternative plan for use of the Hillcrest or Montague Center buildings. The group must inform the school committee chair of their intent in writing and state their intent to the full committee prior to or at the January 8, 2008 meeting. The group must then develop and present a plan at the March 11, 2008 meeting that includes the following criteria: a timeline, business plan, education plan and governance plan. In order to be considered, an application must include components consistent with the proposed plan and application. The intent of this provision is not that all School Committee members believe that the proposed plan has a good chance of success; instead, the intent of this provision is to ensure that a serious community effort to develop a sustainable configuration at Hillcrest and/or Montague Center School will be allowed sufficient time to do so. A school committee vote regarding whether to accept or reject any proposed plans will take place at the March 25th meeting. Any school committee vote to reject a proposed plan must include a detailed explanation for why it fails to meet the criteria. This language of the detailed explanation must be voted on and approved by a simple majority of the full committee.

Appendix B: Prioritized Goals of the School Committee

1. Restore public trust, confidence and respect in the school committee by reaching a decision on the elementary configuration question that puts the needs of students first, and enjoys broad public support;
2. Develop a sustainable budget that restores needed educational services, provides funds for new program development, and has the full support of the school committee;
3. Create a top leadership team, retain effective teachers, and support professional development.

Appendix C: Key considerations

Educational needs

- Full-time principal in each school
- Adequate staffing to deliver basic services to student
- Adequate central office staffing to ensure program improvement and development
- Capacity to analyze and solve the drop-out problem
- Measures are already in place dealing with academic performance of students in elementaries – we have the plan, we need resources
- Have not yet developed a plan to retain students in high school

Measures we are planning to take to build educational model

- District-wide Responsive Classroom
- Pilot site for Math Expressions curriculum
- 9th-grade Academy model for high school
- School-wide focus on high school drop-out problem
- Exploration of Expanded Learning Time program for Sheffield and the district
- Introduction of Sedita model for middle-school and high-school literacy
- Curriculum mapping and alignment at elementaries, middle school and high school
- Introduction of Galileo software to facilitate on-going alignment of assessment and instruction

Analysis of funding crisis (driving factors)

- Losses of Chapter 70 Aid through school choice and charter programs
- High costs for Special Education transportation
- High costs for un-reimbursed Special Education expenses (services and programs)
- Declining enrollment has led to loss of district-wide economy-of-scale for central office and other services
- Cuts in FY04 Chapter 70 Aid precipitated a funding crisis which has not been resolved
- Chapter 70 Aid has increased minimally, assessments close to 10% per year
- Providing for high numbers of children with extraordinary needs reduces the district's ability to provide appropriate educational resources for students of average needs

Effects of funding crisis

- Staff reductions outpacing enrollment declines by 2/1 ratio
- Depletion of services and programs leads to accelerating school choice and charter loss, precipitating further program depletion, and thus creating a vicious cycle
- Loss of morale and public confidence in the schools
- Creation of a perception that elementary school consolidation alone will solve the funding shortfall (it won't) (buildings are owned by the town, do debt payments, in reasonably good shape, maintenance costs are not particularly high, therefore no great savings)

Measures we have taken to resolve leadership and funding crisis

- Joined GIC
- Began elementary consolidation at Sheffield
- Embarked on five-year fiscal planning process with member towns
- Use gains from GIC, consolidation and SPED savings to restore educational programs

Net result of driving factors and compensatory measures taken

- Net budget gain from GIC will buy us a one-year opportunity to make modest restorations to educational programs and services, if a) GIC migration costs are minor and b) we are able to get an inflation-indexed budget passed by our towns
- Even with further consolidation, future level-services budgets will result in assessments running twice the IPD rate, unless additional revenue streams are found

Measures we have taken to build district capacity for educational leadership

- Re-organized administratively to build central office capacity for curriculum, program and professional development

Appendix D: Possible Legislative and Regulatory Strategies to Increase Aid to Struggling Districts

- 1) Increasing state aid on a per-pupil basis, adjusted for inflation, for underperforming districts;
- 2) Creating a hold-harmless safety net for underperforming districts, to limit net fiscal losses generated by student exodus through school choice and charter school movements;
- 3) Inclusion of special education transportation in the transportation reimbursement formula for regional school districts;
- 4) Increasing the percentage of special education circuit breaker reimbursement for underperforming districts;
- 5) Guaranteeing level-services budget increases through increased state aid in underperforming districts where towns are experiencing double-digit assessment increases;
- 6) A hold-harmless provision in the aid formula limiting deductions from state aid for charter and choice tuition;
- 7) Re-visiting the foundation formula, which is equitable in theory, but is in fact inadequate in practice, and thus inequitable to poor districts.