

Gill-Montague Regional School District

Turn-Around Plan: Update and Summary

**Submitted to the DESE and the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education
for the April 29, 2008 Board Meeting**

**by
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District update: elementary school configuration, budget and leadership capacity

The Gill-Montague district continues to make significant improvements in leadership, educational achievement, governance and capacity to oversee educational improvement, with the resources that we do have.

This updated plan will be reviewed by the School Committee at their meeting on April 22nd.

Elementary schools configuration update

On April 1, 2008, the Gill-Montague School Committee voted to reject two community plans to keep Montague Center School open for an additional planning year, thus confirming an earlier vote to close Montague Center School by August 2008.

The amended regional agreement, establishing a lower threshold for future closings of schools, has been approved by both member towns, and has been forwarded to the DESE for approval.

We are actively seeking school choice students from other districts, anticipating that some families of Montague Center School students will choose to choose their children to other districts. We hope to avoid further losses of revenue through this strategy.

We are drafting a new staffing plan for the consolidated and greatly enlarged Sheffield Elementary School. Enrollment is projected to go from the current 160 to around 350, with x students moving over from Hillcrest Elementary, and x students moving over from Montague Center School. We're anticipating shifting positions from classroom teaching to delivery of ancillary services (reading and math specialist and coaches).

We are making necessary and relatively minor adjustments to the Sheffield building, including establishing a special needs 'resource suite', converting offices to classrooms, and installing smaller bathroom fixtures for our 1st and 2nd grade students.

We have formed a Sheffield Building Committee, to explore educational options for a consolidated Sheffield, including possible further consolidation of pre-K and Kindergarten classes from Hillcrest Elementary.

Budget update

The school committee has voted a 5.49% budget. Our towns will vote on this budget at their annual meetings (May 3rd and May 5th). Both towns are asking for very significant reductions in this budget. Although we will make every attempt to persuade our towns to fund this budget, it is fairly likely that we will again be without an approved budget by July 1st. If that is what happens, we will file with the Commissioner of Education for a 'Commissioner's Budget', as we did last year.

With the help of our legislators, we are submitting requests for legislation for Foundation Reserve funding ('pothole' funds), on both the school side and the municipal side. If successful, this will help bridge the funding gap that our communities face.

Our towns-and-schools five-year planning team continues to meet to articulate strategies for creating sustainable local town and school budgets.

We continue to actively participate in county-wide exploration of collaborative and regional strategies for sharing educational services.

Leadership capacity update

Robert 'Chip' Wood is assuming central office duties of the Director of Elementary Education. This position will be formalized on July 1st. He is leading the search for full-time principals for both Sheffield Elementary and Gill Elementary. He is also overseeing transition planning for the elementary system, as well as curriculum, program and professional development.

Dr. Christine Jutres will continue as Principal at Hillcrest Elementary, overseeing all district pre-K and Kindergarten education, as well as leading professional development for elementary teachers in ELA.

We will restore an additional .5 position to the combined middle school / high school administrative team, establishing three full building-based positions.

Key decision-points over the next few months

Although our educational ambitions for our students are vast, we recognize the limiting conditions of limited resources at both the local and state level. The following key events over the next few months will help determine what our actual resources are for FY09:

- Our two member towns will vote on our current budget on May 3rd and May 5th
- GIC sign-up takes place in May. We will then be able to calculate net gains for FY09.
- The initial school choice recruitment period ends on May 9th. This should give us an idea of numbers of new students choosing into the district.
- Any additional loss of revenue through school choice migration to other districts will be known by September.
- Transition costs for exiting our current insurance group should be predictable by June.
- If needed, the Commissioner's Budget in July will establish a budget 'floor' for FY09.
- Negotiations with our teachers is currently underway: we have built into our current budget step-raises and a very modest COLA increase only.

The bottom line

Our current budget will enable us to establish full-time principals and nurses in each building, expand central office leadership capacity, sustain both Reading First and Title I positions (moving from grants to general operating budget), and shift resources from elementary teaching to elementary support positions.

If additional revenues are available – through school choice revenue, pothole funds, GIC gains, or increased Chapter 70 funds – we will be able to further restore and improve educational programs and services at both the elementary and secondary levels.

Goal A: Resolve elementary configuration question

Status: can accomplish with FY09 budget plan

Objectives:

- Establish broad grade-span configuration for all district elementary schools
- Consolidate educational resources at Sheffield
- Free district leadership to focus on educational and fiscal issues
- Re-establish leadership credibility in eyes of community and towns

Priority Goal A: Resolve the elementary configuration question in order to realize fiscal efficiencies that will free up resources to support the district's educational needs.			Status
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 DSC and towns: submitted to DESE
	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	students will be in Sheffield for September 2008
	2	Perform architectural study to determine costs of making 'old' side of Sheffield Elementary fully accessible	planning
	3	Perform architectural study to determine costs of making 'old' side of Sheffield Elementary appropriate for pre-K and K	planning
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	transition planning
	2	Implement process to determine viability of MC plans	done
	3	Review plans according to set timeline, school committee makes final decisions	school committee rejected both plans
	4	Implement plan to move MC grades 1-3 to Sheffield, K to Hillcrest for Sept. 2008	in process
D.	Create staffing plan and budget for consolidated Sheffield for SY08-09		
	1	design and staff behavioral and special education consolidated programs	in process
	2	consolidate classrooms	in process
	3	modify building as needed to accommodate new students and programs	in process

Goal B: Reorganize central office and educational administrative staffing

Status: can accomplish with FY09 budget plan (GIC gains)

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

Priority Goal B: Reorganize central office and educational administrative staffing in order to increase capacity to provide effective management, supervision and oversight of educational improvement		Status
A. Plan educational administrative staffing for SY08-09		
1	Hire superintendent for FY09	waiver issued: contract in negotiation
2	Determine administrative staffing plan for SY08-09	in progress
3	Hire Director of Elementary Education	done
4	Hire principal for consolidated Sheffield Elementary	interviews scheduled
5	Hire principal for Hillcrest Early Childhood Center	done
6	Expand principal position at Gill from .5 to 1.0 FTE: hire	interviews scheduled
7	Hire Director of Student Services and Special Education	interviews scheduled
8	Review administrative needs of PPS and SPED	in progress
9	Add grant-funded .5 nurse/leader position	in progress
10	Explore need for SPED district-wide team leader	
11	Hire all administrative staff for MS/HS	in progress
B. Re-do all administrative contracts		
1	Write job descriptions for new / changed positions	in progress
2	Perform county-wide compensation survey	done
3	Determine cost of indexing admin salaries to county average	in progress
4	Negotiate contracts indexed to county average	in progress
C. Add central office capacity to manage data, technology and IT training of staff		
1	Determine optimal central office staffing for IT	in progress
2	Write job descriptions for new / changed positions	in progress
3	Negotiate contracts / hire new as needed	in progress

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

Status: in progress

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

Priority Goal C: Create an educationally sound and fiscally sustainable budget for FY09 and beyond		Status
A. Create room in FY09 budget for restoration of educational programs and services		
1	Join GIC to reduce health insurance costs	done
2	Regain lost economies-of-scale through elementary school building consolidation	decisions made, in progress
3	Negotiate teachers' contracts within budget parameters	in progress
4	Reduce out-of-district SPED costs through increased monitoring	on-going
5	Explore possible collaboration with neighboring districts on special programs for middle and high school students	beginning discussions
B. Develop inflation index-linked budget for FY09		
1	Calculate net savings through GIC	GIC rates set in March, sign-up in May
2	Estimate net changes in revenue streams	estimating
3	Determine net savings available for restoration of educational programs and services	on-going
4	Issue preliminary budget	towns will vote on May 3rd and May 5th
5	Calculate net assessment to member towns	done
C. Work with member towns to develop 5-year fiscal sustainability plan for district and towns		
1	Secure funding for study	done
2	Determine scope of work	done
3	Hire consultant to do study	preliminary report in progress

Goal D: Restore and improve elementary educational programs and services

Status: Restoration of key positions and initiatives will be dependent upon funding

Objectives:

- To provide sufficient social and emotional support to students to overcome obstacles to learning
- To provide sufficient academic support to students to enable them to achieve their potential
- To provide appropriate academic coaching to teachers to increase their ability to help students improve understanding of core academic subjects
- To provide computer technology learning experiences to elementary students
- 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

Goal D: Restore and improve elementary educational programs and services			Status
A.	Restore elementary educational programs and services		
	1	Increase .5 Gill nurse position to FT	Shift .5 position from Montague Center
	2	Shift Reading Specialist position from Reading First Grant to general operating budget	in budget
	3	Shift Title I teaching position from Title I grant to general operating budget	in budget
	4	Purchase new computer lab for elementaries	done
	5	Hire additional .5 ELL teacher	dependent upon funding
	6	Hire additional elementary social worker / counselor	
	7	Hire additional school psychologist, for testing, diagnostic and clinical intervention services to preK/K and 1-5 students	
	8	Hire math coach for Math Expressions curriculum	
	9	Hire computer technology teacher for elementaries; train teachers in Galileo	
B.	Improve elementary education		
	1	Extend Responsive Classroom model to all elementary classrooms and schools	all initiatives in progress and will continue in FY09, with existing funding; extended professional development for teachers dependent upon additional funding
	2	Establish Math Expressions as core math curriculum	
	3	Maintain and expand reading and literacy initiatives	
	4	Map and align elementary curriculum, identify power standards, translate into student-friendly language	
	5	Explore Expanded Learning Time models	

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

Status: Curriculum initiatives will continue with FY09 budget; additional positions and professional development dependent upon funding

Objectives:

- To provide academic support to students
- To provide social and emotional support to students to overcome obstacles to learning
- 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
- 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

Priority Goal E: Restore and improve secondary programs and services		Status
A. Restore middle school and high school educational programs and services		
1	Add .5 ELL teacher	from GIC gains
2	Provide MS/HS summer school programs	
3	Add 9th and 10th grade team leaders	
4	Continue to fund peer mediation coordinator (50% grant funded)	
5	Add afternoon/evening receptionist security position for building safety	
6	Add middle school reading specialist	
7	Add middle school math specialist	dependent upon funding
8	Add math/science instructor at high school	
9	Add high school career / guidance counselor	
10	Add middle school guidance counselor	
B. Improve secondary education		
1	Continue to train teachers in curriculum mapping and standards-based assessments	all initiatives in progress and will continue in FY09, with existing funding; extended professional development for teachers dependent upon additional funding
2	Continue to train staff in Developmental Designs model	
3	Explore Expanded Teaching & Learning Time initiative	
4	Maintain and expand Reconnecting Youth drop-out prevention program	
5	Continue Sedita Literacy Initiative for MS and HS staff	
6	Train teachers in use of Galileo software to improve continuous assessment & remediation	
7	Explore expansion of 9th Grade Academy to 10th Grade	
8	Explore Collins Writing Program for middle school	