

Gill-Montague Regional School District

**Turn-Around Plan: Progress Report
July 31, 2008**

Submitted to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

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

The Gill-Montague Regional School District is continuing to make significant progress on all fronts, despite a challenging fiscal situation.

The re-configuration of elementary schools and classrooms has enabled the district to better serve the educational needs of our students. We have moved from four elementary schools with significant staffing gaps to three elementary schools that will be appropriately staffed in all essential programs.

Joining the GIC for health insurance has enabled the district to propose a 5.18% budget that begins to restore needed educational services and programs. Our budget has been rejected twice by our member towns, a 'Commissioner's budget' of approximately 4% has been set, and a district meeting for citizens of our region has been set for September 17th. We remain hopeful that our towns and school committee will be able to agree on a budget that allows us to move ahead educationally without causing undue fiscal distress to our towns.

Our district leadership team has been strengthened considerably. We have hired dynamic educational leaders in each of our schools, and have increased our central office capacity to oversee elementary education, special education, and special programs.

Elementary schools configuration

Each of our elementary schools has undergone significant change in the past few months: Montague Center School is closed; Hillcrest Elementary transformed to a pre-K and Kindergarten school, Sheffield expanded to incorporate eight new classrooms, and Gill expanded by the addition of a stand-alone sixth grade and an additional kindergarten class. Each elementary school will have a full-time principal and a full-time nurse.

Consolidation of schools and classrooms has allowed us to re-assign existing positions to better serve the needs of students: one SPED position has been changed to a pre-K-5 Team Leader / School Psychologist position, and another to an Adjustment Counselor position for Sheffield. In addition, we have established a Special Education Resources Suite at Sheffield, to serve a number of children who were at Gill and Hillcrest.

Budget

Net gains from joining the GIC program are allowing the district to survive, and to make modest improvements in staffing. We have been able to move our Reading Specialist position from the Reading First grant (ended) to our general fund, ensuring sustainability of this important position. We have also been able to absorb a reduction in our Title I funds of about \$45,000 through GIC gains. In addition, we are in the process of re-vamping our Title II grant, to enable us to engage in professional development (for teachers) that is more comprehensive and suited to the educational initiatives we've undertaken.

We are adding a Reading Specialist at the middle school, to ensure that each student receives appropriate reading instruction; we're adding a 6th grade classroom teacher to keep class sizes manageable, and are fully funding the Secondary Assistant Principal position, to assist our ms/hs administrative team with student discipline and teacher evaluation.

With state funding essentially flat and our towns struggling to keep up with double-digit assessment increases, all of this has been made possible this year only through our entry into the GIC program. In that sense, these are one-time gains, and further economies and cost-effective strategies will have to be found if we hope to keep improving education.

Educational initiatives

Despite these gains, significant needs remain. Funding has yet to be found for many items in our greatly-reduced and revised Turn-Around Plan, including computer technology teachers for the elementary schools, a math specialist for the middle school, a career counselor for the high school, an additional math/science teacher for the high school and sustainable funding for all of our educational initiatives.

Next steps

The school committee is engaged in strategic planning at several levels: a Sheffield Building Committee has been established to discuss next steps for the elementary schools re-configuration; they have established a sub-committee on Strategic Planning, which is developing a strategic educational vision and plan to guide future school committee decision-making; and there is an on-going collaboration with our member towns regarding the development of a five-year sustainable budget plan.

Both the school committee and the administration are hopeful that we will continue to find ways of improving education while finding additional cost-efficiencies.

What follows in this document are updated charts showing the specific objectives and status of our Turn-Around Plan.

We appreciate the time and attention that the DESE has devoted to our situation, and trust that you will find that we have made significant progress in the last year.

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 #1: 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: approved by 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	Sheffield Building Committee established and meeting
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	done
2	Implement process to determine viability of MC plans	done
3	Review plans according to set timeline, school committee makes final decisions	done
4	Implement plan to move MC grades 1-3 to Sheffield, K to Hillcrest for Sept. 2008	done
D.	Create staffing plan and budget for consolidated Sheffield for SY08-09	
1	design and staff behavioral and special education consolidated programs	all programs will be fully operational, appropriately housed and appropriately staffed for SY 08-09
2	consolidate classrooms	
3	modify building as needed to accommodate new students and programs	

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	done
2	Determine administrative staffing plan for SY08-09	done
3	Hire Director of Elementary Education	done
4	Hire principal for consolidated Sheffield Elementary	done
5	Hire principal for Hillcrest Early Childhood Center	done
6	Expand principal position at Gill from .5 to 1.0 FTE: hire	done
7	Hire Director of Student Services and Special Education	done
8	Review administrative needs of PPS and SPED	in progress
9	Add grant-funded .5 nurse/leader position	interviewing
10	Explore need for SPED district-wide team leader	done
11	Hire all administrative staff for MS/HS	MS & HS principals hired: Assistant principal position budgeted (interviewing)
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	done
4	Negotiate contracts indexed to county average	done
C. Add central office capacity to manage data, technology and IT training of staff		
1	Determine optimal central office staffing for IT	reviewing staffing and data management
2	Write job descriptions for new / changed positions	
3	Negotiate contracts / hire new as needed	

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	done
3	Negotiate teachers' contracts within budget parameters	on-going
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	done
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	done
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
- 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
- **To provide computer technology learning experiences to elementary students**

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	done
2	Add 6th grade teacher and class to Gill Elementary	done
3	Shift Reading Specialist position from Reading First Grant to general operating budget (grant elimination)	done
4	Shift Title I teaching position from Title I grant to general operating budget (grant reduction)	done
5	Purchase new computer labs for elementaries	done
6	Hire additional .5 ELL teacher	interviewing .25 (share with MS/HS)
7	Hire elementary adjustment counselor	SPED teaching position re-assigned
8	Hire school psychologist / team leader, for testing, diagnostic and clinical intervention services to preK/K and 1-5 students	SPED teaching position re-assigned
9	Hire math coach for Math Expressions curriculum	.5 math coach contracted (Title II grant)
10	Hire computer technology teacher for elementaries; train teachers in Galileo	no funding at present
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 (general fund and Title II)
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	on hold

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		add .25 (share with elem)
2	Provide MS/HS summer school programs		done
3	Add 9th and 10th grade team leaders		in process
4	Add afternoon/evening receptionist security position for building safety		in process
5	Add middle school reading specialist		interviewing
6	Add middle school guidance counselor		counselor assigned (re-organization)
7	Continue to fund peer mediation coordinator (50% grant funded)		on hold: no funding at present
8	Add middle school math specialist		
9	Add math/science instructor at high school		
10	Add high school career / 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 (general fund and Title II)
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		