



8 Town Regional School District Planning Board Update

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Whether the Southern Berkshire Regional School District and the Berkshire Hills Regional School District will join to create a new single PreK-12 district is expected to be put to the voters of the eight member towns the last week of October.

In July of this year, the 8 Town Regional School District Planning Board voted to recommend the creation of the new district – to be known as the Southern Berkshire Hills Regional School District. *The new district would maintain all existing elementary and middle schools as they are but create a single high school in a new state-of-the-art facility to be built on the Great Barrington campus.*

The 8 Town high school would have greatly expanded vocational (also known as Chapter 74) facilities and programs, which would be available to high school students in all eight towns. South County students are seriously underserved in vocational offerings as compared to other parts of Berkshire County and the Commonwealth.

The 8 Town Board's July vote followed a 3½ year study by the 24 members of the RSDPB (which includes 3 members from each of the 8 towns). The Board was originally convened to explore possible new models of operation in the face of staggering declines in enrollment and rising operating costs in both districts, trends expected to continue. The Board concluded that by creating a single new district, the eight towns would be better positioned to provide the broadest range of educational opportunities and support services our children deserve in a way that is sustainable and the 8 towns can afford.

The recommended model is the same model the 8 Town Board's research team recommended in early March 2022, and the 8 Town Board voted to further develop in April of that year. Over the last year, the Board has been working on a proposed regional agreement for the new district. That work was supported by legal counsel and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE).

At its September 26 meeting, the Board will be presented with a final draft of the proposed regional agreement, which on September 14 was formally approved by DESE's Office of Regional Governance and its legal office as an agreement it could recommend to the Commissioner of Education. Should the Board vote to approve that agreement, the Board's recommendation and the proposed agreement will be forwarded to the Select Boards of the 8 towns for placement on the warrants for the October special town meetings.

The Board will continue to hold public forums to provide information about its recommendation and answer questions. Upcoming forums are planned for September 27 at Mt. Everett (a forum requested by the SBRSD school committee to discuss just the provisions of the regional agreement), October 4 at the Mahaiwe (an informational forum to be moderated by *The Berkshire Eagle*, which will cover all topics), October 11 at Mt. Everett and October 18 at Monument Mountain (both covering all topics). We will also be present at the Stockbridge Finance Committee on October 2 and the West Stockbridge Select Board meeting on October 10. (In September, we presented at a joint eight town select board/finance committee meeting and at select board meetings in Egremont and Monterey). All voters should visit 8towns.org for detailed information about the reasons behind the Board's recommendation and additional information about upcoming meetings.

Lucy Prashker, Chair of the 8 Town Regional School District Planning Board

Jake Eberwein, RSDPB Project Manager

September 2023