



8 Town Regional School District Planning Board

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Here is our most recent update (January 2023):

Merger Model under Consideration: In April, the 8 Town Board voted (16 to 6) to continue to develop the merger model recommended by our research team – merging the Berkshire Hills Regional School District and the Southern Berkshire Regional School District into a single preK-12 district, maintaining the existing elementary and middle schools as they are, but creating a new merged 9-12 high school to be built on the Great Barrington campus.

Transportation Report: We received an encouraging report from our outside transportation consultant about the effect any merger would have on student transportation. The two questions we have heard most often are:

“Would most students be spending longer times on the bus?”

“Would the cost of transportation increase significantly with a merger?”

The answer to both questions is “No,” according to our transportation expert, Richard Labrie. With a merger and a move to a common bell schedule, new routes could be designed so student time on bus would actually decrease for the vast majority of students with only a very modest added cost.

For elementary school and middle school students, their time on the bus will either stay the same or decrease. In addition, with a common bell schedule, the 8 Town district could move to a “two tier” system for all kids -- as opposed to the single tier system that operates in the SBRSD. The result: no elementary school child would need to ride a bus with high school students. And, with the addition of a few vehicles and greater use of vans, we could not only reduce the bus time significantly for the vast majority of all students, but we could also reduce the maximum time on bus for all students (including high school students) from the current 1 hour to 45 minutes. The estimated cost of that would be only \$55,000/year, assuming state transportation reimbursement of 80% (state reimbursement this year is over 95%). So, according to our expert, transportation concerns should not be an impediment to merger. (The link to the full Transportation Study is [here](#).)

Work on an 8 Town Regional School District Agreement/Agreement on Committee Composition.

Governance is a critical piece of any new district. Following much thoughtful deliberation, our 8 Town Board voted by a strong majority (18 to 2) for a school committee of 11, with three members from Great Barrington, two members from Sheffield, and one member each from Alford, New Marlborough, Monterey, Egremont, West Stockbridge and Stockbridge, with all members elected district-wide at biennial elections (as is the case now in both districts). This composition had solid support from representatives of both districts, and the decision represented a major milestone forward.

Timeline: We are now targeting end of February/early March for a board vote on a recommendation to the Selectboards of the 8 Towns, and, if the vote is to recommend merger, having the question put to the voters of the 8 Towns at the annual meetings in May/June 2023.

Lucy Prashker, Chair of the 8 Town Regional School District Planning Board
Jake Eberwein, RSDPB Project Manager