



Exploring a Regionalization Solution for Elementary Education in Amherst, Leverett, Pelham and Shutesbury

WHY DO THIS?

Our communities are recognized for a long history of and commitment to quality and effective education. Our towns have thrived because those before us were vigilant in trying to make the best choices for the future. Today, it is our turn and responsibility to explore ways that continue this tradition for the benefit of all our residents, especially coming generations of children and families.

OUR VALUES GUIDE US

The Regional School District Planning Board's (RSDPB) work is being guided by the following values:

- ♥ Be good stewards. We received good schools from past generations, and take seriously our responsibility to invest in the future by handing off good schools to the generations that follow.
- ♥ Be fiscally responsible. Be thoughtful and realistic about cost to the towns, and understand short and long-term results of any investment.
- ♥ Provide ample opportunities for town and resident input.
- ♥ Learn about, respect, and reflect the culture of the different communities.
- ♥ Maintain the best features of current schools; capitalize on their strengths.

THE CONTEXT & HISTORY:

Did this regionalization process just begin? Actually, regionalization has been considered many times since our current secondary education region (middle and high school) was created in the mid-1950's. The four towns of Amherst, Pelham, Shutesbury and Leverett have had official discussions about regionalizing in 1968, 1976, 1992, 2009 and currently.

What makes these discussions different? In the past, we relied upon volunteers without the requisite time or expertise. In previous explorations of regionalization, volunteers have conducted all the fact-finding. This has been difficult for the volunteers, and time-consuming for all town and regional business offices. Thus, data had been incomplete and not systematically collected. Furthermore, the volunteers lacked the expertise to meet the state's requirement for an educational plan and voters' needs for a full understanding of the financial implications.

This time, we are hiring experts in school finance and education to collect data to ascertain the impacts of regionalization for each of the four towns. Such data can give everyone a complete picture to be able to compare the viability of the status quo to regionalization. Initial funds to secure consultant services were provided by the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC), the Franklin Regional Council of Government (FRCOG) and a designated contingency fund maintained by the Amherst-Pelham Regional Schools. Forming the RSDPB also gives us the ability to apply competitively for state funds to assist in this process. We hope to utilize state grant funds to support the bulk of the related expenses.

THE PROCESS

What is the Regional School District Planning Board? State law requires that towns interested in regionalizing create Regional School District Planning Committees by Town Meeting votes, and that these committees must come together to create a Regional School District Planning Board. In June 2012, all 4 towns' committees voted to join as a Planning Board (this also occurred in 1992 but not in 2009). While creation of the RSDPB does not commit any town to any plan, it formally allows further exploration. While the state is promoting regionalization, the four towns have come together on our own to explore solutions that fit our communities.

Who is on the Regional School District Planning Board? The Regional School District Planning Board consists of three members from each of the towns – Amherst, Leverett, Pelham and Shutesbury. This configuration is required by state law. Each town’s moderator appointed the members, one of whom must be a School Committee member. The members are as follows:

Amherst	Andy Steinberg, Chair of the Board (Amherst Finance Committee) Katherine Appy (Amherst School Committee) Alisa Brewer (Amherst Select Board)
Leverett	Julie Shively (Leverett Select Board) Kip Fonsh (Leverett School Committee) Ann Delano (Leverett Finance Committee)
Pelham	Jeff Eiseman (Pelham Zoning Board of Appeals) Trevor Baptiste (Pelham School Committee) Darius Modestow (Pelham School Committee)
Shutesbury	Elaine Puleo, Vice Chair of Board (Shutesbury Select Board) Michael DeChiara, Secretary/Treasurer of the Board (Shutesbury School Committee) Becky Torres (Shutesbury Town Administrator)

What regionalization models are being considered? While many ideas have been discussed over the past few years, the Planning Board agreed that only models that involve all four towns would be considered. One of the two models that will be researched is the creation of a new preK-6 region to include all six elementary schools in the four towns. This would then serve as a companion region to the current secondary (7-12 grades) region; both regions would share a central office and superintendent. The other model that will be researched is the expansion of the current secondary region to include preK to 6th grade.

What will happen when?

From now through January 2013: The Board will hire the educational and financial consultants, who will collect information and present their findings to the Board.

- **February 2013:** The Board will hold forums in each of the four towns.
- **March 2013:** The Board recommends whether to form a preK–6 region, form an expanded preK–12 region, or to keep the current arrangement.

If the Board decides to recommend one of the models of regionalization, the following timeline will apply:

- **April 2013:** The Board will hold a second forum in each town to explain its decision and gather input for design of a regional agreement.
- **June 2013:** The Board will complete a draft regional agreement and Long Range Plan (both required by state).
- **July 2013:** The Board will hold a third forum in each town to review the regional agreement and Long Range Plan.
- **August–September 2013,** the Board submits a revised version of the regional agreement plus the Long Range Plan to the state, and finalize both on the basis of its feedback.
- **October 2013:** The Board will present the regional agreement and the long range plan in a four-town forum.
- **November 2013:** Each town will vote separately whether or not to approve the regional agreement.
- **December 2013:** The state (DESE) considers approval of the regional agreement
- **July 1, 2014:** Assumed start date for a new region

How can I find out more information? www.RegionalSchoolPlanning.com is regularly updated. All meetings are posted with the town’s clerks. We invite and encourage community input. Contact members of the Board at regionalschoolplanningboard@googlegroups.com