

AMHERST - PELHAM *Regional* SCHOOL DISTRICT
AMHERST, MASSACHUSETTS

Office of the Superintendent

413-362-1823 (phone)

170 Chestnut Street

413-549-9811 (fax)

Amherst, MA 01002

April 9, 2014

Dear Members of the Amherst, Leverett, Pelham and Shutesbury Communities:

As Town Meetings approach this spring, we wanted to review the question of assessment methodology that is voted on each year at those sessions.

The working group would like to share its view that maintaining the alternative assessment method that has been in place for many years provides stability and equity for next year's budget. There are many reasons to vote for the alternative assessment method for the FY15 budget including per pupil cost equity, shared commitment to the region, and the potential negative impact of choosing a different method.

Per Pupil Cost Equity: An attribute of the alternative method for the member towns has been that each member town pays the same amount per student. Choosing a different method would mean that one member town's students would cost more (or less) than another member town's students. This has felt uncomfortable and inequitable to the member towns in the past and feels uncomfortable to the group as well.

Commitment to the Region: All of the member communities have worked together on the FY15 budget for many months with the understanding that the alternative assessment method would be used, as it has been used every year for the last eight years. To change the assessment method at this point would change the schools' budget resulting in uncertainty for all of the member communities who have already built their own budgets on the numbers released by the school. At this late stage in the budget process, this change would create instability in the school district that would negatively impact the planning done to provide an outstanding educational experience for students. It would also create a new and challenging budget process to enter into less than two months from the end of the fiscal year, which would be virtually unprecedented.

Negative Impact of Choosing a Different Assessment Method: If the alternative assessment method is not approved at each member communities' town meeting, the regional school will not have a budget. The regional school will have to create a new budget that each town can support under a different assessment method at a later date. Unfortunately, less than two weeks after the town meetings on May 3rd, the school district is obligated to notify staff whose positions could potentially be eliminated. As a result of the uncertainty around the budget, the school district will be forced to notify many more staff of a possible layoff than it otherwise normally would. Any staff member who receives this notification can apply for unemployment benefits during the summer whether they are actually laid off or not. Changing the assessment method will create a large financial burden on the school district as it will have to pay for unemployment benefits that it was not anticipating and would be fiscally irresponsible, but potentially unavoidable.

We do appreciate and agree about the need to review the assessment methodology periodically and make sure that it continues to fairly distribute the regional school cost to member towns. That is the reason why this working group was created. The group's purpose is to review the assessment methodology and potentially make clear recommendations that could influence the budget process in future years. In fact, this group has already met once and plans to meet several more times over the coming months.

In closing, we would like to thank everyone for their continued support of the Amherst Pelham Regional Schools.

Sincerely,

Working Group Members

Maria Geryk
Superintendent of Amherst Pelham Regional Schools

John Trickey
Pelham Finance Committee

Jay Leonard
Pelham Finance Committee

Sandy Pooler
Amherst Finance Director

Rebecca Torres
Shutesbury Town Administrator

Elaine Puleo
Shutesbury Select Board

Rus Wilson
Shutesbury Finance Committee

Marjorie McGinnis
Leverett Town Administrator

Richard Brazeau
Leverett Select Board