



## 8 Town Regional School District Planning Board Update

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**Merger Model under Consideration:** In April 2022, the 8 Town Board voted 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.

**Progress on 8 Town Regional School District Agreement.** Since our February 2023 update, the 8 Town board has made substantial progress on developing the terms of a regional school district agreement that would govern an 8 town district. Except for assessment methodologies (which continue under board deliberation), the board has reached agreement on most all of the substantive provisions. Among the most important, we have reached agreement on new school committee governance, district transition provisions, and which issues would require a 2/3 supermajority school committee vote (including, votes to approve school budgets and incur debt, any vote to amend the regional agreement, and any vote to close a school).

On school closures, the Board agreed on a detailed process that would have to be followed before any school committee vote. It also agreed that in addition to a supermajority at the school committee level (with a requirement that the majority include affirmative votes from school committee representatives resident in 6 of the 8 towns), any vote to close a school would need to be approved by the voters of 6 of the 8 member towns. The Board also agreed to include provisions that would allow for intra-district choice. Parents would have the option to keep their children in their existing schools through all grade levels offered in that school (and associated middle grades) even if that school were not the one in closest proximity to their home. Intra-district choice would also be available to students to attend programs unique to a school, and, subject to seat availability, for general family preferences.

**Finance Subcommittee Recommendation on Assessment Methodologies.** At the April 11 board meeting, our finance subcommittee presented its recommendation on how costs of a merged district would be assessed across its 8 member towns. The methodologies cover operating costs (always the largest share of a town's assessment), capital costs generally, and capital costs for construction of a new high school in Great Barrington. The full presentation of that finance subcommittee recommendation is posted on the 8towns.org website [HERE](#). The finance subcommittee vote in favor of the recommendation was unanimous among the 5 voting members of the subcommittee, and 9-1 among the 10 RSDPB members who actively participated in the finance subcommittee deliberations (which spanned 14 meetings over 9 months). Full board deliberations on the recommended methodologies will begin at the next board meeting on May 3.

**Timeline:** The 8 Town board is targeting late May/early June for a vote on a recommendation on the proposed merger and a proposed regional agreement. If the board votes in favor of merger, that recommendation would be put before the voters at special town meetings to be held this fall to allow for additional community education and outreach.

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

*Jake Eberwein, RSDPB Project Manager*

*April 2023*