# SPECIAL COMMISSION ON SCHOOL DISTRICT COLLABORATION & REGIONALIZATION

**Report to the Legislature**

August, 2011

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# CHAPTER 188 OF THE ACTS OF 2010

*AN ACT RELATIVE TO MUNICIPAL RELIEF*

SECTION 72. There shall be a special commission to examine efficient and effective strategies to implement school district collaboration and regionalization. The commission shall consist of the senate and house chairs of the joint committee on education, who shall serve as co-chairs of the commission; the secretary of education or his designee; the commissioner of elementary and secondary education or his designee; the executive director of the Massachusetts School Building Authority or her designee; 1 member of the house of representatives to be appointed by the minority leader, 1 member of the senate to be appointed by the minority leader; and 9 persons to be appointed by the secretary of education, 1 of whom shall be from a list of 3 persons nominated by the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents, 1 of whom shall be selected from a list of 3 persons nominated by the Massachusetts Association of School Committees, 1 of whom shall be selected from a list of 3 persons nominated by the Massachusetts Association of Regional Schools, 1 of whom shall be selected from a list of 3 persons nominated by the Massachusetts Teachers Association, 1 of whom shall be selected from a list of 3 persons nominated by the American Federation of Teachers, Massachusetts, 1 of whom shall be selected from a list of 3 persons nominated by the Massachusetts Association of School Business Officials, 1 of whom shall be selected from a list of 3 persons nominated by the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education, 1 of whom shall be selected from a list of 3 persons nominated by the Massachusetts Municipal Association and 1 of whom shall be selected from a list of 3 persons nominated by the Massachusetts Organization of Education Collaboratives.

The commission shall examine and make recommendations on model approaches regarding, but not limited to, the following areas: (1) identifying indicators for assessing the academic and programmatic quality, overall district capacity, including the effectiveness of the central office and the fiscal viability, efficiency and long-term sustainability of school districts; (2) cooperative purchasing of materials and services; (3) interdistrict academic and extracurricular programs; (4) merger of school district central office buildings, staff and operational systems; (5) merger of collective bargaining agreements; (6) merger of debt obligations, including for school building projects; (7) the effect of school district regionalization on educational and instructional outcomes; (8) the effect of school district regionalization on school funding allocations; (9) school consolidation; (10) transitional costs associated with school district regionalization; (11) appropriate time frames for implementing school district regionalization; (12) incentives for school districts to increase collaboration and/or regionalize; (13) revisions of chapter 71 of the General Laws to facilitate the effective implementation of existing and future regional school district agreements; (14) school building capacity and facilities; (15) the feasibility of adopting a regional district finance structure in which the local contribution of the member cities or towns that the regional district serves is assessed on the basis of a uniformly measured fiscal capacity; and (16) in-district collaborations between schools, including consolidating buildings, programs, school and central office administration, special education and food service.

The commission shall conduct its first meeting not less than 45 days after the effective date of this act and shall issue its final report to the general court on the results of its study and its recommendations, if any, together with drafts of legislation necessary to carry out such recommendations, by filing the same with the clerk of the senate and house of representatives not later than March 31, 2011, and the clerks shall forward the same to the senate and house chairs of the joint committee on education and the chairs of the senate and house committees on ways and means.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The impact of the economic recession, declining enrollments, and rising costs are just a few of the many factors that have motivated state and local officials to consider various approaches for school districts to build capacity, increase efficiency, and extend the reach of limited resources. Two such approaches include the consolidation of school districts (i.e., "regionalization") and the consolidation of services (i.e., "collaboration"), both of which can help school districts to build capacity and improve educational efficiency, quality, and access.

In an effort to advance school district collaboration and regionalization throughout the Commonwealth, the Massachusetts legislature enacted Chapter 188 of the Acts of 2010, *An Act Relative to Municipal Relief*, which called for the creation of a special commission to "examine efficient and effective strategies to implement school district collaboration and regionalization." The Commission was charged with developing recommendations on model approaches to facilitate collaboration and regionalization, and was required to issue a final report on its findings and recommendations to the legislature.

After seven months of discussion and deliberation, the Commission developed the following recommendations in response to its primary charge. The Commission's recommendations do not propose a "one-size-fits-all" approach to collaboration and regionalization; nor do they include a comprehensive analysis of the merits of collaboration and regionalization. Rather, the recommendations presented in this report are designed to assist school district stakeholders in developing capacity-building strategies and identifying practical solutions to existing fiscal, educational, and capital issues. The report also identifies a number of opportunities for the state to promote inter-district collaboration and support the implementation of existing and future regional school district agreements.

The report consists of the three primary sections: I. School District Capacity; II. Regionalization; and III. Collaboration. The findings and recommendations included in each section are summarized below.

***Summary of Recommendations***

## I. SCHOOL DISTRICT CAPACITY

The Commission believes that the core responsibility of school districts is to provide an increasingly diverse population of students with a broad range of high-quality educational opportunities. All school districts must have a sufficient level of capacity to execute this core function and local stakeholders should continually pursue opportunities to build the capacity of their districts.

Given the critical importance of "district capacity," the Commission developed a definition and framework for this concept. Based on the framework, the Commission created a capacity self-assessment tool (*see page 14*) that includes indicators related to various dimensions of capacity, including academic and programmatic quality, central office efficiency, fiscal viability and long-term sustainability. The tool provides an objective process for performing an initial capacity analysis, the results of which can be used to guide conversations about collaboration and regionalization and inform district-wide strategic planning decisions.

The Commission recommends that district stakeholders use this assessment tool to: 1) determine existing levels of capacity and areas of need; 2) establish a starting point for engaging in further analyses and targeted conversations about collaboration, regionalization or other capacity-building strategies; and 3) inform ongoing conversations about ways to increase capacity and improve programs and services.

## II. REGIONALIZATION

For many school districts, regionalization can help maximize district capacity, improve efficiency, and expand educational opportunities for students. However, the study and implementation of school district regionalization can be a time consuming and complex effort that requires communication and collaboration among local and regional stakeholders as well as targeted state financial support and technical assistance.

To facilitate the implementation of existing and future regional agreements, the Commission proposes the following recommendations for the state to increase support, guidance, and incentives for regionalization:

1. Provide support for regional planning efforts, including additional funding and technical assistance;
2. Provide support for the regional transition process, including additional funding and technical assistance;
3. Ensure consistent and reliable regional transportation appropriation;
4. Increase capital support for regionalization initiatives;
5. Centralize information and resources for regionalization;
6. Provide resources for the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) to increase support for regionalization; and
7. Enact legislation to address existing barriers to and increase incentives for regionalization.

## III. COLLABORATION

School district collaboration provides another means by which school districts can build capacity, increase efficiency, and achieve cost savings. In addition, collaboration can provide many of the same benefits of regionalization without undermining local control. To promote greater collaboration among school districts, Massachusetts must develop and implement a more effective statewide model of collaboration, and should leverage the existing infrastructure, expertise, and resources provided by educational collaboratives ("collaboratives") to achieve this goal. However, the state must implement better performance measures, oversight, and accountability standards before collaboratives can be used more effectively and efficiently on a statewide basis. Therefore, the Commission proposes the following recommendations for the state to promote the development and greater utilization of collaboratives:

1. Enact legislation to improve the governance, structure, accountability and oversight of educational collaboratives;
2. Provide incentives for inter-district collaboration;
3. Centralize resources and information on collaborative programs and services; and
4. Provide resources for ESE to support and promote collaboration.

# INTRODUCTION

On July 27, 2010, Governor Patrick signed into law Chapter 188 of the Acts of 2010, *An Act Relative to Municipal Relief*. Among its numerous provisions, the law called for the creation of a special commission to examine effective strategies and recommend model approaches to implement school district collaboration and regionalization. The Commission was comprised of a diverse group of highly experienced professionals representing a cross-section of state and local education and municipal organizations and professional associations.

## STATUTORY CHARGES

In addition to its primary charge to examine efficient and effective strategies to implement school district collaboration and regionalization, the Commission was directed to make recommendations on model approaches regarding, but not limited to, the following specific areas:

- Indicators for assessing:
    - the academic and programmatic quality of school districts
    - overall district capacity, including the effectiveness of the central office
    - the fiscal viability, efficiency and long-term sustainability of school districts
- Cooperative purchasing of materials and services
- Inter-district academic and extracurricular programs
- Merger of school district central office buildings, staff and operational systems
- Merger of collective bargaining agreements
- Merger of debt obligations, including for school building projects
- The effect of school district regionalization on educational and instructional outcomes
- The effect of school district regionalization on school funding allocations
- School consolidation
- Transitional costs associated with school district regionalization
- Appropriate time frames for implementing school district regionalization
- Incentives for school districts to increase collaboration and/or regionalize
- Revisions of chapter 71 of the Massachusetts General Laws (MGL) to facilitate the effective implementation of existing and future regional school district agreements
- School building capacity and facilities
- The feasibility of adopting a regional district finance structure in which the local contribution of the member cities or towns that the regional district serves is assessed on the basis of a uniformly measured fiscal capacity
- In-district [sic] collaborations between schools, including consolidating buildings, programs, school and central office administration, special education and food service

## METHODOLOGY

The Commission held eleven meetings and one public hearing between December 2010 and July 2011, during which members reviewed relevant research on school district collaboration and regionalization and considered current collaboration and regionalization efforts across the state. The Commission also solicited testimony from various stakeholders, including state and local officials and education practitioners from across the Commonwealth (*for copies of written testimony submitted to the Commission*, *see Appendix 5*). The Commission leveraged the collective expertise of its members to engage in far-reaching discussions about how to provide greater incentives and support for collaboration and regionalization and how to alleviate the challenges that currently impede such efforts.

The Commission established four subcommittees to examine the numerous topics included in its legislative charge: Finance; Academic; Transition Process; and District Capacity & Collaboration. Subcommittees met independently throughout the Commission's study and presented final recommendations to the Commission relative to their respective charges, which are embedded in various sections of the report. The purview and responsibilities of each subcommittee are described below:

- **Finance:** The role of the Finance subcommittee was to examine and make recommendations on model approaches for: (a) the identification of indicators for assessing the fiscal viability, efficiency, and long-term sustainability of school districts; (b) the transitional costs associated with school district regionalization; (c) the effect of school district regionalization on school funding allocations; (d) the feasibility of adopting a regional district finance structure in which the local contribution of the member cities or towns that the regional district serves is assessed on the basis of a uniformly measured fiscal capacity; and (e) the merger of debt obligations, including for school building projects.

- **Academic:** The role of the Academic subcommittee was to examine and make recommendations on model approaches for: (a) the identification of indicators for assessing the academic and programmatic quality of school districts; (b) inter-district academic and extracurricular programs; and (c) the effect of school district regionalization on educational and instructional outcomes.

- **Transition:** The role of the Transition subcommittee was to examine and make recommendations on model approaches for: (a) school consolidation; (b) merging school district central office buildings, staff and operational systems; (c) merging collective bargaining agreements; and (d) appropriate time frames for implementing school district regionalization.

- **School District Capacity & Collaboration:** The role of the subcommittee on School District Capacity & Collaboration was to examine and make recommendations on model approaches for: (a) the identification of indicators for assessing overall district capacity, including the effectiveness of the central office; (b) increasing both intra- and inter-district collaborations including offering joint academic programs, restructuring central offices, and consolidating buildings; and (c) increasing the cooperative purchasing of goods, materials, and services.

## CURRENT LANDSCAPE

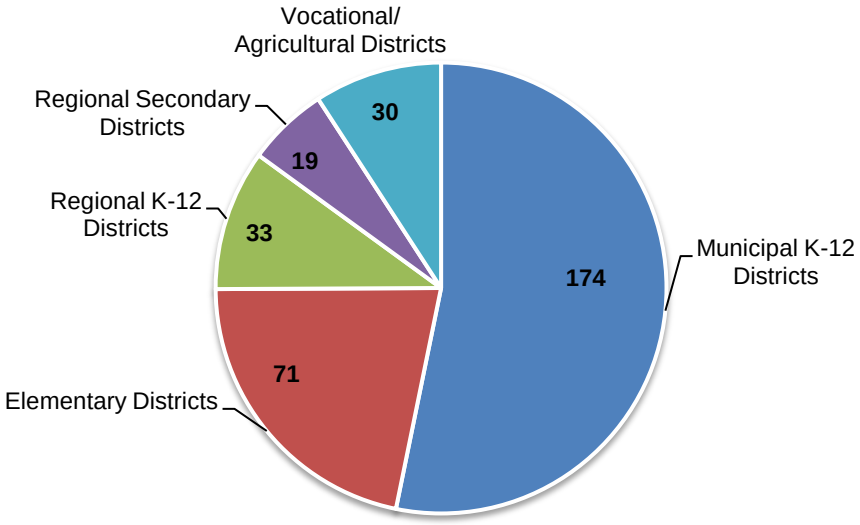
School districts in Massachusetts exhibit a wide array of sizes and configurations. Excluding charter schools, there are currently 327 school districts that serve the 351 cities and towns of the Commonwealth. These 327 districts include 297 academic school districts and 30 regional vocational-technical or county agricultural school districts. Over one third of the 297 academic school districts in Massachusetts enroll fewer than 1,500 students, the majority of which are districts that serve only partial grade ranges.[1]

Academic districts have one of four basic configurations: municipal K-12 districts, which serve a single municipality; regional K-12 districts, which serve several towns in a unified district; elementary level districts, which are defined as districts operating schools that do not include grades 9 and higher; and regional secondary districts (grades 5-12, 6-12, 7-12, 9-12), which serve several towns.

**FIGURE 1.** CONFIGURATION OF THE 351 CITIES AND TOWNS IN MASSACHUSETTS[2]

| Of the 351 Cities and Towns: | |
|---|---|
| **174** | Cities and towns operate municipal K-12 districts |
| **96** | Towns are members of regional K-12 districts |
| **9** | Towns are in multiple academic regions |
| **4** | Towns tuition out all grade levels |
| **15** | Towns tuition out grades 7-12 or 9-12 |
| **53** | Towns operate a partial school program |

**FIGURE 2.** CONFIGURATION OF THE 327 SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN MASSACHUSETTS[3]




[1] Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. *FY'12 Enrollment by Type of District*, from http://finance1.doe.mass.edu/regional/
[2] Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. *FY'12 Configuration of the 351 Cities and Towns in Massachusetts*, from http://finance1.doe.mass.edu/regional/
[3] Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. *FY'12 Configuration of the 327 School Districts in Massachusetts*, from http://finance1.doe.mass.edu/regional/

**FIGURE 3.** 2010 EXPENDITURES PER-PUPIL COMPARISONS BY DISTRICT GROUP/SIZE[4]

| District Group | Enrollment (2010) | Number of Districts | Median Per Pupil | Minimum Per Pupil | Maximum Per Pupil |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| K-12 | 150-1,000 | 10 | $13,160 | $9,546 | $29,119 |
| | 1,000-2,000 | 47 | $11,713 | $9,134 | $22,803 |
| | 2,000-3,000 | 46 | $11,397 | $9,859 | $18,591 |
| | 3,000-4,000 | 37 | $11,652 | $9,953 | $14,276 |
| | 4,000-5,000 | 27 | $11,980 | $9,837 | $18,960 |
| | 5,000-8,000 | 28 | $12,071 | $9,963 | $25,737 |
| | 8,000-26,000 | 12 | $13,231 | $11,667 | $16,597 |
| | 55,000 | 1 | $16,666 | $16,666 | $16,666 |
| Elementary | 40-500 | 43 | $13,728 | $10,147 | $23,905 |
| | 500-1,000 | 18 | $11,236 | $9,574 | $15,646 |
| | 1,000-3,200 | 10 | $11,918 | $9,740 | $21,812 |
| Secondary | 400-1,000 | 6 | $14,458 | $13,410 | $23,439 |
| | 1,000-3,000 | 13 | $13,695 | $10,920 | $18,872 |
| Vocational/ Agricultural | 400-1,000 | 18 | $19,416 | $14,347 | $28,962 |
| | 1,000-2,200 | 12 | $17,324 | $15,622 | $19,948 |

School districts can be further grouped into categories of affiliation based on various types of networks and administrative and/or organizational arrangements that they participate in. These affiliations include: *K-12 Superintendency Unions, K-12 Groups, Tuition Districts, and K-12 Districts.*

*K-12 Superintendency Unions* are cooperative arrangements between two or more school districts to share administrative personnel and services while each town maintains its own school committee and buildings. Districts participating in superintendency unions are members of a regional district at the secondary level but maintain their own elementary districts, and tend to have small student enrollments. The typical union consists of two to four elementary districts and a regional school district serving the secondary grades.

*K-12 Groups* include districts that are members of a regional district at the secondary level, but maintain their own elementary districts. However, unlike superintendency unions, districts in K-12 groups maintain separate administrations from their member regional district. K-12 Groups are not legal entities, but they represent a K-12 pathway for the students in the district.

*Tuition Districts* are districts that maintain an independent school committee but tuition out students to neighboring school districts. Towns that tuition out their students to neighboring districts have no voice in the governance or administration of the receiving district.

*K-12 Districts* are unified academic districts with a single school committee and a single administration.

[4] Table adapted from the DESE District Analysis and Review Tool (DART) for Finance and Staffing. See http://www.doe.mass.edu/sda/dart/

# FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Commission's recommendations were predicated on the following key findings and observations:

1. Incentives work better than mandates in promoting school district collaboration and regionalization at the state level.

2. Given the complex affiliations and diverse configurations of school districts across the Commonwealth, prescribing a "one-size-fits-all" approach to collaboration and regionalization is impractical.

The Commission's findings and recommendations are divided into three sections: I. School District Capacity; II. Regionalization; and III. Collaboration. The first section presents the Commission's proposed definition and dimensions of "school district capacity" and also includes a self-assessment tool that can be used by school districts and local stakeholders to assess district capacity and help guide local decisions concerning both collaboration and regionalization. The second and third sections describe the history, current landscape, opportunities, and challenges surrounding efforts to regionalize or collaborate, and include the Commission's recommendations for facilitating collaboration and regionalization. While school district collaboration and regionalization can offer similar advantages, they each present a different set of challenges, and therefore require different approaches. Accordingly, the Commission's findings and recommendations relative to school district collaboration and regionalization are addressed in separate sections of the report.

# I. SCHOOL DISTRICT CAPACITY

The members of the Commission believe that the core responsibility of school districts is to provide an increasingly diverse population of students with a broad range of high-quality educational opportunities. All school districts in Massachusetts must have a sufficient level of capacity to execute this core function, and local stakeholders should continually pursue opportunities to build the capacity of their districts.

Recognizing that the notion of "district capacity" plays a fundamental role in discussions pertaining to collaboration and regionalization, the Commission determined that it was necessary to establish consensus on the meaning and definition of this concept. To develop this definition, the Commission reviewed recent research and education literature on district capacity, discussed the primary tasks and goals of school districts, and considered the critical capacities that school districts need to provide all students with a broad range of high-quality educational opportunities. By its second meeting, the Commission established a working definition, which was revised several times throughout the Commission's study to reflect the feedback and recommendations that various members proposed during subsequent meetings.

Commission members approved the following definition of district capacity, which provided a conceptual foundation for the development of specific indicators for assessing district capacity.

***"District capacity"*** *is defined as the overall ability of a school district to achieve one primary goal – to provide all children with a broad array of high-quality and developmentally appropriate educational opportunities that will enable them to successfully complete postsecondary degrees and/or become productive members of the workforce and citizens in a democratic society.*

*District capacity is demonstrated by the successful execution of the following primary tasks:*

- *Design and implementation of challenging, aligned, and coherent instructional programs and services (consistent with state and national standards) that are dedicated to the development of the whole child;*
- *Evaluation of program effectiveness through analysis, on a regular and ongoing basis, of student growth and achievement data using clearly identified and developmentally appropriate criteria;*
- *Recruitment, retention, and development of highly qualified staff members, and regular evaluation of their ability to promote high-quality student learning and social/emotional development;*
- *Effective communication and collaboration with parents, families, local and state officials, and other community members to promote student achievement and development;*
- *Support and promotion of positive, nurturing, and safe learning environments in all classrooms and schools; and*
- *Maximization of the allocation and expenditure of district funds, resources, and materials, and accurate monitoring of expenditures over time.*

*In addition, school districts must operate efficiently to achieve the abovementioned goals.*

*The components of district capacity are directly related to these tasks, and can be organized into two broad categories: 1) the instructional, human, financial, and capital resources needed to execute its primary tasks; and 2) the organizational structures and management systems needed to ensure that the district functions effectively and efficiently.*

## INDICATORS OF DISTRICT CAPACITY

Upon reaching consensus on the definition of "school district capacity," the Commission then identified the indicators for assessing it. The Commission was charged with identifying indicators for assessing specific dimensions of school district capacity, including: (1) the academic and programmatic quality of school districts; (2) overall district capacity, including the effectiveness of the central office; and (3) the fiscal viability, efficiency and long-term sustainability of school districts. To perform this task, Commission members reviewed ESE's School and District Accountability and Assistance System, examined other assessment instruments and tools that have been used in the past, reviewed recent research, and held numerous discussions about the key features and components of school district capacity. In order to maintain a reasonable and relevant scope, the Commission focused on identifying the specific domains of capacity directly connected to collaboration and regionalization decisions.

The Commission developed an extensive list of indicators that can be used to assess various capacities within a school district, including central office capacity, academic and programmatic quality, fiscal viability and long-term sustainability. The indicators draw on both qualitative and quantitative data and cover a broad range of district information, including: 1) current & projected enrollments, 2) financial trends, 3) instructional capacity, 4) curricular & program offerings, 5) performance indicators, 6) capital facilities, 7) administrative capacity, 8) collaboration, and 9) community indicators.

Using the identified indicators and definition of district capacity as a framework, the Commission developed the following capacity assessment tool that can be used to perform an initial capacity analysis. The tool provides an objective, criterion-driven process for assessing various dimensions of district capacity—including central office capacity, academic and programmatic quality, fiscal viability and long term-sustainability—the results of which can help generate a preliminary snapshot of school district capacity. It is primarily a diagnostic tool intended to help school districts identify areas of focus for further study and action, and to inform the development of districts' strategic plans and potential collaboration or regionalization strategies.

## SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL

### Purpose & Use

The tool is designed to support the local decision-making process by offering a mechanism for examining relevant data to assess existing capacities within a school district, which can help district stakeholders identify areas of need and determine the most appropriate focus for district-wide improvement strategies and capacity-building efforts.

The tool is constructed as a survey consisting of 61 indicator statements that reflect specific conditions within the school district, and can be used by school district leaders, local stakeholders and members of the general public alike for a number of different purposes. The Commission recommends that the information provided by the assessment be used to:

1. Identify the areas of capacity that are strongest and those that need improvement;
2. Provide a starting point for engaging in further analyses and targeted discussions about regionalization, collaboration, or other capacity-development responses; and
3. Inform ongoing discussions about the capacity of the school district and ways to improve programs and services.

This tool is designed to supplement, not supplant, the local assessment process and should be used in conjunction with existing mechanisms that measure the capacity of the district to serve its students. Moreover, it is not a comprehensive or scientific tool, and should not be treated as one. Rather, the tool provides a framework for an initial capacity assessment process and should be treated as a starting point for engaging in a deeper analysis of multiple types of data.

The tool contains indicators based on the specific areas of district capacity prescribed by the legislative charge to the Commission, and therefore, the tool itself is limited in scope and scale. However, the tool can be adapted to meet individual districts' capacity assessment needs. District stakeholders can collect data on additional indicators as necessary or may decide to focus exclusively on specific areas of capacity when using the tool. In addition, the tool incorporates several benchmarks that were developed based on current data. Therefore, the tool should be updated from year to year to reflect new data.

### *Directions*

The tool includes a series of statements, which solicit a "yes" or "no" response depending on whether or not the condition or trend described by the statement applies to the district. The tool directs users to a variety of available data and resources, primarily collected by ESE or at the local level, which can be used to formulate a response to each of the assessment statements. The data sources listed in the tool are suggestions only, and should not be regarded as the only data that can be used to evaluate the indicators. Users should use the most accurate and accessible data sources available to them, which may or may not include the sources identified in the tool. Descriptions of each of the data sources referenced in the tool, including instructions for accessing and reviewing the data, are outlined in Table 1 on page 18.

Most measurements are based on trends and/or a comparison to "like districts." The Commission recommends that users refer to the ESE District Analysis and Review Tool (DART) to identify "like districts." The DART generates a list of 10 comparable districts using a precise calculation that matches districts by district type and other demographic variables such as total enrollment, percentage of low income students, percentage of English language learners, and the percentage of special education students.

### *Interpretation*

The indicator statements are specifically structured such that an affirmative response suggests a deficient or decreasing level of capacity. After completing the assessment, users should carefully survey the results and identify the items that solicited a "yes" response in order to determine the areas of capacity that require further examination. The Commission recommends that reviewers use the following guiding principle when considering the results of the assessment: *The more "yes" responses indicated on the assessment, the higher the probability that the school district would benefit from regionalization and/or collaboration.*

District stakeholders should use the results of the assessment as a starting point to engage in further discussions about district-wide strategies to address areas of need and to build on existing capacities within the district. Possible capacity-development strategies include: (1) collaborating with one or more districts, cities, towns or other entities to address one or more areas of need identified by the assessment tool, (2) forming a regional school district to address one or more areas of need identified by the tool, or (3) continue operating with no changes in the district's level of collaboration or governance structure.

Ultimately, school districts should assess on a recurring basis whether or not their current organization is operationally efficient, fiscally sustainable, and has the capacity to provide high quality academic programs and sustain long-term, continuous improvement. A capacity assessment tool, such as the one proposed by the Commission, can provide one way for school districts to perform this type of critical analysis. Moreover, assessing and developing district capacity should be a dynamic and continual process, rather than a one-time activity. To this end, the Commission recommends that the tool be incorporated into a school district's annual assessment and ongoing strategic planning process.

# CAPACITY ASSESSMENT TOOL

**Instructions:** Using the suggested data identified in the column labeled "Data Source", check the appropriate box ("yes" or "no") based on whether or not the corresponding statement applies to the district. Refer to Table 1 on page 18 for additional guidance on accessing and using the data to complete the assessment.

| 1. Current & Projected Enrollments | YES | NO | Data Source |
|---|---|---|---|
| a. Current enrollment is below the median enrollment for districts of the same group:<br>• K-12 District = 2,900[5]<br>• Elementary District = 362[6]<br>• Secondary District = 1,300[7] | ☐ | ☐ | *DART* |
| b. Enrollments have declined over the past several years | ☐ | ☐ | *DART* |
| c. The number of students leaving through choice, charter or tuition agreement has increased over the past several years | ☐ | ☐ | *ESE Finance* |
| d. The district relies on incoming choice or tuition students to support programs and budget | ☐ | ☐ | *ESE Finance* |
| **2. Financial Trends** | **YES** | **NO** | **Data Source** |
| a. The district has operated on a budget that is at or below level funded or level services for several years | ☐ | ☐ | *Local* |
| b. School budgets and/or regional assessments to member towns have increased, while programs/services remain the same or have decreased over the past several years | ☐ | ☐ | *Local* |
| c. The district has instituted or increased fees for programs/services within the last several years | ☐ | ☐ | *Local* |
| d. Teacher salaries are not commensurate with those in like districts | ☐ | ☐ | *ESE Finance* |
| e. Administrative costs per pupil have increased or are higher than such costs in like districts | ☐ | ☐ | *DART*<br>*Finance* |
| f. Operations and maintenance costs per pupil have increased or are higher than such costs in like districts | ☐ | ☐ | *DART*<br>*Finance* |
| g. In-district transportation costs per pupil have increased or are higher than such costs in like districts | ☐ | ☐ | *DART*<br>*Finance* |
| h. Out-of-district transportation costs (per out-of-district pupil) have increased or are higher than such costs in like districts | ☐ | ☐ | *DART*<br>*Finance* |
| i. Professional development spending per teacher has decreased or is lower than such spending in like districts | ☐ | ☐ | *DART*<br>*Finance* |

[5] Represents the median enrollment for all K-12 districts (municipal and regional) based on FY11 enrollment data from the DESE
[6] Represents the median enrollment for all Elementary districts (districts that operate schools that do not include grades 9 and higher) based on FY11 enrollment data from the DESE
[7] Represents the median enrollment for all Secondary (regional) districts based on FY11 enrollment data from the DESE

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **3. Instructional Capacity *(by school and district)*** | **YES** | **NO** | **Data Source** |
| a. Class size has increased in the last several years | ☐ | ☐ | *Local* |
| b. Class size is higher than in like districts | ☐ | ☐ | *Local* |
| c. Student/teacher ratio[8] has increased in the last several years | ☐ | ☐ | *DART Finance* |
| d. Student/teacher ratio is higher than said ratio in like districts | ☐ | ☐ | *DART Finance* |
| e. The teacher turnover rate has increased or is greater than the turnover rate in like districts | ☐ | ☐ | *DART* |
| **4. Curricular & Program Offerings** | **YES** | **NO** | **Data Source** |
| a. The number and variety of course offerings is fewer than in like districts (*e.g. the number and variety of foreign language courses, AP courses, electives, vocational programs, etc.)* | ☐ | ☐ | *Local* |
| b. Course offerings have been reduced or eliminated in the last several years | ☐ | ☐ | *Local* |
| c. Special programs and service offerings (art, music) have been reduced or eliminated in the last several years | ☐ | ☐ | *Local* |
| d. Extracurricular offerings have been reduced or eliminated in the last several years | ☐ | ☐ | *Local* |
| e. Early childhood offerings have been reduced or eliminated in the last several years | ☐ | ☐ | *Local* |
| f. Out-of-district special education placements have increased in the last several years | ☐ | ☐ | *Local* |
| g. Special education costs have increased or are higher than such costs in like districts | ☐ | ☐ | *ESE Finance* |
| h. Transportation services have been reduced in the last several years | ☐ | ☐ | *Local* |
| **5. Performance Indicators** | **YES** | **NO** | **Data Source** |
| a. Percentage of students scoring at or above proficient on the MCAS has declined or remained stagnant over the last several years | ☐ | ☐ | *DART* |
| b. Student SAT, PSAT and/or ACT scores have declined in the last several years | ☐ | ☐ | *Local* |
| c. Status of high school graduates (college, careers) has declined | ☐ | ☐ | *Local* |
| d. District has received a warning or has been placed on probation by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges | ☐ | ☐ | *Local* |
| e. Dropout rate has increased in the last several years | ☐ | ☐ | *DART* |
| f. Dropout rate is higher than in like districts | ☐ | ☐ | *DART* |

[8] "Teacher/student ratio" is defined as total student enrollment:total licensed teachers employed by the district

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| g. Four-year or five-year cohort graduation rates have declined in the last several years | ☐ | ☐ | *DART* |
| h. Four-year or five-year cohort graduation rates are lower than in like districts | ☐ | ☐ | *DART* |
| i. Attendance rate has decreased in the last several years | ☐ | ☐ | *DART* |
| j. Attendance rate is lower than in like districts | ☐ | ☐ | *DART* |
| **6. Capital Facilities** | **YES** | **NO** | **Data Source** |
| a. One or more district schools received a "below average utilization" rating in the most recent MSBA Needs Survey | ☐ | ☐ | *MSBA* |
| b. One or more district schools received a "building conditions" rating of 3 or 4 in the most recent MSBA Needs Survey | ☐ | ☐ | *MSBA* |
| c. One or more district schools received a "general environment" rating of 3 or 4 in the most recent MSBA Needs Survey | ☐ | ☐ | *MSBA* |
| d. The district recently attempted to submit a Statement of Interest (SOI) for MSBA funding that was defeated at the local level | ☐ | ☐ | *Local* |
| **7. Administrative Capacity** | **YES** | **NO** | **Data Source** |
| a. The number of district and/or school administrative positions has decreased over the last several years | ☐ | ☐ | *DART Finance* |
| b. District administrators are responsible for more functions than administrators in like districts | ☐ | ☐ | *MARS* |
| c. The district does not have enough administrators to effectively address instructional and achievement issues for students, particularly students with specific and differentiated needs (e.g. English language learners, students receiving special education services, etc.) | ☐ | ☐ | *MARS* |
| d. The district does not have enough administrators to effectively recruit and maintain a high-quality educator workforce | ☐ | ☐ | *MARS* |
| e. The district does not have enough administrators to create and maintain effective lines of two-way communication with parents and family members and other community stakeholders | ☐ | ☐ | *MARS* |
| f. A greater number of district administrators are responsible for operational versus instructional issues | ☐ | ☐ | *MARS/Local* |
| g. The administrative turnover rate has increased or is higher than the rates in similar districts | ☐ | ☐ | *DART* |
| h. District Administrators report to more than 1 school committee | ☐ | ☐ | *Local* |
| i. The current structure of the central office and configuration of administrators do not support optimal efficiency and effectiveness with regard to the district's ability to execute its core functions, including: 1) communication among administrators and also among administrators, principals, teachers, and staff members; 2) the collection and continuous analysis of multiple types of data; and 3) the management of instructional, | ☐ | ☐ | *Local* |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| human, fiscal, and other resources | | | |
| **8. Collaboration** | **YES** | **NO** | **Data Source** |
| a. The district has not explored the possibility of providing joint academic and extracurricular programs with other districts | ☐ | ☐ | *Local* |
| b. The district does not participate in cooperative purchasing programs with other districts | ☐ | ☐ | *Local* |
| c. The district does not partner with other districts or utilize an educational collaborative to offer professional development programs for its staff | ☐ | ☐ | *Local* |
| d. The district does not belong to an educational collaborative | ☐ | ☐ | *Local* |
| e. The district does not participate in a collaborative or cooperative transportation service program | ☐ | ☐ | *Local* |
| f. The district does not partner with other districts or utilize an educational collaborative to provide special education programs and services for its students | ☐ | ☐ | *Local* |
| g. District leaders and/or administrators do not meet with colleagues on a regular basis to discuss common challenges and implement common solutions | ☐ | ☐ | *Local* |
| h. District staff members do not participate in and/or belong to statewide professional associations (e.g. Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents, Massachusetts Association of School Committees, Massachusetts Elementary School Principals Association, Massachusetts Secondary School Administrators Association, Massachusetts Teachers Association, American Federation of Teachers – Massachusetts, etc.) | ☐ | ☐ | *Local* |
| **9. Community Indicators** | **YES** | **NO** | **Data Source** |
| a. One or more communities within the district have a negative Municipal Revenue Growth Factor (MRGF)[9] | ☐ | ☐ | *DOR* |
| b. Property values within the district have decreased over the past several years | ☐ | ☐ | *DOR* |
| c. The bond rating of one or more communities within the district has decreased within the last several years | ☐ | ☐ | *Local* |
| d. Communities within the district have a higher unemployment rate than the rates in like districts | ☐ | ☐ | *EOLWD** |

*Executive Office of Labor & Workforce Development unemployment rate by city/town: http://lmi2.detma.org/lmi/lmi_lur_area.asp?AT=01&A=000025&Dopt=TEXT

**TABLE 1.** ASSESSMENT TOOL DATA SOURCES

| Data Source | Description |
|---|---|
| **DART** | *District Analysis and Review Tool*. To access and review the data for questions associated with the "DART" source, download the "District Analysis and Review Tool" located on ESE's website – http://www.doe.mass.edu/sda/dart/ |
| **DART Finance** | *DART Finance and Staffing* tool. To access and review the data for questions associated with the "DART Finance" source, download the "DART Finance and Staffing" file located on ESE's website – http://www.doe.mass.edu/sda/dart/ |
| **DOR** | Department of Revenue data. To access and review the data for questions associated with the "DOR" source, refer to the following information located on the Department of Revenue's website –<br><br>For "Municipal Revenue Growth Factor" (MRGF) data, refer to: http://www.mass.gov/?pageID=dorterminal&L=4&L0=Home&L1=Local+Officials&L2=Municipal+Data+and+Financial+Management&L3=Data+Bank+Reports&sid=Ador&b=terminalcontent&f=dls_mdmstuf_mungrowth&csid=Ador<br><br>For property values/tax data, refer to: http://www.mass.gov/?pageID=dorterminal&L=4&L0=Home&L1=Local+Officials&L2=Municipal+Data+and+Financial+Management&L3=Data+Bank+Reports&sid=Ador&b=terminalcontent&f=dls_mdmstuf_proptax&csid=Ador |
| **ESE Finance** | ESE School Finance information. To access and review the data for questions associated with the "ESE Finance" source, refer to the appropriate charts located on ESE's website – http://finance1.doe.mass.edu/statistics/ |
| **MSBA** | *Massachusetts School Building Authority*. To access and review data for questions associated with the "MSBA" source, refer to the MSBA's "2010 Needs Survey" report located on MSBA's website – http://www.massschoolbuildings.org/sites/default/files/edit-contentfile/Our%20Programs/2010_Needs_Survey_Report_29April2011.pdf |
| **MARS** | *Massachusetts Association of Regional Schools*. To access and review data for questions associated with the "MARS" source, refer to the MARS "Central Office Capacity" report located on ESE's website – http://www.doe.mass.edu/research/reports/1109mars.pdf<br><br>***Users are encouraged to use the survey instrument found in "Appendix A" to determine the appropriate response for each question associated with the "MARS" source.* |
| **LOCAL** | Local data. Users should refer to local data systems and resources to respond to the corresponding statements. Interested stakeholders, other than those employed within the school district, should seek these data and information from local district staff. |

# II. REGIONALIZATION

In recent years, regionalization has become a topic of interest for school districts seeking more cost effective and sustainable strategies for delivering educational services. In 2010, five new and expanded regional districts were approved, including three new academic regions, one newly expanded K-12 region, and one new vocational/agricultural region. Despite these recent activities, a number of challenges continue to impede efforts to regionalize.

This section presents a brief overview of the history, current landscape, opportunities and challenges of regionalization, and offers recommendations to facilitate the implementation of existing and future regional school district agreements.

## HISTORY

In 1949, the state passed the "Regional Schools Act," which defined regional school districts as independent legal entities and outlined the rights and obligations of member towns within a regional district. While the objective of the "Regional Schools Act" was to promote consolidation, the number of school districts actually increased from 355 to 390 over the following twenty years, as small towns formed regional secondary districts but maintained independent elementary districts.[10] In 1974, the state amended the Regional School Districts law to increase financial incentives for districts to fully regionalize grades K-12 and to provide an increase in the capital reimbursement rate for regionalized districts, after which the number of school districts decreased to 329. However, these incentives were phased out with the passage of the Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993. Only one new academic regional school district was formed in the sixteen years following the elimination of the operating and construction incentive.

## CURRENT LANDSCAPE

In 2010, five new and expanded regional districts were approved. They include:

- Ayer – Shirley;
- Berkley – Somerset;
- Freetown – Lakeville;
- Chatham – Harwich;
- North Shore Technical – Essex Agricultural & Technical

[10] See http://www.doe.mass.edu/research/reports/1109consolidation.pdf

***Regional Planning and Implementation Grants***

In 2008 and 2009, 58 communities in Massachusetts participated in regional planning studies to explore the feasibility of forming a new or expanded academic region.[11] Many of these studies were funded by regional planning and implementation grants provided by ESE (see Table 2). The individual results of the 2009 regional planning studies were well documented and identified a number of key issues that impact the feasibility of regionalization. In particular, the regional planning studies highlighted some of the perceived advantages and barriers to regionalization, many of which are listed on the following page.

**TABLE 2.** 2009 & 2010 PLANNING GRANT RECIPIENTS

| 2009 Planning Grant Recipients | Amount |
|---|---|
| Ayer – Lunenberg – Shirley | $20,000 |
| Berkshire Hills Region – Southern Berkshire Region | $25,000 |
| Boxford – Middleton – Topsfield | $25,000 |
| Frontier Region | $22,500 |
| Greenfield–Gill –Montague Region | $25,000 |
| Hadley – Hatfield | $25,000 |
| Harwich – Chatham | $25,000 |
| Holland – Wales | $25,000 |
| Mahar Region | $25,000 |
| Mohawk Region – Rowe – Hawlemont Region | $15,000 |
| Nauset Region | $23,600 |
| Westfield–Gateway Region | $17,875 |
| **2010 Planning Grant Recipients** | **Amount** |
| Ayer-Shirley | $300,000 |
| Berkley-Somerset | $75,000 |
| Chatham-Harwich | $15,000 |
| Mahar Region | $10,000 |
| *Mendon-Upton/Hopedale*[12] | $10,000 |
| Old Rochester | $10,000 |
| Pittsfield | $10,000 |
| Southwick-Tolland/Granville | $10,000 |
| Massachusetts DESE | $10,000 |

***MSBA Reimbursement Points***

The Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) is a quasi-public government agency that oversees the state's program for subsidizing school building construction, renovation and repair projects. In April 2008, the MSBA Board voted to authorize new regulations that would allow the MSBA to award additional reimbursement points (up to six points) for school building proposals that are part of a regionalization plan. These additional reimbursement points provide a compelling incentive for regionalization and have prompted a number of school districts to explore regionalization as a way to resolve school facility issues.

***Regional Transportation Funding***

MGL Chapter 71, Section 16C provides for the reimbursement of regular day and vocational transportation costs incurred by regional school districts, offering another substantial incentive for school districts to regionalize. While the law specifies that regional school districts shall be reimbursed for the total cost of transporting students who live more than one and one-half miles from the school they are entitled to attend, the legislature has reduced funding for regional school transportation over the past few fiscal years due to budgetary constraints.

In 2010, the legislature included a provision in the Achievement Gap Law (*Chapter 12 of the Acts of 2010*) stipulating that funding for regional school transportation cannot be reduced by a greater percentage than funding for Chapter 70 in a given year. This provision essentially ensured that regional transportation funding—a critical source of local aid for regional school districts—would not be disproportionately affected by necessary budget cuts.

[11] See http://finance1.doe.mass.edu/regional/Reg_PlanningGrants.doc

[12] Mendon-Upton received a 2010 regional planning grant for the purposes of exploring regionalization with Hopedale. However, ESE ultimately rescind the $10,000 grant after being informed that Hopedale was no longer interested in pursuing the study. ESE distributed the remaining funding to various other communities for regional planning or implementation purposes.

## OPPORTUNITIES & BENEFITS

Regionalization represents an opportunity for many school districts to improve efficiency and long-term fiscal stability and to increase district capacity to serve the academic needs of its students. Regionalization can help to improve operational capacity by streamlining governance and eliminating duplicative administrative functions, and can provide an opportunity for smaller districts to achieve economies of scale and realize cost-savings. Proponents of regionalization also point to the increased educational opportunities that regionalization can offer. Other commonly cited benefits that motivate regionalization decisions include:

- Expanded course and program offerings;
- A coordinated K-12 curriculum and program articulation;
- A single school committee with cohesive educational policy;
- A single administration with potential for more efficient and economical operation of school departments;
- A single salary schedule and a single teacher unit for collective bargaining purposes;
- A single budget, administered to take advantage of efficient, centralized purchasing techniques;
- Savings incurred by bulk purchasing and combined transportation costs;
- Utilization of sound, long range planning and fuller utilization of teachers and school facilities for all the pupils affected;
- State transportation reimbursement; and
- Additional reimbursement points for school construction projects.

## CHALLENGES

A number of challenges can deter school districts from pursuing regional options, including certain financial or logistical obstacles and other less tangible barriers. Some commonly cited obstacles and deterrents include:

- Loss of local control;
- Short term transition costs;
- Resistance to change;
- Lack of support and guidance for regional planning and transition;
- The misconception that regionalization always entails the closing of school buildings;
- Uncertainty over the impact on teacher salaries, benefits, tenure and concern for job security;
- Change in school committee representation and potential change in administrative leadership and staff;
- Operational issues – e.g. reconciling collective bargaining agreements, consolidating central office functions, and resolving debt obligations for school facilities;
- Disparities in per-pupil spending between districts;
- Concern over capital and operational assessment methodologies and costs;
- Real or perceived economic, educational and/or social differences between districts; and
- Lack of available districts to partner with.

While the proposed benefits and challenges of regionalization helped inform the Commission's deliberations, the Commission did not debate the merits of regionalization or investigate the competing claims made in support and opposition to regionalization, as this was not the charge of the Commission.

However, members agreed that these issues and challenges must be addressed in order to make regionalization a more feasible option for districts throughout the state.

## *RECOMMENDATIONS*

The Commission strongly recommends that regionalization discussions and planning be guided by the results of the capacity self-assessment tool presented in Section I, as the data presented in the tool can help districts identify areas of need that may be addressed through regionalization. The tool can also generate important information that, in some cases, may be used to leverage support for regionalization initiatives within the community.

The study and implementation of school district regionalization can be a time consuming and complex effort that requires communication and cooperation among local and regional stakeholders as well as targeted state financial support and expanded technical assistance. The following recommendations, which predominantly address steps for state-level action, include a combination of incentives, statutory changes, and policy proposals for providing greater support and guidance for regionalization initiatives.

**Summary of Recommendations**

1. Provide resources to support regional planning studies, including additional funding and technical assistance
2. Provide resources to support the regional transition process, including additional funding and technical assistance
3. Ensure consistent and reliable regional transportation appropriation
4. Increase capital support for regionalization initiatives
5. Centralize information and resources for regionalization
6. Provide resources for ESE to increase support for regionalization
7. Enact legislation to address existing barriers to and increase incentives for regionalization

## 1. PROVIDE SUPPORT FOR REGIONAL PLANNING

There are numerous components and steps involved with forming a regional school district, the first of which is the regional planning process. Under the current law—MGL Chapter 71, Sections 14 and 14A—a town may create a regional school district planning committee and two or more planning committees may join together to form a regional school district planning board for the purposes of studying the impact and feasibility of establishing a regional school district. While the law briefly describes a regional planning board's purpose and the types of factors that should be considered during the planning study, it does not specify how this study should take place or the types of data, methods or assessments that should be used during the regional planning process. The absence of procedural and technical guidance and additional funding to support the feasibility study often inhibit the ability of a planning committee or board to perform a comprehensive, data-driven analysis and produce an accurate assessment of the impact of regionalization. Therefore, the Commission recommends the following measures to ensure the provision of additional support for regional school district planning initiatives—

- **Regional Planning Funds**
  While regional planning studies are necessary in order determine whether or not regionalization is a feasible option, such studies can be costly, and many communities lack the human and financial resources to conduct a thorough analysis. Most regional planning studies necessitate the hiring of short-term administrative assistance or consultants to perform an impact analysis to demonstrate the financial implications, building use, enrollment, curriculum, staffing, and administrative changes that would likely occur should the district form or join a region. Districts need additional funding to obtain this type of professional assistance and resources to support public hearings and outreach throughout the planning process.

  The state has occasionally provided funding for regional planning on a limited scale. As previously noted, regional planning grants were awarded in both 2009 and 2010, but such funding has not yet been made available in 2011. The state should continue to provide funding to incentivize and support a range of activities associated with regional planning. In addition, future regional planning grants should be provided in conjunction with technical assistance and procedural guidance for regional planning in order to ensure that such grants are being used to conduct thorough, data-driven planning studies.

- **Regional Planning Guidance and Technical Assistance**
  The Commission found that many school districts lack the professional and technical expertise necessary to navigate the regional planning process, which can lead to premature or even inaccurate assessments of the feasibility and impact of regionalization. Moreover, ambiguity surrounding the regional planning process can also dissuade many communities from initiating a regional planning study in the first place.

  Therefore, the state should assume a greater role in providing assistance and technical support for regional planning so as to ensure that communities exploring regionalization have the ability to conduct a thorough feasibility study based on accurate information and data. This would provide greater support for school districts considering regionalization, while simultaneously addressing some of the current challenges and clarifying certain misconceptions that have traditionally impeded efforts to regionalize.

The Commission recommends that ESE provide additional technical assistance and guidance for regional planning that includes the following resources and information:

- Procedural guidance for a "step-by-step process" for regional planning;
- Financial simulations to demonstrate the short and long term financial implications of forming a region, including an explanation of the impact on a member town's minimum local contribution and Chapter 70;
- A clear delineation and explanation of alternative allocation methods that meet the statutory requirement;
- A description of different methodologies for preparing a regional budget that reflects individual towns' needs and other opportunities for local management and control (e.g. establishing local advisory councils to provide local school input to the regional district);
- Sample regional school agreements that highlight best practices for forming a region; and
- Clarification and analysis of the implications of the "one-person-one-vote" requirement in a regional school district, including alternatives for meeting this constitutional obligation.

## 2. PROVIDE SUPPORT FOR TRANSITION

Much like the regional planning process, there are very few resources available to school districts to support the transition to a regional district. The lack of guidance and financial support for the transition process remains a significant deterrent to communities pursuing regionalization. Therefore, the Commission recommends the following measures to ensure the provision of additional support for transition—

- **Transition Funding**

  While regionalizing can produce long-term savings for school districts, the up-front cost of transitioning represents one of the most prominent deterrents for many communities exploring regionalization. Collective bargaining, curriculum design, budget development, policy alignment, and strategic planning are among the many costly tasks that districts must address when transitioning to a new region. To incentivize regionalization, the state should provide additional funding to help cover these costs.

  Regional school districts should make every effort to capitalize on opportunities to leverage existing funding sources to support transition costs. For example, the FY'12 Budget included a new line item to provide funding for "regional bonus aid" pursuant to MGL Chapter 71, Section 16D(g). In accordance with the statute, newly formed regional districts would be eligible to receive funding through this line item for up to five years immediately following the formation of the region, provided that such funding is annually appropriated. The Commission commends the legislature for creating this new line item, and recommends that the "regional bonus aid" account be preserved in subsequent fiscal year budgets in order to maintain a mechanism through which school districts can receive funding to help offset regional transition costs.

  While the Commission is extremely supportive of "regional bonus aid," members recognized that the statutory formula for calculating this aid does not yield a substantial amount of funding, nor does it account for the considerable variation in transition costs, which depend on the existing configuration of the districts and the type of merger. For example, the transition costs associated with expanding an existing region to include a new member are usually far less than the costs

associated with merging two independent municipal districts to form a new K-12 region. In many cases, the level of funding provided through the "regional bonus aid" calculation is insufficient to adequately support the up-front cost of forming a new region.

Therefore, the Commission recommends the development of a separate line item or funding program through which school districts can apply to receive additional funding to support transition activities. This additional funding source would provide essential support for newly established regional school districts and for school districts that would like to regionalize but have not done so out of concern for the up-front transition costs associated with regionalizing.

- **Transition Guidance and Technical Assistance** *(See Appendix 1 & 2)*
  The transition to a new regional district can be a complex and lengthy process for which very little guidance or technical support is available. The Commission recommends that ESE develop a comprehensive "transition advisory" that explains the steps for transitioning and that outlines the key questions and issues that should be resolved prior to merging.

  The Transition subcommittee* was responsible for examining and recommending strategies to address various aspects of the regional transition process, including: (i) merging central office buildings, staff and operational systems; (ii) merging collective bargaining agreements; and (iii) appropriate time frames for implementing school district regionalization. The subcommittee's recommendations outline a number of key questions and issues to be resolved prior to merging, which are presented in greater detail in Appendix 1. ESE should use these recommended questions and considerations as a starting point to develop more detailed guidance on the issues that school districts must address prior to and throughout the transition process.

  To help school districts navigate the transition process, such guidance or technical assistance provided by ESE should also include a step-by-step process or protocol for forming a new region. This "step-by-step" transition guidance should include a detailed list and explanation of all the necessary procedures and steps that must occur in order to ensure a successful transition. Appendix 2 includes a framework for a "step-by-step" transition process, which was developed by the Massachusetts Association of Regional Schools (MARS) under a contract with ESE. MARS is currently working on expanding this blueprint to include additional information such as detailed procedures, sample documents, and resources for various steps of the transition process. The Commission fully supports this endeavor, which exemplifies the type of additional support and guidance that the state can provide in order to facilitate regionalization.

## 3. PROVIDE RELIABLE TRANSPORTATION APPROPRIATION

State law requires regional school districts to provide transportation for all K-12 students who live greater than two miles from the school they are entitled to attend, while municipal districts are only required to transport students in grades K-6 who live greater than two miles from the school they are entitled to attend. Therefore, regional school districts typically incur substantially greater transportation costs than do municipal districts. However, MGL Chapter 71, Section 16C includes a provision that allows regional school districts to be reimbursed for the total cost of transportation, which represents

* Refer to page 6 for a description of the Transition subcommittee's charge.

one of the most attractive incentives that the state provides for school districts to regionalize. Unfortunately, funding for regional transportation has been substantially reduced over the past few fiscal years due to budgetary constraints, which has both diminished a major incentive for regionalizing and negatively impacted existing regional school districts that rely on this funding as a source of local aid. Therefore, the Commission recommends that the legislature take the steps to ensure the reliability and stability of regional transportation funding:

- **Amend MGL Chapter 71, Section 16C to ensure that funding for regional transportation is increased when a new region is added**
  Currently, when a new regional district is formed and becomes eligible for transportation reimbursement, the funding provided through the regional transportation line item is spread thinner and the reimbursement for each district is reduced. To offset this effect, the legislature should amend MGL Chapter 71, Section 16C to require that the amount of money provided in the regional transportation line item be increased whenever a new regional district or regional charter district joins the pool of eligible recipients of this funding.

- **Maintain stable funding for regional transportation**
  Consistency and predictability are extremely important when it comes to regional school transportation reimbursement. Due to budgetary constraints, funding for regional transportation has been cut over the past few fiscal years, which has made it increasingly difficult for school districts to budget accordingly from year to year. The Commission believes that the current 100% reimbursement rate provided under the statute is both unrealistic and unsustainable. In addition, funding regional school transportation at 100% minimizes the incentive for regional school districts to pursue cost effective transportation services. Therefore, the Commission recommends that the legislature amend MGL Chapter 71, Section 16C to change the 100% reimbursement requirement to reflect a more realistic expectation so that funding for regional transportation is more predictable and reliable.

## 4. INCREASE CAPITAL SUPPORT

- **Develop models and/or provide state support to offset capital "buy-in" costs charged to communities that join an existing regional school district**
  Towns interested in joining an existing regional district or merging with another district must often pay a capital charge (a.k.a "buy-in") for the use of an existing school building. This initial fee can preclude some districts from ever realizing any cost-benefit to joining the regional school district. Clearly, this can act as a significant disincentive for school districts to regionalize.

  The statutory language that had once authorized a "Regional Buy-In" grant program (under Chapter 70B) was eliminated when the MSBA was created in 2004. The language allowed a city or town to receive reimbursement for part of the buy-in amount that the city or town is required to pay to join an existing region. The Commission recommends that the legislature take action to reinstate the "Regional Buy-In Grants" reimbursement program in order to restore an important resource for school district regionalization efforts.

- **Develop and promote assessment models to apportion capital costs and debt to members based on building use**
  Regional school district agreements delineate the apportionment of capital costs among the district members according to a formula based either on enrollment percentages or other socioeconomic factors. Contention among members in a regional district can arise when one member is responsible for the majority of the student enrollment within a school building, yet all member districts are responsible for paying the maintenance costs of the facility, as set forth in the regional agreement. Therefore, the Commission recommends that ESE develop guidance or provide sample assessment models that demonstrate different methods for apportioning capital costs and debt to members based on the use of the building.

## 5. CENTRALIZE RESOURCES FOR REGIONALIZATION

Regionalization information, such as sample agreements, best practices, and technical assistance should be readily accessible to school districts and members of the public. The Commission recommends that ESE update its Regional School District Organization website to include a complete and comprehensive inventory of the existing data and resources available to regional school districts and school districts exploring regionalization. The updated website should include the additional documents and resources recommended by the Commission.

## 6. PROVIDE ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR ESE

Many of the recommendations included in this section call on ESE to assume a greater role vis-à-vis supporting and promoting regionalization initiatives. The Commission recognizes that additional funding and resources will be needed to support that role and to ensure ESE has the capacity to carry out these recommendations.

## 7. ENACT LEGISLATION TO ADDRESS EXISTING BARRIERS TO AND INCREASE INCENTIVES FOR REGIONALIZATION

To encourage regionalization and facilitate the implementation of existing and future regional school district agreements, the Commission recommends the following statutory changes—

- **Amend MGL Chapter 71, Section 42B** to clarify the process of setting teacher salaries in a newly created, expanded or consolidated regional school district. MGL Chapter 71, Section 42B states that "personnel employed by regional school district committees shall initially be placed on the salary schedule of the regional school district so that the compensation paid to such school personnel shall not be less than the compensation received by such school personnel while previously employed by a local school committee." Many districts mistakenly interpret this provision to mean that when two or more districts merge, the regional school district must immediately adopt the highest salary schedule among the joining districts. As a result, school districts may be reluctant to regionalize out of concern for the perceived up-front cost of combining teacher contracts and salaries. However, the law only guarantees that personnel employed by the new regional district will not have their compensation reduced below the level they received in their previous district. Regional school districts may and do adopt differentiated salary schedules so that personnel retain the salary level of

their previous district until the regional school district renegotiates staff contracts through the collective bargaining process.

Therefore, the statute should be amended to clarify that newly created, expanded or consolidated regional school districts do not have to adopt the highest salary schedule among the joining districts, and that such determination is made through a successor collective bargaining process.

- **Amend MGL Chapter 71, Section 14** to allow a town to initiate a regional planning study by either a vote in town meeting *or* by a majority vote of its selectmen and school committee members. Under the current law, a community can form a regional planning committee to initiate a regional planning study only after a town meeting vote, which can be a lengthy and burdensome process. This change would provide an alternative method for creating the planning committee and would allow the regionalization planning process to begin much earlier, without having to wait for a town meeting.

- **Amend MGL Chapter 71, Section 16** to allow a regional school district to enter into an agreement with one or more member districts that belong to a superintendency union with the region to authorize the regional district to serve as a fiscal agent on behalf of the districts in the union. This would allow the region to receive and expend funds and provide fiscal services for districts in the union, and would provide another opportunity for school districts to streamline operations and increase efficiency. In addition, this type of arrangement can eventually promote the formation of a full K-12 regional district, as the individual communities are able to realize the benefits of a more centralized system of governance.

- **Amend MGL Chapter 71, Section 16(r)** to increase the maximum lease period that a regional school district may sign for the use of surplus space in a school building from 10 to 30 years. The current law permits regional school districts to rent or lease surplus space in a school building to public, private or non-profit organizations for up to 10 years. Extending the lease period from 10 to 30 years would allow regional school districts greater flexibility in renting surplus space in a school building, while still keeping it for possible future use.

- **Amend MGL Chapter 71, Section14 and 14B** to include "cities" in the definition a regional school district, or replace the word "town" with "municipalities" or "communities". This would allow cities to join a region and enable existing regions to start working with cities, instead of being limited to towns.

# III. COLLABORATION

School district collaboration represents another opportunity to enhance district capacity, increase operating efficiency, and expand educational opportunities. Collaborative partnerships allow school districts to come together and pool resources around programs and services that cannot efficiently be delivered by the districts on their own. Moreover, collaboration involves the consolidation of programs and services, rather than the consolidation of schools and/or school districts, thus allowing communities to retain local control. Consolidating services and programs serves as an effective intermediary step or alternative to regionalization that enables school districts to realize cost savings and greater efficiencies.

There are a number of opportunities throughout the Commonwealth for districts to pool resources and consolidate services to build district capacity and allow for a more efficient use of resources. Whether through formal or informal cooperatives or consortiums, school districts across the state are involved in a number of collaborative arrangements to achieve a more efficient means of delivering educational services.

Historically, Educational Service Agencies (ESAs) have been the primary providers of inter-district collaborative programs and services. In 2010, there were 553 ESAs operating in 45 states across the country.[13] The organizational, governance and legal structures of ESAs vary from state to state. In addition, ESAs are known by different names across the country, including Educational Service Districts (ESDs), Intermediate Units (IUs), Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES), Regional Educational Service Agencies (RESAs), and Intermediate School Districts (ISDs), to name a few. In Massachusetts, ESAs are referred to as "educational collaboratives," which are defined as public, multi-service organizations governed and authorized by state law (MGL Chapter 40, Section 4E) to develop, manage, and provide services and programs to member school districts. Collaboratives are initiated and managed locally and allow districts to partner on programs and services that benefit from economies of scale, in both cost and quality. As the primary agents of collaboration in Massachusetts, educational collaboratives were the primary focus of the Commission's deliberations throughout its study.

To facilitate greater inter-district collaboration and improve the delivery of cost-sharing educational services, the Commonwealth needs to develop and implement a more effective statewide model of collaboration. To achieve this goal, the state should further develop and expand the existing infrastructure and network of educational collaboratives in Massachusetts. However, the Commission found that various systemic challenges exist relative to the structure, governance, accountability and oversight of educational collaboratives, all of which must be addressed if collaboratives are to assume a greater role in the state's public education system. The need for improved accountability is underscored by recent reports of irregularities and financial abuse at several collaboratives that are currently under investigation.[*]

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[13] Association of Educational Service Agencies (AESA), *Improving American Education through Educational Service Agencies*, http://www.aesa.us/Research/AESA_White_Paper_1_2010.pdf (January 2010)

[*] On June 20, 2011, the Massachusetts Inspector General's Office released the findings of its investigation into reports of misappropriation and financial abuses that were said to have occurred at the Merrimack Special Education Collaborative and its affiliate non-profit organization, the Merrimack Education Center. Both the Attorney General's Office and the state Treasurer are currently investigating the findings of the Inspector General's report, while the state Auditor is expected to release the results of an independent audit review of the Merrimack Special Education Collaborative and two additional collaboratives – the Reads Education Collaborative and the Southeastern Massachusetts Educational Collaborative – by the end of the summer. In addition, a subcommittee of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education has been formed to review ESE's policies on collaboratives, while the Joint Committee on Education is scheduled to conduct oversight hearings in the fall to examine the governance and oversight of educational collaboratives to decide whether or not there is a systemic problem that needs to be addressed through legislation. While these developments surfaced at the end of the Commission's study (and investigating them was beyond the scope of the Commission's charge) the Commission had already identified the need for greater accountability and oversight of educational collaboratives prior to learning of the Inspector General's investigation. For further information, see http://www.mass.gov/ig/publ/msec_agreements_letter.pdf.

## HISTORY

Most educational collaboratives in Massachusetts were established after the passage of the state's special education law, Chapter 766 of the Acts of 1974, which required that all school districts provide a proper educational program for students with special needs residing in their communities. In order to meet the new requirement, many school districts started joining together to pool resources and provide special education services and programs to students. As a result of this surge in collaborative programs, the state legislature amended the law governing educational collaboratives – MGL Chapter 40, Section 4E – to clarify the governance and organization of collaboratives.

Although collaboratives were originally viewed as organizations formed to provide special education services, they have evolved over the past 30 years to offer a wide range of services and programs, including, but not limited to: special education, professional development, educator licensure programs, professional learning communities, cooperative purchasing, student transportation, technology development and Medicaid and e-rate reimbursement for member districts.

## CURRENT LANDSCAPE

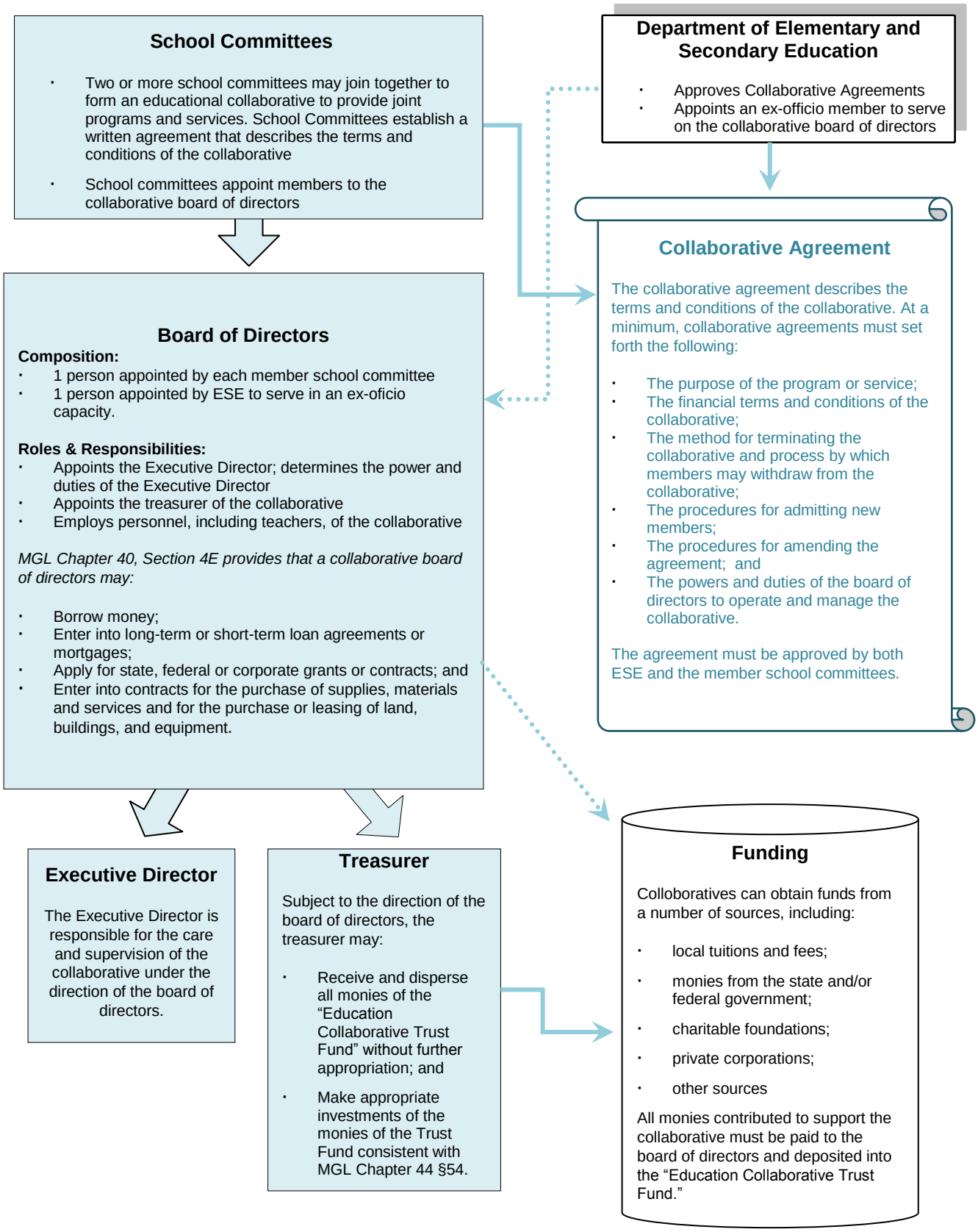
Currently, there are 30 educational collaboratives in Massachusetts that provide a wide array of services and programs to over 300 local and regional school systems. 49 school districts in Massachusetts do not belong to any collaborative, while 71 districts are members of more than one.[14] For a complete list of district membership in educational collaboratives, see Appendix 3.

The current statute governing collaboratives allows two or more school committees of cities, towns and regional school districts and boards of trustees of charter schools to enter into an agreement to provide joint programs and services that complement and strengthen the programs of member school committees and charter schools. Collaboratives are each governed by a board of directors, which, by law, consists of one person appointed by each member district's school committee. Each board conducts its business pursuant to the terms and conditions of the collaborative agreement. Collaborative agreements are drafted and agreed to by the member school committees of the collaborative and must also be approved by the ESE.

Figure 4 delineates the current governance and organizational structure of educational collaboratives, as prescribed in MGL Chapter 40, Section 4E.

[14] Based on ESE FY11 data

**FIGURE 4. ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND GOVERNANCE OF EDUCATIONAL COLLABORATIVES**



## OPPORTUNITIES & BENEFITS

Educational collaboratives help to create capacity through economies-of-scale in service and program areas where resources, both human and material, limit the extent to which those districts can individually provide such programs and services. The most commonly cited benefits of inter-district collaborative programs include increased efficiency, quality, and equity across school districts. Over the past 30 years, many collaboratives have demonstrated success in helping school districts build capacity, improve services and realize substantial cost-savings. For example, in FY 09, educational collaboratives saved school districts nearly $113 million in the following key program and service areas[15]:

- Over $64 million on special education services
- Nearly $5 million in special education transportation costs (over $7 million in the five years of the Special Education Transportation Network initiative)
- Over $16 million through cooperative purchasing programs
- Over $4 million in grant writing services
- Nearly $24 million on Medicaid reimbursement
- $300,000 on E-rate savings

The Massachusetts Organization of Educational Collaboratives (MOEC) estimates a potential statewide savings of **$200 million** if small districts took greater advantage of six cost-sharing services and programs offered by educational collaboratives, including: special education services, transportation services, cooperative purchasing programs, energy management, shared management, and professional development services.

### MASSACHUSETTS SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENT TRANSPORTATION PILOT PROJECT*

In FY'06, the state legislature appropriated approximately $1.5 million through the Circuit Breaker line item to fund the Special Needs Student Transportation Pilot program, which was designed to explore possible strategies to reduce costs and improve the quality of special education transportation. The purpose of the 3-year pilot study was to test the concept that the transportation of special education students to out-of-district placements could be accomplished at a lower cost without impacting the quality of services by delegating the planning and contracting for such transportation services to educational collaboratives. In FY'10, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education provided a $100,000 grant to the Massachusetts Organization of Educational Collaboratives (MOEC) to continue the Special Needs Student Transportation pilot program initiatives in order to further develop statewide special education transportation networks and increase district participation in these regional networks. This initiative produced a number of significant outcomes, some of which include:

- Districts reported a total of **$7,345,000** in transportation cost savings over the five year grant period;
- The quality of transportation services was improved;
- New opportunities for transportation sharing were created;
- The transportation infrastructure was substantially enhanced through the newly established transportation networks.

* *Massachusetts Special Education Transportation Task Force Report (2010).* http://moecnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/01/Special_Education_Transportation_Task_Force_Report_2010.pdf)

## CHALLENGES

Many of the same challenges that obstruct regionalization efforts also inhibit collaboration among school districts, such as local control concerns and a lack of available districts to collaborate with. In addition, numerous challenges currently impede efforts to expand the use of educational collaboratives in Massachusetts. To begin with, the enabling law governing educational collaboratives (MGL Chapter 40, Section 4E) is very broad and offers little guidance on how these entities should operate. While this allows collaboratives substantial flexibility and discretionary power to effectively respond to the needs of the districts they serve, it has also created unevenness and inconsistency among collaboratives in terms of the type and range of services they provide. In addition, ESE remains largely disconnected from the activities and operation of collaboratives, as the statute does not provide a role for ESE to regulate the activities of educational collaboratives. This has prevented collaboratives from being included in most state initiatives and programs and has created a sense of ambiguity relative to the

[15] Data provided by the Massachusetts Organization of Education Collaboratives (Steve Theall, Executive Director)

appropriate role and function of educational collaboratives within the state's public education system. Examples of other challenges include:

- Lack of a formal accountability system and performance standards for monitoring and evaluating collaboratives;
- Uncertainty over which state laws, regulations and policies apply to collaboratives;
- Uncertainty over the types of services that collaboratives are authorized to provide;
- Lack of stable funding mechanism and defined financial structure, including limited access to state-administered grant funds;
- Varying and inconsistent familiarity among local districts about the programs, services and cost-sharing opportunities available through collaboratives; and
- Lack of adequate internal controls over collaborative activities.

These, among other legislative, regulatory, and organizational barriers, must be addressed in order to ensure a greater and more effective use of educational collaboratives in Massachusetts.

## *RECOMMENDATIONS*

To advance inter-district collaboration, the Commonwealth needs to develop and implement a more effective statewide model of collaboration, which can be achieved by expanding the existing network of educational collaboratives in Massachusetts. However, this goal cannot be realized without the development and implementation of better performance measures, oversight, and accountability standards for collaboratives. Therefore, the Commission offers the following recommendations, which include a combination of statutory changes and policy proposals to improve the structure, governance, accountability, and oversight of educational collaboratives, as well as incentives to encourage the development and greater use of collaboratives. The recommendations predominantly address steps for state-level action.

**Summary of Recommendations**

1. Enact legislation to improve the governance, structure, accountability and oversight of educational collaboratives

2. Provide incentives for inter-district collaboration

3. Centralize resources and information on collaborative programs and services

4. Provide resources for ESE to support and promote collaboration

## 1. ENACT LEGISLATION TO IMPROVE THE GOVERNANCE, STRUCTURE, ACCOUNTABILITY AND OVERSIGHT OF EDUCATIONAL COLLABORATIVES

While the current statute briefly explains the process for initiating and forming an educational collaborative, it is silent with respect to how collaboratives should operate, the types of services they should provide, the process by which they will be held accountable to their member districts, and the specific performance standards by which they will be reviewed and measured. In order to resolve these existing uncertainties, the Commission concluded that legislation is needed to establish a more formal legal framework for collaboratives, and recommends that the legislature take the following steps:

- **Amend MGL Chapter 40, Section 4E to update the language and provisions governing educational collaboratives**. The amended language should:
  - Clarify which state laws and regulations apply to collaboratives;
  - Define the governance structure of collaboratives, including the roles and responsibilities of member school committees, the Board of Directors and the Executive Director in the operation, management and oversight of the collaborative;
  - Describe the range and scope of services that collaboratives are authorized to offer (e.g. special education, transportation services, personnel services, grants management, etc.);
  - Require that collaboratives develop and maintain appropriate internal control procedures to ensure greater accountability;
  - Establish data reporting requirements for collaboratives to report necessary information to: (i) the Board of Directors; (ii) member School Committees; and (iii) ESE;
  - Require an annual evaluation of programs and services; and
  - Clarify financial structure and funding source, including eligibility for state grants.

- **Direct and empower ESE to regulate the activities of educational collaboratives and to promulgate regulations under MGL Chapter 40, Section 4E.**
  As previously mentioned, the statute governing collaboratives does not provide ESE with oversight authority to monitor and regulate the activities of educational collaboratives. Therefore, additional statutory language is necessary to ensure that ESE has authority to provide greater oversight and promulgate regulations for implementing various statutory requirements under MGL Chapter 40, Section 4E. Once this authority has been established, ESE should be directed to:
  - Develop and implement accountability standards for collaboratives, including appropriate fiscal controls and fund accounting procedures;
  - Develop performance standards for specific collaborative programs and/or services;
  - Develop and implement standardized reporting procedures for collaboratives to report relevant financial, performance and programmatic data to: (i) the Board of Directors; (ii) member school committees; and (iii) ESE; and
  - Establish the procedures and guidelines for performing annual audits.

  The Massachusetts Organization of Education Collaboratives (MOEC) should cooperate and coordinate with ESE staff to develop these accountability standards and reporting procedures.

- **Direct the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education to update its 1988 policy regarding educational collaboratives to ensure consistency.**
  Section VI of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education's Policy document on education collaboratives requires that the Policy be reviewed and updated at least every five years. However, over 20 years have elapsed since the Policy was last updated in 1988. Many of the requirements and

statutory references in the 1988 Policy are obsolete, resulting in ineffective state oversight of collaborative activities. Therefore, the Board should update its policy to ensure that it is consistent with the laws and regulations governing collaboratives and provides for proper oversight of collaboratives.

### 2. INCREASE INCENTIVES FOR COLLABORATION

To facilitate inter-district collaboration, the state should provide greater incentives for school districts to participate in educational collaboratives or other cooperative programs or consortiums that allow for a more efficient use of resources. ESE should design methods to encourage districts to pool resources to provide collaborative programs, and should sponsor forums designed to examine and support enhanced inter-district collaboration. ESE and the legislature should also continue to support and develop innovative statewide cost-savings initiatives such as the *Massachusetts Special Needs Transportation Pilot Project* described on page 32. This pilot program provided an incentive for districts to collaborate in providing transportation for special education students and helped to expand the network of transportation collaboratives across the Commonwealth.

### 3. CENTRALIZE RESOURCES FOR COLLABORATION

To expand collaboration throughout the Commonwealth, the state must play an active role in disseminating information and promoting opportunities for greater collaboration. Information and resources on educational collaboratives and other cooperative services should be centralized and made available on a single website for easy access. The Commission recommends that ESE update its website to include a central location for this information, and further recommends that resources and information on collaboration be consolidated with the resources and information on regionalization, as discussed in Section II of this report.

### 4. PROVIDE ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR ESE

Ultimately, the Commission's recommendations place ESE at the center of a new accountability and oversight structure for collaboratives. As with the recommendations related to regionalization, additional funding and resources will be needed in order for ESE to provide the guidance, oversight and support proposed by the Commission's recommendations.

Local school committees play a pivotal role in governing and managing the day-to-day operation of the educational collaborative to which they belong. While the Commission recommends that the state assume a greater role in providing oversight and fostering the development and use of collaboratives, district leadership and involvement is critically and equally important.

# CONCLUSION

School districts carry out a number of important functions in supporting their schools, including managerial, political, and instructional functions. Executing these functions requires capacity at multiple levels. Therefore, building and sustaining capacity is integral to the ability of school districts to fulfill these core responsibilities and provide all students with a broad range of high-quality educational opportunities. For many school districts, collaboration and regionalization represent practical solutions to existing educational, fiscal and capital issues and can help districts to increase capacity and deliver educational services more effectively and efficiently.

The recommendations offered by the Commission achieve two main purposes, which are: first, to propose a diagnostic capacity assessment tool that can be used to perform an objective district capacity analysis, the results of which can be used to guide conversations about regionalization and collaboration and inform strategic planning decisions for local stakeholders; and second, to offer statutory, regulatory and policy proposals for addressing existing barriers to collaboration and regionalization and to identify opportunities to facilitate greater collaboration and regionalization across the Commonwealth. While the recommendations include viable strategies to advance collaboration and regionalization throughout the Commonwealth, they are contingent upon two key factors: 1) the provision of additional funding; and 2) ESE's ability to assume the additional responsibilities and execute the various support and oversight functions proposed by the Commission. The Commission acknowledges the significant financial limitations that the state is currently facing, and recognizes the difficulty of securing additional funding and resources to support these recommendations. However, if the state is serious about encouraging and facilitating school district collaboration and regionalization, as with any meaningful reform effort, it needs to be willing to provide additional resources to support this endeavor.

The Commission believes that the core responsibility of school districts is to provide all children with a broad array of high-quality and developmentally appropriate educational opportunities that will enable them to become productive members of the workforce and citizens in a democratic society. Collaboration and regionalization can help school districts move towards this goal by building capacity, improving efficiency, and achieving savings—savings which can then be returned to the classroom.

# APPENDIX 1. *Recommendations For Regional Transition*

1) **Merging school district central offices**

Considerable variation exists among school districts in terms of the functions, staffing, and organization of their central offices. Therefore, it is not feasible to recommend a "one-size-fits-all" approach to merging central offices when two or more communities have decided to regionalize. Rather than developing a single process for merging central offices, the Transition Subcommittee focused on identifying the key questions and issues that all members of a newly formed regional district need to consider in order to successfully plan for merging central offices.

In order to develop these recommendations, Paul Schaefer of the Transition Subcommittee sent out a survey to members of the Massachusetts Association for School Building Officials in order to gather feedback on key questions that every school district needs to consider before merging, with particular focus on the merger of school district central office buildings, staff, and operational systems.

In the survey, Business Administrators were asked the following question: *"As a sitting Business Administrator, if your district was considering a merger, what top five questions or concerns would you like to explore before the decision is made?"*

The responses that the subcommittee received help to shape the following recommendations, which include a list of key questions and considerations that communities and stakeholders should discuss before merging central offices:

(1) Are the curriculums of the contributing districts currently aligned and well-articulated?
(2) What are the staffing implications? The new Table of Organization will need to be discussed. What happens to staff who will be losing positions?
(3) What are the existing accounting and student information systems? How do we consolidate them? Which system do we select? Will the payroll function be in house or out-sourced?
(4) Technology/office space considerations- Where will our central offices be located? How do we make sure that all users have access to the right systems? Email & voicemail are forwarded to one central place?
(5) Assume the goal is to apportion tasks to existing support staff based on function (not school) under new regional structure. Review current staffing for opportunities to put people in appropriate functions.
(6) Document existing internal and external controls across all accounting functions. What needs to be enhanced? Document all. Review most recent audits looking for control enhancement opportunities.
(7) Ancillary Services: In the areas of Facility Management, Transportation Services and the Lunch Program, what systems and/or contractors will be used after regionalization?
(8) Communication
    a. Get all affected employees in a room & make sure they know the plan. Keep communicating all the time to reduce confusion/anxiety.

b. Just as much as the staff needs to know what the plan is, so do the members of the affected communities (parents & students). What methodologies will be used to publicize the process and outcomes?

**2) Merging collective bargaining agreements**

MGL Chapter 71, Section 42B describes the rights of employees in regional school districts. The law states that "personnel employed by regional school district committees shall initially be placed on the salary schedule of the regional school district so that the compensation paid to such school personnel shall not be less than the compensation received by such school personnel while previously employed by a local school committee." There is a prevailing misconception that this provision requires that when two or more districts merge, the regional school district must immediately adopt the highest salary schedule among the joining districts. However, the law only guarantees that personnel employed by the new regional district will not have their compensation reduced below the level they received in their previous district. Regional school districts may and do adopt differentiated salary schedules so that personnel retain the salary level of their previous district until the regional school district renegotiates staff contracts through the collective bargaining process.

During this process, all parts of the existing collective bargaining agreement (CBA) must be negotiated. While it is understood that in the past the parties have come to terms at the better or best level, it is not guaranteed. It is possible that there might not be a new CBA in place on the first operational day of the new district. The Transition subcommittee considered that here may be a need for supervised elections to determine representation during the collective bargaining process. The subcommittee proposes the following recommendations in order to address some of the issues that arise during the collective bargaining process:

- During the planning process, all of the affected bargaining units should meet several times with each other, as well as joint meetings with the management officials of the participating communities; and
- Amend the current law to clarify what should happen when the affected employees belong to different organizations. For example: who represents the teachers if both the Massachusetts Teacher's Association (MTA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) Massachusetts have representation for the contributing districts? The same would be true for cases where a class of employees in one district are represented and in the other districts, they are not.

**3) Transition Period: 2-3 year process**

The transition process is not one that is completed quickly. In looking at the data provided by recently formed regional schools and DESE, the Subcommittee determined that forming a region can be a two to three year process, and therefore communities that are considering regionalization need to allow substantial time for planning and implementation. There are basically two stages for the process:

Stage 1: Planning: This could take from a year to a year and a half just to get to the decision point.

Stage 2: Transition: This could take from a year to a year and a half to complete once the "yes" decision has been made.

# **APPENDIX 2.** *A Framework for a "Step-by-Step" Transition Process*

*The following framework was developed by the Massachusetts Association of Regional Schools (MARS) under a contract with ESE. MARS is currently working on expanding this blueprint to include additional information (e.g. detailed procedures, sample documents, etc.) and resources for various steps of the transition process.*

**<u>**Steps for Forming a New Region** (Transition)</u>**

1. Interim School Committee Appointed according to Regional Agreement
2. First meeting of Interim School Committee called by a member town Superintendent
    a. Superintendent calls the meeting to order to elect Chair
    b. New Chair conductions elections for:
        1. Vice Chair
        2. Secretary
        3. Recording Secretary for minutes
    c. Interim Committee discuss hiring a treasurer
    d. Interim Committee discuss hiring legal Counsel
3. Transition Budget
4. Transition Administration Appointed:
    a. Superintendent
    b. Business Administrator
    c. Treasurer
    d. Consultants
5. Hire:
    a. Legal Counsel
    b. Financial Advisor
    c. Bond Counsel
6. Develop Transition Timeframe
7. Calendar for School Committee Meetings
8. Calendar of Event
    a. Meetings with Selectmen
    b. Meetings with Fin Com
    c. Town Meeting Dates
9. Obtain Federal ID #
    a. Open Bank Accounts
10. Obtain State ID #
11. Obtain DESE Number #
12. Obtain Food Service ID#
13. Develop process for new Policy Book
14. Establish Sub Committees
    a. Communications
    b. Negotiations
    c. Budget
    d. Policy
    e. Transportation
15. Technology

a. Website
b. Email system
d. Hardware for Central Office
e. Hardware and Software for Instruction
f. EPIMS
g. SIMS
h. Phone System

16. Business Operations
    a. Accounting System
    b. Payroll System
    c. Retirement Systems
        1. Teacher
        2. County
17. Hire Auditor
18. If building a new building:
    a. Contact MSBA
    b. Appoint a Building Committee
    c. Building Study
19. Budget Development for next year
    a. Grants
20. Policy Development
21. Instruction
22. Curriculum
23. Professional Development
24. Staffing for new region
    a. Administration
    b. Teachers
    c. Support Personnel
25. Athletics
26. Special Education
27. Food Service

# **APPENDIX 3.** *District Membership in Educational Collaboratives*

*NOTE: The following grid was created using FY11 data provided by ESE. The format of the grid was adapted from the following source: Craig M. Stanley, Massachusetts Collaboratives: Making the most of Education Dollars, Pioneer Institute for Public Policy Research, http://www.pioneerinstitute.org/pdf/wp23.pdf (June 2005).*

| | ACCEPT | Assabet Valley | BICO | Blackstone | CAPS | C.A.S.E. | Cape Cod | Central Mass | CHARMS | South Coast | EDCO | FLLAC | GLEC | HEC | LABBB | Lower Pioneer | Merrimack | NEED | North River | North Shore | Pilgrim Area | READS | SEEM | Shore | SMARTS | South Berkshire | South Shore | So. Worcester | SMEC | TEC | **TOTAL** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ABINGTON | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | 2 |
| ACTON | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 2 |
| Acton-Boxborough | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 2 |
| ACUSHNET | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | 1 |
| Adams-Cheshire | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 0 |
| AGAWAM | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| AMESBURY | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| AMHERST | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| Amherst-Pelham | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| ANDOVER | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| ARLINGTON | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 2 |
| Ashburnham-Westminster | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 2 |
| ASHLAND | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| Athol-Royalston | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| ATTLEBORO | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | 2 |
| AUBURN | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | 1 |
| AVON | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | 2 |
| AYER-SHIRLEY | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| BARNSTABLE | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| BEDFORD | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | ◆ | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 3 |
| BELCHERTOWN | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| BELLINGHAM | | | ◆ | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 2 |
| BELMONT | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 2 |
| BERKLEY | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | 2 |
| BERKLEY-SOMERSET | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 0 |
| Berkshire Hills | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | 1 |
| BERLIN | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| Berlin-Boylston | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| BEVERLY | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| BILLERICA | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| Blackstone-Millville | | | ◆ | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 2 |
| BOSTON | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| BOURNE | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| BOXBOROUGH | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 2 |
| BOXFORD | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| BOYLSTON | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| BRAINTREE | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | 1 |
| BREWSTER | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| Bridgewater-Raynham | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | 2 |
| BRIMFIELD | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | 1 |
| BROCKTON | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 0 |
| BROOKFIELD | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | 1 |
| BROOKLINE | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| BURLINGTON | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| CAMBRIDGE | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | 1 |
| CANTON | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| CARLISLE | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 2 |
| CARVER | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | ◆ | | | | | | | | | 2 |
| Central Berkshire | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 0 |
| CHATHAM | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| CHELMSFORD | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |

| | ACCEPT | Assabet Valley | BICO | Blackstone | CAPS | C.A.S.E. | Cape Cod | Central Mass | CHARMS | South Coast | EDCO | FLLAC | GLEC | HEC | LABBB | Lower Pioneer | Merrimack | NEED | North River | North Shore | Pilgrim Area | READS | SEEM | Shore | SMARTS | South Berkshire | South Shore | So. Worcester | SMEC | TEC | **TOTAL** |
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| CHELSEA | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | 1 |
| Chesterfield-Goshen | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| CHICOPEE | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 0 |
| CLARKSBURG | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 0 |
| CLINTON | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| COHASSET | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | 1 |
| CONCORD | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 2 |
| Concord-Carlisle | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 2 |
| CONWAY | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| DANVERS | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| DARTMOUTH | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | 1 |
| DEDHAM | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | 1 |
| DEERFIELD | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| Dennis-Yarmouth | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | 3 |
| Dighton-Rehoboth | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | 2 |
| DOUGLAS | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 0 |
| DOVER | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | 2 |
| Dover-Sherborn | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | 2 |
| DRACUT | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| Dudley-Charlton | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | 1 |
| DUXBURY | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| EAST BRIDGEWATER | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | 2 |
| EAST LONGMEADOW | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| EASTHAM | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| EASTHAMPTON | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| EASTON | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | 2 |
| EDGARTOWN | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 0 |
| ERVING | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| EVERETT | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | 1 |
| FAIRHAVEN | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | 1 |
| FALL RIVER | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| FALMOUTH | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | 2 |
| Farmington River | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | 1 |
| FITCHBURG | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 2 |
| FLORIDA | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 0 |
| FOXBOROUGH | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| FRAMINGHAM | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| FRANKLIN | ◆ | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 2 |
| Freetown-Lakeville | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| Frontier | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| GARDNER | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 2 |
| Gateway | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 0 |
| GEORGETOWN | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| Gill-Montague | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| GLOUCESTER | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| GOSNOLD | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 0 |
| GRAFTON | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | 1 |
| GRANBY | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| GRANVILLE | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 0 |
| GREENFIELD | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| Groton-Dunstable | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| HADLEY | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| HALIFAX | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| Hamilton-Wenham | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| Hampden-Wilbraham | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| Hampshire | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| HANCOCK | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 0 |
| HANOVER | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| HARVARD | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |

| | ACCEPT | Assabet Valley | BICO | Blackstone | CAPS | C.A.S.E. | Cape Cod | Central Mass | CHARMS | South Coast | EDCO | FLLAC | GLEC | HEC | LABBB | Lower Pioneer | Merrimack | NEED | North River | North Shore | Pilgrim Area | READS | SEEM | Shore | SMARTS | South Berkshire | South Shore | So. Worcester | SMEC | TEC | **TOTAL** |
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| HARWICH | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | 2 |
| HATFIELD | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| HAVERHILL | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| Hawlemont | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| HINGHAM | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | 1 |
| HOLBROOK | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| HOLLAND | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | 1 |
| HOLLISTON | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | 2 |
| HOLYOKE | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 0 |
| HOPEDALE | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| HOPKINTON | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | 2 |
| HUDSON | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| HULL | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | 1 |
| IPSWICH | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| King Philip | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| KINGSTON | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| LANESBOROUGH | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 0 |
| LAWRENCE | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| LEE | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | 1 |
| LEICESTER | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | 1 |
| LENOX | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | 1 |
| LEOMINSTER | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| LEVERETT | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| LEXINGTON | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 2 |
| LINCOLN | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 2 |
| Lincoln-Sudbury | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 2 |
| LITTLETON | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| LONGMEADOW | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| LOWELL | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| LUDLOW | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| LUNENBURG | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| LYNN | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| LYNNFIELD | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | 1 |
| MALDEN | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | 1 |
| Manchester Essex | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| MANSFIELD | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | 2 |
| MARBLEHEAD | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| MARION | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | ◆ | | 2 |
| MARLBOROUGH | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| MARSHFIELD | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | ◆ | | | | 2 |
| Marthas Vineyard | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| Masconomet | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| MASHPEE | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| MATTAPOISETT | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | ◆ | | 2 |
| MAYNARD | | ◆ | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 2 |
| MEDFIELD | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | 2 |
| MEDFORD | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | 1 |
| MEDWAY | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| MELROSE | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | 1 |
| Mendon-Upton | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| METHUEN | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| MIDDLEBOROUGH | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| MIDDLETON | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| MILFORD | | | ◆ | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 2 |
| MILLBURY | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | 2 |
| MILLIS | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| MILTON | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| Mohawk Trail | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| MONSON | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 0 |

| | ACCEPT | Assabet Valley | BICO | Blackstone | CAPS | C.A.S.E. | Cape Cod | Central Mass | CHARMS | South Coast | EDCO | FLLAC | GLEC | HEC | LABBB | Lower Pioneer | Merrimack | NEED | North River | North Shore | Pilgrim Area | READS | SEEM | Shore | SMARTS | South Berkshire | South Shore | So. Worcester | SMEC | TEC | **TOTAL** |
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| Mount Greylock | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 0 |
| NAHANT | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| NANTUCKET | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| Narragansett | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| Nashoba | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| NATICK | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | 2 |
| Nauset | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| NEEDHAM | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | 1 |
| NEW BEDFORD | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | 1 |
| New Salem-Wendell | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| NEWBURYPORT | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| NEWTON | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| NORFOLK | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| NORTH ADAMS | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 0 |
| NORTH ANDOVER | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| NORTH ATTLEBOROUGH | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| NORTH BROOKFIELD | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | 1 |
| North Middlesex | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| NORTH READING | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | 1 |
| NORTHAMPTON | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| Northboro-Southboro | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| NORTHBOROUGH | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| NORTHBRIDGE | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | 2 |
| NORTON | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| NORWELL | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | 1 |
| NORWOOD | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | 1 |
| OAK BLUFFS | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 0 |
| Old Rochester | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | 1 |
| ORANGE | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 2 |
| ORLEANS | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| OXFORD | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | 1 |
| PALMER | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 0 |
| PEABODY | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| PELHAM | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| PEMBROKE | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| Pentucket | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 0 |
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| Pioneer Valley | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| PITTSFIELD | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 0 |
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| PLYMOUTH | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
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| Quaboag Regional | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | 1 |
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| RANDOLPH | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | 1 |
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| REVERE | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | 1 |
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| SALEM | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
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| SAUGUS | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | ◆ | | | | | | | 2 |
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| | ACCEPT | Assabet Valley | BICO | Blackstone | CAPS | C.A.S.E. | Cape Cod | Central Mass | CHARMS | South Coast | EDCO | FLLAC | GLEC | HEC | LABBB | Lower Pioneer | Merrimack | NEED | North River | North Shore | Pilgrim Area | READS | SEEM | Shore | SMARTS | South Berkshire | South Shore | So. Worcester | SMEC | TEC | **TOTAL** |
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| SHUTESBURY | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| Silver Lake | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
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| SOMERVILLE | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | 1 |
| SOUTH HADLEY | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| SOUTHAMPTON | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| SOUTHBOROUGH | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
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| Southern Berkshire | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | 1 |
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| Spencer-E Brookfield | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | 1 |
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| WAKEFIELD | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | 1 |
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| WEST BRIDGEWATER | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | 2 |
| WEST SPRINGFIELD | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ◆ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
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| WESTPORT | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 0 |
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| | ACCEPT | Assabet Valley | BICO | Blackstone | CAPS | C.A.S.E. | Cape Cod | Central Mass | CHARMS | South Coast | EDCO | FLLAC | GLEC | HEC | LABBB | Lower Pioneer | Merrimack | NEED | North River | North Shore | Pilgrim Area | READS | SEEM | Shore | SMARTS | South Berkshire | South Shore | So. Worcester | SMEC | TEC | **TOTAL** |
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# **APPENDIX 4.** *Regional Vocational Technical School Systems*

*The following recommendations, submitted by Dr. Michael Fitzpatrick, were not adopted by the Commission. They Dr. Fitzpatrick served on the Commission as the designee from the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents (MASS).*

The following recommendations are designed to improve access to career and technical education for the Massachusetts communities that currently have no affiliation with any of the state's regional vocational technical school districts, county agricultural schools, or urban vocational schools. The recommendations are bolstered by the research-based findings of the Harvard University Graduate School of Education report entitled "Pathways to Prosperity" and the empirical economic impact data from Georgetown and Northeastern universities research centers.

Recognizing that these findings confirm that some of the most effective 21st century skills training occurs within the vocational technical school systems in Massachusetts, the Commonwealth should advance the formation of ten additional regional career and technical school districts in the next decade, adding one new system per year. To accomplish this, the state, via the Massachusetts School Building Authority and the just-announced office of the Associate Commissioner for Vocational, Workforce, and College Readiness Programs, should consider a competitive architectural design process to identify and secure pre-qualified prototype blueprints for the first five designs, and a second competition for the second five designs. In addition to the additional acoustical, ventilation, electrical, and plumbing considerations necessary to ensure a safe and healthy physical environment for a career and technical center, the design specifications should require that these prototype plans be highly sensitive to the need for flexibility and the ability to transition shop layouts to reflect evolving competencies and industry validated skill sets of today's ever-changing workplace.

These new regional vocational systems should be required to forge affiliations with area post-secondary institutions and private sector employers, and make maximum use of high quality, cost-effective services available through educational collaboratives.

Advancing these new regional systems requires political sensitivity and respect for the existing regional career and technical systems for which academic performance and financial indicators confirm effectiveness and the existence of a positive educational climate.

# APPENDIX 5. *Public Testimony*

SUBMITTED BY:
**Alice DeLuca**
Minuteman Regional Voc-Tech
School Committee, *Vice-Chair*

As I noted at the hearing on May 6, regionalization was a part of a successful school improvement movement in the Nashoba district in the late 1990s. For this K-12, 3-town district that now serves approximately 3,500 students, curriculum K-12 was aligned with the state frameworks and some administrative services were consolidated. The three districts from which it was made were one single town K-8 and one 2-town K-8 Union which fed in to a 3-town high school. The incentive that finally made the towns approve a K-12 region was a million dollar one-time payment (in mid-1990s dollars) from the state. The incentive was too good for the towns to pass up.

Is there an optimal size for a school district? Recent studies argue that there is, and that the size is larger than the average Massachusetts charter school size of 455 students but smaller than the city of Boston (56,000+), with an optimal size being up to 3,000 students living in close geographic proximity. 1 Perhaps the state should be attempting to "right-size" school districts, in the same way that districts themselves are attempting to right-size at the building level. Some districts should probably be smaller, and some larger. Arguably, the growing forest of small charter school districts (with combined annual budgetary obligations of nearly a third of a billion dollars) should be consolidated with others, and some
of the huge districts that do not have stellar educational results should be subdivided in to smaller districts.2

Of the nearly 400 existing Massachusetts districts, there are 154 with fewer than 1,000 students; 19 of these are regional vocational technical or agricultural school districts and a surprising 56 of these are individual charter schools. **Among these "under 1,000" districts, there are only 6 regular public school districts that stand alone and educate their students without either a tuition or regional agreement with another district or regional CTE.** Therefore, with the exception of the charter districts, most of these "under 1,000" districts are already familiar with the regional model.

On the "huge school district" end of the spectrum, almost 20% of the ~1 million students in the state attend districts with more than 10,000 students. Roughly 100 districts (about 25%) have over 3,000 students. It is likely that many of these districts are too large to be efficient. There are about 135 districts in the most manageable range of between 1,000 and 3,000 students. In the next few pages I will address some key points and offer ideas for your consideration.

**A key question**
What is the purpose of increased regionalization? If adding regions is meant to reduce the number of points of contact between the Commissioner and Superintendents, two solutions present themselves:

1.The easiest solution would be to install approximately 8 regional middle managers, each supported by perhaps one staff member and significant electronic linkages to the DESE headquarters. This would allow the Commissioner to interact primarily with these managers who could then oversee the districts, regional districts, CTE districts and charter schools in the geographic catchment area they covered. According to my sources in CTE, there used to be regional administrators of this type which were eliminated many years ago to save money.

2. Alternatively, a limited number of geographic areas could be identified, with all superintendents and directors of charter schools in each area responsible for electing one of them to be a point of contact for the DESE. This would be interesting, in that it would bring together the regional, stand-alone, CTE and charter leaders in each area, and the system would not create new paid middle managers. It would also allow the teams operating in the far western part of the state to advocate for their particular needs. Geographic definition would be preferable to population-density, because if the system were totally based on population then all of the attention would be dedicated to the urban areas.

If the purpose of regionalizing is to improve educational offerings for students, the solutions might be different – including sharing specialist teachers, materials and books, and teacher training.

**Size of District – constrain the upper limit**
The size of the regional district school committee is very important: the number of individuals who must commute long distances to hold public meetings that comply with the Open Meeting Law, the difficulty of scheduling such meetings, and the number of communities that must vote on the school budget. There are already regional districts that require a vote of more than a dozen town meetings to make decisions. This necessitates the cultivation of relationships between the superintendent and the town boards of all these towns, and attendance at multiple town boards and meetings. This inefficient system requires that the superintendent devote large amounts of time to maintaining these political relationships. Committee members must travel over 40 minutes each way to attend open meetings that comply with the
law. This makes holding meetings very difficult.

**Town Meeting government**
Town meeting is not like the television "town meeting." It is a form of government that is mostly unfamiliar to city dwellers. Town meeting is the legislative body of the town, whereby the individual taxpayers get together to vote directly on how to spend their collected taxes. The citizens at town meeting may choose to buy a fire truck, roof a building, install a sidewalk, purchase textbooks etc. In a single-town district, individual taxpayers may even vote on the individual line
items in the school budget.

If the town meeting voters decide to join a region, they give up the control of the detail of the school budget and are left with approving/disapproving one single line item for the entire regional school budget. The voters do not like to give up that control over how their taxes are spent lightly. That is the primary reason why some incentive is necessary. (See the Salem News 2011, May 16 for an article describing Hamilton's town meeting rejecting their regional school budget this
week.3)

If the parent-voters are to support a regionalization, there must be educational advantages for their children. They will perceive that their children will be sent out of town, be given less than other towns in the region, suddenly find their children being taught by a teacher who was not wanted in another town (because of union rules and seniority etc. ) Therefore, the educational incentives must include more educational offerings, not fewer. Also, there must be some provision for preserving local "points of pride." (See suggestion #18)

**Do regions really save money?**
I will not go in to great detail here because it would be possible to write a thesis on this single topic. However, I will point out one item that is often overlooked - In a town school district, all of the insurance is within the town budget. When the towns regionalize, the medical insurance contracts for the school employees go out of the town budget and in to the regional line item. The town's budget for insurance will appear to diminish dramatically and the regional school budget will absorb that cost, but all that has really occurred is a transfer from one municipality to another. Also, it is necessary to bring all teacher contracts up to the top scale, and savings from reduction in force only occur once, in the first year.

**Suggestions for no or low-cost incentives to promote regionalization**

1) Change the language in MGL Chapter 71 Section 68 that creates an existing misconception about the duty to educate. The first sentence of this law says "**Every town shall provide and maintain a sufficient number of schoolhouses, properly furnished and conveniently situated for the accommodation of all children therein entitled to attend public schools**." The intention here was clearly to ensure that every town provided for the education of resident children, but the language limits the thinking of the voter. Why not change the language to "Every town shall provide adequate opportunity for the education of all resident students, either in town-maintained buildings, properly furnished and conveniently situated within the town limits, or through membership in regional school districts in collaboration with other communities." A few more adjustments would be necessary at the end of that section as well.

2) Along the same lines, change the language in the following sections to allow districts, including charter schools and regional school districts, to share superintendents (business managers, facilities managers etc.) by adding the following language to the following sections. Add: "**Nothing in the section shall be construed to prevent a school committee from voting to employ a superintendent and/or business manager or other administrator jointly with other school districts in the area." To**
    a. **Chapter 71 Section 16** " (*l*) To employ a superintendent of schools who may also be **a** superintendent of one or more of the towns comprising said district" "
    b. **Chapter 71 Section 59**. The school committee of a town not in a superintendency union or district shall employ **a** superintendent of schools and fix his compensation."
    c. **Chapter 71 Section 59A** "In any town, having a valuation of less than two million five hundred thousand dollars, which is not a member of a superintendency union under the provision of section sixty-one, the school committee shall, subject to the approval of the department, employ a full-time or a part-time superintendent of schools,"
    d. **Chapter 71 Section 41**:" A school committee may award a contract to a superintendent of schools or a school business administrator for periods not exceeding six years which may provide for the salary, fringe benefits, and other conditions of employment, including but not limited to, severance pay, relocation expenses, reimbursement for expenses incurred in the performance of duties or office, liability insurance, and leave for said superintendent or school business administrator. Nothing in this section shall be construed to prevent a school committee from voting to employ a superintendent of schools who has completed three or more years' service to serve at its discretion."

3) Change **Chapter 71 Section 14B** language. Change "**The said regional district planning board may recommend that there shall be established a regional school district which may include all the towns represented by its membership, or alternatively, any specified combination of towns.**"…….to allow cities to join a region. All that is needed is to add the words "or cities" after the word "towns" wherever the town (s) is referred to in this section. Alternatively, the word "towns" can be changed to "municipalities" or "communities." This would allow the existing regions to start working with cities, instead of being limited to towns.

4) While most towns and cities participate in at least one regional district, there are 117 municipalities that are not members of any of the existing 26 career and technical school (CTE) regional districts. There is a huge opportunity here: duplication of CTE programs is expensive, and with few exceptions the very small CTE programs currently housed within local high schools do not offer enough career options for interested students. Making it easier for towns/cities to join existing regional CTE districts (there are 19 CTE and agricultural school districts with fewer than 1,000 students, of which Minuteman is one), would be a great step forwards to making better use of these already existing regional districts. Towns that choose to join should be held harmless, and should be given some extra benefits, similar to the financial incentives that used to be given to towns that agreed to regionalize.

Impediments to joining include: requirement for acceptance by 100% of local legislative authorities (town meeting) , the difficulties of educating the communities about the benefits of joining the region, perceived loss of control, lack of financial advantage to becoming part of the region.

5) Allow regional school district committees to extend an "offer of conditional membership" to other school districts– give the districts an option to operate as a trial region, perhaps for an initial 3 year period, to try a gradual merging – a chance to prove the economies of scale in purchasing etc. without going so far as to eliminate administrators or combine unions. Provide an incentive in the form of regional transportation reimbursement – increasing the line item to add money for these new expansions would be key. Otherwise, the existing pot of regional transportation money would just be spread thinner…..

6) Add language to **Chapter 71 Section 7A** to ensure that the amount of money in the regional transportation reimbursement line item is increased whenever any new districts or programs join the pool of entities that expect reimbursement. Currently, there is no provision to do this, which means that this last remaining incentive to regionalize is actually being spread thinner each time a new region joins.

7) Encourage agreements between school districts to provide summer programming, not just for struggling students but for students who would like to complete high school.
8) Facilitate inter-district agreements – perhaps provide boilerplate agreements – that would allow regional CTE districts to provide education for kids on the waiting lists at other CTE schools without having to use the Choice system – the Choice tuition is prohibitively low – only $5K – less than half of the lowest CTE school cost per pupil.

9) Encourage MSBA to provide a minimum of 65% reimbursement to any regional district that adds at least one additional town or city to its membership. Current reimbursement rates may be too low to function as a real incentive for those towns that already pay over 80% of their school budgets from the local property tax. In large CTE districts, the capacity of the member towns varies greatly. The aggregate reimbursement may seem acceptable in one town but not in another, and since any one town has veto power over a building project in a regional district this means that no project can occur.
10) Use a state-wide online application form for CTE schools and centralize the data. Make the default be the student's home CTE district, but automatically offer the students space in another district if there is no seat available in their home CTE district. There would be some opposition to this from within the CTE administration community but this would help to get students aligned with available CTE seats, and reduce waiting lists. Provide, on the DESE website, program-based information such as "if you are interested in the Chapter 74 Carpentry program… here is a list of schools where you can find this training." This would help students who want that program to know where to apply.

11) Add an incentive for saving communities money. For example, for demonstrated savings on paper purchases (a perennial favorite), allow that district to enter a lottery for some type of computer networking equipment.

12) Provide grant money to remote communities that have inadequate computer bandwidth, allowing them access to Virtual High School or similar programs for their schools.

13) Ensure that towns/cities considered for consolidation into a region are next to each other (geographically) and are therefore strong candidates for saving money by regionalizing. Require that 1/16 of the ratio of the district perimeter squared divided by the area is as close to 1 as possible, to ensure that districts are not too spread out - the resulting shape would be closest to circular or square. Preferably, ensure that no child riding a bus in the region will be required to be on the bus longer than 40 minutes each way.

14) Create regional charter school district management, combining several charter schools in to a region, since 56 of the 155 districts with fewer than 1,000 students are charter schools.

15) Highlight and incentivize the use of Chapter 7:

a) Add an incentive for utilizing programs available through **Chapter 7 Section 22A**: "Notwithstanding any general or special law relating to collective purchasing, but subject to all other laws regulating public purchases and competitive bidding, the commonwealth and 1 or more of its cities, towns, districts, counties, authorities or commonwealth or Horace Mann charter schools, or 2 or more cities, towns, districts, counties, authorities or commonwealth or Horace Mann charter schools, hereinafter called political subdivisions, **may make purchases of materials, supplies, equipment or services through the state purchasing agent** subject to such rules, regulations and procedures as may be established from time to time by the purchasing agent; provided, however, that the political subdivision shall accept sole responsibility for any payment due the vendor for its share of such purchase."
b) Create boilerplate for joint purchasing contracts - these contracts (and economies of scale) can actually bemade without any region being formed. Make this purchasing as easy as going to a large corporate website like Amazon.com. Perhaps, arrange with Amazon.com or Staples to provide a bulk service to school districts.

16) Change the language in Ch 71 Section 14B (g) – it currently says "**The method by which the agreement may be amended.**" Change that language to encourage flexibility at the inception of such districts – such as "a reasonably flexible method by which the agreement may be amended, necessitating the affirmative vote of only 2/3 of the member communities or a majority of the votes cast." Note that even this provision did not help in the recent rejection of the Ayer-Shirley feasibility study which is now being re-voted after failing by 2 dozen votes.

17) Since it is always easier to make something new than to fix what is broken, add language to allow for the formation of a totally new kind of region: Flex District. The Flex District would incorporate as manytowns/districts/collaboratives/regions as wished to sign up, as long as the number of students in the initial district is less than 3,000 – to allow for more inter-district sharing of resources, administrators, facilities etc. Include language that when the district reaches 4,000 students the school committee will consider whether to realign the district in to smaller districts. A BOCES model could be considered, some type of governance or administration that could provide services to a large number of districts in a geographic area.

18) Encourage regionalizing districts to set aside a line item in each school building budget for "site-based management" that would be based on the number of pupils in the building ($x per pupil * # of pupils) and would allow the individual school's school council to preserve its "point of pride" programs throughout the regionalization process and beyond – a favorite music, art etc. program – so that the distinctiveness of the school is not lost. This method was successful in Nashoba.

19) Encourage regionalizing districts to limit the size of their regional school committee – fewer than a dozen members are best. Discourage proportional representation, because committees made by this method are too large and unwieldy.

20) Ensure that regionalizing districts understand that any teacher in one of their amalgamated unions can bump – this means that a dual-certified social studies and math teacher whose social studies position is eliminated in one of the newly regionalized schools can automatically take a newly created math position in one of the other schools. At the start of the region, this can have a randomizing effect on educational improvement.

21) Add incentives for districts that include local transportation needs in their bus contracts. For example, if a district uses empty buses to transport the elderly to grocery stores or to take commuting populations to the commuter rail, they would receive additional % points in regional transportation aid from the state. Again, this would necessitate the growing of the regional transportation line item in the state budget. (Otherwise the other regional schools would suffer a cut.)

**What Not to Do**

1) Imposing a region on towns, the way "regional" charter schools are imposed on the sending towns, is a bad idea. A case in point would be the AMSA Charter School in Marlborough, which described itself as serving Hudson, Marlborough, Maynard and Clinton. Here, the state enabled the creation of a small "regional" district. None of these towns ever voted to join a charter region. The charter school does not report to the town meetings the way the other schools serving these municipalities do. It is contradictory for the department to add dozens of charter school districts, each one serving between 70 and 1600 students (the majority of the charters serve fewer than 500 students) at a cost of **almost a third of a billion dollars per year**, while requesting that remote small town school districts regionalize to save money. As an example of why adding these schools is neither economical nor good education value for the dollar, for the same money as the AMSA Charter budget the 4 "member" districts could collectively hire 22 dedicated math teacher specialists (each fully loaded at $100K) to teach in the 4 "member" district schools, providing real math teaching to all the kids in those districts instead of just to a few students who are bussed away to this charter.

2) Instituting a punitive solution, such as the one used in Maine, to withhold state aid unless districts regionalize, is not effective for those districts where state aid is already minimal. It was noted at the hearing that 3 regions have recently been formed after MSBA pledged to fund over 60% of the cost of their building projects only if they regionalized. These communities already had an appetite to renovate, and they were going to receive more than half of their capital expense from the state, so this threat was successful. In districts where the state contributes less than 20% of the operating budget and less than 50% of capital costs, this type of threat will not be as effective. Also, in some districts even 70% capital reimbursement from the state is not a sufficient incentive.

   One of the new regions is Ayer-Shirley. It could be argued that the Ayer-Shirley regionalization project has not been entirely successful, since 1) Lunenburg did not become a part of the district and 2) the first vote on the High School building feasibility failed in Shirley, possibly due to insufficient voter education.. Ayer-Shirley, which formed in 2010, was the first new region to form since 2001. The state provided $300,000 to help cover transition costs. Lunenburg was not included in the region, so, although Ayer and Shirley did regionalize, a three-town region was not achieved there. Also, in February 2011 the Ayer-Shirley feasibility study for Ayer High School failed to gain support in Shirley (at the ballot) even with 70% reimbursement from MSBA. A simple majority of votes in both towns was needed but they were 27 votes short. Ayer and Shirley will vote again on the same proposal May 21. Lunenburg is now in merger talks with North Middlesex that have "bogged down" due to the retirement of a business manager – a one-year delay is expected. (See the articles on Ayer-Shirley.4 &5)

Regionalization is an arduous process that requires many personnel hours and much voter education. It is extremely costly in many ways, and for it to be completely successful there must be solid incentives for the participating towns. The proverbial carrot is preferable to the stick, when attempting to regionalize disparate municipal entities.

SUBMITTED BY:

**Michael Idoine**
Wendell Finance Committee, *Chairman*

*NOTE: The following represents a synopsis of a case study carried out by the Wendell Finance Committee on the current Aggregate Wealth Model used in the state's education funding formula. The case study was submitted to the Commission by Michael Idione on behalf of the Wendell Finance Committee. For additional information on this case study and other related documents presented to the Commission, refer to the following links:*

- http://www.wendellmass.us/index.php/home/remosiory/Finance-Committee/Studies/Case-Study-of-Regional-School-Assessments-ver-1_07/
- http://www.wendellmass.us/index.php/home/remosiory/Finance-Committee/Studies/Chapter-70-as-an-Education-Flat-Tax/
- http://www.wendellmass.us/index.php/home/remosiory/Finance-Committee/Studies/Modified-Aggregate-Wealth-workbook/

The Wendell Finance Committee (WFC) presented a case study that shows the effects of the current Aggregate Wealth Model for education funding in Massachusetts on the assessments levied on member towns in the Mahar Regional High School District. The Mahar Regional district is characterized by a community membership of particularly wide disparities in wealth, population and number of students (as expressed as the percentage of population).

The WFC study shows how the Aggregate Wealth Model results in significantly high and distorted per-student assessments for one of the towns in the district (Wendell). By a variety of official measures, this town proves to be one of the least wealthy towns in the district.

The percentage of Wendell's population enrolled at Mahar is the smallest of all the towns in the district. The WFC determined that the distorted assessments derive from the elimination of any student enrollment normalizing factor in the calculation of a town's "required local effort" under the Aggregate Wealth Model. The study suggests that similar distortions in assessment are found in districts throughout the Commonwealth.

The WFC proposes a prototype of a modified version of the Aggregate Wealth model that restores balance to the per-pupil assessments while maintaining the current district-by-district allocation of state Chapter 70 aid. Members of the Wendell Finance Committee developed an excel-based workbook that allows their proposed *Modified Aggregate Wealth Model* to be applied to any regional school district in the state.

SUBMITTED BY:

**Joan Schuman**
Collaborative for Educational Services
(CES), *Executive Director*

- Educational collaboratives can play an important role in building the capacity of local school districts no matter what their size. All districts in Massachusetts, no matter what their size, should become members of collaboratives in order to access the resources that collaboratives represent.

- School districts in Franklin County joined the Hampshire Educational Collaborative once year ago today, and since that time they have enjoyed the benefits of membership, saved money, and found programs for their students and professional development for teachers much closer to home.Similarly, the Collaborative for Educational Services has provided intensive training to 4500 teachers of ELL students in the city of Boston as well as those in Fall River, Springfield, Salem and Holyoke.

- There are 45 states that have educational service agencies that both enhance the capacity of school districts to respond to the needs of their students and educators and often serve as disseminators of information and technical assistance to educators for their respective state Departments of Education.

- Although collaboratives in MA have been seen as a source of help and assistance for school districts in providing services for their low incidence special education populations, they have not been recognized as a resource that the state may turn to for providing programs and services beyond special education.

- The commission has an opportunity to maximize the cost-saving potential of educational service agencies by making them less hidden and silent.

- Key stakeholders and policy makers in the state need to better understand and utilize the capacity of educational service agencies. At the same time, collaboratives need to adapt and evolve to meet the critical expectations the state has for its school districts.

- Like in NY or other states across the country, the state should create incentives for school districts to become members of educational collaboratives and help build the capacity of smaller educational collaboratives so that there is more consistent programming and delivery of services across the state.

- Collaboratives will need proper support and recognition from both the legislature and the state education agency (DOE). State education agency leadership in MA will need to be involved in the promotion of educational collaborative services, the utilization of such services for their own message delivery, and in the accountability of the delivery of services, ensuring that they meet agreed upon cost effective and quality standards.

- Hopes that commission's final recommendations will give educational collaboratives the legitimacy and recognition that they are a solution to many problems that exist in education today.

- In order to provide greater support for collaboratives and establish the structure and consistency that would give educational collaboratives more "legitimacy", the commission should recommend the following—

- Require increased communication between state educational agencies (DESE, EEC, Higher Ed) and collaboratives.

- The state should update its policy regarding educational collaboratives – this policy was established in 1988 and hasn't been looked at or updated since then. The new policy should reflect the many ways in which collaboratives have changed and evolved since 1988. The commission should look at policies in other states (i.e. examine how other states have established/expanded/support/maintain/etc. educational service agencies and consider replicating these policies in MA).

- Modify and update chapter 40 Section 4E .

- Address the "access issues" - any future policy changes or budget proposals should include collaboratives. The commission should also examine the role of the DSACs and Readiness centers in its deliberations and recommendations relative to collaboratives.

- Allow collaboratives to be eligible to receive state education funding and grants. When the Department distributes education funding and grants to LEAs, collaboratives are typically excluded from receive such funding. The department has traditionally interpreted "local education agencies" (which are the entities eligible to receive education funds) to mean school districts, not including educational collaboratives. However, the state has expanded its definition of LEAs to include charter schools (so that charter schools can receive state education funding) but it hasn't expanded this definition to include collaboratives. Commission should recommend that the Department expands its definition/interpretation of "local education agencies" to include collaboratives so that collaboratives can be eligible to receive state funding as well.

- State should recognize the important role that collaboratives can play in distributing/administering state grants and propagating various statewide education initiatives. For example, rather than dolling out education funds/grants to 10 different school districts to provide a specific service or develop their own individual programs (e.g. PD), DESE could give this funding directly to a collaborative which would, in turn, be able to provide such program or service directly to the LEAs. This would help school districts save both money and time because the reporting requirements and procedures involved with grant management are often very costly and burdensome. It would be much more efficient to give this funding directly to a collaborative since many collaboratives already have the infrastructure, capacity, and expertise to be able to provide such services to school districts.

- Collaboratives would be willing to give up some of their current autonomy in order to receive more recognition and support from the state.