

Overview of BCETF Work and Recommendation

- A. The Berkshire County Education Task Force (BCETF) is a volunteer group of current and former school administrators and school committee members, town officials and administrators, teacher association leaders, and local business, higher education and community leaders who have met 35 times since July, 2015 to explore ways Berkshire County can address the challenge of eroding educational quality due to declining student enrollment and revenues that are not keeping pace with costs. We believe that a high quality education is the right of every child in Berkshire County. We have been exploring and seeking options that will provide the best opportunities and outcomes from and for our schools and school districts at a time of declining population and resources.
- B. Phase I of our work confirmed and clarified the fundamental challenge facing education in Berkshire County: the opportunity for access to a quality education for more and more Berkshire County students is eroding as student enrollment continues to decline, per pupil costs rise, levy limits and tax ceilings are reached, and state and federal aid stagnates. Access to rigorous and enriching courses, activities, academic and social supports have declined dramatically over the past decade for many students. They are expected to shrink even more dramatically for more students over the next decade unless dramatic changes occur in our educational system.
- C. Phase II identified five potential options for addressing this fundamental challenge – including making no change - and modeled the likely impacts of each option, applying 34 criteria, 20 of which encompassed elements and conditions of high quality education.
- D. Based on the analysis presented in the Phase 1 and Phase 2 Reports, the Task Force concluded overwhelmingly that a single Berkshire County school district offers the best opportunity to provide the best education for the most students at a sustainable cost. A single countywide district can enable Berkshire County to achieve the goals for education we set out to achieve: expanding course offerings, strengthening vocational options, maintaining broad offering of the arts and other electives and co-curricular activities, and providing more services such as counseling, academic support and enrichment.
- E. Here are but a few examples of the opportunities a single Berkshire County district could provide:
 1. Every junior and senior in Berkshire County has access to a distance learning economics course - for which they receive both high school and college credit - that meets during second period across all high schools and is taught by a MCLA or BCC professor.

2. Every student on the autism spectrum in the County and their teacher has access to an autism specialist who visits the school at least once each week to provide expert consultation; as a result, students can be served in their home room and school at lower cost and with greater success.
 3. Every middle and high school student has access to extracurricular offerings co-led by an industry specialist in rocketry, robotics and video game programming through which the students partner in person and virtually across districts and compete across the County.
 4. Two small K-6 elementary schools with average class sizes across all grades ranging from of 8 to 15 students become a preK-2 and 3-6 school respectively, each with average class sizes of 18 to 22 students.
 5. Students in three small elementary schools - some previously without daily enrichment classes - share a single art, music; physical education, foreign language and drama teacher, so that students have an enrichment class every day taught by a specialist in that content area (and teachers get planning time).
- F. We see moving to a countywide district over ten years not as a “governance solution” but as an “educational solution” to the challenge of having an educational system in Berkshire County that is competitive with the best in the Commonwealth and the world. Without it, our continued sharply declining enrollment and escalating costs will mean that an increasing number of our districts will not be able to provide what we want and need for our children.
- G. A single district is our aspiration. We know that it will require multiple initial and intermediate steps by interested districts in different parts of the county to achieve. This process will likely begin by a few interested districts coming together to form regional districts or modified supervisory unions. Over time these groups of districts will include more districts that wish to join them.
- H. The Task Force is not a decision-making body. It is only advisory. Each district will be able to make its own decision about whether and how to participate. Some districts will continue the work they have already begun to partner more effectively with nearby districts; others will begin such discussions soon, looking to find solutions that work for them; others will want to wait and learn from others; still others may never wish to participate.
- I. The Report does not assume that schools have to be closed; nor does its modeling assume that students’ ability to attend schools beyond their current district’s borders will have to change.
- J. Now the role of the Task Force turns to serving as a resource and helping develop a process and supports – including special legislation to make novel arrangements possible for communities that want to explore steps they can take.