

POTENTIAL 7-12 CONSOLIDATION—FAQ

The following questions were posed by participants in the Massachusetts Office of Public Collaboration stakeholder survey. Answers are provided where available, and the document will be updated regularly as the process moves forward.

SEPTEMBER 18, 2015 UPDATE—NEW QUESTIONS, UPDATES AND RESPONSES IN PURPLE TEXT

SEPTEMBER 30, 2015 UPDATE—NEW QUESTIONS, UPDATES AND RESPONSES IN GREEN TEXT

OCTOBER 14, 2015 UPDATE—NEW QUESTIONS, UPDATES AND RESPONSES IN RED TEXT

OCTOBER 26, 2015—SECONDARY STAFFING DATA ADDED

ARPS HISTORY

Q1: When there was a junior high (7-9) and a senior high in Amherst (10-12), weren't students able to take classes in both buildings based on their achievement and interests?

A1: Yes. Prior to 1996, our secondary schools were organized as junior high and senior high schools with Grades 7, 8, and 9 at the Junior High and Grades 10, 11, and 12 at the High School. Students traveled between buildings for some elective programming, especially in World Language courses, as well as for some core academic courses.

Q2: Why was the grade structure changed at that time?

A2: The junior high school in the 1990s was quite large, with almost 1,000 students, and it was extremely crowded. Today there are about 450 students enrolled in the Middle School. The Regional School Committee and the four communities decided to renovate and expand the Regional High School in order to include grade 9, take the pressure off the Junior High, and move to a Middle School model which is primarily characterized by having teams. As a result of the renovation, the High School capacity increased to 1,700 students (with approximately 1,400 enrolled at that time) and the Middle School enrollment dropped to 740 students. Currently, there are fewer than 1,000 students enrolled at the High School.

RESEARCH INTO CONSOLIDATION OPTIONS

Q1: There are many model K-8 schools. Why doesn't the district convert to K-8 schools in Amherst?

A1: The Regional Agreement provides that only students in Grades 7-12 will comprise the Regional Schools.

ENROLLMENT

Q1: Why is enrollment dropping?

A1: There is a decline in the population of children ages 3-18 in Amherst and the surrounding towns. In addition, the number of students attending local charter, choice and private schools has increased.

Q2: How many more students are selecting private schools over attending the Regional Schools?

A2: Each year the district is required to gather information in January from private schools about the number of residents enrolled and report this data back to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. In 2003, 3% (61 students) of the student population was enrolled in private schools. In January 2015, 5.3% (78 students) were enrolled in private schools.

FINANCES/COSTS AND SAVINGS ASSOCIATED WITH CONSOLIDATION

Q1: How much money will be saved in the near- and long-term with a consolidation?

A1: It is anticipated that the annual savings from a consolidation will exceed \$600,000. **Update –The estimated annual savings will exceed \$800,000.**

Q2: Will any savings from consolidation be redeployed or returned to the taxpayers?

A2: One motivating factor in favor of consolidation is the resulting savings from efficiencies. The financial structural deficit at the Region and the ability of the four towns to afford their assessments led the district to explore consolidation. It is not expected that funds will be returned to the towns, but that cost efficiencies realized by consolidation will make the assessments more affordable for future years.

Q3: If the district proceeds with consolidation, what costs will be incurred?

A3: The High School building has received only minor, but necessary improvements over the last 20 years. These improvements included a new boiler and renovations to the locker rooms and roof. In a consolidated school, the district will consider what, if any, physical changes should occur. With a 1955 core building, a 1965 expansion and 1996 renovation/expansion, it is likely time to consider some interior redesign for 21st century learning. **The district is looking at expanding a side entrance to the HS for exclusive use by Grades 7 and 8 during student drop off and pick up which will require non-structural modifications to exterior doors. Reuse of some adjacent space to create MS offices and common areas will also require a modest financial investment.**

Q4: Where will any money saved through consolidation go?

A4: Funds (expenses) saved through consolidation will help to close the financial gap faced by our district. If possible, and depending on the total amount saved, it is possible some funds will be redirected to expand enrichment opportunities for students, such as expanded dance programming.

Q5: Will the Middle School remain the property of the regional district, or will it be sold?

A5: The primary goal at present is to explore consolidation of Grades 7 and 8 in the the High School. A secondary goal is to look at repurposing the Middle School for educational purposes, including leasing of space to GCC and LSSE, possibly others. There is no plan to sell the Middle School, and it will remain the property of the four towns.

BUILDING USAGE

Q1: Why is there one building currently dedicated to just two grade levels?

A1: When Grade 9 was moved to the High School, there were 739 students at the Middle School and 1,168 at the High School, so space is one reason. In 2001, there were over 1,400 students at the High School. Concurrent with the move of the ninth grade, the 7-8 program adopted a Middle School model based on the principles of *Turning Points*, a team-based learning approach.

Q2: If consolidation occurs and the student population later increases, will the district be able to get the Middle School back to use for educating students again?

A2: If the grades merge into the High School, it is anticipated that the Middle School will be repurposed for other educational purposes. Any lease agreement considered will include language to protect the district in the event enrollment increases and the building is again needed for lower grade students. In addition, it is anticipated that some 7-12 programming may still occur at the Middle School building; specifically vocational programming.

- Q3: Wouldn't it just be simpler to move all Grade 6 students to the Middle School and leave the 9-12 High School as is?**
- A3: The Regional Agreement permits only Grades 7-12 students within regional buildings. The Middle and High Schools are actually owned by the four towns of the Region: Amherst, Pelham, Leverett, and Shutesbury. Grade 6 students are educated within the corresponding schools within the towns of residence.
- Q4: Can you provide maps of the High School which will illustrate how space will be used?**
- A4: Yes. We are hoping that by the Hurricane Summit on November 7, we will be able to illustrate a model of the location of the middle school students and how other building space will be used and modified in a consolidation. **A section of the High School has been identified for Grades 7 and 8 which will comfortably house the Middle School students and have a separate bus drop off and entrance.**
- Q5: Is there anything that can be done which will make the building more visitor friendly?**
- We are working with the architect, JCJ, who was selected for the Amherst elementary building project along with the educational consultant on the elementary project, David Stephen of New Vista Design. Both of these firms have worked together on multiple elementary and secondary building projects, and they are assisting the district with design recommendations which will create learning neighborhoods, common space, display areas for project-based work and other design strategies which are integral to 21st century learning

EDUCATIONAL VISION FOR A CONSOLIDATED SCHOOL/STUDENT MATTERS

- Q1: Does it help the educational vision/mission of the district to merge Grades 7 through 12?**
- A1: Consolidating 7-12 in one building is a financial decision, which has substantial and critically important educational implications. We have an ongoing structural deficit at the secondary level which will require reductions of over \$2 million in the near future. As a result of past reductions, we have constricted curriculum offerings and, most recently, increased class size. We want to avoid the need to cut further, which will mean cutting programs and offerings for our students. Maintaining comprehensive programming is a priority of our students and community, and supports student's continued enrollment in our schools. Therefore, merging 7-12 in one building allows us to reduce the cost of running another building, and thus maintains and allows for improvement of our educational programs.
- Q2: Other than cost savings, why consolidate? Cost savings is not a sufficient reason to me.**
- A2: Cost reduction is the motivating factor in considering consolidating 7-12 in one building. This allows us to reduce expenses in the short- and long-term, so that we are in the position to maintain offerings in our schools and to improve the programming to meet the needs of our diverse learners in the 21st century.
- Q5: Are students in the Middle School currently able to take classes at the High School?**
- A5: Students at ARMS are not able to take classes at ARHS.
- Q6: In a consolidation, will the Middle School students be able to take high school classes and what would be the parameters under which this will be permitted?**
- A6: During the month of September and October, the Regional Educational Working Group will consider this question. Initially, however, consolidation of the grades does create the opportunity for ARMS students to take High School courses.
- Q8: Will the size of classes increase in a consolidated 7-12 school?**
- A8: We are not anticipating increased class sizes in a consolidated school. More information about this will be available once the Regional Educational Planning Group convenes later this month.

Q9: If the district proceeds with consolidation, what costs will be incurred to prepare the high school to include middle school students?

A9: It is desirable within a large school setting to create smaller learning environments and have these spaces be identifiable; thus, the district would distinguish, for instance, a Grade 7 corridor with a particular color or theme. The idea is to create neighborhoods within the building to promote a sense of belonging and identity within smaller learning communities. Because it may be desirable for the Grade 7 and 8 students to be housed for their core subjects in a section of the building, a separate entrance could be created with a separate bus drop-off. Modifications can also be made to the cafeteria area in order to make the space more open and inviting. Opening up some classrooms to the interior courtyards creates opportunities for experiential learning. A large, unused auto shop can be repurposed as a Maker Space. Some offices, particularly a large space which currently houses a copy center used for the district, will be moved to the Middle School building to create additional space. In the short term, we are not anticipating any major renovations, but there will be some funds needed for improvements in order to best utilize the space and create, as best we can, high performance classrooms and workspaces.

Q10: Is it possible to consolidate the Middle and High Schools without compromising education? How will you maintain the high quality of education?

A10: Consolidation will permit the district to maintain current programming and, possibly, expand program offerings dependent upon the actual savings realized.

Q11: Will you keep the Team model if the Middle School students move to the High School?

A11: A Team model will definitely be maintained for Grade 7, possibly Grade 8. The Regional Educational Planning Group will make recommendations about this topic in the coming weeks.

Q12: What will happen with South East Campus if consolidation occurs?

A12: If the Middle School is closed, South East Campus will move to the MS building and be located on the second floor. Students at SEC will then have access to courses at the High School as needed, but still have the small school programming they require for their Special Education approved programming. This transition will occur either in 2017 or 2018.

Q14: Is this just a physical move, or will this entail changes to the way Grades 7 and 8 are taught?

A14: It is a physical move, and the way in which our students in grades 7 and 8 will remain the same for the core subjects. We are exploring how grades 7 and 8 students can also take advantage of the rich array of electives available at the HS.

Q15: What will the administrative structure be in a 7-12 school?

A15: It is likely we will maintain two principals and have two assistant principals in the 1400 student school.

Q16: Won't the passing period become much longer with so many students in the school?

A16: It is anticipated that Middle School students will be located in two adjacent corridors with adequate time to get from one class to another.

Q17: How would common space use be arranged, such as the cafeteria, auditorium and library?

A17: These are all issues which are being tackled at this time with no final answers; however, for planning purposes we are working under the premise that MS students will have a separate lunch period or a separate location for lunch close to the wing in which they will be housed. The librarians were asked to

meet last June to identify how they would organize library space for our MS and HS learners, and it is planned that we will maintain two librarians in the consolidation. The auditorium, which is not consistently scheduled during the day, should be available as needed for the MS students.

Q18: Will we lose the Middle School gymnasium and pool if consolidation occurs?

A18: No. The facilities of the MS will remain available.

Q19: What happens if the student population increases? Is there a reversal process if more space is needed?

A19: Regional enrollments will continue to decline through the next few years, with incoming 7th grade classes which should not exceed 228 students through 2018. Then, beginning with Grade 7 entering arms in September 2018, class sizes drop under 200 per grade for the Region. As these years unfold, we will monitor Choice enrollments at the elementary level as well so that slots are not opened up which will affect the 200 or fewer student target. However, if there were a population increase and the MS would need to reopen, there is no reason the district could not do so.

MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS SHARING SPACE

Q1: How will you make middle school students safe in the high school? Will the middle and high school students be separated in a consolidated building?

A1: Space is being examined this fall to determine where middle school students will be located. Working with the educational consultant assigned to the elementary building project, the Educational Leadership Team consisting of the Middle and High School principals, a High School assistant principal, and central office administration has identified a few possible locations at the HS where 7-8 students can be housed for core curriculum instruction within a Team model.

Q2: Are the seventh and eighth grade students currently separate from each other within the Middle School?

A2: Grades 7 and 8 students are not integrated for off-team classes. In the past, there was some integration of students in world language (if an 8th grader started a world language and was in a primarily 7th grade section) and sometimes study hall. The only current, cross-grade integration may occur in ELL or in Special Education programming.

Q3: Would you consider creating a mentoring program where older students mentor younger students?

A3: This is a great suggestion which will be referred to the Educational Planning Group.

Q6: Will the middle school students have access to high school curriculum and would they be part of the high school class?

A6: The Educational Planning Group will be instructed to look into the educational opportunities implicit in a consolidation. Certainly, it appears that student access to a broad range of elective programming can occur.

Q7: What type of orientation would the district provide to the incoming students who have just left their elementary setting and who now find themselves in such a large building with such a large population?

A7: Guidance staff were provided a full day of release time in mid-September to create a plan for transitioning our elementary students and families into a consolidated building. The written plan has not yet been received at this time.

STAFF MATTERS

Q1: Will teachers have to share space in a consolidated building?

A1: Yes, about 8-10 teachers will work in unscheduled classrooms during the day, meaning they will share space with one or more colleagues.

Q2: How many staff will be laid off if a consolidation occurs?

A2: There will be a combination of administrative, professional, and support staff reductions in the event of a consolidation. The estimated FTE is 10.0-15.0 personnel.

Q3: Other than staff, what other savings occur in a consolidation?

A3: By closing South East Campus and relocating staff and students to the High School from the Middle School, the anticipated utilities savings is over \$100,000 annually. Any increase to utilities costs which result from leasing space at the Middle School will be borne by the lessees. Closing the Middle School cafeteria will save at least \$75,000 annually. With fewer employees, even 5, the district can save up to \$60,000 annually in health insurance costs.

Q4: How many staff will be laid off if no consolidation occurs?

A4: While it is early to know the exact financial gap at the Region for FY17, the range of the gap is between \$250,000 and \$930,000 and more positions and programs will be lost. This means that between 4 and 14 positions will be lost next year. In FY18 and FY19 the gap widens further. Over the three-year period, it is anticipated that cuts will range between \$626, 191 on the low end to as high as \$2,319,484. This is why the district is considering consolidation - to correct the gap for future years.

Q5: If you consolidate and this does not occur until FY18 :(2 years from now) how will you meet the financial gap for FY17, understanding that the savings will not occur until FY18?

A5: The answer to this question depends on the range of the gap, earlier stated as between \$250,000 and \$930,000. It is possible we might be able to use a small portion of our Excess and Deficiency funds to cover some of the gap. However, the balance of the gap will come from cuts to the budget.

Q6: Are teachers being asked for their opinions on consolidation?

A6: Teachers are being asked to complete the survey, which ends Friday, September 25. Once the work of the Working Group, which is comprised of representative teachers and administrators, is complete in October, a preliminary plan conceptualizing consolidation should be ready.

Q7: Are teachers and administrators on board with this plan?

A7: Staff is aware of the issues faced by the Region, and they have been speaking about this in their faculty meetings. The Secondary Educational Working Group, comprised of Central Office administrators, building level administration and teachers from both buildings, is launching their work this week, which will look at the space and educational opportunities and challenges within a consolidation and strategize solutions.

Q8: Will teachers have adequate space to do their preparations for classes?

A8: Planning is occurring now to map the building in a consolidation and identify space for programs and teachers. Preliminarily, while some staff will not have the amount of space they currently have, all staff will have adequate space to prepare for classes.

Q9: Will any teachers lose their jobs?

A9: The effect of consolidating will result in staffing efficiencies, including administration, teaching, clerical, custodial, and paraeducator reductions.

Q10: How will administrators be regrouped?

- A10. A recommendation about the administrative structure will be provided to the Regional School Committee in early January, however, since the Middle School team structure will be maintained in the event of consolidation, the MS will have its own principal within the High School.

PARTNERSHIPS/VOCATIONAL STUDIES

Q1: Is consolidation being done for the purpose of partnering with Greenfield Community College?

A1: No. However, consolidation does open up an opportunity for the presence of GCC within our community. GCC is conducting a separate survey to determine the educational interests of the community. It is anticipated that GCC will begin evening classes in late January 2016. An expanded dual-enrollment program may be initiated in January or February of 2017.

Q2: Have you considered putting GCC in the High School building?

A2: During the course of discussions with GCC, the district initiated the location as being the Middle School since it is frequently utilized in the evening for LSSE courses and there is quite a bit of available space. Locating GCC at the Middle School makes sense, particularly if there is a consolidation and our partnership with GCC expands beyond the January launch of evening courses and an expanded dual-enrollment program in 2017. GCC is also interested in assisting the district with vocational and elective programming, and there is very significant space at ARMS for such programming. At ARHS now, there are established courses including Video Production, Broadcast Journalism, Mechanical and Electrical Engineering, Robotics and a CAD lab. We may be able to expand these offerings to students, including those in Grades 7 and 8.

Q4: Why is the district interested in introducing vocational programming?

A4: Students take multiple paths to their futures. Currently we are sending out 49 vocational students to Smith and Franklin County Technical Schools. By introducing formalized vocational programming and receiving assistance in this endeavor from GCC, we may be able to keep our regional students here in the district. Introducing multiple pathways for students to explore vocational and career programming will assist students in determining how they want their futures to unfold.

Q5: If vocational programs are introduced, what will they be?

A5: There are two informal vocational programs currently at the High School; Child Study and Culinary Arts. To formalize these programs, the district must apply for "Chapter 74" status which is also being considered. It is possible both programs will be moved to the Middle School. It is further possible that the district will add additional vocational programming to either the Middle School or High School buildings.

Q6: What costs will be incurred to retro-fit the Middle School for the different uses you have in mind, including a 21st century vocational school?

A6: Many vocational programs are very high cost, such as precision manufacturing. Others, like Certified Nursing Assistant programs, are low cost. Our communities will weigh in on what programming is desired. Then the costs can be identified and the feasibility determined. The two semi-vocational programs at ARHS now, Child Study and Culinary Arts, can be moved to ARMS at minimal cost, especially Culinary Arts, with a large commercial kitchen already present.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Q1: How will you reach out to the many students and parents whose first language is not English to get their input?

A1: The stakeholder survey was published online and in hard copy in both English and Spanish, the most prevalent non-English language in our community. The Family Center has been encouraging families to take the survey. We know that some families culturally defer to the educational “experts.” Our English Language Education teachers and our tutors have been asked to discuss this opportunity with the students and families they serve so the district can receive as much feedback as possible before the deadline.

Q2: Representative Ellen Story is listed as co-convenor of the Hurricane Summit. Are the other Legislators who represent the towns of the district involved as well?

A2: All of the legislators who represent the towns of the district will be invited to the Summit. In addition, our educational partners, including the local colleges, will be invited. Below is a summary list of the invitees:

- Select Boards, Finance Committees, Town Managers of all four towns
- School Committees of all four towns and the Region
- Chairs of Parent/Guardian organizations of all four towns
- Principals, Assistant Principals, Department Heads and Curriculum Leaders of the district
- Amherst-Pelham Education Association Leadership
- District Equity Task Force membership
- Big Brothers/Big Sisters

We are anticipating Summit attendance of about 250. In addition to the above, we will be announcing a large block of open seats for the citizenry of our towns, which will be available on a lottery basis.

DECISION-MAKING

Q1: Amherst has the highest population in the district. Will Amherst get a bigger “say” in the decision to consolidate the schools?

A1: In January, the Regional School Committee is expected to vote on whether to consolidate ARMS and ARHS. Of the nine members on the RSC, five are representatives of Amherst.

Q2: What is the timeline for making a decision?

As noted above, the RSC will vote on the consolidation question in January 2016. The earliest consolidation would occur is September 2017.

Q3: Has the consolidation question already been decided and all of the public input is just “window dressing”?

A3: The financial imperative (the structural, financial gap) at the Region is the core reason for this exploration. Without consolidation, the Regional Schools will lose the components of an ARHS education that are highly valued such as music offerings, drama, creative arts, etc., because the district must cut approximately \$2 million over the next few years. There is no revenue source that will make up this significant gap. Consolidation is both a short- and long-term resolution in order to provide sustainability. The Superintendent does not see an option other than consolidation at this time; however, it is critical that feedback and ideas from the community be strongly considered and weighed. Ultimately, the Superintendent wants to maintain programs and services to students while being efficient and current in delivering instruction and managing buildings. The Regional School Committee will take a vote on consolidation in January 2015. While the Regional School Committee is aware of the structural gap and the ongoing exploration of consolidation, they have not yet entered into discussion of the pros and cons of a combined 7-12 building. These survey results and the work of the Massachusetts Office of Public Collaboration will help to inform the Regional School Committee in their decision-making.

Secondary Staffing- As of 10/14/2015

	MS	HS	SEC	Total FTE
Admn./ Admn. Support				
Principal	1.00	1.00	1.00	3.00
Asst. Principal	0.00	2.00	0.00	2.00
Athletic Director	0.00	1.00	0.00	1.00
Clerical	3.43	9.00	0.80	13.23
Custodial	5.00	6.30	0.69	11.99
Permanent Sub	0.00	1.00	0.00	1.00
Deans	1.00	2.00	0.00	3.00
Nurses	1.00	1.00	0.00	2.00
LPN's	0.00	1.00	1.00	2.00
Dept. Heads	0.00	2.10	0.00	2.10
Total Admn./Admn. Support FTE:	11.43	26.40	3.49	41.32
Teachers				
Art	2.00	3.80	0.00	5.80
Computer	0.00	0.80	0.00	0.80
ELL	1.60	1.60	0.00	3.20
English	4.50	7.40	0.00	11.90
Literacy	1.00	0.00	0.00	1.00
Family/Consumer	0.00	1.00	0.00	1.00
College	0.00	1.00	0.00	1.00
Guidance	2.00	5.50	0.00	7.50
School Adj. Counselor	1.80	0.00	1.00	2.80
Intervention	2.00	0.00	0.00	2.00
Library	1.00	1.00	0.00	2.00
Math	6.00	9.40	0.00	15.40
Music Choral	1.00	0.60	0.00	1.60
Music Instrumental	0.90	1.00	0.00	1.90
Physican Education	2.00	2.70	0.00	4.70
Pre-School	0.00	1.00	0.00	1.00
Performing Arts	1.00	1.50	0.00	2.50
Science	5.00	8.06	0.00	13.06
Social Studies	5.50	7.00	0.00	12.50
SE Academic	7.40	7.60	6.00	21.00
Vocational Coord.	0.00	1.00	0.00	1.00
Bridges	1.00	0.00	0.00	1.00
ILC	1.00	0.00	0.00	1.00
LLD	2.00	1.00	0.00	3.00
Dev. Studies	0.00	2.00	0.00	2.00
OT	0.30	0.30	0.00	0.60
Psychologist	1.00	3.20	0.00	4.20

SLP	1.00	2.00	0.00	3.00
Team Leader	1.00	0.80	0.00	1.80
Tech Ed.	0.00	2.00	0.00	2.00
Spec. Program	0.00	0.10	0.00	0.10

World Languages

Chinese	0.20	0.80	0.00	1.00
French	1.00	2.00	0.00	3.00
Latin	1.00	1.20	0.00	2.20
Spanish	1.00	3.66	0.00	4.66

Total Teaching Staff FTE 55.20 81.02 7.00 143.22

Paraeducators

Computer	1.00	1.00	0.00	2.00
Academic	7.00	21.00	5.00	33.00
AIMS	3.00	2.00	0.00	5.00
Bridges	3.00	0.00	0.00	3.00
Essential Skills	5.00	0.00	0.00	5.00
Specialist	0.00	1.00	0.00	1.00
Developmental Studies	0.00	7.00	0.00	7.00
Athletics	0.00	1.00	0.00	1.00
ELL	0.00	2.00	0.00	2.00
Intervention	0.00	1.00	0.00	1.00
Prescriptive	1.00	0.00	0.00	1.00
Student Support	0.85	1.00	0.00	1.85
Administrative	0.00	3.00	0.00	3.00
Library	0.00	2.00	0.00	2.00
Pre-School	0.00	1.00	0.00	1.00
Science	0.00	0.69	0.00	0.69

Total Paraeducators FTE 20.85 43.69 5.00 69.54

Total Staff MS/HS 254.08