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School district consolidation in Massachusetts: Opportunities and obstacles

By Sarah Carleton, Christine Lynch, and Robert O'Donnell

The economic crisis has prompted state and local officials to consider new, more efficient ways of delivering services, including school district regionalization. This has prompted a number of districts to look at regional options, but only a few seem ready to bring consolidation plans forward for voter consideration. Historically, district consolidation has been slow to take shape in Massachusetts. Why is this the case?

One reason is that there is an existing network of relationships among districts, short of K–12 consolidation, that may provide some of the benefits of regionalization without sacrificing local control. If current demographic and fiscal trends continue, however, the incentive to regionalize may become stronger. In the interim, the state needs to support regionalization plans where it can and promote greater cooperation among districts in line with creating stronger regional systems of support.

This brief looks at the issue of regionalization from a data and policy perspective. It provides a brief history of regionalization; explains the complex web of relationships that already exist among districts; looks at some demographic, fiscal, and programmatic factors that might motivate districts to regionalize; and uncovers some lessons from a recent series of regionalization studies. It is also intended to serve as a companion to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's (ESE) more in-depth report on the outcomes of its recent regional study grants initiative.[1] Our hope is that this brief will provide some useful context and help ground ongoing discussions around regionalization.

Historical background

Unlike school districts in many other states, which are often separate government entities with independent taxing authority, school districts in Massachusetts are very much dependent on the cities and towns that they serve. In colonial times, districts were established by any group of families willing to support a school, and at one point there were 2,250 districts in the state. In 1882, the state passed a law that consolidated districts by giving authority only to municipalities to fund and manage school districts. With 351 towns and cities in the state, however, local control has meant that there remain a large number of districts relative to the state's student population, including many very small districts in relatively less populated areas.

Beginning with the post-war period, the 1949 Regional Schools Act authorized the regional district as an independent legal entity to encourage small towns to form consolidated school

[1] See http://finance1.doe.mass.edu/regional/.

districts with a single school committee and specified rights and obligations for member towns. Though the state envisioned consolidation, the number of districts actually increased over the next 20 years, from 355 to over 390, as small towns preserved independent elementary districts while creating regional secondary schools. Special commission reports and Board of Education guidelines in the 1960's promoted the formation of more K–12 districts on the grounds that they would improve educational programs and streamline governance, with little avail.

Real progress toward consolidation did not begin until Chapter 71, the state's regional school law, was amended in 1974 to expand financial incentives for districts to regionalize. The aid formula was based on enrollment, which provided some incentive for districts to fully regionalize grades K–12. After these reforms the number of school districts declined to the current level of 329, not including charter schools. However, regional school aid was phased out in the early 1990s with the passage of the Massachusetts Education Reform Act, and the amount that existing districts had been receiving up that point was included in the district's Chapter 70 aid. Since the 1990s only 13 new K–12 districts have been formed, mostly the result of consolidation of regional secondary districts and their members into one K–12 regional district.

Current affiliations among small districts

Three hundred and twenty-nine (329) school districts, not including charter school districts, serve the 351 cities and towns of the Commonwealth. Over one-third of districts have fewer than 1,500 students, and 15 percent have less than 500. Districts have one of four basic configurations: K–12 districts serving one municipality; regional K–12 districts serving several towns in a unified district; elementary level districts; and regional secondary districts serving several towns.

In addition to regional academic high school districts, there are 30 regional vocational-technical or county agricultural high schools for grades 9–12. Like other regional districts, these vocational schools serve a group of member communities, as few as 3 and as many as 19. Students can choose to attend a vocational school instead of an academic high school. Vocational schools regionalize the delivery of technical education programs that smaller academic districts would not be able to offer on their own. While this brief focuses on academic districts, that is not to suggest that vocational districts should not be part of discussions on regionalization.

Table 1: Districts by type and size

Enrollment	Municipal K-12	Regional K-12	Elementary*	Regional Secondary	Total Academic Districts	Voc-Tech/ Agricultural
Less than 1,500	24	8	67	10	109	28
1,500 – 2,999	61	11	4	9	85	2
3,000 – 4,499	40	10	1		51	
4,500 – 5,999	22	1			23	
6,000 +	30	1			31	
Total	177	31	72	19	299	30

* Elementary districts are defined as those operating schools that do not include grades 9 and higher.

By far the greatest number of academic districts in the Commonwealth—177 of 299—are municipal K–12 districts serving a single city or town. They range in size from 170 to 55,900 students. Thirty-one K–12 regional districts serve two to seven contiguous towns (92 towns in total) and are independent legal entities with statutory governance structures, and rights and obligations for their member towns. Members pay an annual assessment to the regional district based on state requirements, the district's regional agreement, and town budget deliberations.

Aside from K–12 districts, 78 towns operate 72 elementary districts, five of which are regional elementary districts, and send their students to another district for secondary school. These towns create K–12 pathways to provide their students with a full education through legal and contractual arrangements of several kinds. Most of these towns belong to regional secondary districts, which are the same legal entities as K–12 regional districts but serve only the middle or high school grades. The 19 regional secondary schools anchor arrangements among 57 elementary districts, with two basic types of K–12 pathways for students—*K–12 superintendency unions* and *K–12 groups*. The remaining 15 towns with elementary districts pay tuition for secondary grades to a nearby district, a financial arrangement that conveys no rights of governance or management. Table 2 shows the number of districts that follow these three K–12 pathways by district size. Districts approaching regionalization from the starting point of unions, groups, or tuition arrangements face different issues, as each of these pathways have their own advantages and drawbacks (see Appendix A for a complete list of elementary districts and their K–12 pathways).

Table 2: Districts by K–12 pathway and size

K—12 Pathways	Superintendency unions		Groups		Tuition	Total
Enrollment	Elementary	Regional Secondary	Elementary	Regional Secondary	Elementary	
Less than 500	24	1	4		12	41
500 - 1,500	11	6	10	3	3	33
1,500 – 3,000	2	5	2	4		13
3,000 +			1			1
Subtotal	37	12	17	7	15	
Total Districts	49		24		15	88
Total Pathways	12		7		15	

Note: Three additional elementary districts are partial members of K–12 districts and not included in this table. Four towns that tuition their students to nearby districts for all grades are also not included.

K–12 superintendency unions are legal entities enabled and regulated by state law, and a form of shared governance considerably older than regional districts. The K–12 superintendency unions include the largest number of small districts among the three pathways, possibly because they offer benefits closer to those of K–12 regional districts. Typically, towns that belong to unions maintain separate local elementary districts, belong to the same regional secondary school district, and share one superintendent and central office to manage all of the districts in the union. Each individual district has its own school committee in addition to a union school committee whose only powers are the hiring and evaluation of the superintendent. Unions are not legal and fiscal entities as regional districts are; union staff receive paychecks from each member district, and any joint purchasing requires separate contracts and payment. Superintendency unions may be formed by elementary districts or by elementary and secondary districts, forming a complete K–12 pathway. In this brief we refer to the K–12 unions in most cases, and note specifically when we refer to elementary unions.

The superintendency union may achieve the advantages of more unified supervision of curriculum and instruction and economies of scale for purchasing and other management systems. However, unions can be very demanding on superintendents and central office staff. The 12 superintendents that currently manage K–12 unions oversee 49 districts, interact with 61 school committees and 40 municipalities, and negotiate 34 teacher contracts. The capacity and efficiency of the central office can be constrained by these demands.

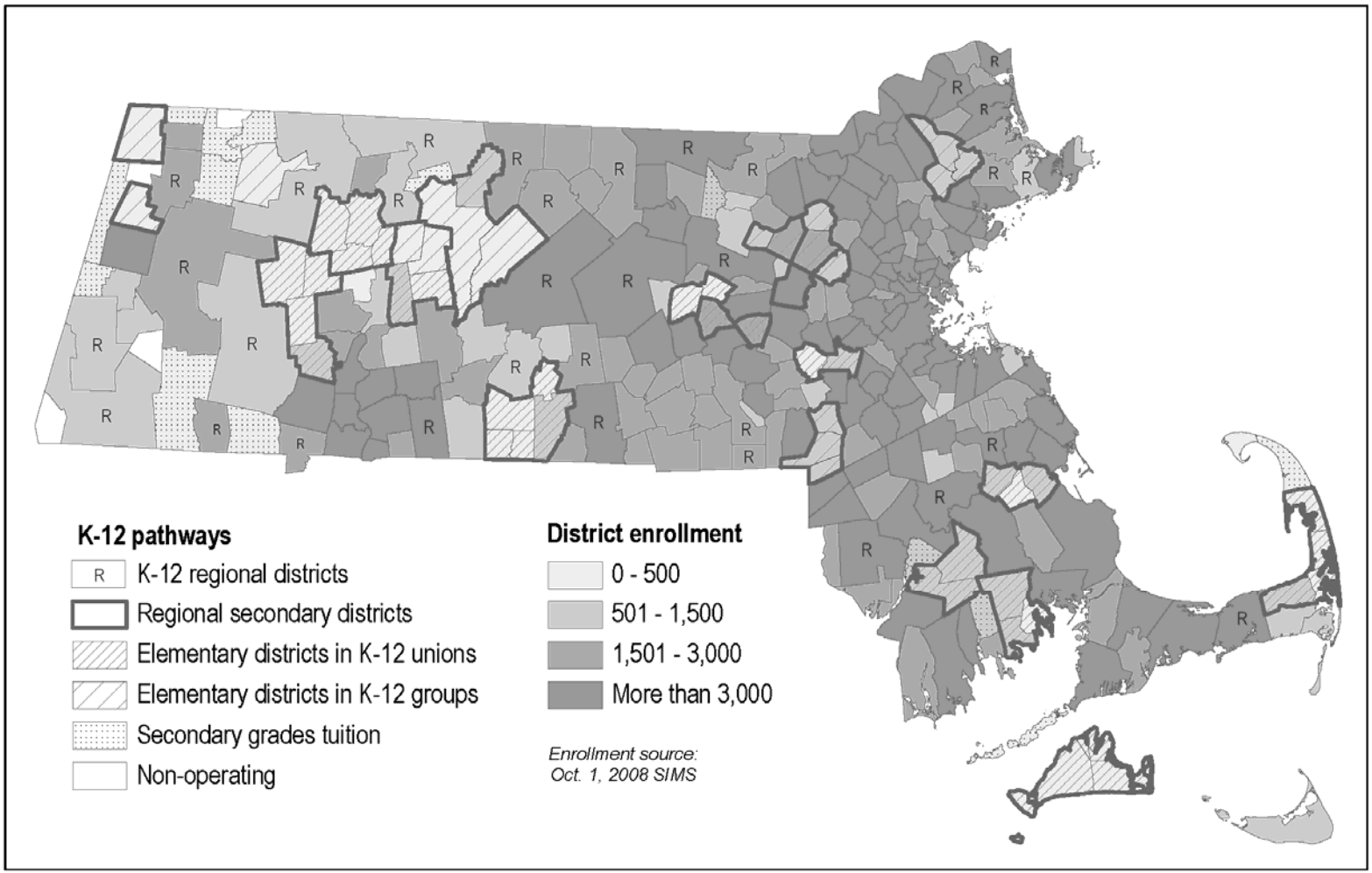
K–12 groups are not legal entities, but they do provide K–12 pathways for students through a shared regional secondary school. Unlike K–12 unions, K–12 groups maintain separate management and governance structures at the elementary and secondary levels. There are seven K–12 groups across the state encompassing 24 districts that serve 16 towns. Nineteen superintendents and 24 school committees manage these districts and negotiate 23 separate teacher contracts.

Adding to the complexity of affiliations, some elementary districts share superintendents in various ways with other districts. Five elementary-level superintendency unions (the same legal entity as K–12 unions but not a K–12 pathway) share superintendents among 16 districts. Other elementary districts share superintendents with their secondary district without full integration of a K–12 pathway; for example, Acton and Acton-Boxborough Regional High School share a superintendent but Boxborough has its own. Also, elementary districts that share a superintendent may not share the same K–12 pathway. For example, among the four districts that make up Union 28, Leverett and Shutesbury are members of Amherst-Pelham Regional High School, New Salem-Wendell is a member of the Ralph Mahar Regional High School, and Erving tuitions its high school students to Gill-Montague, a K–12 regional district.

Policy discussions about regionalization generally assume that the goal is to create more regional K–12 districts serving several towns by merging existing municipal, elementary, and/or regional secondary districts. In practice, however, most districts that are actively exploring regional options are looking at regionalizing at the secondary level, which would actually increase the number of districts serving a given student population. Some districts are proposing new regional elementary districts, which would reduce the number of districts in total but would not consolidate K–12 pathways for students.

Figure 1 shows how many districts, including the great majority of small ones, are elementary districts affiliated through unions, groups or tuition arrangements. It also locates the smaller K–12 districts, both municipal and regional.

Figure 1: District sizes and K–12 pathways



Motivating factors for regionalizing

Currently, small districts are not moving strongly toward regionalization. As conditions change over time, however, regionalization may provide a way for some districts to respond to shifting student demographics; improve long-term fiscal stability; address facility needs; react to a shrinking pool of qualified administrators; better articulate curriculum from kindergarten to grade 12; and increase district capacity to serve the academic needs of students.

A projected decline in enrollment may put pressure on districts. Since passage of the Education Reform Act in 1993, statewide K–12 enrollment in Massachusetts grew from 879,000 students to 980,000 students by 2004, then declined to 959,000 between 2004 and 2009. Smaller districts saw their enrollments decline faster than most other categories during this period, with the exception of the largest municipal K–12 districts. ESE's long-term forecast anticipates continued loss in K–12 enrollment across the state, projecting a decline to 885,000 by 2019.[2] In future years, it may be difficult for smaller districts to sustain their programs and services in the face of these demographic trends.

Demographic shifts may increase cost pressures on districts' annual budgets, and current expenditure data suggest that smaller districts face higher costs than some larger districts. While it is difficult to determine how much of these differences can be attributed to size versus local preferences and ability to pay, Table 3 shows that districts with less than 1,500 students have higher median levels of per pupil spending than medium-sized districts of 1,500 to 5,999 students. It also indicates that different types of districts have different costs; secondary districts are generally more costly than elementary districts of similar size. The higher median cost of small regional K–12s needs to be investigated further, as it casts some doubt on the economies of regionalizing unless a threshold size is reached. K–12 districts with 1,500 to 2,999 students, whether municipal or regional, have among the lowest median costs. Overall, higher costs for small districts coupled with the current climate of fiscal instability could prompt more of them to seek out economies of scale in order to preserve their educational programs over the long term.

Table 3: Fiscal year 2008 median per pupil spending by district type and size

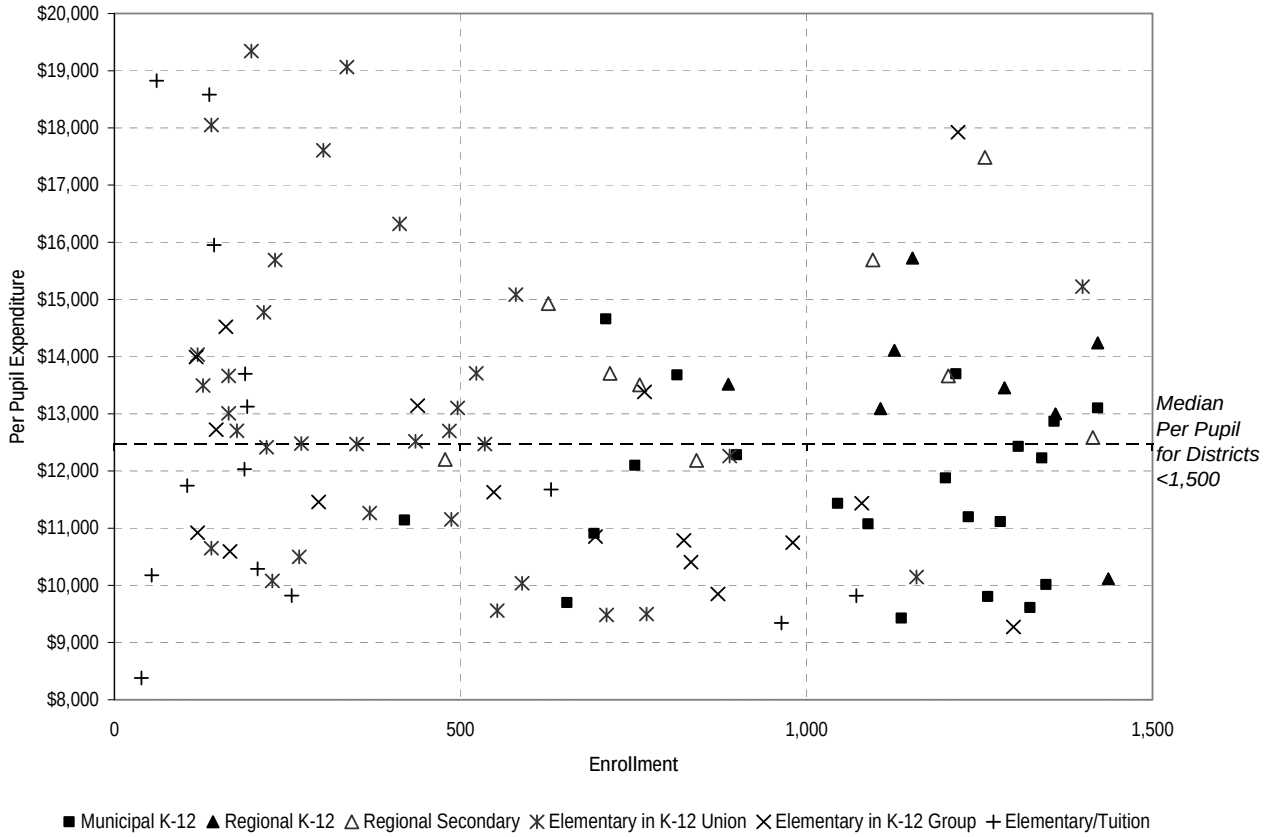
Enrollment	Municipal K–12		Regional K–12		Elementary		Secondary	
	N	$ per pupil	N	$ per pupil	N	$ per pupil	N	$ per pupil
Less than 1,500	23	$11,950	8	$13,656	66	$12,442	10	$13,686
1,500 – 2,999	59	$10,812	11	$10,885	4	$11,517	9	$12,172
3,000 – 4,499	42	$11,185	10	$10,241				
4,500 – 5,999	24	$11,491						
6,000 +	29	$12,536						

Note: Categories with only one district were excluded from this table.
Source: End of Year Pupil and Financial Reports

[2] See http://finance1.doe.mass.edu/statistics/Enrollment_Proj.xls.

As the following chart shows, however, per pupil expenditure among smaller districts varies so widely that the median does not adequately describe what is happening on the ground. Figure 2 highlights the variance in expenditure among small districts specifically, and indicates the concentration of elementary districts, particularly those in K–12 unions, among districts with less than 500 students. Small districts with high expenditures could be making a choice based on their ability to pay and the type of education they want. This choice could also make it more difficult to regionalize a K–12 union of districts with significantly different expenditure levels.

Figure 2: FY08 per pupil spending in districts with less than 1,500 students by district type



School facilities are one of the largest capital assets of small towns, and renovation or new construction represents a very significant cost. The Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) oversees the state's program to subsidize school districts by reimbursing them for a portion of their construction and renovation costs. In 2003, MSBA implemented some major reforms with an impact on how the state's share of school building costs is financed and on the standards that districts need to meet in order to get projects approved for funding. One important change was the addition of six points to the rating scale for evaluating proposals for school building proposals that are part of a regionalization plan. Intended as an incentive for districts to explore regional options, this credit could help regionalization efforts take shape in districts such as Harwich and Chatham; Ayer and Shirley; and Somerset and Berkley. Another advantage of regionalization is that it can allow districts to make more efficient use of existing facilities.

On the issue of administrative personnel, there is anecdotal evidence that small districts have a difficult time paying competitive salaries for superintendents and other key district staff. Fewer and larger districts could help solve this problem and also offset the shortage of qualified and willing administrators to fill these roles as a large cohort of superintendents reaches retirement age. Presently, a number of leadership positions are being filled by retired superintendents on an interim basis, which is not sustainable.

In addition to demographic, financial, facility, and personnel factors, regionalization can provide educational improvement opportunities. Accountability for student performance results has increased pressure on many districts to reorganize or retool to improve instruction. Finding the resources to improve curriculum, professional development, and instruction can be challenging for small districts with few administrators. Regionalizing into larger K–12 districts can free up resources to support a larger central office staff with more diversified skills and roles, including positions with a sole focus on curriculum and instruction. This in turn can result in better articulation of curricula across all grades.

Among districts currently exploring options for regionalization, several were motivated by the opportunity to improve their educational programs. Harwich and Chatham, with 1,350 and 680 students respectively, began discussions to merge their high schools in order to secure state school construction funds. As talks moved forward, however, both districts realized that beyond a new building, a regional solution would allow them to maintain programs, such as foreign languages, that they would not be able to continue to support separately. The towns' residents have not yet reviewed a proposed high school merger, but district officials are engaged in a fruitful discussion. Ayer, Lunenburg, and Shirley were motivated by a similar desire to maintain the range of their educational programs over the long term. Berkshire Hills and Southern Berkshire, two K–12 regional districts with 1,370 and 890 students respectively, opened a dialogue because both districts are facing enrollment declines that will limit their high school course offerings.

The state itself has some interest in district consolidation. From the state's perspective, fewer administrative units could simplify oversight and make it easier to develop more comprehensive support systems for school districts. The state has legitimate concerns about the stability and efficiency of small districts. As declining enrollments and/or revenues destabilize some small districts, ensuing problems eventually become the state's responsibility. Control boards, turnaround plans, district support teams, monitors, and other solutions have already been deployed a number of times in the last decade for both large and small districts. Because there are so many small districts, however, it is more difficult for the state to adequately assess, prevent, and/or assist them with deep-seated problems.

The state could promote collaboration in ways other than formally regionalizing grades K–12. Entering into larger purchasing cooperatives, possibly organized by regional councils, educational collaboratives, or municipalities, could offer economies of scale that smaller districts cannot achieve on their own. Districts can also cooperate directly. For example, Fitchburg and Leominster maintain a close relationship for professional development, and a professional network of curriculum directors exists in that region. Finally, it is expected that ESE's new regional District and School Assistance Centers will foster stronger district networks focused on instructional leadership and instructional improvement.

Proposing regionalization as both a solution and an opportunity requires an understanding of existing legal and financial arrangements and the resources, pressures, and trends in specific districts. No single issue motivates districts to regionalize, and no single problem is clearly solved through this approach. Recent planning studies on specific regionalization possibilities identified the same obstacles that have caused so many small districts to maintain their independence.

Barriers to regionalization

In response to the worsening fiscal climate and strong interest in regionalization from the state secretary of education's office, during 2008–2009 ESE funded two kinds of regional planning studies. The first examined the potential of regionalizing all of Franklin County's school districts into one or more larger entities, and the second offered planning grants to districts to voluntarily explore regional options. The two approaches differed in that one emerged from the state's interest in finding a solutions to ongoing issues in Franklin County and the other encouraged districts to assess their own interests.

Franklin County is one of the most rural counties in the state, and its municipalities have been hit hard by economic decline. Seventeen districts in the county serve a total of 9,200 students, including every type of district and K–12 pathway. Fiscal problems, an underperforming designation for one of the county's districts, and a series of individual requests for state aid prompted state officials and legislators to propose and fund a search for regional solutions to bring order to the varied governance structures and improve the long-term health of the region's school districts. The Franklin County study examined the potential for improving efficiency and capacity by reducing costs and/or reallocating funds. A major finding of the study was that a large district could both reduce administrative costs and strengthen central office management. Without financial incentives, however, the districts have done little to pursue this further.

Thirty-four districts, of which 13 were in Franklin County, comprised 12 regional study groups that received regional planning grants from ESE in fiscal year 2009. The studies included groups starting from different points. Ayer, Lunenberg, and Shirley, for example, had been working for two years on a regionalization plan. Three K–12 superintendency unions planned to look at consolidating not only their central office, but also their school committees and budgets. Several elementary districts proposed to regionalize with other elementary districts, prompted by retiring superintendents or necessary capital projects that raised concerns about their future. In addition to these groups, several others conducted exploratory discussions without grant support (see Appendix B for a list of districts in the Franklin County study and in the district planning groups).

Almost all studies completed to date have identified major obstacles to regionalization. These obstacles have generally been identified many times in the past and might have been foreseen and addressed in some fashion.

Local control

Historically, local control has been a major obstacle to regionalization. Voters want to maintain control over their local schools, and local preferences manifest themselves in a variety of ways, through program, curriculum, and personnel decisions as well as through spending. Any one of these areas can have an impact on a district's interest in regionalizing. For example, districts already in a K–12 union with a central office can still choose to spend more or less per pupil for the educational program they want, since they each enact separate budgets. When faced with equalizing expenditures in a single budget, districts on both ends of the spectrum have something to lose.

Communities are also fearful at the prospect of closing schools, particularly elementary schools, as a perceived consequence of forming new regional districts. While closing and merging schools has the greatest cost saving potential for districts, school closings are not a pre-determined result of regionalization. Closing buildings may not align with community goals and may be impractical if it means transporting students, particularly younger students, over longer distances for longer periods of time. A regional agreement may address this issue, for instance, by including a stipulation that at least one elementary school remain in each member town.

Another approach to maintaining aspects of local control that was outlined in both the Franklin County study and the more recent Ralph Mahar regional study would be to seek legislation to create more powers for school councils in regional districts or provide more autonomies to individual schools while remaining under the regional district's authority. The Ralph C. Mahar regional planning study in particular looked at some challenges and options for expanding the district beyond a regional school serving grades 7–12. One obstacle to regionalizing at the elementary level is the large disparity in per pupil spending that exist among the member towns. In order to deal with this problem, the study includes some legal opinions on regional agreement language that might allow towns to contribute separately to elementary schools within a regional district, and several partial regionalization strategies that could be pursued instead.[3]

State requirements for local funding through the Chapter 70 formula

The Chapter 70 formula calculates local contribution requirements for regional members based on ability to pay rather than equalizing contributions on a per pupil basis. This means that some members are required to pay more than others in per pupil terms because the town's income and property wealth indicate that they can afford to contribute more. This has been the source of controversy in some regional districts in the past and could deter other districts from considering regionalization options if they feel that the formula will treat them unfairly with regard to other regional members.[4] One K–12 regional district, Bridgewater-Raynham, is actually looking at de-regionalizing to better accommodate different preferences in the two towns for spending and programs at the

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[3] Kenneth Rocke, Expanding the Ralph C. Mahar Regional School District: Key questions, key concerns, common interests, Curriculum Design Associates 2009.

[4] Town of Holden vs. Wachusett Regional School District Committee & others. (SJC 9438) 445 Mass. 656 (2005)

elementary grades. Short of restructuring the state's municipal finance system and giving regional school districts independent taxing authority, a highly unlikely outcome, this issue will be difficult to resolve.

Equalizing salary schedules

State law requires that districts merging into a regional district pay each teacher no less than he or she was making before the merger.[5] Practically speaking this means that the highest salary schedule among the districts will likely dictate the regional district's salary schedule. In cases where one salary schedule is considerably higher, the cost of salary increases may make it difficult for voters to endorse the regional plan. For instance, the Frontier K–12 union in Franklin County (four elementary districts and Frontier Regional High School) estimated that teacher salaries would increase by a total of $250,000 per year if the highest salary scale was implemented for all teachers. Raising benefits to the highest level among the districts would add another $190,000 per year. This issue arose in several other groups as well.

Transition costs

Potential salary increases represent an ongoing cost of regionalizing, but districts also face one-time or short term transition costs. Forming a regional district entails setting up a central office and developing its administrative capacity, including business and operations functions and curriculum development and oversight. A K–12 union would have minimal transition costs, while two or more municipal districts with no prior relationship might have significant costs. These districts may want to fund overlapping personnel for some period to ensure that schools function smoothly throughout the transition. Promising negotiations among the towns of Ayer, Lunenburg, and Shirley broke down in part because they could not get a commitment from the state to fund their transition plan, which they estimated would cost $1.6 million over two years to establish a central office and purchase the necessary financial management and information systems.

Another transition cost for a town joining a regional district may be buying a share in another district's previous capital costs, such as for a newly built high school. This prevents new members from free-riding on the capital investments that the other member towns have made.

Regional transportation aid

Regional districts incur greater transportation expenses because they typically serve wider geographic areas and because they are required to transport K–12 students who live more than one and a half miles from school. Municipal districts are only required to transport students in grades K–6 who live more than a mile and a half from school. Recognizing these costs, the state provides transportation aid to regional districts. Over the last ten years the average level of reimbursement has been 77 percent of eligible costs. However, the most recent round of state budget cuts reduced the fiscal year 2010 rate to 29 percent. An uncertain future for regional transportation aid could discourage the future formation or expansion of regional districts.

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[5] MGL Chapter 71 Section 42B

Educational program differences

One of the advantages of regionalization, particularly for districts that already share an affiliation at the middle or high school level, is the ability to align curricula and other programs so that students arrive at middle school and high school with similar levels of experience and expectations. The process of aligning programs, however, may be easier said than done. For example, a district that has invested in bringing special education out-placements back into the district may not want to revisit this issue with potential regional partners that outplace more of their higher-need special education students at significantly greater cost.

Policy considerations and recommendations

There are a number of obstacles to establishing new K–12 regional school districts. For many districts the benefits of consolidation simply do not outweigh the costs. The longstanding legal and financial relationships may also act as a disincentive by providing districts some of the benefits of fully regionalizing without giving up local control. Adding to matters further is the array of district configurations that exist in the state, which means that there can never be a one-size-fits-all solution to issues that arise in the course of regional planning. Over the long term, however, a number of factors may change the landscape and prompt more districts to consider regionalization more seriously.

If the state is intent on expanding voluntary regionalization, ESE and districts will need additional resources. For one thing, newly formed districts will require help with transition costs. Though it is unlikely that there will be a return to an annual subsidy like regional school aid, one-time assistance with start-up expenses may be essential for success. The legislature could also address issues related to the Chapter 70 formula and other areas of municipal finance that may be practical disincentives to regionalization.

With additional resources, ESE could undertake an effort to support regionalization more consistently by undertaking some policy initiatives:

- Partner with other executive branch agencies, including ESE, MSBA, and the Department of Revenue, to coordinate analysis and problem-solving in support of regionalization efforts.

- Develop tools for districts to make early assessments of the financial issues that arise in the course of regional planning. Consistent tools would improve the accuracy of further analysis, and facilitate comparison of proposals and issues.

- Provide districts with a wider array of governance options that would successfully address the typical challenges that cause towns and districts to back away or not consider regionalization.

- Provide more information about the pros and cons of intermediate steps such as superintendency unions, purchasing agreements, and regional collaboration on curriculum and professional development as part of the growing effort to expand regional systems of support.

Given the long history of local control in Massachusetts, it is not clear if voluntary regionalization will ever be widespread, which begs the question of whether Massachusetts would ever mandate district consolidation in some way. One area where ESE has sought expanded authority is in establishing school unions in cases where state intervention is needed to stabilize a struggling school district. However this issue plays out going forward, it will be critically important for ESE to offer sound, consistent policies and resources to make regionalization an attractive and practical option.✱

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Appendix A: Elementary districts and their K–12 pathways

K–12 unions by regional secondary district

Amherst-Pelham (gr 7–12)
- Amherst
- Pelham

Berlin-Boylston (gr 7–12)
- Berlin
- Boylston

Dover-Sherborn (gr 6–12)
- Dover
- Sherborn

Freetown-Lakeville (gr 5–12)
- Freetown
- Lakeville

Frontier (gr 7–12)
- Conway
- Deerfield
- Sunderland
- Whately

Hampshire (gr 7–12)
- Chesterfield-Goshen
- Southampton
- Westhampton
- Williamsburg

Martha's Vineyard (gr 9–12)
- Edgartown
- Oak Bluffs
- Tisbury
- Up-Island (Aquinnah, Chilmark, W. Tisbury)

Nauset (gr 6–12)
- Brewster
- Eastham
- Orleans
- Wellfleet

Northboro-Southboro (gr 9–12)
- Northborough
- Southborough

Old Rochester (gr 7–12)
- Marion
- Mattapoisett
- Rochester

Silver Lake (gr 7–12)
- Halifax
- Kingston
- Plympton

Tantasqua (gr 7–12)
- Brimfield
- Brookfield
- Holland
- Sturbridge
- Wales

K–12 groups by regional secondary district

Acton-Boxborough (gr 7–12)
- Acton*
- Boxborough

Concord-Carlisle (gr 9–12)
- Carlisle
- Concord

King Philip (gr 7–12)
- Norfolk
- Plainville
- Wrentham

Lincoln-Sudbury (gr 9–12)
- Lincoln
- Sudbury

Masconomet (gr 7–12)
- Boxford
- Middleton
- Topsfield

Mount Greylock (gr 7–12)
- Lanesborough
- Williamstown

Ralph Mahar (gr 7–12)
- New Salem-Wendell
- Orange
- Petersham

Elementary - partial membership in K–12

- Hawlemont (PK–6, Mohawk Trail)
- Leverett (PK–6, Amherst-Pelham)
- Shutesbury (PK–6, Amherst-Pelham)

Elementary paying tuition

- Acushnet (PK–8)
- Berkley (PK–8)
- Clarksburg (K–8)
- Erving (PK–6)
- Farmington River (PK–6)
- Florida (PK–8)
- Gosnold (1–6)
- Granville (PK–8)
- Hancock (PK–6)
- Nahant (PK–6)
- Richmond (PK–8)
- Rowe (PK–6)
- Savoy (PK–5)
- Shirley (PK–8)
- Truro (PK–6)
- Monroe (non-operating)
- Mount Washington (non-operating)
- New Ashford (non-operating)
- Tyringham (non-operating)

Appendix B: –2008–2009 regionalization planning groups

Spring 2009 regionalization planning groups

Municipal K–12	Regional K–12	K–12 union	K–12 group	Other elementary
Ayer	Berkshire Hills	Frontier	(Masconomet)[3]	Berkley (elementary/tuition)
Lunenberg	Southern	Conway	Boxford	Somerset (municipal K–12)[5]
Shirley	Berkshire	Deerfield	Middleton	
		Sunderland	Topsfield	Hawlemont (partial member of K–12)
Chatham		Whately		
Harwich			Ralph Mahar[4]	Rowe (elementary/tuition)
		Nauset[1]	New Salem-Wendell	Mohawk Trail (regional K–12)[6]
Greenfield		Brewster	Orange	
		Eastham	Petersham	
Hadley		Orleans		
Hatfield		Wellfleet		
		Tantasqua		
		Holland[2]		
		Wales[2]		
		Brimfield		
		Brookfield		
		Sturbridge		
		Amherst-Pelham		
		Amherst		
		Pelham		
		Freetown-Lakeville		
		Freetown		
		Lakeville		

1 Nauset K–12 union members studied a K–12 regionalization, and discussions ensued with other Cape districts including Provincetown and Truro regarding possibilities such as a larger regional elementary district.
2 Holland and Wales studied a regional elementary district, followed by a more general discussion of regionalizing Tantasqua.
3 Boxford, Middleton and Topsfield studied the consolidation of their existing elementary superintendency union into one regional elementary district that would remain independent of their regional secondary district.
4 Ralph Mahar members studied regionalizing as a K–12, or regionalizing elementary districts including combinations with Erving, Leverett and Shutesbury.
5 Berkley pays tuition to Somerset (a municipal K–12) for secondary grades. The districts studied regionalization.
6 Hawlemont and Rowe share the Mohawk Trail (regional K–12) superintendent and send their students to Mohawk Trail for secondary grades only. The districts studied incorporating fully into Mohawk Trail.

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Municipal K–12	Regional K–12	K–12 union	K–12 group	Other elementary
Greenfield	Gill-Montague	Frontier	Ralph Mahar	Erving[1] (tuition Gill-Montague)
		Conway	New Salem-Wendell[1]	
	Mohawk Trail	Deerfield	Orange	Hawlemont[2] (member Mohawk Trail)
		Sunderland	(Petersham)[3]	Rowe[2] (tuition Mohawk Trail)
	Pioneer Valley	Whately		
				Leverett[1] (member Amherst-Pelham)
				Shutesbury[1] (member Amherst-Pelham)

1 Members of elementary superintendency union 28
2 Share superintendent with Mohawk Trail
3 Petersham is in Worcester County but Ralph Mahar is considered a Franklin County district. A possible redefinition of the "county" region was to include Petersham and to exclude Leverett and Shutesbury, which are members of Amherst-Pelham in Hampshire County.

Appendix C: Counts of districts, towns, and K–12 pathways

Districts		Towns	
K–12 districts		K–12 pathways	
Municipal K–12	177	Municipal K–12	177
Regional K–12	31	Members of regional K–12	92
Partial level districts			
Municipal elementary	67	Municipal elementary*	67
Regional elementary	5	Members of regional elementary*	11
Regional secondary	19	Tuition paid for all grades	4
Total municipal and regional districts	299	Total towns	351
Other districts			
Regional vocational-technical	26	**Towns with elementary districts and secondary arrangements:*	*78*
County agricultural	3	*Members of regional secondary districts*	*58*
Independent public vocational-technical	1	*Tuition paid for secondary grades*	*16*
Independent public high school	1	*Partial members of K–12 districts or unions*	*4*
Commonwealth charter	54		
Horace Mann charter	7		
Total other districts	92		
Total districts	391		