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Berkshire County Education Task Force Planning Study, Phase One Final Report, October 2016

Prepared for the Berkshire County Education Task Force



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Acknowledgments

The UMass Donahue Institute extends its sincere appreciation to the many people who supported and collaborated with us on this report. We thank all members of the Berkshire County Education Task Force, with special thanks to the Task Force chair, John Hockridge. Nat Karns and Matt Maloy from the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission provided generous support related to accessing, analyzing, and interpreting datasets. We also thank the administrators from all Berkshire County school districts who participated in interviews and provided data.

Steve Ellis, senior research manager in UMDI's Applied Research and Program Evaluation group, provided support for initiating and shaping this project. Susan Strate, senior program manager in UMDI's Population Estimates Program, provided support with population projections. Project funding was provided by the Berkshire County Education Task Force.

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Executive Summary

The Berkshire County Education Task Force (BCETF or "the Task Force") is a group of current and former school administrators and educators, school committee members, town administrators, and local business leaders who have concluded that the county's public schools face reductions in educational quality due to declining student enrollment and revenues that are not keeping pace with costs. The Task Force seeks to inform regional dialogue and action with: (1) evidence of whether current approaches to educational service delivery are sustainable, and (2) the potential benefits and risks associated with various strategies to maintain financial sustainability and educational quality.

The Task Force contracted with the UMass Donahue Institute (UMDI) to conduct the first phase of a two-phase study to provide evidence relevant to these issues. Phase One is intended to review and confirm available evidence that decreased enrollment, rising costs, and declining or flat revenues pose challenges to the quality of education in Berkshire County. In addition, it is intended to generate insight into the potential benefits and risks of inter-district shared service and school district consolidation strategies, as well as ways that the costs of these strategies have been modeled. Phase Two would model costs associated with shared services and consolidation. The ultimate goal of this work is to develop implementable recommendations for Berkshire County municipalities.

Methods for the study included interviewing two groups of administrators representing all Berkshire County school districts; numerous communications with Task Force members and personnel from the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission; and review and analysis of relevant literature and datasets. A brief summary of findings for each of the study's research questions are presented next.

Literature Review – Effective Approaches

Shared services. The two primary change strategies being considered by the Task Force are shared services models and school district consolidation. There is substantial evidence that sharing services can save money. Six common domains for shared services in Massachusetts include special education programs and services, professional development, student transportation, educational technology, cooperative purchasing, and energy management, but many other domains for shared services are possible and have been pursued already in Berkshire County. Educational Service Agencies, or "Collaboratives," are a common formal vehicle for shared services work. Berkshire County formerly had an educational collaborative, and current efforts among groups of Berkshire County districts include exploring the possibility of developing another collaborative in the county.

School district consolidation. The Task Force's proposals for school district consolidation include advancing formal partnerships between geographically proximal districts or advancing reorganization of the entire county into a super region of one to three districts. The literature suggests that every potential regionalization effort needs to be assessed individually with regard to its likelihood of yielding

educational quality improvements and cost savings. These desired outcomes are not assured, due to a wide range of educational, financial, political, and legal considerations.

The literature does not provide a clear answer with regard to the optimal school district size for maximizing cost efficiency and academic achievement. Substantial long-term savings due to regionalization have been documented in rural districts that are the size of many Berkshire County districts, although in some cases this was in a context of transitional financial support and technical assistance from a state department of education. Substantial savings have also been projected for similar consolidations, such as in a study of Franklin County in western Massachusetts; the proposed changes have not taken place, however, apparently due in part to a lack of financial incentives. Other studies have reported minimal cost savings or even cost increases when districts were consolidated. Recommendations are offered in relation to maximizing the benefits of potential regionalization efforts.

Enrollment Trends and Population Projections

From 2000 to 2015, the Berkshire County public schools experienced a 22.3% decline in enrollment, compared to a 1.7% decline statewide. At the district level, enrollment declines ranged from 16% to 38% during this time period. Four population models project further decline in the next 20 years, with an average projected decline of 11% from 2015 to 2025 and an additional 7% in the decade after that.

Cost and Revenue Trends

Understanding cost and revenue trends is an important step toward planning strategies to improve educational quality and fiscal sustainability. Relevant trends are presented at the state, county, school district, and town levels.

Major costs and revenues. From 2005 to 2015, while student enrollment fell substantially in the county, both expenditures and revenues grew. Total expenditures (27%) and tax levies (49%) grew faster than Chapter 70 revenues (23%). Chapter 70 funding grew faster than expenditures during the first five years and slower than expenditures during the second five years. Substantial variation was evident across school districts, with tax levies growing much faster than total expenditures in some districts, but a much smaller gap in other districts. Despite the variation across districts, the county-wide figures indicate trends toward substantially declining enrollment, increasing expenditures and tax levies, and state funding that does not keep up with district expenditures.

Tax levy limits and capacity. The average excess levy capacity per school district fell by about 6% from 2015 to 2016, after rising 27% from 2005 to 2010 and 35% from 2010 to 2015. Average excess levy capacity as a percentage of the maximum levy limit also fell in 2016 after rising over the previous 10 years. These trend reversals suggest that many municipalities are utilizing a portion of their remaining taxing capacity in order to support their educational expenditures.

Average total assessed value increased 38% from 2005 to 2010 but then fell by 4% from 2005 to 2010 and increased by less than 1% from 2015 to 2016. Override capacity also fell 4% from 2015 to 2016, indicating further strain on school districts' ability to raise taxes to support educational expenditures.

Individual districts did not all follow the county-wide trends. For example, average excess levy capacity increased by about $215,000 from 2005 to 2016, but across districts this ranged from a decrease of $1.4 million to an increase of $4.3 million. Wide ranges also occurred for other tax figures, including assessed value, excess levy capacity, and override capacity.

Functional expenditures by category. Cost trends are presented for school district expenditures in the 11 functional categories reported by the state: administration; instructional leadership; classroom and specialist teachers; other teaching services; professional development; instructional materials, equipment, and technology; guidance, counseling, and testing; pupil services; operations and maintenance; insurance, retirement programs, and other; and payments to out-of-school districts. County and state percentages are also provided in each category.

Trends in each category can be determined within each district from 2005 to 2015, as well as across districts, and between district, county, and state averages. For example, the spending on administration was similar at the county and state levels in both 2005 and 2015, whereas spending on guidance, counseling, and testing was about 29% lower in the county than in the state in both years. There were also large relative changes between the county and the state in some categories. For example, county expenditures on insurance and retirement programs were 3% lower than state expenditures in 2005 but 19% higher in 2015.

Similar comparisons can be made at the district level. The trends for each district could serve as a source of information for strategic planning regarding financial sustainability and educational quality. This could include understanding how the figures reflect local circumstances (e.g., average age of personnel, infrastructure needs), but also whether they adequately reflect local priorities, needs, and goals.

Selected student populations. One reason cited for rising costs in Berkshire County districts was an increase in the number of students from low-income families, students with disabilities, and English language learners. From 2005 to 2015, the percentage of students from low-income families in Berkshire County increased from 27% to 34%, compared to a 1.4 percentage point decrease state-wide. The percentage of students with disabilities in Berkshire County increased from 15% to 18%, which was twice the size of the state-wide increase. The percentage of English language learners in Berkshire County did not increase from 2005 to 2015, while the state-wide rate increased by 3.4 percentage points. Changes in these student populations varied substantially across districts within the county.

School choice. Many administrators mentioned school choice costs or revenues as a significant influence on their financial standing. There were clear "winners" and "losers" with regard to school choice, such as a net gain of 7% of total expenditures for Lenox and a net loss of 8% for Savoy. The

absolute gains or losses can also be large, such as a net gain of 195 students and almost $1 million for Lenox, and a net loss of 344 students and almost $2 million for Pittsfield. A notable trend was that some districts experienced much greater net school choice gains or losses in 2015 than in 2005.

Building capacity. Most school buildings in Berkshire County are filled below capacity, which increases the level of building costs per student. The capacity problem has worsened over time as enrollment has declined, and this trend will continue as enrollment declines further. continues to decline. In 2015, the percentage of building capacity that was being utilized ranged from 31% to 103%. For 2025, the projected range is 16% to 91%. District administrators and Task Force members said that addressing the issue of unused building capacity needs to be part of districts' long-term strategy for financial sustainability. This might include closing buildings, finding additional uses for unused space, or combining building capacity with other districts as part of regionalization.

Students per teacher. Available data do not permit calculating class size in Berkshire County, but it is possible to calculate the number of students per teacher, including both classroom and specialist teachers. The trend is in the direction of a higher level of staffing per student over time. The number of students per teacher gradually declined from 12.8 in 2000 to 10.9 in 2015. A temporary reversal of this trend can be seen in 2010, when the number of students per teacher increased to 11.6. The county average in 2015 was 11 students per teacher, and district averages ranged from 5 to 13.

Berkshire County has fewer students per teacher than Massachusetts as a whole. This gap widened during the past decade, with the county having 15% fewer students per teacher than the state-wide average in 2005, 18% fewer in 2010, and 21% fewer in 2015. Whether these changes are seen as negative or positive may depend on whether cost or educational quality is being considered.

Teacher salaries. Average teacher salaries have risen in Berkshire County from 2005 to 2015 at a slightly slower rate than in the state overall. The average teacher salary in Massachusetts was higher than in Berkshire County by 10% in 2005 and by 12% in 2015. The average salary in Berkshire County in the 2014–15 school year was $67,041, with a range from $40,903 in Florida to $93,754 in Richmond.

Educational Program Trends

Both sets of administrator interviews investigated changes in the educational programs available to Berkshire County students. The first set of interviews, which asked administrators to comment on changes in the past five years, yielded a fairly high sense of urgency from about half of the districts regarding program impacts due to declining enrollment and/or revenue shortfalls. The second set of interviews was with individuals who had been Berkshire County administrators for at least 15 years, and these interviews yielded a more consistently high level of concern about reduced program offerings.

Five-year time frame. About half of the districts expressed fairly low urgency about program impacts in the past five years due to declining enrollment and/or revenue shortfalls. A variety of reasons

for this outlook were apparent. A few districts are projected to have only small enrollment declines or even small increases from 2015 to 2025, and others anticipated increases due to school choice, facilities upgrades, or large incoming classes. Similarly, many districts reported that negative program impacts in the past five years due to declining enrollment and/or revenue shortfalls had been minimal.

In contrast, about half of the districts expressed moderate to serious concerns, although the concerns were typically more serious with regard to the next five years than the past five years. One district in particular reported urgent circumstances, saying "Adams-Cheshire won't be able to survive on its own."

Multiple districts characterized themselves as nearing a tipping point, where past cuts had minimal program impacts but future cuts would affect students' experiences more directly, including large class sizes, reduced offerings of elective and AP courses, and reductions in instructional technology and library services. About half of the districts anticipated having to cut programs in the next five years. Declining state and tax revenues and increased personnel and benefits costs were prominent issues for many administrators, and multiple districts reported that they had reached or were nearing their tax levy ceilings. Additional budget challenges reported by some districts included a net outflow of school choice students and high or unanticipated costs for special education services.

Fifteen-year time frame. In the second set of interviews, four out of five administrators said that educational offerings had declined in the past 15 years, and they rated the declines from moderate to extensive. These included cuts of many staff positions; increased class sizes; reduced emphasis on science and social studies; reductions in foreign language, vocational, physical education, and some advanced core classes; scheduling conflicts that reduce students' curricular options; and an increase in teaching multiple classes or class levels in a single classroom at the same time.

Three administrators said that the level of academic support has not decreased in the past 15 years, while two reported that the level of support from academic specialists and paraprofessionals has declined. Minimal to moderate cuts in student support services were reported by three out of five administrators, including staff reductions and increased caseloads. All five administrators reported minimal to extensive reductions in extracurricular or co-curricular programs and services, mostly at the secondary level, including athletics, arts, music, drama, and outdoor activity programs.

Four of the five administrators believed that the quality of educational opportunity in Berkshire County had declined in the past 15 years. They said that quality "has been affected tremendously," that the opportunity to "graduate at the highest possible level of academic performance has been sacrificed," and that "educational opportunities in Berkshire County are very unequal." These administrators believed that both college and career opportunities have diminished. Three administrators felt that declines in the past 15 years have reduced students' competitiveness in college admissions.

Course offerings and enrollment. The Task Force wants to assess trends in educational quality by documenting changes in schools' course offerings over time. Course enrollment data for the 2015–16

school year provided by Berkshire County high schools will serve as a baseline from which future changes can be documented. Summaries are provided of the number of AP and honors courses offered in each school, as well as average course participation and class sizes. When multiple years of course enrollment data are available, many additional analyses could be conducted to assess changes in program offerings over time. Using ESE's Student Course Schedule dataset to conduct these longitudinal analyses may increase efficiency and facilitate meaningful comparisons across districts; obtaining these datasets would require permission from ESE and individual districts.

Past and Future Strategies for Improving Financial Sustainability

Administrators reported that their districts had already engaged in numerous strategies to reduce costs and that they planned to implement additional strategies in the future. These strategies are presented in relation to shared services, school district consolidation, and several other domains.

Shared services. Shared services are already taking place among some Berkshire County districts with regard to special education services, health care services, personnel, professional development, and athletics. In addition, two groups of districts in southern and northern Berkshire County are meeting to plan for deepening implementation of shared services. One district described saving money through collaboration with community partners and other city and county agencies.

Several districts discussed shared service arrangements that they hope to create in the future, focused on special education services, information technology, cafeteria management, payroll services, office support, transportation, and collaborative purchasing of supplies. Implementing shared services arrangements more deeply may require changes to collective bargaining agreements. Multiple administrators talked about increasing shared services as a step toward larger collaborative efforts within the county, including possible regionalization and/or creating an educational collaborative.

School district consolidation. Multiple administrators recognized the potential need for further consolidation, but no one described determined current efforts in this area. The most recent effort in the county that sought to change regional affiliations was unsuccessful. Several administrators expressed skepticism about the prospects for consolidation, while others said that it was one of the strategies that their districts are currently exploring.

Other cost-saving strategies. Administrators also reported cost-saving strategies that include reducing out-of-district special education placements, utilizing new energy contracts or equipment, closing underutilized school buildings, combining multiple instructional and administrative roles into single staff positions, seeking grant funding, updating technology, relocating administrative offices, reducing the number of bus routes, consolidating specialized services into single schools in multi-school districts, and utilizing adult volunteers.

Estimating Fiscal Impacts of Change Strategies

The literature review sought to identify examples of rigorous and cost-effective methods for estimating the fiscal impacts of district regionalization and inter-district shared services. Such examples could serve as a foundation for carrying out subsequent phases of the Task Force's work. While no "handbook" on how to carry out such estimates was identified, several reports of districts' regionalization planning were identified that could advance Berkshire County's efforts to estimate potential fiscal impacts. Estimation of savings from inter-district shared services could be carried out using similar methods, focusing on specific categories rather than the entire school district budget. The methods used in different studies are summarized, with discussion of implications for applying similar approaches to Berkshire County.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The Phase One study was intended to review and confirm available evidence that decreased enrollment, rising costs, and declining or flat revenues pose challenges to the quality of education in Berkshire County. The evidence clearly indicates that the quality of education in Berkshire County is being threatened by these factors, with program impacts already being experienced in some districts and signs of potential program impacts over time in most districts.

The Phase One study was also intended to generate insights into (a) the impacts of enrollment, cost, revenue, and program trends; and (b) the potential benefits and risks of shared services and consolidation strategies. Conclusions and recommendations related to these areas are offered to inform discussion and action planning by the Task Force and other stakeholders.

Impacts of enrollment, cost, revenue, and program trends. Trends described in the report that may continue in upcoming years include (a) rising school district costs that are not fully offset by state funding or additional local tax revenues; (b) infrastructure costs that become higher per student as enrollment declines; (c) increasing numbers of high needs students; (d) growing impacts of the school choice process; and (e) personnel costs that are growing faster than total school district expenditures. If recent economic trends continue, there will be substantial additional strain on school district finances. Stakeholders will promote addressing these strains through a combination of increased taxation and state-provided revenues, reduced expenses, and greater efficiencies.

For some municipalities, the ability to increase revenue through taxation is limited by levy ceilings and override capacity. As a result, some districts may reduce academic, extracurricular, and/or support services. To moderate the impacts of these reductions, some districts are likely to increase class sizes, reduce the number of sections offered, offer multiple courses or course levels in a single classroom, increase the use of technology-assisted academic work, combine extracurricular activities across schools or districts, and institute or increase participation fees. Several administrators said that changes such as these have reduced and will continue to have negative impacts on student engagement, educational

quality, and students' career options and college admissions prospects. Most districts will also continue and extend the diverse strategies they have used to reduce costs in the past, as already described.

Shared services. Shared service strategies appear to be promising to pursue immediately, although it is essential to assess anticipated benefits to educational quality and estimate the extent of cost savings that can be realized. The literature suggests that savings will be meaningful but not sufficient to fully resolve many districts' fiscal challenges. Extensive considerations and recommendations related to future shared services work are offered in the main report. These include documenting shared services and cost savings efforts already happening in the county for possible expansion, assessing the potential role of educational collaboratives, investigating implications for collective bargaining agreements, and identifying existing state incentives or advocating for new incentives.

District consolidation. This strategy appears to face greater challenges to implementation than shared services strategies, given mixed evidence of educational and fiscal benefits, as well as evidence that stakeholders in Massachusetts and nationally are often reluctant to regionalize. This context suggests that Phase Two should be seen—as reflected in the Task Force's goal statements—as an opportunity to explore the potential merits and feasibility of specific regionalization options.

Extensive considerations and recommendations related to regionalization efforts are offered in the main report. These include strategies for engaging numerous stakeholder groups regarding the Task Force's findings and their implications for educational costs and quality in Berkshire County, as well as exploring the relative feasibility and potential benefits of the Task Force's two proposed regionalization approaches: (1) advancing formal partnerships between geographically proximal districts, or (2) advancing reorganization of the entire county into a super region of one to three districts. This process could include utilizing the state's district capacity assessment tool to help districts assess their future risks and to help multiple stakeholders assess the relative urgency of each district's situation.

Additional factors to review for each district could include the level of spending in different functional categories (as summarized in this report), costs associated with maintaining existing school buildings versus closing buildings, likely changes in school choice enrollment, and the likely impacts of collective bargaining agreements on regionalization efforts. Finally, it may be beneficial to collaborate and engage in advocacy efforts with state government to support regionalization as a strategy for improving financial sustainability and educational quality in Berkshire County.

Introduction

The Berkshire County Education Task Force (BCETF or "the Task Force") is a group of current and former school administrators and educators, school committee members, town administrators, and local business leaders who have concluded that the Berkshire County public schools are facing current and future reductions in educational programs due to declining student enrollment and revenues that are not keeping pace with costs (BCETF, 2015). The Task Force is working to develop recommendations to support all school districts in sustaining quality education in Berkshire County.

The Task Force seeks to inform regional dialogue and action with: (1) evidence of whether current approaches to educational service delivery are sustainable, and (2) the potential benefits and risks associated with various strategies to maintain financial sustainability while providing quality educational programming.

The Task Force contracted with the UMass Donahue Institute (UMDI) to conduct the first phase of a two-phase study to provide evidence relevant to these issues. Phase One is intended to review and confirm available evidence that decreased enrollment, rising costs, and declining or flat revenues pose challenges to the quality of education in Berkshire County. In addition, it is intended to generate insight into the potential benefits and risks of inter-district shared service and consolidation strategies when used to improve efficiency and sustainability of public school districts.

Phase Two of the study would model costs associated with the following three change strategies:

Tier 1. Advance collaborative and shared services solutions such as cooperative purchasing, transportation, and shared special education programming.

Tier 2. Advance formal partnerships between geographically proximal districts.

Tier 3. Advance reorganization of the entire county into a super region of one to three districts.

These models would provide an estimate of the programming and resources that could be provided to students in each scenario. The ultimate goal of this work, at the end of the second phase, is implementable recommendations that could be considered by Berkshire County school districts and municipalities.

Phase One of the study was guided by the following research questions, which are addressed in this report:

Q1. What does available literature suggest are the most effective approaches to providing financial sustainability of educational service delivery while sustaining (or enhancing) educational quality in contexts similar to Berkshire County?

Q2. What studies are available, if any, that could inform a second phase of the current study in which economic benefits and risks of inter-district cost sharing or consolidation in Berkshire County are modeled?

Q3. What trends are evident with regard to student enrollment in public school districts in Berkshire County?

Q4. What trends are evident with regard to the costs of educational services at the district level in Berkshire County?

Q5. What trends are evident with regard to state and local revenues to support educational service delivery at the district level in Berkshire County?

Q6. What trends are evident with regard to changes in the diversity or range of educational programs available to students?

Q7. What are the likely impacts of trends in student enrollment, costs, and revenues on educational and non-educational services provided by public school districts in Berkshire County over the next five years?

Q8. What approaches have already been pursued to create a more financially sustainable educational system in Berkshire County? What other approaches are already planned?

Methods

The study's methods included interviewing two groups of administrators from Berkshire County school districts, as well as review and analysis of:

- High school course enrollment data provided by Berkshire County school districts;
- Previous findings from BCETF and the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC), as well as numerous meetings, calls, and emails with BCETF members and BRPC personnel;
- Publicly available data sources, primarily from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) and the Massachusetts Department of Revenue (DOR);
- Data from the UMDI Population Estimates Program; and
- Literature from academic, government, private, and nonprofit sources, as well as blogs, websites, and news media.

Protocols for the two sets of administrator interviews were developed in collaboration with Task Force members. The Task Force requested for the first set of interviews to be conducted with representatives from 13 local and regional school districts that collectively included all Berkshire County towns and cities. The chair of the Task Force, John Hockridge, emailed the superintendent, school committee chair, and high school principal(s) from each district describing the purpose of the interview, providing a copy of the interview protocol, and asking at least one participant from each district to participate in a half-

hour telephone interview. UMDI then emailed the same individuals to schedule the interviews, which took place in May and June 2016. In some cases, the superintendent invited additional individuals to participate in the call.

All districts participated in the interview, including 10 superintendents and 12 principals. Table 1 lists the interviewees, and the interview protocol is provided in Appendix A. While every interview included all of the questions in the protocol, many additional questions relevant to the study's goals were asked based on statements made by the interviewees or topics that had arisen in interviews with other districts.

For the first administrator interview, the Task Force had requested a focus on trends related to the past five years and the next five years. After reviewing findings in UMDI's interim report,[1] Task Force members concluded that looking back more than five years was needed to capture the changes in the Berkshire County public education system that they were seeking to document. Therefore, they asked UMDI to conduct a second set of phone interviews with five individuals who had worked as public school administrators in Berkshire County for at least 15 years. Task Force members selected five interviewees who had worked in a range of towns and administrative roles and call or emailed them to request their participation. UMDI then emailed the interviewees to schedule half-hour phone calls, which took place in September 2016. The five interviewees had worked as public school administrators in Berkshire County public schools for an average of 21 years, with a range of 15 to 32 years. Table 2 lists the interviewees, and the interview protocol is provided in Appendix B.

Findings

Findings are presented below for each of the research questions. Major sections include a literature review of effective fiscal and educational approaches; enrollment, cost, revenue, and educational program trends; strategies that districts have used and plan to use to improve financial sustainability while improving educational quality; and estimating the fiscal impacts of change strategies. The research question regarding impacts of enrollment, cost, and revenue trends is addressed throughout the report and in the conclusions and recommendations section.

1. Literature Review – Effective Approaches

The Task Force seeks to provide information about effective approaches to providing financially sustainable educational service delivery while sustaining educational quality. Members have repeatedly emphasized that the second part of this question—how to provide the strongest possible education to students in Berkshire County public school districts—is of the utmost importance. Therefore, while financial issues must absolutely be addressed, educational quality is their top priority.

[1] The findings presented in the interim report are integrated into this final report.

Table 1: First Administrator Interview, Interviewees by District	
Interviewees	**District**
Kristen Gordon – Superintendent Jeremiah Ames – Principal, Hoosac Valley Regional High School	Adams-Cheshire
Peter Dillon – Superintendent Marianne Young – Principal, Monument Mountain Regional HS	Berkshire Hills
Laurie Casna – Superintendent	Central Berkshire
Jo Ann Austin – Superintendent	Farmington River
Alfred Skrocki – Superintendent Gregg Brighenti – Principal, Lee Middle & High School	Lee
Michael Knybel – Principal, Lenox Memorial Middle & High School	Lenox
Mary MacDonald – Principal, Mt. Greylock Regional High School	Mt. Greylock
Amy Meehan – Principal, Drury High School	North Adams
James Brosnan – Superintendent Justin Kratz – Principal, McCann Technical High School	Northern Berkshire Voc Tech
Jon Lev – Superintendent	Northern Berkshire Union
Jason McCandless – Superintendent Matthew Bishop – Principal, Pittsfield High School John Vosburgh – Principal, Taconic High School	Pittsfield
William Cameron – Interim Superintendent Monica Zanin – Principal, Richmond Consolidated School Tracy Tierney – Principal, Hancock School	Shaker Mountain Union
David Hastings – Superintendent Glenn Devoti – Principal, Mt. Everett Regional High School	Southern Berkshire

Table 2: Second Administrator Interview, Interviewees by District	
Interviewees	**Current and Former Berkshire Districts**
Albert Skrocki – Principal, Superintendent	Adams-Cheshire, Lee
Jim Stankiewicz – Principal, Superintendent	Central Berkshire
Bill Travis – Principal, Superintendent	Pittsfield, Mt. Greylock, Richmond
Robert Vaughan – Principal, DSAC Facilitator	Lenox
Marianne Young – Principal, Superintendent	Berkshire Hills, Lenox

The two primary change strategies being considered by the Task Force are shared services models and school district consolidation. The findings in this section focus on those two strategies, based on a review of the literature. Perspectives of Berkshire County administrators on these two strategies, including past and planned actions, are presented in a subsequent section of the report.

Shared Services

Sharing services between districts is a strategy to benefit from economies of scale in terms of both program cost and quality. In shared services arrangements, school and district personnel, often from neighboring districts, agree to share personnel, equipment, curriculum, and other resources needed to provide programs and services. This approach allows local school boards and administrators to benefit from inter-district collaboration without formally consolidating with the partnering districts. Six common domains for shared services in Massachusetts include special education programs and services, professional development, student transportation, educational technology, cooperative purchasing, and energy management (Stanley, 2005).

Districts can share services both formally and informally. Informal sharing consists of mutual aid agreements between districts that allow districts—often small, rural districts—to share assets and avoid duplication (Deloitte Research, 2005). Informal arrangements have the potential advantages of low cost, flexibility, and responsiveness to districts' needs. However, for districts with limited administrative staff, these arrangements can be burdensome to establish and maintain (Duncombe and Yinger, 2007). One way to manage the administrative burden is for different districts to take the lead on coordinating different shared services (Shakrani, 2010).

Another approach is formal sharing of services through Educational Service Agencies, which in Massachusetts are called "educational collaboratives." These 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 (Carleton et al., 2009). Berkshire County formerly had an educational collaborative, the Southern Berkshire Educational Collaborative (SBEC), which closed in 2011 (Smith, 2012).

At the July 2016 Task Force meeting, members noted that SBEC was too expensive for many districts, both larger and smaller ones, and that smaller districts had trouble seeing how it would benefit them. Some districts also felt that participating in the collaborative added a burden similar to having another central office to manage. Task Force members said that a collaborative may be more beneficial if offered on a fee-for-service rather than a membership basis, and that the Collaborative for Educational Services, located in Northampton, has offered to serve that role for Berkshire County school districts so long as they are not required to open a physical office in Berkshire County.

There is substantial evidence that sharing services can save money (Rooney and Augenblick, 2009). The Massachusetts Organization of Educational Collaboratives reports that their 28 collaboratives have

saved participating school districts and municipalities millions of dollars through special education transportation services, management of Medicaid billing, professional development programs, and cooperative purchasing of paper and office supplies, software and hardware technology, heating fuels, and electricity. They argue that collaboratives have the potential to save much greater sums than are being realized currently (Enerson, 2009).

School District Consolidation

District consolidation or regionalization is the process of combining multiple school districts to form a single school district. As with shared service strategies, the impetus for consolidation is typically to sustain or improve the quality of educational programs, sustain or reduce costs, or both. The decision to consolidate is always complicated, due to a wide range of educational, financial, political, and legal considerations. In a review of district consolidation in Massachusetts by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, the authors concluded,

> "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" (Carleton et al., 2009, p. 10).

From the Task Force's perspective, the rationale behind consolidation in Berkshire County would have two purposes: to improve educational opportunities for students, and to realize economies of scale through more efficient use of resources. Moreover, if consolidation succeeded in realizing economies of scale, additional resources would become available to improve educational opportunities. Some Task Force members have noted that further regionalization of the county, as well as possibly consolidating some existing schools, could increase the breadth and depth of courses offered. It could also enable additional course sections to be offered, thereby reducing scheduling conflicts that prevent some students from taking the courses they want to take. This issue is discussed further in the program trends section.

A common argument in favor of consolidating small, rural districts is that small districts have high per-student costs due to duplication of administrative, operational, infrastructure, and personnel costs. This question has been studied extensively, but the literature does not provide a clear answer with regard to optimal school district size in terms of cost savings and academic achievement.

In one of the most rigorous studies (Duncombe and Yinger, 2007, 2010), the authors looked retrospectively at cost savings in 12 pairs of rural districts that regionalized in New York from 1987 to 1995. They found substantial long-term savings in districts that are the size of many Berkshire County districts. A key caveat is that the state of New York provided large incentives over many years to offset

increased capital costs associated with regionalizing; the absence of such incentives would have reduced the fiscal benefits considerably. The state also provided intensive guidance and intervention related to the regionalization process. Potential savings were greatest for districts of 300 students, but significant savings were also found for districts of 1,500 students. If transferable to Berkshire County, these findings could be relevant to all districts other than Pittsfield (which has more than 5,000 students).

A study of Franklin County in western Massachusetts, a mostly rural region with many similarities to Berkshire County, also found that substantial cost savings could be realized by consolidating into one, three, or six districts (Cronin et al., 2009). Commenting on the study, personnel from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education wrote, "A major finding of the study was that [forming] a large district could both reduce administrative costs and strengthen central office management (Carleton et al., 2009, p. 10). They added, "Without financial incentives, however, the districts have done little to pursue this further" (p. 10).

In contrast, numerous studies report minimal cost savings or even cost increases when districts were consolidated. In an analysis of small rural school districts in Texas, Cooley and Floyd (2013) paired districts involved in consolidation with similar districts not involved in consolidation. They concluded that, for the "absorbing" district, per-pupil costs increased and student achievement decreased. In a study of cost savings through consolidation for the state of Michigan, Coulson (2007) concluded that the theoretical maximum savings from consolidating all of the small districts in the state was roughly $31 million. Moreover, the actual savings were likely to be substantially smaller, because of the difficulty of creating districts of the "optimal" size of 2,900 students that was predicted by his statistical model. Despite the many studies on this topic, there is no consensus on the ideal district size to minimize cost per student or maximize student achievement (Rooney and Augenblick, 2009).

In a recent review of district consolidation research, the National Education Policy Center concluded,

> "Contemporary research does not support claims about the widespread benefits of consolidation. The assumptions behind such claims are most often dangerous oversimplifications. For example, policymakers may believe 'We'll save money if we reduce the number of superintendents by consolidating districts;' however, larger districts need—and usually hire—more mid-level administrators. Research also suggests that impoverished regions in particular often benefit from smaller schools and districts, and they can suffer irreversible damage if consolidation occurs. For these reasons, decisions to deconsolidate or consolidate districts are best made on a case-by-case basis." (Howley et al., 2001, p. 3).

Clearly the considerations in planning for potential regionalization are numerous and complex. While these considerations may be sobering, they are important to take into account in service of achieving the Task Force's goals. In reviewing the findings from a group of 12 regionalization planning grants from ESE, Carleton et al. (2009) concluded, "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" (p. 10).

A resource that provides detailed findings about many of these obstacles that may need to be addressed for successful regionalization was provided by New Jersey's Assembly Task Force on School District Regionalization (1999). A sample of their extensive findings includes:

- "The disproportionate distribution of costs among constituent municipalities in regionalized districts is a major disincentive to regionalization."
- "Smaller, more affluent communities in regional school districts, which are locked into paying based on their equalized valuation, as opposed to on a per-pupil basis, may wind up paying more than what they otherwise would pay in a non-regionalized district."
- "Representation on regional school boards can also be a disincentive for regionalization. Small communities with limited representation may not see an advantage to regionalizing" (p. i).

The findings from the New Jersey study lead to a detailed set of recommendations for districts and states engaged in regionalization processes. These and other suggestions emerging from the Phase One study are described in the conclusions and recommendations section below.

2. Enrollment Trends and Population Projections

Enrollment in grades K–12 in Berkshire County public schools declined by 22.3% from 2000 to 2015, a loss of 4,560 students (Figure 1 and Table 3).[2] Massachusetts experienced a much smaller 1.7% decline during that time period. At the district level, enrollment declines ranged from 16.3% for Lenox to 37.7% for North Adams. Two single-school districts—Berkshire Arts and Technology Charter and Northern Berkshire Regional Vocational Technical—were growing during this time period and experienced substantial increases in enrollment.

[2] Based on ESE school district profiles.

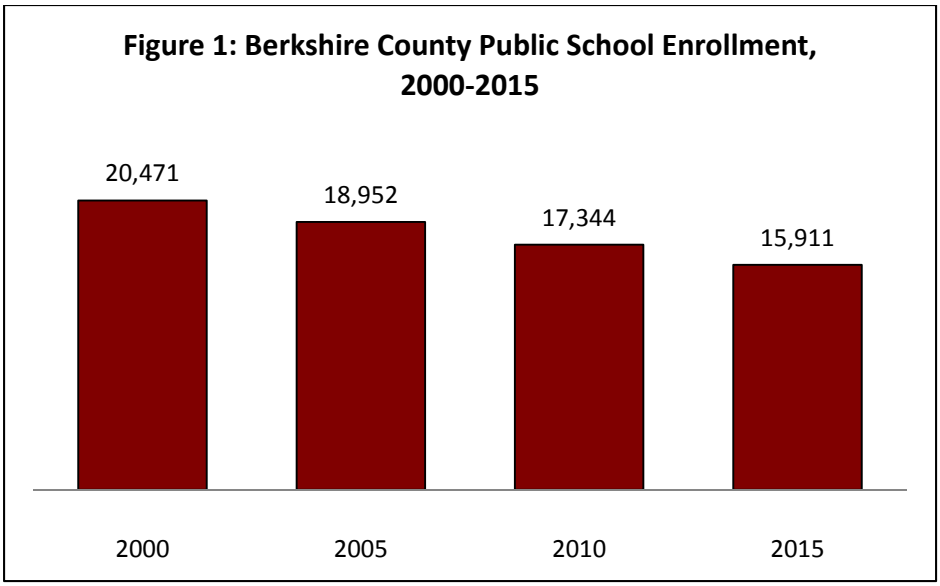


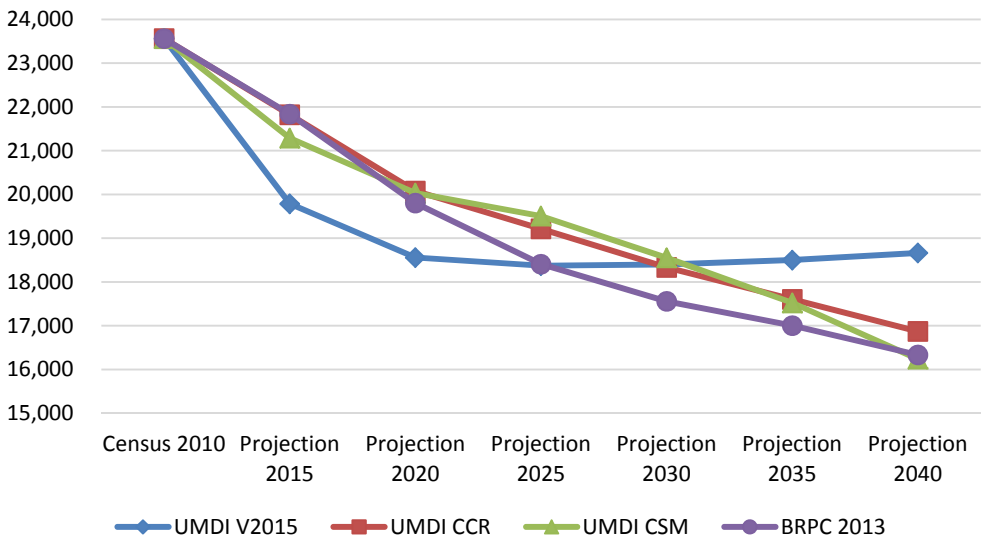
Table 3: Berkshire County Enrollment and Enrollment Change by School District, 2000–15

	K–12 Enrollment				Enrollment Change			
District	**SY00**	**SY05**	**SY10**	**SY15**	**2000-05**	**2005-10**	**2010-15**	**2000-15**
Adams-Cheshire	1,928	1,740	1,507	1,308	-9.8%	-13.4%	-13.2%	-32.2%
Berkshire Arts Tech Charter	0	64	216	334	NA	237.5	54.6	NA
Berkshire Hills	1,612	1,381	1,352	1,314	-14.3	-2.1	-2.8	-18.5
Central Berkshire	2,363	2,192	1,933	1,657	-7.2	-11.8	-14.3	-29.9
Clarksburg	220	199	175	168	-9.5	-12.1	-4.0	-23.6
Farmington River	154	162	121	104	5.2	-25.3	-14.0	-32.5
Florida	104	99	103	82	-4.8	4.0	-20.4	-21.2
Hancock	51	44	30	33	-13.7	-31.8	10.0	-35.3
Lanesborough	274	272	244	194	-0.7	-10.3	-20.5	-29.2
Lee	876	854	819	665	-2.5	-4.1	-18.8	-24.1
Lenox	843	828	804	706	-1.8	-2.9	-12.2	-16.3
Mount Greylock	833	730	636	548	-12.4	-12.9	-13.8	-34.2
North Adams	2,196	1,935	1,520	1,369	-11.9	-21.4	-9.9	-37.7
N. Berkshire Voc Tech	451	468	500	500	3.8	6.8	0.0	10.9
Pittsfield	6,734	6,325	5,930	5,581	-6.1	-6.2	-5.9	-17.1
Richmond	184	184	162	145	0.0	-12.0	-10.5	-21.2
Savoy	44	56	35	35	27.3	-37.5	0.0	-20.5
Southern Berkshire	1,072	948	865	740	-11.6	-8.8	-14.5	-31.0
Williamstown	532	471	392	428	-11.5	-16.8	9.2	-19.5
Berkshire County	**20,471**	**18,952**	**17,344**	**15,911**	**-7.4%**	**-8.5%**	**-8.3%**	**-22.3%**
State	**972,260**	**975,911**	**957,053**	**955,844**	**0.4%**	**-1.9%**	**-0.1%**	**-1.7%**

Four population models—three developed by the UMDI Population Estimates Program, and one developed by BRPC—project further decline in the school age population in the next 20 years. These projections could be altered by changes in birth, death, and/or migration trends.

UMDI's first model was developed from its publicly available "Vintage 2015" series, based on American Community Survey gross migration levels for Massachusetts regions and published for the entire state. UMDI's second model uses a cohort change ratio (CCR) approach (a modified Hamilton-Perry method), and UMDI's third model uses a Cohort Survival Method (CSM) approach; both of these models rely on town-level trends not controlled to larger regional projections. All three UMDI models assume a status quo approach to trends experienced since 2000, with the CCR and CSM models limited to trends during just the 2000–2010 period, and the V2015 public series incorporating some later estimates. BRPC's population projections are based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau (BRPC 2013). Figure 2 shows projections for all four population models from 2010 to 2040 for ages 5 to 19.[3]

Figure 2: Berkshire County Population Projections 2010-2040, Ages 5-19



From 2015 to 2025, the four population models estimate a decline of from 7.1% to 15.7% for the population aged 5 to 19 years old, with an average projected decline of 10.8% (Table 4). During that same time period, a school enrollment model created by BRPC (2015) has estimated a decline of 11% in Berkshire County public school enrollment. This equals the average of the four population estimates shown in the table. While the age 5 to 19 population does not match the K–12 public school population exactly, the two are closely related. In summary, a substantial decline in Berkshire County public school enrollment is likely in the next decade.

[3] Ages 5 to 19 are used because the UMDI projections are produced for 5-year age groups including 0 to 4, 5 to 9, 10 to 14, 15 to 19, etc.

For the subsequent decade, 2025 to 2035, this decline in public school enrollment is likely to be sustained or to increase. The four models estimate an age 5 to 19 population increase of 0.7% to a decline of 10.2% during that period, with an average projected decline of 6.5%.

Table 4: Projected Berkshire County Population, Ages 5 to 19, 2015–35

Model	Projection 2015	Projection 2025	Projection 2035	% Change 2015–25	% Change 2025–35
UMDI V2015	19,786	18,374	18,500	-7.1%	0.7%
UMDI CCR	21,822	19,214	17,603	-12.0	-8.4
UMDI CSM	21,288	19,507	17,524	-8.4	-10.2
BRPC 2013	21,838	18,408	17,005	-15.7	-7.6
Average	**21,184**	**18,876**	**17,658**	**-10.8%**	**-6.5%**

3. Cost and Revenue Trends

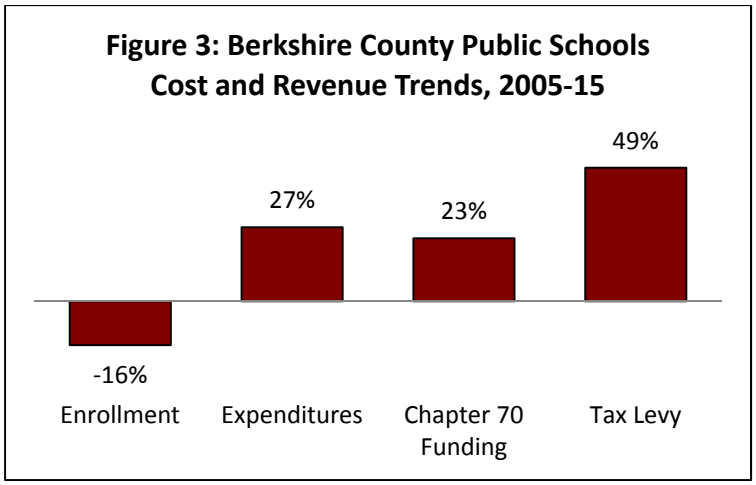
Understanding cost and revenue trends is an important step toward planning strategies to improve educational quality and fiscal sustainability. This section first presents trends related to total school district expenditures, tax levy limits and capacity, and Chapter 70 funding. Then it presents trends regarding several factors that comprise or influence expenditures, including costs by functional category (e.g., administration, professional development), rates of students in selected populations (e.g., students with disabilities, students from low-income families), school choice revenue, building capacity, student-teacher ratios, and teacher salaries.

Major costs and revenues. Changes in enrollment, costs, and revenues at the county level from 2005–15 are shown in Figure 3.[4] The expenditures column reflects total school district expenditures as reported to the state.[5] The Chapter 70 funding column reflects the Chapter 70 revenues provided by the state directly to each school district plus any amounts provided to individual towns within regional districts.[6] During this 10-year period, enrollment fell substantially, while both expenditures and revenues grew. Total expenditures (27%) and tax levies (49%) grew faster than Chapter 70 revenues (23%).

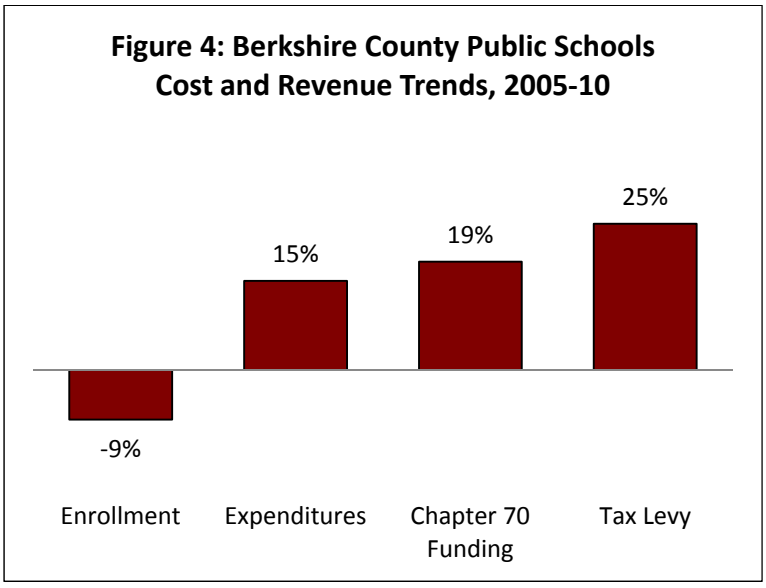
[4] This time period was selected because school year 2004–05 is the first year for which financial information is provided in the ESE school district profiles, and school year 2014–15 is the most recent year for which some of the data in this report is available.

[5] http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/state_report/ppx.aspx.

[6] http://www.doe.mass.edu/finance/chapter70/. Chapter 70 funds provided to the three towns that do not operate a school district or belong to a regional district were combined with Chapter 70 funds provided to the districts to which they primarily send their students—Tyringham with Lee, Mount Washington with Southern Berkshire, and New Ashford with Lanesborough (50%) and Mount Greylock (50%).



Most of the increase in Chapter 70 funding took place during the first half of the 10-year period, as shown in Figures 4 and 5, which show 2005–10 and 2010–15 separately. During both time periods, enrollment fell substantially, and both expenditures and tax levies increased substantially. Chapter 70 funding grew faster than expenditures during the first five-year period and slower than expenditures during the second five-year period.[7]



[7] Note that the change percentages are not additive, due to compounding. For example, expenditures grew 15% from 2005 to 2010, and 10% from 2010 to 2015, but this represented 27% (not 25%) total growth from 2005 to 2015.

Figure 5: Berkshire County Public Schools Cost and Revenue Trends, 2010-15

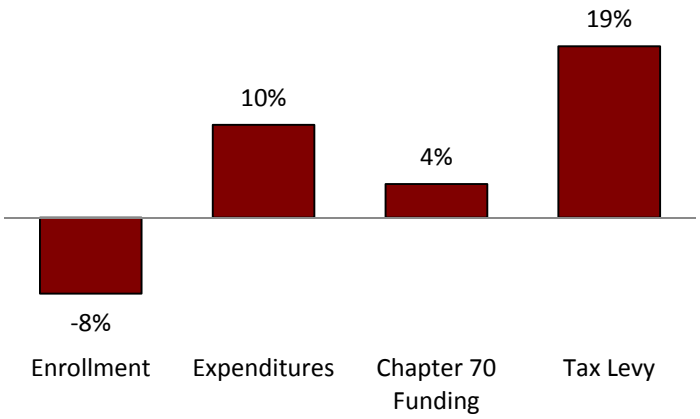


Table 5 shows data at the district level for these same categories—enrollment, expenditures, Chapter 70 funding, and tax levies—for the 2005–10 and 2010–15 time periods. For regional districts, the tax levy column reflects the combined tax levies for each town in the district.

Substantial variation is evident across districts within the county. For example, in Adams-Cheshire tax levies grew much faster than total expenditures, whereas in Berkshire Hills the gap between tax levies and total expenditures was much smaller. Providing the data as two five-year periods rather than a single ten-year period makes it possible to see how trends changed over time. For example, tax levies in Lenox grew about twice as fast from 2005–10 as from 2010–15. Despite the variation across districts, the county-wide figures indicate trends toward substantially declining enrollment, increasing expenditures and tax levies, and state funding that does not keep up with increased district expenditures.

Table 5: Berkshire County Cost and Revenue Trends by School District, 2005–15								
	Change 2005–10 (%)				Change 2010–15 (%)			
School District	Student Enrollment	Total Expenditures	Chap. 70 Funding	Tax Levy	Student Enrollment	Total Expenditures	Chap. 70 Funding	Tax Levy
Adams-Cheshire	-13%	3%	8%	23%	-13%	5%	-4%	30%
Berkshire Arts Tech Charter	238	ND	ND	NA	55	ND	ND	NA
Berkshire Hills	-2	15	7	27	-3	15	-2	15
Central Berkshire	-12	15	16	26	-14	6	-2	18
Clarksburg	-12	25	15	27	-4	-5	5	38
Farmington River	-25	15	13	34	-14	24	0	25
Florida	4	22	22	36	-20	16	6	17
Hancock	-32	4	51	-6	10	-14	-1	-27
Lanesborough-Williamstown	-14	14	18	24	-8	7	-4	14
Lee	-4	22	37	23	-19	7	-2	15
Lenox	-3	23	11	30	-12	12	-1	14
North Adams	-21	-3	3	31	-10	3	-4	29
Northern Berkshire Voc Tech	7	35	50	NA	0	14	8	NA
Pittsfield	-6	20	28	21	-6	14	13	22
Richmond	-12	23	13	30	-10	7	-1	14
Savoy	-38	26	13	52	0	2	-2	0
Southern Berkshire	-9	21	14	31	-14	16	-2	15
Berkshire County	**-9%**	**15%**	**19%**	**25%**	**-8%**	**10%**	**4%**	**19%**

ND = no data. NA = not applicable. For Chapter 70 funds, Lee includes Tyringham, Southern Berkshire includes Mount Washington, and Lanesborough-Williamstown includes New Ashford. Tax levies are combined for all towns in each school district.

Tax levy limits and capacity.[8] Understanding cost and revenue trends for the Berkshire County public schools also requires considering tax levy limits and capacity. Table 6 shows tax revenue statistics for 2005, 2010, 2015, and 2016. Including data from 2016 means that the time intervals shown in the table are not all equal (i.e., there are two five-year spans and a one-year span), but the 2016 data were available and added important information.

Table 6: Tax Levy Limits and Capacity, Averages for Berkshire County School Districts, 2005–16

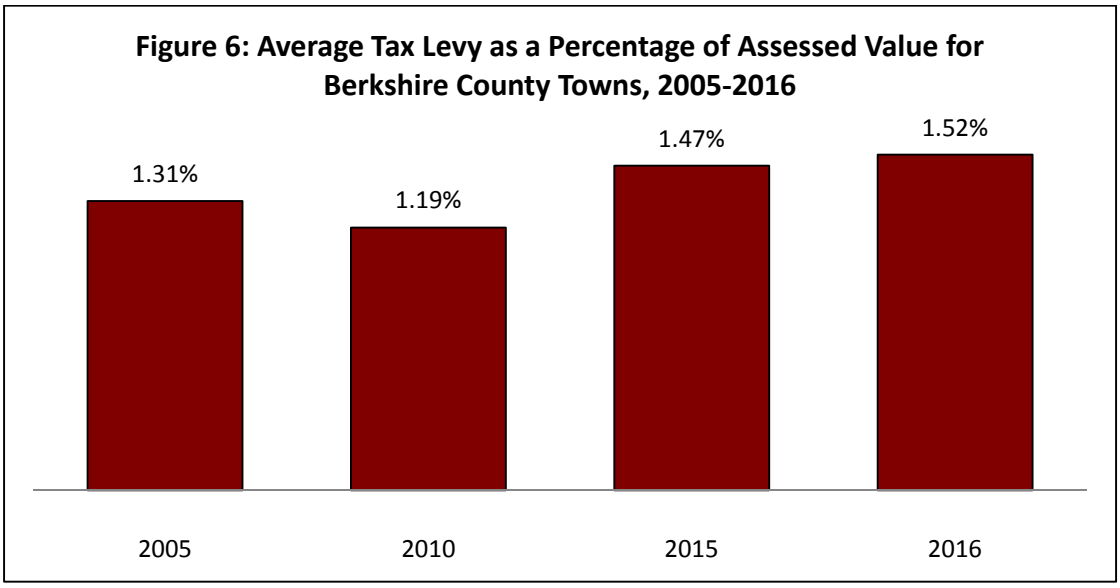
Year	Maximum Levy Limit	Total Tax Levy	Excess Levy Capacity	Excess Levy Capacity as a % of Maximum Levy Limit	Levy Ceiling	Override Capacity	Total Assessed Value	Tax Levy as a % of Assessed Value
2005	$5,562,966	$5,210,054	$352,912	6.34%	$9,946,864	$4,604,884	$397,874,540	1.31%
2010	6,966,674	6,518,710	447,964	6.43	13,682,139	6,903,785	547,285,555	1.19
2015	8,344,722	7,739,632	605,090	7.25	13,154,003	4,998,018	526,160,116	1.47
2016	8,593,004	8,025,466	567,538	6.60	13,223,172	4,812,094	528,926,883	1.52

Table 7 shows changes in the tax revenue values during each of the three time intervals. The average excess levy capacity per school district fell by about 6% from 2015 to 2016, after rising 26.9% from 2005 to 2010 and 35.1% from 2010 to 2015. Average excess levy capacity as a percentage of the maximum levy limit also fell in 2016 after rising over the previous 10 years; however, it remained above 2005 and 2010 levels. These trend reversals suggest that many municipalities are utilizing a portion of their remaining taxing capacity in order to support their educational expenditures.

Average total assessed value increased 37.6% from 2005 to 2010 but then fell by 3.9% from 2005 to 2010 and was nearly flat (an increase of 0.5%) from 2015 to 2016. As would be expected, changes in the average levy ceiling mirrored these trends. Average override capacity amplified these trends, growing more than assessed value from 2005 to 2010, and falling more than assessed value from 2010 to 2015. From 2015 to 2016, however, this trend was interrupted, with override capacity falling 3.7% while assessed value increased 0.5%, indicating further strain on school districts' ability to raise taxes to support educational expenditures. This is also reflected in the average tax levy as a percentage of assessed value, which fell from 1.31% in 2005 to 1.19% in 2010, but has subsequently risen to 1.52% in 2016 (Table 6 and Figure 6).

[8] Finance terms used in this section are explained in the MA Department of Revenue's publication, "Levy limits: A primer on Proposition 2 1/2," available at http://www.mass.gov/dor/docs/dls/publ/misc/levylimits.pdf.

Table 7: Changes in Tax Levy Limits and Capacity, Averages for Berkshire County School Districts, 2005–16								
	Percent Changes in:							
Span of Years	Maximum Levy Limit	Total Tax Levy	Excess Levy Capacity	Excess Levy Capacity as a % of Maximum Levy Limit	Levy Ceiling	Override Capacity	Total Assessed Value	Tax Levy as a % of Assessed Value
2005-10	25.2%	25.1%	26.9%	1.4%	37.6%	49.9%	37.6%	-9.2%
2010-15	19.8	18.7	35.1	12.8	-3.9	-27.6	-3.9	23.5
2015-16	3.0	3.7	-6.2	-9.0	0.5	-3.7	0.5	3.4



The individual municipalities in the county show considerable variation from the county-wide tax levy figures (Tables 8, 9, and 10). For example, while the average change in assessed value from 2005 to 2016 county-wide was 33%, this ranged from 17% for Lenox to 76% for Hinsdale. Table 8 also shows that, on average, tax levy as a percentage of assessed value increased by 0.21 percentage points from 2005 to 2016. However, this ranged from a decline of 0.30 percentage points for Hancock to an increase of 0.62 percentage points for North Adams.

Excess levy capacity figures are also highly variable at the town level. While the average excess levy capacity increased by about $215,000 from 2005 to 2016, this ranged from a decrease of $1.4 million for North Adams to an increase of $4.3 million for Pittsfield (Table 9). Considering excess levy capacity as a percentage of the maximum levy limit simplifies making comparisons across towns. This figure grew by 0.26 percentage points from 2005 to 2016 for the county as a whole, but it ranged from a decrease of almost 17 percentage points for Clarksburg to an increase of 53 percentage points for Hancock (Table 9).

Some Task Force members and district administrators interviewed for this project noted that having substantial excess levy capacity does not assure that a district has a strong fiscal position. Two administrators specifically mentioned Pittsfield, which in 2016 had an 8% excess levy capacity as a percentage of their maximum levy limit; they anticipated that this excess capacity would dwindle rapidly in the next two to three school years.

Finally, override capacity is highly variable at the town level. While override capacity for the county increased by 4% from 2005 to 2016, it ranged from a decrease of 100% for Pittsfield (i.e., their override capacity went to zero) to an increase of 99% for Hinsdale (Table 10). Considering override capacity as a percentage of the total tax levy simplifies making comparisons across towns. This figure declined by 28 percentage points from 2005 to 2016 for the county as a whole, and it declined for 25 out of 32 municipalities (Table 10). There was also a wide range and notable outliers, such as a decline of 106 percentage points for Stockbridge (because their tax levy increased substantially while their override capacity changed minimally) and an increase of 398 percentage points for Hancock (because their tax levy decreased substantially while their override capacity changed moderately).

Table 8: Berkshire County Assessed Value and Tax Levy by Municipality, 2005–16						
Municipality	Total Assessed Value 2005	Total Assessed Value 2016	% Change in Total Assessed Value 2005–16	Tax Levy as % of Assessed Value 2005	Tax Levy as % of Assessed Value 2016	Change in Tax Levy as % of Assessed Value 2005–16
Adams	$357,934,500	$482,882,333	35%	1.83%	2.22%	0.39
Alford	180,734,950	273,428,704	51	0.49	0.46	-0.03
Becket	328,300,700	502,028,856	53	1.01	1.05	0.04
Cheshire	211,016,989	302,765,482	43	1.02	1.23	0.21
Clarksburg	84,069,064	112,169,420	33	1.16	1.53	0.37
Dalton	447,111,318	595,474,465	33	1.76	1.96	0.20
Egremont	312,527,938	384,010,808	23	0.82	0.92	0.10
Florida	98,948,175	125,126,992	26	1.43	1.86	0.43
Great Barrington	871,438,862	1,386,204,580	59	1.48	1.43	-0.05
Hancock	224,006,718	298,369,678	33	0.54	0.24	-0.30
Hinsdale	167,496,825	295,023,940	76	1.48	1.34	-0.14
Lanesborough	330,640,729	397,346,099	20	1.64	1.94	0.30
Lee	649,856,713	912,378,464	40	1.41	1.46	0.05
Lenox	970,735,660	1,138,874,950	17	0.99	1.27	0.28
Monterey	310,972,829	504,273,397	62	0.66	0.63	-0.03
Mt. Washington	60,325,454	83,231,659	38	0.50	0.60	0.10
New Ashford	29,242,700	40,934,800	40	0.90	0.85	-0.05
New Marlborough	360,013,000	485,264,620	35	0.72	0.96	0.24
North Adams	553,363,255	709,233,263	28	1.60	2.22	0.62
Otis	385,669,663	608,324,038	58	0.74	0.78	0.04
Peru	58,777,129	86,345,909	47	1.60	2.01	0.41
Pittsfield	2,767,583,665	3,343,164,997	21	1.81	2.30	0.49
Richmond	311,045,724	409,000,588	31	0.96	1.15	0.19
Sandisfield	171,010,190	216,332,965	27	0.92	1.30	0.38
Savoy	51,748,481	67,162,428	30	1.32	1.62	0.30
Sheffield	456,468,827	608,085,291	33	1.27	1.43	0.16
Stockbridge	714,159,424	849,885,678	19	0.65	0.96	0.31
Tyringham	136,623,160	192,834,550	41	0.61	0.67	0.06
Washington	50,249,783	79,790,690	59	1.34	1.37	0.03
West Stockbridge	234,270,827	371,379,468	59	1.48	1.23	-0.25
Williamstown	772,762,800	956,447,233	24	1.37	1.58	0.21
Windsor	72,879,240	107,883,908	48	1.44	1.34	-0.10
Berkshire County	**$397,874,540**	**$528,926,883**	**33%**	**1.31%**	**1.52%**	**0.21**

Table 9: Berkshire County Excess Levy Capacity by Municipality, 2005–16						
Municipality	Excess Levy Capacity 2005	Excess Levy Capacity 2016	Change in Excess Levy Capacity 2005–16	Excess Levy Capacity as % of Maximum Levy Limit 2005	Excess Levy Capacity as % of Maximum Levy Limit 2016	Change in Excess Levy Capacity as % of Maximum Levy Limit 2005–16
Adams	$450,533	$140,814	-$309,719	6.44%	1.30%	-5.14
Alford	157,616	235,950	78,334	14.98	15.80	0.82
Becket	3,236	328,974	325,738	0.10	5.90	5.80
Cheshire	17,576	33,201	15,625	0.81	0.89	0.08
Clarksburg	227,443	37,556	-189,887	18.95	2.14	-16.81
Dalton	101,454	128,834	27,380	1.27	1.09	-0.18
Egremont	278,741	407,119	128,378	9.85	10.34	0.49
Florida	973	965	-8	0.07	0.04	-0.03
Great Barrington	1,591,588	1,443,425	-148,163	11.01	6.79	-4.22
Hancock	177,493	1,401,712	1,224,219	12.80	66.19	53.39
Hinsdale	348,452	351,073	2,621	12.35	8.16	-4.19
Lanesborough	83,627	205,796	122,169	1.52	2.61	1.09
Lee	300,562	1,677,712	1,377,150	3.17	11.21	8.04
Lenox	733,390	738,548	5,158	7.08	4.86	-2.22
Monterey	82,147	90,033	7,886	3.86	2.78	-1.08
Mt. Washington	80,101	43,935	-36,166	21.05	8.04	-13.01
New Ashford	925	102,606	101,681	0.35	22.87	22.52
New Marlborough	93,058	13,653	-79,405	3.46	0.29	-3.17
North Adams	1,439,144	13,666	-1,425,478	13.98	0.09	-13.89
Otis	143,580	3,202	-140,378	4.78	0.07	-4.71
Peru	278,185	119,806	-158,379	22.83	6.44	-16.39
Pittsfield	2,462,698	6,793,669	4,330,971	4.69	8.13	3.44
Richmond	146,285	91,390	-54,895	4.65	1.91	-2.74
Sandisfield	223,184	81,478	-141,706	12.47	2.82	-9.65
Savoy	490	204,110	203,620	0.07	15.80	15.73
Sheffield	145,658	627,705	482,047	2.44	6.72	4.28
Stockbridge	993,237	678,594	-314,643	17.58	7.69	-9.89
Tyringham	97,881	59,701	-38,180	10.51	4.39	-6.12
Washington	27,212	42,797	15,585	3.89	3.76	-0.13
West Stockbridge	363,211	886,455	523,244	9.46	16.22	6.76
Williamstown	229,274	1,032,865	803,591	2.12	6.40	4.28
Windsor	14,220	143,874	129,654	1.34	9.06	7.72
Berkshire County	**$352,912**	**$567,538**	**$214,626**	**6.34%**	**6.60%**	**0.26**

Table 10: Berkshire County Override Capacity by Municipality, 2005–16						
Municipality	Override Capacity 2005	Override Capacity 2016	Change in Override Capacity 2005–16	Override Capacity as % of Total Tax Levy 2005	Override Capacity as % of Total Tax Levy 2016	Change in Override Capacity as % of Total Tax Levy 2005–16
Adams	$2,047,642	$1,845,331	-10%	31%	17%	-14%
Alford	3,561,445	5,341,996	50	398	425	27
Becket	5,093,813	7,138,181	40	153	136	-17
Cheshire	3,166,086	4,195,311	33	147	113	-34
Clarksburg	921,375	1,067,887	16	95	62	-33
Dalton	3,529,241	3,557,304	1	45	30	-14
Egremont	5,212,508	5,664,091	9	204	160	-44
Florida	1,058,207	838,109	-21	75	36	-39
Great Barrington	9,185,957	14,807,485	61	71	75	3
Hancock	4,213,039	5,341,442	27	348	746	398
Hinsdale	1,554,142	3,098,329	99	63	78	16
Lanesborough	3,089,665	2,110,123	-32	57	27	-30
Lee	7,483,570	8,537,616	14	82	64	-17
Lenox	14,502,005	12,938,971	-11	151	89	-61
Monterey	5,878,211	9,456,371	61	287	300	13
Mt. Washington	1,127,614	1,534,136	36	375	305	-70
New Ashford	467,146	574,777	23	178	166	-11
New Marlborough	6,539,083	7,635,276	17	252	164	-88
North Adams	3,538,517	1,985,109	-44	40	13	-27
Otis	6,780,541	10,509,630	55	237	220	-17
Peru	341,141	311,788	-9	36	18	-18
Pittsfield	16,704,529	0	-100	33	0	-33
Richmond	4,628,267	5,591,314	21	154	119	-35
Sandisfield	2,552,657	2,555,564	0	163	91	-72
Savoy	616,609	386,919	-37	90	36	-55
Sheffield	5,739,810	5,854,484	2	99	67	-32
Stockbridge	12,681,145	13,538,634	7	272	166	-106
Tyringham	2,484,298	3,461,458	39	298	266	-32
Washington	608,000	920,365	51	90	84	-6
West Stockbridge	2,375,029	3,927,185	65	68	86	17
Williamstown	8,862,983	8,148,839	-8	84	54	-30
Windsor	812,024	1,112,986	37	77	77	0
Berkshire County	**$147,356,299**	**$153,987,011**	**4%**	**88%**	**60%**	**-28%**

Functional expenditures by category. Cost trends are also evident in school district expenditures in different functional areas. Annual financial reporting to ESE from school districts results in 11 functional categories that are reported at the county and state levels in Table 11 and further disaggregated by district in Tables 12A through 12C. County-wide spending can be compared to state spending in each category. For example, Table 11 shows that the percentage of budgets spent on administration was similar at the county and state levels in both 2005 and 2015, differing by just 3%. In comparison, spending on guidance, counseling, and testing was about 29% lower in Berkshire County

than in the state in both 2005 and 2015. There were also large relative changes between the county and the state in some categories. For example, county expenditures on insurance, retirement programs, and other were 2.7% lower than state expenditures in 2005 but 18.8% higher in 2015.

Table 11: Percentage of Functional Expenditures by Category, County vs. State Comparison, 2005–15

	2005[1]			2015		
Function	Berkshire County[2]	State	County Relative to State	Berkshire County	State	County Relative to State
Administration	3.1%	3.2%	-3.1%	3.2%	3.3%	-3.0%
Instructional Leadership	5.7	6.2	-8.1	6.1	6.1	0.0
Classroom and Specialist Teachers	34.1	36.8	-7.3	31.3	35.0	-10.6
Other Teaching Services	7.4	6.4	15.6	8.4	7.3	15.1
Professional Development	0.8	1.6	-50.0	1.0	1.2	-16.7
Instruct. Materials, Equipment, Tech	2.8	3.0	-6.7	2.1	2.7	-22.2
Guidance, Counseling, and Testing	1.9	2.7	-29.6	2.0	2.8	-28.6
Pupil Services	8.1	8.7	-6.9	8.3	8.9	-6.7
Operations and Maintenance	7.4	8.1	-8.6	6.5	7.1	-8.5
Insurance, Retirement Programs, Other	14.4	14.8	-2.7	18.3	15.4	18.8
Payments to Out-of-School Districts	14.2	8.4	69.0	12.8	10.2	25.5

[1] Values in the "state" column are from 2006; state-wide percentages were not available for 2005.
[2] The Berkshire Arts and Technology Charter Public and Northern Berkshire Regional Vocational Technical districts were excluded because their financial data were not provided in the ESE school district profiles.

Tables 12A through 12C show the percentage of district spending in each category, enabling comparisons within each district over time as well as across districts in the county and the state. For example, Table 12A shows that North Adams' expenditures on administration increased from 1.7% to 3.2% of their total budget from 2005 to 2015. Their spending on administration at the beginning of this time period was far below the county average of 3.1%, but by 2015 their spending on administration equaled the county average. The bottom rows of each table permit comparisons between individual school districts and county and state averages.

The trends for each district could serve as a source of information for strategic planning regarding financial sustainability and educational quality. This could include understanding how the figures reflect local circumstances (e.g., district size, average age of personnel, geographic spread, infrastructure needs), but also whether they adequately reflect local priorities, needs, and goals.

Table 12A: Percentage of Functional Expenditures by School District and Category, 2005–15 (Categories 1–4)								
	Administration		Instructional Leadership		Classroom and Specialist Teachers		Other Teaching Services	
District[1]	2005	2015	2005	2015	2005	2015	2005	2015
Adams-Cheshire	2.7%	3.2%	5.7%	5.3%	31.8%	33.7%	5.7%	7.9%
Berkshire Hills	4.4	4.6	6.0	8.9	37.1	32.0	6.5	5.9
Central Berkshire	3.1	3.0	5.3	5.6	39.7	33.1	7.3	7.8
Clarksburg	3.1	3.3	8.9	5.5	32.7	29.3	7.8	9.8
Farmington River	3.7	3.8	5.6	5.3	22.3	15.2	9.0	7.5
Florida	4.4	4.0	6.8	7.6	33.2	28.1	4.2	10.0
Hancock	1.5	2.2	1.8	10.2	21.8	28.1	3.0	6.1
Lanesborough	2.3	3.0	4.8	4.4	40.0	32.0	12.6	12.0
Lee	2.6	3.6	7.3	5.4	39.1	34.1	8.3	9.4
Lenox	3.8	3.8	5.1	5.5	41.7	40.5	7.7	6.9
Mount Greylock	3.7	2.7	4.5	4.2	32.2	33.9	6.7	4.6
North Adams	1.7	3.2	4.9	8.1	42.0	30.7	6.3	8.6
Pittsfield	2.2	2.0	8.2	5.7	35.9	33.1	7.0	8.4
Richmond	2.1	2.3	4.3	6.4	36.0	40.3	6.8	5.6
Savoy	3.6	3.6	6.6	6.0	20.6	17.4	4.5	8.8
Southern Berkshire	2.9	3.1	6.0	5.6	36.7	33.1	8.0	9.4
Williamstown	4.5	2.5	4.8	3.8	36.7	38.4	13.9	14.0
County Average	**3.1**	**3.2**	**5.7**	**6.1**	**34.1**	**31.3**	**7.4**	**8.4**
State Average[2]	**3.2**	**3.3**	**6.2**	**6.1**	**36.8**	**35.0**	**6.4**	**7.3**
Ratio County to State	**-3.1**	**-3.0**	**-8.1**	**0.0**	**-7.3**	**-10.6**	**15.6**	**15.1**

[1] The Berkshire Arts and Technology Charter Public and Northern Berkshire Regional Vocational Technical districts were excluded because their financial data were not provided in the ESE school district profiles.
[2] Values in the "state" row are from 2006; state-wide percentages were not available for 2005.

Table 12B: Percentage of Functional Expenditures by School District and Category, 2005–15 (Categories 5–8)								
	Professional Development		Instructional Materials, Equipment, and Technology		Guidance, Counseling, and Testing		Pupil Services	
District[1]	2005	2015	2005	2015	2005	2015	2005	2015
Adams-Cheshire	0.7%	0.9%	1.9%	1.8%	3.1%	1.6%	10.2%	10.1%
Berkshire Hills	0.3	0.6	2.9	1.1	2.9	2.9	9.9	9.8
Central Berkshire	0.1	1.7	2.8	2.2	1.8	3.2	12.1	10.9
Clarksburg	2.1	0.7	4.9	1.4	0.6	1.4	7.4	8.3
Farmington River	0.9	0.8	1.1	2.6	0.5	1.4	12.0	10.6
Florida	0.3	0.5	2.3	1.3	0.4	0.7	11.1	10.0
Hancock	0.1	1.7	2.0	1.4	0.7	1.4	2.2	5.5
Lanesborough	0.2	0.4	1.2	4.4	2.9	1.3	6.5	7.2
Lee	1.0	1.3	5.6	1.5	2.7	2.9	7.4	8.3
Lenox	1.1	1.1	3.3	4.0	2.9	2.5	7.8	6.9
Mount Greylock	0.6	1.1	2.3	2.0	3.8	3.0	10.8	9.1
North Adams	1.4	0.6	4.0	1.2	1.8	2.1	7.1	9.0
Pittsfield	1.7	1.3	3.8	3.3	2.7	2.7	6.4	7.2
Richmond	0.6	0.8	1.4	1.7	3.0	2.6	5.1	6.8
Savoy	0.5	0.1	2.5	1.3	0.2	0.8	5.9	5.1
Southern Berkshire	0.7	1.0	2.8	1.4	1.6	2.3	11.3	11.2
Williamstown	2.2	2.2	3.0	4.2	1.1	1.3	4.6	5.3
County Average	**0.8**	**1.0**	**2.8**	**2.1**	**1.9**	**2.0**	**8.1**	**8.3**
State Average[2]	**1.6**	**1.2**	**3.0**	**2.7**	**2.7**	**2.8**	**8.7**	**8.9**
Ratio County to State	**-50.0**	**-16.7**	**-6.7**	**-22.2**	**-29.6**	**-28.6**	**-6.9**	**-6.7**

[1] The Berkshire Arts and Technology Charter Public and Northern Berkshire Regional Vocational Technical districts were excluded because their financial data were not provided in the ESE school district profiles.
[2] Values in the "state" row are from 2006; state-wide percentages were not available for 2005.

Table 12C: Percentage of Functional Expenditures by School District and Category, 2005–15 (Categories 9–11)						
	Operations and Maintenance		Insurance, Retirement Programs, and Other		Payments to Out-of-School Districts	
District[1]	2005	2015	2005	2015	2005	2015
Adams-Cheshire	11.2%	6.6%	19.8%	21.9%	7.1%	7.1%
Berkshire Hills	8.5	7.5	15.7	19.6	5.7	7.0
Central Berkshire	7.4	8.4	16.1	20.0	4.2	4.1
Clarksburg	4.2	4.9	9.0	16.3	19.5	19.1
Farmington River	5.1	5.8	10.2	17.8	29.7	29.2
Florida	7.6	6.4	15.9	19.4	13.9	12.2
Hancock	4.3	3.2	3.1	1.9	59.6	38.4
Lanesborough	8.3	8.1	13.5	24.0	7.9	3.3
Lee	8.0	7.6	13.5	19.7	4.5	6.3
Lenox	8.8	8.1	15.2	17.4	2.5	3.3
Mount Greylock	9.1	8.5	21.0	18.8	5.5	12.0
North Adams	6.6	6.3	13.6	18.4	10.8	11.9
Pittsfield	8.8	7.2	19.1	20.4	4.3	8.6
Richmond	9.2	6.3	8.8	12.4	22.7	15.0
Savoy	6.2	3.4	12.6	23.0	36.8	30.6
Southern Berkshire	6.5	7.2	16.8	20.5	6.6	5.3
Williamstown	6.7	4.8	21.4	19.9	0.9	3.6
County Average	**7.4**	**6.5**	**14.4**	**18.3**	**14.2**	**12.8**
State Average[2]	**8.1**	**7.1**	**14.8**	**15.4**	**8.4**	**10.2**
Ratio County to State	**-8.6**	**-8.5**	**-2.7**	**18.8**	**69.0**	**25.5**

[1] The Berkshire Arts and Technology Charter Public and Northern Berkshire Regional Vocational Technical districts were excluded because their financial data were not provided in the ESE school district profiles.

[2] Values in the "state" row are from 2006; state-wide percentages were not available for 2005.

Selected student populations. One reason cited by administrators for rising costs in Berkshire County districts was an increase in the number of students from selected populations, such as students from low-income families, students with disabilities, and English language learners. Table 13 shows data at the district, county, and state levels for changes in the percentage of students from these groups from 2005 to 2015. The percentage of students from low-income families in Berkshire County increased substantially, from 27.3% to 34.0%. Moreover, this increase of 6.7 percentage points was much higher than in Massachusetts as a whole, which decreased by 1.4 percentage points. The percentage of students with disabilities in Berkshire County increased from 15.3% to 17.7%. This increase of 2.4 percentage points was twice the state-wide increase of 1.2 percentage points. The percentage of English language learners in Berkshire County did not increase from 2005 to 2015, while the state-wide rate increased by 3.4 percentage points.

Changes in the selected populations varied substantially across districts within the county. For example, while the percentage of students from low-income families increased in almost all districts, some districts started below the county's average rate and increased slower than the county's average (e.g., Lee, Mount Greylock), while others started above the county's average rate and increased faster than the county's average (e.g., Adams-Cheshire, North Adams, Pittsfield). District size is also an important consideration. The very large increase in students with disabilities in Savoy, from 4% to 22%, corresponded to an increase from about 2 students in 2005 to about 8 students in 2015. In contrast, the much smaller increase in Pittsfield, from 15% to 19%, corresponded to an increase of about 220 students with disabilities during that 10-year period. While Berkshire County had a much lower percentage of English language learners than the state as a whole, some districts experienced substantial changes, such as Lenox, whose ELL population grew from about 2 students to 17 students.

Table 13: Percentage of Students in Selected Populations by School District, 2005–15

	Low Income (%)			Students with Disabilities (%)			English Language Learners (%)		
District	2005	2015	Change 2005–15	2005	2015	Change 2005–15	2005	2015	Change 2005–15
Adams-Cheshire	29.7	36.4	6.7	16.5	22.0	5.5	0.1	0.4	0.3
BART Charter	54.7	39.8	-14.9	35.9	21.3	-14.6	0.0	0.9	0.9
Berkshire Hills	20.8	22.3	1.5	14.7	15.3	0.6	1.6	2.2	0.6
Central Berkshire	18.5	24.7	6.2	16.2	13.8	-2.4	0.1	0.3	0.2
Clarksburg	20.6	29.8	9.2	9.0	22.5	13.5	0.0	0.0	0.0
Farmington River	26.3	34.9	8.6	19.4	18.2	-1.2	0.0	0.0	0.0
Florida	13.5	31.5	18.0	15.3	30.3	15.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Hancock	18.9	20.9	2.0	9.8	14.0	4.2	0.0	0.0	0.0
Lanesborough	9.8	27.8	18.0	13.8	20.8	7.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Lee	23.0	24.0	1.0	14.2	13.2	-1.0	3.8	3.4	-0.4
Lenox	4.9	17.6	12.7	13.5	7.7	-5.8	0.2	2.5	2.3
Mount Greylock	12.9	14.4	1.5	13.3	12.8	-0.5	0.0	0.2	0.2
North Adams	41.1	52.7	11.6	16.6	26.0	9.4	2.1	0.9	-1.2
N. Berkshire Voc Tech	30.3	26.6	-3.7	22.8	15.0	-7.8	0.0	0.0	0.0
Pittsfield	35.9	43.4	7.5	15.2	19.4	4.2	3.7	4.4	0.7
Richmond	1.5	15.2	13.7	5.6	2.5	-3.1	0.0	0.0	0.0
Savoy	0.0	22.0	22.0	4.2	22.0	17.8	0.0	0.0	0.0
Southern Berkshire	20.4	25.3	4.9	14.8	14.9	0.1	0.6	1.6	1.0
Williamstown	13.0	15.5	2.5	12.4	12.2	-0.2	0.6	0.9	0.3
Berkshire County	**27.3**	**34.0**	**6.7**	**15.3**	**17.7**	**2.4**	**1.8**	**1.8**	**0.0**
State	**27.7**	**26.3**	**-1.4**	**15.9**	**17.1**	**1.2**	**5.1**	**8.5**	**3.4**

School choice. Many administrators mentioned school choice costs or revenues as a significant influence on their financial standing. The net financial impact of school choice is minimal for some districts, such as Lanesborough, which in the 2014–15 school year had a net loss of 1.3 FTE students and

a net revenue gain of 0.3% of their total expenditures (Table 14). From the 2004–05 school year to the 2014–15 school year, some districts have experienced substantial changes in school choice enrollment. Lenox had a net gain of 79 students in 2005 and a net gain of 195 students in 2015, an increase of 116 students. Pittsfield had a net loss of 166 students in 2005 and a net loss of 344 students in 2015, a decrease of 178 students.

A district's total enrollment is also relevant to the impact of school choice. The gains just described for Lenox corresponded to an increase from 9.5% of their total enrollment in 2005 to 27.6% of their total enrollment in 2015. Pittsfield's losses were larger in absolute terms but smaller in relative terms, corresponding to losses of from 2.6% to 6.2% of their total enrollment. For some districts, the net gain or loss of students comprises a substantial percentage of their enrollment, such as Richmond's net gain of 41.3% or Farmington River's net loss of 35.6% in the 2014–15 school year. Both of these districts also experienced large shifts from 2005 to 2015 in their net gain or loss of school choice students as a percentage of total enrollment; Richmond shifted from a 3.2% loss to a 41.3% gain, and Farmington River shifted from a 2.2% gain to a 35.6% loss.

Table 14: School Choice Enrollment Trends by School District, 2005–15

	Net Gain of FTE Students			Net Gain of FTE Students as % of Total Enrollment		
District	2005	2015	Change 2005–15	2005	2015	Change 2005–15
Adams-Cheshire	16.5	-21.2	-37.6	0.9%	-1.6%	-2.6%
Berkshire Hills	75.2	139.3	64.1	5.4	10.6	5.2%
Central Berkshire	-8.5	5.0	13.5	-0.4	0.3	0.7%
Clarksburg	-8.6	13.9	22.5	-4.3	8.3	12.6%
Farmington River	3.6	-37.0	-40.6	2.2	-35.6	-37.8%
Florida	-3.7	-2.0	1.7	-3.7	-2.4	1.3%
Hancock	-14.6	-8.0	6.6	-33.1	-24.2	8.9%
Lanesborough	17.0	-1.3	-18.3	6.3	-0.7	-6.9%
Lee	45.1	38.3	-6.8	5.3	5.8	0.5%
Lenox	78.8	195.1	116.3	9.5	27.6	18.1%
Mount Greylock	40.2	42.6	2.4	5.5	7.8	2.3%
North Adams	-85.5	-73.7	11.9	-4.4	-5.4	-1.0%
N. Berkshire Voc Tech	0.0	-4.0	-4.0	0.0	-0.8	-0.8%
Pittsfield	-166.4	-344.3	-177.9	-2.6	-6.2	-3.5%
Richmond	-5.9	59.8	65.8	-3.2	41.3	44.5%
Savoy	-5.5	-11.5	-6.0	-9.8	-32.8	-23.0%
Southern Berkshire	13.7	-9.6	-23.3	1.4	-1.3	-2.7%
Williamstown	70.0	37.6	-32.4	14.9	8.8	-6.1%

The financial impacts of these school choice enrollment trends can be substantial (Table 15). For example, the trends just described for Richmond represented an 8.6% increase in the portion of their

total expenditures accounted for by school choice revenue. The impacts can also be large in absolute terms, such as Pittsfield's net outflow of $0.9 million in 2005 and $1.9 million in 2015.

Comparing Tables 14 and 15, it is apparent that the net gain of students as a percentage of total enrollment is greater than the net school choice revenue as a percentage of total expenditures. For example, Clarksburg's net enrollment gain of 8.3% in 2015 corresponded to a net revenue gain of just 2.2%. This is primarily because school choice tuition is capped at $5,000 per pupil,[9] which is much less than the districts' actual expenditures per pupil.

Table 15: School Choice Revenue Trends by School District, 2005–15

	Net School Choice Revenue			Net School Choice Revenue as % of Total Expenditures		
District	2005	2015	Change 2005–15	2005	2015	Change 2005–15
Adams-Cheshire	$53,448	-$122,304	-$175,752	0.3%	-0.6%	-0.9%
Berkshire Hills	358,601	708,582	349,981	1.9	2.8	0.9
Central Berkshire	-129,355	169,464	298,819	-0.6	0.6	1.2
Clarksburg	-49,324	68,976	118,300	-1.8	2.2	4.0
Farmington River	68,172	-196,867	-265,039	2.0	-4.0	-6.0
Florida	-18,281	-8,292	9,989	-1.4	-0.5	1.0
Hancock	-125,682	-40,000	85,682	-9.9	-3.5	6.3
Lanesborough	82,194	12,064	-70,130	2.4	0.3	-2.1
Lee	276,869	244,074	-32,795	2.8	1.9	-0.9
Lenox	412,571	960,789	548,218	4.1	7.0	2.8
Mount Greylock	218,719	247,926	29,207	2.4	2.2	-0.2
North Adams	-459,742	-417,366	42,376	-1.8	-1.6	0.2
N. Berkshire Voc Tech	0	-20,000	-20,000	0.0	-0.2	-0.2
Pittsfield	-876,786	-1,932,300	-1,055,514	-1.3	-2.1	-0.8
Richmond	-29,500	293,148	322,648	-1.0	7.6	8.6
Savoy	-25,673	-91,744	-66,071	-2.7	-7.5	-4.8
Southern Berkshire	143,200	257	-142,943	1.2	0.0	-1.2
Williamstown	474,642	214,544	-260,098	8.9	3.2	-5.7

The net gain or loss of revenue as a percentage of total expenditures can also be large for many districts, such as a net gain of 7.0% for Lenox and a net loss of 7.5% for Savoy. The absolute gains or losses can also be large, such as a net gain of 195 students and almost $1 million for Lenox, and a net loss of 344 students and almost $2 million for Pittsfield.

Building capacity. Many school buildings in Berkshire County are filled below capacity. This increases the level of building costs per student, because some costs are incurred regardless of the

[9] An exception to the $5,000 cap is that the sending district pays the full special education cost for each pupil with an individualized education plan. The special education exception may account for the anomalous figures for Southern Berkshire, which had a net loss of 9.6 students in school year 2014–15 but a small net gain in school choice revenue.

number of students utilizing the building. The capacity problem has worsened due to declining enrollment, and as enrollment continues to decline in the next decade, the problem will be further exacerbated.

In 2015, the percentage of building capacity that was being utilized ranged from 46% to 91% for high schools, 64% to 92% for middle schools, and 31% to 103% for elementary schools (Table 16). For 2025, the projected percentage of building capacity that will be utilized ranges from 43% to 91% for high schools, 51% to 86% for middle schools, and 16% to 95% for elementary schools. School district administrators and Task Force members said that some school districts will need to address the issue of unused building capacity as part of their long-term strategy for financial sustainability. This might include closing buildings, finding additional uses for unused building space, or combining building capacity with other districts as part of regionalization.

Table 16: Percentage of Building Capacity Utilized, 2015 Actual and 2025 Projected

School	District	Grade Levels	Building Capacity	Students 2015	Students 2025	2015 % of Capacity	2025 % of Capacity
High Schools							
Hoosac Valley	Adams-Cheshire	6-12	805	662	505	82%	63%
BART	BART	6-12	ND	334	464	ND	ND
Monument Mountain	Berkshire Hills	9-12	700	542	524	77	75
Wahconah	Central Berkshire	9-12	800	540	366	68	46
Lee	Lee	7-12	704	335	318	48	45
Lenox	Lenox	6-12	540	405	317	75	59
Mt. Greylock	Mt. Greylock	7-12	1200	548	520	46	43
Drury	North Adams	8-12	525	459	428	87	82
McCann	N. Berkshire Tech	9-12	550	500	500	91	91
Pittsfield	Pittsfield	9-12	1650	916	865	56	52
Taconic	Pittsfield	9-12	920	774	733	84	80
Mount Everett	S. Berkshire	7-12	ND	223	127	ND	ND
Middle Schools							
Monument Valley	Berkshire Hills	5-8	440	403	378	92	86
Nessacus	Central Berkshire	6-8	700	445	360	64	51
Herberg School	Pittsfield		765	633	611	83	80
Reid	Pittsfield		726	517	499	71	69
Elementary Schools							
Cheshire	Adams-Cheshire	K-5	300	223	174	74	58
CT Plunkett	Adams-Cheshire	K-5	610	467	366	77	60
Craneville	Central Berkshire	K-5	510	428	417	84	82
Kittredge	Central Berkshire	K-5	400	124	122	31	31
Becket Washington	Central Berkshire	K-5	250	115	111	46	44

Table 16: Percentage of Building Capacity Utilized, 2015 Actual and 2025 Projected (continued)							
School	District	Grade Levels	Building Capacity	Students 2015	Students 2025	2015 % of Capacity	2025 % of Capacity
Elementary Schools							
Clarksburg	Clarksburg	K-8	210	168	113	80	54
Farmington River	Farmington River	K-6	ND	129	100	ND	ND
Florida	Florida	K-8	ND	89	52	ND	ND
Muddy Brook	Great Barrington	K-4	560	385	331	69	59
Hancock	Hancock	K-6	90	43	14	48	16
Lanesborough	Lanesborough	K-6	300	216	219	72	73
Lee	Lee	K-6	550	348	366	63	67
Morris	Lenox	K-5	550	322	233	59	42
Brayton	North Adams	K-7	500	393	355	79	71
Colegrove Park	North Adams	K-7	310	284	220	92	71
Greylock	North Adams	K-7	310	233	199	75	64
Allendale	Pittsfield	K-5	336	316	294	94	88
Capeless	Pittsfield	K-5	268	235	219	88	82
Crosby	Pittsfield	K-5	500	410	381	82	76
Egremont	Pittsfield	K-5	500	514	477	103	95
Morningside	Pittsfield	K-5	520	473	440	91	85
Stearns	Pittsfield	K-5	240	234	217	98	90
Silvio Conte	Pittsfield	K-5	520	386	359	74	69
Williams	Pittsfield	K-5	434	336	312	77	72
Richmond	Richmond	K-8	ND	158	184	ND	ND
Savoy	Savoy	K-5	ND	35	26	ND	ND
Monterey	S. Berkshire	K	ND	6	3	ND	ND
New Marlborough	S. Berkshire	K-4	ND	84	62	ND	ND
South Egremont	S. Berkshire	K-1	ND	13	9	ND	ND
Undermountain	S. Berkshire	K-6	ND	329	214	ND	ND
Williamstown	Williamstown	K-6	ND	459	429	ND	ND

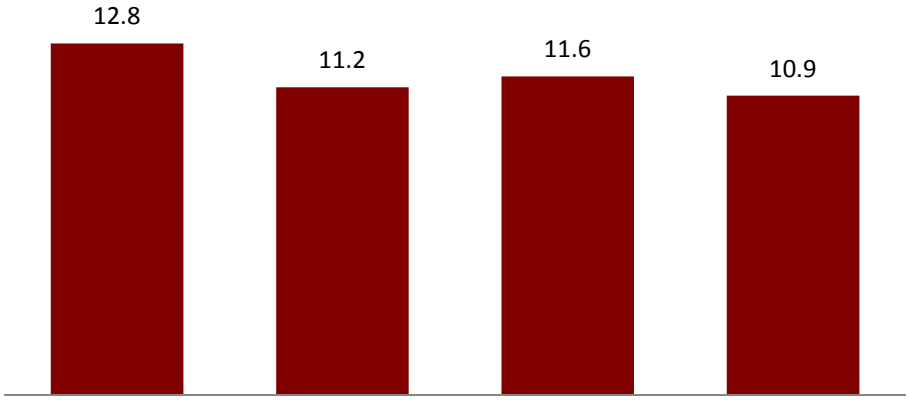
Notes: Enrollment figures include Pre-K students when the Pre-K program is located in the same building. Post-12th grade enrollment is not included. Capacity for Taconic High School is listed for the building that is under construction in 2016. ND = data not available.

Students per teacher. As student enrollment has declined, the number of teachers has also declined. An important aspect of educational quality noted by administrators interviewed for the study is class size. While class size figures are not available, the number of full-time equivalent (FTE) teachers per district can be used to calculate a related measure, the number of students per teacher. This statistic is different from average class size, because it includes both classroom and specialist teachers. However, it can serve as an indicator of the level of instructional personnel. The number of students per teacher gradually declined from 12.8 in the 1999–2000 school year to 10.9 in the 2014–15 school year (Figure 7).

A temporary reversal of this trend can be seen in the 2009–10 school year, when the number of students per teacher increased to 11.6.

The trend is in the direction of a higher level of staffing per student. The data do not indicate how much of the staffing comprises classroom teachers versus specialist teachers. Therefore, it is possible that class sizes have decreased, or alternatively that the number of specialist teachers has increased (to support the growing percentage of high needs students) while classroom sizes have remained the same or increased.

Figure 7: Students per Teacher, Berkshire County Public Schools, 2000-2015



The number of students per teacher varied substantially across districts in Berkshire County (Table 17). For example, although the county average in 2015 was 10.9 students per teacher, this ranged from 4.7 in Hancock to 13.0 in Adams-Cheshire. Moreover, in most districts, the number of FTE teachers declined from 2005 to 2015, but, perhaps contrary to expectations, the number of students per teacher also declined. In three districts—Berkshire Hills, North Adams, and Southern Berkshire—the number of students per teacher increased. North Adams was the most notable example, with a 46% decline in teacher FTEs from 2005 to 2015 and an increase from 8.2 to 10.7 in the number of students per teacher. Despite this increase, North Adams remained below the county average of 10.9 students per teacher.

The county average was also substantially lower than the state average at all three time periods shown in Table 17. A comparison of county and state averages indicates that Berkshire County has substantially fewer students per teacher than Massachusetts as a whole. Moreover, this gap has widened, with Berkshire County having 15% fewer students per teacher than the state in 2005, 18% fewer in 2010, and 21% fewer in 2015.

The narrative has used the terms “lower” and “higher” to describe these averages, rather than “better” and “worse.” This is because the value-laden latter terms depend on one’s perspective. Most people

would argue that, to a point, having fewer students per teacher is better from the perspective of educational quality. However, having more students per teacher is presumably better from the perspective of financial sustainability. The appropriateness of a given number of students per teacher also depends on factors such as the level of need of the students in a given school or district, as discussed in the selected populations section earlier. With higher-need students, fewer students per teacher may be required to achieve a given level of educational quality.

Table 17: Full-Time Equivalent Teachers and Students per Teacher by School District, 2005–15

	SY05		SY10		SY15	
District	FTE Teachers	Students per Teacher	FTE Teachers	Students per Teacher	FTE Teachers	Students per Teacher
Adams-Cheshire	129	13.5	104	14.5	101	13.0
Berkshire Hills	125	11.0	125	10.8	113	11.6
Central Berkshire	157	14.0	145	13.3	141	11.8
Clarksburg	17	11.7	15	11.7	15	11.2
Farmington River	15	10.8	17	7.1	15	6.9
Florida	12	8.3	12	8.6	13	6.3
Hancock	5	8.8	6	5.0	7	4.7
Lanesborough	24	11.3	20	12.2	22	8.8
Lee	76	11.2	75	10.9	71	9.4
Lenox	77	10.8	69	11.7	78	9.1
Mount Greylock	54	13.5	50	12.7	49	11.2
North Adams	237	8.2	148	10.3	128	10.7
N. Berkshire Voc Tech	48	9.8	46	10.9	51	9.8
Pittsfield	539	11.7	509	11.7	487	11.5
Richmond	20	9.2	19	8.5	17	8.5
Savoy	5	11.2	5	7.0	4	8.8
Southern Berkshire	108	8.8	83	10.4	80	9.3
Williamstown	36	13.1	33	11.9	37	11.6
Berkshire County	**1,684**	**11.2**	**1,481**	**11.6**	**1,429**	**10.9**
Massachusetts	**73,757**	**13.2**	**67,747**	**14.1**	**69,344**	**13.8**

Teacher salaries. Teacher salary trends are also relevant to discussions of financial sustainability and possible future regionalization and shared services in Berkshire County. Knowing a school district's average salary and change over time is informative, but a deeper understanding of their meaning requires additional information about factors such as teachers' education level and years of experience, the district's population density (e.g., rural versus suburban), and the level of education and income of community members, all of which may influence teachers' salaries (Callas and McCormick, 1993).

Average teacher salaries have risen in Berkshire County from 2005 to 2015 at a slightly slower rate than in the state overall (Table 18). The average teacher salary in Massachusetts was higher than in Berkshire

County by 10% in 2005 and by 12% in 2015. Average teacher salaries varied substantially across districts. For example, the average salary in Berkshire County in the 2014–5 school year was $67,041, but this ranged from $40,903 in Florida (39% below the county average) to $93,754 in Richmond (40% above the county average). Salary trends within districts also varied substantially, such as Southern Berkshire steadily increasing compared to the county average and Farmington River steadily decreasing compared to the county average.

Table 18: Average Teacher Salary and Comparison to County Average, by School District, 2005–15

	SY05		SY10		SY15	
School District	Average Salary	Comparison to County	Average Salary	Comparison to County	Average Salary	Comparison to County
Adams-Cheshire	$46,631	-6%	$64,342	8%	$67,378	1%
Berkshire Hills	56,509	14	63,269	6	71,618	7
Central Berkshire	59,054	19	58,520	-2	69,081	3
Clarksburg	53,566	8	60,581	1	61,635	-8
Farmington River	50,829	3	57,465	-4	51,018	-24
Florida	36,194	-27	36,153	-40	40,903	-39
Hancock	52,397	6	66,228	11	48,959	-27
Lanesborough	57,615	16	78,725	32	58,259	-13
Lee	52,525	6	57,772	-3	64,212	-4
Lenox	55,146	11	71,334	19	72,217	8
Mount Greylock	55,630	12	68,197	14	79,391	18
North Adams	46,753	-6	61,099	2	62,613	-7
N. Berkshire Voc Tech	51,603	4	75,630	26	78,016	16
Pittsfield	46,113	-7	53,707	-10	64,515	-4
Richmond	52,147	5	78,691	31	93,754	40
Savoy	38,563	-22	45,541	-24	52,156	-22
Southern Berkshire	41,126	-17	57,557	-4	70,660	5
Williamstown	55,441	12	72,807	22	70,952	6
Berkshire County[1]	**49,524**	**NA**	**59,844**	**NA**	**67,041**	**NA**
Massachusetts[1]	**54,701**	**10**	**68,781**	**15**	**74,782**	**12**

[1] Average county and state salaries are weighted by the number of teachers in each school district.

4. Educational Program Trends

Both sets of administrator interviews investigated possible changes in the diversity or range of educational programs available to Berkshire County students. The first set of interviews, which asked administrators to comment on changes in the past five years, yielded a fairly high sense of urgency from about half of the districts regarding program impacts due to declining enrollment and/or revenue shortfalls. After reviewing these findings, the Task Force was concerned that a five-year timeframe was

insufficient to capture the changes they were seeking to document. The second set of interviews was with individuals who had been Berkshire County administrators for at least 15 years, and these interviews yielded a more consistent level of concern about reduced program offerings. Findings from both sets of interviews are presented next.

Five-year time frame. When commenting on the past five years, about half of the districts expressed fairly low urgency about program impacts due to declining enrollment and/or revenue shortfalls. A variety of reasons for this outlook were apparent. A few districts are projected to have only small enrollment declines or even small increases from 2015 to 2025. Multiple administrators believed that an increase in their school choice enrollment would offset declines in their foundation enrollment. Others believed that a planned or recently completed facilities upgrade would attract new students or stem outflows from the district. Still others pointed out that they had a large class of students coming into their pre-kindergarten in the current or future years. A small number of districts described anticipated enrollment trends that were inconsistent with the projections described earlier or cited enrollment numbers that were inconsistent with ESE's online data. The scope of the interviews did not permit probing the source of these beliefs.

Similarly, many districts reported that negative program impacts in the past five years due to declining enrollment and/or revenue shortfalls had been minimal. Many of these districts described reductions to administrative, instructional, and support services personnel that were necessary due to decreased enrollment during the past five years, and in some cases these cuts were emotionally wrenching for the district. In other cases, reductions were accomplished by not replacing retiring employees. However, most districts reported that these personnel reductions did not lead to reductions in academic, student support, or extracurricular program offerings to students, or that the program reductions were minimal. For academic programs, this was accomplished by reducing the number of sections offered, or in some cases increasing class sizes while staying within reasonable limits. In the case of athletics and some other extracurricular activities, several districts had instituted participation fees that are waived for students who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

In contrast, about half of the districts expressed moderate to serious concerns, although the concerns were typically more serious with regard to the next five years than the past five years. One district in particular reported urgent circumstances, saying "Adams-Cheshire won't be able to survive on its own." They said that the district is likely to close a school, and that even doing so might only forestall an unacceptable fiscal and program situation for a few years. They emphasized that their current situation is due to revenue shortfalls rather than declining enrollment. Their budget for the 2016–17 school year cut $1 million and 12 positions, including technology director, curriculum director, elementary coordinator, assistant business administrator, building secretary, six teachers, and 1.5 paraprofessionals, as well as four athletic coaches (Guerino, 2016). The middle and high school principal said,

> "We've stripped away everything we can without affecting the classroom experience …. We're really getting to the point where there's not much happening in the school other than a teacher in a classroom with students."

Multiple districts characterized themselves as nearing a tipping point, where past cuts had minimal program impacts but future cuts would affect students' experiences more directly. Berkshire Hills said,

> "We're right on the edge where we're not going to be able to [avoid program cuts] anymore …. Over time we have reduced positions and asked people to do more with less …. It's making the job, particularly of a teacher, harder than it's ever been …. I would like to free up some time and resources for people to implement and refine new programs, and we're sort of doing the opposite of that."

North Adams described having very large class sizes in some subjects due to staff cuts. Multiple districts reported reducing foreign language offerings, particularly French, as well as cutting instructional technology, curriculum development, and librarian positions. Pittsfield anticipated that an increasing proportion of their budget will be spent on special education, mental health, and ELL programming and said, "I think we will see a decline in not only the core courses that we value, but we are also struggling to hold onto fine arts courses and AP courses, which are two of the things that define us here in the Berkshires." Overall, about half of the districts anticipated having to cut programs in the next five years.

Declining state and tax revenues and increased personnel and benefits costs were prominent issues for many administrators, even those in districts that did not anticipate program or staffing cuts and whose towns consistently passed the proposed annual budgets. Pittsfield explained that Chapter 70 increases five years ago were $1–1.8 million per year, but in the past five years they have been in the range of $55–100 thousand per year. Multiple districts reported that they had reached or were nearing their tax levy ceiling, meaning that they have or will soon have minimal ability to increase local taxes even as costs increase. Additional budget challenges reported by some districts included a net outflow of school choice students and high or unanticipated costs for special education services.

Fifteen-year time frame.

Educational program offerings. When asked if educational offerings had been reduced in the past 15 years, four out of five administrators said "yes" and rated the declines from moderate to extensive (Table 19).[10] A wide range of reductions were described that varied from district to district. Many positions had been cut, reduced, or shared across schools; these included librarians, paraprofessionals, and teachers in the arts, performing arts, music, physical education, and foreign languages. Due to education reform requirements at the elementary level, more time has been spent in

[10] Response options provided for items shown in Tables 19 to 23 were "minimal," "moderate," and "extensive." However, responses such as "between moderate and extensive" were common, which were coded as "min/mod" or "mod/ext."

language arts and mathematics, with corresponding reductions in science and social studies. Several foreign languages were eliminated, fewer sections of Advanced Placement and intensive courses were offered, and students were reduced from five days to three days of physical education classes per week. Some vocational offerings within traditional high schools were also reduced or eliminated, such as house building, culinary, automotive, and drafting programs. Class sizes were also increased for many students. One respondent said that in the districts with greater financial challenges, not much is offered beyond core academic courses, and that this problem has gotten worse in the past 15 years.

In one district, the interviewee said that educational offerings had not been cut, and some new programs had been added, such as work-based learning programs. A second interviewee said that there had been a net reduction in programs, but some new programs had been introduced, such as engineering and robotics.

Table 19: Have Educational Offerings Been Reduced in the Past 15 Years?				
Yes	**No**			
4	1			
Minimal	**Min/Mod**	**Moderate**	**Mod/Ext**	**Extensive**
0	0	1	2	1

The administrators were asked whether decreases in the numbers of class sections offered over the past 15 years have resulted in students being less able to take the classes they wanted. Four out of five administrators said “yes,” and they rated the declines from moderate to moderate/extensive (Table 20). One administrator explained that declining enrollment has led to fewer sections being offered, which causes scheduling conflicts such as AP biology and French being offered at the same time. Students may want to take both courses, but they can only take one. Another administrator noted that these scheduling conflicts result in students being assigned to more study halls, which are often unproductive academically. Scheduling conflicts due to a reduced number of sections can be particularly problematic for vocational students, because their required shop hours leave fewer openings in their schedule for taking academic courses.

Table 20: Have Fewer Section Offerings Reduced Students’ Ability to Take the Classes they Want Over the Past 15 Years?				
Yes	**No**			
4	1			
Minimal	**Min/Mod**	**Moderate**	**Mod/Ext**	**Extensive**
0	0	2	2	0

The Task Force wanted to know if some schools with limited staffing and/or limited student enrollment diversify their course offerings by teaching multiple courses in the same room at the same time with a single teacher. Examples would be a course with three different levels of French in the same room, or a standard-level geometry course where students could receive honors by completing additional

assignments. All five administrators were aware of this practice being used in their own districts and elsewhere in Berkshire County, and they believed that it has increased in the past 15 years.

They noted far more limitations than strengths of this approach to teaching. The strengths included being able to maintain more course offerings to meet the needs of more students, and enabling less experienced students to take music lessons with more experienced students. One administrator also noted that there is research indicating that heterogeneous grouping is beneficial to learning.

A challenge raised by multiple administrators was that teaching multiple levels at the same time requires teachers to spend much more time preparing and to have a higher level of instructional skill. Moreover, the teacher's attention is divided, so less time is available to deepen the learning of students at each level. One administrator said that this is particularly true for the more advanced students in the room, who tend to get less attention from the teacher and have to work more independently.

The administrators were asked whether the level of academic support available to each student has declined during the past 15 years. Two out of five administrators said "yes," and they rated the declines as "moderate" and "moderate/extensive" (Table 21).

Table 21: Has the Level of Academic Support Declined in the Past 15 Years?

Yes	No			
2	3			
Minimal	**Min/Mod**	**Moderate**	**Mod/Ext**	**Extensive**
0	0	1	1	0

Of the administrators who said that academic support services have not been cut, one explained that staff reductions have been partly offset by supports provided through increased use of technology. For example, extensive use of Google Docs allows teachers to provide much more feedback on writing assignments than in the past. He said that this also reduces the burden on teachers to provide after-school meetings with students, because the feedback can happen at any time, at least for students who have access to the needed technology at home.

One administrator who said that the level of academic support has declined said the elementary schools in his town used to have mathematics, science, and reading specialists, but the mathematics and science positions were cut. The specialists had taken some students out of the classroom and did either remedial or advanced work with them, an opportunity that is no longer available. The other administrator said that paraprofessionals have been cut in some districts, and that,

> "They've had to cut back to just keep teachers in classrooms, and a lot of the extra stuff—[such as] the extra paraprofessionals for some program or another—has had to be eliminated as cuts have eliminated one service after another, until it's really just the teachers in the classrooms with the students who are the last ones standing. That's an

> overgeneralization, but that's pretty much what I've seen as budgets in some towns have needed to be cut year after year after year."

This administrator said that the needs of many students are great, and that it has become harder to teach effectively without the support of a co-teacher or paraprofessional. He noted that this does not apply to students with IEPs, because they are still provided with the supports set out by their IEP.

Extracurricular offerings. All five administrators said that extracurricular or co-curricular programs and services had been reduced in the past 15 years. They each rated the declines differently, from minimal to extensive (Table 22). A wide variety of cuts were described, mostly at the secondary level, which interviewees said is where the most extracurricular activities are typically offered. However, one administrator reported an increase in after-school activities at the elementary and middle school levels, mostly grant-funded.

Table 22: Have Extracurricular and Co-curricular Programs and Services Been Reduced in the Past 15 Years?

Yes	No			
5	0			
Minimal	**Min/Mod**	**Moderate**	**Mod/Ext**	**Extensive**
1	1	1	1	1

One administrator reported a substantial decrease in the number of sports being offered, and that over the past 15 years the county has declined from 12 football teams to 6 and from 10 hockey teams to 3. To some extent this has been offset by schools "co-oping" (sharing) teams. Another administrator said that junior varsity sports were most vulnerable and had been cut most extensively.

Arts and academic support programs also experienced cuts in some districts, with fewer after-school activities such as drama and outdoor activity clubs. One district reported cutting music teachers, combining band and orchestra groups across schools, and reducing the number of students who were able to take music lessons at school.

Multiple interviewees reported that late buses were reduced or eliminated, which made it difficult for some students to participate, particularly in districts that spanned large, rural areas. More schools also began charging participation fees in the past 15 years, which reportedly discouraged some students from participating, even though fee waivers were offered for students with demonstrated need.

Student support services. The administrators were asked whether Berkshire County school districts have needed to reduce student support services in the past 15 years. Three out of five said "yes," and they rated the declines from minimal to moderate (Table 23). The two administrators who said "no" reported that staffing of guidance counselors, school adjustment counselors, and speech and language specialists had either increased or stayed level. The declines reported by the other three administrators included staff reductions of guidance counselors, school adjustment counselors, special

education paraprofessionals, and after-school program coordinators, as well as paraprofessionals being assigned larger caseloads. In some cases the reductions were proportional to declines in student enrollment, but in other cases they represented a reduced level of support per student. One administrator noted that these changes were partly driven by the movement toward inclusion, so the staffing changes supported the positive goal of mainstreaming.

Table 23: Have Student Support Services Been Reduced in the Past 15 Years?

Yes	No			
3	2			
Minimal	**Min/Mod**	**Moderate**	**Mod/Ext**	**Extensive**
2	0	1	0	0

Two administrators emphasized that the cuts were focused on the general student population, and that mandated supports for students with IEPs had not declined. However, a third administrator, who asked for the comment to remain anonymous, said that budget pressures had sometimes influenced how IEPs were written, with fewer supports written into the IEP than a student actually needed. Two administrators noted that the needs of regular education students have grown in the past 15 years in areas such as social-emotional functioning, executive functioning, and sensory processing. Many of these students do not have IEPs but still require a higher level of support services. As a result, even if staffing levels have not declined, the level of demand on staff has increased.

Quality of educational opportunity. Four of the five administrators believed that the quality of educational opportunity in Berkshire County had declined in the past 15 years. One administrator said that quality "has been affected tremendously," and another said that the opportunity to have students "graduate at the highest possible level of academic performance has been sacrificed." They said that an important goal of high school is to expose students to many different fields so they understand their options in the world, but many of the opportunities to explore technology, fine and performing arts, and vocational areas have been reduced or eliminated at both the middle and high school levels in the past 15 years. One administrator said that many students' motivation for engaging in school is athletics, arts, and drama, so reductions in those areas negatively affect their attendance and academic work. One administrator added that "The educational opportunities in Berkshire County are very unequal," and that some towns can afford more staffing and resources than others, a gap that he believes has widened in the past 15 years. He tied this in part to the fact that some towns take many school choice students, which he said can result in deep budget cuts in the sending districts. Overall, these administrators believed that opportunities have diminished for students who are preparing for college and those who are preparing to go directly into careers after high school.

The one administrator who said that the level of academic opportunity has not declined attributed it to increased use of technology, such as online courses. These courses have enabled students to work more independently, with support and facilitation from a teacher, particularly when only a few students want to take a particular course.

College readiness and admissions. Three of the five administrators felt that declines in educational and extracurricular opportunities in Berkshire County over the past 15 years have reduced students' competitiveness in college admissions. One administrator was unsure, and one said that the percentage of students going to college and the selectivity of the colleges to which they are admitted is at least as high as it was 15 years ago. Administrators who felt that students' college prospects have diminished said that college admissions officers try to take into account the course offerings and extracurricular activities that were available to a student, but that all other things equal, colleges will prefer students who have completed more advanced coursework. One administrator said, "The diploma is not as rigorous as it used to be, so some of the colleges they want to attend may not be reachable."

Course offerings and enrollment. Documenting changes in schools' course offerings over time is one way that the Task Force wants to assess trends related to educational quality. As one step in this process, they asked all Berkshire County school districts that have high schools to provide course enrollment data and a program of studies for the 2015–16 school year. These data will serve as a baseline from which future changes can be documented.

Data were received from 9 districts, showing course enrollments in 10 of the county's 12 high schools. The data were received in a variety of formats, which UMDI converted to an Excel spreadsheet with a worksheet for each high school. The Task Force agreed that two sets of analyses would be conducted with the course enrollment data to establish a baseline in relation to educational quality, specifically with regard to Advanced Placement (AP) and honors courses (Tables 24 and 25)

The number of AP courses offered per high school ranged from 7 to 19, with an average class size ranging from 5 students at Lenox High School to 16 students at Drury and Pittsfield High Schools. A measure of the level of AP course participation is the average number of AP courses taken per student, and this ranged from 0.16 at McCann Technical School to 0.78 at Lee High School.

The number of honors courses offered ranged from 12 to 39, with an average class size ranging from 10 students at Lenox Memorial to 20 students at Hoosac Valley. A measure of the level of honors course participation is the average number of honors courses taken per student, and this ranged from 0.75 at McCann to 2.88 at Lenox Memorial. Unlike AP courses, courses designated as "honors" do not have an externally specified curriculum or exam and are therefore likely to be less similar across schools.

Table 24: AP Course Offerings and Enrollment by District and High School, 2015–16 School Year							
District and High School	Students In Grades 9–12	AP Courses Listed	Courses With Enrolled Students	AP Course Sections	Total AP Course Enrollment	AP Courses Per Student	Average AP Class Size
Adams-Cheshire (Hoosac)	345	11	11	12	165	0.48	14
Berkshire Hills (Monument)	539	10	10	13	167	0.31	13
C. Berkshire (Wahconah)	552	13	12	14[1]	190	0.34	14
Lee (Lee High School)	236	12	12	13	184	0.78	14
Lenox (Lenox Memorial)	214	15	13	18	95	0.44	5
Mt. Greylock (Mt. Greylock)	343	13	13	19	244	0.71	13
N. Berkshire Tech (McCann)	481	7	7	7	78	0.16	11
North Adams (Drury)	342	8	8	16	249	0.73	16
Pittsfield (Pittsfield HS)	896	19	19	29	460	0.51	16
Pittsfield (Taconic HS)	731	15	15	25	280	0.38	11

[1] To estimate the number of sections, a maximum section size of 25 was assumed.

Table 25: Honors Course Offerings and Enrollment by District and High School, 2015–16 School Year							
District and High School	Students In Grades 9–12	Honors Courses Listed	Courses With Enrolled Students	Honors Course Sections	Total Honors Course Enrollment	Honors Courses Per Student	Average Honors Class Size
Adams-Cheshire (Hoosac)	345	14	14	16	317	0.92	20
Berkshire Hills (Monument)	539	26	26	53	975	1.81	18
C. Berkshire (Wahconah)[1]	552	29	28	44[2]	646	1.17	15
Lee (Lee High School)	236	12	12	18	318	1.35	18
Lenox (Lenox Memorial)	214	39	36	61	616	2.88	10
Mt. Greylock (Mt. Greylock)[1]	343	12	12	24	430	1.25	18
N. Berkshire Tech (McCann)	481	12	12	21	359	0.75	17
North Adams (Drury)	342	13	13	25	486	1.42	19
Pittsfield (Pittsfield HS)	896	33	33	60	1003	1.12	17
Pittsfield (Taconic HS)	731	33	33	62	750	1.03	12

[1] Some courses at these two schools could be taken at either an honors or college prep level, but the number of students in each category could not be determined from the data provided. Students in these courses were counted at the college prep level, so the level of honors course participation is likely underestimated.

[2] To estimate the number of sections, a maximum section size of 25 was assumed.

When multiple years of course enrollment data are available, many additional analyses could be conducted to assess changes in program offerings over time. One challenge with the datasets provided for this study was their non-standardized nature, making it difficult to conduct valid analyses and comparisons with regard to indicators such as course level and class size. If schools in the county want to participate in longitudinal analyses of their course offerings, ESE's Student Course Schedule (SCS)

dataset may provide more thorough and accurate data and facilitate more meaningful comparisons across districts. Massachusetts schools districts submit standardized SCS course data to ESE annually, including course subject, course level, grades and credits earned, and other information for each student's courses. UMDI looked into accessing SCS for this study, but doing so would have required undertaking a process to obtain permission from each district; the Task Force preferred to use the course data that districts had already provided.

5. Past and Future Strategies for Improving Financial Sustainability

During the administrator interviews, districts reported that they had already engaged in numerous strategies to reduce costs and that they planned to implement additional strategies in the future. This section presents those strategies first in relation to two of the Task Force's highest-priority change strategies—shared services and consolidation. Then several additional strategies are presented related to staffing, special education, transportation, technology, energy costs, school closings, grant writing, office space, and volunteers.

Shared services. The interviews with Berkshire County school administrators found that districts are already participating in many shared service efforts and want to continue and expand these efforts. Responding to questions about shared services, one administrator said, "Because of the size of our districts and the cost of education overall, if we don't act and have these conversations and reach out to each other, we're not going to be able to sustain what we're trying to do. We can't be a separate entity." Also with regard to shared services, another administrator said, "We have great hope in the regional task force doing some big things, because we're really struggling to make much headway in terms of smaller-scale partnerships that really extend to actual student services."

Shared services are already taking place among some Berkshire County districts with regard to special education services, health care services, personnel, professional development, and athletics. In addition, two groups of districts are meeting to plan for deepening implementation of shared services. Finally, one district described saving money through collaboration with community partners and other city and county agencies.

Regional efforts. Two districts described the Southern Berkshire Shared Services Project as a group of six districts in southern Berkshire County that have been trying to share services related to technology, curriculum, professional development, grant-writing, and potentially special education services. One district reported that the group received $75,000 from the governor's "community compact program" and another $75,000 from local philanthropies and banks to advance their collaboration. With regard to technology, they are looking across all six districts at hardware, software, and curriculum, and seeking economies of scale in purchasing and technical support. With regard to grant-writing, they have discussed hiring a grant writer to access funds that would be beneficial to all six districts. One of the districts said that they hope this collaboration will not only yield financial savings

but also build trust across districts, which will serve as a foundation for deeper collaboration over time or possibly eventual regionalization.

One district also mentioned a subgroup of districts in northern Berkshire County that was organized by the Task Force and had met twice as of May 2016. This district expressed interest in working with other districts in relation to special education services and possibly student transportation. The work is still in the discussion phase, with no formal agreements yet.

Special education services. Pittsfield said Berkshire County has a strong record of collaboration with regard to special education services. They saw this as a major success, because they believe that it results in better services at a lower cost. Adams-Cheshire reported sending special education students to specialized classrooms in Pittsfield and North Adams in the past, although they reported that they are unable to do so currently. Northern Berkshire Union reported that because their district is so small, they don't have some needed special education programs internally and need to tuition some of their students into North Adams.

Health care services. Multiple districts reported negotiating collectively for health care services through the Berkshire Health Group, which describes itself as "A Massachusetts municipal joint purchase group organized under MGL Ch. 32B, Section12" and lists several Berkshire County towns and school districts among its members.[11] Berkshire Hills reported that in collaboration with their collective bargaining unit and the Berkshire Health Group they were able to move to a plan that saved the district several hundred thousand dollars per year and also reduced costs for employees.

Sharing superintendents. Berkshire Hills and Shaker Mountain are sharing a superintendent starting in the 2016–17 school year. Both districts anticipated modest cost savings through creating efficiencies such as reducing duplicative efforts. Shaker Mountain also anticipated that the arrangement will provide some additional services at the district level including curriculum and business management supports. Both districts noted, however, that the work done previously by a full-time superintendent in Berkshire Hills and a 0.6 full-time equivalent superintendent in Shaker Hills could not be accomplished by a single individual. Lenox and Lee also explored having a shared superintendent in 2016, although they decided against doing so. In an article in the Berkshire Eagle newspaper, the Lenox School Committee chairman was quoted as saying, "There's no benefit to having [our current superintendent] only half-time unless we have somebody to backfill the parts of the job he can't do because he'd spend half-time in Lee. [Postponing the process] will give us time to explore those kinds of things as well as shared services in other areas" (Fanto, 2016). The article also noted that "The Berkshire Hills and Lee school boards approved a legal memorandum in January laying out guidelines for exploring shared services. The Lee and Lenox school committees had signed a similar agreement last fall."

[11] http://berkshirehg.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/bhg-Fact-Sheet-01-27-161.pdf

Sharing other personnel. Lee, Lenox, and Berkshire Hills have formal shared service agreements for services that are outside of the collective bargaining agreement, including technology director, curriculum director, and food service director. Berkshire Hills shares their psychologist with Shaker Mountain a few days per month. Pittsfield has one of the only RETELL[12] specialists in the county and shares that specialist's services with other districts at cost. One administrator also thought that the district was sharing physical therapy and occupational therapy services with another district.

Professional development. Central Berkshire reported that the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts in North Adams organizes county-wide professional development for physical education teachers, nurses, and other specialists. They said that the offerings are usually hosted at one of the county schools, are cost effective for the county and the schools, and allow staff to have more customized and collegial professional development than would be possible at the level of a single district (which might have only a single nurse, for example). Pittsfield also reported that they work with other districts and the superintendents roundtable to offer professional development workshops across districts. (Central Berkshire and Pittsfield may have been referring to the same initiatives.)

Athletics. Many districts reported that they are engaged in "co-op" athletic teams with other districts, in an attempt to reduce costs, increase student participation, and offer sports for which they would not otherwise have enough participants to field a competitive team. Some districts anticipated that declining enrollment would lead to additional co-op team arrangements.

Community and government partners. When asked about reducing costs through shared services, Pittsfield reported on three efforts that involved community and government partners rather than other school districts. First, last year they transitioned a teen parenting program that had been in the district for 25 years out of their collective bargaining agreement and into a community nonprofit and saved about $100,000 as a result of the change. Second, they have contracted with a community organization to offer a parent-child home program that had previously been under their collective bargaining agreement. Third, they are trying to contract with the sheriff's office to staff a truant officer position that currently has a $100,000 impact on the school district's budget.

Plans for additional shared services. Several districts also discussed shared service arrangements that they hope to create in the future. Special education services were mentioned most often; one administrator noted that special education costs are rising "astronomically" and that research would be helpful to identify promising ways to share services and transportation. Shaker Mountain may be engaging in shared services with Berkshire Hills beginning SY17 around information technology and possibly cafeteria management. Currently Shaker Mountain has no information technology support other than with a private contractor and does not get the timeliness of help that they sometimes need. They are hoping to hire the information technology personnel from Berkshire Hills part-time, which they

[12] A Massachusetts initiative to address the academic proficiency of English language learners. It requires specialized training of many teachers and administrators.

anticipate would result in a similar cost to the private contractor but a higher level of service. Other areas mentioned for future shared services included payroll services, "back office support," and collaborative purchasing of supplies.

One area where respondents offered conflicting perspectives was with regard to shared transportation services. North Adams mentioned the potential for savings in special education transportation. Lee mentioned research into special education transportation from years ago which found that the long distances between districts meant that, in many cases, additional transportation costs would erase any costs saved by sending students to a program in another district. With regard to general student transportation, Northern Berkshire Vocational said that years ago there was some discussion of a regional transportation effort, but it was going to cost more than the district's existing system, in part because of the number of routes and late buses in the contract.

Another issue relevant to developing shared services was collective bargaining agreements. As already noted, Lee, Lenox, and Berkshire Hills have formal shared service agreements for services that are outside of the collective bargaining agreement, including technology director, curriculum director, and food service director. The superintendent reported that implementing shared services arrangements more deeply would have required renegotiating the collective bargaining agreement, which they avoided because it would have taken much longer. Instead, they decided to implement some shared service changes outside of the collective bargaining agreement, which could be done quickly and would establish some successes "on the ground." They hoped to subsequently promote shared service arrangements as having benefits for union personnel, pointing to jobs that had been saved.

Multiple administrators talked about establishing facts on the ground with regard to shared services as an important first step in larger collaborative efforts within the county. One superintendent explained that the financial challenges are going to continue, so the status quo cannot continue without jeopardizing the current level of programs and services. Therefore, he felt that increased levels of collaboration, regionalization, and/or shared services will be necessary over time. In the short term, his district is focusing on shared services, because it seems like the easiest thing to get done. But the school committee is looking in a more detailed way into pursuing regionalization across multiple districts, or creating an educational collaborative.

School district consolidation. The interviews with Berkshire County school administrators revealed a variety of perspectives with regard to district consolidation. Although multiple interviewees recognized the potential need for it, no one described determined current efforts to expand regional agreements with other districts. The work of the Task Force may influence this dynamic, because in the next phase of this research they plan to model the likely impacts of further regionalization on educational quality and costs.

The most recent effort in the county that sought to change regional affiliations was an attempt by Adams-Cheshire in August 2015 to attract the 180 students that Lanesborough sends to Mt. Greylock

Regional High School in Williamstown. Adams-Cheshire offered a lower tuition rate that they said would have saved Lanesborough about $1.6 million per year, a substantial sum for both towns (Guerino, 2015). Lanesborough declined the offer, with the school committee chairwoman saying, "Not anywhere have they shown us anything they can educationally provide for us that's better than what we have. We're in the education business, not the money business" (Dravis, 2015). Adams-Cheshire superintendent Kristen Gordon said,

> "We all put our best foot forward, and we had some sincere interest from neighboring communities that were similar enough in population that it would have worked well. But it was politically untenable….But we're always listening. That's part of what the Task Force is about. There are always rumors about the next district over. And we're all watching each other. I mean, there are a couple of [obvious] matches in the county, and we've been watching [those matches] not happen for years now, and you sort of think, 'If *they* can't figure it out, how in the world are *we* going to do it?'"

Several districts talked about possibilities for future regionalization. Lee reported that they are focusing on shared services first, because it's the easiest thing to get done, but they are also looking into pursuing regionalization across multiple districts, or creating an educational collaborative. At the same time, superintendent Al Skrocki had doubts that regionalizing would save money, based on research he had seen, as well as the district's current level of administrative staffing. He explained that you cannot just combine superintendents the way you can in some larger cities or towns, because the Berkshire County districts don't have many middle managers such as assistant superintendents and curriculum directors. He believed that potential savings are minimal, and the end result would be a compromise of services. He cautioned against taxpayers and town meeting members seeking short-term savings that might have long-term negative impacts.

Mt. Greylock said that they have talked about sharing services with Shaker Mountain. Principal Mary MacDonald said that would make sense geographically, because they are all on the western side of Mount Greylock, and that they have not really talked with Adams and North Adams because there is a big mountain between them.

Shaker Mountain said that if enrollment at Hancock Elementary School continues to decline, such as from its current 44 students in grades PreK–6 down to 34 students, the school may close and students would be tuitioned into other districts, probably Williamstown or Lanesborough. But principal Tracy Tierney noted that some town residents, particularly those whose children attend the school, feel that it is a central institution in the town and would want to keep it open regardless of the level of enrollment.

The other school in the regional Shaker Mountain School Union, Richmond Consolidated School, reported that the school has adequate enrollment currently due to a large percentage of school choice students. Principal Monica Zanin explained that if the town population declined, the district would need to decide whether or not to continue expanding the number of school choice students. Alternatively,

they would consider closing the middle school grades and tuitioning those students to other districts. She said that a committee in the town assessed this issue and concluded that closing the school would not save the town money. She also noted that the population trend looks favorable if you consider the Pre-K class, which is larger than usual this year.

The Northern Berkshire Union district said that Clarksburg has an old building and is currently considering a building project through the Massachusetts School Building Authority. Superintendent Jon Lev explained that if the renovation happens and the town has a new building, it might become very attractive for school choice students from other towns. He said that if the renovation does not happen, the school will probably close and the town will probably send its students to North Adams. With regard to other towns in the union, he noted that Florida, Rowe, and Savoy will likely opt to sustain their small schools of about 40 to 90 students each, and that Heath students might begin attending the Rowe Elementary School. (Rowe and Heath are in Franklin County, but Rowe is part of a Berkshire County regional school district.)

Southern Berkshire and Farmington River—both regional districts already—have had initial discussions about regionalizing with each other but described the efforts as very preliminary. Farmington River has only a PreK–6 elementary school, so it tuitions its students in grades 7–12 to other districts, but the long distance to the Southern Berkshire middle school and high school means that most students go to other districts instead. Farmington River superintendent Jo Ann Austin says that the two districts may share professional development, technology, and support services, but currently they are not discussing merging to the extent of having only one superintendent.

Berkshire Hills superintendent Peter Dillon said that conversations about regionalizing might happen later, but "I think we have to build trust and demonstrate that we can work together first." Central Berkshire superintendent Laurie Casna said that their school committee sometimes discusses closer collaboration with other districts, but the district is fairly large (1600 students) and has already reduced some personnel, so they feel that there is less need to collaborate. Northern Berkshire Regional Vocational Technical superintendent James Brosnan noted that his district already represents nine towns and probably would not save money by regionalizing with other districts. The principal of Drury High School in North Adams, Amy Meehan, said that there has been informal talk on social media about possibly consolidating with other high schools, but no formal dialogue. One administrator cautioned that,

> "Official conversations [about consolidation] need to happen in a very thoughtful way. High schools are the flagships of many communities, so when you talk about 'This school is better for this' and 'That school is better for that,' that can be really dangerous to the education climate when teachers are worried about losing their jobs, or a community is worried about losing something that is very near and dear to them. That can be very dangerous, especially if there are conversations by business leaders, or politicians,

> without really understanding some of the intricacies of relationships and the demographics of each community."

Administrators were told that they could request for any of their interview comments to remain anonymous, but only one administrator made this request in the first round of interviews. It was in relation to concerns about merging with districts of different performance levels. The administrator said,

> "While I see the value of coordinating [with other districts] from an economic standpoint, and I know that the principals and superintendents of these other communities want the best for their students, I don't think we can discount …. that my aspirations [for my school] can be higher because of what my community is supporting. And I don't want to see that challenged for my students. I know that one of the focuses is to have some equity across the region with regard to services and programming, and I'm all for equity, but I want everyone to rise up. I don't want our school to lose its advanced academic programs, its extracurricular programs …. I'm trying to be as diplomatic as possible. I like the idea of sharing ideas and figuring out how we can share resources, but I don't want to do it in a way that's going to diminish the opportunities that the students at our school have."

The comment "I'm trying to be as diplomatic as possible" makes the awkwardness of discussing this topic apparent. However, the issue will be present for some stakeholders whether or not it is discussed openly, so it is important to discuss when attempting to regionalize districts. In a letter to the editor in the Berkshire Eagle entitled "Ignore disinformation, support Mt. Greylock plan," the writer said it more directly. Referencing the state's annual ratings of school performance, from levels 1 (highest) to 5 (lowest)—he wrote about Adams-Cheshire's attempts to attract Lanesborough students, "Parents responded in nearly unanimous opposition to the idea of trading out of a Level 1 school into a Level 3 for a few promised dollars" (Moors, 2016).

One other category of comments from the administrator interviews referenced the importance of issues other than cost savings in determining school district configurations. One principal said, "I think that [regionalization] needs to be done not purely as a cost savings measure, but also asking 'How do you maximize educational opportunities for students?' I think that needs to be the guiding question, not just the bottom dollar." Another principal from a rural district described the value of being in a small school in a beautiful setting with deeply committed staff, even if it was somewhat more expensive, and even if they were unable to offer as many curricular options as larger schools. A recent article in the Berkshire Eagle about the issue of closing the Richmond Consolidated Elementary School, described a candidate for the school committee making a similar point, based on both finances and the school's role in the community:

> "she said that if elected, she would 'explore every option to keep the school open. I recognize the financial obligations that might be imposed and the fact that the

> community views need to be properly identified and assessed.' 'While the demographics of the town may be changing,' she pointed out, 'it is important to consider whether that means that the fabric and identity of the town should change as well.' Noting nearly 200 years of continuous school operation in the town, [she] declared: 'That says something about how ingrained the school presence has been in the fabric of town life. It is important to find out whether the community views this as just a dollars and cents issue or something more integral to what makes our town so special to all of us that have chosen to live here.'"

Issues of educational quality are clearly paramount to many stakeholders and must be prioritized alongside financial considerations when exploring potential regionalization processes.

Other cost-saving strategies. The following strategies to reduce costs were also reported during the administrator interviews.

Special education. Several districts had reduced private or out-of-district special education placements. One district described a special education classroom with 11 students, staffed by a teacher and three paraprofessionals, that cost less than a previous residential placement for just 1 of the 11 students. The local classroom was also described as a better outcome for families who wanted their child to be located closer to home.

Energy costs. Berkshire Hills contracted with a new solar energy provider that they estimate will save them $80,000 per year for the next 20–25 years. Southern Berkshire, in a project supported by the Massachusetts School Building Authority, installed new boilers that can use pellets, oil, or gas, whichever is cheapest in a given year. They estimate this saved them about $50,000 in fuel costs during the 2015–16 school year. Multiple districts reported switching to less expensive lighting fixtures, saving a substantial portion of their electric bill. One school reported making this change with grant support from the National Grid electrical company.

Closing schools. North Adams closed a middle school, saving $1.2 million annually. The building was then renovated and re-opened, replacing one of their elementary schools. Southern Berkshire closed a one-room schoolhouse in Monterey that in recent years had only about six students, and which had no students register for the 2015–16 school year. Central Berkshire closed the elementary school in Cummington due to insufficient enrollment.

Combining positions. Several schools reported that they managed budget deficits and small schools by taking on multiple instructional and administrative roles. In Farmington River, the reading director is also the early childhood coordinator and leads aspects of the teacher evaluation system. Starting in the 2016–17 school year, the principal will also be the superintendent, a model the school has used in the past. At Mt. Greylock, the principal is also the testing coordinator, and the assistant principal is also the head of an academic department. Northern Berkshire Union superintendent Jon Lev

said, “One of the biggest ways that we are able to exist is that our central office is bare bones. We have a special education director, myself, a business manager, and that’s it. We don’t have a cafeteria manager, a facilities manager, special education coordinators, or educational coaches. Would I love to have a reading coach in each building? Absolutely. But that’s how we get by.” He also that teachers “bend over backwards” to make sure the school can survive, by taking on extra duties, filling in for absent colleagues to save on substitute teacher costs, and compromising on raises and benefits.

Purchasing 14-passenger buses. Southern Berkshire purchased two of these buses, which reduced transportation costs for athletics and field trips while allowing more flexibility. The vans have enough capacity to fit many full classes. Teachers drive, no special license is required, and no contract is needed, unlike with the large school buses. Due to the district’s contract with a school bus company, the buses cannot be used to bring students to or from school.

Seeking grants. Berkshire Hills has been seeking competitive and private foundation grants, one of which is funding their after-school program. Northern Berkshire Vocational has obtained Perkins and Massachusetts state grants to fund capital equipment. Mt. Greylock receives an annual grant from Williams College that has funded major purchases for technology, professional development, trips, and supplies.

Updating technology. A Lee High School graduate who became a successful technology entrepreneur conducted a free assessment of the school’s technology infrastructure and needs. The resulting changes saved the district $110,000 during the 2015–16 school year, which the superintendent noted is a large sum for a district of Lee’s size. The changes included modernizing hardware and software, reducing from 11 servers to 2 servers, using Gmail instead of paying for email, and using open source software (which is free) extensively. Also, they are now buying Chromebooks rather than more expensive laptop and desktop computers, and they anticipate that in the next two years about 40% of students will be supplying their own devices, which will be facilitated by the school’s installation of wireless infrastructure throughout the building. The changes have resulted in less need for technology support, so the district did not replace their retiring technology director, whose salary and benefits were the largest part of the $110,000 savings. Now the district contracts with Whalley Computer Associates in Southwick at a cost of about $30,000 per year.

Additional strategies. Several districts reported reducing personnel and increasing class sizes as cost-saving strategies. After many years in rented locations, the Lee administration will move into a wing of Lee Middle and High School. North Adams reduced the number of bus routes. Northern Berkshire Vocational uses the state bid list to buy commodities at the best price. North Adams consolidated its ELL services in one elementary school and its autism services in another elementary school. Northern Berkshire Union uses adult volunteers to work in the office, supervise lunch, and take on another duties, freeing teachers and paraprofessionals to spend more time with students.

6. Estimating Fiscal Impacts of Change Strategies

The literature review sought to identify examples of rigorous and cost-effective methods for estimating the fiscal impacts of district regionalization and inter-district shared services. Such examples could serve as a foundation for planning subsequent phases of the Task Force's work. While no "handbook" on how to carry out such estimates was identified, several reports of districts' regionalization planning were identified that could advance Berkshire County's efforts to estimate potential fiscal impacts. Estimation of savings from inter-district shared services could be carried out using methods similar to the regionalization examples below, but focusing on specific categories that could be targets of collaboration rather than the entire school district budget.

Three nearby organizations that have estimated budgets for school district regionalization studies are the New England School Development Council (NESDEC), the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC), and the Rhode Island Public Expenditure Council (RIPEC). The NESDEC studies obtained were conducted to explore regionalization efforts in Franklin County (Cronin et al., 2009); the towns of Ayer, Lunenburg, and Shirley (Davis et al., 2008); and the towns of Freetown and Lakeville (Bettencourt et al., 2008). The PVPC study explored regionalization of the towns of Granville, Southwick, and Tolland (PVPC, 2010). The RIPEC study explored regionalization of the Middletown, Newport, and Portsmouth school districts on Aquidneck Island (RIPEC, 2009). Multiple approaches to estimating fiscal impacts are utilized in these reports.

The Franklin County report compares average per pupil costs in the county and the state for the main school finance categories (e.g., administration, classroom and specialist teachers, operations and maintenance) from ESE's school district profiles.[13] The difference between county and state averages is multiplied by the number of students in the county as a starting point for discussing potential cost savings that could be realized by bringing various categories in line with state averages. The report explores three potential reorganization models: (1) a single, county-wide district; (2) three districts; and (3) five K–12 academic districts plus a sixth district for the county's vocational technical high school. The models specify how many administrators each district would have and their salaries, compares that to the amounts spent on administrators in the county's existing districts, and uses that to posit a savings associated with each model.[14]

The PVPC report uses the state's statutory method[15] for estimating budgets under the following three scenarios: (1) No changes were made, and Granville remained a separate school district; (2) Granville

[13] http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/

[14] ESE notified UMDI of an error in the report that should be taken into consideration if making use of its methods or findings: "NESDEC realized after publication that their conclusions about out-of-district costs were incorrect. The low per-student rate is because there are so many choice students at $5,000 each that the average cost of out-of-district tuitions is greatly reduced." Carleton, S. Personal communication, July 20, 2016.

[15] The statutory method and the alternative/agreement method are described in this ESE document: http://www.doe.mass.edu/finance/regional/guidance.pdf

joined Southwick-Tolland Regional School District, but programming and structure did not change (e.g., no assumptions were made with regard to the use of excess and deficiency funds, duplication of personnel or services, or savings that might occur with changed utilization of facilities; and (3) Granville joined Southwick-Tolland Regional School District and additional savings and efficiencies were found. The report then estimates what each town's payments would be under each scenario, providing essential information for each town's consideration of the fiscal impacts of regionalization. Detailed explanations are provided of how and why the budget estimates were conducted.

The RIPEC study explores the feasibility of regionalizing three districts and consolidating some of their schools by comparing a combined Aquidneck Island district to four "benchmarking" communities in other states. The communities were compared on enrollments, test scores, revenues, expenditures, staffing, student/teacher ratios, personnel expenditures, number and type of facilities, and transportation expenditures. Fiscal impacts of regionalization were estimated using six models that explored different student/teacher ratios, administrative staffing levels, and closing one or two schools. Savings in services, supplies, and capital expenditures related to the school closings were also estimated. The report provides extensive tables, charts, maps, and explanations to illustrate how calculations were carried out and their rationales. It also explores non-fiscal impacts of regionalization, including possible enhancements to the educational experience and teaching force; the potential to retain the local elementary school model; and challenges such as transportation costs, teacher contracts, and alignment of curriculum and standards.

The study of regionalizing Ayer, Lunenburg, and Shirley does not provide as detailed a financial analysis as the reports just described, but it provides useful overviews of key factors that could be considered during regionalization planning. These factors include facilities, administrative structure and organization, geography, transportation, fiscal costs and benefits, and components of a regional agreement. The report also provides extensive appendices of data sources relevant to each of these factors.

The Freetown-Lakeville study explored creating a fully regionalized PK–12 district from two towns that each had an elementary school district and were already regionalized beyond the elementary level. The study does not provide as much detail as some of the other reports. It is not clear whether the scope of analysis was less extensive than some of the other studies, but, if so, the study could be a model if the Task Force intends to do a large number of lower-cost, preliminary studies of the fiscal impacts of potential district pairings or groupings. The Freetown-Lakeville study also highlights a point that Task Force members have often noted—that a high priority for any fiscal savings realized due to regionalization might be increasing educational quality rather than reducing budgets. One of the study's conclusions is that, "With duplicative functions eliminated in a PK-12 District, it is estimated that the Superintendent and three Directors of Business, Instruction, and Special Education would have 25–30% additional time to spend on supervision, evaluation, and planning activities related to the mission, educational programs, and efficiency of the new District" (p. i).

As acknowledged in the reports just described, their fiscal models do not account for all potential costs and savings associated with regionalization. The Task Force would need to decide which specific budget areas to include in modeling of regionalization options (e.g., administrators, transportation, technology); these decisions would likely be influenced by resources available for modeling studies. The Franklin County study provides one approach to estimating fiscal impacts at the county or regional level, which corresponds to Tier 3 of the Task Force's proposed change strategies. The other studies focus more on partnerships between geographically proximal districts, which corresponds to Tier 2 of the Task Force's proposed strategies. However, while resource-intensive, the approaches used for geographically proximal districts could also be applied to larger regions or the entire county.

Some of the authors of the NESDEC and PVPC studies remain active in current efforts to support regionalization in Massachusetts and could likely service as resources for the Task Force's next steps. While the authors of the RIPEC study are not named in the report document, it appears that both RIPEC and NESDEC studied the prospects for regionalization on Aquidneck Island (NESDEC, 2011; Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2013, p. 29).

Conclusions and Recommendations

The Phase One study was intended to review and confirm available evidence that decreased enrollment, rising costs, and declining or flat revenues pose challenges to the quality of education in Berkshire County. The evidence reviewed and presented clearly indicates that the quality of education in Berkshire County is being threatened by these factors, with program impacts already being experienced in some districts and signs of potential program impacts over time in most districts.

The Phase One study was also intended to generate insights into the potential benefits and risks of shared services and consolidation strategies when used to improve efficiency and sustainability of public school districts. Findings regarding these benefits and risks were presented throughout the report. The following sections offer (a) conclusions regarding the impacts of enrollment, cost, revenue, and program trends; and (b) conclusions and recommendations about shared services and consolidation. These conclusions and recommendations are offered to inform discussion and action planning by the Task Force and other stakeholders.

Impacts of Enrollment, Cost, Revenue, and Program Trends

Berkshire County experienced enrollment declines of 22% from 2000–15 that affected all but two single-school districts. Substantial additional declines are likely, with an average projected decline of 11% from 2015 to 2025, and an average projected decline of 7% from 2025 to 2035.

Many of the trends affecting costs and revenues may continue into the upcoming years as well. These trends include (a) rising school district costs that are not fully offset by state funding or additional local

tax revenues attributable to increases in assessed values; (b) infrastructure costs that become higher per student as enrollment declines and buildings are filled well below capacity; (c) increasing numbers of high needs students; (d) growing impacts of the school choice process, with both "winners" and "losers"; and (e) costs of personnel salaries and benefits that are growing faster than total school district expenditures.

Economic trends in the next five years may be somewhat more variable than enrollment trends, although they are difficult to predict and heavily dependent on factors beyond Berkshire County. If recent economic trends continue as in the past five years, there will be substantial additional strain on school district finances. Stakeholders will promote addressing these strains through a combination of increased taxation and state-provided revenues, reduced expenses, and greater efficiencies.

For some municipalities, including a few that serve the majority of Berkshire County's public school students, the ability to increase revenue through taxation is limited by levy ceilings and override capacity. In many school districts, the preferences of constituents may also limit the ability to increase revenue. As a result of these limits, many districts will likely need to make changes to the services they provide. First, some districts will reduce academic, extracurricular, and/or support services, as many administrators reported was done in the past 5 or 15 years. Second, some districts will attempt to moderate the impacts of these reductions, using strategies described in this report, such as increasing class sizes, reducing the number of sections of certain courses, offering multiple courses or course levels in a single classroom, increasing the use of online courses and other technology-assisted academic work, combining extracurricular activities across schools or districts, and instituting or increasing participation fees. Many administrators said that past and future changes such as these have reduced and will continue to have negative impacts on student engagement, educational quality, and students' career options and college admissions prospects.

Many districts will also continue and extend their many past efforts to reduce costs. As detailed in the report, these efforts have included extensive work related to shared services, including personnel, professional development, special education and health care services, athletics, community and government partners, transportation, and additional areas. Individual districts have also reported managing costs related to energy, technology, and some of the areas just mentioned in relation to shared services. Finally, many districts described their preliminary thoughts about or steps toward regionalization efforts, although these efforts were less developed than other strategies. Advancing the discussion and modeling of regionalization efforts to improve financial sustainability and educational quality will be a high priority for the next phase of the Task Force's work.

The Task Force may wish to revisit the research questions of the Phase One study periodically to determine whether the enrollment, cost, revenue, and program trends motivating their work have continued, worsened, or abated. Continuation or worsening of the documented trends would provide a strong rationale for continued efforts to improve the educational quality and financial sustainability of Berkshire County's school districts.

Shared Services

As noted in the introduction, the Task Force has proposed three tiers of change strategies. Tier 1 is "Advance collaborative and shared services solutions such as cooperative purchasing, transportation, and shared special education programming." Shared service strategies appear to be promising to pursue immediately, for several reasons:

- Much shared services work is already happening in the county, but it appears that more could be done, with a high likelihood of additional cost savings and efficiencies.
- Regionalization efforts may take substantially longer to achieve than shared services work. In the meantime, the shared services agenda could be progressing.
- Engaging in shared services would advance collaborative relationships among districts that might facilitate future regionalization.
- It is important to know the extent of cost savings that can be realized through shared services. This can be estimated through planning, but it will only be ascertained through implementation. The literature suggests that the savings will be meaningful but not sufficient to fully resolve many districts' fiscal challenges. Getting this work underway will provide crucial information about what additional cost-saving measures districts will need to pursue.
- Implementing certain shared services may require changes to collective bargaining agreements, as noted by one superintendent. Identifying which shared services fall into this category and engaging in discussions about how to achieve desired changes reportedly requires substantial lead time for planning and negotiation.

Advancing these efforts is therefore an essential part of the estimation of fiscal impacts in Phase Two. Future work in this area could include the following:

- Documenting anticipated benefits to educational quality due to further implementation of shared services strategies.
- Documenting the specific work being done by the groups in southern and northern Berkshire County that are already discussing and implementing shared services work.
- Reviewing the extensive cost-saving strategies being pursued by individual districts and exploring whether similar actions could be facilitated in additional districts through shared services initiatives.
- Documenting the services that are available through existing state collaboratives, assessing what needs they might fulfill in Berkshire County, and seeking evidence of reducing costs while maintaining or increasing quality of programs and services.
- Investigating the potential advantages and disadvantages of forming a new collaborative that is specifically focused on the needs of Berkshire County. A useful resource for this effort could be a

memo and summary report from the Massachusetts Association of School Committees that reviewed challenges and potential areas for services and provided recommendations to the former Southern Berkshire Educational Collaborative (Koocher, 2003).

- Estimating the potential cost savings of engaging in various shared service efforts.
- Investigating the issues associated with shared services and collective bargaining agreements.
- Identifying incentives provided by the state for establishing or engaging with collaboratives or other shared services efforts. Also identifying incentives that have been provided by other states and considering whether and how to advocate for similar incentives for Berkshire County.

School District Consolidation

Tiers 2 and 3 of the Task Force's proposed change strategies are, respectively, "Advance formal partnerships between geographically proximal districts" and "Advance reorganization of the entire county into a super region of one to three districts." Both of these tiers focus on district consolidation. It is important to recognize that consolidation appears to face greater challenges to implementation than the shared services strategies just discussed. Some of the challenges that would need be addressed include:

- Mixed evidence regarding the potential cost savings and academic impacts of regionalizing.
- Maximizing the accuracy of cost-savings estimates.
- Evidence from recent history that stakeholders in Massachusetts districts and nationally are often reluctant to regionalize, due to concerns about local control, school closings, job losses, travel times, and reduced academic opportunities in one or more of the regionalizing districts. The recent Franklin County experience is important to consider, because their "2020 Vision Plan" (Cronin et al., 2009) yielded options similar to Tiers 2 and 3 of the BCETF plan, with millions of dollars in estimated cost savings, yet minimal progress has been made toward regionalization in the subsequent seven years.

This context suggests that Phase Two should be seen—as reflected in the Task Force's goal statements—as an opportunity to explore the potential merits and feasibility of regionalization. Future work in this area could include the following:

- Estimate the cost savings of potential regionalization options.
- Conduct ongoing discussions with numerous stakeholder groups—including parents, school personnel, citizens, policy makers, and employers—about the Task Force's findings regarding enrollment, cost, and revenue trends and their implications for educational costs and quality in Berkshire County. Emphasize both short-term and long-term projections. Be fully transparent about implications of different regionalization scenarios for local control, school closings, employment, and travel times. Clarify the different options for regionalization, many of which are already in operation in Berkshire County, including some that do not require school closings.

- Consider whether Tier 3 holds sufficient promise in terms of feasibility and optimal district size for cost savings and sustaining or improving educational quality. Tier 3 would imply a single district of about 15,000 students or three districts of about 5,000 students each (based on projected 2020 enrollment estimates). These district sizes exceed the optimal sizes estimated in some studies. Moreover, given the complexity of achieving agreement regarding regionalization among even two or three districts, feasibility of super regions is a key question.
- Consider whether regionalization at the Tier 2 level may be both more achievable and more likely to yield desired outcomes. Also recognize the importance of district buy-in and full participation in any modeling efforts, as well as the resource-intensive nature of creating such estimates. One approach would be to establish a process to identify a small number of district groupings, perhaps one to three, that demonstrate strong interest and motivation to participate fully in exploring a regionalization process. This may enable the Task Force to utilize most effectively the resources available for modeling cost savings, program offerings, and other questions of interest, while also maximizing the likelihood of districts acting on the findings if the modeling suggests that regionalization is warranted. It also recognizes that some districts appear to have limited interest in regionalizing (or further regionalizing) at this time.
- Consider promoting and providing support for a process that would help districts assess whether they may be strong candidates for regionalization. The district capacity assessment tool developed by the Massachusetts Special Commission on School District Collaboration and Regionalization (2011) may be a valuable resource for structuring that process and helping districts determine whether they are assessing current and future risks accurately.[16] An additional step would be synthesizing findings across districts to help districts and other stakeholders assess the relative urgency of their situations.
- Analyze indicators that may suggest a greater likelihood of cost savings upon regionalization. One such indicator is each district's administrative cost per student, which is investigated in a study of the central office capacity in Massachusetts regional districts (Massachusetts Association of Regional Schools, 2009). The level of district, county, and state expenditures in different functional categories presented in this report could support such analyses.
- Consider costs associated with both maintaining existing school buildings and closing buildings, as these will be key factors in many districts' decisions regarding whether or not to regionalize.
- Consider school choice numbers carefully, as some districts may gain school choice students more quickly as their foundation enrollment declines. This may also imply that the students' sending districts would experience more rapid enrollment declines than currently predicted.
- As with shared services models, it will be important to consider issues related to collective bargaining agreements as well as existing state incentives for regionalizing. Consider seeking

[16] The Lenox and Richmond school districts have both already utilized the capacity assessment tool (Lenox School Committee, 2015; Massachusetts Association of Regional Schools, 2015).

additional state incentives to support transition costs, which the literature suggests can last for several years after regionalization takes place.

Some additional recommendations from New Jersey's Assembly Task Force on School District Regionalization report (1999) that may be relevant to facilitating effective regionalization processes in Berkshire County include the following:

- Provide students with the option of completing their education at the school they attended prior to school district regionalization.
- Establish site-based management and building level control groups to afford greater local control and parents' participation consistent with district policies and curriculum.
- Educate employees, who will be impacted by the formation or expansion of new districts, concerning their salary and benefit packages.
- Any voluntary regionalization plan should, to the greatest extent possible, protect school employees' rights relating to seniority, tenure, and health benefits.

Additional recommendations from the New Jersey report consider state regulations that may differ between New Jersey and Massachusetts, but which should be considered for potential applicability to Massachusetts as a way to reduce obstacles to regionalization. These recommendations also highlight the importance of collaborating and engaging in advocacy efforts with state government to foster a policy environment that supports regionalization as a strategy for improving financial sustainability and educational quality in Berkshire County.

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Appendix A

First Administrator Interview Protocol
(5-Year Time Frame)

Introduction

- Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today. I work for the UMass Donahue Institute. This interview is part of a study we are conducting for the Berkshire County Education Task Force, which is a group of current and former school administrators and educators, school committee members, town administrators, and local business leaders.
- The Task Force has concluded that Berkshire County is facing reductions in educational programs due to declining student enrollment and revenues that are not keeping pace with costs. They are working to develop recommendations that will enable all school districts to sustain quality education in Berkshire County.
- The Force wants input from administrators in each of the county's school districts who have direct and current knowledge of the issues that are at the center of the Task Force's mission.
- We will be sharing the findings from this interview with interested parties. However, in the event that you would prefer for particular statements to remain confidential, please let me know, and I will protect the confidentiality of those statements. Ask permission to use the recorder.

A. Past changes due to declining enrollment and/or revenue shortfalls (12 min)

1) Has your district needed to reduce educational programs in the past five years due to declining student enrollment and/or revenue shortfalls? (If yes) Please describe the reductions.

2) Has your district needed to reduce extracurricular or co-curricular programs and services in the past five years due to declining student enrollment and/or revenue shortfalls? These might include clubs, sports, transportation, or other programs and services. (If yes) Please describe the reductions.

3) Has your district needed to reduce student support services in the past five years due to declining student enrollment and/or revenue shortfalls? (If yes) Please describe the reductions.

B. Likely future changes due to declining enrollment and/or revenue shortfalls

4) In what ways, if any, do you anticipate that student enrollment and revenue trends will affect your district's educational programs in the next five school years?

5) In what ways, if any, do you anticipate that student enrollment and revenue trends will affect your district's extracurricular or co-curricular programs in the next five school years?

C. Approaches to create a more financially sustainable educational system in Berkshire County

6) In light of the enrollment and revenue trends that we have been discussing, are there steps that your district has already taken to manage costs while sustaining educational quality?

7) Are there additional steps that your district plans to pursue in the future to manage costs while sustaining educational quality? Probe if not already mentioned:

    a. Has your district discussed realizing financial savings through new technologies?

    b. Has your district discussed realizing financial savings through new partnerships or regional agreements with other districts?

Appendix B

Second Administrator Interview Protocol
(15-Year Time Frame)

Introduction

- Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today. I work for the UMass Donahue Institute. As you know, this interview is part of a study we are conducting for the Berkshire County Education Task Force.
- I have already interviewed a principal and/or superintendent from each school district in the county, asking them about changes in the past five years and the next five years. After reviewing the findings, the Task Force asked me to conduct additional interviews with administrators who have worked in the county for at least 15 years, and to seek their perspectives on changes that have happened during the past 15 years.
- We will be sharing the findings from this interview with interested parties. However, in the event that you would prefer for particular statements to remain confidential, please let me know, and I will protect the confidentiality of those statements. Ask permission to use the recorder.

A. Background

1) What administrative positions have you held in Berkshire County, and during what years?

B. Changes in the past 15 years

In responding to the following questions, feel free to focus only on the districts or school levels that you have worked in. But if you feel that you also have sufficient information to comment about other school levels, other districts, and/or the county as a whole, please speak about that broader context as well.

[Follow-up questions regarding program and service reductions will be asked only if interviewees indicate that reductions have occurred.]

2) Over the past 15 years, have Berkshire County school districts needed to reduce their <u>educational program offerings</u> at the elementary and/or secondary levels?
    a. Would you describe those reductions in the past 15 years as “minimal,” “moderate,” or “extensive”?
    b. Please summarize what you see as the main reductions in educational program offerings that have taken place at the elementary and secondary levels in the past 15 years.
    c. [Probe if not mentioned] During the past 15 years, have decreases in the numbers of sections of certain classes resulted in students being less able to take classes that they

wanted to take? [If yes] Would you describe the extent of this problem as "minimal," "moderate," or "extensive"?

d. [Probe if not mentioned] Some schools with limited staffing and/or limited student enrollment diversify their course offerings by teaching multiple courses in the same room at the same time with a single teacher. Examples would be three different levels of French in the same room, or a standard-level geometry course where students could receive honors by completing additional assignments. Did you use this approach in districts where you worked? Have you heard about this approach being used in other Berkshire County districts?

    i. [If yes to either of the previous two questions] Have you seen the extent of this approach increase in the past 15 years? What do you see as the strengths and limitations of this approach?

e. During the past 15 years, has the level of academic support available to each student declined? [If yes] Would you describe the extent of this decline as "minimal," "moderate," or "extensive"? In what ways has this decline affected students' educational experiences?

3) Over the past 15 years, have Berkshire County school districts needed to reduce extracurricular or co-curricular programs and services at the elementary and/or secondary levels? These might include clubs, sports, transportation, or other programs and services.

    a. Would you describe those reductions in the past 15 years as "minimal," "moderate," or "extensive"?

    b. Please summarize what you see as the main reductions in extracurricular or co-curricular programs and services that have taken place at the elementary and secondary levels in the past 15 years.

4) Over the past 15 years, have Berkshire County school districts needed to reduce student support services at the elementary, secondary, and/or district levels?

    a. Would you describe those reductions in the past 15 years as "minimal," "moderate," or "extensive"?

    b. Please summarize what you see as the main reductions in student support services that have taken place at the elementary and secondary levels in the past 15 years.

5) Now I have a few questions with regard to all of the educational, extracurricular, and support service offerings that you have described as being reduced over the past 15 years.

    a. What do you see as the causes of the reductions over the past 15 years?

    b. What do you see as any implications of the reductions for the quality of educational opportunities in Berkshire County?

c. What do you see as any implications of the reductions for students' college and career readiness? What do you see as any implications of the reductions for students' opportunities with regard to college admissions?

d. Are there any other implications of the reductions that you would like to comment on?