

*Independent Study of Martha's Vineyard All-Island Schools
Regionalization*

“A Regionalization Expansion Project”



Presented by:



Dr. Stephen Hemman - MARS Consulting Group
Mr. Malcolm Reid - MARS Consulting Group

Dr. Nadine Ekstrom – Academic Discoveries
Ms. Carol Costello - Academic Discoveries

Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	5
Highlighted Review Findings.....	6
INTRODUCTION	11
FINANCE - AREAS OF FOCUS	13
How do Martha’s Vineyard Public Schools	13
Compare to Other Supervisory Unions and Regions Related to Financial Issues?.....	13
What is the Cost Per Pupil for Each of the Six Districts and the Average Teacher Salary for the Island Schools?.....	14
How Does the Martha’s Vineyard Supervisory Union Compare to Other Supervisory Unions and Regions Based on Student Enrollment?	14
How Does Martha’s Vineyard Compare to Nantucket Schools?.....	15
What is DESE’s Definition of Relative District Wealth?.....	16
How Does Income per Capita and EQV (property wealth) on Martha’s Vineyard Compared to Other Supervisory Unions?.....	17
What Are Comparisons to MVPS Using DESE and DOR?	19
What Are Comparison Districts Based on Per Pupil Costs, District Wealth, and Total Enrollment?.....	19
What is the Total Appropriated Amount by the Six Towns for Education?	21
What are the Budget, Cost, and Organizational Issues that Affect MVPS Expenditures?	21
How Would Regional Transportation Change with PK - 12 Regionalization?.....	22
What is a Superintendency Union?	23
What is the Budget Process for Different Kinds of School Systems?	23
What is Martha’s Vineyard Budget Process?.....	25
How Are Martha’s Vineyard Budgets Organized?	27
Financial Conclusions.....	27
Financial Inefficiencies	28
Financial Recommendations	28
ORGANIZATION FOCUS AREAS	29
How Are the Martha’s Vineyard Schools Organized?	29
1. Edgartown School District	29

2. Oak Bluffs School District	30
3. Tisbury School District.....	30
4. Up-Island Regional School District	30
5. Martha’s Vineyard Regional High School District.....	30
What Are the Roles of Island-Wide Administrators?.....	30
How Are Regular Classrooms Staffed by Teachers?	31
What Are Some General Staffing Issues?	32
How Do Grants Function in the Separate Districts?	33
What Are Shared Services?	33
Are There Shared After-School Programs?.....	34
What is the Role of a Human Resources Department.....	34
What are the Benefits and Challenges of Regionalization?	34
Potential Benefits.....	35
Potential Challenges	37
Pathways to Decision-Making	38
What School Configurations and Staffing Options Relate to Regionalization?	39
What are some Advantages of Partial or Full Regionalization?.....	43
There are several significant issues with this potential regrouping of the grades:	44
What are the Steps Necessary to Amend a Regional Agreement?	45
Pathway to Regionalization:	47
Six Models of Regionalization	48
What are some Organizational Efficiencies?	50
What are some Organizational Inefficiencies?.....	50
What are some Organizational Conclusions?	51
What are some Organizational Recommendations?	51
<i>EDUCATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS</i>	<i>53</i>
<i>METHODS</i>	<i>54</i>
Document Review.....	54
Interviews	55
Focus Groups	55
Classroom Observations.....	55

Areas Of Research	56
Qualitative And Quantitative Data Collection	57
FINDINGS	58
Martha’s Vineyard Public Schools Overview.....	58
Public School Data.....	59
Educational Environments of Students with Disabilities	60
Selected Population of Students (2023-2024)	61
MCAS Performance (Spring 2025).....	61
FOCUS AREAS - DATA COLLECTION	63
Education	63
Focus Area 1: Educational Structure of the five districts	63
● What is the educational structure of the five districts, and how could it look different with PK-12 regionalization?.....	63
Focus Area 2: Academic Achievement	82
● What data explains differences in educational achievement among the five districts?.....	82
Focus Area 3: Efficiency and Effectiveness.....	106
● <i>How could one district make the educational process more efficient?</i>	106
Focus Area 4: Fiscal Responsibility.....	127
● How could one district save resources/money? (e.g. staffing, programs, etc.?)	127
Focus Area 5: Teaching & Learning.....	138
Focus Area 6: Special Education & English Language Learning	152
● How can one district improve special education and ELL programs for students while also making them more cost-effective?	152
Focus Area 7: Potential Advantages of a One-Region Structure	172
● What other advantages does a one-region structure bring to the educational program/students?	172
Focus Area 8 : Perspectives	184
● What other issues, concerns, information can be shared at this time?.....	184
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS.....	191
Educational	191
Areas of Promise.....	191
Areas of Growth	197
RECOMMENDATIONS	204
Educational	204
Concluding Remarks	207
PowerPoint Presentations	208
“Committed to our Clients and their Students“ 574 Station Road, Amherst, MA 01002	210

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Massachusetts Association of Regional Schools (MARS) and Academic Discoveries, Inc. completed a proposal for the Martha's Vineyard Public Schools in the fall of 2025. Martha's Vineyard is an approximately 100-square-mile island situated about seven miles off the southeastern coast of Massachusetts (Cape Cod) and is part of Dukes County. It is also part of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Martha's Vineyard population is approximately 20,700, with a significantly larger seasonal population in the summer, and is becoming more diverse. Martha's Vineyard has a total population of 13,908 residents in the off-season months, according to the latest release from the U.S. Census Bureau: the 2019-2023 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates. This figure changed by +0.5% compared to a year ago. The median age is 50.4, which is older than the Massachusetts average. According to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) website, the school system is designated as a Title 1 district and receives federal funding to support educational programming. The school system serves students from preschool through grade 12 and has approximately 2,184 enrolled students. Martha's Vineyard Regional High School incorporates students from the surrounding towns of Chilmark, Edgartown, Oak Bluffs, Tisbury, Aquinnah, and West Tisbury. Three of the elementary schools and three of the UP-Island Region all operate independently from the others, governed by each town, or group of towns in the Upper-Island Regional District, and overseen educationally by the Martha's Vineyard School Department. There is a single superintendent of schools.

The review identified several programmatic focus areas across the school system: specialized services and programming, educational practices and resources, and streamlined systems.

Components of the analysis included:

- A comprehensive overview of district data provided by the MA DESE and U.S. Census.
- A review of district documents related to the focus of the review
- A review of organizational issues from District documents and personnel interviews
- review of financial analysis taken through reports and data collected from the District and MA DESE
- Individual interviews
- Focus group sessions
- Classroom observations

The Up-Island School Committee commissioned this review to provide the district with an impartial, comprehensive evaluation of its current strengths and weaknesses. The ultimate goal is to inform discussions regarding the prospect of additional regionalization on the Island.

Key components of this review involve assessing the districts' status, including the individual operation of each elementary school. Furthermore, the review is intended to present the School Committee with potential options for consideration as they address further regionalization.

Highlighted Review Findings

The following Focus Areas define the intention of our reports:

Financial

For the Martha's Vineyard Study, the first focus area was to calculate the amount of money the towns appropriated to educate their students. The amount is \$84,908,648 for the 2025 fiscal year.

The next focus area was to calculate the cost per pupil in the five districts: Martha's Vineyard Regional High School, Up-Island Regional School District, and the towns of Edgartown, Tisbury, and Oak Bluffs. Also, we researched the average teacher salaries.

The next focus area was to compare costs per pupil and average teacher salaries to selected Supervisory Unions, selected regions, and Nantucket. This focus compared the relative wealth of each educational entity.

The fourth focus area was to utilize information from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to compare similar districts by demographics and by wealth. Using the Resource Allocation and District Action Reports (RADAR) program, each of Martha's Vineyard's school districts was compared in both directions using an algorithm developed by DESE to find similar districts.

A fifth focus area was to use information from the Massachusetts Department of Revenue to determine the average income of residents and the Equalized Valuation (EQV) for property in the towns on the Vineyard.

The Martha's Vineyard Study initially focused on calculating the aggregate municipal appropriation for student education, which amounted to \$84,908,648 for the 2025 fiscal year.

The subsequent focus area involved determining the cost per pupil across the five districts: Martha's Vineyard Regional High School, Up-Island Regional School District, and the towns of Edgartown, Tisbury, and Oak Bluffs. Concurrently, data on average teacher salaries was researched.

The third area of inquiry involved comparing the calculated costs per pupil and average teacher salaries with selected Supervisory Unions, specific regions, and Nantucket. This comparison assessed the relative financial resources of each educational entity.

The fourth focus area used information from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to facilitate comparisons of similar districts based on demographics and wealth. Through the RADAR program, each Martha's Vineyard school district was compared with peer districts identified by a DESE-developed algorithm.

A fifth area of focus was the utilization of data from the Massachusetts Department of Revenue to ascertain the average resident income and the Equalized Valuation (EQV) for property within the towns of Martha's Vineyard.

Organizational

The organizational structure of the five Martha's Vineyard independent school districts is a central topic of interest, particularly in understanding how these districts are managed and how they interact within the broader educational landscape. Central Office administrators play crucial roles within the Supervisory Union, overseeing administrative and operational functions that support the schools. It is essential to consider whether there are any region-like operations among the school districts that facilitate collaboration or resource sharing.

Another key question is whether staffing levels are contributing to high per-student costs, which could affect the districts' financial efficiency. Additionally, it is worth examining whether any administrative functions are currently missing that could enhance the effectiveness of district operations.

The Island schools also offer options for additional regionalization, which could bring both benefits and challenges. Exploring these options involves weighing the advantages of increased cooperation and resource pooling against potential obstacles, such as the loss of local control or implementation complexities. Overall, these considerations are central to evaluating the current state and future possibilities for the organization and administration of Martha's Vineyard's independent school districts to determine if

additional regionalization would be beneficial to the students, staff, parents, and communities.

Educational

Focus Area 1: *What is the educational structure of the five districts, and how could it look different with PK-12 regionalization?*

The districts are not starting from scratch. Many core elements of a regionalized PK–12 system already exist—particularly in leadership, special education, English Learner services, and early curriculum alignment. These foundations represent strong areas of promise.

However, the current decentralized structure limits the system’s ability to equitably scale these successes. Inconsistent curriculum, fragmented governance, uneven access to enrichment, and administrative inefficiencies represent clear areas for growth.

PK–12 regionalization—or a more unified governance and instructional model—offers a pathway to build on existing strengths, reduce inequities, and create a more coherent, sustainable educational system across the island.

Focus Area 2: *What data explains the differences in educational achievement among the five districts?*

Focus Area 2 highlights a system rich in professional commitment, instructional talent, and promising practices, but constrained by fragmentation. Academic achievement differences are less about capacity and more about coherence. Strengthening shared systems for curriculum alignment, Massachusetts Tiered System of Support (MTSS), behavioral supports, data collection, and staffing efficiency—potentially through greater regional coordination—represents the most incredible opportunity to build on existing strengths and ensure equitable outcomes for all students across the five districts.

Focus Area 3: *How could one district make the educational process more efficient?*

Focus Area 3 reveals that inefficiency in the current system is not due to a lack of effort, expertise, or commitment, but rather to structural fragmentation. Strong local practices, regional labor agreements, and shared services provide a solid foundation. However, without a unifying district strategic plan, standardized systems, and coordinated operational infrastructure, these strengths cannot be leveraged at scale. Advancing toward a more cohesive district model—through regionalization or significantly strengthened central coordination—offers an opportunity to improve efficiency, effectiveness, equity, and long-term sustainability across the Island’s schools.

Focus Area 4: *How could one district save resources/money? E.g., staffing, programs, etc.?*

The district demonstrates an apparent dedication to supporting students and educators through financial investments, shared services, and grant acquisition. These strengths provide a solid foundation for continued improvement. To further enhance fiscal

responsibility, the district could focus on increasing consistency in staffing, scheduling, and professional development, expanding centralized oversight, and exploring broader shared services—all while thoughtfully navigating political and community concerns. Addressing these growth areas would help ensure equitable access to programs, maximize the impact of resources, and support a more efficient and coordinated educational system across the Island.

Focus Area 5: *What are the advantages of a centralized curriculum? (Island-wide versus by individual districts)*

The district is making meaningful strides toward more equitable and aligned teaching and learning through recent curriculum adoptions and evidence-based instructional practices. Centralized curriculum initiatives have the potential to enhance consistency, collaboration, and support for SPED and ELL students, while clearly articulated lesson objectives and systematic assessment could further improve student outcomes. However, historical fragmentation, decentralized practices, and variability in teacher buy-in pose challenges to full implementation and fidelity. Balancing consistency with school-specific flexibility, enhancing professional development, and standardizing assessment practices are key opportunities for growth to ensure that all students receive high-quality, equitable instruction across the Island.

Focus Area 6: *How could one district make special educational and ELL programs better for students and less expensive?*

Special Education and English Language Learning across the Island are characterized by strong dedication, inclusive intent, and meaningful supports for many students, particularly in early grades and in schools with well-established programs. However, the current structure is highly variable and resource-intensive, with inconsistent practices, uneven staffing patterns, and limited systemwide data to evaluate effectiveness and equity.

A unified district model presents a clear opportunity to improve both quality and cost-effectiveness by aligning identification practices, standardizing MTSS and referral processes, centralizing oversight of staffing and caseloads, and strengthening shared data systems. By balancing local strengths with regional coordination, the district can better ensure equitable services, improve outcomes for students with disabilities and ELs, and deploy resources more strategically and sustainably across all schools.

Focus Area 7: *What other advantages does a one-region structure bring to the educational program/students?*

Overall, a one-region structure is seen as a promising mechanism for expanding academic opportunities, strengthening equity, improving professional collaboration, and

creating a more coherent educational experience for students. At the same time, realizing these benefits will require deliberate planning, strong leadership, sustained community engagement, and careful balancing of regional consistency with local identity. Without intentional alignment and clear structures, existing disparities and inconsistencies are likely to persist.

Focus Area 8: *Perspectives*

Overall, Focus Area 8 highlights both a readiness for greater alignment and a caution about the complexity of change. There is strong agreement that improved consistency in grading, data systems, staffing, and administrative processes would benefit students and educators alike. However, addressing inequities, managing cultural resistance, ensuring transparent communication, and thoughtfully balancing innovation with core educational values will be essential for any future restructuring to be successful.

INTRODUCTION

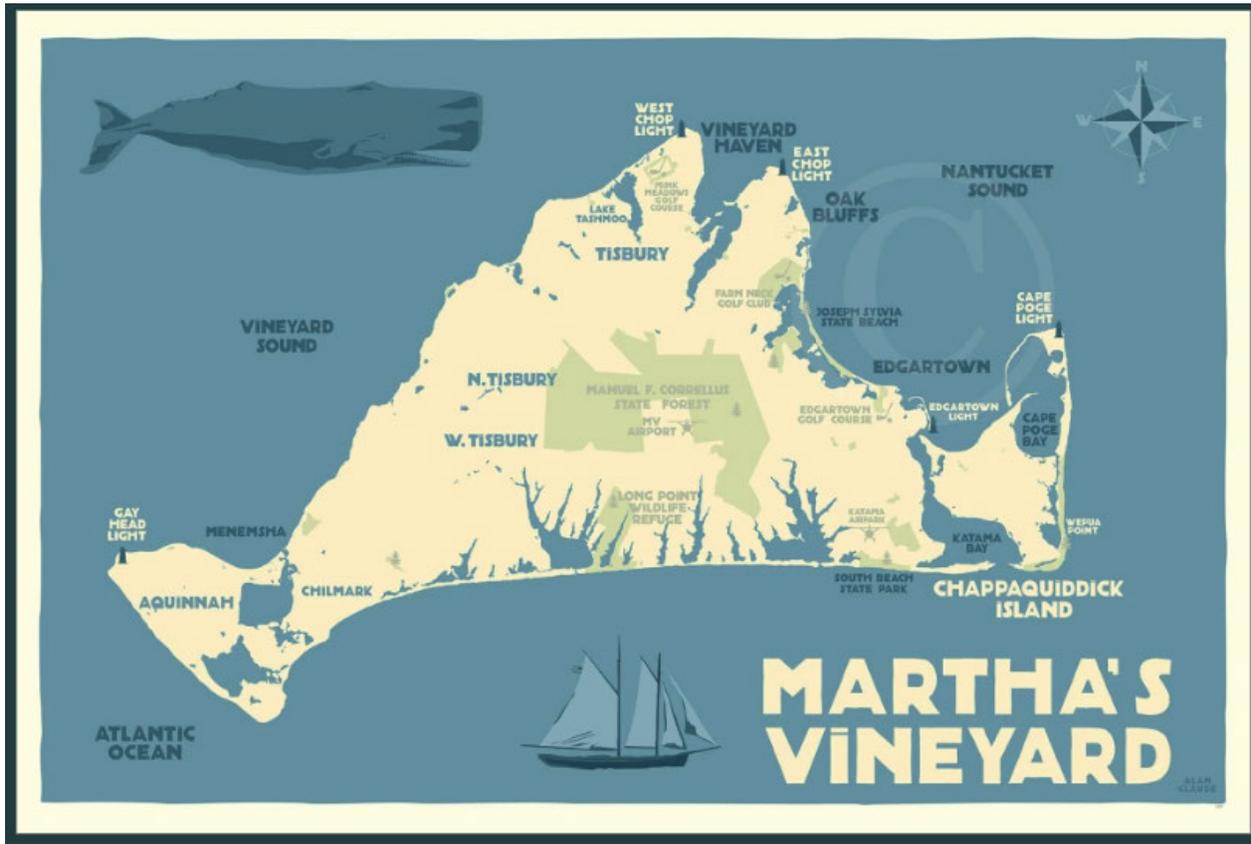
A sub-committee of the All-Island School Committee hired the Massachusetts Association of Regional Schools (MARS) Consulting Group to study the five independent school districts. The goal was to provide information that could help improve student achievement while also strengthening its financial structure (i.e., increasing revenues and/or decreasing expenses) and enhancing the effectiveness of its operations through expanded regionalization of the Island's schools. The MARS Consulting Group subcontracted with Academic Discoveries to provide additional input related to the educational program.

The MARS and Academic Discoveries consultants:

- Visited all six schools and observed in approximately thirty (30) classrooms
- Interviewed (virtually) the Superintendent and all Central Office Staff (12)
- Interviewed (virtually) an average of four teachers in all six schools in Focus Group sessions (~24)
- Reviewed over twenty-five (25) documents (many with multiple pieces) requested and submitted by Central Office staff
- Discussed the regionalization study with the All-Island School Committee Chair and Central Office staff on multiple occasions
- Facilitated four (4) PowerPoint presentations to the sub-committee of the All-Island School Committee

As a result of this study, the report:

- Documents information gathered and studied
- Offers suggestions on ways to address educational issues positively
- Compares Martha's Vineyard schools and town financial information to other school supervisory unions and regional school districts
- Provides information on the pros and cons of expanded regionalization
- Provides six options from maintaining the status quo to full PK - 12 regionalization
- Provides specific steps to follow if there is interest in pursuing expanded regionalization
- Includes multiple documents in an appendix describing the processes necessary to achieve expanded regionalization



Financial and Organizational Issues
That Relate to Additional School Regionalization

Completed by:
Dr. Stephen Hemman
Mr. Malcolm Reid
MARS Consulting Group

FINANCE - AREAS OF FOCUS

For the Martha's Vineyard Study, the first focus area was to calculate the amount of money the towns appropriate to educate their students. The amount is \$84,908,648 for the 2025 fiscal year.

The next focus area was to calculate the cost per pupil in the five districts: Martha's Vineyard Regional High School, Up-Island Regional School District, and the towns of Edgartown, Tisbury, and Oak Bluffs. Also, we researched the average teacher salaries. The next focus area was to compare costs per pupil and average teacher salaries to selected Supervisory Unions, selected regions and Nantucket. This focus compared the relative wealth of each educational entity.

The fourth focus area was to utilize information from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to compare similar districts by demographics and by wealth. Using the RADAR program, each of Martha's Vineyard school districts were compared both ways using an algorithm by DESE to find similar districts.

A fifth focus area was to utilize information from the Massachusetts Department of Revenue to find the; average income of the residents and EQV (Equalized Evaluation) for property in the towns on the Vineyard.

How do Martha's Vineyard Public Schools

Compare to Other Supervisory Unions and Regions Related to Financial Issues?

A "Supervisory Union" is made up of two or more independent school districts all under the supervision of one Superintendent and Central Office staff. Martha's Vineyard is a supervisory union as it is comprised of three independent elementary school districts, one three-town elementary regional school district and one 9 - 12 high school regional school district. These five independent school districts are supervised by one superintendent and the staff in that superintendent's central office.

Comparing the MVPS Districts to other supervisory unions involved looking at regions and town school departments. The following comparative schools were chosen based on their similar student enrollments to the total of the Vineyard's schools. There is information comparing:

- Expenditures per pupil
- Enrollment numbers
- Average teacher salaries

This information comes from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's Resource Allocation and District Action Report (RADAR) and the Department of Revenue.

What is the Cost Per Pupil for Each of the Six Districts and the Average Teacher Salary for the Island Schools?

Following is a chart comparing cost per pupil and average teacher salary information for the five MVPS districts:

Districts	Grades FY24	Foundation Enrollment	Expenditure Per Pupil	Average of Ave. Salaries
High School	9 – 12	808	\$41,143	
Up-Island	K - 8	412	\$34,727	
Edgartown	K - 8	438	\$32,315	
Oak Bluffs	K - 8	435	\$30,770	
Tisbury	K - 8	360	\$32,984	
		T=2,453	\$171,931/5 = \$34,388	\$110,041

How Does the Martha's Vineyard Supervisory Union Compare to Other Supervisory Unions and Regions Based on Student Enrollment?

The next step was to compare the Martha's Vineyard Supervisory Union to other comparable supervisory unions based on student enrollment. The following chart shows that MVPS had an average Pupil Expenditure in FY24 of \$34,688 which is higher than the compared supervisory unions. The cost per pupil ranges from \$34,388 to \$23,408 for a difference of \$10,980 per pupil.

Supervisory Union	FY24 Foundation Enrollment	FY24 Expenditure Per Pupil	Average Teacher Salaries
MVPS	2,453	\$34,388	\$110,041
Nauset	2,072	\$32,350	\$98,277
Amherst-Pelham	2,604	\$25,367	\$72,641
Old Rochester	2,287	\$23,513	\$97,883
No.boro-So.boro	4,063	\$23,408	\$101,989

This MVPS' average teacher salary is the highest of this grouping by enrollment. The following chart compares MVPS average teacher salaries to other regional school districts with similar enrollments.

Regional District	FY24 Foundation Enrollment	FY24 Expenditure per Pupil	FY24 Average Teacher Salaries
MVPS	2,453	\$34,388	\$110,041
Manchester-Essex	1,174	\$27,395	\$94,779
Monomoy	1,654	\$25,510	\$87,618
Pentucket	2,788	\$20,724	\$77,289
North Middlesex	3,096	\$20,548	\$72,714
Quabbin	1,951	\$20,251	\$74,802

Summary

- Compared to other Supervisory Unions:
 - MVPS - generally higher Expenditure per Pupil
 - MVPS - generally higher Average Teacher Salary
- Compared to other Regional School Districts:
 - MVPS - generally higher Expenditure per Pupil
 - MVPS - generally higher Average Teacher Salary

[How Does Martha’s Vineyard Compare to Nantucket Schools?](#)

A request was made for comparisons between MVPS and the Nantucket Public Schools. Both are islands; however, Nantucket is one educational district as compared to MVPS which has five separate school districts. There are two comparisons:

- Based on the End-of-Year State Report for Schedule 3 which includes only the DESE 2000 account which involves only those expenses directly for students. It includes school-based administration, teachers, paraprofessionals, textbooks, and supplies.
- Comparing Total Expenditure by School Committee from the FY24 End-of-Year Report

Comparing MVPS to Nantucket PS - Total Expenditure by School Committee from their FY24 End-of-Year Reports

Nantucket		\$37,326,987	Cost per Pupil	Ave Teacher Salaries
	Students	1,713	\$21,790	\$100,604
MVPS				
Reg'l HS	\$25,088,684			
Up-Island	\$15,187,498			
Edgartown	\$10,504,847			
Oak Bluffs	\$9,861,227			
Tisbury	\$8,304,769			
	Total	\$66,917,025		\$110,041
	Students	2,453	\$28,095	
		Difference	+\$6,305	+\$9,437

This chart shows that MVPS have “total expenditures” of \$6,305 and average teacher salaries of \$9,437 higher than Nantucket. It must be noted that Nantucket’s schools are organized more efficiently than those in Martha’s Vineyard. Most notably, they have all the students in each grade all in the same school. This allows them to control their average class sizes in a much more efficient way than having students in each grade all in different schools.

What is DESE’s Definition of Relative District Wealth?

In Massachusetts, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) uses **relative district wealth** to determine a municipality's required financial contribution to its schools under the Chapter 70 education funding program. The calculation is part of an aggregate wealth model designed to ensure equitable funding across districts.

Relative district wealth is calculated using a combination of two primary factors:

- **Property values:** Specifically, the equalized property valuation of the municipality.
- **Residents' incomes:** The aggregate income of the residents within the municipality.

These two factors are applied to the formula to determine how much of the district's "foundation budget" (the estimated cost of an adequate education) should be funded by local property taxes. The state then covers the remaining amount through Chapter 70 state aid, with the goal of providing more state aid to less affluent districts to equalize funding.

How Does Income per Capita and EQV (property wealth) on Martha's Vineyard Compared to Other Supervisory Unions?

When comparing MVPS to other supervisory unions, the Department of Revenue provides data on Income per Capita and EQV (property wealth) per capita. Income is the total income of the community divided by the number of residents. The total value of the property in a community is divided by the number of residents. These calculations result in the average income of the residents in the community and the average value of the property of the residents in the community.

Income per Capita (FY22) & EQV (kFY24) per Capita

		DOR Income per Capita	FY24 EQV per Capita
Amherst-Pelham	Amherst	\$21,921	\$91,085
	Leverett	\$46,496	\$226,291
	Pelham	\$45,933	\$209,370
	Shutesbury	\$33,308	\$189,098
		T - \$147,658/4 = \$36,915	T - \$715,844/4 = \$178,961
Northboro - Southboro	Northboro	\$78,318	\$289,444
	Southboro	\$159,609	\$364,670
		T - \$235,927/2 = \$117,964	T - \$654,114/2 = \$327,057
Old Rochester	Marion	\$79,125	\$501,379
	Mattapoisett	\$72,192	\$426,015
	Rochester	\$54,998	\$270,829
		T - \$206,316/3 = \$68,772	T = \$1,198,223/3 = \$399,408
Nauset	Brewster	\$50,531	\$689,214
	Eastham	\$52,082	\$904,336
	Orleans	\$78,144	\$1,052,573
	Wellfleet	\$54,999	\$1,176,938
		T - \$236,756/ 4 = \$59,189	T - \$3,823,061/4 = \$955,765
Martha's Vineyard	Aquinnah	\$60,960	\$2,211,660
	Chilmark	\$96,470	\$4,777,035
	Edgartown	\$74,152	\$2,837,676
	Oak Bluffs	\$33,186	\$1,201,689
	Tisbury	\$30,707	\$1,099,786
	West Tisbury	\$37,399	\$1,380,377
		T - \$331,874/6 = \$56,312	T - \$13,508,223/6 = \$2,251,371

Summary: Martha's Vineyard has relatively high property values and relatively low income per capita. Many of these expensive properties are owned by individuals who are not year-round residents. They have income to maintain these properties but are officially residents in mainland cities and towns.

What Are Comparisons to MVPS Using DESE and DOR?

DESE provides district comparisons based on demographics and wealth. It creates a list of comparable districts using an algorithm that weighs the total enrollment and subgroup percentages and finds the most numerically similar. This analysis includes:

- Enrollment numbers
- Percentages of English Language Learners
- Low-income students
- Students with disabilities

DESE uses "relative district wealth" to determine a municipality's required financial contribution to its schools under the Chapter 70 education funding program. The calculation is part of an aggregate wealth model designed to ensure equitable funding across districts.

Relative District Wealth is calculated using a combination of two primary factors:

- Property values: specifically, the equalized property valuation of the municipality
- Residents' incomes; The aggregate income of the residents within the municipality

These two factors are applied to the formula to determine how much of the district's "foundation budget" (the estimated costs of an adequate education) should be funded by local property taxes. The state then covers the remaining amount through Chapter 70 state aid, with the goal of providing more state aide to less affluent districts to equalize funding for education.

What Are Comparison Districts Based on Per Pupil Costs, District Wealth, and Total Enrollment?

The following information is from DESE, produced by RADAR. An important data point is the \$/in-district per pupil. Information compares the pupil costs to other comparable districts. The second important data point is the "relative district wealth." The higher the percentage indicates that a district has greater wealth than those comparable districts. When a district has high wealth, the result is that the district town will pay more of the foundation budget and receive less Chapter 70 Aid.

Town	Region	\$/In-District/ Pupil	Relative District Wealth	Total Enrollm't 2023-4	Eng Lang Learners %	Low Income %	SWD %
MVRHS	So.East	33,658	300.8%	681	15.3	36.6	21.2
Up-Island	So.East	31,146	397.7%	398	2.8	26.9	22.6
Edgartown	So.East	27,389	457.1%	386	19.4	43.5	21.2
Oak Bluffs	So.East	26,760	166.0%	419	23.4	37.0	23.0
Tisbury	So.East	33,639	171.7%	271	28.8	51.7	21.8
No/Soboro	Central	20,836	113.8%	1,194	2.2	13.0	17.5
Som-Berkly	So.East	16,557	54.1%	960	0.8	27.8	15.1
Con-Carl	Gr Bos	23,059	186.8%	1,230	0.7	8.5	20.1
Linc-Sud	Gr Bos	21,167	139.8%	1,462	0.3	9.2	23.9
No-Soboro	Central	20,836	113.8%	1,194	2.2	13.0	17.5
Som-Berkly	So.East	16,557	54.1%	960	0.8	27.8	15.1
Acushnet	So.East	15,218	58.4%	937	0.1	30.9	16.4
Amherst	PionrV	27,911	77.5%	983	13.6	34.4	21.7
Berkley	So.East	14,273	53.5%	836	1.96	25.5	18.5
Brewster	So.East	24,890	159.4%	434	4.8	39.2	21.4
Kingston	So.East		66.9%	1,261	5.4	23.9	22.4
Lincoln	Gr Bos	29,477	266.9%	1,033	3.4	12.9	23.8
Mattapoiset	So.East	22,282	126.7%	400	0.5	21.5	17.8
Middleton	No.East	19,551	106.5%	722	4.3	11.1	21.4
Plainville	So.East	17,065	76.3%	635	8.2	28.2	25.5
Somerset	So.East	16,647	54.3%	1,597	2.6	31.4	20.8
Provincetown	So.East	46,471	934.2%	137	12.4	48.9	23.4
Carlisle	Gr Bos	21,955	179.2%	608	1.2	4.3	14.7
Dover	Gr Bos	21,097	238.3%	497	1.6	3.2	17.0
Orleans	So.East	34,861	387.6%	142	5.6	40.1	18.3
Truro	So.East	44,753%	393.5%	91	3.3	39.6	20.4
Wellfleet	So.East	32,448	317.5%	91	3.3	35.2	12.1

Summary: The Martha's Vineyard districts are among the highest in cost per pupil and wealth factors. They also have among the highest percentage of English Language Learners and low-income families. They are about mid-range with percentage of students receiving special education services.

What is the Total Appropriated Amount by the Six Towns for Education?

The following chart shows the amount appropriated by the individual towns for education in the Martha’s Vineyard school districts. From these appropriations, the regions and towns subtract Chapter 70 Aid to Cities and Towns, grants, and other income which is then the amount that taxpayers pay.

Amount Appropriated by the Six Towns for Education FY25 Budget

	Aquinnah	Chilmark	West Tisbury	Edgartown	Oak Bluffs	Tisbury	Totals
Up-Island	\$1,813,454	\$2,942,125	\$9,292,481				
Comments: Assessment/Budget less Shared Services							
School Dept				\$9,045,974	\$8,236,571	\$7,338,540	
Comments: Budget less Shared Services							
School By Town				\$3,478,534	\$3,956,653	\$8,536,140	
Comments: FY24 End-of-Year Report							
MVRHS Assess- ment	\$429,332	\$901,716	\$3,200,651	\$5,846,194	\$6,056,899	\$5,242,435	\$21,677,227
Comments: Less Shared Services							
Shared Service Budget	\$265,782	\$392,345	\$1,392,191	\$2,290,120	\$2,380,047	\$1,870,465	\$8,590,949
Comments:							
Totals	\$2,508,567	\$4,236,186	\$13,885,323	\$20,660,823	\$20,630,170	\$22,987,580	
Comments: \$84,908,648 Total Appropriated for Education							

What are the Budget, Cost, and Organizational Issues that Affect MVPS Expenditures?

- Complexity of Supervisory Union Structure
 - Streamline administration: consolidate duplicative services across multiple towns
 - Staffing optimization: align positions to actual needs, potentially reducing redundance

- Shared Services expansion: could apply district-wide rather than town-by-town
- Procurement efficiencies: combine purchasing, reduce duplication
- Organizational issues affecting costs:
 - No bulk purchasing
 - Grants are secured by schools - often not shared
 - Five separate budgets - inconsistencies with student educational opportunities

Martha's Vineyard does not have a Human Resources Department. At Martha's Vineyard High School, they have a business operation with a manager, payroll, and accounts payable staff. At the Superintendent's office, the Business Administrator is in the same office with payroll and accounts payable staff. Edgartown, Oak Bluffs, and Tisbury send their payrolls and accounts payable to the respective town halls.

How Would Regional Transportation Change with PK - 12 Regionalization?

Currently, only the Martha's Vineyard Regional High School and the Up-Island Regional School District receive regional transportation reimbursement from the State. Edgartown, Oak Bluffs and Tisbury Public Schools do not receive any. If the Island were regionalized PK - 12, all schools would be included in the districts' total transportation reimbursement.

Currently, if the three non-region schools became part of a region, they would receive the following reimbursement based on their students who are transported more than 1 ½ miles from their homes to their school:

- Edgartown = \$131,244
- Oak Bluffs = \$89,291
- Tisbury = \$12,999
- Total additional transportation reimbursement = \$233,534 X 85% (current reimbursement rate) = \$198,504 (estimated)

The two current regions currently receive:

- Up-Island = \$163,279
- MVRHS = \$635,242
- Total - \$798,521

The new total would be \$997,025 (approximately) with a PK - 12 region. Other regionalization models where each grade is consolidated into one building, that transportation reimbursement could be higher.

What is a Superintendency Union?

Massachusetts General Laws allow the school committees of two or more towns to join together to form a union school committee. The organization of the union school committee is governed by statute, as are its powers, which are limited to the authority to employ a superintendent of schools, school physicians, school nurses, clerical and secretarial personnel, special teachers, and supervisors. All other powers and responsibilities are retained by the local school committees of the member towns. There are [16 superintendency unions](#) in Massachusetts. In 2025, 16 superintendents and 62 school committees serve 48 municipal school districts and 14 regional school districts, with 81 schools serving 28,583 students. Currently 46 of the municipalities participating in superintendency unions also are members of regional school districts; 42 of these are members of regional school districts that hire the same superintendent and central office staff. For information on superintendency unions, contact Michelle Griffin at 781-338-6515 or Michelle.L.Griffin@mass.gov.

What is the Budget Process for Different Kinds of School Systems?

In the Commonwealth of Massachusetts there are four types of educational entities:

1. Town School Department
2. City School Department
3. Regional School District
4. Supervisory Union

The process to have an approved budget varies depending on the organizational structure of the educational entity. The following will outline the process for each to obtain an annual budget.

Town School Departments

In a town there are many departments that serve the community. A school department is organized with a school committee which hires a superintendent who in turn hires staff to provide the education for students attending town schools. The central office develops one budget that will meet the requirements to educate the students. After the School Committee approves, the school department usually presents its budget request first to Selectboards and Finance Committees. Then funding for the schools is approved by the Town Meeting.

Besides the budget that is under control by the School Committee, towns might include in their budget costs for health insurance, liability insurance, and building insurance.

The school budget is appropriated in total by town meeting with the school committee having the authority to adjust the budget lines depending on the needs as the fiscal year moves forward. If they need additional funding, the committee will have to go back to town meeting.

City School Departments

Similar to towns, cities are organized into city departments. The school department is organized with a school committee which appoints the superintendent and in turn hires staff. The central office develops the one budget which is presented to the City Council. The budget is appropriated by the city council with the school department having control of the budget line items. If the school committee needs additional funding, they would go back to the city council to request the needed funds.

Cities, as in towns, might put the health insurance, liability insurance and building insurance in the city's budget.

Regional School Districts

A regional School District consists of two or more towns that join together in order to provide the education for the students in their towns. A regional agreement is written that outlines how the district will operate. The proposed regional agreement has to be approved by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education which then would go to the towns to be approved at a town meeting. The regional agreement can be amended according to requirements in the regional agreement.

The regional school committee hires a superintendent who in turn hires staff. The central office develops one budget. This budget includes all the costs to operate the district which includes health insurance, liability insurance, and building insurance. Districts vary in the process when seeking budget approval. The district might do presentations to selectboards in each town, finance committees in each town, and public presentations in each town. The school committee is required to certify the budget. For funding the budget, the school committee establishes an assessment for each member town.

Once 2/3 of the regional school district member towns appropriate their assessment, the district then has a budget for the next fiscal year. The school committee can make internal adjustments in the budget to address changes that take place that were unknown during the budget process. There are additional laws and regulations concerning fiscal matters that a regional district must follow during the fiscal year.

Supervisory Unions

Massachusetts General Laws allow the school committees of two or more towns to join together to form a union school committee. The organization of the union school committee is governed by statute, as are its powers, which are limited to the authority to employ a superintendent of schools, school physicians, school nurses, clerical and secretarial personnel, special teachers, and supervisors. All other powers and responsibilities are retained by the local school committees of the member towns. (DESE Website)

Martha's Vineyard public schools consist of a secondary region, a K-8 three-town region, and three K-8 town school districts. A Superintendent's Shared Services Budget is established. There is not one budget but rather 5 budgets. The process to fund (and then allocate into five separate budgets - one for each school district) the Martha's Vineyard schools requires many steps which are outlined below.

What is Martha's Vineyard Budget Process?

1. Superintendent's Shared Line-item Budget

This budget consists of 200-line items that consist of shared services to the two regions and 3 towns. Each line is assessed based on the established assessment process.

2. Central Office at the Regional High School estimates the amounts of income for the following:

- a. Chapter 70
- b. Grants
- c. Regional transportation reimbursement
- d. Other income

The estimates are then used to calculate assessments.

3. Martha's Vineyard High School Line-item Budget

The Martha's Vineyard 9-12 Regional School District votes a budget, income to support the budget, chooses between the Statutory and the Alternative Assessment methodology, and then assesses each town according to the regional agreement.

4. Transportation Budget for all schools

The Martha's Vineyard 9-12 Regional School District operates the student transportation system for the regions and town schools. Each entity is assessed transportation costs which becomes part of their budget.

5. Up-Island Regional Line-item Budget

The three-town K-8 Regional School District votes a budget and the income to support the school district. It receives assessments from Shared Services and Martha's Vineyard Regional High School transportation.

6. Edgartown Line-item Budget - School and Town for Schools

The Edgartown School Committee votes a budget for the K-8 students. It receives assessments from the Shared Services Budget and Martha's Vineyard Regional High School transportation. Also, in the town budget there are costs for insurances.

7. Oak Bluffs Line-item Budget - School and Town for Schools

The Oak Bluffs Town School Committee votes a budget for the K-8 students. It receives assessments from the Shared Services Budget and Martha Vineyard Regional High School transportation. Also, in the town budget there are costs for insurance.

8. Tisbury Line-item Budget School and Town for Schools

The Tisbury Town School Committee votes a budget for the K-8 students. It receives assessments from the Shared Services Budget and Marth's Vineyard Regional High School transportation. Also, in the town budget there are costs for insurance.

9. Calculate Assessments

- a. MVRHS
- b. Up-Island
- c. Shared Services Budget

10. Each budget is separate from one another.

How Are Martha's Vineyard Budgets Organized?

Superintendent's Shared Line-item Budget

1. Central Office at the Regional High School estimates the amounts of income for the following:
 - a. Chapter 70
 - b. Grants
 - c. Regional transportation reimbursement
 - d. Other income
2. Martha's Vineyard High School Line-item Budget
3. Transportation Budget for all schools
4. Up-Island Regional Line-item Budget
5. Edgartown Line-item Budget----School and Town for Schools
6. Oak Bluffs Line-item Budget----School and Town for Schools
7. Tisbury Line-item Budget---- School and Town for schools
8. Calculate Assessments
 - a. MVRHS
 - b. Up-Island
 - c. Shared Budget
9. Each budget is separate from one another

Financial Conclusions

- There is a significant need for collaboration among the schools to enhance the educational experience for students.
- District comparisons show that Martha's Vineyard Public Schools:
 - Cost per pupil is generally higher than comparison districts
 - Average teacher salaries are higher than comparison districts
 - Budgets should be reviewed to determine where reductions can be accomplished which would then reduce assessments
 - A reorganized structure of the schools could provide significant savings
- Making changes to the organizational structure of the five separate districts could make a difference in total costs and assessments to the towns.
- Share non-entitlement grants system-wide
- Cost-saving opportunities:
 - Consolidate duplicative services across multiple budgets/districts
 - Reduce staffing redundancies by aligning staff to actual needs

- Increase concept of Shared Services in areas other than special education and English Language Learning
- Combine purchasing for all districts - bulk purchases
- Five separate budgets create inconsistencies with student educational opportunities

Financial Inefficiencies

- Multiple layers of five separate budgets create redundancies
- Budgets are not always tied to best practices
- Payroll duplication in six towns is inefficient
- Because of the Supervisory Union school arrangement, there is some misalignment in connecting resources to student outcomes
- The five separate budgets complicate equitable resource allocation

Financial Recommendations

We recommend that the districts look carefully at their budgets to see where staffing could be lowered, share staff, and consolidate duplicative services. By making budget reductions in the amount of funds appropriated by the towns, there would/could be reduced assessments.

The multiple districts have a complex Supervisory Union Structure - we recommend:

- Streamline administration: consolidate duplicative services across multiple towns
- Optimize staffing by aligning positions to actual needs, potentially reducing redundance
- Expand Shared Services by applying services district-wide rather than town-by-town
- Increase procurement efficiencies by combining purchasing to reduce duplication

Organize these issues to lower costs:

- Add bulk purchasing
- Allow grants to be shared by all appropriate schools
- Change from five separate budgets to one to remove inconsistencies with student educational opportunities

ORGANIZATION FOCUS AREAS

- What is the organizational structure of the five Martha's Vineyard independent school districts?
- What roles do the Central Office administrators play in the Supervisory Union structure?
- Are there any region-like structures among the school districts?
- What is the organizational structure of the five Martha's Vineyard independent school districts?
- What roles do the Central Office administrators play in the Supervisory Union structure?
- Are there any region-like structures among the school districts?
- Is staffing creating a high per student cost?
- Are there administrative functions missing?
- What options do the Island schools have for additional regionalization?
- What are the potential benefits and potential challenges to increased regionalization?
- Are there administrative functions missing?
- What options do the Island schools have for additional regionalization?
- What are the potential benefits and potential challenges to increased regionalization?

How Are the Martha's Vineyard Schools Organized?

There are five independent school districts serving the six towns on Martha's Vineyard. Each district operates autonomously, focusing on the distinct communities found on the island. These five school districts are overseen by a single Central Office with one Superintendent and administrative staff overseeing Special Education, English Learner staff and support, curriculum, financial services, and Shared Services staff. This configuration of independent school districts overseen by a single administration is known as a "supervisory school union."

The five independent districts are:

1. Edgartown School District

The Edgartown School District serves the town of Edgartown and is centered around the Edgartown School, a K-8 school. This district is overseen by a school committee elected by local residents. Part of its unique characteristics are its emphasis on

community involvement and a curriculum that integrates local history and environmental education, reflecting Edgartown's maritime heritage.

2. Oak Bluffs School District

The Oak Bluffs School District covers the town of Oak Bluffs, with the Oak Bluffs School providing education from kindergarten through eighth grade. The district is managed by its own elected school committee. Oak Bluffs is notable for its diverse student body and strong arts programming, often collaborating with local artists and organizations to enrich student experiences.

3. Tisbury School District

The Tisbury School District serves the town of Tisbury (Vineyard Haven), with the Tisbury School offering PK-8 education. The district is managed by its own elected school committee. Among Tisbury's unique characteristics is its focus on STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics) initiatives, preparing students for technological literacy and creative problem-solving.

4. Up-Island Regional School District

The Up-Island Regional School District is a regional school district serving the towns of West Tisbury, Chilmark, and Aquinnah. It includes the West Tisbury School (K-8) and the Chilmark School (K-5). A regional school committee, composed of representatives from each town, governs the district. Among its unique characteristics are its regional approach, fostering significant involvement by families and offering multi-age classrooms, particularly in Chilmark.

5. Martha's Vineyard Regional High School District

The Martha's Vineyard Regional High School is responsible for all grade 9 - 12 students on Martha's Vineyard. It is governed by a regional school committee with representatives from all Island towns. The high school is distinguished by its comprehensive academic offerings, vocational programs, and strong athletic tradition.

These districts are managed by a school committee, elected by residents of the respective towns. These committees oversee budgets, policy, curriculum, and hiring of the single Superintendent. The districts collaborate on Shared Services (Special Education and English Learner services), including transportation, but maintain autonomy in day-to-day operations and educational philosophy.

What Are the Roles of Island-Wide Administrators?

A "supervisory school union" organization is quite unique. The Superintendent and Central Office staff have a somewhat "dotted line" responsibility for the five independent districts. Because each of the districts has its own School Committee, these districts

prepare their own budgets and are responsible to get them approved by the towns they serve. This means that each of the districts has varying amounts of resources which are specifically connected to that district's mission and goals. The Superintendent and Curriculum Director, for example, can offer suggestions and support, but the curriculum is organized and implemented by each district in the supervisory union.

Central Office Administrators include:

- Superintendent
- Director of Curriculum and Instruction/Professional Development
- School Business Administrator
- Behavioral Health Coordinator
- English Language Learner Director
- Grant Coordinator
- Director of Student Support Services
 - Special Education
 - Psychologist Services
 - Speech Services
 - Physical and Occupation Therapy Services

Most of these Central Office administrators have a dual responsibility to the staff in the schools. They offer support in their areas of expertise but do not have “direct line” authority over the staff in the schools. That is up to the administrators in the individual schools and their respective School Committees.

The Shared Services Coordinator, however, has a more direct line responsibility for the Project Headway and Bridge/Compass staff and programs. These are programs for students whose needs require more specialized services. These programs are situated in specific schools with staff employed specifically to meet their individual needs. We will discuss later how these Central Office positions would/could be different in a more regionalized school district.

How Are Regular Classrooms Staffed by Teachers?

Staffing classrooms with more typical average class sizes is not feasible with the current Supervisory School Union model. For example, there are 26 students in West Tisbury in the first grade. Most educators would agree that 26 first graders in one class is not desirable. Therefore these 26 first graders have been split into two sections of 13. This is great for the students (and the teachers), but it is not economically desirable.

There is not a good solution at this time to the small class sizes in the four elementary districts because each district is its own school district. Students cannot be shared between elementary schools and, more significantly, staff cannot be shared between

schools. Although there is one union contract for all five districts, this only covers certain working conditions like wages and benefits.

So, for example, if a teacher in Oak Bluffs wants to transfer to the elementary school in Edgartown, that teacher would lose their seniority, and may lose some accrued benefits, and most importantly, their professional status. Interestingly, however, according to the Agreement (i.e., Contract) between the five district school committees and the Martha's Vineyard Educators Association, in the case that a teacher in a "Shared Services" position is Reduced in Force, "...that teacher may request a transfer (i.e., BUMPING) to a position IN ANY DISTRICT for which they are certified that is held by the least senior teacher with professional teacher status." This option does not appear to be available to any other teaching staff.

The Association contract does speak to average class size. ARTICLE XVII, Class Size says, "The Committee and the Association recognize the desirability of achieving optimum teacher/learning conditions by assuring workable class size, with the maximum of twenty-five (25) students. In the event that class size in K-3 exceeds twenty (20) and in Grades 4-12 exceeds twenty two (22) whether it be before the school year begins or during the year, the building principal, school committee, the staff affected, and union representation of the individual school shall meet to address the needs of those students affected and discuss possible options within budgetary and space restraints." Currently, average class sizes in the elementary grades do not come close to reaching these maximums. In addition to the relatively small average class sizes in the elementary grades, there is a full-time paraprofessional (ESP) in most classrooms. Again, a great advantage for the students and staff.

What Are Some General Staffing Issues?

- Districts can't share teachers and don't share substitutes
- If teachers change schools, they may lose benefits and professional status.
- Different districts have different teacher schedules making shared professional development opportunities difficult.
- Different schools have different duties.
- Reduction in Force in each district is inefficient
- There is a large percentage of staff retiring in the next few years. It is difficult to attract staff to the Island.
- Some teachers, especially at the high school, are teaching out of their certification areas.
- Individual schools have not shared teacher expertise
- Student information does not travel between districts as easily as students.

- Each district has its own Professional Development interests and needs.
- Teacher, “Schools battle other schools for equal resources.”
- Students in different districts do not have the same opportunities.
- Teacher, “How can we regionalize our district if we cannot regionalize our practices.”
- Elementary teachers want more similar colleagues but are concerned about a regional curriculum.
- Teacher, “Schools have a self-protective mentality.”
- Different districts provide different readiness, background, experiences for high school entry.

How Do Grants Function in the Separate Districts?

There is a Grant Coordinator position in the Central Office. Each individual district also applies for competitive grants that often are only for that school. Teachers in different schools wish that they had access to special professional development that they know has happened only in the school that applied for that specific grant.

In fact, the grant supporting this regionalization project is focused on PK - 8, but the grant for this project was available at the high school level, so this technically high school grant is supporting the project focused on the elementary level. More on how grants could/would be affected in a fully regionalized system.

What Are Shared Services?

“Shared Services” are region-like services that operate across all five school districts. They support a variety of staff and programs for students in all schools. This is one area where there are efficiencies and economies of scale. Shared Services staff and programs include:

- Behavioral Health - includes a Coordinator and Social Worker
- English Language Learner - includes a Director and Teachers
- Grants - support special education and professional development for all schools
- Shared Services Coordinator - oversees programs
- Adult Learning Program - administration salary covered by a grant
- Speech Program - speech teacher salaries and summer speech program
- Project Headway - teacher and paraprofessional salaries and summer program
- Special Education Summer Program - staff salaries and student experiences
- Bridge/Compass Program - includes teachers and paraprofessionals
- Shared 766 Transportation - special education transportation
- Shared Programs - Physician, music, strings, accompanist, choir expenses, mileage reimbursement, Felix Neck Environmental Program and network support (all Island-wide program and expenses)

Later in the report, this will be emphasized as a model for pre-full regionalization.

Are There Shared After-School Programs?

Each elementary school has its own extra-curricular programs which depend on available resources and supervision. Each school has developed after-school programs that are somewhat unique which means that all students do not get the benefit of programs and activities that might better meet their individual interests.

Later in the report we will address how partial or full-regionalization might provide better opportunities for all students.

What is the Role of a Human Resources Department

Currently there is no formal Human Resources Department for the Island schools. Human Resources is the organizational function that ensures the effective and efficient use of human capital to accomplish organizational goals.

As effective HR Function:

- Helps the organization respond to change
- Creates an effective match between people and positions
- Fosters employee commitment and performance
- Complies with federal, state, and local laws to protect against potential litigation

Three key HR Roles:

- Strategic
 - Supporting organization's mission and goals
 - Communicating issues about organization change to employees
- Administrative = focus on compliance, record keeping
 - Maintaining employee records
 - Filing reports as required by law
 - Processing insurance invoices
- Operational - focus on daily issues
 - Recruiting
 - Employee relations
 - Answering benefit questions

What are the Benefits and Challenges of Regionalization?

Martha's Vineyard is currently divided into six towns with five separate school districts. While this structure reflects the island's unique local identities and histories, there are compelling reasons to consider expanding regionalization into potentially fewer or different regional school districts.

There are a variety of potential benefits and also potential challenges that come with partial and/or full PK - 12 regionalization. Each of the following issues may or may not be relevant to Martha's Vineyard, but they are all worth considering when making a decision to further regionalize the current five separate school districts or keep the status quo.

Potential Benefits

- There are myriad benefits to increased regionalization, chief among them are the organizational efficiencies, and potential long-term cost savings that all lead to an enhanced service delivery model. The Martha's Vineyard towns have operated in silos for a long time. That issue is facilitated by each town having its own school committee, its own budget process, and its own governance structure.
- Efficiency/Cost Savings: The development of a regional integrated pre-school program. Replaces: the school department currently manages five separate pre-school programs.
- Efficiency/Cost Savings: Regional reimbursement for transportation. Replaces: Three towns receive no reimbursement.
- Efficiency/Cost Savings: Consolidated business office operations with a single budget and centralized purchasing. Replaces: Multiple duplications of efforts with budgets and purchasing when working with different districts and individual Town Halls - Currently there are different processes for accounts payable, reimbursements and payroll.
- Efficiency/Cost Savings: Absence of human resources department. Replaces: some teachers working with individual town halls and some working with High School or Central Office staff whose jobs are not for HR.
- Efficiency/Cost Savings: Increased organizational agility for program development, budget development and policy development. Replaces: There are currently five school committees as part of the organizational governance structure.
- Efficiency/Cost Savings: Regionalizing into one, or fewer, district(s) can streamline administration, reduce overhead costs, and allow for more efficient use of funds. Savings can be redirected to classrooms, student programs, and facility improvements, directly benefiting students. Replaces: multiple school districts with multiple budgets, multiple school committees and different operations.
- Efficiency/Cost Savings: Administrative time could be dedicated to supporting teaching and learning, researching, implementing, and supporting further school improvements. Replaces: inefficient use of leadership time.

- Efficiency/Cost Savings: A more unified curriculum across all six towns would ensure that students enter the HS with the same educational foundation. Replaces: Each elementary district follows its own curriculum and procedures.
- Efficiency/Cost Savings: Having teachers on the same schedule would make sharing resources, knowledge, best practices, and professional development more possible. Replaces: Different elementary districts have their own student and staff schedules.
- Efficiency/Cost Savings: The time and resources required to implement new curriculum would be drastically reduced, greatly accelerating school improvement. Replaces: The current difficulty studying and implementing new curriculum.
- Efficiency/Cost Savings: Ensuring that all students, regardless of their town of residence, have equal access to high-quality educational programs, extracurricular activities, and specialized services. Regionalization helps balance disparities in funding, staffing, and resources that can exist between smaller, separate districts. Replaces: Elementary schools with different levels of financial support and, as a result, different programs and opportunities for students.
- Efficiency/Cost Savings: Unifying the districts allows for a common curriculum, consistent academic standards, and aligned assessment practices across the Island. This makes student transitions between schools smoother and ensures all students are held to the same high expectations, regardless of which town they live in. Replaces: Different school models and different academic programs in different elementary schools.
- Efficiency/Cost Savings: Improved staff recruitment and professional development in a more regionalized district can make it easier to attract and retain top educators and support staff. Coordinated professional development and resource sharing also foster a stronger, more collaborative teaching community Island-wide. It also allows teachers to move between elementary schools without losing seniority, benefits and professional status. Replaces: An inability for teachers to move between different districts which promotes keeping teaching positions in buildings when they could be better utilized in another school.
- Efficiency/Cost Savings: With a single district, long-term planning for enrollment trends, school facility needs, and capital improvements becomes more effective and strategic. The district can optimize building use, reduce redundancies, and ensure that investments serve the best interests of all Island students and taxpayers. Replacing: Each district has different long-term planning goals and methods.

- Efficiency/Cost Savings: There should be fewer abrupt program cuts because costs are spread across multiple towns. Replaces: Programs and staff can be cut in the individual elementary districts without regard to system-wide needs.
- Efficiency/Cost Savings: A unified district speaks with one voice, strengthening advocacy for state and federal funding and policy support. The Island's communities can collaborate to address shared challenges and opportunities, ensuring that decisions reflect the needs of all Martha's Vineyard families.

Conclusion: Regionalizing Martha's Vineyard's school districts into a single entity can lead to greater efficiency, equity, educational quality for all students, and potential cost savings. While such a change would require careful planning and community engagement, the potential benefits for the Island's future are significant.

Potential Challenges

- Martha's Vineyard, though home to six distinct towns, is currently served by five independent school districts. This organizational structure has developed over time and persists for several compelling reasons.
- Each town on Martha's Vineyard possesses its own unique history, culture, and community values. By maintaining independent school districts, local residents have a greater say in educational policies, school culture, and curriculum decisions. This autonomy helps ensure that schools reflect and reinforce the distinct character and priorities of their respective communities.
- Different towns may face varying educational challenges and priorities. Independent districts allow for customized approaches to class sizes, extracurricular offerings, and resource allocation. For example, one town might prioritize marine science due to its coastal setting, while another might emphasize arts or vocational training. Localized governance enables responsiveness to these differences.
- Aligning programs can limit innovation or reduce local autonomy.
- Unique instructional models from former districts may be discontinued.
- Smaller, town-based school districts encourage higher levels of community involvement. Parents and residents can participate more directly in school committee meetings, volunteer activities, and school events. This proximity fosters stronger relationships between educators, students, and families, and it enhances accountability for educational outcomes.
- Martha's Vineyard's educational landscape has evolved to reflect the island's settlement patterns and traditions. Many residents value the continuity of their town's school and the historical significance of their independent district. Change could be perceived as a loss of heritage or a dilution of community spirit.

- While consolidation can sometimes yield cost savings, on an island with geographically separated towns, a single district might introduce logistical complications. Existing districts are already structured to address transportation, scheduling, and staffing in ways that suit their specific locations. Consolidation could inadvertently increase bureaucracy or create inefficiencies due to the Island's unique geography and infrastructure.
- Independent districts allow towns to set budgets and pursue funding opportunities that align with their priorities. This flexibility can help address differences in enrollment, property values, and town resources, ensuring that each community's school is adequately supported according to local expectations and needs.
- There are differing municipal levels of financial capacity among the member towns.
- Some towns may feel they contribute more financially than they receive in services.
- Schools might receive uneven staffing or programming depending on space or enrollment.
- There could be debates about which buildings to upgrade, close, or repurpose.
- There could be uneven geographic distribution of programs (e.g., where SPED programs are located).
- Larger regional school committees could slow decision-making.
- Representation formulas may leave smaller towns feeling underrepresented.

Conclusion: While there may be arguments for district consolidation elsewhere, Martha's Vineyard's six towns have benefits from maintaining five independent school districts. This structure preserves local control, respects community identity, supports tailored educational approaches, and honors the Island's traditions. For these reasons, the current system continues to be one way to serve the diverse educational needs of Martha's Vineyard's students/residents.

Pathways to Decision-Making

Before a final decision is made by the All-Island School Committee to move forward, a committee composed of stakeholders from each participating community—including school committee members, parents, educators, school leaders, and local public officials—should be established. This committee would be responsible for reviewing the MARS Consulting Group/Academic Discoveries report, evaluating the six proposed options, considering factors such as educational quality, cost, community impact, and operational feasibility. This ad hoc committee (a subcommittee of the All-Island School Committee) through collaborative discussion and analysis, would develop a well-informed recommendation on the option(s) that best meet(s) the needs of the students

and communities to provide guidance to the All-Island School Committee and district leadership for the next steps.

Part of this ad hoc committee's analysis should include analyzing the six options outlined below. Each has merit but some of them are more feasible and some more controversial. The All-Island School Committee could be analyzing this information concurrently with the ad hoc committee. The ad hoc committee should, after an agreed-upon timeline, meet with the All-Island School Committee for a discussion and presentation of their recommendations. The All-Island School Committee, after due consideration, should make a decision how to proceed.

If the All-Island School Committee votes for the status quo, at least the options have been thoroughly vetted. If a decision is made to pursue some further form of regionalization, there is another task ahead. If the decision is to add all grades PK - 8 or just grades 7 and 8 to the secondary region, the task would be to amend the Regional High School Regional Agreement. That does not mean that a Regional Agreement Amendment Committee would be starting from scratch. It means that only those sections that are affected by the inclusion of more grades to this region would have to be addressed. Anything, however, could be addressed.

The same process would be used with the Up-Island Regional Agreement if a decision were to be made to add all or some of the other three towns to that Regional Agreement.

This Regional Agreement amendment process would also be spearheaded by an ad hoc committee of either the Regional High School Committee or the Up-Island Regional School Committee. Again, a group of school committee members, parents, educators, school leaders, and local public officials would fill this committee with a recommended size of approximately fifteen members who are committed to the process.

In our experience, this ad hoc group would normally meet once per month with professional support to guide the group through all the issues involved. We recommend that the Superintendent and Business Administrator participate as *ex-officio* members for their support and guidance.

What School Configurations and Staffing Options Relate to Regionalization?

Before we look at the regional agreement amendment process more closely, we should review the six options that our consulting group has outlined. Based on our study of

Martha's Vineyard's "School Supervisory Union," we believe that there are at least six possible pathways for the schools going forward:

1) Status Quo - there is no legal reason to change the structure of the five districts at this time. We believe that there are some educational and financial reasons that this may not be the best option.

2) Additional Region-Like Organization - The organization already has some region-like structure. The Superintendent and other Central Office staff provide support and oversight to all the five school districts. The Shared Services program is another good example of finding ways to serve students across the elementary districts in a thoughtful and economical manner.

More of this centralized cooperation could happen with the curriculum. The elementary schools do not have to be in the same district in order to build more common curricula. This has been recently done with the English Language Arts curriculum. The more common the curriculum is across the elementary districts; there will be a significant benefit to elementary students who change schools during the school year or even between school years. It would also give the teachers something that they have expressed to us that they would welcome; i.e., more colleagues at their grade level doing similar things. The obvious downside is that some teachers might have to give up their favorite curriculum.

3) Increased regionalization PK - 8 - The Up-Island Regional School District could expand to include one, two, or three of the independent PK - 8 districts. This would be done by amending the Up-Island regional agreement to include additional town schools.

This would enhance opportunities for staff to have more like-colleagues. It would also enhance a common educational experience for students who change schools in the middle of or between school years. Additionally for students, it would provide a more common educational experience in preparation to enter the high school. Staffing implications could include making one building into a grades 7 - 8 middle school (grades 6 - 8 later if space became available) or combining all like grades as shown in the chart below under full PK - 12 regionalization or any other combination of putting like grades in the same school. Staff reductions, in addition to normal staff attrition, would be possible in any of these combinations and still provide low average class sizes.

4) Regionalization in Grades 6 - 12 or 7 - 12 - Currently, we do not believe that any of the five elementary schools could house all grades 6 - 8 students. An option, therefore, is to regionalize grades 7 - 12. It would have most of the same benefits as for a 6 - 12

region. That could be rectified at some point in the future. For now, perhaps all grade 7 and 8 students could be housed in one building:

Grades in middle school	Current # Classrooms	Total Number Students	Average Class Size	-5 Classrooms
7-8	20	310	15.5	15 - 20.7

Putting all 7th and 8th graders into one middle school would create a school with three teams of 103-4. There would be 5 teachers on each team, i.e., math, science, English, social studies and a world language. 3 teams X 5 teachers = 15 total academic teachers which is a savings of 5 teachers and 5 teaching assistants.

If as average teacher salary is \$110,000 and average ESP salary is \$40,000, then $\$110,000 \times 5 = \$550,000 + \$40,000 \times 5 = \$200,000$ □ Grand total salary savings = \$750,000. When including staff benefits, these savings would increase.

5) Regionalizing PK - 12 With Fewer Than All Six Towns - Although we believe if a full PK - 12 region is seriously considered, the greatest benefits would be accrued by including all six towns. The issues for any one or two towns who did not join the full region would be significant, e.g., purchasing central office-type services, having tuition agreements with the secondary school, etc.

6) Full PK - 12 Regionalization - We believe that this would achieve the greatest educational and financial benefits, but it brings a number of significant negative issues with the changes in culture which would result, at least in the near-term.

Following is a chart which shows the savings that could accrue in a PK - 12 region if each individual grade were to be housed in the same building. There are certainly many different configurations of this that could save different amounts of resources.

Staffing Implications - Regrouping Students by Grade Levels in the Five Elementary Schools - This would happen to a partial degree if less than all three independent elementary districts joined the Up-Island Regional School District

Grades Grouped: Pre-School / K-1 / 2-3 / 4-5 / 6-8

Grade in Sch	Current Clrm	# Students	Ave Cl Size	-1 Clm	-2 Clm	-3 Clm	-4 Clm	-4 to -5 Clm	-4 to -6 Clm	-4 to -7 Clm	-4 to -9 Clm
K - 1	21	282	13.4	20 - 14.1	19 - 17.0	18 - 15.7	17 - 16.6	16 - 17.6	15 - 18.8	14 - 20.1	14 - 20.1
2 - 3	20	323	16.2	19 - 17.0	18 - 17.9	17 - 19.0	16 - 20.2	16 - 20.2	16 - 20.2	16 - 20.2	16 - 20.2
4 - 5	21	338	16.1	20 - 16.9	19 - 17.8	18 - 18.8	17 - 19.9	17 - 19.9	17 - 19.9	17 - 19.9	17 - 19.9
6-8	32	465	14.5	31 15.0	30 - 15.5	29 - 16.0	28 - 16.6	27 - 17.2	26 - 17.9	25 - 18.6	23 - 20.2
Totals	94	1,408	15.0	90 - 15.6	86 - 16.4	82 - 17.2	78 - 18.1	76 - 18.5	74 - 19.0	72 - 19.6	70 - 20.1
				-4 Clm	-8 Clm	-12 Clm	-16 Clm	-18 Clm	-20 Clm	-22 Clm	-24 Clm

Clm = Classroom

Example - assume keeping average class sizes < ~18

K-1: reduce 5 teachers & 5 ESPs - grades 2-3: reduce 2 teachers & 2 ESPs - grades 4 - 5: reduce 2 teachers & 2 ESPs - grades 6 - 8: reduce 6 teachers & 6 ESPs = total reduction of 15 teachers & 15 ESPs. If average teacher salary is \$110,000 and average ESP salary is \$40,000, then $\$110,000 \times 15 = \$1,650,000 + \$40,000 \times 16 = \$600,000$ □ Grand total salary savings = \$2,250,000 [Benefits add up to an additional 35%.]

If PK - 12 full regionalization:

* Classroom, special education, English Learner, and other specialist teachers could be shared or moved to a school with teacher needs vs. currently they are held in a school where the position may not be needed in a given year in order not to lose the teacher for possible future needs.

- * Class sizes could be better managed & more equal among all elementary schools for all students - not possible now.
- * All like-classroom teachers (i.e., each grade) are brought together in the same building to offer collegial support.
- * There would be greater same-age social contacts for students - especially for middle school students.
- * Extracurricular activities could be enhanced for all students.
- * Students who move between towns, even during the school year, would stay in the same school and have the same curriculum & peers.

There are several significant issues with this potential regrouping of the grades:

- * It does not appear that any one of the current elementary schools is large enough to house all middle school (grades 6 - 8) students. An option might be to make the middle school for only grades 7 & 8.
- * Each current elementary school has a definite character with special programs and activities unique to that school. That would be difficult for students, staff, and parents to give up. Based on our experience, however, we believe that these same unique characteristics would soon develop in the differently graded schools.
- * This configuration would require Island-wide elementary bus transportation like for the high school. The additional cost would be offset by additional transportation reimbursement from the State and, of course, the significant savings with staff reductions.

What are some Advantages of Partial or Full Regionalization?

- * There would probably be a reduced need for English Learner, special education teacher and paraprofessional support as well because the students with these needs would be consolidated in one building.
- * Class sizes would be more equal among all middle school students which is not possible now.

* We heard from staff that they would prefer having more same grade colleagues to support more professional development, collegiality, relationships and work with students.

* Students who move between towns, even during the school year, would stay in the same school and have the same curriculum & peers.

* We heard from high school staff that students come into the ninth grade with different educational backgrounds and skills. A common middle school experience would address this issue.

* There would be a social advantage for middle school-aged students to have a greater social pool of students creating more possible connections of similar personalities and friendships.

There would be a greater possibility/probability of appropriate-aged extra-curricular activities because of the bigger pool of students.

Intramural and interscholastic team sports would be enhanced with similar-aged students in the building.

There are several significant issues with this potential regrouping of the grades:

* Each current elementary school has a definite character with special programs and activities unique to that school. That would be difficult for students, staff, and parents of the school that becomes the “new” middle school to give that up. Based on our experience, however, we believe that these same unique characteristics would soon develop in the “new” middle school.

* Elementary students from the school that becomes a middle school would be distributed among the other four elementary schools.

* This configuration would require Island-wide middle school bus transportation like for the high school. All students in grades 7 - 12 could ride on the same busses so there would be little, if no, additional cost.

* For some staff, the downside of this is that it would lead to a more common curriculum, resulting in perhaps giving up a preferred curriculum.

What are the Steps Necessary to Amend a Regional Agreement?

Many current regional school districts were formed in the 1950's, 1960's, and 1970's. As student populations declined in the Northeast in the early 2000's, other communities began to look to regionalization to provide sustainability. Many districts that regionalized years ago have now begun to add to their region's towns.

The Massachusetts Association of Regional Schools (MARS) saw that there was a need to develop a Step-by-Step written process to explain the specific steps that are needed to fulfill this need. Under a contract with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, members of MARS (and the MARS Consulting Group) wrote the "Step-By-Step Process" following established State guidelines, regulations, and statutes.

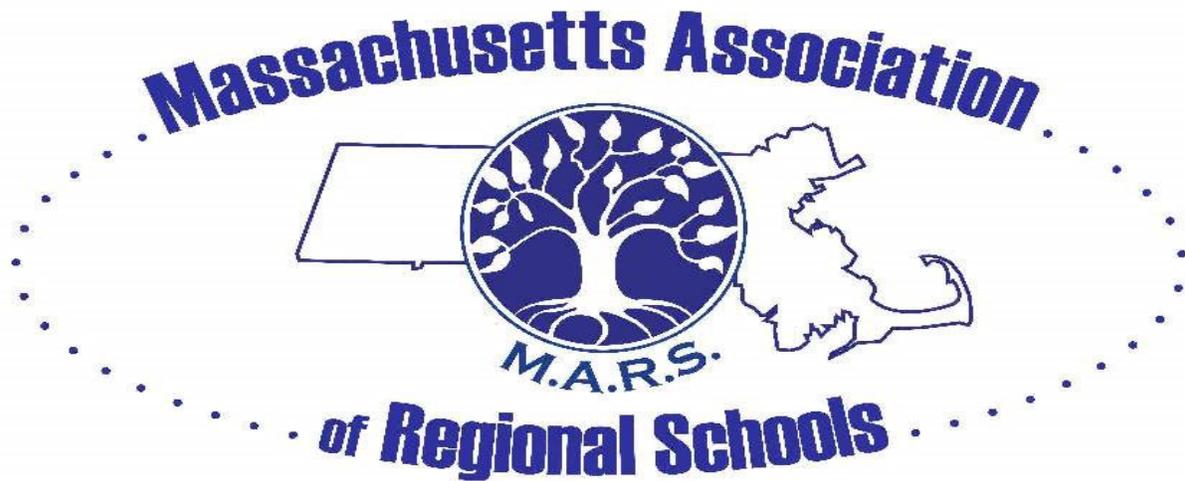
The process answers these questions:

- What do we do first?
- Who do we contact?
- What is a regional agreement? What are the implications: financial, educational, legal?
- How long will it take?

What needs to be developed?

- Any new region would need to develop a "Long Range Education Plan" but that should not be necessary if the MVRHS regional agreement or the Up-Island regional agreement is modified instead of developing a brand-new regional agreement.
- Design a restructured educational program and administrative structure
- Draft an amended regional agreement
 - Include all important constituents - parents, citizens, public officials, school committee members
 - Hold focus groups in all communities
 - Regional Agreements must consider
 - Financial matters
 - Educational programs
 - Facilities
 - Governance
 - Transportation changes
 - Contracts - union plus all other contracts; e.g. transportation, milk, copy machines, etc.
 - Central Office reorganization

- Ownership of buildings - most often elementary buildings are leased from the member towns
 - Maintenance
 - Debt service on existing debt
- Review with appropriate school committees
- Make revisions as necessary
- Send the amended regional agreement to DESE for preliminary review
- Make additional revisions as requested
- Send amended regional agreement to member towns' Select Boards
- Hold additional forums in the member towns
- Resubmit regional agreement to DESE after local legal review
- DESE approves:
 - Long Range Education Plan - if necessary
 - Amended regional agreement
- Regional agreement is put on the warrant for a special or annual town meeting
- Hold final public forums
- Town meetings vote by ballot
 - All member towns must vote positively
 - Only majority vote required
- Certified votes are sent to the Commissioner of DESE
- Once the Commissioner approves, the actual process starts to initiate the new region as of a July 1.



Pathway to Regionalization:

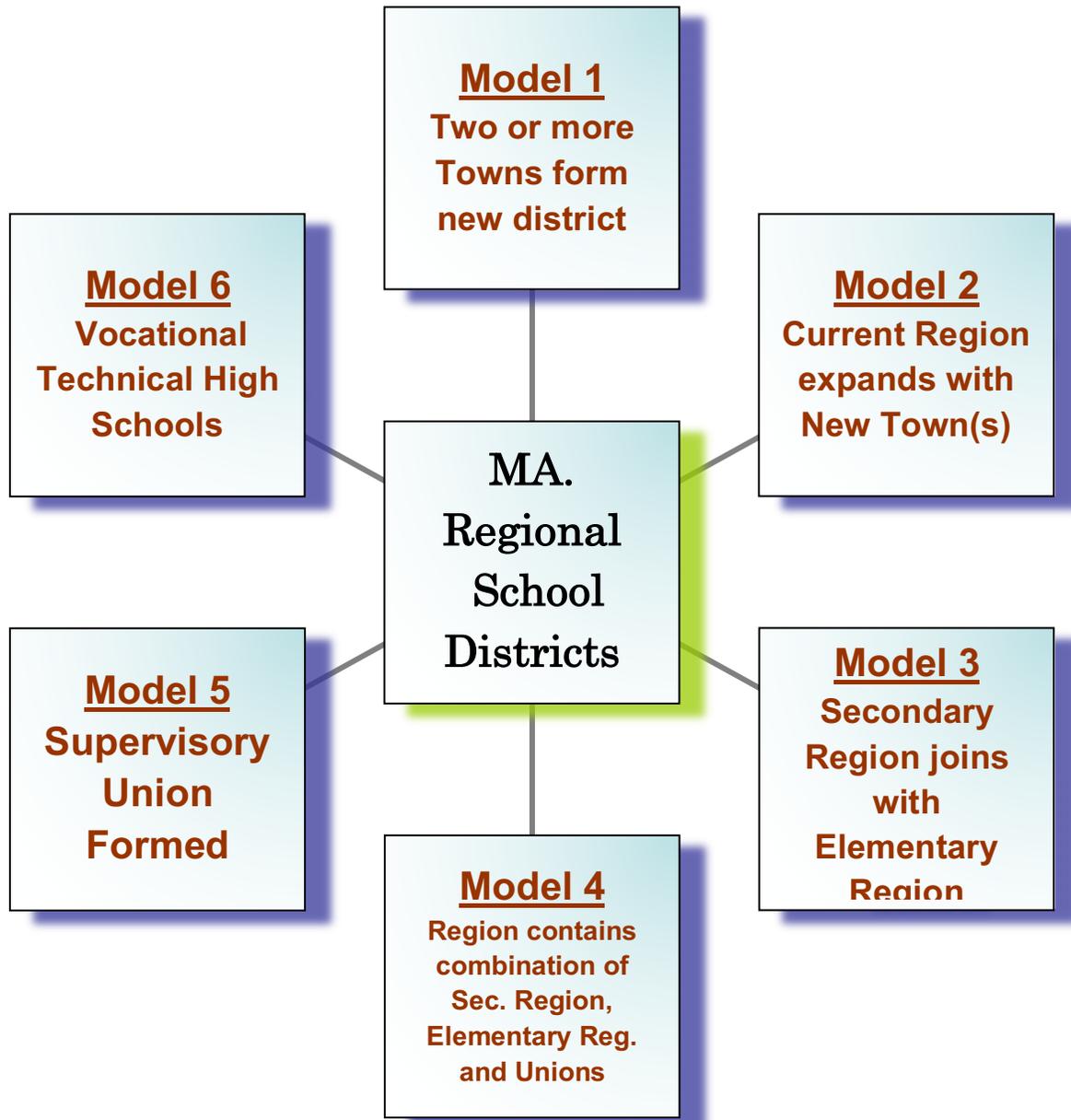
Phase I

**“An Important Step-by-Step Process for
School Districts
Considering Regionalization”**

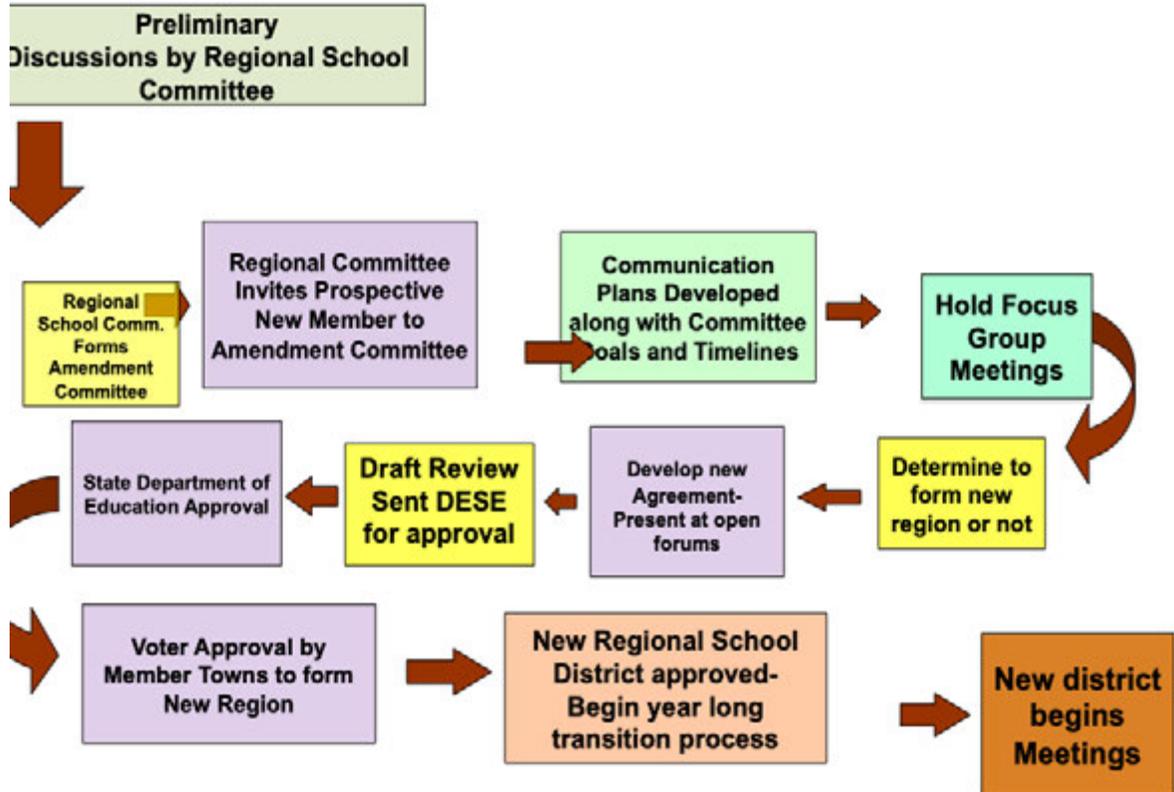
Prepared by

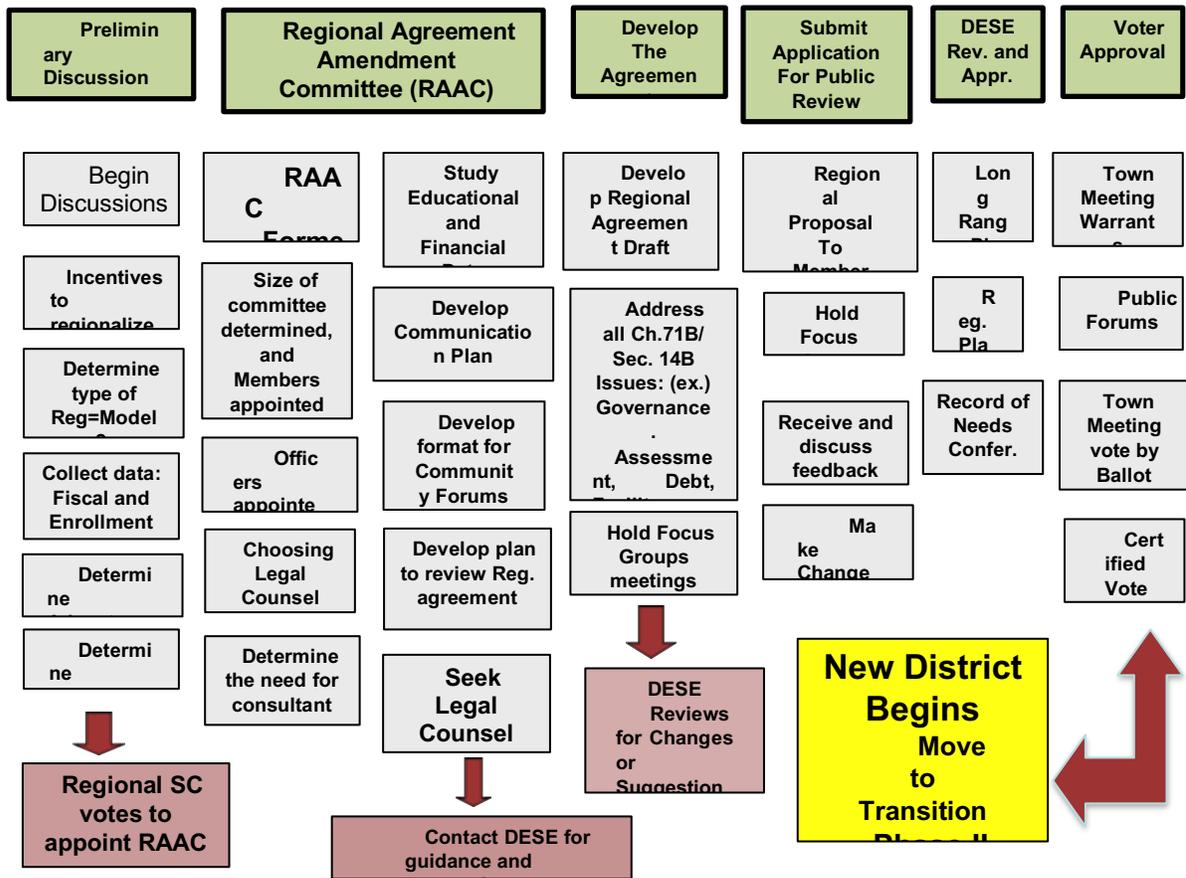
**Massachusetts Association of Regional Schools
[See full report in the Appendix]**

Six Models of Regionalization



Incorporating a New Member Town





[See the full Step-By-Step document in the Appendix]

What are some Organizational Efficiencies?

- Collective bargaining
- Shared Services
- English Learners - "Elevation" database
- Community engagement with local businesses

What are some Organizational Inefficiencies?

- Different technology in different schools with different site licenses
- No bulk purchasing
- Lack of transportation for after-school programs
- Six school committees for six towns - many meetings with different priorities
- Grants not easily shared

What are some Organizational Conclusions?

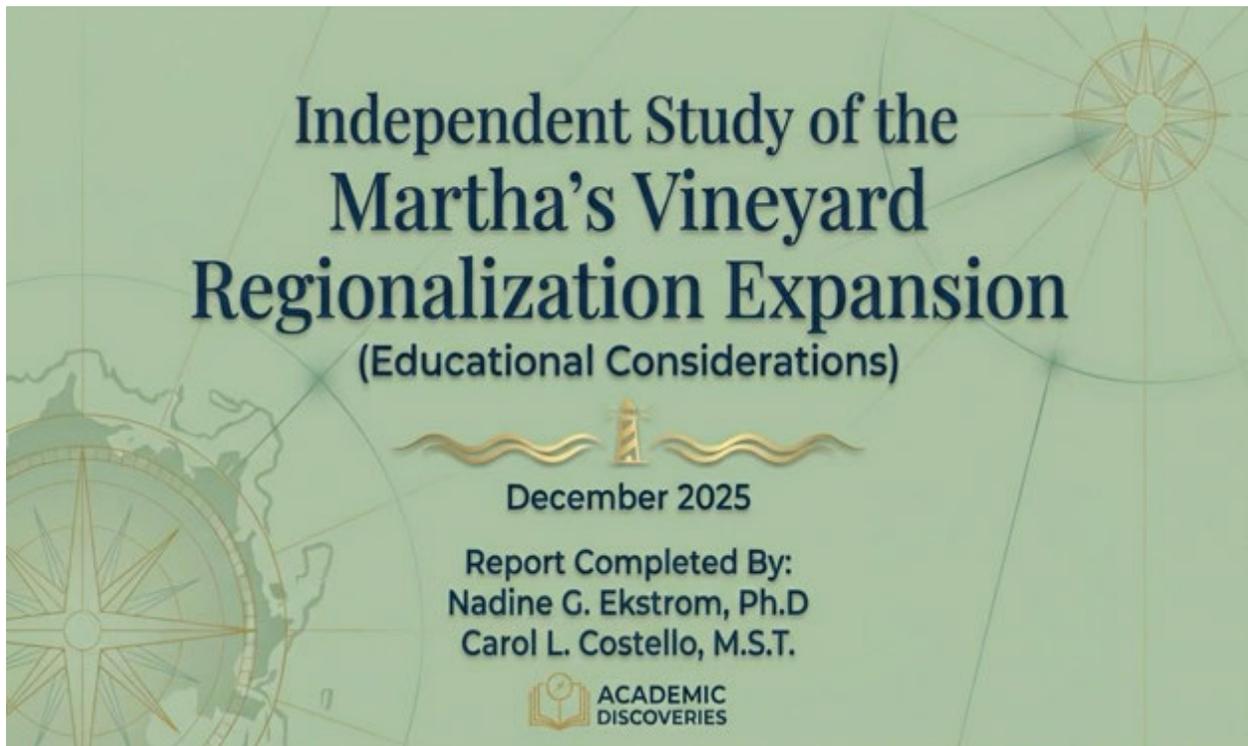
- The five independent school districts in the Supervisory Union are not able to provide the organizational means to operate as efficiently as they could as one PK - 12 district.
- The Supervisory Union is able to provide some supervisory oversight.
- The overall educational system also provides some region-like support in the form of a Shared Services program that groups children with special educational needs and those with English Language Learner needs in efficient PK - 8 system-wide programs.
- The business function is scattered between all five school buildings:
 - The Central Office does some work for all schools.
 - The High School Region has its own business function and staff.
 - The Up-Island Region does some of its financial work.
 - The three independent elementary districts work both with their respective towns and the Central Office.
- There is a great need for a Human Resources function. Regional teachers work with the Central Office Business Office and the three independent district teachers work with their respective town office staff.
- By maintaining four relatively small elementary schools where teachers cannot be shared, class sizes are very small and can't be managed system-wide efficiently.
- The five independent districts make it difficult to share grants and local dollars for greater professional development exposure.
- The small enrollment in each elementary school's middle level grades makes it difficult to provide many after-school programs.
- This report has itemized six different options that could be utilized to move forward.

What are some Organizational Recommendations?

- We recommend that the All-Island School Committee Subcommittee:
 - Review and discuss the MARS Consulting Group/Academic Discoveries report.
 - Consider the six options related to additional regionalization.
 - Study the many educational issues raised in the Academic Discoveries report for possible implementation.
 - Set up an ad hoc committee to study these reports and discuss the opportunities and challenges of any additional regionalization.

- Hold forums in the communities to gather community sentiment and gather additional information.
- At the very least, look to find ways to actualize region-like programs that will serve the students, staff, parents, and communities better than at present.
- Consider adding a Human Resources position to serve the district and staff.
- Find ways to consolidate the business operation with appropriate staff.
- Review all the recommendations in these reports.

EDUCATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS



METHODS

The program review follows an improvement-based review model, in which the primary goal is for the reviewers to assist the Martha's Vineyard Public Schools (MVPS) in determining whether to move toward additional or full regionalization PK-12. In this way, the MVPS and its stakeholders will be able to see, more clearly, a pathway to improving the system, from multiple perspectives including organizational, financial and academic strengths.

Academic Discoveries conducted a sequential explanatory mixed methods design by collecting and analyzing quantitative district documents, as well as conducting qualitative interviews, focus group discussions, and classroom observations (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Academic Discoveries drafted interview, focus group, and survey questions, which the district finalized and approved. The organization further created a protocol for observations using the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) Observation Tool and cross-referenced it with the district's focus areas.

To address these areas of inquiry, a multifaceted and inclusive program review was conducted. This review incorporated a variety of data sources and perspectives. Focus groups provided a forum for in-depth discussions on specific topics related to vertical alignment, curriculum, special education identification practices, and resource allocation. Classroom observations offered firsthand insights into the implementation of instructional practices and special education services at different grade levels. This comprehensive approach allowed for a nuanced and data-informed understanding of the Martha's Vineyard Public Schools' programming to support multiple educational departments.

Document Review

Academic Discoveries reviewed numerous documents made available to them through the *MA-DESE Resource Allocation and District Action Reports (RADAR)* and *District Analysis and Review Tools (DART)* as well as the U.S. census report and district website, to create a well-rounded profile of the Martha's Vineyard School District.

In addition, Academic Discoveries requested and reviewed document folders provided by the district based on each of the focus areas, as well as for organizational and financial review.

Interviews

Dr. Ekstrom conducted a series of twelve (12) interviews with administrators including principals, assistant principals, Director of Student Support Services, ELL Director, Curriculum Coordinator, Project Headway Director, and Superintendent of Schools, via virtual platforms. These interviews took place on October 3rd, October 6th, October 10th and October 20th.

Focus Groups

Ms. Costello and Mr. Reid conducted a total of six (6) Focus Group sessions on Thursday, October 16, 2025 and Friday, October 17, 2025 and met with thirty-one (31) educators from the five (5) elementary schools. These educators included classroom teachers, guidance counselors, health teachers, world language teachers, special education teachers, literacy (reading) specialists, instrumental teachers, and paraprofessionals (ESPs).

Classroom Observations

On Thursday, September 11, 2025 and Friday, September 12, 2025, Dr. Ekstrom conducted observations in each of the elementary schools and the regional high school on Martha's Vineyard. During the first day, she visited seven (7) classrooms at MVRHS, including inclusion, co-taught and a sub-separate classroom. In Oak Bluffs, she visited six (6) classrooms including sub-separate, co-taught, and inclusion. In West Tisbury, she visited six (6) classrooms including co-taught, inclusion, and sub-separate. On the second day, she visited five (5) inclusive classrooms in Chilmark, six (6) inclusion and sub-separate classrooms in Edgartown, and four (4) sub-separate and inclusion classrooms in Tisbury.

Areas Of Research

The primary goal was for the reviewers to assist the Martha’s Vineyard Public Schools in identifying answers to the district’s inquiry referencing overarching research focus areas:

Educational Focus

FOCUS AREA	OVERARCHING RESEARCH QUESTION
Focus Area 1: Educational Structure of the five districts	What is the educational structure of the five districts, and how could it look different with PK-12 regionalization?
Focus Area 2: Academic Achievement	What data explains the differences in academic achievement among the five districts?
Focus Area 3: Efficiency & Effectiveness	How could one district make the educational process more efficient?
Focus Area 4: Fiscal Responsibility	How could one district save resources/money? (e.g. staffing, programs, etc.?)
Focus Area 5: Teaching & Learning	What are the advantages of a centralized curriculum? (Island-wide versus by individual districts)
Focus Area 6: Special Education & English Language Learning	How could one district make special education and ELL programs better for students and less expensive?
Focus Area 7: Potential Advantages of a One-Region Structure (perspectives)	What other advantages does a one-region structure bring to the educational program/students?
Focus Area 8: Perspective	What other issues, concerns, information can be shared at this time?

Qualitative And Quantitative Data Collection

Academic Discoveries President, Nadine Ekstrom and Consultant, Carol Costello, met with Mark Friedman, District Business Director beginning on August 22, 2025 and subsequently on August 29, 2025, September 5, 2025, September 19, 2025, September 26, 2025, October 3, 2025, October 24, 2025, November 21, 2025, and December 1, 2025 . The purpose of these meetings was to ensure that the process remained on track to meet the needs of the districts as requested. They were also in constant communication through phone conversations and emails during the process. These meetings and discussions with Finance Director Mark Friedman and Sara Dingley, Curriculum, Instruction, and Operations Coordinator, have been very productive in supporting the timely progress of the program review schedule.

The consultancy team also provided a total of four presentations: a general overview of the academic and financial inquiry being conducted on Tuesday, September 23, 2025; a report on the academic inquiries and findings on Thursday, October 16, 2025; and a report on the financial inquiries and findings on Wednesday, November 19, 2025. These presentations occurred prior to a final report being completed and a presentation being made to the Regionalization Sub-Committee on Thursday, December 18, 2025.

Prior to initiating the inquiry-based research, Dr. Ekstrom reached out to Mr. Friedman and Superintendent Richard M. Smith to review overarching program questions. Dr. Ekstrom shared the program review expectations, identified district documents and data to be submitted for analysis, planned for interviews and focus groups with district staff, and schedules for classroom observations.

FINDINGS

Martha's Vineyard Public Schools Overview

Martha's Vineyard is an approximately 100 square mile island situated about seven miles off the southeastern coast of Massachusetts (Cape Cod) and is part of Dukes County. It is also part of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Martha's Vineyard has a year-round population of about 20,700, with a significantly larger seasonal population in the summer, and is becoming more diverse. Martha's Vineyard has a total population of 13,908 residents, according to the latest release from the U.S. Census Bureau: the 2019-2023 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates. This figure changed by +0.5% compared to a year ago. The median age is 50.4, which is older than the Massachusetts average.

A notable Brazilian immigrant population contributes to the island's cultural diversity. The Black population increased by 67% between 2010 and 2020, and the multi-racial category grew nearly 400% in the same period. Also, 82.1% of locals are Caucasian, 3.2% are African American and 1.3% have Asian roots. There is also a share of 9.2% that includes residents with two or more races. Approximately 20% of the year-round population is Brazilian, and Portuguese is the second most spoken language.

Martha's Vineyard has 4,996 resident households, with an average of two (2) members in each home. Of these, 60.9% are families, while the remaining 39.1% are made up of individuals living alone or with non-relatives, such as roommates. Housing costs on Martha's Vineyard come to a median of \$2,010 per month, while tenants specifically pay a median gross rent of \$1,717. In addition, 85.7% of the population are US-born citizens, while 6.8% have gained naturalized citizenship. At the same time, 7.4% of residents are non-citizens.

<https://www.point2homes.com/US/Neighborhood/MA/Martha-s-Vineyard-Demographics.html>)

In terms of education, about 27.1% of the population in Martha's Vineyard went to high school, while 16.3% pursued college studies. Another 7.6% earned an associate degree and 24.5% hold a bachelor's degree. Meanwhile, 22.8% went even further, earning a master's or doctorate. *Source: Point 2 Homes:*

<https://www.point2homes.com/US/Neighborhood/MA/Martha-s-Vineyard-Demographics.html>.

Public School Data

The Martha's Vineyard Public Schools consists of six (6) school buildings: Martha's Vineyard Regional High School, Chilmark, Edgartown, Oak Bluffs, Tisbury, and West Tisbury. The total student enrollment for the Martha's Vineyard Public Schools is 2,184 students.

According to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) website (2024-2025), 62.4% of students are White vs. 51.5% in the state. In comparison, 4.3% are Black/African American vs. 10.2% in the state; 27.3% are Hispanic or Latino(a) vs. 25.9% in the state, 4.0% are multi-race vs. 4.6% in the state; and 0.4% are Asian compared to 7.5% in the state. Table one (1) below shows the breakdown of student populations:

Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity (2024-2025)

Race	% of District	% of State
American Indian/Alaskan Native	1.6	0.2
Asian	0.4	7.5
Black or African-American	4.3	10.2
Hispanic or Latino(a)	27.3	25.9
Multi-Race (non-Hispanic or Latino)	4.0	4.6
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0.0	0.1
White	62.4	51.5

Table 1: Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity 2024-2025

Educational Environments of Students with Disabilities

Of the one hundred forty-seven (147) total number of enrolled students with *Individual Educational Plans (IEPs)* in the school systems, 104 students (70.8%) are enrolled as *full inclusion*, which means that they are inside the general education classroom 80% or more of the day. This is 3% more than the state rate, and 5.3% more than the state target rate. Twenty (20) students, or 13.6% of those students with IEPs are enrolled as *partial inclusion*, which means they are inside the general education classroom 40%-79% of the day. This is 1% more than the state rate of 12.6%. (the state target rate is unavailable). Eleven (11) students (7.5%) are enrolled as *substantially separate*, which means they are inside the general education classroom less than 40% of the day. This is 5.4% less than the 12.9% state rate and 5.8% less than the 13.32%. Twelve (12) students, or 8.2% of the enrollment are in separate schools, residential facilities, or homebound/hospital placements (not including parent-placed private school students with disabilities). This is 1.6% more than the state rate of 6.6% and 1.8% more than the state target of 6.44%. (See Table 2 below):

Data Retrieved from School Year 2023-2024	Enrollment	District Rate	State Rate	State Target	Target met by District
Enrolled students with IEPs	147	--	--	NA	--
Full Inclusion (inside the general education classroom 80% or more of the day)	104	70.8%	67.8%	65.49%	Yes
Partial Inclusion (inside the general education classroom 40%-79% of the day)	20	13.6%	12.6%	NA	--
Substantially Separate (inside the general education classroom less than 40% of the day)	11	7.5%	12.9%	13.32%	Yes
Separate Schools, Residential Facilities, or Homebound/Hospital placements (does not include parentally-placed private school students with disabilities)	12	8.2%	6.6%	6.44%	No

Table 2: Educational Environments for Students Kindergarten – Age 21 with IEPs. (2023-2024)

Selected Population of Students (2023-2024)

According to 2023-2024 DESE reporting data, approximately 147 (23.8%) of the Martha's Vineyard Public Schools' kindergarten to age 22 students have disabilities. This percentage is higher than the Massachusetts State Average of 20.6% by 3.8%. Martha's Vineyard also has 22.8% of students in high needs, 13% of students who are English Learners, (vs. the state average of 13.9%). Martha's Vineyard has 35% percent of low-income students vs. the state average of 42.1%. Please see the Selected Population Categories, listed in Table 3 (below):

Title	% District	% of State
High Needs	22.8%	20.6%
English Learners	13.0%	13.9
First Language Not English	31.9%	27.2%
Low Income	35.8%	42.1%
Students w/Disabilities	23.8%	20.6%

Table 3: Selected Population of Students in the Martha's Vineyard Public Schools

The District Analysis and Review Tools (DART) are used to provide snapshots of district and school performance and to track data over time. The tables identified above are available in the MA Department of Education website under DART and found here: (<https://www.doe.mass.edu/dart>).

MCAS Performance (Spring 2025)

According to DESE DART data in Table 4 below, the FY25 MCAS performance shows students in the Martha's Vineyard elementary schools scoring generally lower than the grades 3-8 performance of students statewide in ELA and Mathematics, except for Oak Bluffs, who scored higher in Mathematics, (50%) for grades 3-8 than the state average of 41%. Edgartown scored 38% and Tisbury scored 36%. In ELA, Edgartown scored 41%, Oak Bluffs scored 41%, and Tisbury scored 38% compared to the state average

of 42%. The Martha's Vineyard Regional High School scores in both ELA and Mathematics were higher than the state average. In terms of the regional high school performance in English Language Arts, 56% of sophomores met or exceeded expectations, compared to 51% statewide for comparable schools. In Mathematics, 50% of sophomores met or exceeded expectations, compared to 45% statewide for comparable schools. In the table below, the first number represents the percentage of the Martha's Vineyard students. The second number represents the state average.

Dist./School	ELA MCAS Grades 3-8 Percentage of Students Exceeding or Meeting Expectations	Math MCAS Grades 3-8 Percentage of Students Exceeding or Meeting Expectations	ELA MCAS Grade 10 Percentage of Students Exceeding or Meeting Expectations	Math MCAS Grade 10 Percentage of Students Exceeding or Meeting Expectations
Chilmark	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Edgartown	41/42	38/41	N/A	N/A
Oak Bluffs	41/42	50/41	N/A	N/A
Tisbury	38/42	36/41	N/A	N/A
West Tisbury	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
MV Regional High School	N/A	N/A	56/51	50/45

Table 4: 2025 MCAS Results by MV School

Detailed 2025 MCAS results for Martha's Vineyard are available through the Massachusetts DESE at: <https://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/results.html>. Note: For a high-level overview, state results showed that overall, students across the Commonwealth are still behind pre-pandemic performance levels.

FOCUS AREAS - DATA COLLECTION

This section of the report meticulously details the comprehensive findings derived from a multi-faceted approach to data collection. The methodologies employed, as previously outlined in the report, were specifically designed to provide an in-depth and granular understanding of the subject matter.

Our investigation drew upon a rich array of data sources, each contributing unique insights. A thorough review of district documents offered foundational information, complemented by an examination of official district websites which provided current public-facing information and policies. Further contextualization was gained from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) website, allowing for cross-referencing with state-level guidelines and data. The Resource Allocation and District Action Reports (RADAR) were instrumental in understanding resource distribution and the impact of various district initiatives.

Beyond document analysis, qualitative data was gathered through direct engagement with stakeholders. Interviews were conducted with key personnel, offering individual perspectives and detailed accounts. Focus groups facilitated discussions among groups of individuals, revealing shared experiences and collective insights. Finally, classroom observations provided firsthand evidence of educational practices and the learning environment, allowing for a direct assessment of the implementation of policies and curricula. The synthesis of these diverse data streams ensures a robust and well-rounded presentation of findings within this report.

Education

Focus Area 1: Educational Structure of the five districts

- **What is the educational structure of the five districts, and how could it look different with PK-12 regionalization?**

Document Review

The research team conducted a systematic document review to understand the District Educational Structure as part of a regionalization study. This foundational analysis

focused on three critical areas: 1) Organizational Charts to map the administrative hierarchy and assess potential efficiencies; 2) Substantially Separate Programs to document specialized K-8 services, their functions, and locations for planning consolidation; and 3) Curriculum and Instructional Materials to identify common curricula and differences across core subjects to inform harmonization and resource sharing in a regional model.

Organization Personnel Chart(s)

Organizational Structure and Leadership in Martha's Vineyard Public Schools

The administrative structure of Martha's Vineyard Public Schools is designed to provide unified oversight across all Island districts. At the highest level, the system is led by a single Superintendent, who works in tandem with an Assistant Superintendent to manage the entirety of the educational operations.

Centralized Island-Wide Administration

Key leadership roles are centralized to ensure consistency, compliance, and effective service delivery across the Island's schools:

- **Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent:** These two positions serve as the chief executive and instructional leaders, respectively. They are responsible for the overall strategic direction, policy implementation, and day-to-day governance of all school districts. In addition, the AS oversees:
 - the Behavioral Health Coordinator and direct clinical services offered Island-wide.
 - Curriculum and Instruction Coordinator
- **Director of Student Support Services (DSS):** This critical role manages a comprehensive network of services aimed at student well-being and academic accessibility. The DSS oversees:
 - the Early Childhood Coordinator.
 - the Board-Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) for shared programs, ensuring accountability and compliance for these services.
 - all shared programs staff and related service providers (such as speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, etc.).
- **Director of English Learners (ELL):** This director ensures equitable and high-quality educational services for all English Language Learners. Responsibilities

include:

- direct support for ELL staff across the Island.
 - oversight of the Island-wide ELL summer program.
 - coordination of parent and community outreach efforts relevant to the ELL population.
 - management of student identification, assessment processes, and state compliance requirements for English Learners.
- **Director of Finance:** The finance director is essential for the fiscal health and long-term stability of the school system. Key functions encompass:
 - oversight of Island-wide budget development and long-range financial planning.
 - management of the Grants Coordinator position.
 - supervision of payroll, procurement, and all financial services.
 - management of Human Resources services for the Island districts.

The Role of the Assistant Superintendent in Detail

The Assistant Superintendent's role is multi-faceted, focusing heavily on the academic and operational backbone of the schools, specifically:

- **Curriculum and Instruction:** They directly support the student learning curriculum and instruction staff, ensuring the alignment of all teaching materials and practices with state frameworks and standards.
- **Professional Development and Assessment:** The role includes managing Island-wide professional development initiatives, coordinating assessment schedules, and overseeing the process of curriculum adoption.
- **Operations and Facilities:** The Assistant Superintendent is also tasked with the oversight of daily school operations, administrative support functions, student transportation, and facilities management.

School-Level Leadership and Specialized Roles

While much of the administrative structure is centralized, individual schools maintain their own operational leadership organized by:

- **School Principals:** Principals are responsible for the direct management of their respective buildings. Their duties include overseeing their assistant principal(s), managing accountability reporting (which tracks student performance and school metrics), and the direct supervision of all building staff.

- **School-Specific Organizational Charts:** Beyond the overarching Island structure, each school provides its own detailed staff listing. The Martha's Vineyard Regional High School exhibits a more complex and specialized organizational model, featuring dedicated director-level positions that manage specific, non-instructional services critical to the high school's operation:
 - Director of Information Technology (IT)
 - Director of Special Education (distinct from the Island-wide DSS)
 - Director of Facilities
 - Director of Operations
 - Director of Finance
 - Director of Athletics
 - Director of Student Affairs

Special Education substantially separate programs

The next phase of the investigation focused on clarifying the operational structure and rationale behind the Island's substantially separate special education programs. A key finding was the identification of these programs as "shared" services. This designation signifies that the accessibility of these specialized educational services is entirely decoupled from a student's town of residence. In practice, this means that if a student is determined to require the unique and specific services offered by one of these substantially separate programs, they are entitled to attend the program at the physical school facility where it is housed, irrespective of which town on the Island the student resides in. The shared-program model ensures equitable access to essential educational support for all eligible K-12 students across the Island community, irrespective of municipal boundaries. This approach makes specialized resources available broadly. Within the district, two specialized programs, *Bridge* and *Compass*, are currently operating to serve students with diverse and intensive needs that require targeted, comprehensive support structures. These programs are strategically located across multiple schools to maximize accessibility and appropriate grouping.

The **Bridge** program is designed to support children with intensive needs that are developmental, intellectual, and/or medical in nature, impacting multiple areas of functioning. Additionally, it serves children whose intensive needs present with

characteristics similar to those on the Autism Spectrum. The program is currently housed across two distinct locations, West Tisbury and Edgartown.

- **Location and Grade Levels:** Both the West Tisbury and Edgartown sites operate two self-contained classrooms. These classrooms are structured to serve students across the elementary and middle school spectrum, specifically from Kindergarten (K) through Grade 8.
- **Current Enrollment:** As of this report, the West Tisbury location serves a total of 12 students. The Edgartown location has a higher current enrollment, supporting 21 students. The staffing ratios and resource allocation at each site are adjusted to meet the unique profiles and intensity of need for the enrolled students.

The **Compass** program is a therapeutic educational setting specifically designed for children with intensive needs stemming from an identified emotional disability. The core mission of this program is to provide the necessary therapeutic and academic supports within a structured school environment to help students manage their disability and access the curriculum. The program operates out of two locations: Tisbury and Oak Bluffs, structured by grade band.

- **Location and Grade Levels:**
 - The Tisbury location focuses on younger students, serving those in Kindergarten (K) through Grade 4.
 - The Oak Bluffs location supports the transition into and through middle school, serving students in Grades 5 through 8.
- **Current Enrollment:** The Tisbury location currently has an enrollment of 4 students. The Oak Bluffs location serves 8 students. The smaller class sizes in the *Compass* program reflect the intensive nature of the emotional and behavioral support required for this student population.

While the descriptions above provide an overview of the programs' locations, target populations, and current enrollment, a significant amount of critical operational and descriptive information remains unavailable for the researchers. This missing information is essential for a complete and thorough program evaluation.

Specifically, the following detailed information was requested, however, not available by the district:

- **Explicit Program Descriptions:** Comprehensive narrative descriptions detailing the instructional model, therapeutic approach, daily schedule, and overall environment for both *Bridge* and *Compass*.
- **Entrance and Exit Guidelines:** Formal, written criteria for determining a student's eligibility for placement into these specialized programs (entrance) and the criteria for successful transition back to less restrictive settings (exit).
- **Staffing Requirements and Profiles:** Detailed documentation outlining the required staffing matrix for each program location, including the necessary credentials, certifications, and specific training (e.g., behavioral management techniques, crisis intervention, specialized curriculum implementation) needed to support the intensive profile of the enrolled students.

The absence of this documentation creates uncertainty as to whether formal, written policies and procedures governing the operation, student placement, and staffing of the **Bridge** and **Compass** programs currently exist within the district's administrative records. Without this foundational information, a thorough analysis of program fidelity, effectiveness, and resource allocation is significantly constrained.

Curriculum Used in the K-12 Schools

The Island schools are currently making progress in implementing a unified Island-wide literacy curriculum, Houghton-Mifflin, for grades K-5. While this is a significant step, the K-12 system currently operates without a single, Island-wide curriculum. Table 5 below offers valuable insight into the areas of alignment and divergence among the K-8 curricula used across the Island. It's worth noting that one school shared their instructional standards, which can serve as a foundation for curriculum development, and another school, while not providing curriculum details for this study, can contribute to future curriculum alignment efforts.

District	Mathematics	English Language Arts	Science	Social Studies
Chilmark	TERC Investigations (K-5)	HMH (K-5) Heggerty (K-1)	No defined curriculum	No defined curriculum
Tisbury	2016-2017 Standards provided No defined curriculum provided	HMH (K-5)	2016-2017 Standards provided No defined curriculum provided	2016-2017 Standards provided No defined curriculum provided
West Tisbury	Inspire Math HS - aligned advanced geometry HS - aligned Algebra	HMH (K-5) Homegrown (6-8) Lucy Caulkins writing Reveal (K-5) Heggerty (K-2) Inconsistent use of Empowering Writers (supplement) Orton-Gillingham	McGraw-Hill	Online Textbook
Oak Bluffs	Homegrown (K-5) Desmos (5-8)	HMH (K-5) Homegrown (6-8) Orton-Gillingham	McGraw Hill: Science textbook, Homegrown (K-8)	HMH K-5 (texts) Homegrown (6-8)
Edgartown	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available
English Learning	Not available	iReady (K) Team Toolkits (K-5) National Geographic (3-8)	Not available	Not available

Table 5: Curriculum Used in the K-12 Schools

Interviews

The qualitative component of the study involved a structured interview process with key personnel across the district's administrative and instructional leadership. A total of four core questions were formulated and posed to three distinct groups: building administrators (principals), central office administrators (superintendents and directors), and curriculum coordinators.

The intent behind asking similar core questions to these varied groups was to facilitate a comparative analysis and gain a comprehensive, multi-faceted understanding of their perspectives. By examining the responses through the lens of their specific roles and responsibilities—whether focused on daily school operations, district-wide policy, or instructional alignment—the study aimed to uncover both areas of consensus and potential divergence in understanding and strategy.

Crucially, one of the four questions was uniquely tailored and presented *only* to the curriculum coordinators. This differentiation was intentional, designed to delve specifically into the practical, theoretical, and systemic aspects of curriculum development, implementation, and evaluation within the district. Isolating this question allowed the study to gain specialized insights into the challenges and successes directly related to their primary functions as curriculum experts and instructional leaders.

The principals, the special education director, and the English learner coordinator were all asked: *How do enrollment trends affect your district's structure and planning?* Given the small number of respondents, a combined summary of their answers will be presented.

The input text analyzes the similarities and differences between the various educational roles who were interviewed, focusing on enrollment and student population dynamics.

Similarities All interviewees consistently reported that overall school enrollment remains stable. However, a significant and shared dynamic noted by every participant is

the growing complexity and concentration of the English Learner (EL/ELL) student population, particularly within the Tisbury school district. This demographic shift is seen as a key factor influencing instructional and resource allocation.

Beyond the EL/ELL population, every interviewee also identified several systemic challenges impacting the district. These universally recognized obstacles include the high frequency of transient students, who often move in and out of the district during the school year, presenting continuity and integration challenges. Additionally, the increasing need for and complexity of Out-of-District (OOD) placements, students who require specialized educational services not available within the district's schools, was highlighted as a growing strain on resources and a concern for comprehensive educational planning.

Differences: Distinct perspectives from various stakeholders reveal a complex interplay of challenges centered on student population dynamics and financial stability, with core themes emerging from differing accounts of primary focus and specific trends.

One significant thread of feedback focused on the difficulties faced by transient students. The individuals in this group directly attributed these complications to instability in local housing, suggesting that frequent student mobility creates operational and instructional hurdles. Furthermore, this group highlighted a perceived notable decline, or "major drop," in the English Learner (EL) population. Compounding these issues, they specifically cited the administrative and logistical complexities arising from the district's participation in the School Choice program, which introduces unpredictable enrollment patterns and resource allocation challenges.

In sharp contrast, a separate group of interviewees identified budgetary stress as the most pressing financial concern, stemming primarily from unexpected and costly Out-of-District (OOD) placements for specialized student needs. Interestingly, this group's observation of the English Language Learner (ELL) demographic trend differed from the first, noting a "significant increase" in ELLs, with the current enrollment figure estimated

at approximately 315 students. To manage this growing population and ensure consistent service delivery, they reported implementing and using the Elevation data system to standardize ELL process management. Finally, this group provided a specific geographic context, naming Oak Bluffs as the largest school in the district, suggesting where the primary concentration of the student body, and perhaps the growing ELL population, is located.

A summary combining the responses from the principals, the special education director, and the English learner coordinator will be presented due to the limited number of participants. All were asked the same question: *What is the educational structure of your district, and how could it look different with PK-12 regionalization?*

The interviewees describe how shared services programs are already somewhat regionalized, particularly for those students who are able to maintain an education within their home district compared to those who are placed in residential placements, but note that fully regionalizing would change how principals think about and serve preschool students. Currently, preschools are often treated as separate entities, primarily serving the children with the highest needs. Regionalization, however, could shift the perspective to include all students and align PreK-8 thinking. This would also support planning for growing enrollment and allow schools to strategically place students to best meet their learning needs.

The interviewees highlight challenges in programming for very small populations, sometimes only one or two students with unique needs, where regionalization could allow grouping students and creating interest-based programs such as STEM or enrichment activities. Bringing students together, especially in early grades, could also streamline administrative tasks, such as enrollment and staffing, and reduce redundancy.

The interviewees also discuss efforts in the EL (English Learner) department, noting that regional collaboration has improved team meetings, protocols, and curriculum

evaluation. By piloting high-quality instructional materials and using a rubric to assess curriculum, the team is working to build consensus across districts and strengthen instruction for all EL students.

In essence, regionalization is seen as an opportunity to rethink inclusion, streamline resources, and improve programming and instructional consistency across the island. The analysis comprehensively compares the various roles and their perspective, which address critical issues within the local K-12 school system, primarily focusing on the decentralized structure and the pursuit of greater unity.

Shared Core Consensus: The Imperative for Unity

Despite their differing angles, all interviewees reached the same fundamental conclusions about the structural deficiencies of the current system. A primary and explicitly stated point expressed by all was the significant lack of consistency and equity in student experience, resources, and educational outcomes. This fundamental flaw was directly attributable to the decentralized, town-by-town structure, in which five distinct school districts operate primarily independently. Consequently, every participant unequivocally emphasizes the critical need for systemic improvements, specifically through curriculum alignment across all grade levels and the implementation of coordinated professional development (PD). This standardization is viewed as essential to ensure all students receive a comparable, high-quality education. The ultimate objective of all analyses is to move toward a more unified system, whether through formal regionalization (consolidation), as discussed by some interviewees, or through other mechanisms of increased central control to establish greater district-wide oversight and administrative unity, and to correct the current fragmentation.

Key Differentiating Factors: Focus, Detail, and Perspective

While the conclusions align, the various roles in the districts diverge significantly in their primary focus, the level of specific detail provided, and the practical lens through which they approach the problem. One group of interviewees concentrated on the prospective benefits and political challenges of regionalization/consolidation, making it forward-looking and addressing what *could be*. In contrast, another group of participants

focused on the current structure, governance, and tangible failures of the decentralized system, analyzing *what it is*.

Regarding the administrative structure, one group focused primarily on regionalization to achieve efficiency gains and overcome opposition. In contrast, others provided specific, granular detail on the "confederacy" structure, explicitly naming the separate school districts that feed into the single high school.

A significant distinction among individuals was evident in how they addressed opposition. Some interviewees directly confront opponents' key concerns, including the fear of losing individual school autonomy, the erosion of local culture, and a decline in parental engagement. Others, however, primarily detail the internal administrative breakdown of the system rather than engaging with external political opposition.

Finally, the participant responses differed in the level of detail and the concrete examples they provided. In comparison, a group of participants tended to be more high-level and conceptual, discussing system-wide goals. Others provide significantly more specific, concrete details on operational and fiscal failures. For instance, some individuals offered powerful examples of system breakdown, such as operational failures (instances of building principals "going rogue" by abandoning shared initiatives), and fiscal/contractual issues (details on how differing town tax bases and varying municipal budget priorities negatively affect the ability of individual schools to advance capital projects or maintain parity).

Synthesis of the Combined Analysis

In essence, some individuals reported on the Strategic Proposal, outlining the cure (regionalization) and anticipating the political obstacles to implementing a significant structural change. It proactively addresses the emotional and cultural resistance to centralization. Others reported on the operational and fiscal diagnosis, meticulously detailing the depth of the current illness. By focusing on governance failures, budgetary disparities driven by local tax structures, and examples of non-compliance at the principal level, these individuals powerfully illustrate *why* the current decentralized

model is academically and financially unsustainable. The combination of the interview participants provided a complete argument: Some validate the systemic deficiencies that others seek to solve through comprehensive structural reform.

Due to the limited number of participants, a combined summary of responses will be presented, incorporating feedback from the principals, the special education director, and the English learner coordinator. All participants responded to the question: *Is there a better way to share or enhance cultural and extracurricular activities across school systems?*

The interviewees noted that while some after-school programs, such as a chess club at the high school, are accessible to all students, most enrichment opportunities are limited to individual districts. They suggested that sharing teacher talents and existing programs, such as sewing, Legos, or dance, across districts could broaden access and foster more inclusive and engaging experiences. Past attempts to run cross-district programs, like a “Fun Club” for social skills, were not very successful, but there is interest in restarting them. Currently, the system tends to encourage competition rather than collaboration between schools, limiting the ability to offer island-wide cultural or enrichment opportunities, such as specialized dance programs, in a coordinated way.

All participating individuals highlighted the challenges created by fragmented systems across island schools and the potential benefits of a regionalized K-12 structure. All interviewees emphasized that regionalization could improve equity, expand access to enrichment opportunities, and create more unified cultural, athletic, and extracurricular programming. Each participant acknowledged that the current setup limits collaboration across towns and that shared resources, along with coordinated busing, could strengthen community connections and student experiences.

The various roles, however, differed in their focus. In comparison, some centered on relationships, cultural identity, and student experience. They described how K–8 schools develop deep, long-term connections with families, whereas middle schools

often receive students as newcomers, making it harder to maintain continuity. It also highlights geographic isolation and transportation gaps as significant barriers to accessing after-school programs and community spaces.

Others, in contrast, focused on structural and policy-related inequities. They discussed how differences in funding, programming decisions, and staffing across towns create inconsistent learning experiences for students. They emphasized the need for standardized academic programs, such as the recent adoption of a common reading curriculum, to support students who move between towns, including many immigrant families. Some individuals pointed to school choice policies, duplicative staffing, and administrative inefficiencies as issues that regionalization could resolve.

In essence, some individuals addressed the human and cultural dimensions of schooling. In contrast, others highlighted systemic, operational, and equity-driven concerns, yet both converge on the idea that regionalization could create a more coherent, equitable, and connected educational system.

Participants were then asked, *if you could redesign the system from scratch, what would you keep and what would you change?* The interviewees discussed governance and budget challenges, emphasizing the need for a single, unified school committee (SC) structure with representation from each town. They suggested that school committee members should prioritize the schools first rather than town interests. Currently, the Martha's Vineyard Regional School Committee is weighted by population, operates with frequent meetings across multiple subcommittees, and experiences fatigue and quorum challenges. Central office and shared program staffing follow a regional funding formula based on head count; however, budgeting remains competitive and difficult to manage.

Participants believe that a regionalized structure, particularly for middle school, could stabilize budgets, reduce competition, and allow more strategic planning and depth of focus. While they support keeping localized elementary schools, they see value in

centralizing middle school administration to strengthen academics and program coherence.

The interviewees also highlighted organizational inefficiencies such as different software systems, inconsistent professional development, and limited collaboration. They proposed a more coordinated hierarchy with distributive leadership, reducing principal autonomy where necessary, to enable better planning and consistency across the island's schools. Despite these challenges, they value the community's commitment and want to preserve it.

Focus Groups

In Focus Area 1, we asked two questions related to the overarching question: *What is the educational structure of the five districts, and how could it look different with PK-12 regionalization?* These questions were posed to content area and general classroom teachers as well as special educators, guidance counselors, and specialists from each of the elementary schools as well as the high school. In asking these questions, our intention was to focus on equitable access to education by gathering data on how curriculum was developed and implemented across the schools, and whether there was continuity across the curriculum that provided vertical alignment for students as they transitioned to the high school. We also explored commonalities in extracurricular activities for students, and whether there were opportunities to expand these activities so that all students across the district might have equal access to them. Participants at the elementary level responded similarly when asked about the state of curriculum alignment and extracurricular activities across the different districts.

The first question was: *Are there any areas where alignment across districts is already happening? How effective is that alignment? What additional opportunities for alignment might be beneficial to your school/district?*

In terms of curriculum alignment, elementary school teachers identified the new ELA program as the primary area of commonality.

- **ELA:** K-5 schools have recently started using the HMH ELA curriculum, which is

seen as a positive step for alignment and collaboration among teachers. However, this alignment is not happening in grades 6-8.

- **Math:** Middle schools in Oak Bluffs and Edgartown (grades 5-8) use the same curriculum (Amplify DESMOS) and have established PLCs (Professional Learning Communities) which have significantly improved MCAS scores.
- **Science:** Some efforts are being made in grades 7-8 science to align curricula, with some schools using similar textbooks (I-Science McGraw-Hill).
- **History/Social Studies:** Schools follow state frameworks, and there is some alignment in sequencing, but preparation for high school varies, leading to an "uneven playing field." PLCs in history are the only unification.
- **Health:** The health curriculum is aligned in terms of standards, but different programs are used, and there's a desire for a unified vision.

Overall, there is a general feeling that alignment is beneficial, but challenges exist in consistent implementation, particularly across different grade levels and schools. Some teachers feel a lack of formal structure and support for cross-school collaboration.

Cultural and Extracurricular Activities: There's a strong desire for more shared cultural and extracurricular activities across the island, especially for middle school students, including arts, theater, and social events. Smaller schools have fewer opportunities due to funding and staffing limitations, creating "haves and have-nots" among towns. Band and orchestra island-wide, as well as more diverse sports, are seen as beneficial. Soccer, baseball, and hockey are already regionalized and are considered positive examples of unification.

Challenges, however, include the logistics of transportation for elementary students across the island are a significant barrier. Differences in school cultures and the lack of common planning when teacher turnover also pose challenges. Most after-school activities are currently run through community organizations like the YMCA.

The second question was: *Is there a better way to share or enhance cultural and extracurricular activities across school systems?*

Participants responded that if all schools were part of one district, there would be more flexibility with funding and staffing, allowing for more enrichment opportunities, especially for smaller schools. An island-wide band and orchestra would be beneficial, and middle school students need more social opportunities like arts and theater, recalling past all-island dances. While athletics, such as regional soccer, baseball, and hockey teams, are a positive example of unification, there's still room for more sports and better alignment of dates. Smaller schools lack after-school clubs due to staffing, and there's a need for more sports and extracurricular experiences with transportation provided. Again, this disparity creates "haves and have-nots" among towns, leading to inconsistencies that are jarring. School cultures vary significantly, and while centralized culture might not be desired, more after-school activities would be welcome, despite transportation challenges. Most current after-school activities are run through community organizations like the YMCA, and while all schools do a play, which is a significant community event, the logistics of transporting elementary students across the island are unrealistic due to bus shortages and diverse populations. Sharing resources for ideas is good but not necessarily bringing students to other places. Soccer is a unifier but is not school-connected, and many students rely on public transportation to get to school. Extracurricular activities are just starting to return.

Classroom Observations

Section 1: Learning Environment (Standard II-B)	
The learning environment is safe and supportive, fostering a sense of welcome and belonging for all students.	
<p>a. The learning environment creates a welcoming and supportive space for all students.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>The space is purposefully organized and used to support student routines and learning.</i> <i>The classroom includes purposeful and usable displays or resources, such as language models, anchor charts, student work, classroom agreements, and criteria of success that support access to grade-level content.</i> 	
Yes	18
Mostly	5
Partially	3
Not Yet	2
Not Observed	0

The provided text is a summary of classroom environment observations across various schools and grade levels, focusing on wall displays and student seating arrangements.

Key Findings:

- **Wall Environment:** There is a wide range in the richness and purposefulness of wall displays.
 - Many classrooms, particularly in elementary grades (Oak Bluffs, West Tisbury, Chilmark, Tisbury), had **"language-rich"** or **"very appropriate/purposeful"** visuals that support academic learning, reading, language arts (phonics, grammar), math facts, calendars, and schedules.
 - Some rooms, mainly at the high school level (CTE), had many items but lacked a clear purpose. In contrast, others (ESL/Biology, American History, Earth Science) had highly purposeful, content-specific visuals.
 - A few classrooms (Edgartown Grade 5 SS, Bridge, Tisbury Grade 4) were noted as having walls that were **"mostly blank," "lacked language-rich visuals,"** or had visuals that were **"scattered and not in consecutive order."**
- **Seating Arrangement:** Seating is highly varied, reflecting a focus on collaborative learning in many instances:
 - The most common arrangements involved **small groups** (3-5 students), **partners**, or **tables/desks clustered together**.
 - Some specialty arrangements included **U-shapes**, connected rows, lab desks, and flexible seating options such as **fun floor chairs**, **stand-up desks**, and **floor space carpet** (Grade 3 Writing in Edgartown, Grade 6 Math in Tisbury, Bridge).
 - Several entries lacked specific seating information.

In essence, the observations highlight a general trend toward using classroom walls as instructional tools, especially in earlier grades, and toward flexible or collaborative seating arrangements across all grade levels.

Section 1: Learning Environment (Standard II-B)

The learning environment is safe and supportive, fostering a sense of welcome and belonging for all students.

b. Teacher and student interactions reinforce inclusivity and value unique experiences related to background, identity, language, ideas, and perspectives.

- *Students and teachers listen to each other's ideas and contributions.*
- *Students and teachers intentionally invite all students into the learning and create space for each other's perspectives.*
- *The teacher employs a range of strategies that honor students' identities and their cultural and linguistic diversity.*

Yes	17
Mostly	4
Partially	4
Not Yet	1
Not Observed	2

The school observation summary, themed, "Inclusivity and Valuing Unique Perspectives," finds that teacher and student interactions consistently reinforce inclusivity through active listening and strategies that honor diverse identities. School-specific observations highlight instructional strengths like strong student discourse, critical thinking, and collaboration, alongside areas for focus such as the need for more consistent student questioning (High School Geometry) and the lack of language-rich visuals in some Edgartown and Tisbury classrooms. While many schools are noted for their language-rich wall displays and visual supports, others have limited aids, sometimes compensating with varied seating. Some classes across the buildings were not observed.

Section 1: Learning Environment (Standard II-B)

The learning environment is safe and supportive, fostering a sense of welcome and belonging for all students.

c. There are established routines and structures for learning.

- *Routines and structures maximize instructional time.*
- *Routines and structures support all learners to engage in academic tasks and positively contribute to the classroom and school community.*

Yes	12
Mostly	7
Partially	3
Not Yet	1
Not Observed	5

The observations show a strong emphasis on established routines and structures for learning across schools and grade levels, supporting instructional time and student engagement. Key positive themes include explicit routines and expectations, structured start-up activities, smooth transitions, variety in instructional methods, and support for diverse learners (e.g., chunked directions, adult circulation). Areas noted for inconsistency or further attention include instances where routines were not posted or observed, limited student interaction in one high school class, and one observation focusing heavily on non-academic routines.

Focus Area 2: Academic Achievement

- **What data explains differences in educational achievement among the five districts?**

[Document Review](#)

[Number of Teachers/Students Per Grade \(Including SE and EL students\) by School](#)

Table 6 captures the number of teachers in each grade K-8, the number of classes for each grade, and the number of students in each class, including special education and EL students. It also offers information about additional services provided by support staff in special education and EL services, specialists, and programs contained within each school.

The data shows that Oak Bluffs, followed by Edgartown and West Tisbury, are the largest schools in terms of the number of classes per grade level as well as the number of students. Chilmark has the smallest student population with the other four elementary schools more than 5-6 times as large. These four schools also provide grades 6-8, with Chilmark sending their students to Tisbury School. The smallest student to teacher ratio is in Chilmark, with an average ratio in grades one and two of 9:1.

	Oak Bluffs	Chilmark	Edgartown	West Tisbury	Tisbury
# of Classes per Grade	K - 3	K - 1	K - 3	K - 2	K - 2
	1 - 2	1/2 - 1	1 - 3	1 - 2	1 - 2
	2 - 3	1/2 - 1	2 - 3	2 - 2	2 - 2
	3 - 3	3/4 - 1	3 - 2	3 - 2	3 - 2
	4 - 3	3/4 - 1	4 - 2	4 - 2	4 - 2
	5 - 3	5 - 1	5 - 3	5 - 2	5 - 2
	6 - 3	6 - 0	6 - 2	6 - 3	6 - 2
	7 - 3	7 - 0	7 - 2	7 - 3	7 - 2
	8 - 3	8 - 0	8 - 2	8 - 3	8 - 2
		<u>Total: 26</u>	<u>Total: 6</u>	<u>Total: 22</u>	<u>Total: 21</u>

# of Teachers per Grade	K - 3	K - 1	K - 3	K - 2	K - 2
	1 - 2	1 - 1	1/2 - 1	1 - 2	1 - 2
	2 - 3	2 - 1	1/2 - 1	2 - 2	2 - 2
	3 - 3	3 - 1	3/4 - 1	3 - 2	3 - 2
	4 - 3	4 - 1	3/4 - 1	4 - 2	4 - 2
	5 - 3	5 - 1	5 - 3	5 - 2	5 - 2
	6 - 3	6 - 0	6 - 2	6 - 3	6 - 2
	7 - 3	7 - 0	7 - 2	7 - 3	7 - 2
	8 - 3	8 - 0	8 - 2	8 - 3	8 - 2
	<u>Total: 26</u>	<u>Total: 6</u>	<u>Total: 22</u>	<u>Total: 21</u>	<u>Total: 18</u>
	Oak Bluffs	Chilmark	Edgartown	West Tisbury	Tisbury
# of Students per Grade	K - 40	K - 14	K - 44	K - 33	K - 26
	1 - 32	1 - 9	1 - 35	1 - 26	1 - 28
	2 - 45	2 - 9	2 - 38	2 - 26	2 - 34
	3 - 47	3 - 15	3 - 34	3 - 34	3 - 36
	4 - 33	4 - 15	4 - 37	4 - 31	4 - 37
	5 - 51	5 - 12	5 - 50	5 - 39	5 - 38
	6 - 41	6 - n/a	6 - 37	6 - 41	6 - 28
	7 - 47	7 - n/a	7 - 38	7 - 53	7 - 28
	8 - 39	8 - n/a	8 - 37	8 - 46	8 - 22
	<u>Total: 375</u>	<u>Total: 74</u>	<u>Total: 350</u>	<u>Total: 328</u>	<u>Total: 277</u>

# of SE Students	<u>OB</u>	<u>CHIL</u>	<u>EDG</u>	<u>WT</u>	<u>TIS</u>
	K - 6	K - 3	K - 5	K - 7	K - 3
1 - 2	1 - 1	1 - 6	1 - 7	1 - 5	
2 - 8	2 - 4	2 - 5	2 - 2	2 - 5	
3 - 10	3 - 4	3 - 9	3 - 9	3 - 0	
4 - 11	4 - 4	4 - 9	4 - 8	4 - 0	
5 - 11	5 - 3	5 - 12	5 - 10	5 - 0	
6 - 8	6 - n/a	6 - 6	6 - 6	6 - 0	
7 - 13	7 - n/a	7 - 10	7 - 10	7 - 0	
8 - 9	8 - n/a	8 - 7	8 - 13	8 - 0	
<u>Total: 78</u>	<u>Total: 19</u>	<u>Total: 70</u>	<u>Total: 72</u>	<u>Total: 13*</u> *no data 3-8	
	Oak Bluffs	Chilmark	Edgartown	West Tisbury	Tisbury
# of EL Students	K - 9	K - 0	K - 14	K - 2	K - 0
1 - 10	1 - 0	1 - 10	1 - 3	1 - 0	
2 - 13	2 - 0	2 - 6	2 - 3	2 - 0	
3 - 13	3 - 0	3 - 2	3 - 1	3 - 12	
4 - 4	4 - 0	4 - 3	4 - 2	4 - 11	
5 - 5	5 - 0	5 - 4	5 - 1	5 - 5	
6 - 1	6 - n/a	6 - 1	6 - 0	6 - 0	
7 - 9	7 - n/a	7 - 3	7 - 1	7 - 0	
8 - 5	8 - n/a	8 - 0	8 - 1	8 - 0	
<u>Total: 69</u>	<u>Total: 0</u>	<u>Total: 43</u>	<u>Total: 12</u>	<u>Total: 28*</u> *no data K-2/6-8	

# of ELL/SE/ Classroom Assistants Per Grade	Oak Bluffs	Chilmark	Edgartown	West Tisbury	Tisbury
	K-3	K-1	K-3	K-2	K-2
	1-2	1-1.5	1-3	1-2	1-2
	2-3	2-1.5	2-3	2-2	2-2
	3-3	3-1	3-2	3-2	3-2
	4-3	4 -1	4-2	4-2	4-2
	5-0	5-1	5-2	5-1	5-2
	6-4	6-n/a	6-2	6-0	6-2
	7-3	7-n/a	7-2	7-5.67	7-2
	8-0	8-n/a	8-2	8-1	8-2
	<u>Total: 21</u>	<u>Total: 7</u>	<u>Total: 21</u>	<u>Total: 17.67</u>	<u>Total: 18</u>

Table 6: Number of Teachers/Students per Grade Level

The largest population of students receiving special education services is Oak Bluffs (78 students), followed by West Tisbury (72 students). The largest population of students receiving EL services is Oak Bluffs (69) followed by Edgartown (43).

According to documents received from the district:

- **Oak Bluffs** offers seven specials, one math support teacher and two reading specialists.
- **Edgartown** information not available.
- **West Tisbury** offers six specials.

- **Tisbury** offers one math specialist and one literacy specialist for the upper grades. In grades K-4 there are four math and literacy specialists, one of which is an overlapping special education teacher.
- **Chilmark** has a .8 math specialist and a .8 literacy specialist and offers five specials.

While content-area specialists exist in at least four of the five schools, not all are available across all grade levels. In West Tisbury, for example, there are no content-area specialists listed.

Staffing Qualifications and Roles/Responsibilities

The following information was obtained in reviewing the staffing qualifications and roles/responsibilities of teaching staff among the five elementary schools:

- **Chilmark** - Chilmark shows that of six (6) general education teachers, 4(4) are SEI endorsed, which is a mandatory requirement for classroom teachers. One (1) teacher currently shows as not SEI endorsed, while there is no information on licensure or endorsement for one teacher. One special educator is identified as having SEI endorsement.
- **Edgartown** - All classroom teachers are licensed with SEI endorsement.
- **Oak Bluffs** - Almost all teaching staff members are licensed and have SEI endorsement. One teaching staff member does not have a waiver to teach, and one staff member whose license has expired.
- **Tisbury** - All classroom teachers, special educators and EI teachers are licensed and possess SEI endorsement.
- **West Tisbury** - All classroom teachers, special educators, and administrators are licensed and SEI endorsed.

Overall, data indicates that the teaching staff across all five elementary schools is up-to-date in licensure and SEI endorsement with few exceptions. The status of those

individuals identified as lacking in either of these areas will be clarified for additional information.

MTSS Framework Used Throughout the Different School Systems - Procedures and Protocols

In Table 7 below, there is evidence of the use of procedures and protocols by Oak Bluffs, West Tisbury and Chilmark. Edgartown and Tisbury, however, identify as emerging without any formal system in place.

MTSS Framework used throughout the different school systems (Tiered systems of support)	
Chilmark	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Weekly MTSS meeting/Child Study pre-referral. ● Small classes; tier 1 support for all, including ESP. ● ESPs in classes are tier 2 ● Literacy and math specialists push in and pull out for tier 3 support. ● GC, lunch bunches, etc. for tier 2/3
Oak Bluffs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Log System ● Child Find meeting with the school psych who meets monthly with grade level teams. ● DCAP and ICAP to provide pre-referral support
Edgartown	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Emerging–nothing formal
West Tisbury	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Weekly MTSS meetings-Grade Level Teams SST pre-referrals to Tiered Supports ● Small inclusive groups; tier 1 support ● ESPs and Specialists in classes are tier 1 and 2 ● Literacy, math and SEL specialists push in and pull out for tier 2 and 3 support, e.g. WIN Blocks and Intervention Blocks ● Co-Taught Classes or portions of classes - lower grades with MTSS tiered intervention in inclusive model
Tisbury	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Emerging- nothing formal
MVRHS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● ICAP meetings and Child Find meetings weekly with referrals as needed. Attendance notifications to parents and students. ● ELL liaisons work to support students through attendance and outreach. ● Flex every day for students and teachers to meet. ● Outside counseling referrals. ● Co-teaching in 9th and 10th grade core classes to push an academic and language supported inclusion model

Table 7: Procedures and Protocols by School

Discipline Data and Procedures - Discipline Approaches Used

The Discipline and Data Procedures by School in Table 8 confirms the presence of handbooks for each of the elementary schools. The following editions were provided: Tisbury (24-25 edition); West Tisbury (no date was provided); Oak Bluffs (24-25 edition, however, the signature page indicates a date of 23-24 and there is no Table of Content); Chilmark and Edgartown (25-26 editions).

Oak Bluffs - The handbook refers to the Social Curriculum as a goal to “create a safe, challenging and joyful environment for all students to learn.” It then speaks to the skills, modeling by adults, and logical consequences to mitigate the breaking of school rules, which are also listed.

Evidence of Positive Behavioral Approaches is not present in the handbook, however, Oak Bluffs did provide its procedures based on a combination of restorative and progressive discipline and as indicated, the use of *Zones of Regulation* “to support students and maintain a positive school climate.” As stated below:

“When a behavior incident occurs, teachers’ complete behavior log through the PowerSchool platform. The logs are then sent to school administrators and guidance counselors.”

Edgartown - Provides in its handbook, extensive information under the section entitled, “SCHOOL RULES, which speaks to, and honors, both that of the whole school as well as the learning agreements that apply to each individual classroom. In addition, the following information is provided:

- Expectations are explained in greater depth below each of these sub-headings:
 1. Be Respectful of Our School Community
 2. Be a Responsible Member of Our School Community
 3. Be Safe and Healthy in Our School
 4. Be Ready to Fully Participate in School Including Dress
- Recess Rules
- Lunchroom Rules
- Dress Code
- Specific Clothing Requirement
- Consequence for Dress Code Violation

- Use of Electronic Devices and School Internet
- Internet Safety Policy & Compliance with the Children's Internet Protection Act
- Cell Phones and Telephone Use
- Animals in School
- Smoking/Vaping
- Consequences, Interventions, and Disciplinary Actions
- Detention
- Suspension

There is evidence of *Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports* strategies being used. Edgartown also provides in its handbook extensive information on its multi-tiered system of supports for behavior and identifies itself as a *Responsive Classroom* school, that uses this systemic approach toward building a successful and safe learning environment. The gradual tiers of progressive discipline under this approach are outlined in the Handbook. On Table 8, however, there is indication that no formal process is used.

Tisbury - The handbook summarizes student behavior expectations followed by a series of steps in situations of non-compliance and resulting consequences outlined in sections referred to as: Detention, Student Guidelines; SPED Corrective Actions; Bullying and Intimidation; and a Provision of Academic Alert (grades 5-8).

There is evidence of *Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports* strategies in the handbook. The school indicates it uses *Zones of Regulation* informally.

West Tisbury - The handbook provides a *Code of Conduct* followed by consequences for Violations of the *Code of Conduct* including suspension and due process.

There is no evidence of *Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports* approaches in the handbook, however, the school indicates that it uses *Responsive Classroom*, the *Yale RULER* approach, and *Think Kids*.

Chilmark - Provides the *Martha's Vineyard Public Schools Student Conduct and Discipline Section* that outlines the school rules, non-discrimination policy, harassment

policy and procedure, and discipline procedural due process. There is also a section entitled *Behavioral Guidelines* in which reasonable consequences are emphasized and given in a progressive manner and outlined in this section.

Evidence of *Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports* strategies are somewhat present. The school indicates that it uses *Zones of Regulation* and the *Spots* curriculum, and that all teachers are trained in *Responsive Classroom*.

Discipline data and procedures (student handbooks) ○ What is the discipline approach? Do you have PBIS? Zones of Regulation? etc.					
OB	EDG	WT	TIS	MVRHS	CHIL
Handbook in folder	Handbook in Folder	Handbook in folder	Handbook in folder	Handbook in folder	Handbook in folder
PBIS: No <i>Zones of Regulation</i>	PBIS: No No formal Process	PBIS: No Responsive Classroom Yale RULER Approach <i>Think Kids</i>	PBIS: No <i>Zones of Regulation:</i> Not formally	PBIS: No <i>Zones of Regulation:</i> No SAO overview Overview and pass system	PBIS: No <i>Zones of Regulation</i> and <i>Spots</i> curriculum All teachers are trained in Responsive Classroom

Table 8: Discipline and Data Procedures by School

Summary: Handbooks were available for all five elementary schools, however, all were not updated to reflect the current year, according to what was submitted. One of the five schools demonstrated evidence of using a social-emotional curriculum resource, while the other four schools used portions or admitted to not having a formal program in place.

Discipline Data - Only Oak Bluffs provided discipline data for this report. That data is shown in Table 9 below:

Oak Bluffs Discipline Data

High Frequency Incidents	Types of Incidents	Total Number of Incidents
	Disruptive Behavior – 120	120
	Physical Incidents	84
	Disrespect	60
	Defiance	50
	Language	42
Moderate Concerns		
	Body Shaming/Teaming	36
	Threats	25
	Defacing School Property	22
	Attendance Issues	21
	Bus Incidents	20
Lower Frequency Incidents		
	Tardiness, Honor Code Violations, Gum, Suspensions, Phone, Leaving Class	12-15
Very Low Incidents		
	Fighting, Racial, Stealing, Hacking, Sexual Comments, Skipping Class, Broken CB, Illegal Substance	<7

Table 9: Oak Bluffs Discipline Data

Summary: It is unclear whether all elementary schools maintain discipline data and/or how that data is collected. An effective system shared by all schools would be beneficial in establishing a clear picture of the issues, disciplinary measures, and concerns for students across the schools. By doing so, this would provide additional resources to mitigate behaviors and to support students, schools and families, e.g. Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) approach. The areas for consideration would be recommended as follows: consequences and progress disciplinary steps; the collection of data through incident reports; records of follow-up by administrators; and a repository for entering that data to maintain documentation which is necessary for reporting to DESE.

Schedules for Related Service Providers and Support Staff

Chilmark - Two schedules of service providers were provided for this review. In both cases, the schedules showed multiple non-service or non-teaching periods throughout the week. For example, guidance filled 8 out of 11 periods on two days of the week, 6 out of 11 periods a day on one day of the week, and 5 out of 11 periods a day on day of the week based on a full-week schedule.

A math specialist schedule showed a total of total hours of service provision as 2 hours and 15 minutes one day a week and 1 hour and 45 minutes the remaining days a week based on a full-week schedule.

Edgartown - Provided 5 general education staff schedules that showed a 30-minute lunch and 1 planning period per day for @ 50 minutes. Likewise, the 4 ELL teachers had a 30-minute lunch and had up to one hour prep times throughout the week in addition to short transition periods of @ 10 minutes between classes. Edgartown also has 3 reading specialists. Lunch was @ 40 minutes per day and preps ran from 1.5 hours one day a week to 50-minute preps four x per week. The physical therapist had 1 prep 4 of the 5 days per week with 2 preps on one day.

The Physical Therapist had .5-hour pre and .5-hour travel and lunch 4 days per week.

There are 2 occupational therapists. In addition to a .5 Hour lunch they receive a 1-hour pre two days a week and a .5-hour prep 3 days a week. The Speech-Language Pathologist shows a lunch; however, no times are provided on the schedule. There is also one ESP schedule showing that a lunch is provided and 10–20-minute breaks between classes. There are no prep times.

Oak Bluffs - The two ELL teacher schedules show a lunch and prep combined of 50 minutes (20 minutes of prep and 30 minutes of lunch) and an additional prep of 35 minutes per day. The SLP schedule shows a 45-minute lunch with no indication of a prep time and several open blocks between students. The special educator shows a lunch and consistent prep time throughout the week. The math specialist has lunch and a single 45-minute prep each day. The reading specialist schedule shows a prep time each morning for 40 minutes and a half hour lunch each day. There is a 15-minute break period each afternoon.

West Tisbury - The part-time teacher/part-time ESP schedule shows a 30-minute lunch and half hour planning period per day. A second ESP schedule shows a 30-minute lunch and only ten minutes in the morning break but does not indicate that this is a prep period. A second part-time teacher/part-time ESP who works only 3.5 days a week has a lunch and 30-minute planning period on those days in which they are in. There is one special education schedule. The ESL schedule shows a 30-minute lunch and 30-minute planning period per day.

Tisbury - Schedules were not available.

Summary: In Focus Area 2, we looked at data to determine the causes of differing educational achievement among the five districts. First, we reviewed the number of teachers in each grade at each K-8 school and the number of students in each class, including special education. Overall, data indicates that the teaching staff across all five elementary schools is up-to-date in licensure and SEI endorsement with few exceptions.

The status of those individuals identified as lacking in either of these areas will be clarified for additional information.

There is evidence of the use of procedures and protocols based on the MTSS Framework by Oak Bluffs, West Tisbury and Chilmark. Edgartown and Tisbury, however, identify as emerging, without any formal system in place.

Handbooks were available for all five elementary schools, however, all were not updated to reflect the current year, according to what was submitted. One of the five schools demonstrated evidence of using a social-emotional curriculum resource, while the other four schools used portions or admitted to not having a formal program in place. Discipline data could not be reviewed as information was only submitted by one elementary school.

In our review of schedules for related service providers and support staff, it was noted that planning times were inconsistent in terms of the number of service hours per day that these staff members provided. While there was a common thread between content area and general education teachers of having a half-hour lunch and 45–50-minute planning time daily. In these two areas, each school's schedules varied by both lunch and planning times, with some providers having extended planning times, and unfilled service provision blocks. This leads to questions of effectiveness and efficiency within the schools and raises the question of cost-savings for related service providers and support staff who are not teaching full day sessions.

Interviews

All interview participants were questioned on this focus area, which contained a total of four questions in this section of the regionalization study. While principals were asked three questions, other roles received between one and two questions.

The initial inquiry directed to all participants was a crucial element of this investigation. Specifically, individuals were presented with the following question: *Beyond test scores,*

what other indicators or data do you consider when assessing educational success (student engagement, social-emotional growth, career readiness)?

This question was designed to purposefully move the discussion away from traditional, purely academic metrics and elicit a broader, more holistic understanding of what constitutes genuine educational success. The inclusion of parenthetical examples such as student engagement, social-emotional growth, and career readiness, was intended to guide respondents toward non-cognitive and practical life-skill domains, encouraging them to elaborate on the more nuanced and complex facets of student development that contribute to long-term well-being and post-school success. The data gathered from this foundational question is essential for understanding the current landscape of educational assessment and for advocating for a more comprehensive framework of student evaluation.

The interviewees collectively highlight that tracking student success across the island schools involves a combination of academic, social-emotional, and engagement measures. Still, approaches and systems vary in scope, consistency, and effectiveness.

Similarities: All interviewees emphasized a multifaceted approach to monitoring student progress, including academic performance, social-emotional learning (SEL), and engagement. Individualized indicators, such as IEP goals, classroom participation, and teacher observations are central to understanding student growth. Academic progress is tracked using a mix of formal assessments and progress-monitoring tools, including iReady, MCLASS, and school-specific assessments. SEL and behavioral development are monitored through logs, check-ins, structured programs, and specialized tools such as VOCAL, SESLS, RULER, and community partnerships. All participants recognized challenges with data consistency and comparability across schools and years. Schools rely heavily on teacher knowledge and formative assessments, and cross-district monitoring is limited. Additionally, the interviewees consistently point to the importance of community and family partnerships in supporting student outcomes.

Differences Some interviewees emphasized a holistic view of student success, including career readiness and engagement. SEL programs, profession-gearred class rotations, and post-high school planning are highlighted, with outside-the-classroom activities such as sports serving as informal indicators of engagement.

Others focused on systemic structures, regionalization efforts, and behavioral health supports. It details the use of specific SEL tools (EDSCS, VOCAL, SESLS), MedStar clinicians, social workers, and dedicated PD budgets. Efforts to regionalize curriculum and assessment practices are underway, though comparative data across schools remain limited.

Some individuals concentrated on operational challenges and centralized monitoring, including inconsistent use of PowerSchool, a lack of structured tracking systems, and selective use of district-level indicators. Strengths in community engagement and centralized monitoring of former and EL students are noted, but systematic tracking is limited.

Overall, the interviewees revealed that while schools employ a mix of individualized and formalized measures to track student success, inconsistencies in data collection, cross-district coordination, and monitoring systems limit the ability to have a fully integrated picture of student growth. While some highlighted outcomes, others highlighted systemic and regionalized supports, and a small group highlighted operational and monitoring challenges, collectively illustrating areas for potential improvement.

The second question asked principals: *How does your district's performance compare with the other four districts in the region? And what factors do you believe most contribute to achievement differences among the five districts (e.g., funding, staffing, curriculum alignment, student demographics, community resources)?*

Principals noted that comparing their district's performance to others in the region is challenging due to differences in student populations, program offerings, and school

missions. One principal pointed out that the local charter school is not a useful comparison because its goals and structure are very different. When compared with other feeder elementary schools, differences in school culture and personality were highlighted as contributing factors.

Principals emphasized several key factors that influence achievement differences among districts:

- **Student demographics:** Districts vary widely in the proportion of English Learners (EL) and students with special needs. The district with the highest percentage of EL students has implemented a successful co-teaching model to integrate them into general education, which has positively impacted performance. Growth in special education enrollment has also prompted increased staffing and support.
- **Funding and staffing:** Stability and low turnover among teachers have been cited as critical for maintaining growth and supporting consistent programming. Loss of educational support personnel (ESPs) is a concern, but strategic staffing adjustments have helped address student needs.
- **Curriculum alignment and professional development:** Principals highlighted strong, district-wide implementation of math curriculum, collaborative planning time, and participation in shared PD as important contributors to success. Visiting other schools to observe curriculum in practice and sharing learning has strengthened teaching practices.
- **School culture and relationships:** Positive relationships between staff, principals, and teachers, along with a collaborative and supportive culture, were repeatedly noted as key to sustaining achievement and engagement.
- **Community factors:** Frequent student mobility on the island and informal parent conversations about other districts contribute to perceptions of performance differences.

Regarding standardized testing, principals reported strong MCAS performance, noting that the district has exceeded targets, though statewide comparisons are limited due to differences in size, diversity, and programs offered. Principals stressed that

achievement is not solely reflected in test scores, citing strengths in public speaking, problem solving, and other outcomes not captured by standardized assessments.

In sum, principals attribute differences in district performance to a combination of student demographics, staffing stability, curriculum implementation, school culture, and community factors, while emphasizing that standardized test scores capture only part of the district's broader educational successes.

Principals in the study were asked a critical, open-ended question: *Are there particular programs, policies, or practices in your district that you think influence achievement outcomes (positively or negatively)?*

This broad inquiry sought qualitative insights into systemic factors, from curricula to administrative policies, that principals perceive as driving student success or struggle. The goal was to move beyond standardized metrics to identify context-specific district initiatives that either leverage improvement or create barriers to equitable achievement. Principals identified a variety of programs, policies, and practices that positively influence student achievement, while also noting areas with limitations or uneven impact.

Positive Influences

- **Instructional Programs and Curriculum:** Principals highlighted the implementation of the new HMH reading curriculum, Reveal Math, and the RULER social-emotional learning program as having strong positive impacts. The transition to structured co-teaching and multi-age classrooms has supported differentiated instruction, inclusion of students with special needs, and student collaboration. Orton-Gillingham practices and Haggerty exercises have been integrated into new curricula, helping staff adapt and maintain evidence-based practices.

- **Staffing and Facilities:** Increased staffing for special education and ESL, as well as recently renovated spaces, has enabled programs to operate more effectively and meet student needs. Principals noted that stable, well-supported staff contributes to consistency and program success.
- **Enrichment and Experiential Learning:** Hands-on and off-campus programs, such as multi-day outings, sailing, and ski trips, have provided unique learning opportunities, fostered leadership, and encouraged risk-taking in safe environments. After-school programming, including homework clubs and ESY, supplements classroom learning and broadens access to enrichment.

Areas of Challenge or Limitation

- **Policy Gaps:** Current policies around attendance, teacher prep time, and class scheduling create inconsistencies and inequities. There is limited leverage to enforce attendance or standardize practices across buildings. Principals noted that some policies rely on tradition rather than strategic implementation.
- **Transition and Regionalization Concerns:** While most principals are optimistic about potential regionalization, they anticipate that changes may impact younger grades more than older ones, particularly regarding transitions and program alignment.
- **Integration of Programs:** Maintaining coherence when introducing new curricula and balancing legacy practices requires careful planning and support for teachers, particularly in co-teaching and intervention programs.

Overall, principals emphasized that programmatic support, strategic staffing, small class sizes, leadership opportunities, and experiential learning have a strong positive influence on achievement, while policy inconsistencies and systemic gaps present ongoing challenges.

The final question in this focus area was deliberately posed to a more select, smaller cohort of participants rather than the entire survey population. This was done to allow for a deeper, more nuanced exploration of a specific, complex topic that required specialized knowledge or a particular lived experience. They were specifically asked to provide detailed, qualitative responses regarding their perceptions and experiences with [insert specific topic of the final question here, e.g., the long-term impact of the pilot

program on community engagement]. The intention behind this focused approach was to gather richer, more in-depth data that could not be adequately captured through standard, broad-based multiple-choice questions.

Interviewees indicated that while some district-level student achievement data are tracked, there is limited centralized analysis, and much of the responsibility currently falls on individual schools. Tools mentioned include Edwin Analytics, PowerSchool, Teach Point, MCAS, MClass, iReady, Aimsweb, and benchmark assessments, typically administered three times per year.

At the district level, this data is primarily used to monitor student growth, inform scheduling, and guide instructional support. Data teams have been established to review evidence of student learning, including weekly exit cards, which help teachers and administrators assess progress and determine next steps. One person, however, noted that identifying which specific data points to track and how to use them effectively is still a work in progress.

In summary, district-level data tracking exists but is in development, with schools largely managing their own information, and central office efforts focused on summative assessments and supporting instructional decision-making.

Focus Groups

In Focus Area 2, we asked one question related to the overarching question: *What data explains the differences in educational achievement among the five districts?* In doing so, we sought to better understand how students were assessed, and what they were assessed on, in other words, what each school prioritized as important in collecting data to better understand the needs of each learner.

The question that was asked in this section was: *Beyond test scores, what other indicators, or data, do you consider when assessing educational success (student engagement, social-emotional growth, career readiness)?* Participants responded to the question by listing the various benchmark assessment methods used in each of the

schools for ELA and math such as I-Ready, Aimsweb, MCLASS (for Amplify), Easy CBM, and IXL. Some schools also use adaptive online assessments like STAMP for language proficiency and DELTA MATH for math. Tracking of K-8 students in math varies by school, leading to inconsistencies, and there is no system-wide assessment.

Participants also noted that there were different schedules and scheduling approaches across the various middle schools, inconsistent "time on learning" within subjects, and disparities in multilingual learners, socio-economic levels, and housing among towns, all of which affect educational outcomes.

Participants felt that student transfers between towns also created challenges. While some schools use social-emotional questionnaires and wellness classes, there is a desire for more uniformity in record-keeping, especially for MTSS (Multi-Tiered System of Supports), and better access to and training for systems like PowerSchool for discipline input.

Classroom Observations

Section 2: Curriculum Planning (Standard I-A)	
The lesson uses instructional materials that reflect grade-level demands of the content standards and evidence-based practices and demonstrates a clear focus on embedded language development.	
b. The lesson supports students in developing disciplinary literacy.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Students have opportunities to practice disciplinary language and target language functions and features, aligned to content and language objectives.</i> • <i>The lesson is grounded in language objectives that highlight target language functions and features related to the content of the lesson.</i> • <i>The lesson includes targeted language development aligned to grade-appropriate English language development standards.</i> 	
Yes	12
Mostly	5
Partially	3
Not Yet	0
Not Observed	8

The document is an observation summary focused on the development of disciplinary literacy across various schools, grade levels, and subjects. The key supports for disciplinary literacy include practicing disciplinary language, aligning lessons with language objectives, and integrating targeted language development consistent with grade-appropriate English language development standards.

Classroom observations across schools (High School, Oak Bluffs, West Tisbury, Chilmark, Edgartown, and Tisbury), showed a strong focus on language use in many instances, such as discussing moral dilemmas, utilizing strategies like think/pair/share, focusing on related language in science and math, and emphasizing word development/sentence structure in ELA. Teachers were noted for expecting students to use specific disciplinary vocabulary and language-rich materials.

A few observations noted concerns, including student disengagement, students copying responses, missing posted objectives, and one instance of a student's individual issues being announced to the class. Other positive points included students demonstrating inquiry-based processes.

Section 2: Curriculum Planning (Standard I-A)	
The lesson uses instructional materials that reflect grade-level demands of the content standards and evidence-based practices and demonstrates a clear focus on embedded language development.	
c. The lesson is grounded in a clear purpose that is visible and/or shared or co-constructed with students.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The lesson is connected to prior and/or upcoming lessons.</i> • <i>The objectives of the lesson are clear and shared with students.</i> • <i>The lesson is grounded in an anchoring essential question, genuine topic, problem, issue, or phenomenon connected to the content standards and/or practices.</i> 	
Yes	9
Mostly	7
Partially	1
Not Yet	0
Not Observed	11

Observations centered on the "Lesson Purpose and Connection" domain revealed several strengths in implementation across the reviewed school settings. A notable achievement in many lessons was the successful establishment of continuity by connecting new material to students' prior knowledge. This essential instructional practice positively ensured that students could anchor the upcoming content within their existing cognitive framework.

Furthermore, a significant number of observed lessons featured objectives that were either visibly clear or explicitly shared with the students, providing a strong foundation for understanding the learning goals. Where opportunities for growth were identified, the focus is on maximizing the visibility and clarity of the lesson's purpose and objectives. Explicitly listing these elements will further empower students to understand the *why* behind the learning activity and effectively monitor their own progress toward the intended outcome.

The inclusion of real-world connections in some observed lessons demonstrates a promising start toward making content more relevant and engaging for students, indicating a clear potential for broader integration. Crucially, an exemplary instance was recorded where the instructor specifically highlighted a connection to future learning, effectively illustrating how the day's lesson served as a foundational building block for subsequent academic content. This forward-looking perspective is a powerful tool for motivating students and demonstrating the long-term utility of the material. In sum, the strong practice of linking to past learning provides a solid base, and continued development will focus on ensuring transparent objectives and embedding practical, future-oriented relevance to enrich the student experience.

Section 3: Instruction (Standard II-A, II-B)

All students engage in the complex thinking and ideas of the lesson through instructional practices and pedagogy that are evidence-based, inclusive, and culturally and linguistically sustaining.

b. Students receive flexible scaffolds and supports, when necessary, so that all students can engage in grade-level work.

- *Teacher(s) provide scaffolds as necessary to allow all diverse learners, including students with disabilities, English learners, and former English learners, to work towards the same grade-level objectives as their peers.*
- *Teacher(s) include strategic linguistic scaffolds (orally and/or in writing) that preserve the cognitive complexity of the tasks so all learners can access and demonstrate understanding of grade-level material.*
- *Students access resources, visual supports, and strategies when needed to persevere through challenging tasks.*

Yes	11
Mostly	6
Partially	2
Not Yet	0
Not Observed	9

This observation report details instances of scaffolds and supports used to promote grade-level engagement, as well as identified gaps and areas for improvement.

Key Scaffolds Observed: Strategic supports (including linguistic) were used to maintain cognitive complexity and work toward grade-level objectives. Specific examples include using visual aids (maps, web diagrams, color-coded clocks), small groups, prior knowledge activation, manipulatives, and individualized learning stations.

Key Gaps/Areas for Improvement Noted: Concerns included a complete lack of strategic scaffolds, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), or Differentiated Instruction (DI) in several observed classes. Other issues involved a significant content shift, privacy concerns related to a teacher "calling out" individual students' issues, and several administrative "Not observed" or "no/ob." reports.

Section 3: Instruction (Standard II-A, II-B)

All students engage in the complex thinking and ideas of the lesson through instructional practices and pedagogy that are evidence-based, inclusive, and culturally and linguistically sustaining.

c. All students participate in high-quality student-to-student academic discourse (in pairs, small groups, and/or whole class), to clarify or improve their understanding of grade-level content.

- *Teacher(s) facilitate purposeful student-to-student discourse that is aligned to the goals of the lesson.*
- *Students use academic/disciplinary language and/or target language functions and features during discourse.*
- *Students negotiate the meaning of complex texts and/or topics by asking questions, referring to the text or task, responding directly to their peers, and/or respectfully challenging each other's thinking.*
- *Within group work, all students are engaged and contributing to the group's discussion.*

Yes	10
Mostly	4
Partially	5
Not Yet	2
Not Observed	7

The core expectation is to improve High-Quality Student-to-Student Academic Discourse, where all students actively discuss content to deepen understanding. Observations show mixed success: some classes exhibit strong alignment using specific models like Think/Pair/Share and CERO, but many others struggle with low engagement, minimal or absent student-to-student talk, a focus on procedural rather than academic content, and predominantly teacher-led discourse. Overall, most classes need significant growth to ensure student-to-student discourse is consistently academic, purposeful, and involves complex content negotiation.

Focus Area 3: Efficiency and Effectiveness

- ***How could one district make the educational process more efficient?***

[Document Review](#)

In this focus area, we looked at district strategic plans which were provided as school improvement plans, as well as staffing contracts and staffing turnover rates of teachers, staff, and administrators. No district plan developed by the Central Office was provided.

School Improvement Plans - What are your district's initiatives?

Chilmark - Chilmark has a two-year School Improvement Plan that runs from 2024-2026. The plan identifies five (5 main goals) and planning steps, however, it does not demonstrate the measures of success necessary to know if the goals have been met.

The goals are as follows:

- **Goal 1: Refine and codify the school's education framework.** This includes clarifying their approach to multi-age education and project-based learning, and providing professional development.
- **Goal 2: Ensure an inclusive, welcoming, and belonging-fostering school environment.** This involves assessing and increasing DEIB understanding, anti-racist practices, and improving community communication.
- **Goal 3: Provide academic and social-emotional support that meets the needs of all students.** This focuses on implementing an MTSS cycle, examining literacy instruction, providing guidance support, piloting co-teaching, and establishing a school-wide behavior management approach.
- **Goal 4: Review, evaluate, and catalog all school traditions.** The aim is to honor, update, and clearly define traditions to reflect current values and support inclusion.
- **Goal 5: Create a sustainable school environment.** This involves collaborating on sustainability efforts, reducing energy use with a goal to become fossil fuel-free by 2040, and strengthening interdisciplinary learning about the environment and sustainability.

Edgartown - Edgartown identified the submitted School Improvement Plan as the 2024-2026 School Year, however, the Plan is titled, "2025-2026 (Draft) Edgartown School Improvement Plan. It is created in a chart form and identifies the goal, action, who is responsible, and outcome for each of four target areas listed below:

Target Area #1: Social Emotional Learning / Culture

- Continue and expand training in Collaborative Problem Solving (CPS) for staff.
- Increase the percentage of staff trained in Responsive Classroom.
- Offer Safety Care Training to increase staff preparedness.

Target Area #2: Instructional (assessments, curriculums, models)

- Teachers will follow a scope and sequence for continuity in ELA curriculum, with summer work and ongoing professional development.
- Expand and evaluate the effectiveness of the Co-teaching Initiative, including EL and SPED teachers.
- Implement the HMH ELA Curriculum in K-5, with material purchase and initial teacher training before summer 2025.
- Evaluate and improve the 6-8 ELA program through staff discussions.
- Examine and evaluate the K-8 math curriculum in 2025-2026 with the goal of selecting a new curriculum in 2026-2027.
- Retain the school's 3-8 drama program.
- Expand enrichment opportunities by exploring curriculums and hiring an enrichment teacher in 2026-2027.

Target Area #3: Facilities

- Reduce reliance on fossil fuels by pursuing a grant to replace the oil-fired heating system and exploring air conditioning.
- Complete the Outdoor Learning Campus Project (OLCP) - Phase 1 and Phase 2.
- Pursue solar power options for the school's energy source.
- Repair lighting and sound electrical work on the main stage.

Target Area #4: Community and Culture

- Ensure equity and access to school curriculum and programs by providing continued professional development and forming an Equity Audit Committee.
- Increase positive family engagement by scheduling events like an "Evening of the Arts/STEAM Event," a literacy night, and a math night.

Oak Bluffs - The Oak Bluffs School Improvement Plan is designed for the FY25-FY26 School Year. The plan also presents in chart form and is divided into the following categories for each of the objectives: Baseline Data/Indicators of Success/Measurement Methods/Implementation Plan/Person(s) Responsible/Date. It is unclear if the date listed for each of the objectives is the date that the objective is/was expected to be met or if the date the objective was being addressed.

The plan outlines three main objectives:

Objective 1: To create a process for tracking, implementing, and communicating discipline

- **Rationale:** The school needs a more structured process for discipline.
- **Goal:** Increase communication and create consistent, transparent processes for discipline infractions.
- **Implementation:** Utilize the information system (PowerSchool) for teachers, counselors, and administrators to track behaviors and provide support. Employ alternative discipline strategies like restorative practices, Responsive Classroom, THINK KIDS, and Collaborative Problem Solving.

Objective 2: To successfully implement a new evidence-based K-5 English Language Arts (ELA) program

- **Rationale:** MCAS scores indicate a need for more consistent ELA instruction and the school is committed to evidence-based literacy.
- **Goal:** Improve instructional consistency, support teacher development, foster inter-district collaboration, and increase student proficiency in reading and writing (10% increase on MCAS ELA scores over 2025 baseline).
- **Implementation:**
 - Provide comprehensive professional development for K-5 teachers on the new ELA program.
 - Build weekly PLC time for ELA collaboration and establish cross-grade vertical planning days.
 - Establish regional ELA collaboration with other Island schools, aligning pacing guides and assessments.
 - Train teachers in administering and analyzing benchmark assessments (AIMSWEB, i-Ready, Program-Based Benchmarks) three times per year.
 - Identify and support a teacher leader or hire a literacy coach to guide implementation.
 - Order and distribute new ELA program materials and resources.

Objective 3: To update and complete a safety plan for the Oak Bluffs School

- **Rationale:** The school needs a safety update for building security.
- **Goal:** Expand safety for staff and students, focusing on the physical environment.
- **Implementation:**
 - Work with the Oak Bluffs Police department for lockdown drills and emergency training for staff and students.
 - Update the school safety handbook with police support.
 - Purchase magnets for classroom doors.
 - Use state and national grants for "red claws" in interior doors and M3

- window film for exterior windows.
- Conduct 2-4 safety drills with students and staff during the 24/25 school year.

Tisbury - The Tisbury School Improvement Plan is a one-year plan (2025-2026) and outlines in document form three main objectives to improve the school, along with the measurement tools, and indicators:

Objective I: Strengthen supports for students' social-emotional wellness and mental health.

- **Activities:** This includes guidance support, referrals to therapy, social support groups, health classes, partnerships with various organizations (Island-wide Youth Collaborative, MV Mediation), additional outdoor opportunities, access to behavioral health, social-emotional learning, mental health literacy, positive discipline, individualized interventions, parent/family coaching, staff professional development, Wellness Committee support, an updated Wellness Policy, morning meetings, and K-8 assemblies.
- **Measurement tools:** Staff observations, guidance and nurse referral numbers, school climate surveys, and student surveys.
- **Indicators:** Improved survey results, responsive school practices, and an increase in social-emotional learning (SEL) opportunities.

Objective II: Continue to strengthen student, family, and community engagement.

- **Activities:** Increased translation and interpretation services, utilization of PTO and Tisbury School webpages, Open House and Back to School Nights, report cards, parent-teacher conferences, home-school communications, newsletters, K-8 curriculum guides, promoting collaboration with outside support agencies (Island Wide Youth Collaborative, MV Community Services, Island Counseling Center, Island Grown Schools, Tisbury Police Department/School Resource Officer), student council involvement, student community service opportunities, classroom project presentations to families, efforts to engage more ESL families, and cultural celebrations.
- **Measurement tools:** Attendance at parent-teacher conferences and Open House, and active use of online resources.
- **Indicators:** Increased attendance, and positive feedback from the PTO and School Advisory Council (SAC).

Objective III: Strengthen conditions for supporting all types of learners.

- **Activities:** Providing enriched learning opportunities (ELL, Arts, remediation), adding support staff, in-class enrichment, alignment/scheduling of ESP support, student planners, online posting of daily assignments, increased technology (hardware and software), improved assessments (iReady, Aimsweb), Title I supports (Homework Club, instructional materials, reading and math remediation), RTI (MTSS) practices, professional development, summer programming, alternative assessments, and project-based learning opportunities.
- **Measurement tools:** RTI data, MCAS scores, ACCESS scores, parent and teacher feedback, weekly consult meetings, and student performance on classroom and building-based assessments.
- **Indicators:** Improved performance and/or growth among diverse student groups, student satisfaction, and positive parent and teacher feedback through PTO and SAC.

West Tisbury - West Tisbury provided a School Improvement Plan for 2023-2025. It was written in document form and had three goals.

Here are the main points of the West Tisbury School Improvement Plan 2023-2025:

GOAL 1: Strengthen community engagement by fostering partnerships with families in order to create an inclusive, positive learning experience for all students.

- **Activities:** Parent Nights, School Psychologist/counselor forums, SEL (Social Emotional Learning) discussions, using IEP and Parent Question trends for information, Equity Audit/Parent Survey, PTO and family events, Parent Volunteers, Room Parents, Social Media, Principal Coffee, Project Based Learning - Parent Share and Support, Musicals and Music Concerts, inviting parents to see Classroom and School Routines, sharing sports game scores, updating blackboards, a WTS Parent Book Group, in-person meetings and Parent/Teacher conferences, and supportive cafeteria, Quiet Cafe, and Recess routines.
- **Measurable Outcomes:** Parent Engagement and Feedback Surveys, Student Surveys and Feedback Forms, and Attendance/Participation Records.

GOAL 2: Support all students in the attainment of grade-level essential standards. Continue to implement a multi-tiered system of supports, "MTSS."

- **Activities:** Strengthen implementation of WIN (What I Need) blocks for targeted practice, extension, or intervention in core subjects (literacy and math), strengthen and improve regular data cycles for Tier I, Tier II, and Tier III instruction, improve performance of historically marginalized subgroups, investigate and adopt a new

Math Curriculum aligned with Massachusetts State Standards, foster belonging and teach social emotional skills with daily Morning Meetings and SEL instructional blocks/WINs, analyze PBIS (Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports) practices and provide professional development, continue a robust Summer Boost program (academic, social emotional, and specials), and implement Interactive modeling - Responsive Classroom.

- **Measurable Outcomes:** Decrease in students requiring Tier 2 and Tier 3 supports (local data), increase in academic language achievement of English learners (local and ACCESS data), increase in student participation in arts and enrichment, increase in % of students meeting or exceeding on Math, ELA, and Science MCAS, and increase in MCAS SGP on Math and ELA.

GOAL 3: Research current findings on adolescents (middle school age) and share salient information with students, teachers, and parents. Also, identify areas of impact for implementation of research-based practices from findings.

- **Major areas of research focus:** Student Motivation, Screentime (lowtech vs. high tech), Homework practices and expectations, SEL: "Three Signature Practices" and other practices, and Cell phones in schools.
- **Data to be collected:** MVRHS transition, Electives, 8th grade privileges, and Student Counsel Expectations and Feedback.
- **Measurable Outcomes:** Agendas/participation and attendance records of shared information, Student Surveys and Feedback, and Identified area/areas for implementation with action steps and cost estimates.

Summary: Each school provided a School Improvement Plan (SIP), however, each plan was developed for different periods of time, in different formats, and with different goals. Three schools had three (3) goals while two schools had two (2) goals.

Commonalities in these goals included the following:

All five schools had some form of goal/objective related to teaching and learning. One of these schools also looked at research and application of practices related to adolescents. Three schools had goals/objectives related to Social-Emotional Learning. Two Schools had goals related to facilities, including the environmental sustainability of the school's facilities. Three schools focused their goals/objectives on culture and community engagement. One school focused on safety.

One way to create commonality among the elementary schools would be for the District, namely the Superintendent's Office, to have oversight of the School Improvement Plans that are based on a District Strategic Plan. This would include the identification of all, or at least some of the expected goals, the structure of the plan and expectations for the format, and common dates in each plan, and a review of each of the plans by the School Committee Boards. While School Improvement Plans are specific to the needs and focus areas of each school, creating a cohesive district would involve a focus on similar goals and outcomes for the purpose of drawing schools together under a single umbrella.

Staffing Contracts - Five (5) Bargaining Units Join to Create Each Contract

Each agreement is negotiated collectively between the Martha's Vineyard Superintendency Union #19 School Committee, the Martha's Vineyard Regional High School District Committee, the Up-Island Regional School District Committee, and the School Committees of Edgartown, Oak Bluffs, and Tisbury, and the Martha's Vineyard Educators Association (MVEA). While the contracts differ by job roles and responsibilities, all common parties in each school across the island follow the same contract.

The Martha's Vineyard Educators Association Teachers Agreement is a collective bargaining agreement between various Martha's Vineyard school committees and the Martha's Vineyard Educators Association, representing professional teaching employees, counselors, and nurses. The contract is effective from September 1, 2022 to August 31, 2025.

The articles of the contract cover key areas of employment and school operation, including: the recognition of the Association as the exclusive bargaining representative; the Grievance Procedure for resolving contract disputes; protection of professional status teachers from discipline without just cause; procedures for Hiring (salary setting) and vacancies and promotions; rules for resignation; and a detailed evaluation process.

The agreement also specifies the school year (186 days) and comprehensive provisions for various types of leave, including sick leave (up to 15 days/year, accumulating to 200), temporary, personal, extended, career alternative, sabbatical, jury/court, and family leave. Further articles address the Sick Leave Bank, Professional Development and reimbursement, the role of an Advisory Board, class size limits (max 25, with meetings for K-3 > 20 and 4-12 > 22), preparation time (225 minutes/week), student discipline acknowledgement, lunch period (30-minute duty-free), and Insurance contributions.

Operational aspects covered include facilities and the Labor Management Building Safety Committee, school calendar review, and miscellaneous items (e.g., no health/cleaning duties). Financial and organizational articles detail payroll deductions, association dues, retirement (including a potential stipend), the salary schedule (with payment options and educational 'lanes'), and a prohibition on work stoppage. Lastly, procedures for Reduction in Force (RIF), negotiation for new positions, stipulations for extracurricular activities and duties, and policy on substance abuse/EAP and part-time employees are outlined. Appendices provide the detailed salary schedules and stipend categories for extracurricular activities and athletic coaches.

The Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) for the Administrative Support Personnel (ASP) Unit of the Martha's Vineyard Educators Association, covers the period from July 1, 2022 to June 30, 2025.

The key provisions of the agreement address full-time and regular part-time ASPs (excluding certain staff), with provisions covering their employment. The agreement defines four categories for the Work Year and Hours (Full-Time, School Year, and Less Than School Year), outlining their respective entitlements to vacations and holidays. Compensation and Benefits include multi-year salary schedules with annual raises and a one-time payment, annual step advancement based on evaluation, and longevity stipends after 10 years of service. Comprehensive leaves are provided, such as sick

leave (18 days/year, accumulating up to 200 days), a sick leave buy-back program, personal leave, and various unpaid leaves. For Insurance, the employer contributes 75% for health and 50% for dental premiums. Overtime is paid at the regular rate between 35 and 40 hours, and time and one-half over 40 hours with prior approval. Employee Rights and Procedures establishes a four-level grievance process ending in binding arbitration, guarantee just cause for discharge for non-probationary employees, set a 120-day probationary period, and detail a Reduction in Force (RIF) policy based on seniority and competence with a two-year recall right. Other articles cover an annual evaluation by April 1st, encourage staff to participate in at least two days of paid staff development, and include agreements to form specific study committees.

The Agreement between the Martha's Vineyard Superintendency Union #19 School Committee and the Martha's Vineyard Educators Association, representing Educational Support Professionals for July 1, 2022 - August 31, 2025 is a collective bargaining agreement for full-time and part-time Educational Support Professionals (ESPs) employed by Martha's Vineyard Regional High School District and the School Committees of Tisbury, Oak Bluffs, and Edgartown.

For ESPs, the agreement establishes the Association as their exclusive representative, outlines a multi-level grievance procedure, and clarifies job definitions, explicitly excluding curriculum design and parent conferences from their duties. A full-time work year is 184 days, and a full-time employee works at least 30 hours per week. They receive 15 sick days annually (accumulating up to 200), up to 6 days of personal leave, and have a sick bank option. Other financial provisions include overtime pay (time and a half over 40 hours), a \$10.00/hour stipend for substituting for a teacher, a \$5.00/hour differential for working with intensive special needs students, and longevity payments. The employer pays 75% of health and 50% of dental insurance premiums. Employees cannot be discharged without just cause after a 90-day period, and reductions in force are primarily by attrition.

The Agreement between the Martha's Vineyard Superintendency Union #19 School Committee and the Martha's Vineyard Educators Association Custodians for July 1, 2022 - June 30, 2025 is a collective bargaining agreement for full-time and regular part-time custodians across the Martha's Vineyard Superintendency Union, Martha's Vineyard Regional High School District, Up-Island Regional School District, and the School Committees of Edgartown, Oak Bluffs, and Tisbury.

For custodians, the agreement recognizes their association and details a work year of 12 months at 40 hours per week for full-time staff, with 14 paid holidays and vacation accrual up to 25 days based on service. Their grievance procedure also escalates to arbitration, and non-probationary employees require just cause for discipline. Full-time custodians receive 18 sick days annually (accumulating up to 200) with a buy-back option upon retirement, and up to six days of personal leave. Compensation includes a \$1.00 per hour night shift differential, overtime at time and a half over 40 hours, and longevity payments. The employer's contribution to health and dental insurance mirrors the ESP agreement (75% and 50%, respectively). The contract also mandates two four-hour paid annual training sessions and covers procedures for seniority, probationary periods (90 days for new hires), and recall rights in a reduction in force. Both agreements ensure accumulated sick leave is carried over for transfers between Island School Districts.

The Agreement between the Martha's Vineyard Superintendency Union #19 School Committee and the Martha's Vineyard Educators Association Food Service Workers for July 1, 2022 - June 30, 2025 is a collective bargaining agreement for all regular full-time and part-time Food Service Workers employed by the various Martha's Vineyard school committees.

Key provisions include the Association's recognition as the exclusive bargaining representative and a requirement for just cause before discharging or suspending non-probationary employees, following a 120-day probationary period for new hires. The agreement establishes a multi-level grievance procedure that culminates in final and

binding arbitration, though an arbitrator cannot alter the agreement or award retroactive relief beyond 30 days before filing. The work year is set at either 192 or 182 days, inclusive of professional development. Job assignments, hours, and workloads are determined by the School Committee and are not to be reduced without cause. Paid leaves are extensive, offering 15 annual sick days for full-time workers (up to 200 days of accumulation) with a retirement buy-back option, up to 5 bereavement days, and up to 6 personal days (deducted from sick leave).

The contract also covers family leave, an open evaluation process, and payroll deductions for association dues. Financial and health provisions state that Food Service Workers working 20+ hours are eligible for insurance, with the employer paying 75% of health insurance for Regional High School or Up-Island Regional School employees, and elementary systems aligning with town vote. Dental insurance is covered at 50% by the employer in elementary systems with an available plan. The contract includes provisions for Workers’ Compensation pay continuation (deducted from sick leave), mandatory retirement system participation, and a no-strike clause. It also details annual longevity payments, a process for transferring accumulated sick days and longevity between Island School Districts, and paid vacation benefits that accrue based on years of service. Appendices include wage options (22 or 26 payments) and the hourly salary schedule for various cook and helper roles, along with one-time payments.

What are the staffing turnover rates by school?

Table 10 below shows the staffing turnover rates (including teachers, staff, and administration) for each of the elementary schools as well as for Martha’s Vineyard Regional High School for 2024:

OB	EDG	WT	TIS	MVRHS	CHIL
Teacher: 9.2%	Teacher: 21%	Teacher: 13%	Teacher: 17%	Teacher: 17%	Teacher: 7%
Admin: 50%	Admin: 100%	Admin: 0%	Admin: 0%	Admin: 0%	Admin: 100%

Table 10: Staff Turnover Rates for 2024

This one-year table presented for 2024 shows a greater turnover of administrators than of teachers. There was administrator turnover in Oak Bluffs, Edgartown, and Chilmark in that single year. Teacher turnover ranged from 7% in Chilmark to 21% in Edgartown. There is no indication, however, of why the turnover in Edgartown is greater than the other schools, including the regional high school. Edgartown is second to Oak Bluffs for the elementary schools in terms of the greatest number of staff.

Summary: The district may be able to make the educational process more efficient by creating School Improvement Plans that reflect the goals of a District Improvement Plan so that there is commonality among the elementary schools. The staffing turnover rates, and the reasons for turnovers at the administrative level at the elementary schools, is in question and may be answered through the interview section of the report.

The consistency of the staff contracts, done through collective bargaining with each group in totality, has been beneficial in terms of salaries, expectations and other contractual obligations. In speaking with focus groups, however, the broad sweep of agreements fails to address specific areas that are relevant to individual schools and staff. It is questionable whether all parties want to re-open and/or these specific areas and integrate them into the contract, and whether doing so would create a more equitable or inequitable contract.

Interviews

Five questions were posed to all participants in this part of the regionalization study. The wording of these questions was sometimes adjusted based on the individual's role to ensure relevance and allow them to provide a response based on their position, meaning not all role groups received the exact same set of questions.

The first question asked various individuals: *Who is involved in the development of the district strategic plan and the school improvement plan? How are the focus areas of your school improvement plan aligned with the district strategic plan?* Their responses resulted with varied opinions based on their roles. Overall, administrators are engaged

in School Improvement Plan (SIP) development and efforts to align SIPs with district priorities have increased in recent years. Across all parties, administrators note that shared initiatives, particularly curriculum work such as HMH, have helped strengthen coherence, and there is broad agreement that alignment between district direction and school-level planning is improving.

However, administrators differed in focus and perspective. Some emphasized variability: administrators report inconsistent awareness of the district strategic plan, uneven communication, and limited alignment due to the Island's multi-district structure. Administrators in some circumstances described strong school-based processes for SIP development but perceive the district plan as less clear or fully developed, resulting in uneven coherence across districts.

In contrast, others depicted a more structured, systemwide planning environment that emerged after 2020, driven by new leadership, formal strategic commitments (“three buckets”), and a deliberate effort to connect all initiatives—including SIPs, PD, and district projects—to these commitments. While these individuals acknowledged progress, it also raises concerns about superficial involvement, limited cross-department collaboration, and persistent gaps in communication or inclusivity, particularly for departments like ELL.

Taken together, some individuals reflected the earlier stage of inconsistent alignment and limited strategic clarity, while others described a more mature but still evolving system in which strategic planning is better defined, more intentionally coordinated, yet not fully collaborative or consistently implemented across all stakeholders.

The second key question was: *How is the collective bargaining process handled district-by-district?* This inquiry sought detailed procedural information on labor negotiations across school districts to determine if the system is centralized or fragmented. Key areas of interest included: Negotiation Structure (central versus district-level management), Key Stakeholders (district and labor representatives),

Timeline/Frequency of contracts, and Areas of Focus (e.g., salary, benefits, working conditions). Understanding this district-level variance is crucial for analyzing the overall labor landscape and identifying opportunities for efficiency and equity through potential standardization.

Participants consistently described the collective bargaining process as regionalized and unified across the Island, rather than handled independently district by district. Most emphasized that there is one primary teachers' union (MVEA) representing educators Island-wide, with additional subsets for groups such as custodians and administrative assistants. Negotiations typically involve regional teams that include school administrators, School Committee members, Finance Committee representatives, and union representatives.

Several respondents noted that the process is generally well-run, efficient, and collaborative, supported by structures such as the Joint Labor Committee (JLC), which meets monthly to maintain open communication and address issues proactively. Contracts are negotiated on a three-year cycle, and recent agreements have been completed successfully.

While bargaining is regional, respondents highlighted one exception: reductions in force (RIFs) are handled by individual schools, as seniority is not applied across districts. Overall, participants described a cohesive, Island-wide bargaining system characterized by shared representation, consistent structures, and ongoing communication, though with localized differences in personnel decisions like RIFs.

The third question in this critical focus area sought to understand district functional operations: *Where in your district's current processes do you see efficiencies and inefficiencies (e.g., curriculum alignment, scheduling, staffing, resource allocation, administrative procedures)?* This open-ended inquiry was designed to elicit detailed, qualitative data on the practical realities of district management. By identifying both successes (efficiencies) and obstacles (inefficiencies) in key operational areas, the

study aims to generate a balanced assessment. The resulting data is crucial for identifying scalable best practices and systemic obstacles requiring targeted intervention.

Administrators overwhelmingly described the Island's multi-district structure as highly inefficient. Fragmented leadership duplicated administrative processes, and inconsistent practices across towns create major challenges in operations, staffing, curriculum, and resource allocation. While the district benefits from strong staff, MTSS/SEL supports, and caring school environments, these strengths are limited by structural and systemic barriers.

Key Inefficiencies:

- **Fragmentation and Redundancy:** Multiple districts responding independently to towns result in duplicated meetings, separate payrolls, inconsistent hiring, and repetitive administrative work.
- **Curriculum Misalignment:** Schools use different curricula with limited mapping or shared standards, causing uneven academic coherence.
- **Staffing and Resource Allocation:** Small class sizes and lack of flexibility to share personnel across schools lead to underutilized staff and imbalance.
- **Disconnect Between Central Office and Schools:** District initiatives often fail to translate into effective implementation, leaving schools scrambling to act.
- **Operational Challenges:** Decentralized procurement, IT systems, transportation, and capital project funding are inefficient and poorly coordinated.
- **Governance Issues:** A large School Committee and multiple town governments slow decision-making and create competing priorities.
- **Limited Data Use:** Improvements in communication or EL protocols are constrained by inconsistent or insufficient data systems.

Efficiencies Noted:

- **Shared Services Model:** Coordinated support for specialized students (consultants, ESPs, specialized training) reduces redundancy and improves service delivery.
- **District Cabinet Collaboration:** Provides a forum for information sharing and some strategic planning.
- **School-Level Practices:** Isolated efficiencies include improved EL protocols and parent communication, though these are not system-wide.

Administrators agree that structural fragmentation is the primary barrier to efficiency. Most system-level operations are inconsistent, duplicative, or poorly aligned, while a few shared services and collaborative initiatives provide limited relief. Regionalization or stronger district-wide coordination is seen as the most viable approach to improve efficiency, equity, and coherence across the Island's schools.

The next section of the study sought to gather in-depth, qualitative feedback from participants regarding the integration of digital resources into pedagogical practice. Specifically, participants were asked a critical, open-ended question: "*How could technology, data systems, or digital tools be used more effectively to support teaching and learning?*"

This inquiry was designed to move beyond simple satisfaction ratings and elicit actionable suggestions for improving the existing digital ecosystem. The aim was to capture specific ideas on:

- **Technology Integration:** Identifying underutilized or new technologies that could enhance lesson delivery, student engagement, and differentiated instruction.
- **Data Utilization:** Exploring how existing student performance data and learning analytics could be better collected, visualized, and applied by educators to inform instructional decisions and provide timely interventions.
- **Tool and Platform Design:** Soliciting feedback on the usability, interoperability, and functionality of current digital tools and platforms to streamline administrative tasks and maximize instructional time.

Administrators consistently emphasized that current technology and data systems are fragmented across the Island's schools, leading to inefficiencies, inconsistent practices, and challenges in supporting teaching and learning. Key issues include the decentralized management of platforms like PowerSchool, lack of uniform devices, and disparate software for special education (SPED) and English Learner (EL) programs. Students transferring between schools often face disruptions, as their records and data are not seamlessly shared, and teachers must spend time reconciling information manually. Administrative tasks such as reporting, tracking professional development, and maintaining health or attendance records are similarly fragmented, creating extra work for principals and staff.

Administrators noted improvements in policy development, technology leadership, and sharing of instructional resources, and they highlighted the growing capacity of staff to use technology effectively. There is a clear desire for system-wide standardization, including consistent platforms, device management, and policies for emerging tools like AI. Administrators also identified the potential of centralized dashboards for principals and superintendents to track longitudinal student data, absenteeism, and other key metrics, which could enhance teacher collaboration and instructional decision-making. Several responses emphasized shifting from a compliance-based approach to a data-informed culture that focuses on teaching and learning outcomes.

Similarities Across Responses

- **Fragmentation and Inconsistency:** All responses highlighted that technology and data systems are managed separately by schools or districts, causing inefficiencies and duplication of effort.
- **Need for Standardization:** Administrators consistently expressed the need for uniform platforms, devices, and data systems across the Island.
- **Data-Informed Decision Making:** There is agreement on the potential value of centralized dashboards and DESE data to guide instruction, improve collaboration, and track student outcomes.

- **Staff Capacity and Policy Development:** Several responses noted improvements in staff skills and recent adoption of formal technology policies.

Differences Across Responses

- **Focus Areas:** One response emphasized cybersecurity concerns and policy handbooks, another focused on longitudinal dashboards and integrating health and SPED data, and the third highlighted consistency in SPED/EL software and instructional decision-making.
- **Emerging Technology Use:** Administrators differed in their focus on AI and digital engagement; some noted early experimentation, while others highlighted the lack of guidance and training.
- **Perspective on Current Progress:** Some administrators emphasized recent improvements in sharing and staff capacity, whereas others stressed ongoing inefficiencies and the lack of integration across schools.

Focus Groups

In Focus Area 3, we asked three questions related to the overarching question: *How could one district make the educational process more efficient?* These questions offered us a glimpse of both the larger organizational structure of the school system as well as the operations within each individual school. The first question was: *How is the collective bargaining process handled district-by-district?* Respondents said that the collective bargaining process is handled regionally with one contract for all staff members across all bargaining units. Since each town has its own budget, however, the contract affects each town differently. This leads to complexities with six school committees and an all-island school committee. Also, while the teachers' union is regionalized and has successfully negotiated a recent contract, there are unclear areas regarding stipends, start and stop times, and club stipends, often leading to decisions left to principal discretion. This creates inconsistencies in job descriptions, staff meeting requirements, and professional development days across different schools.

There is a perceived need for clearer guidelines, more efficient and competent practices, and better support for licensure and a revitalization of the mentor program, potentially through a centralized human resources department at the superintendent's

level. Finally, challenges exist around the implementation of collective bargaining, particularly concerning inequities in "time on learning" at elementary schools and varying arrival and departure times for professional development.

The second question was: *Where in your district's current processes do you see efficiencies and inefficiencies (e.g., curriculum alignment, scheduling, staffing, resource allocation, administrative procedures)?* Respondents said that scheduling is a significant challenge in K-8 schools, as well as a lack of reading and math specialists at all schools at the middle school level. Classes are not leveled except for math due to staffing and scheduling constraints.

A looming crisis is anticipated in the next 5-6 years as 65% of staff are eligible to retire, and young teachers cannot afford to live in the area, leading to a shortage of applicants. Mental health concerns are also an inefficiency, with a lack of counselors and no school resource officer, despite issues with substance use affecting students and families.

Regionalization is seen as beneficial for addressing these issues on a more global level. Inefficiencies also stem from constant battles for resources between schools, leading to unequal allocation. A teacher shortage island-wide is exacerbated by awkward interviewing processes and the loss of accrued benefits when transferring between schools. Budget disparities between schools result in differences in spending, such as on library materials. Chilmark, for example, struggles to find substitute teachers. Conversely, a single principal structure can be efficient for responding to student and community needs. Inconsistencies in elementary school interventions due to a lack of regionalization, however, mean that what constitutes a successful learner in middle school differs from high school. The ability to "hide" inefficiencies with ample funding is also noted. Students coming into high school often lack academic study skills and exhibit immature behaviors, being "stuck in the elementary school model." There is a hope for all schools to teach the same math curriculum.

Finally, struggles in aligning curriculum, particularly in mathematics, affect students who move between different programs. There is a strong sense of autonomy and independence at the school level, making changes difficult, and services are not shared well, creating friction.

The third question was: *How could technology, data systems, or digital tools be used more effectively to support teaching and learning?* Respondents said that most classrooms have smartboards that are used daily. K-2 students have iPads that stay at school, while grades 3-8 have Chromebooks, with grades 4-8 taking them home. There is a strong desire for all schools to have access to the same technology. Purchasing school-wide licenses is costly for smaller schools, and individual teachers in a grade level across the district cannot share materials or receive dedicated professional development together on these platforms.

Some schools, like Chilmark and West Tisbury, struggle with collaboration, including scheduling, structure, and the ability to communicate through similar platforms both in school and with parents, despite being in their own districts. One school reports having ample technology and strong technology support due to town funding but finds the software aspect challenging for parents. Other schools mention iPads starting in kindergarten, chrome books for older grades, and a technology teacher for grades 3-8, along with an Instructional Technology support person. Schools use various programs like PowerSchool, Enriching Classrooms, RULER/Mood Meter, We THINKERS, and Everyday Speech. One respondent shared that, regarding all the digital subscriptions (BrainPOP, ixl, study island, mystery science, generation genius, lexia, dream box etc.) and the power school platform, that right now, all schools are paying for them individually. If they were purchased at a regional level, it could potentially reduce the overall costs.

Within special education, technology has grown. There is no single PowerSchool account for the district, and technology add-ons are not purchased as one district. Some schools have technology but lack training, particularly for clear touch boards, and

internet connectivity can be an issue. While software and sites are purchased, the technology can be unreliable, with devices crashing if all students use them simultaneously.

Focus Area 4: Fiscal Responsibility

- **How could one district save resources/money? (e.g. staffing, programs, etc.?)**

Document Review

This section of the report will examine three key areas. First, we will analyze the extracurricular programming offered by each school, noting both its unique aspects and commonalities. Second, we will detail the contracted services utilized for special education. Third, we will review the professional development initiatives implemented across the Island over the past three years.

Extracurricular activities across each school

Across the schools, there is a shared commitment to offering students enriching academic experiences, opportunities for engagement beyond core instruction, and programming that reflects each community's values and strengths. All schools provide some combination of advanced or enrichment coursework, unified arts or specials, and co-curricular or experiential learning opportunities, indicating a common emphasis on whole-child development, student engagement, and access to learning beyond traditional classroom instruction. At the same time, the scope, structure, and consistency of these offerings vary considerably by school, largely influenced by school size, staffing capacity, and local priorities.

Edgartown stands out for the breadth and depth of its programming, offering the most comprehensive and structured array of academic, enrichment, and extracurricular options. Its programming reflects both scale and resources, with multiple advanced academic pathways, daily WIN blocks across all grades, extensive unified arts, school-wide traditions, and a robust schedule of trips and experiential learning opportunities. Edgartown also hosts Island-wide programs, reinforcing its role as a hub for broader district services. In contrast, Oak Bluffs provides targeted advanced offerings and

enrichment primarily at the upper elementary and middle school levels, including engineering, Spanish, Algebra, and health education, while also serving as the host site for the Island-wide Compass program. Its strengths lie in specialized coursework and programmatic contributions that extend beyond its own student population.

West Tisbury's programming reflects a more focused approach, emphasizing academic enrichment and skill development in the middle grades. Enrichment math, WIN blocks, electives, study skills, and civics suggest a strong emphasis on academic readiness and transition support, though with fewer school-wide traditions or extracurricular elements than Edgartown. Tisbury differs by prioritizing early and continuous exposure to Spanish and fostering school culture and student interests through a growing set of clubs and extracurricular activities. Its programming is less structured around advanced coursework but places greater emphasis on student engagement, school pride, and exploratory learning.

Chilmark is distinct in its philosophical and instructional approach, emphasizing multi-age classrooms, project-based learning, outdoor and experiential education, and inclusive traditions that involve all students. Rather than offering a wide range of discrete courses or electives, Chilmark's model integrates learning across ages and disciplines, with outings and trips serving as core components of the educational experience. This approach contrasts with the more course-based and schedule-driven models of the other schools.

In summary, while all schools share a common goal of providing enriching, student-centered experiences, they differ significantly in how those experiences are structured and delivered. Larger schools tend to offer a wider range of formal academic options, electives, and extracurricular activities, while smaller schools emphasize integrated, experiential, and community-based learning. These differences highlight both the strengths of localized school identity and the resulting variability in student access to academic and enrichment opportunities across the district.

List of Contracted Services for Special Education Services

The requested information, while not available with in-depth details by the district, will be an invaluable resource once received. We anticipate that obtaining this data will allow for a more thorough and complete analysis, contributing significantly to a comprehensive report. What is currently known is the following:

- The shared services have contracts with consultants that provide support to the programs/teachers, with an estimated cost of \$9,000 each per year for onsite visits and online consultations.
- Agencies receive contracts for supports in various capacities, such as, but not limited to; vision, orientation and mobility, speech-language services, etc.

Each school is billed for the services, however, as part of this review, it may be beneficial to review the money spent for contracted services to determine the cost efficiency of these services.

Professional Development Offered

The Island educational system demonstrates a strong commitment to continuous improvement and educator excellence through a substantial investment in staff and administrator professional development. The total expenditure for professional learning initiatives was \$203,411.21.

This total includes two main components:

- **Direct Professional Development Costs (\$118,907.23):** This funding covered activities designed to enhance pedagogical and administrative skills, such as travel, attending conferences, hosting/attending workshops, and in-service staff development/consulting.
- **Educator Credit Allowances (\$84,503.98):** This amount was allocated through union contracts to support individual educators pursuing advanced degrees, specialized certifications, or college coursework, directly enhancing their classroom expertise.

This significant financial outlay is a strategic demonstration of the district's dedication to facilitating professional growth, ensuring students benefit from the most current and effective teaching practices.

The district provides mandatory and optional professional development (PD) workshops throughout the year. However, individual school buildings also offer their own PD sessions, which are not always communicated to the central office. This practice leads to inconsistencies in professional development across the Island.

Upon review of the district's website, it was clearly outlined that the various professional development opportunities provided to educators included, but not limited to, the following topics:

Mandatory: Safety Care training (required for shared service staff), Student Talk in the Classroom (Co-teachers and ESL teachers), HMH Into Reading Grades K-5 (all lead instructional staff and reading specialists K-5 ELA) MVYPS PK-8 Technology and Safety Training (all MVYPS staff working in grades pk-8) Math Language Routines that Increase Content and Language Development (All 6-12th grade ESL teachers and math teachers), 2025 MVYPS School Climate Survey Kick Off (All staff), and building-based PD (All faculty).

Optional: SEL curriculum (all educators), Introduction to Collaborative Problem Solving (all educators), Licensure Support with MTA Staff (all educators), Student Talk in the Classroom (all educators), Strengthening New IEP Skills (special education teachers and specialists), Teacher-Directed and Designed Professional Development (all educators), Read & Write for Google: Live Demonstration and Workshop (all educators), Utilizing Everyday Speech to Implement the New MA IEP (All k-12 Special Education teachers, administrators, and support staff, as well as general education teachers who collaborate with specialists on students' social emotional and social communication services.), A Comparative Analysis of Brazilian and Massachusetts Math Standards (K-9 Math and ESL teachers), Specialized PD for ESPs/Paraeducators (all ESPs), Communities of Practice (CoPs) at MVYPS, How We Use the i-Ready to Meet the Needs of Individual Students to Support Current Lessons (all grades 5-8 math teachers), MV Atlas of Life (all staff), K-12 Multilingualism and multiliteracies in

Teaching and Learning (All educators), From Lines to Loops – Strengthening Two-Way Family Communication (NAFSCE Webinar) (All staff), Know Your Rights Training for Educators, K-12 (All staff), Rhythm and Movement with Leo Sandoval (All staff), Building Bridges to Support Stronger Comprehension: The interdependence of teaching semantics, morphology and comprehension (K-3 classroom teachers, reading specialists, and special education teachers), Goalbook-Pilot IEP software (special education teachers, liaisons, representatives from each school), How We Use the i-Ready to Meet the Needs of Individual Students and Support Current Lessons (All grade 5-8 math teachers), Math Language Routines: Supporting All Learners Through Purposeful Interaction in Math (All math and STEM teachers, co-teachers [special education and ESL teachers]), Social/Emotional Disabilities 101 (All educators), and ESPs are Rock Stars! Best Practices in the Science of Reading for ESPs K-2 (K-2 ESPs).

Interviews

This portion of the interview phase within the study was structured with a specific set of five core questions, designed to elicit detailed responses across various organizational roles. Although the overall question pool consisted of five distinct areas of inquiry, not all questions were presented to every interviewee. Instead, the approach was tailored: each individual role category was assigned a targeted subset of between three and four questions from the main pool. This ensured that the questions asked were highly relevant to the responsibilities and perspective of the role being interviewed, allowing for focused, in-depth data collection pertinent to each role's unique context within the project or organization.

The initial inquiry posed to the group of individuals was: *To what extent is there consistency in the curriculum/schedules and duties across all elementary and middle schools in the district? Furthermore, how are teacher qualifications being optimally utilized during this period?*

Administrators indicated that consistency in course offerings, schedules, and teacher duties across elementary and middle schools is limited. While some core courses and

enrichment classes are similar, there are notable differences in scheduling, preparation time, and specialist assignments, leading to inequities in workload and responsibilities. Teacher qualifications are generally aligned with licensing requirements, but geographic challenges, staff availability, and the need to fill certain positions sometimes result in teachers working outside their areas of expertise or on provisional waivers. Educational Support Personnel (ESPs) roles vary widely, with some focused on small-group instruction and others primarily covering lunch and recess duties, contributing to uneven support across schools. Differences in school size, staffing allocations, and course offerings, such as foreign language programs, further exacerbate inconsistencies.

Administrators noted that principals often manage their schools independently, leading to decentralized decision-making and a lack of oversight on equity or consistency, and that few shared services exist across districts to address these disparities. Overall, while teacher qualifications are generally maintained, scheduling, duties, and support structures are inconsistent, resulting in variable experiences for staff and students.

The next question asked participants *How are budget decisions made? By whom? How do you ensure that the budget you request is adequate to meet student needs and is fiscally responsible?* The participants reported the following:

Administrators consistently described the budget process as collaborative, school-driven, and highly localized, with building leadership, finance officers, and school committees playing central roles. In all responses, budgets are developed with student needs as the primary driver, prioritizing special education, English Learner services, and other essential programs, while also considering staffing and operational constraints.

Administrators emphasized the importance of transparency with town leadership, reviewing past budgets, and aligning requests to student needs. Central administration is acknowledged as a key player in reviewing budgets, building consensus, and supporting schools to secure necessary resources. Administrators generally expressed confidence in their ability to meet student needs and maintain fiscal responsibility.

The responses also shared concerns about inefficiency and complexity. All participants noted that the process is multi-layered and administratively cumbersome, particularly in regional contexts where budgets must be coordinated across multiple towns.

Duplication of services, decentralized decision-making, and inconsistent coordination between districts create additional challenges. Additionally, administrators observed that while budgets are generally adequate, the link between allocations and instructional best practices is often unclear.

Differences across the responses relate primarily to emphasis and detail. Some responses highlighted variability across communities, noting that some districts, such as Edgartown, have flexible budgets that allow teachers greater access to resources, whereas other towns face tighter fiscal constraints, particularly for new construction or program expansion. It also emphasized the influence of longstanding or powerful school committees and the uneven leveraging of administrative and support roles, such as ESPs. Others placed more focus on the holistic oversight of central administration, the importance of building consensus, and the multi-step procedural complexity from building-level planning to town meetings. It also noted the growing scrutiny on budgets as they now constitute a large portion of town expenditures and explicitly mentioned inefficiencies tied to duplicated services and decentralized processes.

Overall, all responses converge on the themes of collaboration, student-centered decision-making, and fiscal responsibility, while differences lie in the attention to community variability, structural influences, and procedural complexities within the budget process.

In the next question, participants were asked *What creative strategies (e.g., shared services with other districts, grants, partnerships, technology integration) are already in place, and where might there be opportunities for more? What challenges/barriers currently prevent these strategies from being implemented?*

Similarities: All responses emphasize that shared services, particularly for special education, speech and language therapy, and other specialized staff, are the primary and most effective creative strategy currently in place. Administrators consistently recognize that these arrangements provide both financial and instructional efficiencies, and that collaboration among staff has improved over time. Each response notes opportunities for expansion, whether through broader implementation of shared services, centralized initiatives, technology integration, or standardization of instructional practices. Challenges are also consistent across responses, including logistical barriers (space, transportation, small student populations), decentralized decision-making, inconsistent practices across schools, and difficulties achieving consensus. Overall, administrators agree that shared services show promise but require stronger coordination, systemic guidance, and alignment to maximize impact.

Differences: Some responses highlight a broader set of creative strategies, including technology integration (1:1 devices), community partnerships, grant-writing, and instructional approaches like co-teaching, looping, and multi-age classrooms, emphasizing SEL benefits and instructional collaboration. Other responses focused more on collaboration among staff, professional learning communities, and consistency in assessment and progress monitoring, with attention to competition between schools and cross-district coordination challenges. A few provided narrower responses, emphasizing emerging centralized initiatives such as evaluation, PowerSchool, and HMH as opportunities, while stressing that high autonomy and inconsistent implementation across schools limit the effectiveness of even promising strategies. In summary, while all responses converge on shared services as central and effective, they differ in scope, ranging from broad instructional and technological innovations to cross-district coordination and centralized program implementation, and in how they frame the primary barriers to expanding these strategies.

The next question was: *What are the political issues internally and community-wide regarding the potential regionalization of the school district?* The responses varied, based on the school community the administrators worked in or lived.

Administrators described political concerns about regionalization as both internal and community-wide, largely rooted in pride, tradition, and fear of change. Internally, long-standing staff and teachers value the current systems, with strong attachments to established practices and skepticism about altering what they perceive as successful approaches. There is concern that regionalization could lead to job losses or diminished roles, not only in schools but potentially in other town services, creating anxiety among employees.

Community-wide, residents and towns are proud of their local culture and traditions, and there is apprehension that regionalization would dilute local identity and control. Financial considerations are a major driver, with some towns, particularly those with higher tax burdens like Tisbury, seeing regionalization as a potential means to achieve cost savings and manage expensive projects, such as school renovations. At the same time, disparities in budgets, population size, and demographics across towns create tensions, with fears that one group might disproportionately benefit at the expense of another.

Administrators noted that while regionalization is increasingly part of the conversation and some communities are open to it, resistance remains from those who value local autonomy, fear loss of identity, or are influenced by a vocal minority opposing change.

Overall, political issues center on balancing financial efficiency with maintaining local control, identity, and community trust, highlighting the need for careful communication about the benefits and trade-offs of regionalization.

Next, participants from the central office were asked: *How is grant funding obtained and utilized? Who is responsible for writing the grants? How successful have grant applications for competitive grants been in the past 5 years?*

Administrators described grant funding as a mix of entitlement grants managed centrally and competitive or discretionary grants pursued at both the school and district level. Entitlement grants, such as Title I and IDEA funding, are generally coordinated by a grants manager or central office staff, ensuring fiscal oversight, accountability, and alignment with stakeholder needs. Competitive grants, however, are often identified and written by individual principals or central office administrators, with varying levels of collaboration. A grants manager may facilitate or coordinate these applications, but the responsibility for identifying opportunities and writing proposals often falls on the applicant.

Overall, grant applications have been largely successful, with some notable wins for programs supporting co-teaching, teacher development, and behavioral health initiatives. Challenges include inconsistent processes across districts, limited capacity to both apply for and manage grants, and occasional pushback when pursuing grants that require significant administrative effort. Administrators also noted inefficiencies in payroll and grant management, particularly when responsibilities fall on the superintendent or other central staff due to limited HR support. Despite these challenges, grants have been a valuable source of supplemental funding, especially for staffing, instructional initiatives, and collaborative practices across schools.

Focus Groups

In Focus Area 4, we asked two questions related to the overarching question: *How could one district save resources/money?* The responses to these questions focused on two contentious areas: the perceived sense of inequity in staffing and resources across and within the schools themselves, and financial concerns raised by communities about the possibility of regionalization. Notably, there was historical reference to attempts to fully regionalize in the past, however, push-back by some communities ended those attempts beyond a single high school.

Our first question was: *How consistent are the course of study/schedules and duties across all elementary and middle schools in the district? How are teacher qualifications*

maximized during this time? Respondents revealed that consistency varies greatly from school to school and year to year. In middle schools, teachers may teach subjects they are not certified in due to staffing needs, and there's a lack of reading and math specialists. Teachers often wear multiple hats, such as a literacy specialist also serving as a librarian, and do not get non-working lunches. Planning times differ due to varying "specials" offered by schools. Teacher qualifications are largely at the discretion of each school, depending on applicants and availability. High school faces a significant challenge with a high number of uncertified teachers due to the cost of living and a lack of a dedicated human resources department, which leads to administrative staff handling extensive onboarding tasks, including visa work and finding housing.

Professional Development is also imbalanced, with elementary teachers receiving more professional development than the middle and high school. A new schedule implemented this year was intended to address inequities but became a point of contention. Some, however, not all schools are well-staffed with aides and effectively allocate resources, particularly in K-4. Also, the schedules for K-4 and middle school differ, with middle school teachers having more prep time. This contributes to a sense of inequity among the staff.

The second question was: *What are the political issues internally and community-wide regarding the potential regionalization of the school district?* Respondents identified the primary concern as financial, with districts that have fewer high-needs or English Language (EL) populations being unwilling to pay for those with more of these populations. This sentiment, often referred to as the "R word," is deeply political and rooted in an "elitist attitude," according to one participant.

Historical attempts at regionalization for K-12 schools ended up with regionalization only in the high school, and current building projects face similar financial disagreements. Each of the six towns has a fierce sense of independent character and varying tax bases, with more affluent up-island towns and dense, high-tax towns like Tisbury. This leads to a reluctance to pool resources and a desire to protect individual town identities

and budgets. There is also a divide between "old people" and "new people" ("wash ashore" as they are referred to) which creates defensiveness. Teachers express concerns about losing authenticity with curriculum and practice, as each elementary school has its own "vibe." While regionalization could lead to cost savings, there is resistance from teachers who don't want to move schools and a preference for the current K-8 configuration. Many feel that regionalization has been discussed before without fruition, and that a unified curriculum must precede any further regionalization efforts.

Focus Area 5: Teaching & Learning

- **What are the advantages of a centralized curriculum? (Island-wide vs. individual districts?)**

Document Review

In the document review section, the district was unable to provide curriculum maps (scope and sequence) for any schools and indicated that they were unavailable.

Benchmarking platforms used by each school were identified in Table 11 below:

OB	EDG	WT	TIS	MVRHS	CHIL
MCLASS 3x per year for 3-8, 2x per year K-2	See separate document *	MCLASS-3x per year K-5	iReady in Math (HOW OFTEN?)	Midterms and finals for all courses, so summative assessment two times per year.	AIMSWEB for math 3x year.
iReady for math and ELA 3x per year.		IXL 3x per year, k-8	WIDA Model Fall and May/June	AP ongoing assessment through AP classroom.	MCLASS for Reading 3x per year.
WIDA Model 2x per year for all ELs		Reveal Math, pre and post assessments	.	WIDA Model 2x per year (plus the ACCESS exams)	IXL for math (HOW OFTEN?)
(used to use Fountas and Pinnell BAS)		WIDA Model Fall and May/June.	Algebra prognosis		
		End of year finals			

Table 11: Benchmarking Assessments used by elementary schools, including time period of assessment delivery

*Edgartown provided a benchmark assessment schedule for grade spans for the 2025-2026 school year. (See Table 13 below). The schedule indicates the consistent use of Aimsweb through the grade levels except for Grade 3 ELA.

K-2 Assessment Schedule 2025-2026

K-2 Grades-ELA		
Fall (10/6)	Winter (1/31)	Spring (6/10)
mClass	mClass	mClass

K-2 Grades- Math		
Fall (10/6)	Winter (1/31)	Spring (6/10)
AimsWeb (1-2)	AimsWeb	AimsWeb

Grade 3-8 Assessment Schedule 2025-2026

3rd Grade-ELA			
Week of	Fall	Winter (1/31)	Spring (6/10)
9/8	mClass	mClass	mClass
No date given		ELL ACCESS	MCAS
No date given	Writing Prompt	Writing Prompt	Writing Prompt

3rd Grade- Math			
Week of	Fall (10/6)	Winter (1/31)	Spring (6/10)
9/8	AimsWeb	AimsWeb	AimsWeb

4th Grade-ELA			
Week of	Fall	Winter	Spring
9/8-9/19	i-Ready	i-Ready	i-Ready
No date given	AimsWeb	AimsWeb	AimsWeb
No date given	Writing Prompt	Writing Prompt	Writing Prompt
No date given		ELL ACCESS	MCAS

4th Grade-Math			
Week of	Fall (10/6)	Winter (1/31)	Spring (6/10)
9/8-9/19	i-Ready Diagnostic	i-Ready Diagnostic	i-Ready Diagnostic
No date given	AimsWeb	AimsWeb	AimsWeb

5th Grade-ELA			
Week of	Fall	Winter	Spring
No date given	AimsWebPlus	AimsWebPlus	AimsWebPlus
9/8-9/19	i-Ready Diagnostic	i-Ready Diagnostic	i-Ready Diagnostic
No date given		ELL ACCESS(Jan)	MCAS
No date given	Writing Prompt	Writing Prompt	Writing Prompt

5th Grade ELA			
Week of	Fall (10/6)	Winter (1/31)	Spring (6/10)
9/8-9/19	i-Ready Diagnostic	i-Ready Diagnostic	i-Ready Diagnostic
No date given			MCAS
No date given		ELL ACCESS (Jan.)	

6th Grade-ELA		
Fall	Winter	Spring
i-Ready Diagnostic (9/15)	i-Ready Diagnostic (1/12)	
AimsWeb	AimsWeb	AimsWeb
F/P Benchmark and CORE Vocabulary Screener		F/P Benchmark and CORE Vocabulary Screener
	ELL ACCESS	MCAS
Narrative Writing Prompt		Narrative Writing Prompt

6th Grade-Math		
Fall	Winter	Spring
i-Ready Diagnostic (9/15)	i-Ready Diagnostic (1/12)	
AimsWeb	AimsWeb	AimsWeb
		MCAS
	ELL ACCESS	

7th Grade-ELA		
Fall	Winter	Spring
i-Ready Diagnostic (9/15)	i-Ready Diagnostic (1/12)	
AimsWeb	AimsWeb	AimsWeb
F/P Benchmark and CORE Vocabulary Screener		F/P Benchmark and CORE Vocabulary Screener
	ELL ACCESS	MCAS
Narrative Writing Prompt		Narrative Writing Prompt

7th Grade-Math		
Fall	Winter	Spring
i-Ready Diagnostic (9/15)	i-Ready Diagnostic (1/12)	
AimsWeb	AimsWeb	AimsWeb
		MCAS
	ELL ACCESS	

8th Grade-ELA		
Fall	Winter	Spring
i-Ready Diagnostic (9/15)	i-Ready Diagnostic (1/12)	
AimsWeb	AimsWeb	AimsWeb
F/P Benchmark and CORE Vocabulary Screener		F/P Benchmark and CORE Vocabulary Screener
	ELL ACCESS	MCAS
Narrative Writing Prompt		Narrative Writing Prompt

8th Grade-Math		
Fall	Winter	Spring
i-Ready Diagnostic (9/15)	i-Ready Diagnostic (1/12)	
AimsWeb	AimsWeb	AimsWeb
		MCAS
	ELL ACCESS	

Table 12: Edgartown Schedule of Benchmark Assessments by Grade Span: 2025-2026

Summary: The list of assessment platforms for each of the schools, except for Edgartown, does not clearly define the grade levels who participate in the identified assessments, nor is there consistency in the chosen platforms across all schools, vertically through grade levels and also, across schools other than Edgartown. In addition, there is no clarity in the times of the year that several of the assessments are

given in each school. The use of common assessments across grade levels and schools would enable the district to have a snapshot of student performance for the purpose of providing additional intervention and progress monitoring of students. Reviewed against MCAS results, these benchmark assessments would enable schools to track student progress for the purpose of providing interventions both pre- and post-MCAS. The results of these assessments may also provide invaluable information indicating the need for additional support through the hiring of tutors and/or specialists for this purpose, and possibly through Title I funds.

Interviews

All participants responded to two standardized questions designed to assess perspectives across the educational hierarchy on a common topic. While the overall goal was consistent, a significant divergence in viewpoints was observed among the participants, which appeared to be related to their administrative level. Specifically, building administrators expressed somewhat different views in some instances compared to central office staff. This difference is likely due to the distinct daily operational concerns, resource management challenges, and strategic priorities associated with each administrative level.

The first question in this section asked participants: *Describe the curriculum adoption process/cycle used in your school. How is the curriculum currently developed, implemented and assessed in your district/school? What level of consistency exists across grade levels and school?*

The curriculum adoption and implementation process on the Island has historically been fragmented and highly localized, with schools and teachers exercising substantial autonomy. Both principals and central office administrators recognize the challenges this presents in creating consistency across grade levels and schools. While recent initiatives such as the adoption of HMH, represent steps toward district-wide alignment, both groups note ongoing difficulties with implementation, assessment, and teacher buy-in. The following summarizes the similarities and differences in perspectives

between principals and central office administrators regarding curriculum development, implementation, and consistency.

Similarities:

- **Fragmentation and Autonomy:** Both principals and central office administrators describe the curriculum process as historically fragmented and highly localized. Schools and teachers have substantial autonomy in selecting, implementing, and assessing curriculum, leading to inconsistencies across grade levels and schools.
- **Recent Moves Toward Centralization:** Both groups note the HMH adoption as a turning point toward a more unified, centralized approach. This adoption is seen as the first major effort to standardize curriculum and create district-wide consistency.
- **Challenges with Implementation:** Both summaries highlight uneven assessment and implementation practices. Teachers often adapt or modify curriculum independently, and programs may sit unused or inconsistently applied after adoption.
- **Teacher Involvement and Voice:** Both principals and central office administrators emphasize the importance of including teachers in the adoption process to gain buy-in, particularly when moving toward a standardized curriculum.

Differences:

- **Focus and Perspective:**
 - **Principals** emphasize the *day-to-day experiences* of teachers and schools, noting informal processes, pilot programs, and the lack of formal Instructional Leadership Teams (ILT). They describe the process as “hit or miss,” with examples of inconsistencies between schools and grade levels.
 - **Central Office Administrators** provide a *system-level perspective*, focusing on historical trends, structural limitations, and overarching goals for alignment, sustainability, and professional development. They highlight systemic constraints like student mobility, population differences, and prior failures to maintain district-wide vetting processes.

- **Historical Context:** Central office administrators provide more detail on the historical lack of curriculum focus, past curriculum adoption groups, and district-wide audits, while principals focus more on current practices and recent experiences with curriculum adoption.
- **Professional Development and Collaboration:** Central office administrators explicitly discuss building sustainable professional development and communities of practice as part of a district-wide curriculum strategy. Principals mention benefits of cross-grade PD but highlight that such opportunities are limited due to decentralized practices and lack of leadership-driven structures.
- **Special Education Considerations:** Central office administrators note that curriculum oversight for SPED is uneven and often tied to specific student populations, whereas principals focus on general classroom curriculum processes and broader teacher experiences.
- **Level of Control and Influence:** Principals stress the lack of voice in curriculum decisions in past adoptions (e.g., HMM), while central office administrators acknowledge this challenge but position themselves as trying to balance central guidance with teacher input to achieve consistency.

Overall: Both perspectives agree that curriculum has historically been inconsistent and localized, with recent steps toward centralization (e.g., HMM) representing a positive shift. Principals focus on practical, teacher-level impacts and immediate challenges, whereas central office administrators emphasize systemic structures, historical context, and long-term strategic goals for alignment, professional development, and equity.

The second question asked participants: *What would you anticipate to be the disadvantages of a centralized curriculum?* As in the previous question, there were some similarities and some differences between the building and central office administrators. The responses are summarized in the next paragraph.

Both principals and central office administrators expressed cautious optimism about the potential benefits of a centralized curriculum, but each group highlighted concerns about implementation and teacher buy-in. Principals emphasized the importance of preserving local school identity, teacher creativity, and a sense of ownership, noting that rushed or

poorly communicated rollouts could undermine staff engagement and reduce buy-in. Central office administrators similarly recognized the need to maintain instructional flexibility and teacher ownership, while adding that careful management and structured input from all schools could mitigate challenges. Both groups acknowledged that clear communication, professional development, and opportunities for teacher voice are essential to successfully implementing a centralized curriculum, and that maintaining consistency must be balanced with school- and student-specific needs.

Similarities:

Both principals and central office administrators stressed the importance of teacher creativity and ownership, and the need for thoughtful implementation with clear communication and professional development. Both groups acknowledged that buy-in is critical, and that a centralized curriculum should not undermine schools' unique identities or the instructional flexibility teachers currently have. Both also noted that centralized programming could support consistency and student equity across the Island.

Differences:

Principals focused more on the perception of loss of control and intellectual ownership, highlighting concerns about staff frustration, school culture, and alignment with local practices. They also emphasized the importance of allowing adaptation within the centralized curriculum to meet the specific needs of their students. Central office administrators, in contrast, framed disadvantages more around structural and logistical concerns, such as schools losing momentum, fidelity issues, and the need to manage competitive school cultures. They expressed greater confidence in the feasibility of centralization if managed carefully, whereas principals were more concerned with the potential for resistance or loss of teacher buy-in.

Focus Groups

In Focus Area 5, we asked two questions related to the overarching question: *What are the advantages of a centralized curriculum? (island-wide vs. by individual districts)*. Our goal was to get a clearer picture of how the curriculum was introduced and implemented

at all levels, both on a school-basis as well as a district basis, and then how sustainability and fidelity to the curriculum was ensured. We also wanted to get a deeper understanding from those participants who opposed a centralized curriculum. What were their fears and concerns? We were interested in hearing other options for ensuring that all students were prepared equitably, with the necessary resources, tools, and opportunities, to transition to high school and beyond.

The first question was: *Describe the curriculum adoption process/cycle used in your school. How is the curriculum currently developed, implemented, and assessed in your district/school? What level of consistency exists across grade levels and school?*

Respondents said that In middle schools, teachers often advocate to their principals for curriculum changes, sometimes piloting new programs. Historically, K-5 math curriculum adoption involved publishers and DESE ratings, with the principal making the final decision. The ELA curriculum, however, was a top-down decision, leading to pushback and inconsistencies even within classrooms, as teachers are attached to their existing methods. K-5 math currently lacks a unified curriculum, with teachers largely choosing their own.

There's an anticipation of a top-down decision for K-4 math after K-5 ELA implementation. One school independently purchased a K-5 math curriculum without broader discussion. Some teachers are in favor of a cross-island curriculum for content areas for the sake of consistency and collaboration. Another school adopted a new math curriculum (REVEAL math) last year after group research and input, with training provided. In science, department chairs have significant autonomy, with some vertical alignment efforts. English is standards-based with no textbooks, and teachers check in with 7th and 8th grade teachers. History departments work to devise similar curricula, but adherence varies due to a lack of oversight. Teachers often build their own curriculum, and while they may collaborate vertically on programs, the final decision on what to teach can be left to individual teachers, even after piloting and voting on a particular one.

The second question was: *What would you anticipate being the disadvantages of a centralized curriculum?* Respondents said that one disadvantage is the lack of oversight to ensure the curriculum is being used effectively, potentially leading to wasted resources and a lack of data on its effectiveness. While there are definite advantages from an equity standpoint, some teachers feel it stifles creativity and individual choice, leading to a loss of individuality. However, single-grade-level teachers appreciate the potential for collaboration with colleagues in other schools. Smaller schools value their ability to work individually with students and maintain their unique character and connection to the Wampanoag community. A regional curriculum would prepare all students similarly for high school, but concerns exist about limiting teacher flexibility and adaptability to student needs. The loss of project-based approaches and specialized programs that offer a more inclusive education is also a disadvantage. Teachers are finding it difficult to integrate creative projects into a "boxed curriculum," leading to a feeling of dryness and a lack of student engagement.

There is also a concern about losing time to learn new curricula and the difficulty of getting long-term teachers to adopt new methods. Some feel that a standardized curriculum removes the "art of teaching" and the personal connection with students. However, the use of consistent academic language and curriculum would be very helpful for SPED and ELL students. While the reading program receives significant support, some teachers are resistant to change, even if it is perceived as better.

Classroom Observations

Section 2: Curriculum Planning (Standard I-A)

The lesson uses instructional materials that reflect grade-level demands of the content standards and evidence-based practices and demonstrates a clear focus on embedded language development.

a. The lesson is grounded in materials and tasks that are aligned to grade-level content standards and practices.

- *Lesson objectives, activities, and assessments are aligned to targeted grade-level standards and practices.*
- *Instructional tasks are carefully sequenced and structured to advance students in learning at the depth of the standard(s).*
- *Texts used during the lesson are at (or above) grade level.*

Yes	7
Mostly	7
Partially	5
Not Yet	2
Not Observed	7

The observation summary assesses how well lessons across different schools and subjects align with grade-level standards. The core expectation is for lessons to be grounded in grade-level materials, content, and practices, with clear objectives and appropriate texts.

While most lessons were found to be at or near the expected grade level, with specific strengths noted in various subjects (e.g., CTE, American History, and several elementary grades), the most common area for improvement was the lack of clearly stated or visible lesson objectives. Other identified weaknesses included a lack of individualized assessment, unclear curriculum usage, and failure to explicitly outline the purpose ("why") of activities. The overall conclusion is that while grade-level content is largely being taught, greater consistency is needed in making objectives explicit for students.

Section 3: Instruction (Standard II-A, II-B)

All students engage in the complex thinking and ideas of the lesson through instructional practices and pedagogy that are evidence-based, inclusive, and culturally and linguistically sustaining.

f. All students think critically about the content and draw connections to other contexts within and/or beyond the lesson.

- *Students pose questions, critically think about the content, and develop new ideas or theories.*
- *Students consider why their learning matters and grapple with the essential question, genuine topic, problem, idea, or phenomenon.*
- *Students apply their learning to new contexts and/or broader concepts.*

Yes	11
Mostly	5
Partially	1
Not Yet	1
Not Observed	10

The implementation of critical thinking, connections, and inquiry is steadily advancing across the schools, yielding notable successes, especially in historical discourse, practical math applications, and science. The school systems are making excellent progress toward full integration, and we have clearly identified key areas where focused attention will further accelerate this growth (Geography, a Substantially Separate class, Kindergarten, 6th Grade, and Earth Science). Plans to consider more comprehensive data collection to capture the breadth of student success fully may be explored further as discussions around regionalization continue over time.

Focus Area 6: Special Education & English Language Learning

- **How can one district improve special education and ELL programs for students while also making them more cost-effective?**

[Document Review](#)

This report evaluates the benefits of consolidating independent school districts into a single unified district, focusing on three key areas: cost effectiveness, improved services for students with disabilities, and enhanced programming for English Language Learners (ELL). The analysis will cover potential areas of efficiencies, improved consistency and quality of specialized services by pooling staff, and the standardization of robust ELL programming, identification, and placement across the unified structure.

Number of students by disability category in each school Prek-8

According to the documents provided by the district, the schools have the following breakdown of students with disabilities based on their categories:

- **Chilmark:** 6% autism, 27% communication, 6% developmental delay, 6% emotional, 27% health, 6% physical, 22% specific learning disability.
- **Edgartown:** 20% autism, 19% communication, 10% developmental delay, 3% *does not apply*, 1% emotional, 14% health, 1% intellectual, 1% neurological, 31% specific learning disability.
- **Martha's Vineyard Regional High School:** 10% autism, 3% communication, 15% emotional, 23% health, 5% intellectual, 1% multiple disabilities, 1% neurological, 1% sensory/vision, 41% specific learning disability.
- **Oak Bluffs:** 3% autism, 16% communication, 21% developmental delay, 1% *does not apply*, 5% emotional, 14% health, 1% neurological, 1% sensory/vision, 38% specific learning disability.
- **Tisbury:** 3% autism, 20% communication, 16% developmental delay, 8% emotional, 13% health, 2% intellectual, 2% neurological, 2% sensory/vision, 34% specific learning disability.
- **West Tisbury:** 16% autism, 16% communication, 8% developmental delay, 3% *does not apply*, 17% health, 1% intellectual, 39% specific learning disability.

Special Education RADAR

A detailed review of data from the RADAR Special Education system reveals several distinct patterns in the distribution of communication disabilities, specific learning disabilities, and autism across the Island's school districts compared to the state averages. This analysis excludes Martha's Vineyard Regional High School, focusing solely on the K-8 programming.

Communication Disability:

The K-8 programming across the Island's districts, except for Martha's Vineyard Regional, exhibits a significantly higher prevalence of students with communication

disabilities. The collective percentage of students identified with a communication disability is more than double the state average of 13.6%. This substantial disparity suggests that the Island's K-8 districts may be either identifying or serving a much larger population of students with these needs compared to the statewide norm. Further investigation may be warranted to understand if this is due to localized environmental factors, specific identification practices, or a true demographic difference.

Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD):

Similarly, the percentage of students identified with specific learning disabilities is notably higher across all of the Island's districts when compared to the state average of 23.9%. Every district on the Island reports a proportion of students with SLD that exceeds the state benchmark. This elevated rate of SLD across the board may indicate a systemic factor, such as consistency in diagnostic criteria or early intervention strategies, or it may simply reflect a localized demographic characteristic. This is an area where districts could compare intervention and support models to ensure best practices are being uniformly applied.

Autism:

In contrast to the findings for communication and specific learning disabilities, all districts on the Island report a lower percentage of students with autism when compared to the state average of 17.3%. The uniformly lower rate across all districts suggests that the prevalence of autism among the school-age population in these areas is below the statewide average. While this is a consistent trend, the districts should continue to monitor these percentages to ensure that all students who require services are being appropriately identified and supported, aligning with the quality of services provided throughout the state.

Number of English Learner students by proficiency level in each school Prek-8

The district documents indicate a significant population of English Learners (ELs) with varied proficiency levels across the schools. Notably, the high school and Chilmark currently do not have any students identified as ELs. The remaining schools, however, support these students, and Table 14 details the number of EL students in each building, categorized by proficiency level. Three of the district's schools show a

relatively balanced distribution of identified EL students. In contrast, West Tisbury supports a smaller percentage of students in this category compared to the other schools.

Number of EL Students by Proficiency Level in Each School Prek-8							
School	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	Total/ (Percentage)
Chilmark	0	0	0	0	0	0	0 - (0%)
Edgartown	11	23	22	19	2	0	77 - (30%)
Oak Bluffs	11	18	23	27	4	1	84 - (33%)
Tisbury	13	8	30	23	3	1	78 - (31%)
West Tisbury	2	1	5	4	2	0	14 - (6%)

Table 13: Number of EL students in each building, categorized by proficiency level.

Special Education RADAR

A significant variation is evident in the percentage of students identified as both English Learners (ELs) and students with a disability when comparing individual districts to the state average. The state-wide average for students concurrently identified with EL status and a disability is 3.1%.

However, the reporting for Martha's Vineyard presents an initial discrepancy that requires noting: district documents indicated zero students in the EL category, whereas the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) data reported 10

students, resulting in a calculated percentage of 3.1%, aligning precisely with the state average. Up-Island is slightly below the state average at 2.6%.

In stark contrast, several districts report percentages that far exceed the state benchmark. Two districts exhibit rates approximately double the state average (3.1%). Specifically, Edgartown reports 6.1%, and Oak Bluffs reports 6.5%. Most notably, Tisbury's percentage of dually identified students is exceptionally high, standing at 9.8%, which is nearly three times the state's average.

These significant differences suggest potential areas for further inquiry and analysis, particularly regarding identification practices, resource allocation, and support services for this specific and vulnerable student population across the various districts. Understanding the factors contributing to these disparities—especially the extremely high rates in Edgartown, Oak Bluffs, and Tisbury—is crucial for ensuring equitable educational outcomes.

Caseloads for special education teachers, related service providers, team chairs, and ESL teachers by school

To effectively evaluate the efficiency and appropriate staffing levels required to adequately support students with disabilities and those who are also identified as English Learner (EL) students, a comprehensive investigation into the current caseloads of the relevant service providers was deemed essential. The rationale behind this focus is that provider caseloads are a direct indicator of resource allocation, staff capacity, and the potential for individualized student attention. Consequently, the district was asked to furnish specific documentation detailing these caseload inquiries, which was critical for establishing a foundational understanding of the current service delivery model and identifying any areas of strain or inefficiency within the system. This documentation served as the primary data source for analyzing the distribution of student needs among specialized staff and determining if the existing staffing structure is robust enough to meet the dual-identification requirements of these complex learners without compromising service quality or compliance standards.

Special Education Caseloads

Discrepancies in Special Education Caseloads and Staffing Rationale

District documentation reveals a substantial disparity in special education caseloads across the various elementary school buildings. This significant variation is the primary driver for recommending a comprehensive review of current caseload assignments, daily instructional schedules, and potential methods for case consolidation. The ultimate goal of this review is to optimize resource allocation, which could potentially lead to a reduction in the overall number of special education teaching staff required across the district.

The potential for staffing consolidation would be further enhanced and made more feasible if the Island districts were to agree upon and implement a reconfiguration of their schools into grade-level specific buildings. This structural change, which would naturally centralize student populations by grade, is anticipated to create efficiencies in service delivery. This recommendation for organizational restructuring and its potential staffing implications is detailed later in the organizational section of this report.

A granular analysis of current caseload figures demonstrates the extent of the discrepancies:

- **Chilmark (19 students on IEPs total):** Special education teachers manage caseloads of **19 students**.
 - a. Chilmark has 7 educational support personnel (ESPs)
- **Edgartown (70 students on IEPs total):** Special education teachers report a wider range, with caseloads falling anywhere from **12 to 24 students**.
 - a. Edgartown has 21 educational support personnel (ESPs)
- **Oak Bluffs (78 students on IEPs total):** Caseloads are significantly lower than the other districts, ranging from **7 to 12 students** per special education teacher.
 - a. Oak Bluffs has 21 educational support personnel (ESPs)
- **Tisbury (59 students on IEPs total):** Similarly, Tisbury's caseloads are markedly lower than their counter districts, with figures ranging from **3 to 13 students**.
 - a. Tisbury has 18 educational support personnel (ESPs)

- **West Tisbury (72 students on IEPs total):** Data provided by West Tisbury indicates caseloads ranging from **5 to 13 students**.
 - a. West Tisbury has 17.67 educational support personnel (ESPs)

It is important to acknowledge the data from the regional high school, although it is not the focus of this K-8 study, as it is already a regionalized entity. For context, the high school's special education teacher caseloads currently range from 3 to 20 students.

The existence of shared programs, which are currently housed in five of the K-8 districts and at the regional high school, underscores the importance of this finding. The noted discrepancies in caseloads across all schools, even those with shared program components, highlight an inconsistency in the distribution of workload and, by extension, service model implementation. Addressing these pronounced variations is crucial for establishing an equitable and efficient district-wide special education service model.

English Learners (ELs) Caseloads

The district-provided documentation sheds light on the distribution of English Learner (EL) students and the corresponding English as a Second Language (ESL) staffing across the various school buildings. It is important to note that while the data provides the total number of ESL teachers per school, it lacks the critical information regarding the specific caseload size assigned to each individual teacher. This omission hinders a complete assessment of the support structure for EL students.

A detailed, school-by-school breakdown of the reported figures reveals inconsistencies and variance in EL student identification:

- **Chilmark:** This school reports **zero** identified EL students and consequently has **zero** dedicated ESL teachers.
- **Edgartown:** The student count for Edgartown exhibits a significant discrepancy between the provided documents. One document identifies **79** students as ELs, while a second document reports **43** students. Despite this notable difference in reported enrollment figures, the school is staffed with **4** ESL teachers.

- **Oak Bluffs:** Like Edgartown, Oak Bluffs provides conflicting enrollment data. The EL student population is cited as **87** students in one official document, yet another source lists **69** EL students. The school employs **4** ESL teachers to serve this student population.
- **Tisbury:** Tisbury's reported EL student numbers are closer but still inconsistent. One document indicates **74** EL students, and the second report shows **71** EL students. The school has **3** ESL teachers on staff.
- **West Tisbury:** This school reports the lowest EL student enrollment figures among the operating schools. One document states there are **15** identified EL students, while another provides a count of **12** students. The school is staffed with **1** ESL teacher.

The variations in the reported EL student counts across different official documents for the same reporting period require further investigation to establish the true number of students requiring ESL services in each building. Furthermore, without the individual teacher caseload data, it is challenging to accurately evaluate the student-to-teacher ratio and determine if the current staffing levels are adequate to meet the diverse linguistic and academic needs of the identified English Learner population, as mandated by instructional requirements.

Special Education RADAR

According to data derived from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) RADAR Special Education reporting system, the Martha's Vineyard Public Schools (MVPS) exhibit a significantly higher ratio of hired special education staff compared to the statewide average. This disparity, as visually represented in the subsequent table, Table 15 compels a deeper inquiry into the underlying factors driving such substantial staffing levels across each building within the district.

Special Education FTE per 100 Students with Disabilities		
District	Teachers	Paraprofessionals (ESPs)
State	5.9	11.4
Edgartown	7.3	25.4
Oak Bluffs	9.1	24.1
Tisbury	9.2	45.3
Martha's Vineyard	6.6	6.8
Up-Island	5.2	30.8

Table 14: Special Education FTE per 100 Students with Disabilities

The disproportionate staffing ratio raises several critical questions that require thorough investigation. Primarily, a comprehensive exploration is necessary to ascertain the specific purpose and justification for the high numbers of personnel. This inquiry must move beyond mere compliance metrics to examine the programmatic models, service delivery mechanisms, and unique student needs cited as the rationale for the current staffing structure.

Furthermore, a rigorous analysis must be conducted to determine the tangible impact of this significant staffing investment on core student outcomes. Specifically, the data must be examined to establish whether the higher staff-to-student ratio correlates with measurable improvements in student achievement, progress toward Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals, successful inclusion rates, and post-secondary success for students with disabilities.

Economically, the data necessitates a detailed budgetary review. The high staffing numbers are a major contributor to the overall inflation of the district's operating budget. An analysis of the cost-effectiveness and fiscal sustainability of the current staffing model is crucial to ensure responsible stewardship of public funds. The review should

compare per-pupil spending for special education in MVPS to demographically similar districts across the state, while accounting for the high cost of living on the island.

Finally, the reported data lends credibility to concerns raised during administrative interviews. Specifically, statements were made by district administrators indicating a deliberate strategy to maintain staff from year to year, even in the face of a reduced student population. The stated rationale for this retention strategy is to prevent trained staff from seeking employment in other, mainland districts, thereby mitigating the well-documented challenges of recruiting and retaining qualified personnel on Martha's Vineyard. This operational choice directly contributes to the inflated staffing numbers and warrants critical assessment regarding its ethical implications, long-term financial consequences, and ultimate impact on service quality when decoupled from current student enrollment needs.

Interviews

The report section summarizes a study where all participants answered four core questions. The number of follow-up questions varied by role (two or four extra questions) to gather in-depth data in two critical areas: Program Enhancement (improving support for special education and ELL students) and Cost-Effectiveness (optimizing resource allocation and service delivery). This differential approach ensured maximum data relevance and depth for nuanced recommendations.

The initial inquiry posed to participants was: *From your perspective, how well is the structure of special education meeting student needs? How do you know? What data supports your conclusions?* Every interviewee offered their perspective on the current structure.

Administrators at both the building and central office levels generally agree that special education is an area of strength across the Island, particularly where inclusive practices and co-teaching models have been implemented. Both groups recognize that students with disabilities are receiving substantial support and that recent shifts toward co-teaching, collaboration, and shared services have led to positive outcomes for many

students. At the same time, their perspectives differ in focus. Building administrators tend to emphasize observable student progress and day-to-day effectiveness within their own schools, while central office administrators focus more on systemwide consistency, alignment, and long-term sustainability.

Building administrators largely described special education as meeting student needs well within their schools. They pointed to concrete evidence such as improved MCAS results, strong growth data for high-needs students, effective inclusion practices, and positive feedback from families. Many highlighted the success of co-teaching models, adequate staffing levels, strong relationships with parents, and consistent monitoring of IEP implementation. Their responses often reflected confidence in their local structures, noting that small school size, frequent collaboration, and direct oversight allow them to closely track student progress and respond quickly to individual needs.

In contrast, central office administrators acknowledged these successes but emphasized variability across schools and questioned whether supports are always applied consistently or strategically. While they agreed that IEPs are generally being implemented, they raised concerns about uneven practices, over-identification, and reliance on anecdotal data rather than shared, systemwide metrics. Central office respondents focused on the need for clearer Tier 1 and Tier 2 intervention frameworks, more uniform inclusion practices, and a regionalized approach to special education that would provide a coherent continuum of services, reduce duplication, and allow staff to be deployed more flexibly across schools. They also highlighted structural challenges unique to the Island, such as limited access to day programs and dependence on residential placements.

Overall, both groups see strong commitment to serving students with disabilities and recognize the positive impact of inclusive and co-taught models. The primary difference lies in perspective: building administrators view special education as largely effective based on local data and daily experience, while central office administrators identify systemic inconsistencies and advocate for greater alignment, shared data, and regional

coordination to ensure equitable and sustainable support for all students across the Island.

The second question asked participants *If you could redesign the programs to be both better for EL students and those with disabilities and more efficient, what would that look like? And what barriers might make these changes difficult?*

Both principals and central office administrators provided thoughtful perspectives on redesigning programs to better meet student needs while improving efficiency. Their responses reflect a shared commitment to inclusive, student-centered approaches, with particular emphasis on co-teaching, individualized supports, and collaborative practices. However, differences emerge in scope and focus: principals tend to emphasize day-to-day operational challenges and school-specific solutions, whereas central office administrators focus on system-wide coherence, scalability, and structural barriers that affect all schools.

Similarities:

- **Commitment to Inclusion:** Both groups highlighted co-teaching as an effective model for keeping students in general education classrooms and supporting diverse learners, including special education and EL students.
- **Focus on Student-Centered Practices:** Both emphasized tailoring programs to student needs, such as individualized supports and attention to growth data.
- **Recognition of Barriers:** Principals and central office administrators identified financial constraints, staffing limitations, and buy-in from teachers and the community as challenges to program redesign.
- **Collaboration and Planning:** Both groups stressed the importance of shared planning, professional development, and data-driven decision-making to ensure program effectiveness.

Differences:

- **Scope of Perspective:** Principals focused primarily on school-specific implementation, scheduling, and operational logistics, such as managing EL programs, WIN blocks, and co-teaching schedules. Central office administrators took a broader, system-level perspective, considering scalability, consistency across schools, and structural redesign of services (e.g., redefining Tier 1 interventions, consultation models, and A/B grid structures).
- **Emphasis on Trust and Communication:** Central office responses highlighted the critical need for trust among administrators and consistent messaging across schools to implement systemic changes, whereas principals emphasized practical obstacles like staff fatigue, time constraints, and the immediate challenge of scheduling and resources.
- **Early Childhood Focus:** Central office administrators explicitly identified preschool and early childhood programs as a priority area for redesign due to growth and cost, while principals focused more on EL and SPED program efficiency within their individual schools.
- **Vision vs. Operational Detail:** Principals offered concrete examples of potential improvements at the classroom and school level, such as mixed staff assignments and individualized student growth strategies. Central office administrators discussed larger structural shifts, emphasizing shared ownership, cross-school collaboration, and redefining roles to optimize program impact.

The third question in this focus area asked some participants: *In what ways are the IEP processes and staffing used across schools aligned? How do they differ? How do you know?*

Administrators indicated that IEP processes and staffing show areas of both alignment and variability across schools. Early childhood special education is relatively well-aligned, and having one designated student services director to oversee each district supports consistency in oversight. Key roles, such as liaisons, a BCBA, and coordinators, help provide guidance and maintain a uniform approach where possible. IEP processes are supported by committees, referral protocols, and grant-funded initiatives, particularly for EL students.

Differences persist in efficiency, implementation, and social-emotional curriculum support, which varies by school depending on available personnel and how meetings are conducted. Some schools face challenges with over-identification and inconsistencies in MTSS implementation, Tier 2/3 interventions, and IEP documentation processes. Principals emphasized the need for centralized oversight to ensure consistency, noting that having one individual review IEPs across schools is more efficient, though high school IEPs are managed separately, creating some inefficiencies.

Overall, alignment exists at the structural and leadership level, but practical execution differs school to school, requiring ongoing coordination, communication, and oversight.

The last question in this category asked some participants: *Who develops/provides/plans professional development for EL and special education staff? How is effectiveness measured?*

Professional development for EL and special education staff is primarily developed and delivered by the Director of ELL, the Special Education Director, the Early Childhood Coordinator, and the Behavior Health Coordinator. Principals are sometimes involved, and external consultants or trainers are brought in for specialized sessions. PD sessions are generally aligned with the district's School Improvement Plan (SIP) priorities, but principals noted that there is not a strong, systematic plan in place—much of the PD is developed based on immediate teacher requests or emerging needs. Effectiveness is measured primarily through teacher surveys and feedback after each session, which are then used to refine future PD. Some PD includes stipends or grant-funded initiatives to incentivize participation, and certain sessions aim to address practical instructional strategies, Tier 1/2 interventions, multilingual learners, or safety and behavior management. Overall, PD is viewed as useful and occasionally inspirational, but the process is informal, reactive, and lacks a cohesive long-term strategy.

Focus Groups

In our focus group sessions, we asked three questions related to our overarching question: *How can one district improve special education and ELL programs for students while also making them more cost-effective?* The questions specifically focused on special education and ELL, with participants from a range of roles responding. Our questions garnered responses about caseloads, the IEP process, and services for both students on IEPs and ELs. There were also challenges noted in the current structure of special education, and multiple suggestions about how both programs could be improved.

The first question was: *In what ways are the IEP processes and staffing used across schools aligned? How do they differ? How do you know?*

Each grade level typically has a SPED teacher with a caseload of 10-20 students, and collaboration across grade levels for student support is challenging due to overwhelming caseloads and modifications. Most students are referred for IEPs by teachers, leading to weekly SST (Student Support Team) or RST (Response to Intervention) meetings. However, the process is perceived as slow and clogged, with a sense that administration discourages referrals, causing parents to bypass the system. Teachers feel unsupported and that the process isn't working, leading to struggling children, especially after fifth grade when support diminishes.

There is a shared services program that is regionalized for sub-separate students (e.g., autism, emotional dysregulation), with students bussed to specific schools. Additionally, schools have their own special education departments, and there is a SPED administrator at the district level. The process of getting students on IEPs varies significantly between schools, and student records, including those for ELL students, are not consistently shared when students transfer, requiring new permissions to access information. Some towns, like Edgartown, have strong EL programs that are sought after. PowerSchool add-ons could benefit from uniformity across schools to ensure student information travels with them. While the process is generally similar across all schools, relying on team members and speaking to the same Director of

Student Services, there are discrepancies in different towns regarding ELLs.

As an interventionist, one respondent said that having data to prove student progress is important, and there is an anticipation of learning how new curricula are working in other schools. SPED is considered expensive but valuable, and there's a need to understand inclusion better and move away from 1:1 support in middle school, as it doesn't continue in high school, leading to IEPs needing to be rewritten. There is a concern that the current approach is not addressing population changes.

Schools use data points and RTI support, with students going through a child study team process that can take a year. While efforts are made to ensure students have support before transitioning to high school, the referral process is slow and feels like "dragging heels," leading to questions about teacher effort and financial implications. A streamlined process is lacking, but once students are on IEPs, the service delivery is generally good.

The second question was: *From your perspective, how well is the structure of special education meeting student needs? How do you know? What data supports your conclusions?* Respondents said that the structure of special education in the lower grades is strong, with specialists providing daily support to students. The referral process for evaluating students for Tier 3, however, is difficult, particularly at grades 5-8. While students can be identified, there is a lack of further support due to staffing shortages.

Students on IEPs receive services and the program has improved with co-teaching and inclusion services, but data to show progress is often unavailable. Some schools have strong systems for early support, with regionalized programs like COMPASS and BRIDGE for emotional needs. However, there are also schools where special education support is stretched thin due to a high percentage of high-needs students, leading to a focus on basic service provision and no resources for accelerated programs. Teachers in these settings are accustomed to students being pulled out and are not as used to

providing additional services within the classroom.

The third question was: *If you could redesign the programs to be both better for students and more efficient, what would that look like? And what barriers might make these changes difficult?* Respondents said If programs were redesigned to be better for students and more efficient, there would be enough staff to meet every student's needs, including more teachers in each middle school grade level to offer accelerated classes and more support options. Regionalization, using the same programs and processes, would lead to better professional development, though catching everyone up would take years and require continuous meetings. Cost-effective aspects exist, but concerns remain regarding bussing, servicing, and class sizes. A better mixing of students in middle school and a clearer Student Support Team (SST) process are desired, moving away from a mentality of using SST solely for Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). Increased documentation from younger grades for SST is crucial, as the system is still developing.

While some schools have increased special education teachers, there is a question about the right type of staff and the number needed, especially with changing demographics (65% high-needs population now compared to 45% 10-15 years ago). This demographic shift complicates regionalization, as towns, not schools, drive decisions, and some towns resist regionalization despite internal support. The cost of living also impacts student numbers, which fluctuate but remain around 400-410. Some schools do a good job with special education, offering many resources and co-teaching in every grade level. Teachers need to be on board with support programs and not feel burdened by additional planning, especially since there are no programs for students above grade level.

[Classroom Observations](#)

Section 3: Instruction (Standard II-A, II-B)

All students engage in the complex thinking and ideas of the lesson through instructional practices and pedagogy that are evidence-based, inclusive, and culturally and linguistically sustaining.

d. All students receive and incorporate targeted and constructive feedback that clarifies misconceptions and/or deepens the quality of student work and thinking.

- *Teacher(s) set and clearly communicate expectations for student thinking and work.*
- *Teacher(s) check for understanding and monitor student work to assess students' progress towards learning goals and to identify and respond to misunderstandings.*
- *Teacher(s) provides asset-based feedback that maintains the cognitive lift on students.*
- *Students receive frequent whole-class and/or individual feedback, from peers or from teacher(s), that reinforces expectations for student work and aligns with the goals of the lesson.*

Yes	12
Mostly	6
Partially	3
Not Yet	0
Not Observed	7

This document summarizes classroom observations focused on the theme of students receiving and incorporating targeted, constructive feedback. Positive examples of effective feedback included immediate 1:1 or whole-class feedback, use of probing questions, modeling tools, instant formative assessment, and direct small-group instruction. However, areas for growth were also identified, including feedback not being observed in several classes, missed opportunities to check for understanding, the need to encourage higher-order thinking, and concerns about negative feedback approaches (e.g., calling out individual issues) and about managing discussion domination.

When examining inclusive practices, observers consider a range of approaches. The following instructional methodologies were reviewed to identify common approaches and systemic consistencies that support inclusive practices across all schools: (See Table 16 below):

Percentage of Inclusive Strategies Observed in Classrooms	
Inclusive Strategy:	Percentage of Observed Classrooms Implementing Identified Strategy:
Small group instruction	50%
Graphic Organizers	21%
Peer Tutors	4%
Cooperative Learning	54%
Heterogeneous Groups	29%
Non-Linguistic Representation	14%
Movement	36%
Hands-on Activities and Learning Experiences	64%
Student Choice	46%
Flexible Grouping	21%
Rubrics	7%
Technology	50%
Differentiated Instruction and UDL	25%

Table 15: Percentages of Inclusion Strategies Observed in Classrooms

The observation data reveals a varied implementation of inclusive practices across classrooms, with some strategies widely used and others rarely present.

High-frequency strategies

The classrooms surveyed show a clear integration of inclusive teaching practices. The most common practice is hands-on activities (64%), followed by cooperative learning (54%), and then equally frequent strategies of small-group instruction (50%) and technology integration (50%). These findings emphasize a strong focus on experiential,

collaborative, and targeted teaching, with continued use of digital tools to support diverse learners.

Moderately used strategies

The input text outlines the implementation of several classroom practices. Student choice (46%) and movement-based strategies (36%) were moderately implemented. Less common were Heterogeneous grouping (29%) and UDL/differentiated instruction (25%), suggesting these are emerging areas of focus.

Low-frequency strategies

A recent report highlights that several high-impact inclusive classroom practices are being used infrequently, potentially hindering support for diverse learners. Practices observed in only about one in five classrooms include graphic organizers and flexible grouping. Non-linguistic representations were rarely seen (14%), and rubrics, which provide transparency, were also limited (7%). Peer tutoring, despite its strong research support, was the least common practice observed (4%).

Overall Interpretation

Teachers effectively use active, collaborative, and technology-supported strategies for instruction, but the text notes an opportunity to improve instructional design and accessibility. Specifically, the consistent application of structured supports (like graphic organizers and rubrics) and explicit Universal Design for Learning (UDL) practices is less frequent. Suggested professional development should target strengthening these areas by focusing on offering multiple means of representation, increasing flexible grouping, embedding clarity/access tools (visuals, rubrics), and utilizing peer-assisted learning structures.

Focus Area 7: Potential Advantages of a One-Region Structure

- **What other advantages does a one-region structure bring to the educational program/students?**

Document Review

In this section, the question we asked was: *What unique course, program, etc. is offered in each building to make it your own?* We examined the unique courses, programs, including programs within and outside of the school day, etc., that are offered in each building and what threads could be tied together to build a stronger school system while preserving the integrity and culture of each school. We learned the following:

During the School Day:

Oak Bluffs - Oak Bluffs provides the following:

- Engineering 5-8
- Spanish 7-8
- Algebra - Grade 8
- Health Curriculum Taught in Classroom - 5-8
- Compass Program

Edgartown - Edgartown provides the following:

- Enrichment math in grade 7
- Algebra - Grade 8
- WIN (What I Need) Blocks - K-8
- SPARK UA - Rotation for grades 5 and 6
- School Plays by classroom in grades 3,4, and 5
- Open Gym - Grades 5-8 from 7:30am - 8:10am daily
- School Garden Program
- Spanish - Grades 4-8
- Unified Arts Program - Health, Music, PE, Tech, Art, Library (K-4), FACS and IA (5-8)
- Student Council - 7-8
- Buddies - older grades partner with lower grades for morning meetings
- Monthly fun runs - whole school community meetings
- Traditions - UN Day, Children's Day, Author visits, winter concert, March to Sea, 8th Grade Recognition
- Trips - 6th grade trip to Nature's Classroom, and annual trip for each grade level

West Tisbury - West Tisbury provides the following:

- Enrichment math; multiple courses Grades 5-8
- WIN - What I Need Blocks
- Specials Rotation Electives - grades 7 and 8
- Study Skills - Grade 6
- Civics - Grade 6

Tisbury - Tisbury provides the following:

- School Pride
- Spanish K-8 - Early exposure balanced with other electives
- Specials - band, guitar club
- Growing extra-curricular activities

Chilmark - Chilmark provides the following:

- Outing program
- Multi-age classrooms
- Morning Circle
- Long standing traditions and trips that include all students and are paid for by fundraising
- Project Based Learning

Extra-Curricular Activities Across Each School K-8

Oak Bluffs - Oak Bluffs runs the following programs before and after school:

- Middle School Sports - track, volleyball, basketball
- School play/musical
- Homework clubs for elementary and middle schools
- After school enrichment activities that are teacher interest based
- Student Council

Edgartown - Edgartown run the following programs before and after school:

- Middle School Sports (6-8) - track, basketball, volleyball
- Mock Trial - grade 7
- School Musical - grades 5-8
- After School Clubs - 3 six-week rotations of various clubs for all ages/grades
- Homework Club - grades 3-8
- Town Library or Boys and Girls Club for programming

West Tisbury - West Tisbury runs the following programs before and after school:

- Middle School Sports (6-8) - track, basketball, volleyball
- School musical (3-8)
- Before school open gym
- Afterschool 5–6-week clubs (3x per year, multiple grades, all days)

Tisbury - Tisbury runs the following programs before and after school:

- Sports - track and field, basketball and volleyball: some students participate in the all-island Junior High football team.
- Note: The location of information for this section was directed to the School Handbook. No further information was available through the handbook on extra-curricular activities.

Chilmark - Chilmark runs the following programs before and after school:

- Ad hoc based on adult availability and interest
- Partnering with the library

It is evident that each school offers a unique culture and opportunities that vary for their students from the other schools. This is invaluable to the wellbeing of the school and the community and should be preserved. It is necessary, however, that there are areas for consideration to make the schools more “alike” for the benefit of student learning and opportunities. The following chart is provided below to bring the schools together while preserving their uniqueness:

Must Dos
<p>Curriculum:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Spanish - Grades 5-8 (with possible consideration of grades K-4)● Mathematics - Algebra in Grade 8● Health Curriculum - K-8 as designated in the MA Frameworks● A single designated Social-Emotional Curriculum taught with fidelity● Specials - Art, Music, Physical Education, Library● S.T.E.M. - All grades with added emphasis in grades 5-8 on engineering● Civics integrated into all grade levels as part of the MA Frameworks for History and Social Sciences● Overall, a COMMON CURRICULUM for the major content areas: ELA, mathematics, science and social studies to be used with fidelity and developed by curriculum teams across the schools.● Nature’s Classroom - Grade 6

Experiences that Building Administrators may unify under with collaboration:

- Annual grade level field trips to the same locations
- Extra-Curricular Activities after school as much as possible; At least offering an after-school program
- WIN Blocks or similar approaches to intervention time grades K-8
- Study Skills course in either grade 6,7, or 8 in preparation for high school

Experiences that PTO/PTA Organizations/Teaching Staff/Administrators within each building may be open to address:

- Before and After Programming

Interviews

The regionalization study included an examination of the quality, effectiveness, and efficiency of professional development across the participating school districts. This area of the study was supported by three main questions, with all interviewees responding to at least two of these questions.

The first question in this section asked participants: *What professional development and/or opportunities to collaborate at grade level or vertically are provided to teachers annually related to the curriculum? Who plans it? How is effectiveness measured?*

Professional development and opportunities for collaboration around curriculum are seen as critical by both principals and central office administrators, yet both groups acknowledge that current practices are limited, inconsistent, and often reactive. While there are pockets of effective PD and collaboration, such as HMH training or school-specific initiatives, systemic alignment across schools and grade levels is lacking. Both groups identify a need for a more coordinated, strategic, and sustainable approach to PD that addresses curriculum implementation, instructional consistency, and student outcomes.

Similarities:

- **Limited and Inconsistent PD:** Both principals and central office administrators highlighted that curriculum-focused PD is minimal and unevenly implemented across schools.

- **Principal Responsibility:** Principals largely plan and coordinate PD at the building level, with the central office providing some guidance but not consistently directing curriculum-related training.
- **Reliance on External Funding or Grants:** Both groups noted that grant-funded initiatives (e.g., HMM) have been a primary source of structured PD opportunities, rather than sustained district-wide programming.
- **Focus on SEL rather than Curriculum:** Central office and principals agree that much of the PD has historically emphasized SEL, anti-bias work, or general instructional practices rather than specific curriculum or content-area strategies.
- **Challenges with Collaboration:** Both groups identified limited opportunities for school-to-school or vertical collaboration, with few structures in place to support cross-school professional learning communities (PLCs).

Differences:

- **Perception of Structure:** Principals often noted examples of school-based collaboration, such as vertical teams or site-specific PD days, even if limited, whereas central office administrators emphasized the piecemeal, request-based nature of PD and the lack of systemic planning.
- **Assessment of Effectiveness:** Principals tend to measure effectiveness informally, through teacher surveys or observations during PD sessions, while central office administrators noted there is no formal system for evaluating the impact of curriculum-focused PD.
- **Central Office Role:** Central office highlighted systemic constraints, including budget limitations and the challenges of coordinating across multiple autonomous schools, whereas principals focused more on day-to-day implementation and the practical barriers to collaboration within and between schools.
- **Awareness of Gaps:** Central office administrators emphasized the structural barriers preventing sustained curriculum PD (e.g., lack of district-level budget, fragmented authority), whereas principals highlighted operational barriers like scheduling, teacher buy-in, and lack of time for collaborative planning.

Implications:

The responses suggest a need for a district-wide strategy to coordinate curriculum-related PD, ensure vertical and grade-level collaboration, and provide clear measures of effectiveness. Strengthening the role of central office in planning, aligning, and resourcing PD could complement principals' efforts at the building level, ensuring that training not only meets teacher needs but also drives consistent implementation across schools. Grant-funded initiatives like HMH provide useful models, but a sustainable approach will require dedicated funding, structured collaboration time, and consistent communication from central leadership.

The next question asked participants: *How does the current structure support—or hinder—student transitions between grade levels or schools?*

Participants generally agreed that transitions between grade levels within the same school are working well, with many schools implementing strategies to ease these transitions. Examples include mid-year orientation for 8th-to-9th grade transitions, teachers “moving down a grade” to familiarize themselves with incoming students, and intake meetings for kindergarten and high school students to share key information with teachers. These practices support continuity in student learning and social-emotional adjustment.

Participants consistently noted that transitions between different schools are more challenging. Differences in curriculum, instructional approaches, and scope and sequence across schools create hurdles for students, particularly for EL students or those moving from one town to another. Communication gaps between schools and variation in assessment and teaching practices can lengthen adjustment periods and cause anxiety for both students and teachers. While some schools use shared systems or resources (e.g., *Elevation* for enrollment tracking), the effectiveness of these tools depends on timely communication and consistent implementation.

Similarities:

- **Grade-to-Grade Transitions within a School:** Most participants felt these are generally smooth due to intentional strategies like teacher handoffs, mid-year orientation, and shared student information.
- **Challenges with School-to-School Transitions:** All respondents highlighted that moving between different schools is more difficult, mainly due to inconsistencies in curriculum, assessment, and instructional approaches.
- **Support for EL Students:** Multiple participants emphasized that transitions are especially complex for EL students, requiring careful staffing and targeted supports.
- **Use of Intake and Information-Sharing Systems:** Participants across schools mentioned practices like intake meetings and data-sharing to help teachers prepare for incoming students.

Differences:

- **Perception of Transition Quality:** Some participants felt transitions (both grade-to-grade and school-to-school) are well-supported, while others emphasized persistent gaps, particularly related to curriculum alignment and communication.
- **Focus on Curriculum Alignment:** Some participants highlighted specific curriculum differences, such as the use of unique programs like the RULER approach, whereas others focused more on logistical supports like guidance counselors and intake processes.
- **Communication Practices:** While several schools reported strong collaboration and proactive communication between teachers during transitions, others noted gaps or delays in sharing information, particularly when students move between schools or towns.
- **Grade-Specific Concerns:** Transition challenges were often framed differently depending on grade level. Kindergarten and high school intake procedures were highlighted as effective, whereas middle school and high school academic transitions, especially in math or AP classes, were noted as anxiety-inducing.

While grade-level transitions within schools are generally supported through intentional planning and information-sharing, school-to-school transitions remain inconsistent and challenging due to differences in curriculum, instructional practices, and communication

gaps. Effective strategies, such as intake meetings, teacher collaboration, and centralized tracking systems, help mitigate some challenges, but broader alignment and coordination across schools could further enhance student transitions.

The third question asked: *How does the current structure support—or hinder—staff transitions between grade levels or schools from one year to the next?*

Participants had mixed perspectives on how the current structure supports or hinders staff transitions. Several respondents noted that transitions are generally manageable, especially when there is autonomy within grade levels or schools. Teachers often start fresh when moving to a new grade or school, which can make the process smoother. Opportunities for communication and collaboration across grade levels were cited as helpful in facilitating these transitions.

Challenges were also highlighted. Transitions between different schools, particularly from elementary to middle school, were described as more difficult due to differences in school culture, expectations, and structures. Some participants noted that moving teachers between grades or schools can be a struggle when there are inconsistencies in classroom expectations or staffing needs. Small class sizes and concerns about losing strong teachers were also barriers, as these factors limit flexibility in staffing decisions. Overall, while some mechanisms exist to support transitions, structural and cultural factors can create obstacles, particularly for school-to-school moves or when professional roles are at stake.

Similarities:

- Autonomy within schools and grade levels generally supports teacher transitions.
- Communication and collaboration among colleagues are helpful for easing transitions.
- Elementary-to-middle school moves are consistently noted as more challenging than grade-to-grade transitions within the same school.

Differences:

- Some participants felt transitions were smooth and not a major hindrance, while others highlighted significant struggles related to school culture, professional status, and staffing constraints.
- Perceptions varied depending on the level of the school (elementary vs. middle/high) and the frequency of teacher movement between grades or schools.
- Structural constraints, like small class sizes or contract limitations, were cited as barriers by some, but not all participants noted these issues.

Overall, staff transitions between grades within a single school are generally supported, though challenges arise when moving across schools or levels due to cultural differences, structural constraints, and concerns about staffing stability. Effective communication and collaboration help mitigate some difficulties, but system-wide alignment and planning could improve the consistency and ease of staff transitions.

Participants generally acknowledged that a one-region structure could provide expanded academic opportunities, particularly in areas of equity, collaboration, and access to advanced or specialized courses. Several respondents noted that at the high school level, regionalization is already in place, enabling access to AP classes, CTE programs, and bilingual education. Expanding this model to lower grade levels could allow earlier exposure to electives, career pathways, and other enrichment programs. Respondents emphasized that collaboration among teachers across schools could enhance instructional practices and ultimately benefit student learning.

Equity was highlighted as a central advantage of a regional system. Some participants observed that funding disparities across towns currently limit access to programs; a regional structure could distribute resources more fairly, ensuring that all students have equitable access to services, electives, and enrichment opportunities. Additionally, consistent professional development and cross-school collaboration were seen as key ways to increase instructional quality and student growth.

Several participants were cautious or uncertain about the impact, noting that the evidence for academic benefits beyond the high school level is limited. Concerns were also raised about community resistance, particularly from wealthier towns, regarding perceived redistribution of resources. Ensuring buy-in and maintaining local identity while implementing regional programs was viewed as a potential challenge.

Similarities:

- Agreement that regionalization at the high school level already supports expanded academic opportunities (AP, CTE, electives).
- Consensus that collaboration among teachers across schools could improve instruction and student outcomes.
- Recognition that equity in funding and program access is a major potential benefit.
- Interest in extending successful high school models to middle and lower grades.

Differences:

- Some participants emphasized tangible program expansion (e.g., regional band, shared CTE courses) while others focused on structural equity and teacher collaboration as the primary benefit.
- Degree of certainty about positive outcomes varied; some were confident, while others indicated a lack of sufficient evidence to predict benefits.
- Concerns about community pushback and financial redistribution were more pronounced in responses focused on equity and resource allocation.

A one-region structure is perceived as a promising avenue for expanding academic opportunities, especially by providing equitable access to advanced courses, electives, and specialized programs, while fostering collaboration among teachers. Yet, the success of such a structure depends on thoughtful implementation, community buy-in, and careful attention to equity across towns.

Focus Groups

We posed four questions to our focus group related to our overarching question: *What other advantages does a one-region structure bring to the educational program/students?* These questions sought to stretch the thinking of our participants, including the effectiveness of the current professional development structure, planning, and evaluation, as well as the transition of students from middle to high school. There were also questions that asked participants to look to the future with potential opportunities for expanded opportunities for students, and increased equity of access for students to special education and ELL services as well as enrichment programs.

The first question was: *What professional development and/or opportunities to collaborate at grade level or vertically are provided to teachers annually related to the curriculum? Who plans it? How is effectiveness measured?* Respondents said that PD offerings are sometimes limited in relevance, with teachers often taking the initiative to find and complete PD on their own time. While some schools, like West Tisbury, are able to fund good PD, there are issues with timely information dissemination for district-planned PD. Regionalized PD, particularly for subjects like music, is highly valued, allowing teachers to meet with colleagues from other schools. However, the amount of time dedicated to arts programs varies across schools. There's a sentiment that the last math PD was over 30 years ago. Upper-grade science teachers attempt to meet, but scheduling difficulties hinder consistent collaboration. A previous push for PLCs (Professional Learning Communities) where grade levels met regularly has diminished as participation became voluntary. There's a master plan for PD time, and while district days offer a variety of options, teachers express a desire for PD that provides tangible, usable takeaways, making it difficult to justify giving up their time for unproductive meetings. The lack of a clear leader for PLCs is also noted as a factor in their reduced effectiveness.

The second question asked: *How does the current structure support, or hinder, student transitions between grade levels or schools?* Respondents noted that different curriculums and a lack of differentiation in middle schools lead to students entering high

school with varied experiences. While some schools have successful transitions within their own buildings due to strong relationships and practices, there is a significant lack of alignment between schools, particularly when students move from one to another.

This situation is exacerbated by housing insecurity and school choice, leading to students frequently switching schools and having to adapt to completely different teaching methods. The text highlights that populations, budgets, schedules, and learning opportunities are all disparate across the different schools, creating a challenging environment for students, especially those with lower socio-economic concerns and English language learner issues. Although there are efforts for 8th and 9th grade PLCs (Professional Learning Communities) and high school teachers working with 8th grade teachers, a smooth transition between middle and high school is often contrasted with the more difficult transitions when students move between different schools. Guidance is noted as being helpful in supporting transitions to high school.

The third question was: *How might a one-region structure expand academic opportunities for students (e.g., advanced courses, electives, career pathways)?* One respondent noted that despite having a regionalized high school, they did not observe increased opportunities there, and the environment felt less supportive. Another suggested that a 5-8 grade structure could allow for different approaches to student needs, as the current system sometimes "waters stuff down" due to a high percentage of students with lower ability levels, even though a group of kids could handle more challenging work.

The fourth question was: *How might a regional structure increase equity of access to special education, ELL services, or enrichment programs?* Respondents said inequities exist due to some schools having very high English Language Learner (ELL) populations, which diverts resources. For example, Edgartown spent a significant amount of money on its ELL population last year, and Tisbury and Edgartown have the vast majority of ELL students. If regionalized, services could be provided differently, and communication would be stronger, even within the same building.

Focus Area 8 : Perspectives

- **What other issues, concerns, information can be shared at this time?**

Document Review

In our document review the first question was: *What are the grading policies for each school system?* Each elementary school, as well as the regional high school, provide the grading systems used to communicate student achievement. This is different from grading policies, which outline the position of the school in terms of determining grading priorities, addressing issues that arise when facing challenges to grades.

Consistent in the response is the use of a standards-based format at the elementary level, K-4, except for Edgartown who identified “none that are consistent.” At the middle school level, (grades 5-8), there is a fluctuation in the use of letter grades, grading periods, (trimester vs. semester), and the piloting of standards-based grading which is taking place in Oak Bluffs. (See Table 17 below):

What are the grading policies for each school system?	
Chilmark	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Emerging. ● Semesters (narrative standards based grading 2x a year)
Oak Bluffs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● K-4 Standards based narrative ● 5-8 Math is piloting standards-based grading ● 5-8 letter grades
Edgartown	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● None that are consistent.
West Tisbury	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Semesters ● K-8 Standards based grading ● Mid-semester report for 6-8 students that reports on ‘Habits of Learning’
Tisbury	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● K-4 Standards Based. Language is around “applies skill” ● 5-8 Letter grades. Trimesters.
MVRHS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Number grading system behind the scenes that translates to a forward-facing A-F grading system. All teachers create category weights. Some use total points to determine letter grade. ● Weighted GPA

Table 16: Grading Policies for Each School System

The next question was: *What is the student information platform used in each school? What is the special education platform used in each school?* It was reported by the Director of Student Services that Powerschool is the platform used in each school, which is purchased separately by each district, rather than a single purchase for all schools on the Island. Frontline, known as ESPED, is the platform used for special education, and Elevation is the online platform used for the English Learner database.

The final question was: *What are the counseling, nursing, and psychologist caseloads, FTE?*

In response, the district provided the response indicated in Table 18 below:

What are the counseling, nursing, and psychologist caseloads, FTE?	
Chilmark	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 1 Nurse: 75 students ● 0.6 FTE Guidance Counselor: 75 students
Oak Bluffs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Nurse, 1 ● Guidance Counselor K-4: 195 ● Guidance Counselor 5-8: 174 ● Adj Counselor for Compass, 1 ● Outside clinicians 1x per week.
Edgartown	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 2 Nurses ● 2 Guidance Counselors
West Tisbury	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 1 nurse for whole school ● 2 guidance counselors ● 2 health and wellness support/teachers
Tisbury	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 1 Nurse ● 2 Guidance Counselors
MVRHS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 1 Nurse/750 students ● 3.5 Adjustment counselors/750 students ● 4 Guidance/College Counselors/750 students ● One of the four shared services school psych is dedicated to MVRHS for all students and testing

Table 17: Counseling, nursing, and psychologist caseloads, FTEs

The table shows the inequity in the number of nurses in each school, with Oak Bluffs and the regional high school having one nurse while Edgartown has two nurses, despite the comparable student population in each of these schools. Chilmark does not have a guidance counselor or adjustment counselor, while Oak Bluffs provides the services of outside clinicians at least 1x per week. West Tisbury also offers two health and wellness support teachers, while the presence of these roles is not indicated in the other schools.

Shared Services Caseloads

The following additional information was provided in this document section:

PK-grade 12

School Psychologists 4 FTE's- each average 75-80 evaluations a year

OT- 2 FTE's- average 40 students each

PT-1 FTE 19-25 students

SLP- 7 FTE's- average 40 students each

It is unclear whether the four school psychologists average a total of 75-80 evaluations per year in total or individually, or whether the shared service caseload reflects services for one school or across some or all schools.

Summary: Commonality across elementary schools in all areas would be beneficial to student learning and teaching practices to ensure that all students “get what they need” to learn in terms of access, feedback, and accountability. It would be beneficial for all elementary schools to use a standard format for grading, including the presentation of a common report card. Given that a standards-based report card is used for four of the five elementary schools, the development of a common report card would be applicable, once the schools establish a common curriculum for each content area by which the standards can be defined, a standards-based report card, with common language and a clear understanding of the meaning of each of the standards as well as the scoring, can be developed. The same approach would be true of the middle school, including the possibility of a standards-based report card developed in a similar manner.

It would also be beneficial for schools to share a common PowerSchool platform so that student information can be transferable across schools as needed, such as the process currently with ESPD and Elevation. This would be especially helpful in maintaining data on students who move and change schools within the island. In addition, the receiving regional high school would be able to plan for necessary supports and interventions for students based on data provided in these platforms re: grades, absences, truancies, behavioral supports, and other relevant information.

At this time, there is not enough information to analyze the information provided under “shared services” to better understand how the service provision breaks down, how many hours are spent in each school, which schools the service providers are attending, etc.

Interviews

In this section of the report, participants were asked one question: *Are there any other issues that you believe are helpful in this process?* These responses provided insight to some concerns, interests, and hopes regarding the future of the school districts on the Island.

Participants raised a mix of practical, historical, and community-based considerations that could impact regionalization efforts. A recurring theme was the need for structural improvements, particularly the creation of a centralized HR function and standardized administrative processes. Several respondents noted inconsistencies across schools—such as leave requests, payroll processes, and contract management—that could be streamlined under a regional system, enhancing efficiency and equity.

Financial sustainability and cost efficiency were repeatedly mentioned. Participants highlighted the high costs of duplicated programs and infrastructure, and viewed regionalization as a way to reduce redundancy and manage resources more effectively. Historical hesitancy toward regionalization was acknowledged, with some participants noting long-standing resistance rooted in tradition or competition among towns.

The importance of communication and transparency emerged as a key issue. Respondents stressed that staff and community members need clear narratives about the process to avoid confusion or misinformation. Ensuring that teachers, administrators, and the broader community have a voice and feel included in decision-making was emphasized as critical to building trust and buy-in.

Finally, participants highlighted community identity and local beliefs as potential challenges. While there is optimism about the benefits of regionalization, including equity, efficiency, and collaboration, there is recognition that differences in town cultures, priorities, and historical practices may slow or complicate implementation.

Similarities Across Responses:

- Consensus on the potential for regionalization to improve efficiency, equity, and cost management.
- Agreement that centralized HR and administrative processes are lacking and would be valuable.
- Recognition that communication and community engagement are critical to success.
- Awareness of historical resistance and local traditions as potential barriers.

Differences Across Responses:

- Some participants focused primarily on financial and operational efficiencies, while others emphasized community dynamics and staff buy-in.
- Varying levels of optimism: some see regionalization as a straightforward path to improvement, while others view historical biases and cultural factors as significant hurdles.
- Suggestions ranged from structural fixes (HR, payroll, leave policies) to broader considerations like union contracts, class sizes, and equitable resource allocation.

Participants generally see regionalization as beneficial but caution that success will depend on addressing administrative inconsistencies, managing costs, and securing staff and community buy-in. Thoughtful communication, collaboration, and consideration of local culture are essential to move the process forward effectively.

Focus Groups

Respondents said that increased mental health counseling services would be ideal, with a need for more support and collaboration with educators in other schools, and more opportunities for co-teaching models. A major concern among staff is the cost of housing, and there is a general sentiment that regionalization might lead to staff condensing and reductions, despite a desire for budgets to come down. There is not much hope for regionalization, according to the respondents, as it is not something everyone on the island can support, (it was noted that even the police department is not regionalized). Teachers would find it helpful to understand the pros and cons of regionalization from other towns and what the big changes would be, with all towns interested in potential money savings. There is a strong belief that if students are not prepared in reading, writing, and math by high school, something needs to be done, as many are unprepared for life beyond the island and lack independence, indicating a need for increased rigor. Finally, school culture and its impact on the tax base cannot be overlooked, especially with recent changes in the island's population and stereotypes about different populations, as each district has varying income levels, property requirements, and student demographics.

Comments after the focus group session included:

When schools make the shift to prioritize digital instruction and assessment, it would make sense that handwriting and an emphasis on penmanship is going to be sacrificed. As someone who recognizes and values the profound connection between writing and thinking, I worry a lot about the impact digital composition is having on young minds (not just on handwriting). I was with freshmen last week who are tired of being asked to do readings online. Their eyes hurt; they're getting headaches. Others remarked that they can't easily annotate. The fact that students these days are unable to take a standardized test (SATs, MCAS) on paper (with a pen) really troubles me too, because

people *think* and process information differently when writing by hand vs. keyboard, when reading on a screen vs. paper.

The topic of screen-based learning and engagement in our schools is a discussion that has been brewing here at our high school, and it is one that is growing. With A.I. here and committees being assembled now to integrate A.I. into the classrooms, many of us are starting to push back (most specifically right now against screens in the classrooms). Students are asking for it too. Screens can be helpful for visuals, and for making our use of time in the classroom more efficient, but in many regards (and maybe the ship has sailed and it's too late for this), I think there is great value in substituting imagination for the visuals and in slowing down and diving deeper rather than more efficiently trying to cover even more ground within the limits of a class period. We don't need *more* screens. We don't need *more* digital learning. I know though that we all, myself included, can be quick to adopt tech in the classroom because it can be, or appears to be (and certainly can be sold) as a great democratizer, a way to differentiate, an opportunity for more access, but I'm starting to really question if it's all ultimately doing more harm than good.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Educational

Areas of Promise

Focus Area 1: Educational Structure of the Five Districts

Focus Area 1 highlights that the five districts already function within a largely shared educational structure supported by island-wide leadership, including a single superintendent and assistant superintendent, as well as centralized roles in student services, finance, English Learners, behavioral health, and related services. This existing infrastructure demonstrates that regionalized systems are already operating effectively, particularly in promoting compliance, equity, and access to specialized supports. Equitable access is further reflected in fully regionalized substantially separate special education programs, such as *Bridge* and *Compass*, which ensure students receive services regardless of town of residence and underscore a shared commitment to inclusion and collective responsibility. The districts have also made meaningful progress toward instructional coherence through the adoption of HMH ELA in grades K–5, and growing middle school alignment, including a shared math curriculum (Amplify Desmos), collaborative PLCs, and emerging coordination in science and social studies. Additionally, classroom observations consistently revealed positive, inclusive learning environments characterized by strong routines, welcoming climates, and instructional practices that honor students’ language, culture, and identity, with flexible seating and collaborative groupings especially evident in elementary settings. Across all roles, there is a shared recognition that continued fragmentation limits equity, consistency, and efficiency, and a broad consensus that greater PK-12 regionalization or centralization could strengthen instructional consistency, improve resource allocation, and expand access to enrichment and extracurricular opportunities.

Focus Area 2: Academic Achievement

The review of academic achievement across the five districts indicates a system grounded in strong instructional foundations, qualified and stable staffing, and a clear commitment to holistic student success, while also revealing inconsistencies in structures, data use, and instructional coherence that contribute to uneven outcomes

across schools. Nearly all teachers are appropriately licensed and SEI-endorsed, with principals highlighting staff stability, low turnover, and strong professional relationships as key strengths. Classroom observations frequently reflected evidence-based and inclusive instructional practices, such as clear lesson objectives, connections to prior learning, embedded language development, and effective scaffolding for English Learners and students with disabilities. Progress toward curriculum alignment through the adoption of common programs like HMH ELA, Reveal Math, and Amplify/Desmos, has supported greater collaboration and improved outcomes, particularly where shared professional development and PLCs are well established.

Educators across districts also emphasize measures of success beyond test scores, including social-emotional learning, engagement, IEP progress, and experiential learning opportunities, such as outdoor education and enrichment programs. However, variation in MTSS implementation, with more established systems in Oak Bluffs, West Tisbury, and Chilmark, underscores the need for more consistent structures and shared expectations to equitably monitor progress, allocate resources, and scale effective practices across all districts.

Focus Area 3: Efficiency and Effectiveness

The analysis of efficiency and effectiveness across the five districts reveals a system built on strong professional foundations, stable and collaborative labor structures, and several effective shared practices, yet one that is significantly limited by fragmentation, inconsistent planning structures, and duplicated operational systems. Island-wide collective bargaining agreements provide consistency in salaries, benefits, and working conditions, support staff mobility, and contribute to stable labor-management relationships, which in turn promote workforce stability and retention.

At the school level, thoughtful School Improvement Plans reflect shared priorities such as curriculum improvement, MTSS implementation, social-emotional learning, family engagement, and inclusive school culture, with growing use of data to inform planning. Shared service models in areas such as special education, related services, and

professional development have reduced duplication and improved equity, while cross-district collaboration and cabinet-level coordination have strengthened alignment in selected initiatives, including curriculum adoption.

Additionally, classrooms are generally well equipped with instructional technology, and staff capacity to use digital tools and data systems is increasing. However, the absence of a unifying district-wide strategic plan and shared operational infrastructure continues to limit efficiency, equity, and scalability, making greater coordination—through formal regionalization or strengthened central oversight—the most promising path to improving educational, operational, and fiscal efficiency.

Focus Area 4: Fiscal Responsibility

The district demonstrates a strong commitment to fiscal responsibility with a clear focus on student needs and educator development. All schools prioritize enriching academic and extracurricular programming, including advanced courses, unified arts, and experiential learning, reflecting an emphasis on whole-child education. Professional development represents a significant investment, totaling over \$200,000 in FY2024-2025, and includes both mandatory and optional workshops that enhance teaching expertise, special education implementation, and SEL integration. Grant funding has been effectively leveraged to support co-teaching, behavioral health initiatives, and instructional innovation. Shared services, particularly in special education, provide financial efficiencies and strengthen collaboration among staff. The budget process, though multi-layered, is generally collaborative, transparent, and student-centered, ensuring that resources are directed toward instructional priorities.

Focus Area 5: Teaching & Learning

The district demonstrates several promising practices in teaching and learning. There is increasing recognition of the benefits of a more centralized curriculum, particularly for improving equity, providing consistent academic language, and supporting SPED and ELL students. Recent adoptions, such as HMH and Reveal Math, represent steps toward alignment and standardization, helping teachers collaborate across schools and grade levels. Classroom observations indicate that most lessons are grounded in grade-

level content standards, evidence-based practices, and culturally sustaining pedagogy. Students are engaging in critical thinking, making connections, and applying learning beyond the classroom, especially in subjects like history, science, and math. Additionally, some schools show effective integration of project-based learning and creative approaches that support student engagement. The use of benchmark assessments, where applied consistently (i.e. Edgartown), allows for tracking student progress and informing targeted interventions.

Focus Area 6: Special Education & English Language Learning

The Island demonstrates a strong commitment to serving students with disabilities and English Learners, with special education widely viewed as an area of strength. Inclusive practices, co-teaching models, and shared regional programs (e.g., sub-separate programs for autism and emotional needs) have contributed to positive student outcomes, particularly in early grades. Building administrators report observable student growth, improved MCAS performance for high-needs students, effective collaboration among staff, and strong family relationships.

Data show that the districts consistently identify and serve students with communication and specific learning disabilities at rates above the state average, suggesting robust identification and support systems. While autism identification rates are below the state average, they are consistent across districts, indicating relatively uniform practices.

For English Learners, several schools maintain well-developed programs, with Edgartown and Oak Bluffs supporting substantial EL populations across proficiency levels. Administrators and educators recognize that consistent academic language, aligned instructional practices, and centralized curriculum structures would especially benefit EL and dually identified students. Classroom observations further highlight strengths in active, inclusive instructional practices such as hands-on learning, cooperative learning, small-group instruction, and targeted feedback, all of which support diverse learners.

Focus Area 7: Potential Advantages of a One-Region Structure

Across document review, interviews, and focus groups, a one-region structure is widely viewed as offering meaningful opportunities to strengthen equity, coherence, and access while preserving each school's distinct culture. Each school currently provides rich and varied programs ranging from engineering, civics, and enrichment math to project-based learning, multi-age classrooms, and strong traditions that reflect local priorities and community identity. This diversity is seen as an asset that could be leveraged more intentionally under a regional structure to broaden student opportunities.

A regional model presents clear potential to unify core academic expectations while maintaining unique school-based experiences. Participants consistently identified advantages in establishing a common curriculum for major content areas, aligned intervention structures such as WIN blocks, consistent access to Algebra in grade 8, expanded STEM and civics instruction, and shared experiences like Nature's Classroom. Such alignment would promote equity of access, reduce disparities between towns, and ease student transitions across schools.

Professional development emerged as another promising area for regionalization. Both administrators and educators value regional PD opportunities, particularly in specialized areas such as music, arts, and curriculum-specific training, and see strong potential for cross-school collaboration, vertical alignment, and shared expertise. A one-region structure could support more strategic, sustained, and measurable PD that improves instructional consistency and student outcomes.

Participants also noted that regionalization could improve equity in access to enrichment, special education, and ELL services. By pooling resources and coordinating services, a one-region system could reduce the disproportionate strain placed on individual schools with higher-need populations and ensure that all students have access to comparable academic, extracurricular, and support opportunities, like the benefits already realized at the regional high school level.

Focus Area 8: Perspectives

Across document review, interviews, and focus groups, there is a shared recognition that greater coherence and alignment across schools would strengthen equity, transparency, and student support. The use of standards-based grading at the elementary level in most schools provides a strong foundation for developing a common reporting structure that could clarify expectations for students and families. Participants broadly agreed that consistent grading formats, shared language around standards, and common reporting tools would improve feedback, accountability, and continuity as students move between schools and ultimately into the regional high school.

There is also promise in the widespread acknowledgment of inefficiencies and inequities in staffing and student services. Disparities in nursing, counseling, and wellness supports were clearly identified, creating momentum for more equitable distribution of services under a more coordinated structure. Interview and focus group participants similarly identified centralized systems, such as shared HR, payroll, leave policies, and student information platforms, as logical and beneficial steps toward improving efficiency, consistency, and data sharing. These structural improvements were viewed as attainable and practical advantages of greater regional coordination.

Participants expressed optimism that clearer communication, stronger narratives, and more inclusive engagement could support future change. Many emphasized the importance of ensuring that staff, families, and communities understand the rationale for potential restructuring and have opportunities to contribute their perspectives. There is also a shared belief that regionalization, if thoughtfully implemented, could help address long-term financial sustainability while improving equity of access to academic programs, student supports, and mental health services.

Areas of Growth

Focus Area 1: Educational Structure of the Five Districts

The analysis identifies several structural and programmatic challenges that limit coherence, equity, and long-term planning across the five districts. Curriculum alignment remains inconsistent beyond the early grades, particularly in grades 6–8 and in subjects such as social studies, health, and some science courses, where districts often rely on varied or homegrown materials, resulting in uneven preparation for high school. The absence of formal documentation for specialized programs, including *Bridge* and *Compass*, restricts the ability to assess program fidelity, effectiveness, and scalability within a regional framework.

Decentralized governance structures, multiple school committees, and differing policies and systems contribute to administrative inefficiencies, duplicated efforts, and inconsistent implementation of shared initiatives, while high levels of principal autonomy can undermine island-wide decisions.

Access to enrichment and extracurricular opportunities is also uneven, with most offerings remaining town-based and limited by transportation, staffing, and funding constraints, particularly for middle school students and smaller schools, despite athletics serving as a successful regional model. Additionally, enrollment volatility driven by student transience, housing instability, rising out-of-district placement costs, and inconsistent understandings of English Learner trends complicates budgeting and long-term planning. These challenges are further exacerbated by limited formal structures for cross-district collaboration, as teacher collaboration is often informal and lacks protected time and systems for sustained vertical and horizontal alignment.

Focus Area 2: Academic Achievement

The findings reveal significant inconsistencies in systems, instructional coherence, and service delivery that limit the districts' ability to equitably support students and use data effectively. There is no unified, system-wide approach to collecting or analyzing academic, behavioral, or social-emotional data, with schools relying on different assessments, tools, and schedules, which hinders cross-district comparison and longitudinal analysis; notably, discipline data were only available from one school. MTSS and behavioral frameworks are unevenly implemented, with some schools still in emerging stages and lacking formal protocols, and positive behavioral and social-emotional programs varying widely in consistency and fidelity. Staffing models and access to specialists differ by school and grade level, and schedule reviews revealed inconsistencies in service hours, extended planning blocks, and unfilled instructional time, raising concerns about equity, efficiency, and cost-effectiveness. While many classrooms demonstrated strong instructional practices, observations also identified variability in student engagement, academic discourse, consistent use of learning objectives, and effective scaffolding, particularly at the secondary level. These challenges are further compounded by demographic differences, student mobility, housing instability, and varying levels of English Learner and special education needs, with cross-town transfers often disrupting continuity of learning due to inconsistent curricula, expectations, and support structures.

Focus Area 3: Efficiency and Effectiveness

The review highlights significant structural and operational challenges across the districts that limit coherence, efficiency, and long-term sustainability. The absence of a central district strategic plan has resulted in widely varying School Improvement Plans, inconsistent goals, and limited alignment to shared benchmarks, reducing accountability and collective progress. Fragmented governance and operations across multiple towns contribute to duplicated administrative functions, slow decision-making, and inefficiencies in areas such as hiring, budgeting, procurement, instructional technology, transportation, and capital planning, while reductions in force are managed at the school level, limiting equitable staffing flexibility.

Staffing and resource allocation are uneven, with significant variation in access to specialists, interventions, and enrichment, compounded by scheduling challenges, anticipated retirements, teacher shortages, and housing affordability concerns. High administrator turnover in several schools further threatens leadership stability and continuity.

Technology and data systems are fragmented, with separate student information systems, software, and devices that impede collaboration, limit data transfer for mobile and high-need students, and prevent longitudinal tracking, while school-by-school technology purchases increase costs and reduce equitable access. Finally, despite regional contracts, inconsistent interpretation and implementation across schools create variability in workloads, professional development, and extracurricular responsibilities, with a lack of centralized HR support limiting licensure, mentoring, induction, and strategic workforce planning.

Focus Area 4: Fiscal Responsibility

Despite these strengths, the district faces challenges related to inconsistency and fragmentation that limit both fiscal and instructional efficiency. Programming across schools varies in scope, structure, and access, creating inequities in student experiences. Professional development is not consistently coordinated across buildings, leading to duplication and missed opportunities for centralized planning.

Staffing and scheduling inconsistencies, such as teachers working outside their certified areas, varying prep times, and uneven use of ESPs, reduce the district's ability to allocate human resources cost-effectively. Budget processes, while collaborative, are complicated by decentralized decision-making, duplication of services, and varying fiscal capacity across towns. Political and community dynamics, including resistance to regionalization and strong attachments to local identity, further constrain opportunities to standardize programming, share services more broadly, and reduce inefficiencies.

Focus Area 5: Teaching & Learning

Despite progress, teaching and learning are constrained by fragmentation and inconsistency across schools. Curriculum adoption and implementation remain largely localized, with individual teachers and principals exercising significant autonomy. This results in variation in instructional approaches, assessment practices, and curriculum usage.

Benchmarking platforms and schedules are inconsistent across schools, limiting the district's ability to monitor student progress comprehensively or align interventions systematically. Teachers express concern that a fully centralized curriculum could reduce instructional flexibility, stifle creativity, and undermine school-specific approaches, such as project-based learning or culturally embedded content. Additionally, lesson objectives are often not clearly stated, and individualized assessment practices are uneven, limiting clarity and student understanding of learning goals.

Professional development related to curriculum adoption and instructional alignment is inconsistently delivered across grade levels and schools, leading to variable teacher readiness and fidelity to new programs.

Focus Area 6: Special Education & English Language Learning

Despite strong commitment and staffing, significant inconsistencies exist across schools in identification practices, service delivery, staffing models, and data systems. Special education and EL caseloads vary widely by school, with large disparities in student-to-teacher ratios and educational support personnel that are not clearly tied to student need or outcomes. EL staffing data are inconsistent and incomplete, making it difficult to assess whether services are equitable or efficient.

Rates of students identified as both EL and having a disability vary dramatically across districts, with some schools reporting rates two to three times the state average. These discrepancies raise concerns about over-identification, uneven MTSS and Tier 1/Tier 2 interventions, and inconsistent referral practices. Interview and focus group data

indicate that SST and IEP referral processes are often slow, cumbersome, and inconsistently applied, particularly in grades 5–8, leading to frustration among teachers and families.

At the system level, the district employs a substantially higher ratio of special education staff compared to state averages, significantly impacting the operating budget. While this staffing approach supports service availability and retention on the Island, there is limited evidence connecting these high staffing levels to improved student outcomes. Professional development for special education and EL staff, while generally valued, is reactive and informal, lacking a cohesive, long-term strategy tied to measurable impact. Classroom observations further indicate uneven implementation of high-impact inclusive practices such as UDL, flexible grouping, graphic organizers, rubrics, and peer tutoring.

Focus Area 7: Potential Advantages of a One-Region Structure

Despite these opportunities, the current structure reveals significant inconsistencies that a one-region model would need to address thoughtfully. Curriculum, instructional practices, and student experiences vary widely across schools, creating challenges for students who move between buildings. These inconsistencies particularly affect English Learners, students experiencing housing instability, and those transitioning at key points such as middle to high school. Participants consistently described school-to-school transitions as more difficult than grade-to-grade transitions within the same building, citing misaligned curriculum, assessment practices, and communication gaps.

Professional development is another area requiring substantial growth. PD is largely decentralized, reactive, and uneven in quality and relevance, with limited systems for evaluating effectiveness. Teachers often pursue PD independently, and structured collaboration such as PLCs has diminished over time due to unclear leadership, scheduling barriers, and voluntary participation. Without stronger regional coordination, PD efforts risk continuing to be fragmented and insufficient to support consistent curriculum implementation.

Concerns were also raised about implementation challenges associated with regionalization. Some participants expressed uncertainty about whether expanded opportunities would materialize in practice, noting mixed perceptions of benefits at the already regionalized high school. Others cautioned that community resistance, particularly around funding equity and perceived loss of local control, could hinder progress. Maintaining local identity, traditions, and school culture while implementing regional standards and shared programming was viewed as essential but complex.

Focus Area 8: Perspectives

At the same time, the findings reveal significant inconsistency and fragmentation that currently hinder coherence across the system. Grading practices vary widely at the middle school level, including differences in letter grades, grading periods, weighting systems, and pilot approaches to standards-based grading. These inconsistencies complicate student transitions and make it difficult for families and educators to develop a shared understanding of academic expectations. Similarly, the absence of shared student information and special education platforms limits the ability to track student progress, coordinate services, and respond effectively when students move between schools.

Inequities in student support services represent another critical area for growth. The uneven distribution of nurses, counselors, psychologists, and wellness staff raises concerns about equitable access to care and support. In addition, the lack of clarity around shared service caseloads and service delivery models makes it difficult to assess effectiveness or ensure that student needs are being met consistently across schools.

Cultural, historical, and community-based concerns also present challenges. Longstanding resistance to regionalization, rooted in tradition, competition among towns, and differing community identities, continues to shape perceptions. Participants expressed varying levels of optimism, with some viewing regionalization as necessary and inevitable, and others questioning whether meaningful change is feasible given past

efforts. Focus group responses further highlighted anxieties related to housing costs, potential staff reductions, union considerations, and the broader impact of school structure on town identity and tax bases.

Finally, concerns about instructional direction, particularly the increasing reliance on screen-based learning, signal deeper questions about educational priorities. Educators and students alike raised concerns about the cognitive, physical, and engagement-related impacts of excessive digital instruction, especially as artificial intelligence becomes more prevalent. These perspectives underscore the need for intentional decision-making about instructional practices, rigor, and student readiness for life beyond the island.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Educational

Based on the identified areas of growth across the eight focus areas, the following recommendations are offered to strengthen coherence, equity, and efficiency across the five districts. Moving toward a regionalized PK–12 structure represents a significant opportunity to unify the educational, operational, and fiscal systems of the Island, allowing the districts to function as a single, coordinated entity. Regionalization would provide a consistent framework for curriculum, instruction, student support, and professional development, ensuring equitable access to high-quality learning and services for all students, regardless of town of residence. It would also enable centralized planning, standardized data systems, and streamlined operations, reducing duplication, improving resource allocation, and increasing long-term sustainability. By consolidating governance, staffing, and programmatic oversight, a single district could address longstanding inequities, enhance cross-district collaboration, and provide continuity for students as they transition between schools. At the same time, regionalization can be implemented in ways that preserve local identity, traditions, and school culture while promoting shared expectations, aligned practices, and a collective commitment to student success. These recommendations outline concrete steps to realize the full potential of regionalization, ensuring that the benefits of coherence, equity, and efficiency are fully achieved across the Island’s schools:

- 1. Establish a Unified District Structure and Strategic Plan:** Regionalization would allow the creation of a single PK–12 district with a central strategic plan, aligned goals, and consistent benchmarks. School Improvement Plans (SIPs) could be coordinated across all schools, ensuring accountability, coherent resource allocation, and measurable progress toward shared priorities.
- 2. Standardize Curriculum and Instruction Across Grades:** A regional model would enable the adoption of vertically aligned curricula across all schools, particularly in grades 6–8 and in subjects like social studies, health, and science. Shared instructional resources, common learning objectives, and documented program models (e.g., Bridge and Compass) would promote equitable preparation for high school and facilitate seamless transitions between schools.
- 3. Centralize Data Systems and MTSS/SEL Frameworks:** Regionalization would support unified student information systems, assessments, and behavioral/SEL data platforms, allowing longitudinal tracking, cross-school comparisons, and evidence-based decision-making. Consistent implementation of MTSS, PBIS, and SEL programs across the district would ensure equitable intervention and support for all students.

4. Equitable Staffing and Service Delivery: A regional district could implement standardized staffing models and caseload guidelines for special education, EL, and other support services, ensuring equitable access to specialists and interventions across schools. Centralized HR functions would strengthen recruitment, retention, induction, and professional development, while enabling proactive planning for retirements, housing challenges, and staffing shortages.

5. Expand Access to Enrichment and Extracurricular Opportunities:

Regionalization would allow arts, clubs, athletics, and experiential learning programs to be coordinated across schools, removing town-based inequities and ensuring that all students, particularly in middle school or smaller schools, have access to a broad range of opportunities.

6. Increase Operational and Fiscal Efficiency: A single regional administration would reduce duplication in budgeting, procurement, scheduling, transportation, IT, and capital planning. Central oversight would streamline decision-making, optimize resource allocation, and allow cost-effective, consistent use of staff, facilities, and technology across the district.

7. Strengthen Professional Development and Teacher Collaboration: Regionalized professional development would be coordinated across all schools, ensuring alignment with curriculum implementation, instructional best practices, and differentiated student needs. Structured PLCs, mentorship programs, and coaching could operate district-wide to build capacity and promote cross-school collaboration.

8. Promote Equity and Consistency in Student Supports: A regional system would standardize staffing and service delivery for nurses, counselors, psychologists, and wellness staff, ensuring all students have equitable access to health and support services regardless of town or school.

9. Maintain Local Identity While Supporting District Coherence: Regionalization could preserve valued school cultures and community traditions while implementing shared programming, policies, and standards, balancing local identity with the benefits of system-wide consistency.

10. Purposeful Technology Integration and Instructional Practices: A regional model would allow for coordinated technology purchases, policies, and professional development, ensuring equitable access and purposeful integration while mitigating overreliance on screens and supporting rigorous, engaging learning experiences.

These recommendations collectively aim to reduce fragmentation, ensure equity and consistency, enhance instructional quality, and improve operational efficiency, laying the groundwork for a more coherent, sustainable, and high-performing regional education system.

This comprehensive report concludes an intensive, highly collaborative project. We sincerely thank all stakeholders for their cooperation and dedication. It was professionally enriching working with the dedicated staff and administration, whose insights were invaluable. Our sincere appreciation also goes to the Regionalization Subcommittee for their visionary leadership and rigorous review. Furthermore, the specialized technical support from MARS (Massachusetts Assessment and Regionalization Services) was critical to delivering these findings. We thank you for the opportunity to serve as your consultants on this vital project and look forward to possible future collaborations, wishing you success in implementing these recommendations.

Respectfully Submitted,



Nadine G. Ekstrom, Ph.D.

Carol L. Costello

Carol Costello, M.S.T.

Concluding Remarks

The MARS Consulting Group in conjunction with Academic Discoveries would like to especially thank Mark Friedman who was our direct contact with the staff and provided a great deal of support and insight into this project. A second person we would like to thank is Sara Dingley who spent a great deal of time and personal capital securing our requested documents and also offering her insights into the Martha's Vineyard Schools. We wish to thank the teachers who welcomed Nadine Ekstrom into their classroom and the teachers who participated in focus group in each school with Carol Costello (and Mac Reid). All the Principals were supportive with our requests and spending time being interviewed by Nadine Ekstrom (and Mac Reid).

We also appreciated the involvement along the way of All-Island School Committee Chair, Alex Salop, who supported our efforts and also added insights about the schools and communities as well as our on-going PowerPoint presentations and final report. We also appreciated the opportunity afforded us by the All-Island School Committee to study the issues related to increased regionalization for the five districts of the Island schools.

We have worked diligently during these four months to provide the districts with a document that addresses the overarching theme - to independently study expanded Martha's Vineyard Public School regionalization, "...to analyze financial and operational costs and benefits of expanded regionalization/restructuring, and to understand the processes and timeframes for expanded regionalization."

Massachusetts Association of Regional Schools Consulting Group

Steve Hemman, Ed.D.

Malcolm (Mac) Reid, MS

Academic Discoveries, Inc

Nadine Ekstrom, Ph.D.

Carol Costello, M.S.T.

PowerPoint Presentations

September 23, 2025

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1TdSCnPP6cJufALHMLjg021WsUKo-6F8SUNZ2BclUSVM/edit?slide=id.g3819aefcc0f_0_0#slide=id.g3819aefcc0f_0_0

October 22, 2025

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1IRcagdTwzRglmi0Ed905lcFlv1COHHW6U82hyK_ZmvM/edit?slide=id.g3819aefcc0f_0_0#slide=id.g3819aefcc0f_0_0

November 19, 2025

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1JFkRzUacT4zzOAWqFw0mwAwYyy8TxbX-NT_nLjj-g8Q/edit?slide=id.p1#slide=id.p1

December 18, 2025

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1chKY0R7B4I2KbIRZ7YZ-kz44_g4biu1xZLaMTgNRMOE/edit?slide=id.p1#slide=id.p1

Appendix Table of Contents

1	MARS Consulting Group response to MV School Committee Member
4	Regional Step-by-Step Team Members
5	Phase I - Introduction
7	Following the Pathway
11	Phase 1: Pathway to Regionalization Checklist
13	Phase 1: Form/Expand/Enlarge a Regional School District
13	Step 1: Preliminary Discussions a. Begin Discussions and Contact DESE
17	Step 1: Preliminary Discussions b. Identify Incentives to Regionalize
18	Step 1: Preliminary Discussions c. Determine Type of Region
21	Step 1: Preliminary Discussions d. Utilize Self-Assessment Tool for Measuring District Capacity
22	Step 1: Preliminary Discussions e. Determine Advantages to Regionalization
23	Step 1: Preliminary Discussions f. Determine the Challenges to Regionalization
26	Phase II - Introduction
27	Phase II: Becoming a New Region
27	I The First Stages of the Transition Period
29	II Develop Transition Timeframe
33	III Develop Process for New Policy Book
33	IV Establish Sub-committees
35	V Technology
37	VI Business Operations
40	VII Budget Development for the First Year of the Region (including Grants)
41	VIII Curriculum and Instruction
42	IX Professional Development
42	X Staffing for the New Region
44	XI Athletics
45	XII Special Education
47	XIII Merging Food Services and Custodial Services
47	XIV If Building a New Building or Renovation an Old Building or Combination
48	XV Building usage & Leases
48	XVI Transportation
49	Conclusion
50	Phase II Becoming a New Region Checklist
56	Appendices to Step-by-Step



Response to a Question from a MV School Committee Member

1. Capital cost allocation - Currently your HS Regional Agreement spells out that capital costs are allocated based on student enrollment. You also have negotiated a different capital cost allocation for the addition/renovation of your high school. Our understanding from you at the beginning of this project is that we should stay away from reporting on different capital cost allocations as that is not relevant to this process. Capital cost allocation would be part of the negotiations while amending your HS Regional Agreement.

2. Borrowing/Debt Service - This is the same issue as above and we were told this is also not part of this project. We understand that some of your districts have considerable debt service, and some others may have none. We are not aware that any regional agreement makes concessions for this disparity.

3. School Choice - The State sets the rate (i.e., \$5,000) for a sending town to spend and for the receiving town to receive money for School Choice. A Regional Agreement could stipulate how a district intra-school choice system could work, and the costs associated with that. That second process would be negotiated during the development of amending your current HS Regional Agreement. We are not aware that any regional school district based the cost of intra-school choice (i.e., students moving from one school to another within the region) on that school's cost/student. The assumption is that within a few years after regionalizing, schools at the same level would have similar costs/student.

There is often a misunderstanding of how the State's School Choice works. Most significantly, a local or regional school committee has to vote EVERY YEAR whether or not to participate in additional School Choice students. That is, the school committee, usually based on the recommendations of the superintendent, designates the specific number of School Choice students that would be allowed at each grade level. The Committee could say, in a given year, that they will participate in the School Choice program but will only admit two students in the second grade, for example. The law requires that any student admitted to a district, at any grade level, must be allowed to stay in that district until graduation.

Another misconception about school choice is that you only receive \$5,000 for a student and that student costs the district whatever the average cost/student is in that district; e.g., in the case of the average MV cost per student of ~\$32,000. Let's say that your two second grades in a particular school each have 12 students. The school committee votes to accept two second graders in that school. The district will receive \$10,000 for those two students. All it will cost the district is for two additional books and a few materials. It is definitely a win for the district. If even a single School Choice student would put that grade's average class size over the district's average class size limit, the Committee would not open a spot for any additional students at that school/grade.

4. E & D Monies - This formula is already spelled out in your HS Regional Agreement. Any change to this formula would be negotiated during amending your current HS Regional Agreement.

5. Additional Payroll Expenses - From Mark Friedman - "With UIRSD as an example - we pay about \$10.4K/year for a payroll service for 101 FTEs - or about \$103/another 259 employees to our payroll service - which would add another \$27K in expenses. The towns would see a corresponding reduction in either costs or worker hours for their remaining payroll. At that point we would be fully disconnected from the towns and the towns' Human Resources and benefits support - which in my view would compel us to create a formal H.R. department employee. To fully incorporate Oak Bluffs, Edgartown, and Tisbury, would mean adding."

6. Central Purchasing - It is possible/probable that a centralized purchasing process may require a Central Office position(s) but this will be at least partially offset by savings in bulk purchasing and time in the individual schools that now is required to do the purchasing for each separate school district.

From Mark Friedman - "Combining all purchases into one district will significantly increase the number of procurements (Invitations for Bids, Requests for Proposals, etc.) we would have to perform (currently many purchases fall below the \$50K or \$100K state thresholds for full procurements because the amounts are smaller when broken up by school). I would recommend that a two-person purchasing department would be required. There would be some small efficiencies gained in that individual school staff would then have to perform fewer three quote processes."

7. Sample budget - We could provide an example of a multi-town regional school budget.

8. OPEB Obligations - This is a complicated issue and would require additional study with an attorney that understands the OPEB consolidation process. The big picture -

if the individual school districts on the Vineyard regionalized, each town would keep their own liability up to the time of regionalization and then OPEB would become the responsibility of the region for all the schools.

9. Election and Number of Members - First, this has already been established in your HS Regional Agreement and could continue in a new amended regional agreement. Second, a change from the current regional HS school committee representation would be negotiated during the amendments to your current HS Regional Agreement. We plan to provide the information which stipulates the five methods to seat a school committee that is designated by MGL.

10. Leases From the Towns - Leases for elementary schools would be negotiated between the Select Boards and the future Regional School Committee. The leases would not be part of the amended Regional Agreement.

11. Sample 6-Town Regional Agreement - The process to have a 6-Town Regional Agreement would be typically a year-long process involving School Committee, Select Board and community members who will amend (generally with professional guidance) your HS Regional Agreement. We will share sample Regional Agreements and plan to share the “Step-by-Step” regionalization process which was written by members of the MARS Consulting Group at the request of DESE.

12. Additional Central Office Staff.

During a recent Zoom meeting which included Mark Friedman, Sara Dingley, Nadine Ekstrom, Carol Costello, Steve Hemman and Mac Reid, Sara articulated a significant issue. When we consider partial or full regionalization on the Vineyard, what are the values that should be considered and are the most important, e.g., cost efficiency, student achievement, local character of each school community, or what? This will be an important conversation of the All-Island School Committee when discussion whether to, or how to, move forward with a partially or fully regionalized district.

We believe our final report will address the pertinent issues related to a partial or full PK-12 region and the next steps necessary to proceed if the All-Island Regional School Committee votes to go forward.

Mac Reid & Steve Hemman - MARS Consulting Group

Author/Contributor Information

Regional Step-by-Step Team Members

The following are the members of the Massachusetts Association of Regional Schools (MARS) who wrote this *Step-by-Step Process for Forming a Regional School District*:

Stephen R. Hemman, Ed.D.

Executive Director MARS 2008 -present
Interim Superintendent for Somerset Berkley Regional School District
Consultant for Southwick, Tolland and Granville
Superintendent of Schools, Narragansett Regional School District 2000-2008
Business Administrator, Chittenden East School District, Vermont 1981-1985

Barbara J. Ripa, Ed.D.

Assistant Executive Director of MARS 2009 -present
Superintendent of Schools, Hampshire Regional School District 2005-2009
Consultant for Northern Berkshire Vocational Regional School District

Paul Gagliarducci, Ed.D.

Former Superintendent of Hampden Wilbraham Regional School District
Consultant for Southwick, Tolland and Granville regionalization process
Consultant for Northern Berkshire Vocational Regional School District

Ellen Holmes

School Committee Member, Ashburnham-Westminster Regional School
Committee, 1998-present
Chair, MASC Regional Schools Committee, 2004-present

Julie Ramos Gagliardi

Chair of Somerset Berkley Regional Planning District Committee
Presented Somerset Berkley Regional Agreement to Town Meetings

George Frost

Ayer Interim Superintendent, 2007-2011
Deputy Superintendent, Acton-Boxborough Regional Schools, 1994-2007
Regional School experience

Malcolm Reid

Shirley Superintendent and Helped Develop Ayer-Shirley Regional School
District;
Boxborough Interim Superintendent; Director of Personnel, Groton-Dunstable
and Acton-Boxborough Regional School Districts; Principal in Groton-Dunstable,
Boxborough and Acton-Boxborough Schools; SPED Director; Director of Pupil Services

Attorney Edward F. Lenox, Jr.

Partner in the law firm of Murphy, Hesse, Toomey and Lehane and has represented regional school systems for 30 years
Past President of the Massachusetts Council of School Attorneys
Counsel to the Ayer-Shirley Regional Planning Board and drafter of the Ayer-Shirley Regional Agreement
Counsel to the Chatham-Harwich Regional Planning Board and drafter of the Chatham-Harwich Regional Agreement

Phase I - Introduction

“This agreement is entered into pursuant to Chapter 71 of the General Laws of Massachusetts, as amended and supplemented, between the Town of; and, the Town of _____; and the Town of _____; hereinafter sometimes referred to as the member towns for the establishment of a regional school district, hereinafter sometimes referred to as the District. In consideration of the mutual promises herein contained, it is hereby agreed as follows:” (M.G.L. Chapter 71, Sections 14-161 and the Regional School District Regulations, 603 CMR 41.00)

And so begins the legal document that will guide the educational future of the member communities that comprise a Massachusetts Regional School District. Steeped in more than a half century of tradition, communities have joined resources to provide outstanding educational opportunities to the school age children living within their boundaries. Regionalization is a “political, economic and educational marriage” that fulfills a constitutional responsibility to educate children in public schools. It is not an easy path. It is a process that demands goodwill, compromise and dedication. Most importantly, the process demands the trust of everyone involved albeit a citizen, a parent, or a political leader. The regional school district becomes an autonomous political entity with power and authority to set policy, budgets and determine educational programming. The involvement of the community in the establishment or re-design of a regional school district cannot be understated.

“A Pathway to Regionalization” is a cooperative document developed by the Massachusetts Association of Regional Schools (MARS) under the sponsorship of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). The document’s purpose is to provide a workable guide for communities who are considering developing or modifying a regional school district. The guide is divided into two parts: Phase I and Phase II. The format for Phase I is a detailed “step-by-step” process, outlining the statutory requirements and regulations in an understandable, chronological and workable format. The checklist provided for Phase I allows a Regional

Planning Board to complete specific requirements as the committee moves toward a ballot vote and then transitions to the new regional school district. It is important to complete the steps in the order they are presented.

While the two organizations involved in this document are available for comment and guidance, the pathway approach reduces the need to rely solely on the agencies to respond to every question or issue. The document's format highlights important statutes, legal issues and procedural steps that have been followed by other communities. The experiences of the organizations as presented in this document will help a Regional Planning Board avoid pitfalls that could potentially delay or doom the regionalization process.

A thorough analysis can make the challenge of merging independent districts less daunting by addressing community concerns. Superintendency Unions that move to full regionalization find the process somewhat easier since a centralized administration and coordination of services already exists. Planning studies also help districts resolve some areas of local concern through negotiation and via inclusion of language addressing concerns within the new Regional Agreement. Regional Agreement language can address elementary educational concerns, maintaining or closing town school buildings, determining the makeup/representation of the new regional School Committee, etc. Towns and districts that recognize that the advantages of greater articulation of curriculum and streamlined governance can, in the long-term, outweigh the fiscal challenges, and will discover creative ways to minimize those obstacles.

An extensive Appendix is located at the back of this manual and contains rich supporting information and sample documents. For example, Appendix A provides information regarding Massachusetts General Laws and Regulations regarding regional school districts and where specific information can be found. Appendix B provides a summary document prepared by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) regarding how to form a region, and Appendix C provides the names and contact information of individuals and agencies that districts will need to work with during the regionalization process.

Following the Pathway

The basis for developing a regional agreement varies. Experience tells us that while there may be similarities, each time communities begin the discussion to investigate

regionalization, the nuances and issues are never quite the same. New England communities historically have maintained a healthy but strong independence. Deciding to forego autonomy is not an easy decision. During the past decade, Massachusetts has experienced three very dramatic changes that have caused many communities to consider the possibility of utilizing district consolidation to improve their school district: 1) a decline in student enrollment; 2) economic uncertainty; and 3) facility issues and school building/renovation incentives. Consider these two examples:

A community that has operated its own K-8 school may come to realize that student population can no longer sustain adequate staffing levels to provide a full range of educational opportunities. While it may tuition its high school aged students to its neighbor's high school, it may realize that administrative costs, staffing levels or meeting state and federal mandates can no longer be accomplished as an independent small district. The community may turn to its neighbor and ask to create a new regional district.

Two neighboring communities each operate their own small high schools. The costs to maintain and staff the two buildings may have reached a point where limited tax resources have been maximized. One or both of the buildings may also need major renovation or repair. The communities might begin a discussion of combining the two schools and seeking additional financial support from the MSBA to build a new or renovate a school. Such consolidation can result in an improved facility with increased programming, done in an affordable manner.

"A Pathway to Regionalization" sets a very clear process for communities to follow as they begin discussion. Each step along the way is detailed to allow a Regional Planning Board to meet the requirements of state law and the regulations, timelines and policies of DESE. The manual is divided into two distinct parts: Phase I and Phase II. In Phase I, "Pathway" begins with initial steps that will cause communities to ask the critical question: "Why regionalize?" Once substantial justification has been determined, the process identifies statutory and legal obligations that must be honored to begin the process. Along the way, steps are clearly identified, each step leading toward the ultimate goal of a new Agreement upon which each community's electorate will decide.

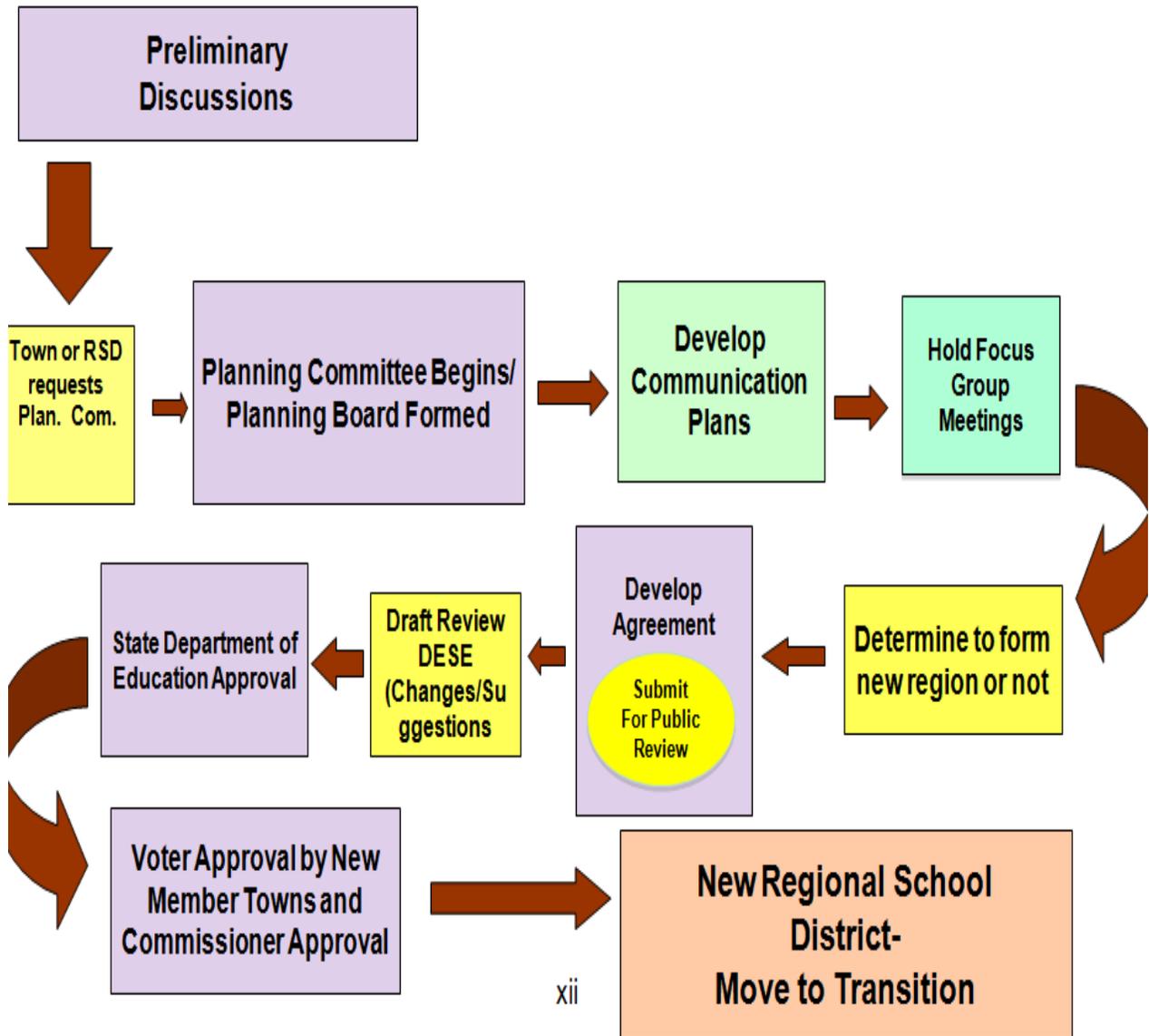
The second phase of the process takes place after the new regional district has been approved by the electorate of each town involved. Phase II addresses the steps that are involved in transitioning away from the current, municipal district formats to the new single regional district format. This document provides steps that give legal and administrative advice including safeguards for the Regional Agreement to protect districts as they transition, and a quick reference of pertinent sections of state law.

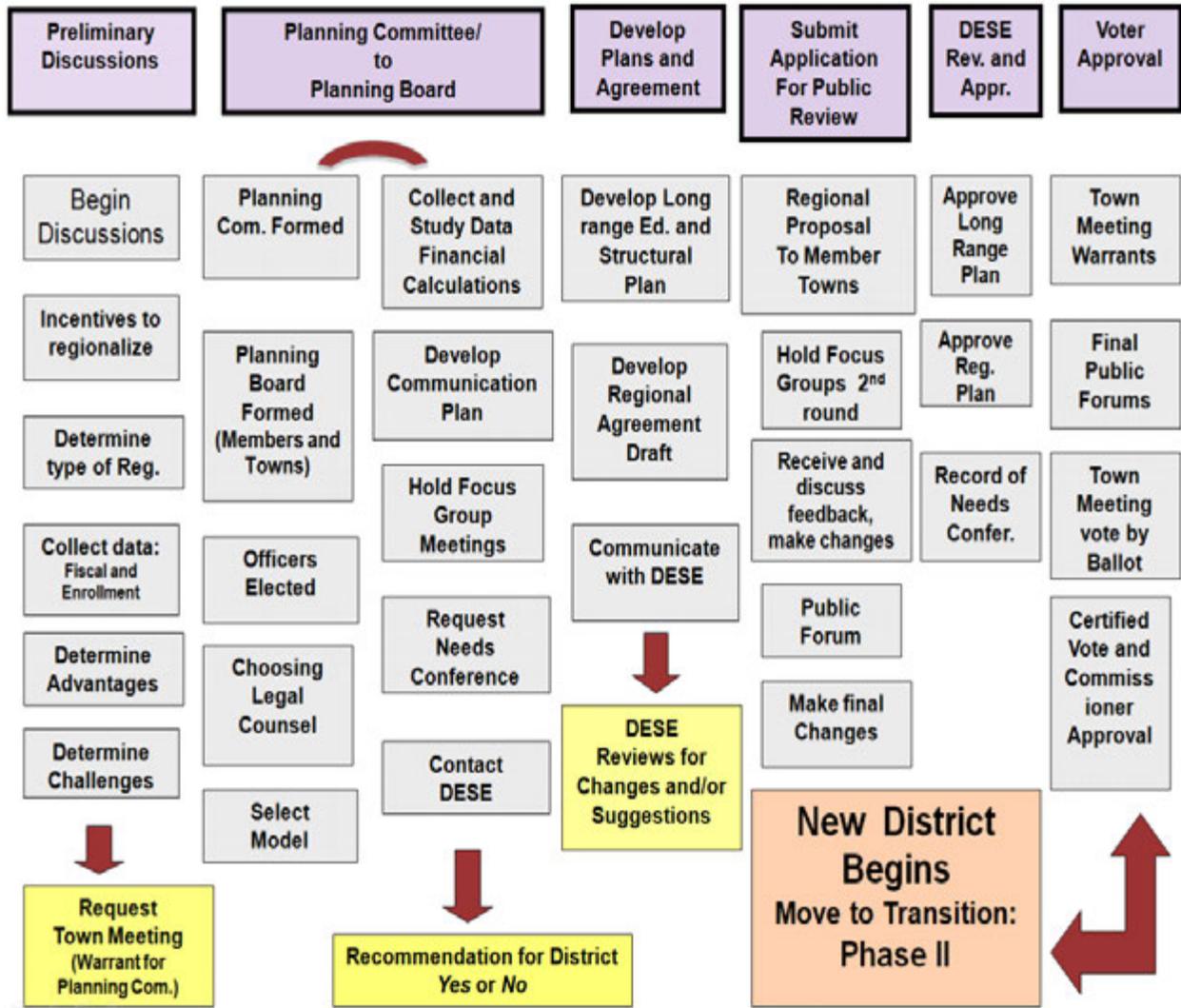
Ultimately the goal of “Pathway” is to provide a user-friendly document that helps communities maintain control of their future through a less difficult process. The agencies involved in this project understand that forming a regional school district can appear to be a daunting task, but it doesn't need to be. The manual as presented is a comprehensive document, designed to address all steps necessary for districts with no current regional affiliation to follow as they form a new regional district. If however, you are seeking to expand or enlarge an existing regional school district, the process will be considerably easier, you may not need all sections of the manual and, quite possibly, you can reach your goal in a shorter period of time.

A successful process requires good faith, hard work and forming positive relationships. Establishing and maintaining regular conversations with the Regional School District Liaison at DESE will be invaluable. The Department is always ready to answer questions, provide helpful information, clarify a process, verify compliance and help you craft a comprehensive agreement document that meets the legal requirements and your local needs. When writing or re-writing the Regional Agreement, the Department can help you tailor the Agreement to address the unique concerns and circumstances of your district.

The end result of a new regional school district with a well-developed Regional Agreement provides compelling motivation and guidance through the process. The outcome of a new efficient region with a strong, vibrant and programmatically engaged course of study for students in the merging school communities can benefit many generations to come.

Pathway to Regionalization: An Important Step-by-Step Process





Phase I

Pathway to Regionalization Checklist

Step 1: Preliminary Discussions

Completed

- a) Begin Discussions and Contact ESE

- b) Identify Incentives to Regionalize _____
- c) Determine Type of Region _____
- d) Utilize Self Assessment Tool for Measuring District Capacity _____
- e) Determine Advantages to Regionalization

- f) Determine Challenges to Regionalization

- g) Request Town Meeting for Appointing Planning Committee _____

Step 2: Regional Planning Committee and Regional Planning Board

Completed

- a) Form Planning Committees

- b) Form Planning Board and Elect Officers _____
- c) Hire Consultants _____
- d) Confirm Selection of Regional School Model

- e) Collect and Study Data _____

- f) Develop Communications Plan _____
- g) Hold Focus Group Meetings

- h) Recommendation to Regionalize (Yes or No)

Step 3: Develop Agreement and Long Range Plan Completed

- a) Contact DESE to Request Reorganization Needs Conference

- b) Develop Draft Regional Agreement

- c) Begin Writing Long Range Educational and Structural Plan

Step 4: Submission of Proposed Regional Agreement for Public Review Completed

- a) Conduct Focus Groups/Public Forums (2nd Series)

- b) Planning Board Evaluates Feedback, Discusses Feedback, and Makes Appropriate Changes _____
- c) Present Final Regional Agreement to Public Prior to Vote

Step 5: Voter and State Approval Completed

- a) Request Warrant Article for Town Meeting Vote _____
- b) Vote by Ballot at Town Meeting _____
- c) Sign Regional Agreement _____
- d) Send Signed Agreement and Certified Votes to DESE
for Commissioner Approval _____

Phase I: Form/Expand/Enlarge a Regional School District

Step 1 - Preliminary Discussions

a. Begin Discussions and Contact DESE

You are interested in looking at regionalization and it's coming up in conversations. Maybe members of the Finance Committee in town have spoken with members of the Board of Selectmen, and maybe (hopefully) members of the School Committee have been included in these conversations as well. You have many questions and even some concerns, and you know you need data to inform any decision that you eventually may make. But where do you begin? You can begin right here.

The process to form a new regional school district may take up to three years. The first year is devoted to conversations about the prospect of forming or expanding a region, beginning to collect the necessary data and scheduling meetings where regionalization can be discussed.

The second year of the process is taken up with scheduling and securing votes at Town Meetings to establish a Regional Planning Board so that a formal study of regionalization can occur. During this study phase, if a decision is made to move forward with a positive recommendation, the Planning Board begins to develop a regional agreement and long range plan and schedule public forums that ultimately will lead to a town meeting vote to act on the proposed regionalization plan.

The third year of the process is not required but is recommended. A Transition Period is now allowed under CMR 41.03(5) which may last from six months to a year and a half. During this period, the member districts retain their own school committees while the new regional district elects or appoints its own school committee and superintendent to begin the work needed to assume full control of the regional district. At the conclusion of the transition period, the member districts no longer have their own school committees and the new regional district is fully operational.

In this manual, Phase I addresses the first two years of the process, taking the reader up through the process of Town Meeting Votes, at which time the new region is approved by the voters or not. If the vote is positive, the second part of the manual (Phase II) will be needed. Phase II of this manual addresses the recommended transition time, which could be a third year of the process. Information contained therein takes the district through the process of becoming a fully functioning independent school district.

So, let's begin.

If you have not already included the Finance Committee, Board of Selectmen and School Committee in your informal discussions, add them to the group now. The School Committee could take the lead and bring in the Finance Committee and Select Board. As you begin to meet more formally and include more members in your meetings, make sure you comply with Open Meeting Law regulations regarding posting the meeting if any of the departments will have a quorum present at the meeting. Someone should be identified as responsible for keeping track of the data collected and what was discussed, as this information will be needed later on.

Open and honest discussions with all stakeholders will only make this process a success, no matter if the outcome is regionalization, collaboration without governance, or a combination of effort.

Several important questions need consideration during this early part of the process, such as what are the strengths of your district and what are the areas where you are not strong? . In Appendix F, we have included a "Self-Assessment Tool to Measure District Capacity" that was developed by the Legislative Commission on School District Collaboration and Regionalization. We recommend that you use this tool to assess your strengths as a district and areas needing improvement. It can help you determine what issues need to be addressed in your school system, such as do you have declining enrollment, facility or financial issues or are you struggling to maintain appropriate programs for your students? Are you part of an existing region and looking to expand grade levels or to formalize an existing affiliation such as a tuition arrangement or superintendency union? Do you have a partnering district in mind? When considering regionalization, school districts often seek alliances with other like-district partners. In most cases, geographic location becomes the initial jumping off point, but then districts examine and begin to identify other similarities.

Four state organizations can provide you with important data for your district and town. We recommend that you review the information provided on the following websites:

- The M.I.S.C. (Management Information for School Committees) from the Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC) at: <http://www.masc.org>. under Publications
- The D.A.R.T. (District Analysis and Review Tool) from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) at: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/dart>. (See Appendix D)
- Enrollment projections from the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) at: <http://www.massschoolbuildings.org>.
- Department of Revenue Municipal Data Bank. <http://www.mass.gov/dor/local-officials/municipal-data-and-financial-management/data-bank-reports/>.

Combining data gleaned from these sources with information from internal resources will better inform your future decisions. As you begin this process, one of the most important tasks you will face is to “uncover the questions.” Let's examine the five topic areas that generate the most common questions concerning regionalization.

Question 1: Academics

Review your existing Educational Plan, and see where you want to make changes and improvements. Assess your programmatical priorities and focus. Do your potential partners have a similar perspective? Consider factors such as four-year and five-year graduation rates, college placement rates, AP scores and course offerings, and MCAS and AYP status that are relevant to **your** discussion. How have you articulated your educational philosophy across your curriculum? Examine what you believe are your strengths and challenges. Consider whether these factors align with the districts with which you might want to explore the question of regionalization in greater detail.

Review the assessments your district utilizes currently, with an eye to what works well and what your educational community might want to add, modify or remove. Does your current configuration limit the breadth of educational opportunities in the classroom and access to extracurricular activities that could create a better learning experience? The design of your class day and year, as well as potential partners, needs to be understood. Do they align, and if not, are there philosophical differences that would conflict? What are your community beliefs regarding "user fees?" Do your neighbors hold these priorities? Press clippings from previous debates can reveal many answers. There are also opportunities to explore if negotiation or compromise can be found.

Question 2: Quality of Programs and Services

Are there programs or services you wish you could be providing to your students? Have you seen these programs in neighboring communities? You may discover your neighbors covet programs and services that you offer. Will consolidation of administrative/central office personnel and services afford greater supervision, direction

and flexibility that could benefit student learning? Pursuing the conversation could lead to an expansion of services that will benefit all of your students.

Question 3: Technology

The most effective place to start looking at technology is to review your most recently submitted Technology Plan, submitted annually to DESE. Are you meeting your instructional and administrative technology needs? What technology goals do you have and what are potential obstacles preventing you from achieving your goals? Are the districts you are considering regionalizing with in a similar situation? Do they hold similar priorities in this area? This is an essential area to question as it influences educational instruction and delivery, professional development for faculty and staff, central office functions and potentially building project needs. Understand your stakeholders' needs fully to avoid pursuing the wrong priority.

Question 4: Physical Plant

Next to fiscal challenges, facility issues are the second most common reason districts consider regionalization. Do you face school closures due to declining enrollment, or expansions due to increased program requirements? Can you make better use of your existing school facilities? If you have a major renovation or substantive repairs now or in the near future, MSBA requires you to consider neighboring communities with which to build or consolidate. MSBA has directed much of its funding and focus to districts considering a new or expanded regional school district. The funding crisis has caused everyone to consider opportunities in regionalization that might otherwise have been overlooked.

Question 5: Fiscal Issues

Limited and/or exhausted financial resources at the local level drive most discussions. Districts seek potential district educational partners with similar (or better) fiscal health and long-term stability. Taking a look at Chapter 70 information for each district involved could be helpful. <http://finance1.doe.mass.edu/chapter70/>. If you are considering regionalization, examine a span of time for your district and your prospective partner(s) to better assess the differences between trend and aberration. Gather and review your collective bargaining agreements and then compare them with the M.I.S.C. and D.A.R.T. reports. You can read the actual agreements on-line on the DESE website. Begin to analyze what costs may be associated with consolidating salary and benefit packages between you and future partners.

At the conclusion of this initial discussion (and the many throughout this process), always return to these questions: *Is the learner learning? What can we do to raise student achievement and success?*

This is a good time to reach out to DESE and share with the Department information about the conversations that have taken place and to discuss your timeline. One member of your group should call:

The Office of School Governance
Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

It is important to have DESE officials involved early in the process to provide technical assistance and advice. All proposals for a new or amended regional school district agreements must be approved by all member towns and by the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education prior to the December 31 in order for the agreement to become effective the following July 1. It is important to discuss the timeline of your study with DESE. Regional School District Regulations (CMR 41.03) outlines the necessary steps to secure the Commissioner's approval. <http://www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/603cmr41.html?section=03>.

Phase I: Form/Expand/Enlarge a Regional School District

Step 1 - Preliminary Discussions

b. Identify Incentives to Regionalize

The incentives for school districts to consider forming or joining a regional school district generally fall into one or more of three categories:

1. Educational incentives
2. Fiscal incentives
3. Building incentives

Let us take a closer look at each of these incentives, starting with educational incentives.

1. Concern for maintaining a strong educational program with excellent curricular and extra-curricular offerings can be a stimulus for districts to form or join a regional school district. When school districts are small, they are often limited in the scope and breadth of courses and extra-curricular programs they can offer their students. Some programs and services must be offered on a part-time basis. Finding qualified staff to teach on a part-time basis can be challenging. When school districts combine and pool their resources, they can gain flexibility in staffing and increase their ability to offer a more diverse program of studies taught by highly qualified staff, and offer a richer array of extra-curricular activities.
2. Many districts have formed regions because they were seeking financial stability. State aid to schools and towns has reduced over the last decade while district costs have risen. Declining student enrollment and increased costs of instructional materials, transportation, utilities and contracted services along with staggering increases in health insurance costs have caused many districts to consider cost sharing with other similar districts through the regionalization process. By forming a region, the member towns were able to pool resources to improve administrative efficiency and

reduce redundancy of positions, achieve financial stability and increase their sustainability.

Additionally, a major financial incentive to form a region has been receiving reimbursement for regional transportation, which is applied for all students who live a mile and one half or more from the school. While the level of reimbursement has fluctuated in recent years, it has consistently been in the mid 50% range or higher.

3. Facility issues can also stimulate school districts and towns to consider joining or forming a regional district. Are you experiencing over-crowding in your schools? Are the facilities in need of major renovation or replacement? If the answer to either question is yes, the town and school district could be faced with the need to fund expensive repairs or a building project and may be seeking assistance through the Massachusetts School Building Authority. MSBA has established criteria and potential incentives for regionalizing for districts who wish to apply for funds. One such criteria for small towns and school districts is that they must consider regionalizing with another town or towns. MSBA is much more likely to consider funding the building or renovation of schools designed to serve the combined school population of two or more small towns that formed a region.

Phase I: Forming/Expanding a Regional School District

Step 1 - Preliminary Discussions

c. Determine Type of Region

During the fact-finding, data collection and discussion process, it is important to consider the current configuration of your school district and any affiliations that you have with neighboring districts in order to move onto a further discussion on the type of regional school district you may want to deliberate. Part of the decision may be directed by your or other district(s) current configuration and demographics.

Additional information on the current configuration of school districts in MA is provided in a DESE report entitled School District Consolidation in Massachusetts. This report provides a brief history of regionalization; explains the complex web of relationships that already exist among districts; looks at some demographic, fiscal, and programmatic factors that might motivate districts to regionalize; and uncovers some lessons from a recent series of regionalization studies. This **report is located on the DESE web site at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/research/reports/1109consolidation.pdf>** Information on the fifty-eight academic regions, the twenty six vocational regions and the sixteen superintendency unions may be found on the DESE website at **<http://finance1.doe.mass.edu/regional/>** Discussions regarding the type of regional school should include such questions as: What will the grade configurations be? What

school facilities would be needed? Where would they be located? Do we want to form an academic or vocational regional school district. Do we want to establish a superintendency union as a first step? What are our options?

There are five different models of regionalization, as depicted in the attached diagram. In addition, Massachusetts school districts often have formed superintendency unions to create cost efficiencies. A supervisory union is formed between two or more school committees for the purpose of jointly hiring central administrative staff. In this arrangement, each district maintains its autonomy and has its own school committee but shares one superintendent and may also share central office staff and possibly other staff. A Supervisory Union may offer cost efficiencies, but also presents a complex form of governance. Superintendents who work in supervisory unions work with multiple school committees, prepare multiple budgets and file multiple reports. However, often, this is the first step toward a more formal affiliation as a regional school district. Examples of current supervisory unions that share central office staff with their regional school district are Union 3, comprised of the elementary districts of Northboro and Southboro and the Northboro-Southboro Regional School District and Union 54, comprised of the elementary districts of Brewster, Eastham, Orleans and Wellfleet and the Nauset Regional School District serving secondary students from the same member towns. Other superintendency unions have no affiliation with a regional school district. An example would be Union 43, comprised of the school districts of Clarksburg, Florida, Monroe and Savoy.

The regional model selected will be based on what type of region is the best fit for the individual districts involved in the planning study.

Model #1: Two or More Towns form Regional District

Two or more towns join to form a new regional school district. Regionalization can occur at the elementary school level, the secondary school level or K-12. There are thirty-four K-12 districts. Examples of a K-12 model include the K-12 regional district of; Adams-Cheshire, Ashburnham-Westminster, Dennis Yarmouth and the newest regional districts of Ayer-Shirley and Monomoy (Chatham-Harwich). Secondary Regions include Concord-Carlisle and Masconomet. Two examples of an Elementary School Region are Chesterfield-Goshen and New Salem-Wendell.

Model #2: Current Region Enlarges to include new Town(s)

An existing regional school district enlarges to include one or more new towns not currently in the region. The Southwick-Tolland Region is an example of this model. The two town K-12 district recently enlarged its membership to include the town of Granville.

Model #3: Current Region expands to include additional grade levels

An existing secondary region or an elementary region expands to encompass grades

K-12. The member towns of the existing 5-12 Freetown-Lakeville Regional District recently approved the expansion of the district to encompass grades K-12. Most of the existing K-12 regional school districts started as a secondary regional school district.

Model #4: Region is Combination of Secondary Region, Elementary Region and Unions

Member towns of an existing secondary region may also belong to a separate elementary region that may or may not share the same central office staff through a superintendency union. The Hampshire Region is a 7-12 regional district comprised of five towns. Two of the town members at the secondary level are also members of an elementary regional district. The secondary region, the elementary region and the three municipal elementary districts all share central office services through Union 66. This is a more complicated model but one that has been used by the members of Hampshire, Mahar, Mohawk and Martha's Vineyard Regional School Districts.

Model #5: Vocational Technical School Districts

There are twenty-six regional vocational technical school districts in MA, serving 234 member cities and towns. In addition, municipal districts often offer their vocational programming. Use of this model would typically involve a non-member of a regional vocational district requesting membership. However, some municipal vocational schools and neighboring member towns have expressed interest in forming additional regional vocational school districts. The Step by Step process may be adapted to assist communities interested in joining or forming a regional vocational school district. Assabet Valley, Nashoba Valley and Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational School Districts are but three examples of the 26 regional vocational technical high school districts operating in our state.

Phase I: Form/Expand/Enlarge a Regional School District

Step 1 - Preliminary Discussions

d. Utilize Self-Assessment Tool for Measuring District Capacity

In 2010, the Massachusetts Legislature formed the Commission on Regionalization and Collaboration to study regionalization and the use of collaboratives across the state. The full report of the Commission can be accessed at:

<http://www.malegislative.gov/Committees/187/Document/Joint/J14/Commission-Sch>.

To aid in its study, the Commission developed this assessment tool. The purpose of the tool is to measure district capacity, which the Commission defines as the ability of a district to provide a quality education for its students. The tool is constructed in survey format. It is highly recommended that any district considering joining or forming a region make use of this tool. Appendix F of this manual contains a copy of the tool.

The assessment tool consists of 61 indicators that reflect specific conditions within the school district. The indicators are presented as statements, requiring users to indicate a “yes” or “no” response depending on whether or not the statement applies to the district. The indicator statements are specifically structured such that an affirmative response suggests a deficient or decreasing level of capacity. To this end, the tool offers a way for users to pinpoint specific dimensions or areas of capacity that likely require further development or examination.

The survey can be used by school district leaders, local stakeholders and members of the general public to perform an initial capacity analysis in order to:

1. Identify the areas of capacity that are strongest and those that need improvement;
2. Establish the foundation upon which to engage in further analyses and targeted discussions about regionalization, collaboration, or other capacity-building initiatives; and
3. Inform ongoing discussions about the capacity of the school district and ways to improve programs and services.

The tool can also be used to establish a baseline for measuring changes over time and assessing the impact of various reform initiatives. Moreover, the tool is designed to be user-friendly and accessible to local school leaders and members of the general public alike, which can allow communities to disseminate important information to help foster a community-wide dialogue about the strengths and weaknesses of the local school district.

While the self-assessment tool contains a targeted list of indicators that are specific to regionalization and collaboration, the tool can be adapted and expanded in order to meet individual district's capacity assessment needs. In addition, while the Commission developed

this tool as a way to support the local assessment process, it can also be used to carry out various statewide initiatives and assessment purposes.

The assessment tool directs users to a variety of available data and existing resources and requires users to complete a series of “yes” or “no” questions based on this corresponding data. Most measurements are based on trends and/or a comparison to “like districts.” The trend can be several years, five years or more. The “like districts” can be based on enrollment, Department of Revenue information, neighboring districts or any grouping that may be viewed as similar. However, the Commission strongly recommends that users also refer to the ESE District Analysis and Review Tool (DART) to determine a list of ten comparable districts, which the DART identifies using a precise calculation that matches districts by district type and by other variables such as total enrollment, percentage of low income students, percentage of English language learners, and the percentage of special education students. The DART can be found at: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/dart/>. Sample DART reports are available in Appendix D of this document.

In order to streamline the assessment process, the tool identifies specific resources and/or data that can be used to properly answer each of the questions in the far right column of the survey grid. A brief description of each of these sources and directions for using the data to complete the assessment are outlined in Appendix D.

Phase I: Form/Expand/Enlarge a Regional School District

Step 1 - Preliminary Discussions

e. Determine Advantages to Regionalization

There are many advantages for school districts when they join an existing regional school district or join other independent districts to form a new region. Some examples of advantages that have been noted in previous studies and compiled by DESE are listed below. The list largely pertains to PreK-12 districts and all advantages may not be applicable to districts exploring other models.

- A single school committee with cohesive educational policy for all K-12 students
- A single administration with potential for more efficient and economical operation of school departments
- A coordinated curriculum, kindergarten through grade twelve
- Expanded curricular offerings due to fiscal efficiencies to serve increased number of students from combined enrollments
- Fuller utilization of teachers and other staff and school facilities
- Opportunity to offer more enrichment within school curriculum
- Opportunity to expand athletic programs and extra-curricular activities

- Coordinated program of testing, guidance, health services and support services
- A single salary schedule and set of bargaining agreements for staff in each bargaining unit
- A single budget, administered to take advantage of efficient, centralized purchasing techniques and coordinated transportation
- Expansion of critical mass to gain economies of scale and aggregated purchasing power of goods and services
- Opportunity for more administrative capacity at the district and school level
- Opportunity to redirect leadership time and energy to educational programs through a reduction of duplicative effort in business procedures, reporting and negotiations
- Expanded offerings could lead to fewer students leaving district under School Choice
- State regional transportation reimbursement
- Additional reimbursement points may be granted by MSBA for regional school building projects

Phase I: Form/Expand/Enlarge a Regional School District

Step 1 - Preliminary Discussions

f. Determine the Challenges to Regionalization

The decision whether or not to regionalize must be made by each member town. We have already considered some of the advantages to forming a regional school district. Such a process, however, is not without its challenges or fears, which should be thoroughly considered as well. It is important to note that many fears are unfounded while others are based on specific circumstances that may have occurred in one regional district. For instance, the fear that local elementary schools will close and young students will be transported across town borders is not supported by fact. While some towns have formed a regional district for the purpose of building a joint school building, generally it has been for the purpose of serving middle or high school grade level students. It has been a rare occurrence that elementary schools have closed as a result of regionalization. Another common misconception is that teachers will lose their jobs as the new region "cleans house." Teacher benefits are protected by law (MGL Chapter 71, Sections 42B and 43). Although it is possible in specific circumstances that some staffing positions may be eliminated or reconfigured due to consolidation, in actuality, few school or teaching staff have lost jobs as a result of regionalization.

The following list of challenges and perceived challenges is a composite of those that have been presented/voiced in the past and can be divided into four major categories. Many of these fears can be alleviated by a well-crafted Regional Agreement, which can be designed to address issues of the towns. If the fear that local schools would be closed is considered an obstacle to the process, the Regional Agreement can be tailored to include language describing how local input would be part of any such decision; that local officials would have a say.

Educational and/or Social Differences:

- Feared loss of focus on elementary education
- Differences in financial support of education in member towns
- Differences in educational goals and objectives
- Real or perceived social differences

Local Control and Community Distinctiveness:

- Unwillingness to share control with neighboring towns
- A fear of loss of local pride and control
- Loss of community voice through reduction of School Committee representation
- Potential change in administrative leadership and staff
- Loss of town control of state aid when funds are distributed directly to the regional district
- Loss of direct budget control and control of school buildings
- Potential for closing town school buildings
- Concern for job security and impact on teacher salaries, benefits and professional status

Resistance to Any Change/Misconceptions:

- Fear that elementary students will be transported across town lines and with longer bus rides
- Refusal to recognize the shortcomings of the small school district
- Belief that smaller is better with more individualized attention to students
- Belief that the town is doing its best for students and the joint district would be too far removed from understanding of town desires and interests
- Fear there will be more state control
- Fear there will be more bureaucracy in a larger regional administration
- Fear there will be larger schools and larger class sizes

Financial:

- Fear that regional districts cost more to operate
- Objection of wealthy districts to joining with poorer districts for fear of having to pay an undue share of the costs of the new district
- Poorer districts fearing increased taxes to meet higher standards

- Impact of state aid calculations - Belief that more state aid, or a change in the state aid formula or a reduction of state and/or federal mandates will resolve existing financial challenges and allow the existing towns to remain solvent
- Unwillingness to share budget control over educational spending
- Absorption of town-related services and costs into regional budget
- Potential increased costs due to:
 1. Requirement to hire a regional treasurer;
 2. Additional costs to coordinate technology, align curriculum and school schedules, negotiate and combine contracts and leases, etc.;
 3. Merging collective bargaining agreements;
 4. Legal costs to develop the regional agreement and negotiate contracts;
 5. Cost of buy-in if a small town is joining an existing region;
- Credibility of the state - lack of trust in continued state reimbursement for regional transportation
- Potential loss of state construction aid if closing a school building recently constructed or renovated with state funds
- Changes in operational assessment methodology under the education reform law requiring towns to pay according to their ability based on state formula and not on a per-pupil basis
 - a. copy of amended Regional Agreement and member Town Clerks' confirmation documents in case copies sent to DESE are lost.];
 - b. Email Chris Lynch and Michelle Griffin that these materials are being sent to them.
- 2. When four (4) copies [if two (2) member towns] returned: [One (1) is kept by DESE]; one (1) copy to each Select Board for member towns' records; and two (2) copies to district.
- District to keep at least one version of the amended Regional Agreement in Word form for future potential changes.
- District to post the amended Regional Agreement on the District website.

The MARS Consulting Group:
Gagliarducci Mac Reid

Steve Hemman, Principal Consultant

Jay Barry

Paul

Additional Information

[Not to be shared unless regional school committee is not part of the process.]

1. The only signature that is required is that of the Commissioner of DESE.
2. In instances where a town initiates the amendment process, the regional school committee may not agree and therefore the chair of the RSC may not sign. In this instance, the chair of the Regional Planning Board or Regional Agreement Amendment Committee may sign, although not necessary.

3. Logistics may not allow chairs of select boards to sign and this is acceptable.

Phase II - Introduction

Congratulations! If you are reading this section it means that your new or expanded regional school district agreement has been approved by the voters and the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education and you are now moving into the transition phase, or what we call Phase II. The transition period begins from the time the voters approve the Regional Agreement and the Commissioner has approved the new district and ends on June 30 of the year when the new district assumes full control. Typically, the transition period lasts from six to eighteen months and is a very busy time for all those involved.

Phase II of this document was created to provide a comprehensive list of all the actions that will need to be taken and decisions that need to be made before the new district can operate independently. Unlike in Phase I, the information is not presented in a chronological manner as there is no set order for when each action must be taken. The order in which items are addressed is at the discretion of the district. Once again, a Checklist has been provided to help the user keep track of what has been done and what is still to be completed. Additionally, several Appendices contain supportive information and sample documents to address transition activities.

This is an exciting time for you and your new district. We wish you all the best as you complete your transition.

Phase II: Becoming a New Region

I. The First Stages of the Transition Period

The first order of business is to convene the Regional School District Committee. Your agreement may provide that the first regional school district committee be appointed from the member districts' sitting committees until such time as elections are held or the agreement may call for an immediate election of new school committee members. Regardless of the method of selection, the members of the new regional school committee must first convene as an official body to begin the work of the new region.

The initial meeting may be called by one of the local school Superintendents and that Superintendent runs the meeting until a Chairperson is elected.

A. Powers and Duties of the Regional School Committee

The Regional School Committee, whether selected through interim appointment, or elected, has all of the powers of school committees and those additional powers as stipulated in Chapter 71, Section 16B. The Regional Agreement, however, may address how these powers, duties and responsibilities must be coordinated with those of the member district school committees during the transition phase. The language of the agreement is the contract between/among the member districts and must be honored throughout the process. In addition to areas that must be coordinated with the member district school committee, the regional agreement will address quorum and the needed votes to address specific tasks. Some of the first official responsibilities of the Regional Committee are:

1. Elect school committee officers, chairperson, vice chairperson
2. Hire/appoint a Superintendent, Business Manager, Special Education Director and other central office staff, as appropriate,
3. Engage consultants; e.g., legal counsel, financial advisor, bond counsel, and health plan design consultant
4. Hire a treasurer
5. Set calendar of future school committee meetings
6. Establish a budget for the transition period and for the first full year of operation
7. Arrange for the election of permanent school committee members, as appropriate
8. Meet with all staff of the member district as well as member town officials
9. Develop transportation policy and vet with DESE
10. Receive, manage, and expend funds
11. Enter contracts and leases
12. Negotiate and enter into collective bargaining agreements
13. Appoint a Building Committee, as needed
14. Develop and approve a strategic plan for the district

These are examples of important duties and powers, but it does not imply that it is an exhaustive list

B. Relationship between Regional School Committee and local school committees during the transition.

The Regional Agreement will detail the relationship and interaction of the sitting Committees where powers/responsibilities may overlap. The agreement may limit the ability of the local school committees to make long term commitments or obligations that will ultimately be the responsibility of the regional district school committee. This relates to issues which will be carried forward into the new Region, and for which the Regional School Committee will have to accept responsibility. The regional school district agreement may provide that during the transition:

1. The local School Committees must receive Regional School Committee approval for decisions made about changing the district school choice status.

2. The Local School Committees receive Regional School Committee approval of any expenditure which would commit the new Region in the future.

Any issue that could have long-term financial, contractual and educational impact on the new region” should have input from the Regional Committee. The critical piece is that clear lines of communication and action are established in order to ensure a smooth transition and the future stability of the new region. .

C. Termination of the Transitional Regional Committee

The Transition Regional Committee’s duration will be defined in the Regional Agreement. It may only exist for the initial period from the date of the vote establishing the region until the fiscal year following the next fiscal year from the vote. During this time, there may be two regional school committees – the initial appointed school committee and the newly elected school committee. Regardless of the composition, the regional school committee has all of the powers outlined in law and in the regional school district agreement.

D. Calendar for School Committee Meetings

Developing something as simple as a calendar for School Committee meetings needs to be thought through carefully. Site becomes an issue, because there are now at least two partners in the process. Making the operations of the new School Committee visible in each member community is of great importance in order to create interest and support. The frequency of meetings can be a bit tricky, because it must blend with the meetings of the local School Committees, given that initially some members may serve on both. There is also value in trying to avoid meetings of the other local boards in the member communities (e.g., Boards of Selectmen and Finance Committees). Finally, because of the number of initiatives and issues that arise in the beginning stages of the Region, there is great need for multiple meetings each month. This becomes even more important, as the budget is developed.

One alternative to avoiding some meeting conflicts of town boards is to schedule the Regional School Committee meetings (perhaps two per month) on different days of the week. This schedule, while not perfect, deals with the matters noted above.

II. Develop Transition Timeframe

It is important to first list all the tasks that have to be addressed during the transition period. The next step is to assign tasks and establish a timeline for addressing and accomplishing these tasks.

A. Calendar of Events:

1. Meeting with Staff - Meetings with staff from all job categories should be held early in the process and should include updates as the process moves forward. Staff will have numerous concerns and will be worried about individual positions and roles. The best way to deal with this

is to be open and thorough in all communications with the staff regarding what possible changes the regionalization may bring.

2. The Regional School Committee will find it both necessary and advantageous to schedule meetings with local town boards. The range of common topics of interest will be wide and varied. The process of regionalization is new and can be misunderstood, so opening lines of communication is critical. For example, local boards will often need to have the Regional budget process clearly explained, particularly the concept of “assessment.” Issues around End of Year Reporting and Schedule 19 matters, building leases, insurance (all types), and MSBA matters will abound. Explanatory meetings can be the mechanism to smooth out the bumps in the road. Many communities have developed groups (Selectmen, Fincom, School Committee, and staff) which work together on local budgets—reviewing/projecting available funds and projected costs. If these exist, it makes great sense to continue Regional involvement with them, so that budget discussions can occur in a collective way. This is of particular importance in the first few budgets!

Engaging town officials with the affairs of the Region early and often should be a goal during the transition period.

B. The Tasks: [in alphabetical order – see Appendix K for timeline]

- Administrative Organization—Develop a new organization chart
- Athletics—Merge teams, policies, and school colors, logos, and mascots
- Auditor—Take over auditing tasks from individual towns
- Budget Development—Develop the first Regional budget during the Transition Phase
 - Sub-committee of the Transitional Regional School Committee
 - Develop a Joint Sub-Committee comprised of members of the School Committee, Boards of Selectmen, and Finance Committees
- Building Leases or Purchases -- Draw up agreement to lease or own facilities
- Building Usage—Finalize plans regarding building usage and purpose
- Business Operations—Merge multiple business practices, procedures, and staff
 - Payroll and accounting systems
 - Retirement systems (teacher and county)
 - Insurance issues
 - Identification numbers and codes (Federal, State, and DESE)
- Curriculum and Instruction—Merge curriculum and instructional practices from the various school districts

- Food Services and Custodial Services—Merge staff and services
- Grants—Check with DESE on grants that continue from the local district into the new region. Submit blended grants for the first year of the operational region (some eligibility parameters may change with different schools and different students)
- Insurance
 - Property & Casualty
 - Health
 - Acceptance of 32b
- Professional Development—Develop plan for teaching staff, support staff, and administrators
- Public Relations—Form a Regional School Committee sub-committee to communicate with members of the community, the students, and the staff
- Revolving Funds - Monies that are held by the municipal governments, including revolving funds like School Choice, Food Service, etc., will need to be transferred to the new region. The Regional School Committee will need to vote to accept all revolving funds. The district's finance officer will then establish an account or accounts and request that all these funds be transferred to the new region.
- School Committee Organization—Appoint Interim Regional School Committee prior to elected Regional School Committee, if called for in your regional agreement.
- School Committee Policy Development—Merge multiple School Committee policy books and develop a new one for the new Region
- Special Education—Develop a plan to address the following issues:
 - Communication
 - Students
 - Staff
 - Level of Services
 - Technology
 - Location of Programs
- Staffing—Merge the teaching staff, support staff, and administration of the individual districts into a regional staff
- Strategic Planning—Develop at least a short-term strategic plan and make a commitment to a more comprehensive strategic plan in the near future

- Student Activity Funds - Monies that are held by the municipal governments, including revolving funds like student activity funds, will need to be transferred to the new region. The Regional School Committee will need to vote to accept all revolving funds. The district's finance officer will then request that all these funds be transferred to the new region.
- Sub-Committees of the Transitional and Elected Regional School Committee—Do the necessary work more efficiently
 - Communication
 - Negotiations
 - Regional Budget
 - Town-wide Budget
 - Policy
 - Strategic Plan
 - Web Site
- Technology—infrastructure, hardware, and software
 - Web Site
 - E-mail System
 - Hardware and software for Central Office
 - Hardware and Software for Instruction
 - EPIMS
 - SIMS
 - Phone System
- Timeline—Develop an action plan with a timeline
- Transportation—What changes and what stays the same? Given that there are many different configurations as districts approach regionalization (for example, expanding regions or newly-formed organizations), there may be significant changes to student transportation practice and policy. This will be particularly true for newly-formed regions, which will receive partial reimbursement for transportation costs and may have to transport students greater distances.
 - Develop a new transportation policy - In new regions it may be necessary to adopt new policy regarding student transportation given that the member communities may have different individual transportation practices and policies.
 - Review current service in light of new requirement to provide K-12 transportation to eligible students
 - Assume responsibilities for regular day transportation in transition year if called for in your regional agreement.
 - As appropriate, begin discussions with DESE to request regional transportation reimbursement in the first operational year of the new Region. While such reimbursement has been granted, it is not guaranteed.

- Union Negotiations
 - Getting “new” unions certified and recognized by the Regional School Committee
 - Negotiating with all “new” unions

III. Develop Process for New Policy Book

One of the important duties of the School Committee is to develop, adopt and implement policies, which govern the operation of the district. It is a daunting, time-consuming task which may create the need to consider a consultant to help with the process.

To begin this process, we recommend that you consider doing the following:

- A. Conduct an initial review to study existing policy manuals from member districts to find what currently is shared as policy. There may be many policies of this type.
- B. Review policies that address the same topic but are written differently and yet produce a similar result.
- C. Identify policies which exist in all manuals but are different in intent.
- D. Include those policies which appear in one district but not the others.

IV. Establish Sub-committees

As with any school committee, there will be a need for subcommittees to focus on segments of the operation and to address critical issues. In some ways, this will be intensified during the transition period, because all segments of operation are being developed for the first time as a Regional District and will require some level of School Committee involvement.

A. Communication

If there is one single area that is critical in the transition period, it is communications. It is important to reach out to the public, staff, affiliated agencies (collaboratives, contractors, and special education private schools), DESE, MSBA and your local municipal officials early on in transition period. Regionalizing brings new ways of doing things into play, many of which are not intuitive. Nothing will be more evident of this than the budget preparation and concept of an “assessment” that will be voted on by local member communities. The community and its leaders may have great difficulty understanding that the budget process is now different. Create a subcommittee to focus on and anticipate the need to communicate—how, when, who and where is important to getting word out and creating support. The development of a website

as early as possible and then using it to share updates on the regionalization process will be a critical step in establishing a commitment to open communication.

Another example of the need to communicate clearly will relate to the process to identify a name of the regional district. This needs to be determined during the Planning Board phase and ought to be a topic of discussion in all public forums leading up to the initial vote on regionalization.

There will be similar types of decisions to be made when team names, colors and mascots are determined. These issues should be included on several School Committee meeting agendas for open discussion.

B. Negotiations

Some staffing contracts may end on June 30 and will not apply on July 1 when operations for the Region begin. Some contracts, however, may continue on in the new Region. The Regional Agreement will need to address such matters. Unions will need to seek School Committee recognition for them to represent employee groups. Ultimately, it will be necessary to establish a negotiation subcommittee to conduct the actual “at the table” negotiations. While it is not absolutely necessary to have a contract in place on day one of operation, it is better to have something in place sooner rather than later.

C. Budget [See budget process in Section VI.]

Developing the first Regional budget is one of the most important activities during the transitional period. It is recommended that the Regional School Committee establish a subcommittee representing all communities and interests to work closely with the administration [Superintendent(s), Business Manager(s), and Personnel Manager(s)] to develop assumptions, drafts, and final documents. We recommend that you consult Chapter 71, Section 16B and 603 C.M.R. 41.05 and Appendices M1 and M2 for additional budget preparation information. It is recommended that during the transition period a joint board be formed of representatives of the Regional School Committee and the member Boards of Selectmen, and the Finance Committees. This should be done very early in the transition period in order to establish a working budget relationship.

This “Tri-Board” will make sure that all parties understand that the previous “budget” process has now become an “assessment” process. Hopefully, this group will establish some common assumptions and perhaps even agree on budget parameters. If this happens, the first regional school budget/assessment process will go very smoothly and get support from the various boards at the respective annual town meetings.

D. Policy

Often, a Policy Sub-Committee will choose to focus on one section of the policy manual at a time and review/update those policies as needed before moving on to another section of the manual. It is advised that the School Committee identify regular times in its meeting agendas to discuss and take action on policy to keep the manual as current as possible. Sometimes, school committees engage a group like MASC to support this effort.

- E. Strategic Plan [see Appendix L for an example of a Strategic Plan written by a new regional district]

Creating a Strategic Plan has several levels of value for the new region. First, it will give direction and set goals and initiatives for the region to utilize as decisions are made. Second because strategic planning will involve input from staff, community and parents as well as administrators, it will begin the development of core values for the district. Finally, the process will give all constituent groups a sense of ownership and commitment to the new entity. The strategic plan does not have to be of long duration, perhaps for only two to three years until a more robust process can be undertaken, but it will pull together the collective guidance from the member districts.

While many districts have undertaken this type of task and will have staff that can develop a good process, there are a number of consultants available who can assist in expediting the process for the region. The consultant can perform much of the leg work and facilitation of meetings and can then take charge of the production of the model and final version of the plan. Ayer Shirley received proposals from multiple consultant groups who were greatly interested in this type of work. Hiring the consultant gave regional administration the opportunity to participate actively in the process without having to be fully responsible for the task.

V. Technology

- A. Web Site:

The new region's website will be the "face" of the region, at least at the beginning. It is important to form a sub-committee with interested parties representing the administration/staff, the School Committee, and the community. It may be possible to build on one or both of the individual school district websites. Finding other districts' excellent sites and studying them will help focus the task. It may be necessary to hire a consultant to assist with this task.

Web sites should have constantly updated and user-friendly information. During the transition year, the web site will be helpful keeping members of the staff and community informed and involved in the many activities being conducted. Questionnaires can help focus the tasks at hand.

While the regional website is being built and implemented, it is important to designate an administrative overseer of the site. Generally, another person will be given (perhaps for a stipend) the day-to-day task of administering the site. Protocols need to be established which assure that appropriate information is put up on the site and is monitored for timeliness.

B. E-mail System

It is possible, and maybe probable, that the newly regionalized school districts have different e-mail providers. If they do share a single provider, it is also possible/probable that the different systems have different features. Generally, the technology staff will assume responsibility for researching the similarities and differences and making recommendations to the administration. A decision will have to be made by the Superintendent or designee which e-mail system and which features to utilize. All staff will have to be assigned a new e-mail address.

C. Hardware and Software for Central Office

Again, it will be important for the technology staff to review what each separate district has, what is needed for the consolidated Central Office, and to make a recommendation for the tools that are needed.

It will be clear that there are two significant considerations for hardware. One is the infrastructure which includes servers and switches. It may be necessary to bring in an outside consultant group to review the state of the infrastructure and make recommendations for the future. It is possible that by utilizing the best hardware from both districts, little or no additional expense will be necessary in this area. Many districts will find that this is an area that has been neglected during difficult economic times, and now is the time to remedy that situation. The other significant consideration for hardware will be in the business function as a separate server may be needed to support this department. The financial software will need to include an appropriate system for payroll, accounts payable, benefits/human resources, EPIMS, and all necessary personnel functions. The Business Manager and staff will assume responsibility for this recommendation.

D. Hardware and Software for Instruction

One might assume that the combined hardware and software assets of the two (or more) districts might be adequate to begin the new region. It is very possible, however, that during this transitional planning period, the staff and administration will recommend additional, or different, important software and hardware.

Often there are different software packages in the different districts that are used to accomplish the same tasks. Conversely, some schools may be using an on-line version and others using a downloaded version of the same software program. All of these software packages need to be reviewed by the system's designated curriculum person and staff to make recommendations with input from principals and department leaders.

E. EPIMS

EPIMS is a relatively new system devised by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to track educational staff and to ensure that teachers are "highly qualified." Reporting EPIMS data to DESE can be done by someone in the Business Office or perhaps by a Data Manager. Most, if not all, financial software packages include an ability to keep track of EPIMS data and send reports to DESE.

F. SIMS

The district's technology staff will know about Student Information Management System (SIMS). In some instances, the software package from one system will be used in the new region. That will necessitate importing the student data from the other system(s) into the one to be used. Perhaps the new Region will incorporate an entirely new SIMS package, necessitating importing all student data.

G. Phone System

Like all other technology systems, the existing phone systems need to be reviewed for serviceability, functionality, age, appropriateness, and compatibility. This too is most often done by the technology staff. Does each school have compatible and comparable equipment and service? What is needed to make this happen? New phone numbers and personnel extensions need to be established.

The other significant question is what service provider should be used. There are many things to consider such as service (quality and response time), installation expenses, general monthly expense, long-distance rates, and desired bells and whistles.

VI. Business Operations

A. Payroll and Accounting Systems

It is quite possible that member districts will have different software systems for financial operations (payroll and accounting, etc.). For example, Ayer used MUNIS and Shirley used Unifund, which made it necessary for an RFP (Request For Proposal) for the system. In any case, there will be need for training and importing of data regardless of what system is finally selected.

This process needs to be undertaken very early in the transition period, because much of the change over will begin in January prior to a July 1 start up. There may be a number of unintended consequences, as well so an early set up is important. It may take up to a full year from initial planning to actual operations.

B. Retirement Systems—Teachers and County

It will be fairly simple to move teachers from local districts to the region for the purposes of MTRS [Massachusetts Teachers Retirement System 617-679-6877] (teachers and many administrators). There are several reasons for this. All teachers belong to MTRS, so it is a simple change of employer, and because it is a state obligation, there is no local assessment factor. County retirement systems will require some more discussion and thought. As an example, when Ayer and Shirley were involved in regionalization discussions with Lunenburg, retirement issues were magnified, because Ayer and Shirley were part of Middlesex and Lunenburg was part of Worcester County Retirement System. However, it is again a case where early outreach to the agency is beneficial. Staff in Ayer-Shirley was able to walk through the transition for staff movement from towns to Region without major issues. The Middlesex County Retirement System (978-439-3025) also worked hard to provide an initial assessment, which assisted in building the budget.

C. Insurance Issues

Some insurance issues will be relatively simple to resolve. For example, property and casualty insurance, as well as other types of insurance (Workers' Comp, etc.) can be quoted by current local carriers, and coverage determinations will be part of that process.

Health insurance will be more complex and will most likely need the involvement of a consultant who knows the process of plan design and options regarding purchasing groups. The process will also require some input from legal counsel on a number of levels. For example, legal counsel input around working with existing union contracts and statute will be invaluable.

Legal counsel is critical, because, while acknowledging that it would be impossible to create an official "Insurance Advisory Committee" to participate in the process as the new district will not have any retired members (a required member of the Committee) for at least one year, counsel can help determine who should be at the table during deliberations to replicate the Insurance Advisory Committee as closely as possible. Legal counsel will also be able to provide guidance and recommendations regarding the Regional School Committee's acceptance of the various provisions of sections of MGL 32b, relative to the multiple options that fall under local control.

The processes to consider the many options involved around health insurance need to begin very early in the transition period. It may take a full year to manage and implement this transition.

D. Obtain Federal ID Number and State LEA Number

The Region will need to obtain several ID numbers in order to meet regulations for reporting information and to conduct general business affairs. Examples of this include a Federal ID number (EIN), as well as a tax-exempt number. There will also be a need to work with DESE, in order to have the Region receive its own LEA (Local Education Agency) code. Eventually DESE will cease reporting (MCAS, etc.) and receiving (SIMS/EPIMS etc.) information from local member districts and will transition to the Region, but all of this must be established ahead of time.

Federal Tax Exempt EIN # -- 617-626-5050 (Department of Unemployment Assistance)

State Tax Exempt ID # -- 617-887-6367 (tax exempt status); 617-973-2629 (state comptroller – contractor status); 888-227-2423 (register with the CCR—Central Contractor Registry); 866-705-5711 (obtain a DUNS number—Data Universal Number System); [CCR and DUNS are required for certain government agencies]

DESE LEA (Local Education Agency) Code—call: 781-338-3282

E. Bank Accounts

Depository and checking accounts will be opened and a taxpayer ID number is mandated when this occurs. Funds will be transferred during the transition period and will have to be accounted for, when the year-end report is completed, and audits are done. Purchasing of goods/services will mandate tax status information.

F. Filing EOY (End-of-Year) REPORTS and E&D (Excess and Deficiency)

New districts must report in both of these areas, even during the transition phase. The EOY, which must be filed on Excel templates, is due at the Department of Revenue no later than September 30 each year. The report notes all revenues received by the school committee and all expenditures from the school committee budget, state or federal funds, revolving accounts or the municipal budget on behalf of the school district that occurred in the fiscal year that just ended the previous June 30th. A good introduction to the EOY Report can be found at:

<http://www.doe.mass.edu/finance/accounting/eoy/fy11/memo.html>

Regional School Districts are allowed to maintain an excess and deficiency fund, pursuant to Chapter 71, Section 16B1/2 and further defined in CMR 41.06. The District must submit information to the Department of Revenue to certify the balance in the fund on or before October 31 of each year.

G. Hire Auditor (MGL 71:16E)

An RFP (Request for Proposal) for an auditor, or auditing firm, should be developed. Ayer Shirley contracted the assistance of a nearby regional school auditor to help write the specifications. Posting and advertising precede interviews. This can be done by the Business Manager with possible assistance by other colleagues. Eventually, a recommendation is made for a Regional School Committee vote. Since the audit is conducted after the end of the fiscal year, this search can be conducted late in the transitional year. See Appendices M1 and M2 for a sample blank audit form and one used by a regional district.

VII. Budget Development for the First Year of the Region (Including Grants)
(MGL 71:16B, 71:16B 1/2, and 71:16G.5)

Building the first regional budget is one of the most important things that has to be done during the transition year. In some ways, the process is the same as building a local school budget. However, there are also some major differences. One of the differences is finding consensus among School Committee members and voters from multiple towns. In addition, since all state funds will now be directed to the regional district accounts, member towns will only be voting on their share of the regional budget or an assessment. It is also important to note that unlike in municipal districts, only those expenses reported in the school committee budget would count toward meeting the district's net school spending requirement under the state Chapter 70 program. Again discussion with local town officials will avoid surprises in the budgeting process.

The first fiscal year budget process should begin early in the fall. The Superintendent, with the support of the Business Manager and Central Office staff, should recommend a group of budget assumptions for the Regional School Committee to consider. This would include such issues as staffing levels (e.g., class size, equity among buildings, etc.), union negotiation amounts (contingency, if contracts are not yet settled), balancing textbooks, materials, and supplies among the former separate districts, etc.

Given general acceptance of the Regional School Committee, the Superintendent and administration can begin building a regional budget within the approved budget assumption parameters. The Superintendent should be prepared to present a first pass of the budget at the earliest January School Committee meeting.

It is important to also include the Finance Committees and Boards of Selectmen of all towns in the beginning stages of this budget development. A sub-committee in each community, which includes both town and school elected officials and administrative staff will guide the bottom line process. For example, if each group can agree on a total assessment number or a percentage budget increase near the beginning of the process, the Regional School Committee and the Superintendent/school administration can work toward that number.

It is frequently the case that one community has a greater capacity to meet an assessment number than another community in the same regional school district. It is therefore very important that there is constant communication between the schools, town boards, and the communities to prepare for an eventual assessment (budget) vote in each community.

It is assumed that the School Committee and administration will continue to fine tune the budget, and thus the assessment numbers to the member communities throughout the winter and early spring months. The law requires that the Regional School Committee vote to certify the budget at least forty-five (45) days prior to the earliest community's Annual Town Meeting. This number can be decreased right up to and including Town Meeting floor, but it cannot be increased within these forty-five (45) days.

It is important to consider anticipated or continuing grants, revolving funds or general fund revenue when creating your spending plan for the district. Although grants and revolving funds, such as school choice revenue are not included in the school committee budget presented to the town for approval, they may be used to support the district's overall spending in a given year. Information on sources of revenue to support the districts spending should be presented to the member towns for informational purposes.

During the transition period, it is likely that member communities will need additional funding Support. Expenses for legal and other consultant support, purchase of "systems" (financial software, etc.), and, perhaps, stipends for staff doing significant additional work. These additional services and expenses should be temporary once the new regional district is fully operational. New Regional Districts have been successful in recent years in securing additional funds through the state budget process to support these temporary transition costs.

Appendices **N1** and **N2** contain regulatory information and language regarding regional school district budgets. Appendix **O** contains an advisory regarding Stabilization Funds in regional budgets.

VIII. Curriculum and Instruction

There will be a need and a challenge to conduct a thorough and complete analysis of the curriculum in member districts, which includes review of vertical alignment of topics and benchmarks. There will be a similar need to look at texts and materials available throughout the district schools to insure that, once curriculum is aligned and approved, that appropriate series are in place to carry out curriculum goals (especially true in math and reading). Such an undertaking will require creating opportunities to bring staff together under the direction of an individual who “owns” the project. It will likely require commitment of resources to make all of this happen.

Instructional practice and the accoutrements available (whiteboards/projectors/ computers, etc.) which support, it need review on several levels as well. This will be one of the many areas where the debate over the issue of promoting parity will become evident.

IX. Professional Development

Professional development is an often used term in public education. During the Transition Period, it will take on much greater importance! The implementation of multiple new systems (finance, telephone, technology etc.) and alteration of others (SIMS, EPIMS, MCAS reporting) will demand that staff receive appropriate training to insure efficient transition and use of the new systems. Literally, every person in every job classification will need training to become adept in their work.

The formation of a Professional Development Committee is strongly recommended to define and determine the goals of the program. Research and development projects must be solicited, selected and funded to give staff the opportunity to share best practice and begin to make enhancements to curriculum and instruction. Principals and teachers in content areas and at grade level must be engaged in meaningful meetings to discuss and determine the direction of curriculum. It has been our experience that having someone available to take ownership of this process is critical to the ultimate success of the first year of operation. A Professional Development Committee will assist in developing and implementing a program that will meet staff and district needs and interests. It should include staff from every building, department, Special Education, and related services. Funding/revenue streams should be identified, and the budget process must earmark this need during development.

Bringing staff together at grade level and by discipline to discuss and share materials and techniques will be very important to develop a cohesive staff who understands what each is doing. There will also be a need to follow up on DESE mandates in some areas (e.g., ELL, etc.), to provide opportunities for staff to develop new curriculum ideas and to allow staff time to respond to building and district initiatives.

X. Staffing for the New Region

In a new regional district there may be a need for additional personnel, such as a district treasurer required by MGL 71:16A, (Please see Appendix P of this manual for a sample list of the Treasurer's responsibilities) and there also may be an opportunity to streamline or reconfigure current staffing. Whenever possible, it is important that individual contracts terminate on June 30, before the new Region begins the next day. This will allow the Superintendent and School Committee to make decisions regarding appropriate staffing for the new Region.

There will be tremendous community pressure to cut "duplicates" and administrators in member communities. Citizens often want to either reduce the budget or use the savings for expanded programs. This will create a tremendous level of anxiety for staff throughout the organization, and there is no way to completely avoid it, regardless of the amount and clarity of communications. When the new region begins, there will only be the need for one Superintendent, Special Education Director, Business Manager, Technology Director, Food Service Director, etc. This may also extend to the other central and business office staff such as; administrative assistants, payroll specialists, accounts payable and similar support positions. Regionalization may provide the opportunity for reduced costs through the elimination of duplicate positions, but it may also provide the opportunity to provide an increased level of administrative and programmatic support to enhance district operations and programming.

It is possible that as a result of creating a larger structure with increased enrollments and fiscal responsibilities, there is a need for additional positions, such as business or personnel office staff to manage the added fiscal responsibilities and larger student population and staff. Based on discussions held during your planning study, there may also be a desire to hire additional personnel to support elementary education or other programmatic areas. The new Regional School Committee must carefully review and consider its current personnel and make appropriate adjustments, as needed.

Perhaps the greatest area for staff anxiety will be reflected in the hiring timeline. Despite assurances and reassurances, many staff will worry about where they fit in to the regional plan. There is no avoiding this phenomenon completely. Hence, it is critical that the process and steps in the hiring process are communicated to all staff likely to be affected. The posting process needs clarity and explanation and above all consistency for every position. Whenever possible, postings should include job description and other pertinent work/position expectations. Starting as early as possible is the first recommendation, setting a time line, and then following it, is very important. It is also suggested that staff know who and how decisions will be made.

Regionalization does provide an opportunity to make personnel changes that appear to be in the best interests of the new Region. One philosophy is that it is important to find a position for all current staff. Another philosophy is that since all non-teachers are not guaranteed a position and have to apply for a position, only the best candidates for the positions should be hired. These both obviously have some

potential political ramifications. A third philosophy is somewhere in the middle of these in that most of the staff is rehired and only those few who are no longer needed are not re-hired.

A. Administration

Administrators are not covered by any law which guarantees them a job with the new Region. This leads to a certain amount of angst, even in the best of circumstances. Everyone knows that there will only be one Superintendent, one SPED Director, one Business Manager, etc. It is probable that all administrators will have to apply for their current job or, possibly, another open or contested position. All these administrators are considered “new” administrators and therefore can be given a one-year (up to five) contract.

Although most positions, including administrative positions, are legally hired by the Superintendent or Principals, there are several positions that must be appointed by the School Committee. These positions are recommended by the Superintendent, but are officially appointed by the School Committee. These positions are: Superintendent; Business Manager; Special Education Director; School Physician, Treasurer, and Auditor.

One unique situation is that many administrative positions (e.g., principals) will have to be appointed by the Interim Superintendent, who may or may not be the new Regional Superintendent. This can create an awkward situation. There are ways, however, to address this issue. One possible solution is to have the school committee and Interim Superintendent grant temporary authority to the newly hired Regional Superintendent to make the necessary appointments. Another possible solution is to have the Interim Superintendent and the Regional Superintendent work closely together to identify the best candidate for the open administrative positions. The final candidate is then appointed by the Interim Superintendent.

B. Teachers

Because teachers are the only job category specifically protected by statute (Ch 71 Sec 42b), teachers are not required to reapply for their positions. This could be different, if there were significant consolidation of sections and/or services in the new Region, and there were significant numbers of NPTS (Non-Professional Teacher Status) teachers, but that is not likely to be the norm.

C. Support Personnel

Postings need to be executed for all positions not held by “teachers.” All support staff, paraprofessionals, cafeteria staff, custodial staff, etc. (and administrative staff as noted above) will be required to apply for posted positions. No one in these categories is guaranteed a position. Most of these appointments are normally handled at the Principal/Director level with occasional input from the Interim Superintendent.

XI. Athletics

The absolute most debated decision that will be made for any new region is uniform color scheme and mascot for High School athletics----- end of story.

It will be critical to engage the community in the decision making process. Coaches / advisors, support groups (booster groups etc.) and alumni, parents and students will all feel a stake in this process. Engaging all of the players will be critical to the successful outcome. In many cases, it is these activities that have the greatest galvanizing effect on the community and cannot be taken lightly.

Within this area some important decisions will occur:

- League affiliation and divisional competition level—smaller schools become larger
- Revenue for uniform replacement
- Consideration of programs available—merged team arrangements with other districts may end)
- Development of a fee structure—reflects whatever criteria is decided by the Regional School Committee

XII. Special Education

Merging special education programs during the transition year is obviously a very sensitive and important project. This process is complicated by the merging of administrative, teaching, and support staff within the Special Education Department.

Here are some of the issues:

A. Communication

This is probably the most important issue that needs to be addressed during the transition period. Parents will have fears that regionalization will somehow lesson, or even change, the services which they believe are currently in their children’s best interests. Staff will be concerned about their jobs being moved/changed or even eliminated in the transition. All of these concerns may be justified in some cases. Communicating openly and honestly will at least preserve the integrity of the process.

B. Students

Should some students be moved into a similar program in the other district? Can a new program be created that is cost-efficient to bring back some students currently being served in out-of-district placements? Can current or new resources better meet the needs of students who have Individual Educational Plans? How can students be included in the transition process, if their program/location is going to change? How can unresolved issues between one school district and families be resolved in the new region with combined resources?

C. Staff

The first order of business is to have the Regional School Committee appoint a Director of Special Education. [This may be part of a more comprehensive responsibility such as Director of Student Services.] This may be difficult if there are multiple competent SPED Directors already in the various towns being regionalized.

It might be possible that some special education staff will have to move to different buildings and/or programs in order to make the new Special Education Department efficient and able to meet the needs of students. Complicating this issue will involve any unions that support any of the staff in this department. In some cases, a group of staff in one school district (prior to officially regionalizing) may be unionized, and their counterparts in another district may not be unionized. Union or no union, working conditions for staff have to be homogenized.

Staff needs to be included in the transition process. They obviously have a great interest in their own position. They will also have an interest in how programs are merged and developed for students. A significant number of professional development opportunities should be available during the transition process. Part of this will involve the possible change in the special education paperwork process.

D. Level of Services

As soon as the administrative structure is in place, work needs to begin on the services for students. It is quite possible that the different separate school districts have different criteria for student services. This has to be addressed early in the transition process to ensure that I.E.P.s written during the transition year, but implemented in the first year of the Region, are written using the Regional philosophy and resources. Another issue is to merge Special Education transportation. This may involve going out to bid or rearranging current bids, if possible.

E. Technology

It is probable that special education administrators will be surprised at the issues related to merging technology requirements into one regional system. A decision will need to be made early on a specific Special Education software package which should be used during the transition year when writing I.E.P.s for the succeeding year. This will take considerable professional development training with the staff.

Assuming an administrator responsible for more than Special Education (e.g., Counseling, Reading, Nursing, etc.), there are other software considerations. For example, the Nursing Staff probably use a software program (e.g., SNAP) to keep track of student and system issues. The Counseling staff also needs to be tied in to a student information system). This department will also need to be involved in the merged phone system.

F. Location of Services

Many decisions will need to be made regarding location of administration, programs and staff. During the transition year, the merged administrative staff may move into one of the districts' locations, or an entirely new location may be determined. New programs will need to find a home, and current programs may be merged, creating the need for different space in the same or different buildings.

It is imperative during this transition period that there is significant personal communication between members of the regional schools and the families of children with IEPs to reassure families that their child's IEP will carry over into the new district. It is also necessary to make sure that any changes in programs continue to meet the needs of all children with special needs and the requirements of their IEPs.

XIII. Merging Food Services and Custodial Services

It is assumed that each of the individual school districts forming a new region will have its own staff and hierarchy. Decisions will first have to be made regarding the leadership of Food Services and Custodial Services. Assuming that all current school buildings will continue to be used, most of the current Food Service and Custodial staff. The new districts should contact the DESE's School Nutrition Program Office to ensure continuity of funds and notifications.

XIV. If Building a New Building or Renovating an Old Building or Combination

The entire building project concept should have been discussed and considered during the Regional Planning Board phase. It will, however, be important to review MGL Ch. 71 sec 16, which details the methods available to districts that will need to borrow in order to fund capital projects. The Regional Planning Board should include details regarding how the borrowing process will occur in the written Regional Agreement.

A. Working with the MSBA (Massachusetts School Building Authority)

As is the case with many communities, a need for a major school building project becomes the driver to get people to the table. Most often, this is for the secondary level. As a result, interaction with the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA 617-720-4466) becomes an integral part of the process. MSBA is more inclined to support combined/regional approaches to high/middle school construction than it is to build multiple smaller projects.

MGL 71:16 governs much of the affairs of regions including construction. It, along with the MSBA website "Building With Us" section, does a complete walk-through from Statement Of Interest (SOI) through feasibility and financing to project approval. There are a significant number of steps to get a district from concept to reality. Enrollment studies help determine a "building capacity" enrollment figure. A "feasibility study" will help determine educational needs and begin to develop schematic design documents.

The process is intricate and complex, but MSBA will be available to help guide districts through the process. MSBA will partner with the district through the entire process.

B. Appoint a Building Committee

Once the MSBA directs the district to move toward the feasibility phase of the project, the district will need to name a "Building Committee" in accordance with 963 CMR 2.00. The MSBA provides an official form which delineates by position who ought to be a member of the committee. For example, the Local Chief Executive Officer, the Superintendent, Principal, a School Committee member, a local budget official, a member with MCPPO certification,

members of the community with construction, engineering or architectural background etc. This is a great opportunity to reach out to local boards and the community as a whole to become involved in a critical school project.

Soliciting volunteers is an important task to perform and will generate interest. The Committee, once formed, must be approved by the Regional School Committee and then submitted to the MSBA. The Building Committee is subject to all open meeting law regulations.

C. Feasibility Study

At some point, the MSBA will approve the district to move forward toward completing a “feasibility study” for the proposed building project. This process is explained in great detail in the previously mentioned "Building with Us" information on the MSBA website. It will require a number of steps to be completed in precise order (beginning with the submission of the Maintenance and Capital Planning survey -- MCP) and will carry the district through OPM (Owner's Project Manager) selection to Designer selection and through the completion of a needs assessment/schematic design.

XV. Building Usage & Leases [see Appendix Q1 and Q2, and MGL 71:14C]

One of the first considerations will be how, and if, to use all the buildings currently in each of the towns. It is possible with the consolidation that regionalization allows, not all of the current buildings will be used. Buildings may be utilized in different configurations than currently used. After possible future construction/renovation, the building usage will change. This should have been addressed in the communication leading up to the regionalization vote, but needs continued serious discussion. Because locally owned school buildings will be used for regional educational purposes, the Regional Agreement will need to address whether the buildings will be purchased or leased. In nearly all instances, leasing is the most simple and preferred option. The lease must be discussed and negotiated with local town officials and will require approval and signature from both the Regional School Committee and Boards of Selectmen or City Councils.

The lease should include clear provisions regarding town/region responsibility for maintenance of building and grounds (including grass mowing and snow removal). [See lease attachment for an example.] It is possible that a discussion of building/facility needs will be part of the regionalization process. Initially, many districts are brought to the table, because of the need for a building project (most often high school or middle high school configuration). These conversations may lead the Regional Planning Board to consider recommendations for building/facility usage in the early stages of the process. Placement of programs (often special education) and grade level configurations can be influenced by possible building project decisions. A sample lease agreement is in Appendix Q.

XVI. Transportation (MGL 71:16C)

Transportation takes on a very different status in a regional district. Regional School Districts are required by Chapter 71, Section 16C to transport K-12 students who live a 1 ½ miles from school or more. Municipal districts are required only to transport K-6 students. DESE provides an excellent guide

to transportation on its website. It can be accessed at:

<http://www.doe.mass.edu/finance/transportation/guide.html>

One of the incentives for regionalization is that the cost of transporting regular day K-12 students who live 1 ½ miles or more from school is eligible for state reimbursement. (about 55% in FY11). Because it is a reimbursement, the funds may not be available until the second year of regional operation. It may be possible to receive the reimbursement in the first year of operation if the newly formed Regional School District assumes control of and provides transportation during the transition year. Responsibility for transportation should be discussed with DESE during the planning process and included in the regional agreement language. If the Regional District assumes control of transportation during the transition period, the regional must develop a Transportation Policy and outline the process by which they will manage the transportation program during the transition period. Appendix R contains a sample communiqué that one district used to document regular education transportation costs during the transition period. The involvement of DESE and their advice and guidance early in the decision making process for transportation cannot be emphasized enough. Doing this right the first time may bring significant funds to the region during the first year of operation.

It is important that the Regional School Committee develop a transportation policy for the regional district during the transition and after. It is likely that the two or more member districts will have different ridership guidelines and may have different carriers, which will impact the need to put contracts out for bid.

Conclusion

The “transition period” between the town’s vote to regionalize and the actual start date of an operational region is a critical period. During this time, the foundation is laid for all programs, curriculum, facilities, services, staffing, etc. Communication and understanding/following the rules and regulations are key to the successful beginning of any new region.

State funding has been available over the last several years to assist districts as they transition from municipal district to regional district. It is likely that the funds will come through the DESE administered grant process where an application will be filed and a final accounting of expenditures will be required. It would be wise to contact DESE directly about the availability of grant funds and the process to obtain them.

Phase II
Becoming a New Region
Checklist Completed

1. Interim School Committee Appointed according to Regional Agreement

2. First meeting of Interim School Committee called by a member town Superintendent

- a. Superintendent called the meeting to order to elect Chair

- b. New Chair conducted elections for:

1. Vice Chair

2. Secretary

3. Recording Secretary for minutes

- c. Interim Committee discussed hiring a Treasurer

- d. Interim Committee discussed hiring Legal Counsel if not already hired

3. Transition Budget Constructed

4. School Committee Appointed:

- a. Superintendent

b. Business Administrator

c. Treasurer

5. Hired:

a. Consultants

b. Legal Counsel

c. Financial Advisor

c. Bond Counsel

Completed

6. Transition Timeframe Developed

7. Calendar for School Committee Meetings Developed

8. Calendar of Event

a. Meetings with Selectmen

b. Meetings with Finance Committee

c. Town Meeting Dates

9. Obtained Federal ID #

a. Opened Bank Accounts

b. Established Deposit Account for DESE and Local Funds

10. Obtained State ID #

11. Obtained DESE ID #

12. Obtained Food Service ID #

13. Developed process for new Policy Book development

14. Established School Committee Sub-Committees

a. Communications

b. Negotiations

c. Budget

d. Policy

e. Transportation

- Contacted DESE to establish process to request Transportation Reimbursement

15. Technology

a. Website set up

b. Email System set up

Completed

c. Identified Hardware and Software for Central Office

e. Identified Hardware and Software for Instruction

f. EPIMS

g. SIMS

h. Phone System selected

16. Business Operations

a. Accounting System set up

b. Payroll System set up

c. Retirement Systems set up for:

- Teacher s

- County

d. Insurance issues addressed

17. Auditor hired

18. If renovating or building a new building:

a. MSBA contacted

b. Building Committee appointed

c. Building Study completed

19. Budget Developed for the next year, including:

a. Grants

b. Operating Budget

c. Capital Budget

d. Debt

20. Policy Development Process established

Completed

21. Instructional Leadership and Direction identified

22. Curriculum Leadership and Direction identified

23. Professional Development Program set up

24. Staffing for New Region hired:

a. Administration

b. Teachers

c. Support Personnel

25. Athletics Program set up

26. Special Education Program set up

27. Food Service Program and staffing set up

28. Custodial Services staffing set up

29. Strategic Plan developed

Appendices to Step-by-Step

A	Massachusetts General Laws and Regulations Regarding Regional School Districts	98
	
B	DESE Summary - Steps to Forming a Regional School District	99
	
C	Contact Information	109
	
D	DART	111
	
E	RFP - Request for Legal Services	112
	
F	Self-Assessment Tool to Measure District Capacity	114
	..	
G	Warrant Article	123
	...	
H1	Regional Agreement - Blank Form	124
	...	
H2	Sample Regional Agreement	137
	...	
I	Reorganization Needs Conference - DESE Form	148
	...	
J	Letter of Transmittal	150
	...	

K	Sample Transition Timeframe	151
	
L	Sample Strategic Plan	157
	
M1	Audit Specifications	162
	
M2	Sample Audit	164
	
N1	Preparing the Regional Budget - DESE Publication	170
	...	
N2	Budget Preparation - DESE Guidance	176
	...	
O	Stabilization Funds - DESE Advisory	181
	
P	Treasurer's Responsibilities	183
	
Q	Sample Lease Agreement	186
	
R	Regular Ed Trans. in the Transition Year - Sample Memo	200
	..	