



## 2D8T Recommendation to the Mohawk Trail and Hawlemont School Committees April 16, 2025

*On April 16, 2025, the 2D8T Steering Committee, by a vote of 12-1, recommended that the Mohawk Trail and Hawlemont School Committees adopt the following plan of action:*

### **Background**

A 2 District 8 Town (2D8T) Steering Committee was formed in early 2024 and tasked with conducting a Sustainability Study to analyze the operating and organizational structures of the Mohawk Trail and Hawlemont Regional School Districts. The study was designed to explore options to ensure our students receive the highest quality educational experiences while reflecting the fiscal realities of our 8 towns/residents in light of declining enrollment, rising operational costs, flat state aid, and increasing needs of our student bodies.

Over the past 16 months, the Steering Committee, composed of volunteers from each town (representing the community) and both school districts, has examined historical and current conditions of our schools; solicited broad input from our community; generated and considered a range of possible options; modeled promising options; and deliberated on the associated benefits and challenges. (View this journey in reports, presentations, and detailed analyses at [2districts8towns.org](http://2districts8towns.org).)

### **Recommendation**

This comprehensive effort has led the Steering Committee, by a vote of 12-1, to recommend to the two School Committees that **we pursue the goal of organizing all students and staff onto a single campus (pre-kindergarten through Grade 12) on the Mohawk Trail Regional School (MTRS) campus**. This is an aspirational goal that can only be fully realized over a period of 5 -7 years – a period of time during which the Districts cannot realistically afford to continue to operate under the status quo. Therefore, we also recommend that the Districts transition to a centralized campus through the following phases:

#### **Phase I**

- **Create a single district**, merging Mohawk Trail and Hawlemont, with one school committee.
- **Combine all Grade 6 students into a reorganized middle school** (Grades 6-8) at MTRS.
- **Consolidate some combination of elementary schools**, with assignment of elementary students by geography (closest school) rather than strictly by town lines.
- **Apply to the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) for funding** to create/remodel space(s) on the MTRS campus for elementary school use.

#### **Phase II**

- **Move all elementary grades to the remodeled/newly constructed spaces** on the MTRS campus.

If the conditions necessary to complete these steps (such as acceptable capital costs, student travel times, *etc.*) are not met, incremental changes would still allow for some fiscal and educational benefits to be realized.

The 2D8T Steering Committee believes that a single campus provides the maximum set of educational, operational, and fiscal benefits, such as:

- **Equitable access for all students** to existing and expanded resources that ensure high-quality academic and co-curricular experiences.
- **Maximum economies of scale** by reducing redundancies associated with operating multiple facilities (staff, utilities, supplies, maintenance and upkeep), and by potential reduction in transportation costs.
- **Larger cohorts of students and staff**, which would enable expanded social interactions, peer and professional networks, and robust teaching and learning environments.
- **Fiscal savings** in the operations of all schools/administration which would reduce assessments to the towns and, as possible, allow for reinvestment in educational enhancements such as pathways programs for high school students and enrichment (*i.e.*, world languages) for younger students.
- **Centralized staffing** (counselors, interventionists, academic coaches, district office), which would lead to a highly connected and aligned teaching and learning system across all grades.
- **Scaling of unique programs** and offering them to more/all students (such as elementary foreign language options, the HAY program, and service learning opportunities).
- **State-of-the art buildings** that address aging facilities and mitigate the impacts of climate change on the learning environment.

**We believe that the educational and financial advantages that would come from combining our districts and organizing onto a single campus would surpass what we might expect from any other solution.**

### Next Steps

While the 2D8T Steering Committee and research team have generated a significant volume of baseline research and analysis, there is still much to be done, and many questions still to be answered prior to any formal vote by the 8 towns. We need to complete in-depth analyses of all aspects of the centralized campus model, reaching out to our communities again for input on:

- **Educational visioning** - engage in community-informed design of educational programs, services and experiences for our high school, expanded middle school, and consolidated elementary students.
- **Transportation** - generate greater detail on travel times and options for our students, both in Phase I and as the move to a fully centralized campus is completed. Explore the relative benefits of a single-tier vs. (existing) two-tier bus schedule, including potential impacts on student safety, costs and overall feasibility.
- **Capital** - in (potential) partnership with the Massachusetts School Building Authority, examine possible renovation/addition options (construction timetables and costs). A key factor to be addressed is funding for the capital improvements necessary to create a centralized PK-12 campus, including the extent to which towns are willing/able to re-invest realized operating savings as part of an overall capital funding plan.
- **Fiscal modeling** - detail how operational savings and capital investment would impact town assessments and individual homeowners (tax rates).
- **Rowe** - explore with Rowe that town's interest in participating as a regional member in this effort and to what extent.
- **Transition** - develop a detailed plan and timeline that will result in creation of the single campus.

As we move through these steps, it is important to keep in mind that we have excellent teaching and administrative staff. Consolidation means reduction in the number of employees, and further work is required to determine how best to reduce staff size over time, minimizing layoffs through attrition, reassignment and the thoughtful integration of staff from both existing Districts. We seek a process that will preserve and promote overall excellence in teaching at our schools even as we embark on a financially sustainable path forward.

#### **A Final Note**

Implementation of this aspirational vision for education in our 8 towns is ultimately up to the voters. There is work still to be done, including the development of a regional agreement. This agreement will address the conditions of the merged district - from formulas for operating and capital assessments, to school committee composition, to where students attend school. Any changes to the current regional agreement must be unanimously approved by all 8 towns.

Change is hard. Our schools are small and expensive. Most of them have deteriorating physical structures, outdated electrical systems, and insufficient technological infrastructure. All of this affects student learning and needs to be addressed, whether we combine and reorganize or not. The plan outlined above is designed to better position our schools with more resources and broader social advantages, to give our children the education, support, and choices they need and deserve. We believe the path we have identified is the right choice for our children now and for the many generations to come.