



News Coverage

Mohawk Trail and Hawlemont Regional School Districts
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[Mohawk Trail, Hawlemont community members review restructuring proposals](#)

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SHELBURNE FALLS — Residents have begun reviewing the various models for possible restructuring of the Mohawk Trail and Hawlemont Regional school districts, and are making it clear they want to see all potential impacts and benefits explored.

The 2 District, 8 Town Steering Committee, or 2D8T, and the Pittsfield-based Berkshire Educational Resources K-12 (BERK12) research team held their first presentation of the five [models](#) on Tuesday, giving parents and community members an overview of potential cost savings, facility investments, transportation impacts and programming opportunities if the two districts made no changes, merged into a single district, moved the sixth grade to the middle school, closed one to three elementary schools, or consolidated all schools to a single campus. The models could save the districts between \$30,000 and \$5.3 million.

After reviewing the models, BERK12 opened the floor to questions and comments.

“Our job as a research team was to help the steering committee to create a set of options and then study those options so that the committee and the community could engage in an informed discussion about a possible direction,” BERK12 Project Manager Jake Eberwein said. “It’s important to emphasize no decisions have been made and the ultimate decision will fall to the voters.”

Conversations ranged from bus route logistics to the pros and cons of small classes. Parents asked if the schools were to be consolidated to a single campus, whether the elementary and high schools would have the same start time, whether the students would share the same buses and how long students could be on the bus.

Eberwein said if they were on the same property, the elementary, middle and high schools could all operate at the same hours, with start and end times staggering by five to 10 minutes. Elementary and high school students would share the same bus. Ride times would be shorter for some students and longer for others, with an average ride time of 36 minutes.

There is no legal limit on how long a student can be on a bus, but the districts could add small vans to pick up students in the outlying regions to cut down on ride times, according to Eberwein.

Attendees also asked if consolidating would mean students would have more classmates in a room, and if that would be beneficial when today’s students often require more individualized support. Eberwein said there is a lot of research and discourse on class sizes, and while smaller classes are beneficial for younger students, some classes across the districts could be too small. Consolidating schools could allow for multiple classes per grade level, in turn allowing students to have more

peers and make friends from other towns. It would also allow teachers to share resources and collaborate with other teachers serving the same grade level.

Attendees said they would also like to see the districts invest in new programming to keep the schools competitive and attractive to students who might be considering leaving the districts. They said classes like automotive repair and carpentry were once offered at Mohawk Trail Regional School and were very popular.

“The trades are a big deal,” Mohawk Trail School Committee Chair Martha Thurber said. “The tech schools can offer AP classes, but we can’t offer anything that’s even close to what they’re offering.”

Thurber said the school offers career pathways that allow students to see options in health care and education, and the school is looking to develop more. While Mohawk Trail and Hawlemont cannot offer the same vocational programs as technical schools, there are some programs the elementary schools have that could be brought to other schools through consolidation, like the Hawlemont Agriculture and You (HAY) program.

Attendees did not indicate any preferences of models. One parent asked whether \$5.3 million in savings would justify the level of change proposed under the models that involve closing one to three elementary schools or consolidating all schools to one campus.

Paula Consolo, who serves on both the steering committee and the Buckland Finance Committee, said it is up to the community to decide what savings and changes would be acceptable.

“Maybe we’re willing to pay more and we want two elementary schools; maybe we want three. It’s really up to us as a community of people who live here to decide what we want,” Consolo said. “But keep in mind, if we do nothing, we’re going to feel the crunch.”

The steering committee is seeking public feedback on the five models and has created a [survey](#) for community members to offer input. The survey is available at surveymonkey.com/r/2districts&towns.

Five more public presentations have been scheduled. A remote option is available for each meeting.

- March 6, 6:30 p.m. — Virtual meeting.
- March 11, 5:30 p.m. — Sanderson Academy.
- March 19, 6:30 p.m. — Hawlemont Regional School.
- March 20, 6:30 p.m. — Mohawk Trail Regional School.
- March 26, 6:30 p.m. — Colrain Central School.

In addition to the community presentations, discussions have been scheduled with the selectboards and finance committees of the member towns.

- March 3, 6:30 p.m. — Hawley and Charlemont at the Hawlemont Regional School.
- March 10, 6 p.m. — Shelburne over Zoom.
- March 17, 7 p.m. — Ashfield and Plainfield at Sanderson Academy.

- March 18, 5 p.m. — Heath and Colrain at the Jacobs Road Municipal Center.
- March 25, 5:30 p.m. — Buckland at Buckland Town Hall.

To view the presentations and full reports, visit [2districts8towns.org](https://www.2districts8towns.org).

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