

[Five reorganization options possible to increase sustainability of Mohawk Trail, Hawlemont districts](#)

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BUCKLAND — During a time of rising costs, stagnant state aid and declining enrollment, the 2 District, 8 Town Steering Committee, or 2D8T, has selected five options of possible reorganization for the Mohawk Trail and Hawlemont Regional school districts to further explore in an effort to increase sustainability.

The 13-member committee, made up of teachers, parents and community members, was tasked with finding a way for the districts to provide the best education for students while managing the fiscal limitations of the eight member towns (Ashfield, Buckland, Charlemont, Colrain, Hawley, Heath, Plainfield and Shelburne).

The Pittsfield-based [Berkshire Educational Resources K-12](#) (BERK12) research team was brought on board to assist, thanks to funding from a \$250,000 Community Compact grant. After months of researching the conditions of the districts, BERK12 is looking to the future of the districts and modeling different scenarios.

The five models being explored are as follows:

1. No change.
2. Merge the Mohawk Trail and Hawlemont Regional school districts into a single school district.
3. Move the sixth grade classes from the elementary schools to Mohawk Trail Regional School. This option will be explored with two subcategories: one with the districts merging and one with the districts remaining separate.
4. Move the sixth and possibly fifth grade classes to Mohawk Trail Regional School and close one to three elementary schools. This option will be explored with three subcategories that consider closing one school, closing two schools or consolidating all district elementary schools into Buckland-Shelburne Elementary School.
5. All schools consolidate into a single preschool-12th grade campus at Mohawk Trail Regional School.

Each model will consider whether the scenario would maintain or improve the districts' educational quality by looking at the range of programs and course offerings possible, student supports, class sizes and student experience, as well as if each model would create a more financially sustainable situation for the member towns or create greater efficiencies and alignment

with district goals. Some of the models may not prove feasible in terms of politics and desirability for families, legal and regulatory challenges, and impact over time, which will also be considered.

Project Manager Jake Eberwein said that with the current data, and with a bit of guidance from the 2D8T committee on how it envisions the schools operating, the BERK12 team will be able to put together an accurate representation of the models.

“I don’t want to mislead you and say I can fully predict the impact on families,” he noted.

Eberwein said the 2D8T committee and the research team will need to conduct a lot more public outreach to see how students and families feel about each scenario to truly understand the impact of what closing a school, reorganizing the district or leaving the district unchanged would be. He added that while doing nothing and not closing any schools may prevent pushback from residents in the short-term, in the long-term, the decision would still be political as residents wonder why operational costs for the schools continue to rise.

“Doing nothing is also a choice,” he said. “But this sustainability process is about proactive planning.”

From now through December, the BERK12 will be doing more research and preparing the models, Eberwein said. From December to January, BERK12 and the 2D8T committee will evaluate the models and conduct public outreach. In February or March, the committee will select the best option to move forward with for a final report and bring a recommendation to the eight member towns.

BERK12’s [full reports](#) on the districts’ finances, buildings, educational offerings and other elements can be viewed at [2districts8towns.org](http://2districts8towns.org).

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