

B.E.S.T. @ WORK  
BUILDING EDUCATION  
SUSTAINABILITY  
AND TRUST

# Welcome

## **Tonight's Agenda: Presentation**

- **Introduction to BEST**
- **Background**
- **Recommendations**
- **Next Steps**
- **Discussion and Feedback**

## Who is the BEST Committee?

- 3 School Committee members
- 1 representative selected by each Member Town
- 1 representative from Mohawk District Educators
- 1 representative from Hawlemont School District
- Key Administrators (Superintendent and Business Manager)

## BEST Goals

To develop a plan that will help ensure the long-term viability of the District by:

- Enhancing educational programs to maximize college and career opportunities
- Controlling costs and assessments to member Towns
- Enhancing revenues

*The only thing not on the table is the status quo*

## BEST Subcommittees

- Communications/Community Outreach
- Education
- Facilities & Finance
- Fundraising & Grants
- Transportation

## Fundamental Propositions

- We are all in this together
- Reducing operating costs alone will not solve the problem
- **Nothing** can be implemented without the **unanimous** consent of all District Towns
- The status quo is unacceptable
- The **only** alternative: deep cuts to staff and programs

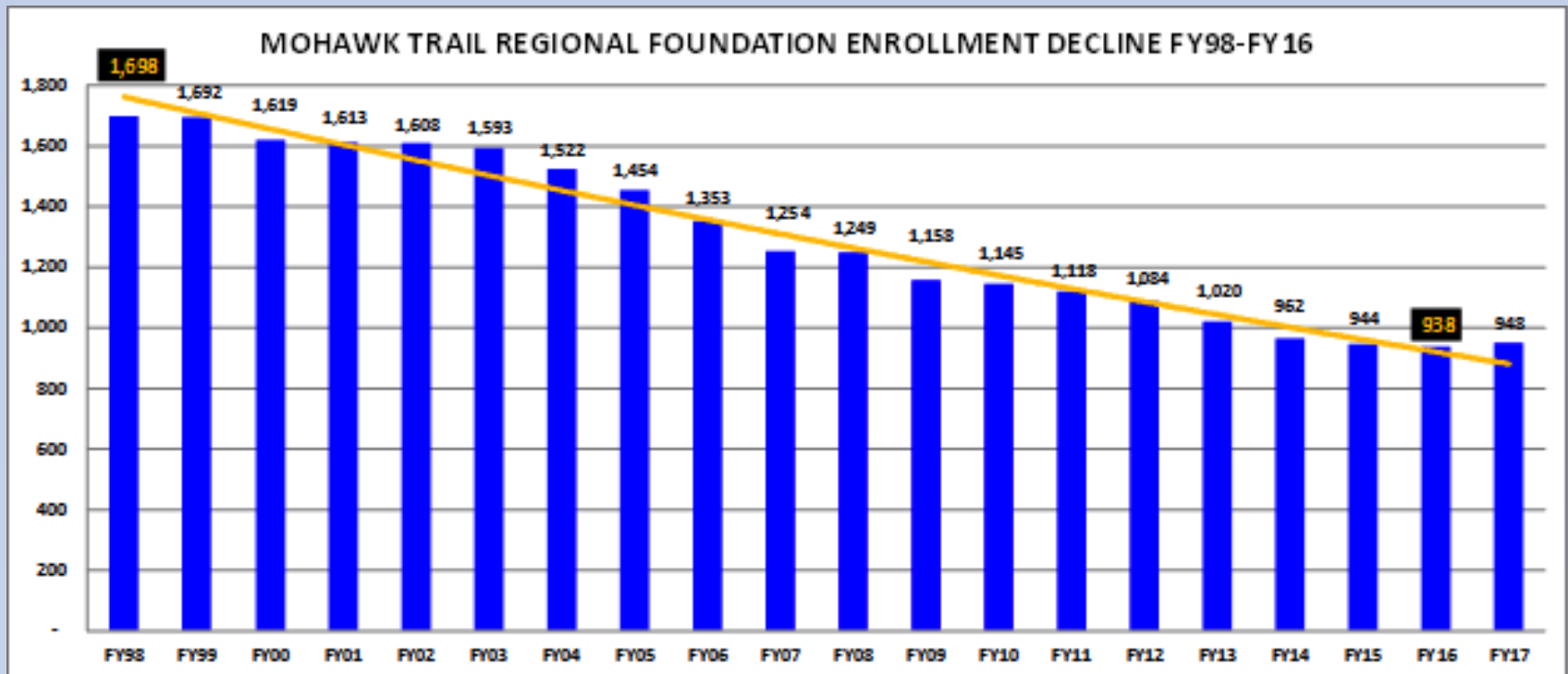
## Background

Financial unsustainability

- Declining enrollment
- Declining enrollment  $\neq$  cost savings
- Flat Chapter 70 state education aid

## Declining Enrollment

Mohawk student enrollment has declined 45% since late 1990s

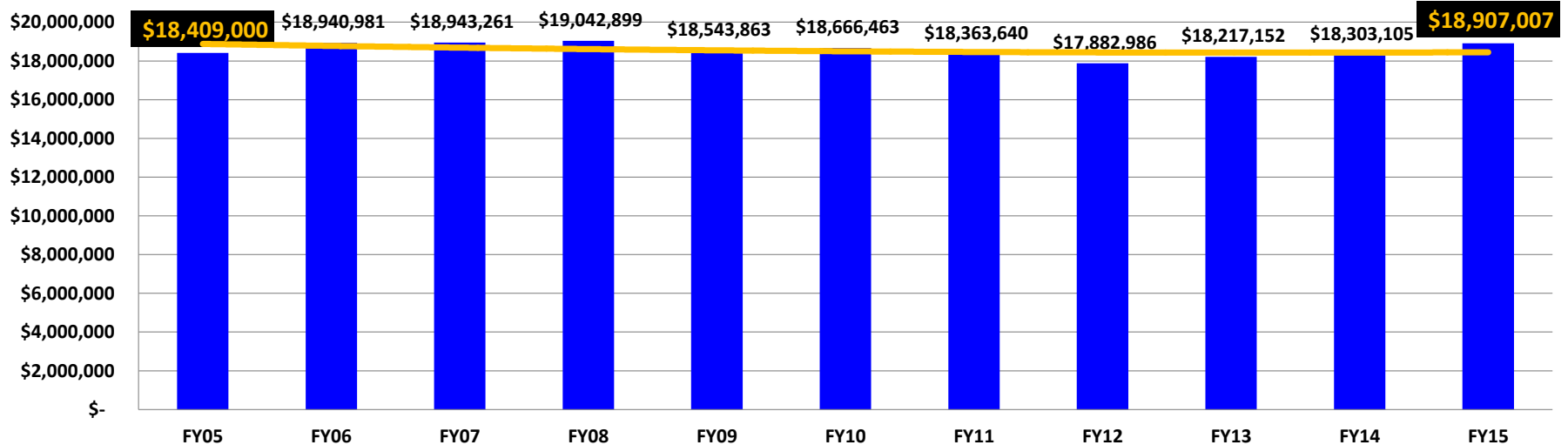




## Declining Enrollment ≠ Cost Savings

Mohawk's steep enrollment decline has not produced cost savings

**Mohawk Trail Regional Operating Expenses FY05-FY15**



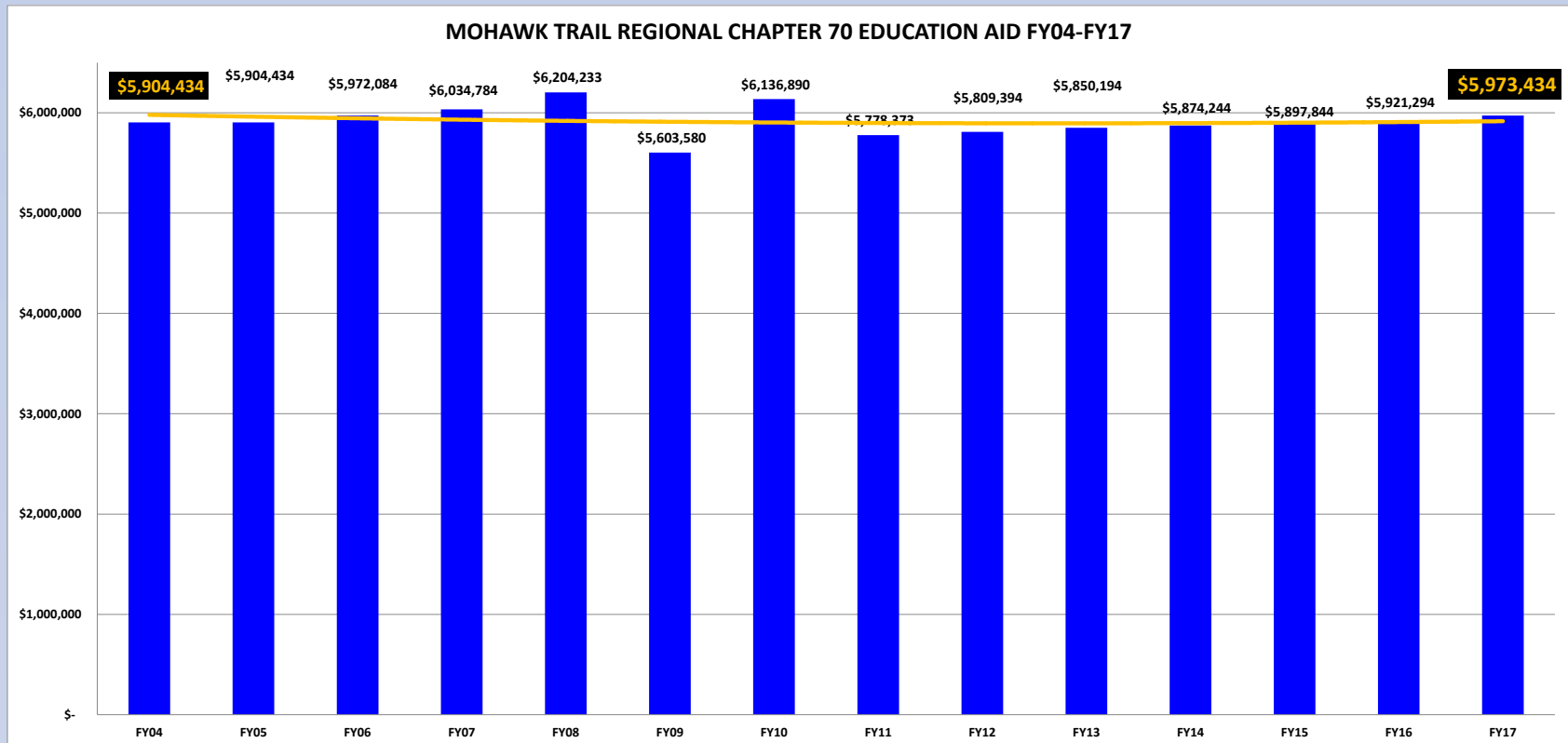
## No Economies of Scale

Mohawk unable to capture cost savings with enrollment decline

- Example 1:
  - Single grade classroom
  - Enrollment declines from 20 to 15 (25%)
  - Requirement for 1.0 FTE classroom teacher same
- Example 2:
  - Building Costs (Principal/ Nurse/ Secretary/ Custodian/ Cafeteria)
- Example 3:
  - Transportation Costs (250 square miles - largest geographic district in MA)

## Flat Chapter 70 State Education Aid

- Mohawk state education funding flat for more than a decade



## 2006-2007 Interim Planning Committee

- Recommendation
  - Combine four elementary schools into BSE building
- School Committee response
  - Proposed changes to regional agreement
  - Defeated by towns twice 6-2

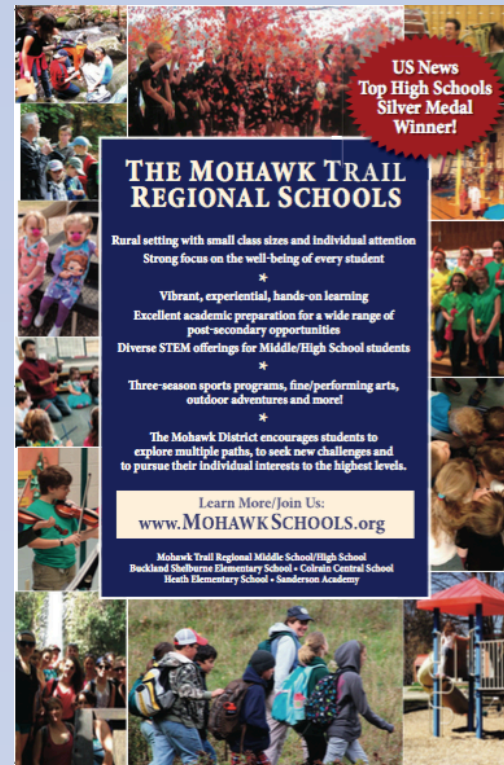
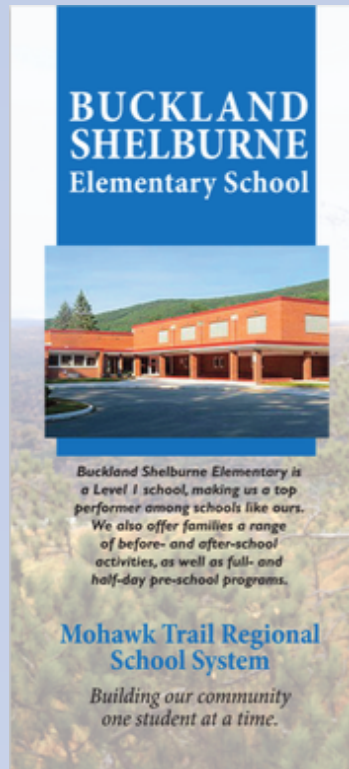
## 2013-2015 Long Range Planning Committee

- Recommendation Examples
  - Share school buildings with towns
  - Alternative energy solutions
  - Full reimbursement of regional transportation
  - Advocate for rurality factor in Chapter 70 formula
  - Support drive for high-speed Internet access
- School Committee response
  - Implementing several of these recommendations
  - Additional cost savings required to achieve sustainability

## Communications Sub-Committee: Key Focus

- Market the district's educational options to families & students in the 9-town region and beyond.
- Advertise what Mohawk offers for education
- Reach middle and high school families as they're researching educational options
- Reduce number of students leaving district to choice, private, and charter schools.

## Communications Sub-Committee



*Mohawk has no marketing budget; work was done by volunteers and some staff.  
The Communications Sub-Committee solicited donations from local businesses to financed printing.*

## Communications Sub-Committee: Initiatives Taken

- Met with Mohawk co-principals, technology dept, and capstone advisor to brainstorm ways to involve students in telling Mohawk's success story
- Assessed ways to make the school website more inviting and user friendly to families researching the district.
- Communicated BEST progress with the staff and school community
- Created a Facebook page for each school





## BEST Recommendations: Overview

Phased approach allows for:

- Community involvement
- Thorough, thoughtful planning
- Systematic re-assessment of key variables

## Unanimous Town Approval

- Regional Agreement Amendments needed for each phase
- Amendments require unanimous approval by all 8 District Towns

## Phase 1 – Heath: Overview

- Heath Education Task Force Recommendation
  - Close Heath and tuition students to Hawlemont or Rowe
- Heath remains in the MTRSD/pays operating assessment
- MTRSD negotiates/pays tuition to Hawlemont/Rowe
- Heath 7-12 students attend Mohawk
- **Savings: \$500,000+**

## Phase 1 – Heath: Next Steps

- Heath chooses a partner (Hawlemont or Rowe)
- MTRSD negotiates tuition
- DESE approval
- District Towns approval

## Phase 2 – Expansion of MS to include 6<sup>th</sup> grade

- Sept 2018, Middle School expands to include 6<sup>th</sup> grade
- Enriched educational and extra-curricular activities
- Increase retention of students at the pivotal point between 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grades
- Creates space in BSE and Sanderson for Phase 3

## Phase 2 – MS Expansion: Process to Understanding

- Feedback session gathered input from all K-8 educators on all 4 possible configurations\*

The 4 grade configurations evaluated were:

- Pre-K remains in all elementary schools
  - Pre-K to grade 2 at all schools
  - Grades 3-5 only at BSE
  - Middle School expanded to include 6<sup>th</sup> grade
- Held 3 focus groups with parents to gather input and feedback\*
  - 69% of Middle Schools include 6<sup>th</sup> grade

\*Full reports/ background notes are available on the BEST website

## Phase 2 – MS Expansion: Student Benefits

(Change = Opportunity)

- Increased enrichment opportunities: art, music, theatre, sports,
- More science and technology; much greater access to labs
- Increased academic opportunities: much greater choice of classes
- Students benefit from Mohawk's strong team-teaching model
- Easier transition to the MS model of single subject classrooms
- Larger peer group, more kids "like me" (social/emotional health)

## Phase 2 – MS Expansion: Challenges

- Elementary schools lose their 6<sup>th</sup> grade “leaders”
- Honoring long-held, deeply meaningful traditions
- Mindful planning for students arriving in 7<sup>th</sup> grade
- Difference in age/maturity between Grade 6 and Grade 12



## Phase 2 – MS Expansion: Challenges for Hawlemont/Rowe

Integration at 7<sup>th</sup> grade (staggered enrollment) requires mindful planning for students arriving in 7<sup>th</sup> grade.

- Specific planning/training with 6<sup>th</sup> grade teachers in both districts
- Aligning curriculum scope and sequence (e.g., planning grant for Mohawk MS to start an Ag program to dovetail with HAY program)
- Common events for 6<sup>th</sup> grade students in both districts (e.g., art shows/concerts/end-of-year party/dance) Other ideas?
- Learning from our neighboring districts: In-depth discussions with Gill/Montague on their process

## Phase 2 – MS Expansion: Conclusion

**MS expansion is the key to reducing costs in Phase 3**

- Thoughtful and deliberate planning is essential to a MS expansion
- Recommend completing this transition in September 2018 rather than September 2017 to give us the time necessary
- There is a clear need for continuing dialog with those most affected throughout the transition process

## Phase 3 – Two School Consolidation

Collaborate with member towns to redistrict and consolidate elementary students (Pre-K to Grade 5) into two schools, creating two new learning communities at the current Buckland Shelburne Elementary and Sanderson Academy sites.

## **Phase 3 – School Consolidation: Overview**

- Heath School closes
- Sept 2018, Mohawk MS is expanded to include 6<sup>th</sup>-grade
- Sept 2019, Colrain Central School closes and is returned to the town for repurposing
- Sept 2019, All Grades Pre-K to 5 attend BSE and Sanderson

## Phase 3 – School Consolidation: Benefits

- Cost savings: ( $\$600,000 + \$500,000 - \text{Heath} = \$1.1 \text{ million}$ )
- More resources and opportunities for teachers/school staff to collaborate
- Social and academic benefits to students: wider social network, greater access to special programs and resources (technology, extracurricular activities, etc.)

## Phase 3 – School Consolidation: Challenges

- Colrain loses its local elementary school
- Additional transition for several grades of students moved in middle of elementary years
- Potential capacity constraints at BSE might require geographic redistribution

## Phase 3 – School Consolidation

### New Learning Communities

The way that we frame these changes will make an enormous impact on the educational experiences of all the children in our district.

## A Centralized Campus ??

Based on community feedback, BEST revised its recommendations

- Consider a centralized campus ONLY after Phases 1-3 are completed and ONLY IF additional consolidation is essential for sustainability



## Ongoing & Next Steps: District Vision

- Re-thinking operational structure = opportunity to re-think the educational experience
- How do we want to teach and learn?
- Connect students to learning, learning to community
- A *shared* community endeavor: students, parents, educators, taxpayers

## **Ongoing & Next Steps**

- **Transportation**
- **Cooperate with Other Districts**
- **Address the Revenue Challenge**
- **Alumni/ae Network**

## **Tonight's Agenda: Feedback & Discussion**

All materials available on the BEST website  
<http://mtrsd-best.weebly.com/>

**We hope you will continue to participate in the process.**