



The Connecticut Association of Boards of Education offers the following background information to inform the discussion of regionalization and shared services.

### **CABE Promotes Shared Services**

School districts continue to implement shared service arrangements involving multiple school districts, or with their municipality. Examples include sharing speech pathologists, art, music, foreign language teachers, finance department, IT, custodial and maintenance services, human resources and food services. Currently, 66 school districts do not maintain their own high school. They are part of a regional school district, or pay tuition to another school district or an incorporated or endowed academy. There are also multiple examples of cooperative purchasing – fuel oil, electricity, solar panels, transportation services, health insurance, etc.

In many cases, the regional educational service center (RESC) coordinates these agreements, or provides the services to the districts. The RESCs were created over 50 years ago to assist in the delivery of special education services, and they continue to play a critical role in that area. These arrangements are developed after an analysis of savings and impact on students. In some cases, shared services have been examined and found to generate little or no savings, and/or have a detrimental impact on students, such as lengthy 2 hour bus rides.

The role of the state should be to provide incentives and remove barriers to shared services and economies of scale. Supporting these flexible arrangements allows for the greatest cost savings and the greatest educational benefit.

As Governor Lamont's Fact Sheet on SB 874 states, "Connecticut's public education system is one of its most vital assets and any changes must be the result of an inclusive, deliberative process that rewards but does not rush to force partnership." The accountability of local school boards and municipalities to their citizens would be reduced under a forced consolidation of school districts.

### **Size of district does not necessarily relate to efficiency**

A recent study by the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, "K-12 Regionalization in Connecticut: Pros, Cons and Surprises" provides some critical data and analysis. The report shows that in 2015-16 the Ellington school district had a K-12 enrollment of 2,633 and the second-lowest per-pupil expenditure at \$12,985. The district has 3 elementary schools with enrollments between 201 and 430 and one high school with an enrollment of 771. The educational outcomes of the district were high, as a DRG group B district. In fact, ALL school districts in Connecticut with an enrollment between 2,500 and 3,000 had per-pupil expenditures BELOW the state district average.

### **Consolidation experience in other states**

Much can be learned from the studies of consolidation of school districts in other states. A report "Consolidation of Schools and Districts: What the Research Says and What It Means" released by the National Education Policy Center finds that the most dramatic effect of school and district consolidation is often on communities. "Put simply, the loss of a school erodes a community's social and economic base – its sense of

community, identity and democracy – and the loss permanently diminishes the community itself, sometimes to the verge of abandonment.”

“Specifically, low-wealth and minority populations tend to be inordinately and negatively affected by consolidation initiatives.”

In Maine, a 2007 law required the merge of many school districts. A number of exceptions and exemptions have been added to the legislation since the original adoption, some designed to address “unintended consequences”. Districts faced a complicated transfer of property, as well as challenges in finding a way to equitably share costs and combine collective bargaining agreements. In some cases, consolidation created more conflict than success, with many districts failing to save any money.

In 2017, the Maine Department of Education reported that 33 towns withdrew from the school districts since 2012.

The Vermont legislature enacted a variety of carrots and sticks to support consolidation of school districts. This process is currently underway, and there is insufficient data to assess educational impact or cost savings.

### **Consolidation brings costs**

A report by the American Association of School Administrators examined “School District Consolidation: The Benefits and Costs”

Some states have enacted policies that encourage district consolidation by providing additional funding. New York, for example, provides an increase in the basic education aid of up to 40% for 5 years, with declining increases for an additional 9 years. In addition, consolidating districts may also receive a 30% increase in school construction aid for projects initiated within 10 years of consolidation.

The report notes that certain costs may actually increase as a result of district consolidation:

- Transportation costs per-pupil increase due to increased distances
- Personal costs are increased to the level of salaries and benefits in the most generous contract

The report found that there are also human impacts from consolidation – administrators and teachers tend to have a more positive attitude toward their work in smaller schools, and students and parents may be more comfortable interacting with teachers in a small school with a community feel.