

**Six-Town Regionalization Planning Board (STRPB)**  
**Towns of Bernardston, Gill, Leyden, Montague, Northfield and Warwick**  
**2022 Annual Town Report**

After almost four years of research on the educational and financial feasibility of forming a new Pre-K through 12 regional school district by merging the Gill-Montague Regional School District (GMRSD) and Pioneer Valley Regional School District (PVRSD), the Six-Town Regional Planning Board (STRPB) is hopeful that it will be ready to make a recommendation to the Towns soon.

It is important to note that both GMRSD and PVRSD have been experiencing declining enrollment over the past two decades. This trend is a result of many factors, including a declining and aging regional population, school choice, and competition from private and charter schools. Declining enrollment creates both financial and educational challenges for school districts because foundation budgets established by the state (Chapter 70: state revenue for districts) are driven by student enrollment. The Massachusetts Association of Regional Schools (MARS) produced two educational reports for the STRPB which can be found on the board's [website](#).

In June of 2022, two in-person teacher and staff forums were held to better understand their thinking on how this might benefit students. Ideas regarding expanded academic learning opportunities, additional programs and services, enhanced athletic and extra-curricular possibilities were shared. These meetings were facilitated by Mary Broderick and the results can be found in her report dated July 2022. This can be found on the STRPB's website: <https://sites.google.com/view/strpb/reportssurveys>, see report "The Six Town Regionalization Planning Board Report on Teacher/Staff Thinking," July 2022.

In November, a remote meeting was held for the Gill and Montague Selectboards, Finance Committees, Town Officials, and other interested parties to view a presentation of our findings. This was followed by a similar in-person meeting at the Bernardston Senior Center for the four towns in the Pioneer Valley Regional School District. In January and February, 2023, presentations were given to the Gill-Montague Regional School Committee and the Pioneer Valley Regional School Committee respectively. These were opportunities to present information and hear comments and suggestions.

As the STRPB moves closer to making recommendations, this annual report is intended to provide the residents with an update of activities planned in the 2023 year and to establish some expectations. Given the fact that we were commissioned by the Towns in accordance with MGL Chapter 71, sec 14 to consider regionalization options in addition to the current districts, it is essential that the Selectboards and other stakeholders (i.e., students, staff, parents, community) provide feedback to the STRPB. Meetings and forums will be held specifically for this purpose.

Previous grants were awarded by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. However, neither the House or Senate provided funding for regionalization studies in the current State budget. Fortunately, the STRPB was able to secure an Efficiency and Regionalization Grant with the support of our local legislators from the Department of Revenue. We are hopeful that this grant and your feedback at forums will allow us to complete our work and report our findings.

The STRPB created two primary subcommittees (education and finance) to focus on these areas along with a facilitator and consultants. These areas are complex and require in-depth study. We have learned that the educational benefits are positive and would result in more courses, programs and services for students. The financial implications require more research. Through our research, it was found that some cost savings were possible in the central office, but it was also presumed those cost savings would be reinvested in student programs and services.

Our research also found that a new district that combined GMRSD and PVRSD would financially be in hold-harmless. We will be updating this data, looking at projected salaries and benefits and other costs that will result in a projected budget. This will help us develop potential assessments for our respective towns. Once we have this information, the STRPB will meet with Selectboards to share our findings and solicit feedback prior to making any recommendation(s). We encourage you to attend and participate in these discussions.

The STRPB has also identified some of the challenges in creating a new school district and will solicit feedback on how best to address and/or mitigate them. Although there are other secondary outcomes that the STRPB is considering, our primary focus remains on the educational and financial outcomes.

The Warwick Selectboard recently discussed its continued interest in the work of the STRPB. They concluded that even though Warwick has withdrawn from the Pioneer Valley Regional School District, they remain interested in pursuing regionalization alternatives. The Warwick Community School will reopen this Fall and students in grades 7 through 12 will continue their education at Pioneer through a tuition agreement. However, if a new regional school district is created this agreement will become null and void and Warwick is open to considering joining the new district if it finds the conditions for doing so advantageous.

All residents of Bernardston, Gill, Leyden, Montague, Northfield and Warwick are encouraged to participate in as many forums as possible to ensure the STRPB hears all perspectives in its research.

On behalf of the STRPB, thank you for taking the time to read this report.

Respectfully submitted,

Alan Genovese, STRPB Chairperson

Greg Snedeker, Vice Chairperson/Secretary/Treasurer