

A Report to the RSU #50 School Board

**On behalf of the RSU 50 Futures Task Force**

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## Overview

In the late summer preceding school year 2013 – 14, the RSU 50 School Board endorsed Superintendent Larry Malone’s proposal to a) create a vision for the RSU’s future, and b) study school configuration and merger options that would allow the district to attain that vision and thrive in the years ahead.

Great Schools Partnership, Inc., a school-support nonprofit based in Portland was retained for the equivalent of 20 days to support the RSU 50 “Futures Task Force,” hereafter FTF. GSP has partnered with the schools of RSU 50 in numerous ways, including leadership of a 3-year “Southern Aroostook Math Science” grant supporting STEM education, since 2008. The board-approved role of GSP was to plan and facilitate FTF work sessions, support and co-facilitate community forums, compile essential information, and provide this brief paper report to the school board. This report has been written on behalf of the Futures Task Force with every intention to represent their views as well as their findings.

The membership<sup>1</sup> of the FTF was recruited with care to ensure representation of the RSU’s towns, teachers from both schools and geographic ends of the district, students, school board members and administration. Based on this representative selection process, and then limited by availability, interest, and stamina (the team met over many months), the group maintained a viable core membership throughout.

The FTF met through the fall, winter and spring of the past school year. Attendance was typically in the range of 8 – 12 individuals. FTF meetings were always in the evening and always two hours in length. Locations alternated between north and south ends of the district in sync with the school board’s sequence. The total number of meetings held by the FTF, inclusive of two Community Forums, was twelve (10 work sessions; 2 community forums).

The concrete products of the FTF’s work include the following:

1. A draft Vision, Mission and Core Beliefs document, to be reviewed, amended if necessary, and adopted by the school board. This language is provided in the report.
2. A listing and criterion-driven analysis of all known and plausible school configuration Options.
3. This report, which also includes the Options analysis identified in #2.

This report is written without bias, for the board’s review and deliberation. The report is written with the intent enabling the board to make long-range decisions on its schools’ composition, siting and educational designs. Board members and other readers may conclude the report is incomplete or partial in addressing details such as district’s demographics, student achievement, cost projections, etc. There are several important explanatory variables for this:

- Limited time. The majority of time spent by the FTF and GSP focused on the Vision document, Options analyses, and planning for Community Forums. This was not a 20 day contract to write a report; rather, the bulk of the work *was the work*.

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Regularly attending members of the FTF. Administrators: Larry Malone, Peggy White, Christine Cunningham, Jon Porter, Eryn Schmidt. Teachers: Rowena Harvey. Students: Parker Walker, Wynta Boudreau. Board Members: Greg Ryan, Barbara Burton, Connie Theriault, Kim Lane (resigned in April); Community Representatives: Becky Drew, Jutta Beyer, Jona Fitzpatrick (never attended), Paige Coville, Lora Ryan, Anna Robinson (attended once)

- Incomplete data. The data collection, analysis, and reporting in RSU 50 is currently mostly determined at the building level, perhaps a holdover habit from pre-RSU years. As such, each school – and leadership within each school – have been deciding what to collect, how to portray the data, and how to preserve those data.
- Information identified as necessary to decision-making in this report. As a result of the FTF’s work, certain data have become necessary in order to develop a comprehensive basis for selecting among future Options. For example, the board should pursue an engineering study of each school facility for its maintenance needs/costs, code compliance, and general prospects for hosting students and teachers in years to come. Without such a study, the board may select a future option for a building that could become costly or unsuitable.
- Representing the emotional complexity and impact of future consolidation on families, communities, and employees. Sentiments about RSU 50’s schools’ future location and composition run the gamut from excitement over new opportunities for students, families and faculty to ardent opposition to any future consolidation anywhere. Additionally, it is likely that residents simultaneously acknowledge the need for greater efficiencies and improved design, yet strongly oppose any change for their neighborhood school. Hence it is impossible to describe – much less weigh – the range of emotional responses and employment impacts of change such as those envisioned in the Options offered here. Without meaning to trivialize the prospects of change, one could say about every single option: “It’s complicated.” No choice, not even Option 1 (no change), is uncomplicated or uncontroversial.

### **The process ahead**

Once this report has been received, reviewed and discussed, the Board should feel better informed to identify one, two or several of the ten possible future Options that appear most promising. Steps from that point forward are up to the school board, but seem likely to include:

- Create a simple communications plan so that the community, faculty, staff and students may follow the board’s deliberations.
- Agree to a desired timeline for implementation (which year the selected option will become reality), and agree to an acceptable “plan b” timeline if planning, budgeting and data collection require additional time.
- Obtain additional data necessary to narrow the field and finalize a decision. A more comprehensive list of these data are located at the end of the report, but they would include such studies as bus route and fleet analyses, curriculum and staffing options, professional surveys of building maintenance, suitability, and infrastructure, detailed classroom / school / event capacity studies; and projected savings estimates.
- Overlay these new data onto each board-selected future Option to determine which option(s) are still viable.
- Conduct community open-house events to share the board’s findings with families, taxpayers and employees.

### Rationale for the FTF study

A descriptive summary of the compelling reasons behind the RSU 50 board's desire to study future options follows. In the section after, we provide a sampler of supporting data to many of these brief claims.

#### Population

The population of school age students is declining across Maine, including northern Maine and RSU 50. Shrinking student populations rapidly create challenges when it becomes hard to a) recruit teachers, b) retain teachers (high teacher turnover puts a school district into a perpetual state of training, supporting and evaluating new hires), c) offer essential courses and desirable electives, d) maintain curriculum continuity and coherence, e) justify existing administrative and support services no matter how essential they are, f) garner support for a district budget from the taxpaying property owners and parents of school-age children. School mergers lessen most of these issues though rarely make them disappear.

By definition, putting ever-smaller populations of students into the same buildings each year means that operating each building in the RSU becomes more costly per pupil.

#### Similarity / "merge-ability"

The schools in RSU 50 are similar in configuration, student bodies, staffing and community values. No one school could overshadow or "swallow" the other if a merger occurred (for example, if RSU 20's Belfast High Area High School was to absorb the much smaller and philosophically distinctive Searsport District High School).

In fact, a longstanding pattern of within-district collaboration and peer support among RSU 50's administrators and faculty is characterized by efforts to pursue similar procedures, to learn from and with one another, to adopt compatible curriculum models, and to seek ever more contact.

#### History and trends

This region has experienced consolidation and change in the past. For example, in 1998 Patten, Sherman and Stacyville, each of which had their own elementary schools, consolidated into Katahdin Elementary (DK - 6). In 1967 Patten Academy and Sherman High School merged into Katahdin Middle High School. Patterns on the northern end of RSU 50 are comparable. Until consolidation and the opening of the Southern Aroostook Community School (CSD #9) in 1976, each small community had its own elementary school. High school students attended either Oakfield High School or Island Falls High School. Students in other district towns had school choice. When Oakfield High School burned in 1974, consolidation efforts became reality. Southern Aroostook graduated students in 1974 even though there was no building to house students at that time. Island Falls grammar school and gym (annexed to the high school) burned in the spring of 1975.

Because most of the Options described later on will require some recombination of students, buildings, bus routes, staffing, and athletic team make-up, the near horizon will inevitably hold

uncertainties. At the same time, cases across the state and in the region’s own history attest to stability and satisfaction in the long term. Recent mergers at Oceanside High School (formerly Rockland and Georges Valley), Spruce Mountain High School (formerly Jay and Livermore Falls) and others may serve as comforting and technically informative models to local residents.

The schools in RSU 50 have also experienced shifts in staffing assignments and staff reductions in the past decade. A quick glance at a summary of these down-sizings show annual “FTE” reductions in staffing that range from 1.0 FTE (in 2007 – 08) to 7.5 FTE (in 2013 – 14), inclusive of all staffing positions (not just teachers). While any school merger can pose the prospect of reductions, it will not be a novel experience for this RSU. As a matter of doing business, schools everywhere adapt to variables in demographics, student needs, and the constraints of the physical plant.

Curriculum and Opportunity

By definition, small and semi-autonomous schools strive to provide the widest possible selection of courses and extracurricular opportunities for students that their staffing and budgets will support. Yet as student numbers and budgets decline, the efforts of each of the four school units in RSU 50 to maintain robust offerings becomes increasingly untenable. We offer a generic table below to contrast single-school programming constraints with merged school possibilities. These samples are not intended as explicit plans; rather, they serve to indicate the range of possibilities when separate schools opt to merge their faculties and resources.

**High School Social Studies (plausible example)**

Parameter	Separate Schools	Combined School
<b>Staffing</b>	One teacher per school	Two teachers become small department
<i>Staffing discussion:</i> Merging is likely to create a small and more stable department of role-alike colleagues where today there is one social studies teacher in each building.		
<b>Class size</b>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>2013 – 14 data:</u></p> Core course sections: 15 – 20 students per class Elective course sections: 7 – 12 students per class	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Projected Student #s:</u></p> Core course sections: 20 – 25 Elective course sections: 15 – 20
<i>Class size discussion:</i> A merged high school would enable required (core) class sizes to grow modestly. Class sizes would still be manageable, and lessons that involve group projects, role-plays, debates, etc. may even be easier to design.  Where today two schools offer parallel electives to very small groups of students, a merged high school can offer an elective once to very manageable class sizes.		
<b>Course offerings</b>	<p><b>SACS 2013 – 14:</b></p> Civics (core) US History (core) World History (core)  Honors History (Optional) Psychology (Option)	Teacher A: Core Course 1 (3 sections) Core Course 2 (2 sections) Elective A (1 section) Teacher B:

Parameter	Separate Schools	Combined School
	<p><b>KMHS 2013 - 14:</b>                      US History (core)                      US History 2 (core)                      Global Studies (core)</p> <p>Psychology (Optional)                      Contemporary Issues (Opt'l)                      Applied Economics (Opt'l)</p>	<p>Core Course 2 (1 section)                      Core Course 3 (3 sections)                      Elective B (1 section)                      Elective C (1 section)</p> <p><b>Social Studies electives and co-curriculars (examples only)</b></p> <p>Sociology                      Psychology                      Economics                      Geography                      AP US History                      Mock Trial</p>
<p><i>Course offerings discussion:</i> The “Separate Schools” column above shows that core courses (required for diploma) are different in each school. Core course instruction comprises close to the full teaching load for each school’s teacher.</p>		
<p>The “Combined School” column envisions a single common set of required (core) courses for all students, with slightly larger class sizes, shared by the two teachers of this department. This column also demonstrates how electives can be fit into the teaching load of each social studies teacher, thereby providing a more flexible and diverse set of offerings to students.</p>		
<b>Budget</b>	<p>Each teacher budgets solo:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Textbooks / replacements</li> <li>Field trips</li> <li>Supplies (consumables)</li> <li>Equipment</li> <li>Guest speakers</li> </ul>	<p>Sources of cost efficiency include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shared materials and textbooks</li> <li>One field trip</li> <li>Bulk purchase reductions</li> <li>One conference benefits both teachers</li> <li>Shared guest speakers</li> </ul>
<p><i>Budget discussion:</i> In two schools (left column), each social teacher must maintain an adequate supply of textbooks, equipment (maps, globes, library references) and classroom “consumable” supplies. Guest speakers and field trips are arranged independently. In a merged social studies scenario (right column), there are economies of scale and effort in each of these areas.</p>		
<b>Curriculum</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Non-aligned required courses</li> <li>Similar course titles taught with different / uncoordinated syllabi and assessments</li> <li>Different adopted textbooks</li> <li>Separate collections of teacher resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>One set of graduation standards and core courses</li> <li>Colleagues can review and select new curriculum materials</li> <li>Colleagues can co-create syllabi and assessments</li> <li>Colleagues can pool and share resources that complement departmental courses</li> </ul>
<p><i>Curriculum discussion:</i> Combining schools would permit the social studies department to adopt a single set of core (required) courses, align their assessments and grading practices, and reach consensus on</p>		

Parameter	Separate Schools	Combined School
curriculum materials.		
<b>Professional Development</b>	<p>Each teacher pursues personally selected PD opportunities.</p> <p>Also, middle level and high school faculties participate in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) regularly. At KMHS, high school PLCs are mixed-department in their make-up. At SACS, PLCs are grouped by department, or as two compatible departments (Social Studies &amp; English = Humanities)</p>	<p>Colleagues can share their professional growth when one teacher experiences Professional Development.</p> <p>Colleagues learn together (same-content PLCs) by studying standards, scoring student work, refining assessments, discussing articles.</p>
<p><i>PD discussion:</i> In separate schools social studies teachers spend their collegial time (PLCs, for example) with teachers from other subject areas. In a merged setting, two social studies teachers can work together develop and adopt social studies course syllabi, common assessments, scoring rubrics. Additionally, they may share and explore new and emerging information in their field.</p> <p>In a merged school, when one teacher attends a conference or meeting that provides professional development in social studies, both teachers <i>and all students</i> may benefit from the resources brought home.</p>		
<b>Student Experience</b>	Attend several core classes/day with same small group of classmates, often repeated for four years	Attend core classes of slightly larger size, and with different mixes of classmates.  Group work in classes more possible as a mode of learning (team projects; role playing; literature circles; mock debates).
<p><i>Student Experience discussion:</i> There are advantages as well as disadvantages to small classes. And there are benefits and downsides to spending most of the school day with the same classmates all day long. In either case, a merged school can provide a different mix of classmates from one class to another as well as some more options for group work and role playing within each class section.</p>		

## Elementary School – grade 2 (plausible example)

Parameter	Separate Schools	Combined School
<b>Staffing</b>	One – two teachers per grade level	3 – 4 teachers per grade, depending on size of the cohort
<p><i>Staffing discussion:</i> Any merging of elementary grades could create modestly larger cohorts of teacher colleagues who share a grade or grade span. At a minimum given current enrollment, there would be two sections of each grade in a merged school. More likely, there would be three or four teachers per grade. This cohort size would fluctuate with peaks and valleys of student populations in each grade.</p>		
<b>Class size</b>	<p><u>2013 – 14 data:</u> 12 - 18 students per class</p>	<p><u>Projected numbers:</u> 16 – 20</p>
<p><i>Class Size discussion:</i> The merging of schools would appear to create reasonably-sized and age-appropriate class sizes. Additionally, merged elementary schools would be less likely to experience very small classes (e.g. classes of 10 – 13).</p>		
<b>Curriculum</b>	Each building adopts separate curriculum, decides minutes per subject, designs lessons, assessments, and data to monitor.	One building provides support for RSU curriculum adoption and determines bell schedule. Teacher teams collaborate over units and assessments.
<p><i>Curriculum discussion:</i> Merged schools, by definition, must adopt common curriculum, instructional models, and materials. Slightly larger cohorts of teachers would need to collaborate over the merits and drawbacks of their current materials and come to agreement.</p>		
<b>Interventions</b>	Two similar but unique building-based models, involving Ed Techs and Literacy Specialists	One RSU model determines data points, staffing, and instructional models. School develops a database and approach to teachers' data study.
<p><i>Interventions discussion:</i> Each building has created its own approach to interventions, and has also determined which specialist positions are needed to support students' various learning needs in a timely way. Merging elementary schools creates an opportunity to marry the best elements of these divergent experiences and serve all students.</p>		
<b>Professional Development</b>	Grade span PLCs operate on similar but not identical routines for peer support, data study, and common learning.	PLCs can vary between grade-level or grade-span configuration, depending upon needs of group and school.
<p><i>Professional Development discussion:</i> Each building has created its own approach to collegial support and common study time. Merging elementary schools creates an opportunity to marry the best elements of these divergent experiences and serve all teachers' needs.</p>		
<b>Budget</b>	Each building determines supplies and equipment needs; field trips; guest experts.	Some efficiencies of scale for purchasing, material sharing, full-bus field trips, and classroom guests.
<p><i>Budget discussion:</i> In a merged school setting, high cost equipment purchases would be shared among more classrooms and experienced by more students. Field trips planned for students in a given grade are more cost effective (more students per bus, one trip not two, etc.).</p> <p>Professional development costs (conference attendance, etc.) can benefit more colleagues, when the</p>		



Parameter	Separate Schools	Combined School
attendees return to school and share.		
<b>Student Experience</b>	Students divided into two sections per grade at most	More combinations of students possible to maximize peer compatibility and placement according to teacher strengths.
<i>Student Experience discussion:</i> Having multiple sections of students allows for greater options in teacher-student matching and may foster more socialization and resilience among students. Teachers may also mix their students according to their academic needs for small group break-out instruction (“flex-grouping”).		

## Budget

The condition of RSU 50's budget, and trends in the "drivers" or factors that influence the bottom line, appear to converge on the urgency of board attention to future schooling options. This paper will not do full justice to a treatment of the RSU's budget; rather, we will identify several generalities and a selection of specifics that highlight current reality. Readers are advised to study a recent document (Slide presentation) prepared by the Central Office in 2014 for the board. The document may be found at this link:

<https://docs.google.com/a/rsu50.org/viewer?a=v&pid=sites&srcid=cnN1NTAub3JnfHd3d3xneDo00DY5YjiMGNIYmFmNWMY>

### Generalities:

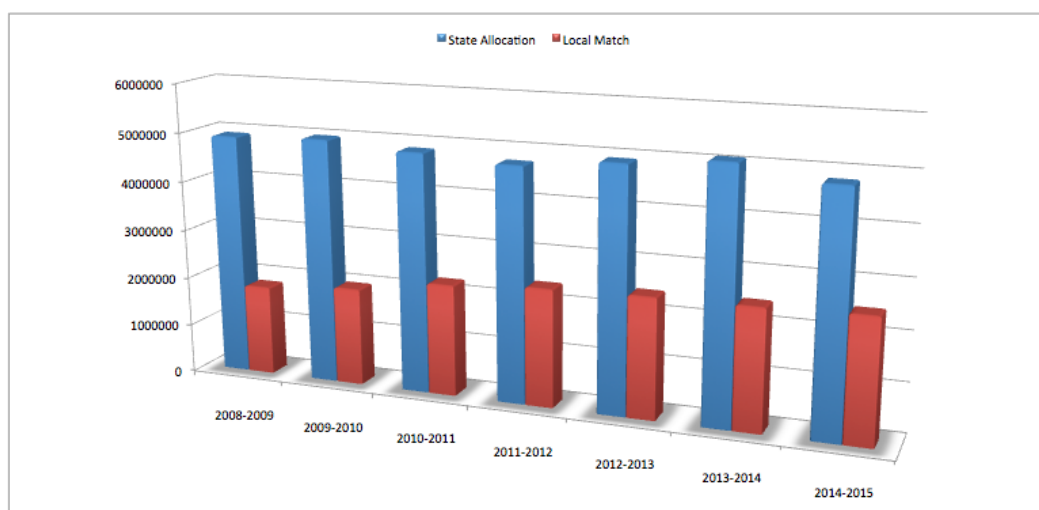
Costs of operating schools rise over time, as a rule of thumb. Fixed costs such as physical plants, salaries and benefits, and special education expenditures occupy large segments of any district's annual outlay. As this district gradually loses students, it still strives to provide a comprehensive educational and co-curricular experience to all of its students.

Maine (similar to other states) expects local districts to comply with mandates and recent laws, each of which may entail new / reconfigured staffing, professional development, faculty work beyond the contract, and/or materials. Currently the most significant mandates on districts' "tables" are the Proficiency-based Diploma and Effective Educator systems for the supervision and evaluation of teachers and principals.

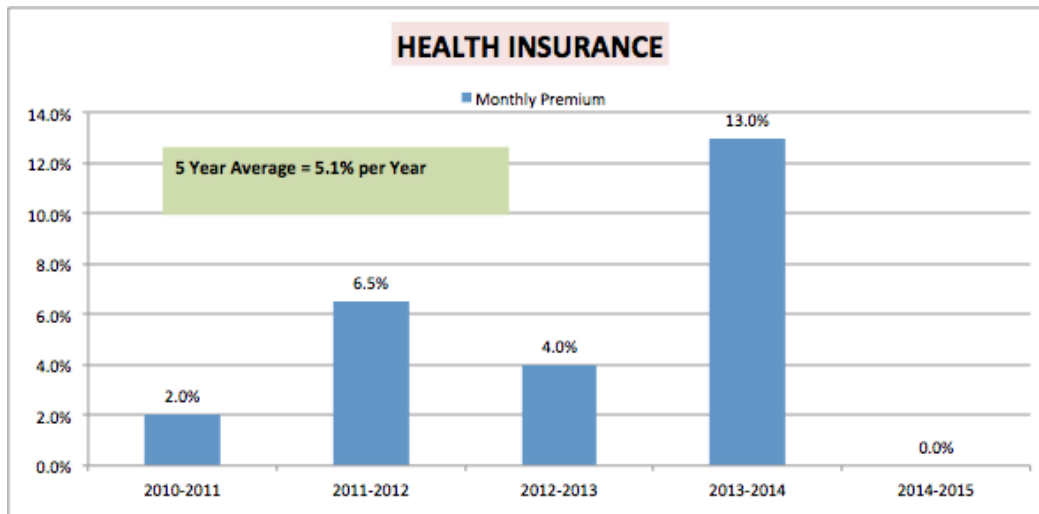
Charter and Virtual schooling is a small but growing alternative to local pK – 12 schools for families. In small districts such as RSU50, every student or family who pursues this option represents a small blow to fiscal viability.

### Specifics:

The ratio of State of Maine allocation to schools against local funding has followed an unswerving path of increasing burden to local residents. Whereas in 2008 – 09 local funding comprised 37% of the overall school budget, the projected burden for 2014 – 15 is 52% (see table below).



The cost of health insurance to the district has climbed an average of 5.1% per year in the years 2010 – 11 to 2013 – 14 (see table below).



### A Partial Sampling of RSU 50 Relevant Data

#### Overview

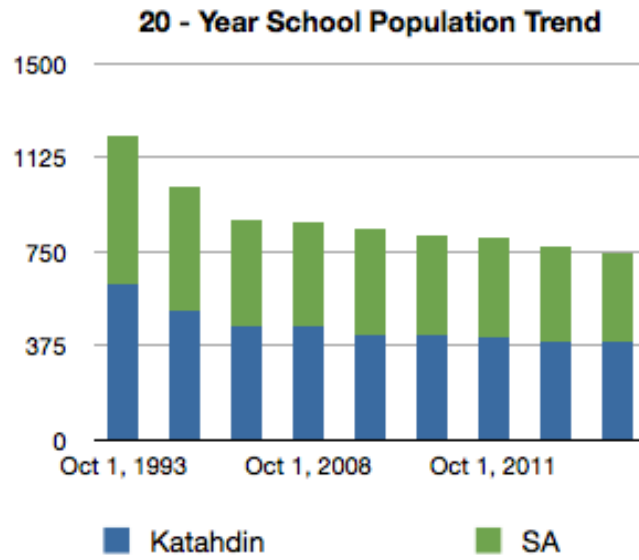
Schools that study their own data are generally more able to know where they are succeeding and where they face challenges. Monitoring measures such as those provided below helps schools to attain their vision and mission and live by their core beliefs. One district that monitors and reports multiple measures of school quality is RSU 13. When Rockland District High School and Georges Valley High School became Oceanside High School, RSU 13 began reporting to their communities on the outcomes of this new and merged school. Their data are reported annually, and may be viewed at this website (offered as an example only):

[http://ohs-east.rsu13.org/sites/default/files/OHS\\_Eval\\_Plan20140414\\_Draft.pdf](http://ohs-east.rsu13.org/sites/default/files/OHS_Eval_Plan20140414_Draft.pdf)

This section provides a sampling of data that may serve the board and community in their deliberation of the merits of future Options. Data provide information from which to build a rationale for pursuing one or more Options over others. Data also can serve to understand the current status and effects of the RSU in today's configurations. Data such as these can become a baseline against which to analyze (and report on) the successes of future school configurations ("How are we doing now compared to our history"). Finally, there are times when data serve to refute rumors or misperceptions that can accompany high-stakes changes in a school district.

#### Population

Data provided by the RSU 50 Central Office and based on October 1 student population reports to the State indicate an unswerving decline in enrollment. The most recent five years the RSU has witnessed a loss of just over 20 students annually, on average. That trend is consistent with the past twenty years, over which the trend has been just over 23 students annually.



Additional student population data indicate a number of families in the region who opt to home school their children. The number of students currently hovers around 50 (about 7% of the RSU's 750 students).

A small number (6) of students have transferred out of the RSU in the most recent three years, with no replacement transfers in.

#### Implications:

The RSU student population shows no sign of reversing its present pattern of diminution. Over all of the years reported the balance of students from northern and southern municipalities has been relatively equal. No school is shrinking in a different pattern relative to the others.

By definition, putting smaller populations of students into the same buildings each year means that operating each building in the RSU becomes more costly per pupil.

#### **Staffing**

The schools of RSU 50 employ relatively similar staffs in terms of assignments and roles. Differences exist, but they are minor.

Elementary schools employ between one and two teachers per grade, a number that flexes with spikes and peaks in student population. These schools also employ small numbers of specialists (Literacy Coach, Math Interventionist, Library, Guidance).

Secondary schools employ between one and two teachers per content area, depending in part on graduation requirements (higher course requirements in English than in Social Studies, for example).

Administration of schools involves one principal in each grade span (two in SACS' pK-12 building, one at KES, one at KMHS), no assistant principals, and one Athletic Director for each side of the RSU.

The Central Office serves all of the district’s schools with a Superintendent, Director of Special Services, Business Manager, and Administrative Assistant.

All schools employ administrative assistants, educational technicians, custodians and bus drivers in relatively equal proportions.

Reductions in professional and support staff in all RSU 50 schools have been tracked since 2007 – 08, and clearly show a determined effort to adjust personnel to the region’s declines. Over these seven years, fully 29 FTE position reductions have been enacted. Reductions have ranged from retirements that were not replaced, to reductions in force of teachers, to elimination of ed tech positions. Over and above these 29 reductions, some stipends for retained positions have been reduced. Reductions per year have been as low as 1.0 FTE total (2007 – 08), and as high as 7.5 FTE total (2013 – 14).

It bears noting that while continuity of support staff employment has been generally stable over the years, teacher turnover has created chronic challenges for the schools of the RSU. Recent years have been challenging for SACS in this regard (high school math and science in particular); but KMHS is entering a new school year ('14-15) with a mere vestige of veteran staff. Any district with high teacher turnover experiences additional costs (advertising, course tuition required for full certification, supervision and evaluation time, mentoring, etc.) but more importantly, learning “costs” to students while their new teachers gain familiarity with curriculum, learn school culture and procedures, and slowly develop collegial contacts.

**Staffing Summary: 2014 – 15 Academic Year**

<b>Teachers</b>	<b>Administrators</b>	<b>Support Staff</b>
<b>69.0</b>	<b>6.0</b>	<b>78.0</b>
65 teachers, 2 library, 2 nurse	4 principals 1 Sup’t 1 Dir Special Svcs	Bus, Admin Ass’t, Cooks, Custodian, Ed Techs, etc.

**Implications:**

Two parallel school systems are inherently less efficient; each building and office must hire and supervise the staff positions necessary for instruction, support services, and operations regardless of student numbers.

**School design / configuration**

**Structure:**

A preliminary review of high school structures conducted by secondary principals resulted in a table of side-by-side comparisons of SACS and KMHS. Largely as an outcome of close collaboration over recent years, these schools reported highly compatible core structures, including:

- Instructional minutes (385 daily)

- Bell schedules and start / end times (7:55 – 2:20; 4 instructional blocks daily and one intervention block daily)
- Lunch minutes (25 – 30 minutes)
- Passing time / hall time (15 daily minutes)
- PLC time: prioritized in each school (different structures at present, but all teachers experience 2 – 4 PLC collegial sessions monthly)

At the elementary schools, a similar comparison highlights the following parallels

Element	SACS	KES	Notes
<b>Instructional Minutes</b>	70 min’s Everyday Math 90 minutes Houghton Mifflin Reading 30 minutes writing/science 30 minutes specials (guidance, library, music, PE-2 X wk.)	75 min’s math Investigations 90 minutes Houghton Mifflin Reading 30 minutes writing/science 30-40 minutes specials (guidance, library, music, PE-2 X wk.)	Some differences occur in grade 6, both schools
<b>Interventions (daily)</b>	30 minutes reading 30 minutes math	30 minutes reading 30 minutes math	Some differences occur in grade 6, both schools
<b>Data Study</b>	6-week data meetings to re-evaluate intervention Assessments: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DIBELS</li> <li>• NWEAs</li> <li>• Classroom assessments</li> </ul>	6- week data meetings to re-evaluate intervention/student achievement Assessments: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DIBELS</li> <li>• NWEA</li> <li>• Fountas &amp; Pinnell</li> <li>• Star Math</li> <li>• DSA</li> <li>• PPV</li> <li>• OS Survey</li> <li>• Classroom assessments</li> </ul>	
<b>PLC / Grade level teams</b>	2014-’15: After school 2:30-3:30 Alternating weeks: PLC / grade level teams	2014-’15: Tuesdays 2:40-3:30 pm Grade Level Meetings once a week at lunch time	

### Curriculum offerings:

A preliminary review of high school offerings conducted by secondary principals resulted in a table of side-by-side comparisons of SACS and KMHS. These schools reported similar core offerings with unique details, including:

- Comparable but not coordinated core subject offerings
- Comparable but not coordinated graduation / diploma requirements
- Isolated unique offerings at one school only (Art III, IV; Journalism; Drama; Media)

### Co-curricular offerings:

Secondary schools in RSU 50 offer generally parallel athletic opportunities to their boys and girls, some of which are provided at both middle and high school levels. These include:

- Soccer
- Baseball / softball
- Basketball
- Cheering
- Golf (SACS only)

A consideration in any school merger is how the new, recombined student population might impact interscholastic competition and MPA "Class" standing. Relevant data follow:

See link here, and table below, for MPA's recommended caps for Class C / Class D school teams  
<http://www.mpa.cc/images/pdfs/classification/cut-offs/cutoffs-2013-15.pdf>

## Maine Principals' Association Sports Classification Enrollment Cut-Offs

(Effective 2013-2014 & 2014-2015 School Years)

Sport	Season	Class A		Class B		Class C		Class D	
		Current	Proposed	Current	Proposed	Current	Proposed	Current	Proposed
Baseball	Spring	725+	705+	400-724	425-704	200-399	192-424	0-199	0-191
Basketball	Winter	725+	705+	400-724	425-704	200-399	190-424	0-199	0-189
Cheerleading	Winter	725+	705+	400-724	425-704	200-399	192-424	0-199	0-191
Cross Country	Fall	725+	700+	400-724	400-699	0-399	0-399		
Drama	Winter	550+	525+	0-549	0-524				
Field Hockey	Fall	750+	716+	450-749	475-715	0-449	0-474		
Football	Fall	775+	875+	535-774	600-874	0-534	455-599		0-454
Golf	Fall	650+	650+	375-649	375-649	0-374	0-374		
Ice Hockey (Boys)	Winter	850+	860+	0-849	0-859				
Ice Hockey (Girls)	Winter	There is one class in girls' ice hockey – East/West.							
Lacrosse (Boys)	Spring	830+	750+	0-829	0-749				
Lacrosse (Girls)	Spring	830+	750+	0-829	0-749				
Ski	Winter	675+	675+	500-674	500-674	0-499	0-499		
Soccer	Fall	725+	705+	400-724	425-704	200-399	190-424	0-199	0-189
Softball	Spring	725+	705+	400-724	425-704	200-399	192-424	0-199	0-191
Swim	Winter	785+	700+	0-784	0-699				
Tennis	Spring	720+	700+	400-719	400-699	0-399	0-399		
Track (Indoor)	Winter	745+	700+	0-744	0-699				
Track (Outdoor)	Spring	745+	700+	475-744	461-699	0-474	0-460		
Volleyball	Fall	500+	500+	0-499	0-499				
Wrestling	Winter	700+	685+	475-699	426-684	0-474	0-425		

wddata/classification/proposed13-15/proposed cutoffs.doc



Grade span details:

Schools in RSU 50 have divided grade spans in mostly comparable ways for purposes of administrative oversight, curriculum coordination, staff meetings, PLC structures, and professional development strategies. A quick reference follows.

School	Gr Span	Admin	PLC	PD target	Staff Meets
KES	pK – 6	pK – 6	Grade cluster	Whole group	Whole group
SACES	pK – 5	pK – 5	Grade cluster	Whole group	Whole group
KMHS	7 – 12	7 – 12	Inter-department	Whole group	Whole group
SACHS	6 – 12	6 – 12	Department	Whole group	Whole group

### **School achievement / attainment measures**

Elementary proficiency

Subject	KES3 – 6	SACS3 – 8	Maine
Math	70 %	59 %	63 %
Reading	78 %	62 %	72 %

\* Data provided by DoE (annual report card)

Middle / High School meets & exceeds proficiency (2013 – 14 NECAP / SAT)

Subject	KMHS8	SACS8	Maine	KMHS11	SACS11	Maine
Math	37 %	34%	72 %	33 %	43 %	48 %
Reading	60 %	48%	62%	43 %	43 %	49 %
Writing	23 %	14%	47 %	33 %	26%	42 %
Science	N/A	N/A	N/A	34 %	17%	41 %

\* Data provided by schools

High School graduation, drop-out, and attendance rates

School	Graduation Rate 4-yrs	Graduation Rate 5-yrs	Drop-out	Attendance
KMHS	81.8 %	90.63 %	2.4 %	92 %
SACS	78.6 %	87.18 %	3.9 %	95.5 %*
Maine	86.4 %	n/a	2.6 %	94.4 %

\*SACS attendance rate is whole-school

College academic success (first year, UMaine only)

The only “feedback loop” provided by higher education to RSU 50’s sending schools comes from the University of Maine (Orono campus). In its most recent summary (below), UMaine informs schools about the matriculation and early success of their graduates over 5 years from 2008 – 12.

**Admission, Matriculation, Retention, and Academic Success: UMaine 2008 – 2012<sup>2</sup>**

<b>School</b>	<b>% Applicants admitted (5 yr average)</b>	<b>% Applicants enrolled</b>	<b>2.0 – 2.99 Year-end GPA %</b>	<b>3.0 – 4.00 Year-end GPA %</b>	<b>% Returned Yr2</b>
SACS	56%	27%	63%	25%	75%
KMHS	73%	47%	41%	41%	82%
State	81%	32%	41%	40%	78%

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.umaine.edu/ois/>

RSU 50 College attendance and completion sample statistics<sup>3</sup>

School / Unit	% graduating class accepted to any post-secondary school	% graduating class attending any college in fall of post – high school year	% graduating class attending any college two years post – high school (traditional + delayed matriculation)	% attaining any degree or certification in 6 years post – high school (degree completion)	Other notes
<b>KMHS</b>	Monitor and report in future (MELMAC data available?)	<b>61%</b> (8 year average, 2006 – '13)	<b>73%</b> (6 yr average, 2006 – '11)	<b>37%</b> (class of '07)	Schools with small student populations will always exhibit higher annual variability than those with large student populations
<b>SACS</b>	Monitor and report in future	<b>58%</b> (8 year average, 2006 – '13)	<b>66%</b> (6 yr average, 2006 – '11)	<b>28%</b> (class of '07)	
<b>Aroostook County</b>	Not available	<b>64%</b> (class of '13)	Not available (Mitchell Institute estimates 68-69%)	<b>49%</b> (class of '07)	
<b>Maine</b>	Not available	<b>62%</b> (class of '13)	<b>68%</b>	<b>55%</b> (class of '07)	
<b>Maine poverty demographic</b>	Monitor and report in future	<b>48%</b> (class of '13)	Not available	Not available	
<b>Average of 5 lowest Maine Schools</b>		<b>43%</b> (class of '13)			

<sup>3</sup> National Student Clearinghouse reports are now issued annually to all Maine high schools by the Mitchell Institute in Portland ([lpilimpton@mitchellinstitute.org](mailto:lpilimpton@mitchellinstitute.org)) in coordination with Maine's DoE. This year the reports also include subgroup college attendance, persistence and degree attainment trends for gender, poverty and student achievement demographics. Very small schools may show "no data" when these subgroups are small.

College attendance and completion data summarized above indicate several patterns:

1. The two high schools of RSU 50 are similar to each other, and close to county and State averages, in college-attendance patterns over recent years. On average, Southern Aroostook is a few percentage points lower than Katahdin in college-attendance, and both schools' averages are barely below their regional and state counterparts. Importantly, when looking at student matriculation at any point two years post-graduation, RSU 50's schools actually match or exceed the State's average.
2. Both high schools of RSU 50 are significantly below their regional and state comparison groups on measures of college completion (2- or 4-year degrees), even when those graduates are tracked for 6 years post-graduation.

Implications and possibilities for RSU 50:

1. Studying college attendance patterns for RSU 50's students should include long-term (2-years post-high school) matriculation as well as long-term (6-year) completion data. Both should be compared to State and Regional data when these are available.
2. Cultivating students' post-secondary aspirations, and then supporting the completion of those plans in the months and years beyond graduation, seems to offer an ongoing challenge to the schools of this region. While there may be ways in which larger (merged) student populations could generate a wider array of post-secondary "peer stories" and options, getting more graduates into college is a long-term effort for any institution.
3. Neither secondary school in this district has "the answer" to college-going relative to the other. Both schools struggle.
4. Guidance programs offered by either school (or in one merged school) must include early, pervasive and consistent college-awareness and placement support services.
5. MELMAC grants, college tours, and college fairs may be more likely or cost-effective in larger merged high school (field trip economy of scale, more attractive for admissions officers as a recruitment population, etc.)

**Bus fleet data**

Current allocations of buses, drivers and other pertinent transportation data should be summarized by the RSU 50 Central Office in the space below. This baseline should help provide the school board and administration with objective measures from which to analyze the impact of any preferred consolidation option.

2014 – 15 Bus Fleet Summary Statistics

Fleet size (# buses operated by RSU 50)	
# FTE bus drivers	
# FTE bus mechanics	
Annual fuel allocation \$	
Annual fuel usage gallons	
Least filled bus run % of seating capacity (name route)	
Most filled bus run as % of seating capacity (name route)	
Average passenger load (student riders as % of total posted bus occupancy)	
Longest bus ride mileage and time (name route) _____	
Shortest bus ride mileage and time (name route) _____	

### **Vision, Mission and Core Beliefs**

As the result of several work sessions by the Futures Task Force, input from a Community Forum, and faculty and student feedback, the FTF respectfully submits the following draft Vision, Mission, and Core Belief statements to the RSU 50 School Board. Language such as this can provide important guidance to the school board, administration and faculty in determining school and district priorities and allocations of resources. Additionally this language may assist the school board in its selecting from among the ten school futures Options outlined in this report.

The FTF presumes that the school board will act to amend and/or adopt these three statements as policy in the near future, but leaves the timing and the wording to board discretion.

#### **VISION**

Challenging, educating and equipping all for productive global citizenship.

#### **MISSION**

While acknowledging budgetary constraints and existing state/federal educational mandates, we – school, parent and community – will advocate for and develop educational policies to deliver a challenging curriculum within a safe, healthy, and respectful environment.

#### **CORE BELIEFS**

- Student success is our top priority.
- Success is attainable for all students when all persons are held to high expectations in knowledge, skills, and appropriate behavior.
- School provides physical safety, supportive learning, and creative opportunities for all persons, and is achieved through school and family partnerships within the framework of community.

## OPTIONS DESCRIBED AND REVIEWED

### Overview

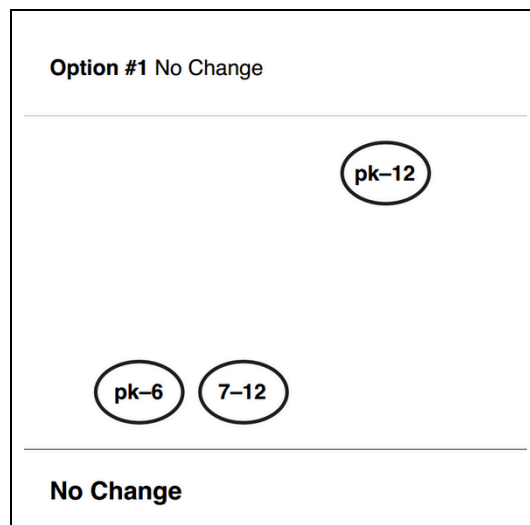
The lion's share of the past year's FTF work sessions was to identify and analyze each future Option that was known to have been suggested anywhere and by anyone in the RSU. This process involved subgroups collaborating to create detailed charts for each of the ten known options. These charts provided the basis for the write-ups offered below; in other words, the paragraphs are readable summaries of teams' parameter-driven analyses. Parameters discussed for each Option included (for example):

- Curriculum benefits and challenges
- Student transportation impacts
- School culture benefits and challenges
- others

Each Option's write-up below is also accompanied by a simplified graphic intended to provide a quick visual reminder of the changes represented in that particular Option.

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### THE OPTIONS



### Analysis:

Option 1 represents a decision to operate the schools of RSU 50 as they are currently configured. It received no votes of support from the members of the FTF in a mid-April blind straw poll.

**Benefits** of Option 1 include the retention of local pK – 12 schooling and maintaining local schools' identities, traditions and cultures. Current class sizes range from small – to – manageable, depending on the grade and the subject. Schools' current facilities can support music, art, food service, performances, and laboratory-based classes. Local taxpayers may feel connected to their own schools' budgets.

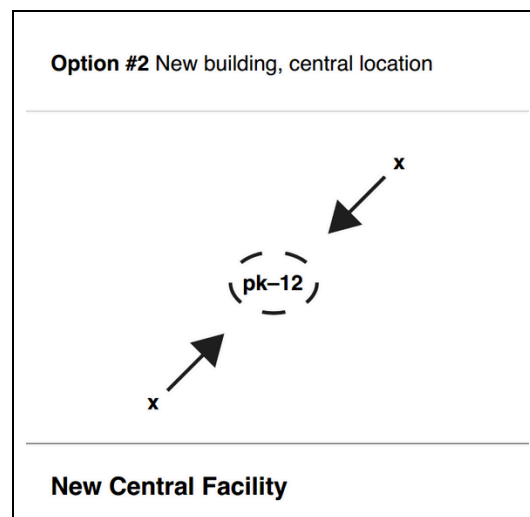
**Challenges** presented by Option 1 are numerous. Educationally, schools on both sides struggle to provide a comprehensive education as student populations and tax bases shrink over time. High school classes are at times run with rosters under 5 students, and even more often, under 10; it is a struggle to approach the State's EPS student:teacher ratios. Duplication of educational services is an unavoidable reality of operating two distinct pK – 12 systems. Where services are shared or split (technology integration, world language, etc.), such arrangements can present a challenge in recruitment / retention of faculty (wear and tear). By definition, putting ever-smaller populations of students into the same buildings each year means that operating each building in the RSU becomes more costly per pupil.

Curriculum coordination and alignment is an obvious challenge presented by operating two pK – 12 systems. Matching course offerings with Highly Qualified Teachers on each side of the district is similarly daunting. Schools currently operate tiny and parallel departments, and at times are challenged to comprise a Full Time Equivalent assignment for essential faculty and staff.

Culturally, school staffs would continue to uphold their present identities and traditions, yet may find themselves demoralized by unavoidable diminution over time.

Co-curricular offerings represent a major source of school pride and history everywhere. While maintaining the status quo provides continuity in these traditions, schools in the RSU are experiencing challenges today in fielding full team (or drama) rosters, paying for two sets of uniforms and equipment, and in finding coaches and club sponsors.

A major challenge is operating and maintaining the full complement of RSU50's school buildings in spite of declining enrollments and a shrinking tax base. Every building in the district requires maintenance, some of which is already being deferred because of current fiscal constraints. Infrastructure of each building includes wireless capability and upgrades, phone systems and HVAC.



*Note from FTF: Building a new school structure and “decommissioning” all current school facilities in the RSU is clearly a long-term scenario. Uncertainties within this option include funding sources (state v. local), sustainability of local effort, and timeline. If the school*



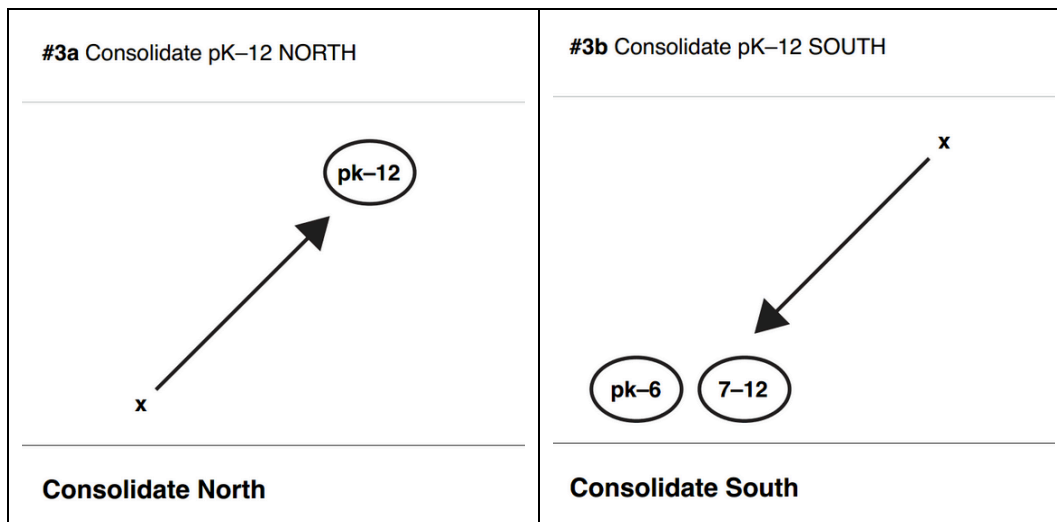
*committee determines that this option is their desired future, more research will be needed. Also, another Option will need to be selected in the interim as a means to span the 10+ years of waiting time for a new building to be sited, proposed, approved, funded, and built.*

Analysis:

Option 2 represents a long-term commitment to the construction of a new pK – 12 school, positioned centrally in the RSU (e.g., in Crystal?). While this option does not represent an immediate solution to the RSU’s concerns, it received very strong endorsement from the FTF membership.

**Benefits** of Option 2 include site neutrality, coordination of services, educational opportunities and staffing, creation of a new regional multi-community asset, and all the efficiencies that accompany a centralized location. Designing a school from the ground up represents opportunities to deeply reexamine every element of how schools operate. Will the school’s architecture make co-teaching a possibility? Will the school provide a “maker space” for independent inventions, robotics clubs or team projects? Will students sit in rows or in groups? Will classroom furniture be stools, chairs, or Pilates balls? In other words, a school’s design can become an expression of its beliefs about teaching and learning.

**Challenges** presented by Option 2 include time frame (the RSU requires an immediate solution), funding uncertainty, and garnering and maintaining very long-term regional effort between now and approval.



Analysis of 3a and 3b:

Option 3a and 3b are intentionally paired as two sides of the same coin: consolidate all students and staff to either the north end campus (3a) or to buildings on the south end (3b). Both options share some benefits and challenges. However, they are not identical. Each option presents unique benefits and challenges as well.

**Benefits** of both Options include the formation of larger and more diverse communities of learners (elementary and secondary students), merging professional and support staffs, and consolidating roles. A pK – 12 school on either end of the district would likely lead to the creation a new school name and mascot, similar to the recent experiences of Spruce Mountain (Jay /

Livermore Falls) and Oceanside (Rockland / Georges Valley). This phenomenon is not foreign to the RSU 50 communities' own histories of past consolidation. In other words, it can be done.

Significant cost savings would appear to be immediate due to the closure of facilities.

Course and co-curricular offerings would likely experience greater diversification and enrichment. Students would benefit from having a wider array of opportunities, and faculty may benefit from the "stretch" of adding new syllabi to their repertoire. Faculty would benefit professionally from the presence of larger departmental and grade level cohorts (at present some faculty in each school represent an entire department; if such a person leaves there is a disruption of curriculum and a break in the instructional continuity the RSU's students experience). The RSU's curriculum would be more readily coordinated and aligned. Administrative roles and support staff could be diversified (e.g. Curriculum Coordinator, Assistant Principal) and/or consolidated. Managing Student Information Systems (data, reporting, grading) would be significantly more efficient under one roof.

It was also noted during RSU50's community forums that students in modestly larger schools enjoy the opportunity to "reinvent" themselves and discover new interests, thanks to new friendships / role models and a broader array of curricular and co-curricular opportunities. The post-secondary aspirations of high schoolers also may rise as a result of a wider array of student trajectories.

Either location's infrastructure and maintenance would be easier to fund and sustain in the RSU's budget. Co-curricular opportunities may become more competitive, thus contributing to higher levels of performance (not limited to sports). The district may climb to Class C competition, and uniforms and costly equipment can be shared more readily. Consolidation of coaching / club sponsor roles, and efficiencies in the costs of games and events would appear likely.

Regarding student transportation, both 3a and 3b surpass Options 4a and 4b for logistical advantages. Because each "3" option entails one final destination, there would be no duplication of bus routes. Please refer to the analysis section of 4a - 4b.

**Challenges** presented by both options include the assimilation of students and staff from one of the district's facilities into the other; a potential perceived "lost identity" for students, staff and families from either side (likely a transitional problem, not a permanent one); more populated halls, classrooms, and cafeterias (loss of intimacy); remodeling of classrooms and other school facilities that must be repurposed; and potentially more competitive selection processes for co-curricular opportunities. Teaching assignments would need adjustments, which would lead to careful planning of professional development and certification support. And finally, either option will require changes in bus logistics and longer rides for some children.

#### Analysis of 3a:

**Benefits** unique to Option 3a include locating all of the region's secondary students closer to Region 2 CTE. Academic course options increase for Region 2 students with this option because of their shorter bus ride and timely afternoon return to SACS (i.e., in time for one academic period before the end of school). This school site offers environmental studies opportunities in the property's extensive forest. The SACS facility also houses the Region 2 Forestry program, includes a large multi-purpose room/cafeteria, expansive playing fields and forest, and has a capacity for 800 students. Handicap accessibility has been installed throughout the school. There are dedicated office spaces for elementary administration, secondary administration and superintendent.

**Challenges** unique to Option 3a primarily involve facilities constraints. The SACS building does not have a dedicated auditorium. The building will require a new heating system, and the roof needs work. Science lab classrooms may need to be refurbished or expanded. The building's interior aesthetics could be due for a review, including painting, lighting, displays of student artwork, etc.

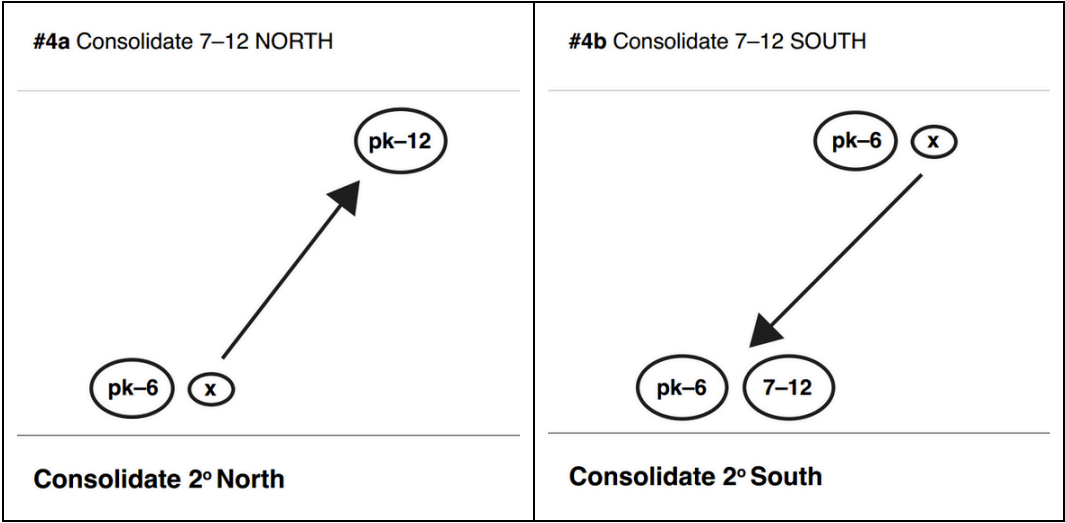
Conceivably, students from Benedicta may opt to attend a closer high school if this option is selected, resulting in lost tuition revenue to the RSU.

Analysis of 3b:

**Benefits** unique to Option 3b include dedicated space for school performances and for music instruction, sufficient spaces for administrative offices, playing fields and an environmental studies ecosystem resource behind the middle high school. The overall capacity of both buildings is sufficient, although room sizes and assignments may need to be reassessed. Handicap accessibility is established, with some potential need for minor modifications.

**Challenges** unique to Option 3b include locating the region's secondary students farthest from Region 2 CTE in Houlton. The end-of-day travel time from Region 2 back to Katahdin would reduce school-based academic course options for this student population because of a late return to school. Assuming that 3b would prompt the full closure of the SACS facility, a related problem would be finding a suitable new location for the Region 2 Forestry program.

Regarding facilities constraints, KMHS would need to analyze their cafeteria capacity and consider rebuilding their kitchen for food production.



Alternative #4a

Phase I	Phase II	Phase II
KMHS 9 – 12 (or 6 – 12) students attend SACS: permanent shift.	Retrofit KMHS to accommodate pK – 8 (or pK – 5) students from KES sending towns.	All RSU 50 HS students continue at SACS. pK – 8 (or pK – 5) Katahdin students occupy KMHS building. Decommission KES.

Analysis:

Option 4a and 4b are intentionally paired as two sides of the same coin: consolidate all *secondary* students and staff to either the north end campus (4a) or to buildings on the south end (4b). Both options share some benefits and challenges. However, they are not identical. Each option presents unique benefits and challenges as well.

**Benefits** of both options are parallel to those described in the analysis of Options 3a / 3b. Please refer to that section.

In addition to those anticipated benefits:

Regarding student transportation, options 4a and 4b propose to retain the RSU’s youngest students in their local schools, providing them with the same access currently enjoyed by families, and provides the shortest available bus routes.

**Challenges** presented by both options are parallel to those described in the analysis of Options 3a / 3b. Please refer to that section.

In addition to those anticipated challenges:

Families with children in separate grade spans may be challenged to attend simultaneous school events such as Parent-Teacher conferences (this can probably be avoided with careful attention to each school’s calendar).

Either option will require changes in bus logistics and longer rides for some secondary children. Importantly, there may be new transportation costs required by either 4a or 4b, since some routes would require duplicate coverage (pK – 6 students bused separately from 7 – 12 students, even if they stand at the end of the same driveway). Additionally, adjustments in bell schedules would be necessitated if the RSU must operate redundant bus routes. The constraints entailed by student transportation, overlaid by the need to dovetail schedules with Region 2, warrant careful study.

Cost savings of facilities operations do not appear to be as significant as the 3a – 3b options, since the 4a – 4b options retain pK – 6 students locally. Inherently this requires the operation and maintenance of more physical plants.

Analysis of 4a:

**Benefits** unique to Option 4a are identical to those outlined in Option #3a. Please refer to that section. In addition, 4a appears to have a unique argument over 4b that is entirely due to its architecture and infrastructure. As of this writing, it seems unclear how SACS could be “one-half shut down,” since it is one contiguous facility with systemic heating and wiring.

**Challenges** unique to Option 4a primarily involve facilities constraints. The SACS building does not have a dedicated auditorium or music instruction space. The building will require a new heating system, and the roof needs work. Science lab classrooms may need to be refurbished or expanded.

There may be additional challenges that arise in determining where to assign any teachers whose certification and/or teaching assignments span the division of grades envisioned in this Option.

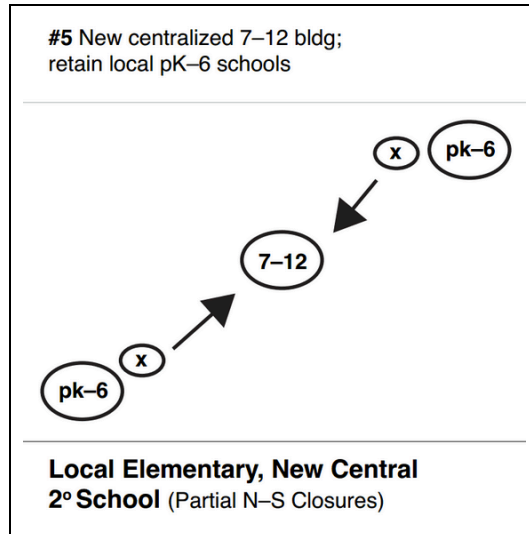
Analysis of 4b:

**Benefits** unique to Option 4b are identical to those described in the analysis of Option 3b. Please refer to that section.

**Challenges** unique to Option 4b are identical to those described in the analysis of Option 3b. Please refer to that section. In addition, assuming that 4b would prompt *partial* closure of the SACS facility, a significant question implied in this option is whether it is feasible to mothball part of the SACS building while operating pK – 6 and Forestry in other portions of the facility. Regarding facilities constraints, KMHS would need to analyze their cafeteria capacity and consider rebuilding their kitchen for food production.

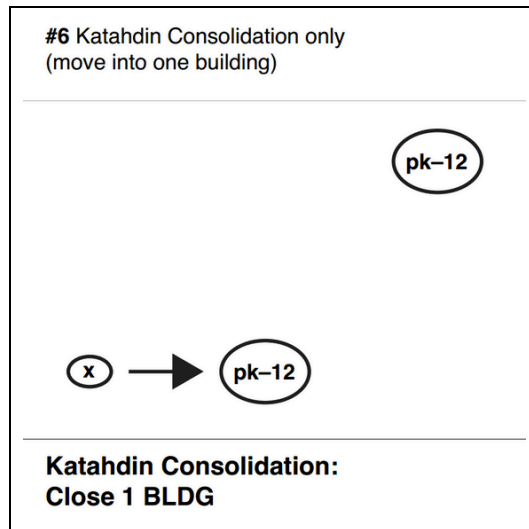
Analysis of Alternative 4a:

Because this alternative arose in the final days of the FTF's work, we are not providing a Benefits and Challenges analysis of this option. An inherent decision in this Option would involve determining which grade span is most amenable to a northward consolidation (High School only or Middle and High School). Such a decision would ride on questions of teacher certification and grade assignments, curriculum approaches that benefit from being under one roof, student transportation impacts, parental "presence" impacts (where children may be attending school in both north and south), and allocation of spaces within SACS.



**Analysis:**

*Note from FTF -- this scenario was tabled and not analyzed, by consensus agreement of the FTF. The rationale was that it does not appear to be fiscally sustainable to build and maintain a new building while also maintaining two pK - 6 elementary schools. The FTF proposes that it makes more sense to review option #2 (pK - 12 in Crystal) if a new school is determined to be a priority.*



**Analysis:**

Option 6 represents consolidation on the Katahdin end of the district only. It entails moving pK – 6 across Rte. 11 and closing the KES facility. SACS students and faculty would appear to be unaffected by this option.

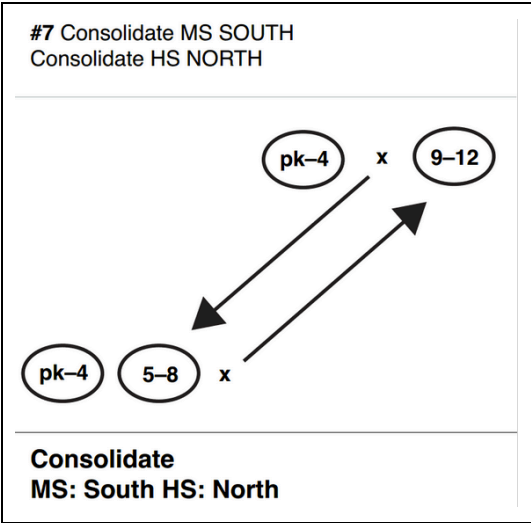
**Benefits** of Option 6 include the retention of local pK – 12 schooling and maintaining local schools’ identities, traditions and cultures, and attending to local pK – 12 professional development priorities. The longer school bus routes that appear to be likely outcomes of choosing other options would be avoided. This option appears to be favored by many residents of southern towns in the RSU. Current class sizes range from small – to – manageable, depending on the grade and the subject. Schools’ current facilities would continue to support music, art, food service, performances, and laboratory-based classes. Local taxpayers may feel connected to their own schools’ budgets. Secondary students on both ends of the RSU might serve as role models and transition mentors to their elementary counterparts. There may be some opportunity to consolidate roles and services within the Katahdin schools as well, at professional and support staff levels. Savings from the closure of the KES building would accrue to the region’s taxpayers.

**Challenges** presented by Option 6 are identical to those described in the analysis of Option 1. Please refer to that section. In addition:

A major challenge is operating and maintaining a nearly-full complement of RSU50’s school buildings in spite of declining enrollments and a shrinking tax base. Other buildings in the district require maintenance, some of which is already being deferred because of current fiscal constraints. Infrastructure of each building includes wireless capability and upgrades, phone systems and HVAC. There would be no savings in student transportation.

Finally, the KMHS kitchen would require an upgrade, gym uses and demands would need to be assessed for the full pK – 12 program, and the KMHS building itself would require remodeling and some refurbishing (bathrooms and water fountains, etc.).

Option #6 appears to avoid the ultimate question of programming and staffing in the face of declining populations over time. In other words, is it educationally and fiscally viable in the long term to operate schools on two ends of the district as everything shrinks?



Analysis:

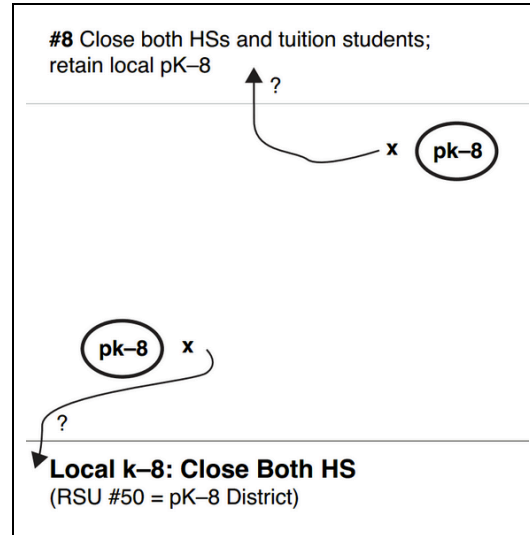
Option 7 envisions a bi-directional and partial consolidation, in which pK – 4 students remain local, students in the 5 – 8 grade range would be consolidated into one building (KMHS?), and students in the 9 – 12 range would be consolidated in the other building (SACS?). The destination

of 5 – 8 and 9 – 12 students would be up to the school board, but for the sake of analysis 9 – 12 is being sent to the north in order to benefit from proximity to Region 2.

**Benefits** of this option run somewhat parallel to previous analyses (3a-b; 4a-b), including the creation of new and merged student populations. It may be worth considering the creation of an original school name and new mascot (similar to Oceanside East and West; both campuses were renamed, there is a new mascot and school colors). Middle school and high school course and co-curricular offerings might experience expansion and diversification. Staff may benefit from mergers of tiny departments and greater internal professional collaboration opportunities. Curriculum would be easier to coordinate and align, at least within each building's self-contained grades spans. Athletic teams may become more competitive, and the school may elevate to Class C status.

**Challenges** of Option 7 include the prospect of needing to assign teachers to either high school or middle level, when some teachers' loads, as well as adopted curricula, presently span these grades. There appear to be less potential for efficiency in merging or redefining professional and support staff roles. Some duplication of services would continue as they do today.

All or most buildings in the RSU would be required to remain open (conceivably, one of the Katahdin buildings could contain everyone), and none of the pending repairs could be taken off of the RSU's capital improvement list. Busing complications similar to those described in Options 4a – 4b seem likely, as well. This option appears to offer little potential for fiscal savings.



#### Analysis:

Option 8 envisions an RSU with no operating high schools. In this vision of the future, all pK – 8 students would be educated locally in their respective ends of the district, while high school students would be tuitioned to regional schools.

It is not clear how much traction this option has in the larger RSU 50 school community; as such, the FTF is not currently aware of the level of community support for this idea.



**Benefits** of this option are speculative at present, but could include consolidation of the Katahdin students into one building (closure of one facility), considerable reductions in the costs of professional and support staff, and general simplification of the RSU's educational services to the region.

**Challenges** of Option 8 include paying for high school students' tuition and transportation while losing all local control over their education. The region may struggle even more than it presently does to attract families with school-aged children (including teachers with families).

### **Remaining data collection needs (tagged to Options)**

These data collection options will likely be driven by which Options the board has deemed most plausible and/or most desirable. Depending upon the board's prioritized list of Options, some data may become moot. Other data needs may emerge over time, as well. This is at least a strong starter set.

- **Options 3a/b, 4a/b, 6:** Determine the capacity of KMHS and SACS to house all of the RSU's children and desired programming. Capacity calculations should involve fire/safety code, handicap access, event seating (cafeteria, assemblies, community performances, sport events), remodeling (furniture and plumbing to match the age of student users) and classroom needs based upon curriculum plans.
- **Options 3a/b, 4a/b, 6, 7:** Review parking, playgrounds, playing fields, and other grounds uses of KMHS and SACS for their capacities and potential modifications.
- **All Options:** Catalog facilities maintenance and capital improvements needed to maintain each campus. Project their timelines and costs.
- **All Options:** Identify infrastructure improvements that maybe necessary to support communications, teaching and learning (phone system, internet service, Tandberg connections, etc.).
- **All Options:** Carefully analyze bus routes and fleet requirements for each desired option. Project maximal riding times, potential impacts on bell schedules, Region 2 logistics, and arrival / departure impacts for Region 2 students' academic course needs.
- **Options 2, 3b, 4b, 5, 7, 8:** Determine whether there is a suitable alternate location for the Region 2 Forestry Program, in the event that the SACS facility is "decommissioned."
- **All Options:** Research the sequence of steps and transactions entailed in school closure, disposition of equipment and property, etc.
- **Options 2, 3a/b, 4a/b, 5, 6, 7:** Estimate the potential costs of renaming school: new colors and uniforms, new logos and letterhead, etc.
- **All Options:** Project costs of merging and costs of long-term operations as a way to estimate savings to the RSU.
- **Options 2, 3a/b, 4a/b, 5, 6, 7:** Task administrators to launch and oversee a thorough teacher-driven review of curricular and instructional compatibilities among alike grade spans.

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- **Options 2, 3a/b, 4a/b, 5, 6, 7:** Task administrators to develop and present 2 – 4 viable proposals and rationales for administrative, guidance, and specialist roles in all future Options.
  - **Options 2, 5:** Obtain the process, cost, and timeline specifics of applying for school construction funds from the State of Maine
  - **Options 2, 5:** Determine an acceptable interim solution (i.e., one of the other Options) for implementation beginning fall 2015; acknowledge that the transitional solution could become a permanent solution, should any of the factors involved in new school construction become unworkable
  - **Options 2, 5:** Determine (officially) whether local funding would be sufficient for new school construction. In other words, formally identify the necessary source(s) of funding.
  - **Options 2, 3a/b, 4a/b, 5, 6, 8:** Describe and cost-out the process for decommissioning any /all current schools.
  - **All Options** (optional): contact schools where student relocations have occurred in recent years to gain their perceptions and advice about the experiences of students, teachers, and families. Spruce Mountain (formerly Livermore Falls HS and Jay HS; now housed at the Jay HS campus and renamed) and Oceanside (formerly Rockland District HS and Georges Valley HS; now sending students to either campus depending upon grade span) are two, and there are others.
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## Facilitator's reflections

As a representative of Great Schools Partnership, it was my job to facilitate and assist the work of the Futures Task Force throughout the past school year. I co-planned and co-facilitated each scheduled meeting and forum with input and assistance from district administration. I gathered necessary materials and compiled results of forums and work sessions.

Great Schools Partnership is a long-time external partner to the schools of RSU 50. I offer the following observations in an effort to provide readers of this report with my subjective appraisal of the Futures Task Force as a team. I also offer a few big picture observations regarding the possibility of some consolidation in the near future.

### The Futures Task Force:

- I observed earnest and selfless engagement by FTF members in their work regardless of their town of residence or their employment status in the RSU. This is noteworthy considering that certain future options might represent personal challenges, job loss, or other undesirable outcomes to FTF members.
- I observed dedication to the work by FTF membership overall. Attendance at our evening work sessions and community forums was strong throughout the months of our existence.

### Opportunities attending consolidation:

- Implied in the school board's endorsement of the Futures Task Force as a working group is an acknowledgement that multiple variables could drive this region toward some consolidation of existing schools. It is a recognition of a system under strain.
- By definition, any merge option implies that one group of towns "loses" some or all of its students to a different, more-distant campus, while another group of towns either gains or retains their children. Clearly then, the FTF was tasked to identify and analyze these options, however uncomfortable or uncertain the outcomes may seem.
- Any of the RSU's towns might pursue withdrawal from the RSU if there is a perception of disenfranchisement or loss. Similarly, some families may opt to relocate, enroll in virtual schooling, or home-school their children. These unpredictable contingencies were not reviewed by the FTF. The FTF served and studied the RSU as it is currently comprised.
- Most school consolidations are accompanied by at least two staff-and-community stages of transition: first, celebrating the history and traditions of existing schools; second, celebrating and "rebranding" any new schools and the opportunities that a merger represents. The latter may also involve deliberate ice-breaker gatherings of future faculties, classmates and/or families in advance of an actual merger.
- There will be temporary costs involved in the process of any school merger, and these costs should be estimated and shared at the same time the RSU anticipates long-term post-merger savings.
- Reductions in staffing are inherently possible as an outcome of merging, and these reductions may occur at any level of employment. Administration may be reassigned or reduced, as might teachers, ed techs, office personnel, cooks and custodians. Careful considerations lie ahead as to the balance of savings and efficiencies gained by reductions, against the opportunity to improve services and expand opportunities by creatively retaining and reassigning of existing staff. Merging is not simply an opportunity to cut

people, in other words. Merging also allows schools to reexamine current assignments, identify chronically unfilled needs, and pursue new opportunities.

- Merging of schools may broadcast an appearance of future stability within the district by creating a new normal; we can hope that such a process could attract and retain employees.
- Schools can (and do) create opportunities for students to connect with their towns of residence. This could take the form of service learning projects, internship opportunities, or class investigations that occur outside of school. In this way students and towns maintain closer contact even in the context of a more regionalized school.
- Schools exist in Maine that are similar to RSU 50 in size and capacity. For example, Deer Isle-Stonington has fewer students per grade than RSU 50, always runs on a tight / contentious budget, and struggles to support all of its initiatives. Deer Isle-Stonington is also regarded as an innovative and transformative district. It can be highly valuable in RSU 50's current situation to reach out to these comparable counterparts and learn how they are planning to address their futures.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the Futures Task Force,

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