



SOUTHERN BERKSHIRE REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

Members of the Regional School District Planning Board (RSDPB):

We, the members of the Southern Berkshire Regional School District School Committee, feel strongly that the time has come, particularly in light of recent occurrences, that we closely examine the current environment in which we are trying to create this once-in-a generation change to how, what and where we deliver education to the students of our eight towns. We are writing this letter as a way to get the full committee's attention as we are at a loss and are not sure how best to make our concerns heard.

We firmly believe that our School Committee members on the RSDPB, despite what some may think and have said, have approached this major initiative in the spirit of collaboration and moving toward a model that makes sense for all of our students. Again, despite some contrary views that have been expressed, we said we entered this process, though with some trepidation, with a great deal of excitement thinking how we could all potentially gain by working together to bring our communities' resources together to explore new approaches to the delivery of education. Unfortunately, it is our firm belief, at this time, that this process is being rushed and, that until we address the difficult dynamic between the two districts and the ongoing feeling of imbalance, there simply is no path forward.

To further explain: despite the fact that we have clearly demonstrated our commitment to the work of the RSDPB through our active presence at over 120 meetings across 2.5+ years; clearly demonstrating our desire to see a successful outcome to our work, there have been outspoken rebukes of the SBRSD School Committee, district leadership team and our staff. We believe that this is in no way a warranted response. Too many of our questions related to the assumptions regarding the financial savings realized by a merger have not been answered and the premises upon which the savings have been explained (i.e., larger class size, redundancies eliminated, staff retirements, etc.) do not in many cases make sense to us. Responses have not been forthcoming regarding our district's main campus in Sheffield. We do not believe that the transportation studies are responding to several concerns. These issues have been raised multiple times and not yet fully discussed.

As School Committee members, parents, and active community participants we are feeling at capacity with the work within our district. Additionally, we believe that when it comes to further explaining our sense that our two districts have different philosophies, look at how we implement change in SBRSD. Our district leadership team, a large segment of our staff and members of our School Committee are jointly engaged in implementing programs that have been under development for several years in order to ensure the greatest degree of buy-in from all impacted by educational decisions. These include: our new math program (already a 38% improvement in scores on standardized tests), a complete review and revamping of K-12 reading material, the expansion of our Early Childhood programs throughout the district, the exciting Early College High School at Mt. Everett (recipient of \$1,000,000+ in grant funds) and our redesigned middle-school program.

Dr. Beth Regulbuto

Superintendent

Business Manager

Jane Burke

School Committee Chair

Arthur J. Batacchi, Jr.

School Committee Vice Chair

School Committee Members

Jeffrey Blaugrund

James DiPisa

Danile Kelly

Laura Rodriguez

H. Dennis Sears

E. Bonnie Silvers

Kara Smith

Nanci Worthington

All of our district's work to bring in added support through grant writing efforts, have more than quadrupled the outside funds we are receiving to support new initiatives. Added to all of this, is the enormous effort put forward by staff and district leadership to develop new programs to enrich our arsenal of social and emotional-support tools to assist students in coping with the impact of COVID-19.

Unfortunately for us, the negative dynamic at full RSDPB meetings and many subcommittee meetings is becoming an emotional energy drain. Our members show up, engage, make suggestions, do research to support the RSDPB's efforts, volunteer for additional work, put forth our best efforts and try to bring positive energy in order to collaborate. The environment in which we are working is not truly conducive to our feeling productive. If anything, we are left in a constant state of defensiveness and charged with not cooperating because we are not 100% behind pouring all of our energy into being "absorbed" and, yes, that is the prevailing sense, and working to create a new Monument Mountain.

Again, it is unfortunate; however, at this point we are struggling as we consider withdrawing from this process unless we can take a pause, stop being driven (in our view) by the MSBA's deadlines, work to resolve this strong sense of imbalance between our two districts and create a timeline that truly allows us to examine variations on the proposed model as was promised when the research team put forward their extensive report in March. After all of this time, money spent, energy invested, it has become too difficult to continue in this environment and feel productive. We strongly believe that we can all figure this out if we take a step back for a moment. We may bleed blue and gold; but first we believe in providing our five communities the best education possible for their children while acknowledging fiscal restraints.

We hope you receive this missive in the spirit with which it has been written; we want to be able to support a joint effort to bring public school education in south county to new heights. We need to explore how best to accomplish this shared goal.

Sincerely,

Southern Berkshire Regional School District School Committee

Jane Burke, New Marlborough, Chair
Art Batacchi, Sheffield, Vice Chair
Jeffrey Blaugrund, Alford
James DiPisa, Egremont
Danile Jordan-Kelly, Egremont
Laura Rodriguez, Monterey
H. Dennis Sears, Sheffield
E. Bonnie Silvers, Sheffield
Kara Smith, Sheffield
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