Responding to Recent Claims About 2D8T

A recent *Our Schools, Our Towns* newsletter urges communities to stop further study of a potential Mohawk Trail–Hawlemont consolidation and instead focus exclusively on securing additional state funding.

We strongly support increased state funding for rural schools. But additional state aid and examining how we can operate more sustainably are not competing strategies. **We need to pursue both.**

State funding has increased—but not enough

The state has increased Chapter 70, rural aid, regional transportation, and other education funding. Those increases are welcome.

But they have not kept pace with the financial pressures facing Mohawk Trail. State-provided revenues to MTRSD are expected to increase by approximately $500,000 from FY26 to FY27, while town assessments increased by approximately $1.12 million, or 7.8%. The growing burden on our small communities remains a serious concern.

Fair Share revenues do not change that reality. While billions have been directed to education, only a small portion ($8 million) has gone specifically to rural school districts. Rural advocates (led by our local leaders) continue to press for substantially greater rural aid.

Enrollment continues to decline

Claims that elementary enrollment has been essentially stable for a decade are not supported by the data.

Elementary enrollment has declined approximately **17.7% over the past 10 years**, including **4.7% over the past five years**. Since 1997, PK–6 enrollment has declined by approximately **51%**.

The rate of decline has slowed, but there has not yet been a sustained enrollment turnaround. This is part of a broader demographic challenge affecting rural western Massachusetts, the state and many parts of the country.

A new funding formula is not an immediate solution

We support revisiting the Chapter 70 formula and ensuring that rural districts receive fair treatment. But that process will take years.

Our communities have financial and educational decisions to make now. That is why we continue to advocate for substantially increased rural aid while also examining how our districts can operate more efficiently and sustainably.

Simply staying the course and hoping that substantially more state funding arrives is not a sustainability strategy. Absent significant new revenue or changes in how we operate, our towns will be asked to pay increasingly more to maintain the school system we have today, even as staffing and programs are reduced to contain costs. In other words, our communities risk paying more while our students receive less. Over the past two years alone, the districts have reduced approximately 20 full-time-equivalent positions.

We should continue fighting for more state support. But waiting for a funding breakthrough cannot substitute for examining the choices that are within our control.

Feasibility is about getting answers—not deciding the outcome

Most importantly, continuing our work with the Mass. School Building Authority by entering into the Feasibility Phase does **not** constitute a decision to close four elementary schools.

Feasibility is the process through which the districts, communities, design professionals, and MSBA would examine enrollment, educational needs, the existing MTRS campus, potential configurations, costs, and state reimbursement. Multiple alternatives (from renovation to new construction) would be developed, compared and priced before any construction project could move forward.

Keeping the focus on students

Reasonable people can disagree about the best future for our schools, and the Steering Committee welcomes thoughtful discussion and differing viewpoints.

Our objective is not to close schools or eliminate jobs. It is to ensure that o**ur students continue to have access to the high-quality educational opportunities they deserve, while creating a system our communities can sustain over time.**

We remain committed to sharing information openly, answering questions honestly, and giving our communities the facts they need to make these important decisions.

Ultimately, the measure of any path forward should be whether it strengthens educational opportunities for our students—not simply whether it preserves the system we have today.