

Attachment #6: Sample Recommendations

Sample Recommendations from the Gill-Montague Regional District Report

The district should provide additional time for professional development and collaborative planning by restoring in-service half days or a comparable alternative, and make effective use of the time. Restoring time is a particularly critical need at the secondary level where the need for improved curriculum alignment and delivery is the greatest.

The professional development plan supports teachers and administrators by providing professional development activities to assist them in improving student academic performance. The plan articulates the relationship between professional development and assessment, curriculum, and instruction with the intent of making available professional development in these three areas.

However, a dramatic reduction of in-service days jeopardizes the district focus during 2010-2011 on student assessment and other district initiatives. In interviews, principals and teachers indicated that they had had no input into making the change and expressed a concern about the sufficiency of number of in-service days. The district's ambitious plans to improve student achievement require substantial professional development to increase teacher capacity. An increase in the number of in-service days in the school calendar is essential for the accomplishment of those plans.

The evaluation process should be revised to include goal-setting for all educators, consistent with the new statewide framework that will be established in spring 2011 by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Teacher and administrator interviews and a review of the collective bargaining agreement reveal that most teachers are evaluated using a checklist. Under the contract, goal-setting is only permitted for teachers who do not meet the performance standards. Those teachers whose performance is found not satisfactory are required to set goals. But when teachers set and achieve goals in line with those of the district and school as well as their own needs, growth occurs. Since most teachers meet the performance standards, the district's evaluation process does not promote most teachers' growth and overall effectiveness. The Gill-Montague Regional School District and the Gill-Montague Education Association have agreed under the pending contract, whose ratification has been postponed at ESE's request, to establish a joint labor/management committee to address the teacher evaluation procedure and other related issues.

The teacher evaluation procedure should be strengthened by enabling teachers and principals to establish goals to improve teachers' performance. This will encourage growth by teachers with satisfactory performance through professional development activities under the professional development plan, thus establishing a critical link between the evaluation process, the individual professional development plan and the professional development provided at the school and district levels.

The RATIONALE ↓ summarizes evidence in findings

The rationale also includes the EXPECTED OUTCOME ↓ OR SIGNIFICANCE.

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The district needs to pursue much more aggressively regional and inter-district solutions to address the increasingly significant financial and educational needs created by its small size.

Gill-Montague is a small school district serving communities of moderate wealth. Four schools—two elementary schools, one middle school, and a high school—enroll 1,085 students (2009-2010). At the same time, its overall per-pupil spending exceeds the state average by 11 percent¹ and exceeds the median for in-district per-pupil costs in similar small districts by 28 percent.² Its spending above required net school spending is among the highest in the Commonwealth³. These two realities—small size and high per-pupil spending—are connected. The need to capture economies of scale and address important student and staff needs has become critical.

Broken down by categories, the district's fiscal year 2009 per-pupil expenditures were higher than per-pupil expenditures for the state and similar small districts⁴ in:

1. administration (49 percent above the state; 20 percent above similar small districts),
2. instructional leadership (40 percent above the state; 65 percent above similar small districts),
3. other teaching services (39 percent above the state; 24 percent above similar small districts),
4. pupil services (34 percent above the state; 24 percent above similar small districts),
5. benefits, including health insurance (34 percent above the state; 23 percent above similar small districts),
6. guidance and psychology (50 percent above the state; 47 percent above similar small districts),
7. operations and maintenance (31 percent above the state; 37 percent above similar small districts), and,
8. instructional materials (82 percent above the state; 133 percent above similar small districts).

It is instructive to note that the first five categories had been identified in a 2009 study as the five largest sources of above-average district spending in Franklin County as a whole.⁵

These eight areas can be the starting point for the district to pursue aggressively potential regional approaches to contain cost increases and/or address needs in more cost-effective ways. Sharing administrative, operations, support staff, and even teaching positions with neighboring districts is one option demanding serious consideration. Purchasing services and experts' time from regional educational collaboratives and state associations is another. A careful analysis of costs and needs could lead to the adoption of inter-district or regional approaches to delivering these and other services to Gill-Montague schools:

- building maintenance and repair,
- management of the school breakfast and lunch program,
- special education and regular transportation,
- purchasing,
- payroll,
- hardware purchase and maintenance,
- instructional coaching and other professional development,

1 In fiscal year 2009, Gill Montague spent \$14,433 per pupil; the state average was \$13,006.

2 ESE's September 17, 2010 Financial Analysis: Gill- Montague FY09 (see Appendix D) identified six K-12 districts of similar size to Gill-Montague (500-1,500 students) that are similar and/or are considered benchmark districts by the Technical Panel of Gill-Montague's Oversight Group: Ayer, Mohawk Trail, North Brookfield, Pioneer Valley, Quaboag, and Ware. The report compared in-district per pupil expenditures. The median in-district expenditure for the seven districts in FY 09 was \$11,810; Gill-Montague's was the highest at \$15,134. See Table 4 in Appendix D.

3 In fiscal year 2009, Gill-Montague's net school spending was 41 percent above required spending; in fiscal year 2010, after program reductions, its net school spending was still 37 percent above required net school spending.

4 See Financial Analysis-Gill-Montague FY09 in Appendix D, cited above.

5 Franklin County Schools: a 2020 Vision. Report to Franklin County Educational and Community Leaders via the Greenfield Community College Foundation, April 27, 2009, New England School Development Council (NESDEC)

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- energy conservation, and
- legal assistance.

Regional organizations can provide these and other services. One resource designed to help identify regional practices that may work for Gill-Montague is a recent publication from a task force convened by the Secretary of Education to identify potential operational efficiencies.⁶ Its promising practices guide describes practices districts in the Commonwealth have implemented to contain costs in three areas: human resource management, infrastructure management, and curriculum and instruction including technology. A number of the practices take advantage of regional approaches to achieve economies of scale and address unmet needs in areas that include some of the above. In addition, state associations including the Massachusetts School Business Officials (MASBO) and regional educational collaboratives including the Collaborative for Educational Services (formerly Hampshire Educational Collaborative) are prepared to expand services and are looking for willing partners.

Further resources for guidance and technical are incorporated into recommendations when helpful.

⁶ [A Promising Practices Guide to Improve Operational Efficiency and Achieve Cost Savings for Public School Districts](#), 2010, Secretary of Education, Executive Office of Education.