

MEMORANDUM

TO: MSBA BOARD OF DIRECTORS
FROM: KATHERINE CRAVEN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
SUBJECT: BERKLEY AND SOMERSET PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICTS
DATE: MARCH 20, 2009

In 2007, the Berkley and Somerset school districts each submitted an SOI for a new high school in their respective communities. For the past 20 years, Berkley and Somerset have had a tuitioning agreement to allow the Berkley high school age students attend the Somerset High School. Currently, Berkley sends approximately 250 students to Somerset High school, which represents about 25% of Somerset's 955 high school enrollment.

The current agreement expires in 2016, and Berkley is interested in having a permanent home for their students. Somerset and Berkley were two of the nine districts that the MSBA placed in the regional assessment category, and indicated that it would not build a high school for an enrollment as small as Berkley's, and would not fund a renovation or new high school for Somerset unless it included a permanent home for the Berkley students.

Over the past year, the MSBA, with assistance from DESE, has facilitated discussions with Berkley and Somerset to discuss the opportunity to regionalize, its benefits, implications and the process for creating a regional district. The Berkley Superintendent and School Committee undertook a town-wide survey and held a public forum to ask Berkley citizens about their receptivity to regionalizing with Somerset. Berkley received very positive feedback from the survey and is interested in pursuing a regional agreement with Somerset. After considering the financial and educational issues, the Somerset Superintendent and School Committee concluded that they are more interested in continuing the tuitioning agreement and have indicated that they are not interested in forming a region. Neither community applied for a DESE planning grant to more thoroughly explore the process.

The MSBA and DESE believe that there is a natural synergy to the Somerset-Berkley regionalization:

- Berkley contributes between \$2 - \$3 million dollars to Somerset's school budget annually
- Berkley and Somerset would both share in the cost of a new/renovated school
- As part of a regional agreement, Berkley would have a formal role in the administration and governance of the education program including a seat on the regional 9-12 school committee
- The Berkley students are currently attending the Somerset High School where they are accepted as part of the community
- The agreement provides stability and certainty to both districts

- The new district would be eligible for 9-12 transportation aid from the Commonwealth
- Regionalization plus utilizing a green model school could yield the district an additional 13% from MSBA to defray the costs of the school

Somerset's high school was built in 1936, with additions in 1952 and 1968. The school is experiencing structural failure in limited areas of the building. In February 2008, approximately 1800 square feet of classroom and office space on the first floor of the high school was closed due to structural concerns. Last week, after a consulting engineer performed an inspection of the area of concern, the Superintendent closed another approximately 2200 square feet adjacent to the area already closed on the first floor and an additional approximately 3300 square feet on the second floor, directly over the areas closed on the first floor. As a result, six classrooms, two bathrooms, a stairway, and sections of two corridors are now out of use.

This condition has caused Somerset to seek MSBA financial assistance to make repairs. The MSBA met with Somerset, its legislative delegation and Jeff Wulfson on March 19, 2009. The MSBA indicated that if Berkley and Somerset formed a regional district, a school project in the new district would potentially be eligible for up to 11 additional reimbursement points that would not be available for a single district new school – up to 6 additional reimbursement points for forming a new regional school district, up to 5 additional reimbursement points if the newly formed district participated in the Model School Program. (see attached Reimbursement Rate Summary for a complete breakdown of potential reimbursements points).