

BLACKSTONE-MILLVILLE REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

Three Year Strategic and Financial Plan

July 1, 2018 – June 30, 2021

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Blackstone-Millville Regional School District is moving forward to meet the needs of all students. From the High School earning the designation as one of 120 Public Broadcasting System (PBS) High Schools in the nation, to implementing a new math program and writing program at the elementary level, to Chrome Books for all high school students to our award winning National Championship Charger Marching Band, there is a vibrancy and positive change on display across the District.

However, public education across the county is at a crossroads. Traditional federal funding has been reduced forcing more pressure on state and local budgets that have not been able to keep pace with the ever changing requirements of curriculum, technology, English Language Learners, and Special Education. Schools and Districts are educating an increasing number of students with more complex social, emotional, and behavioral issues that require more resources. Parents and students have more choices than ever causing uncertainty in how to plan for declining enrollment in traditional school districts. These factors and many more were highlighted in the recent report from the State Auditor titled “Updating the Structure and Finance of the Massachusetts Regional School Districts”. The District is facing several important issues that must be addressed over the next three years to insure the sustainability and long-term viability of BMRSD; stabilizing enrollment, continuing to update curriculum and technology, and improving infrastructure. All of these issues and their solutions have one fact in common, they all require systematic funding increases to reach the goal of long term viability of our District. This in turn forces the member towns and their residents to assess what level of educational opportunities they want for their students and to reach consensus on how to support BMRSD with the same fervor that is now reserved for other competing options.

STABILIZING ENROLLMENT

Stabilizing enrollment must be a key strategy as funding follows the student and our funding has been following students away from BMRSD in accelerated fashion over the past decade. The District must promote the attributes of each school, especially the High School, in a variety of platforms to market itself to taxpayers who have traditionally supported the home district.

The competition for students has allowed all other districts and schools to market to our students on an uneven playing field that favors them and puts us at an unfair disadvantage to be the choice of our own residents. We know that we need to do a better job of reaching out to students and parents, to offer programs that inform both students and their parents, and to let all families know of the great opportunities that exist in every school at BMRSD. It is no longer acceptable to point the blame in other directions for we can influence the decisions parents and students make by focusing on what we have to offer that differentiates us from other educational options. One idea to consider would be moving Grade 8 to the High School and Grade 5 to the Middle School. This entertains a lengthy discussion but the benefits far outweigh any negative concerns.

TECHNOLOGY

The District has begun the work of updating current technology, no longer defined as desktop computing or work stations and traditional computer labs. Technology is changing rapidly as evidenced by the many high school students in the Commonwealth bringing their own device to school and integrating all aspects of curriculum, teaching and learning into their technologies. All students at BMRHS now have their own Chrome Books that are with them from freshman year through graduation. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education will require that all MCAS Next Generation testing be computer based by 2018, requiring broadband capacity and enough devices for all students to connect within the test windows dictated by DESE. We recently completed the wireless project that provides wireless coverage and capacity in every school. Furthermore, as there were over 17,000 jobs in technology related fields that were unfilled in MA as of July 1, 2017, DESE is looking at making computer science a part of the foundational curriculum as a high school graduation requirement, thereby putting emphasis on additional resources needed to make that goal a reality.

The District technology needs were presented in June 2017 by the Director of Technology with the timeline for implementation. They include continuing the Chrome Book initiative, replacing our antiquated 1970's era phone system with a more modern VOIP phone system, replacing our interactive boards on a schedule over three years, and updating servers and backup solutions to keep our data secure. These are not simply nice to have, these initiatives are necessary to provide the technology the District needs to communicate, to store data, to improve learning, and integrate curriculum into technology platforms to prepare our students for today's school and career paths. The cost to funds these solutions averages about \$190,000 in each year of this plan. These solutions are best practice and allow us to keep pace with the demands of a twenty-first century education.

All aspects of technology supporting teaching and learning from printers and copiers to our website to Google Apps make education more dynamic with a deeper texture to support our students. Who had the crystal ball that could have predicted that chalkboards would be

replaced by white boards which were replaced by Smartboards that are now being replaced by flat screen computing? What could be next? Balancing future needs with recent expenditures is a cost benefit analysis of the highest magnitude. The unlimited storage of the Cloud has freed up budgeting for expensive traditional storage but what about security and privacy concerns? The cottage industry that is educational technology produces more questions than answers about when to spend how much with whom on what.

CURRICULUM

Curriculum is being redefined constantly, from a Nation at Risk, to No Child Left Behind, to Race To The Top, to the current Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) that governs public education across the nation. Certainly what we teach, when we teach it, and how we teach it have changed almost as rapidly. The skills needed today for college and career success emphasize how to breakdown and synthesize information, the ability to read complex text, sharing work in a team, how to search for data and prove that it is valid, and how to present material in a clear and concise manner using multiple technologies.

Keeping curriculum current to match these skills has been much of the ongoing work done over the past few years under the umbrella of Race To The Top and the Common Core Initiative. It is still evolving as mentioned above regarding the discussion of including computer science as a curriculum requirement. Due to the budget constraints of 2009-2015 when the general fund budget only moved from \$21.0M in 2009 to \$21.3 in 2015 for a total increase over six years of 1.4%, the District is trying to catch up with technology needs as well as updating the curriculum in order to match the requirements of teaching and learning in 2017-2018 and beyond.

The District did make some headway with the addition of the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Technology position and during 2014-2017 saw several important improvements made. The curriculum has been mapped to current frameworks in scope and sequence and learning expectations have been set, but still training is needed for the next step which is assessment of evidence. Resources need to be set aside for teachers to develop assessments that will allow students to provide evidence of meeting learning outcomes that match content mastery to give all students opportunities to meet the demands of an ever changing workplace. The position of Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessments, or whatever one choses to call it, is sorely missed in FY18 because we simply did not have the funding to support it. This position is integral to continuing our curriculum and technology alignment to keep us moving forward with the best opportunities for our students. It is a must have position and must be restored for FY19; or we will continue to be mired in mediocrity and not have the chance for excellence.

We completed implementation of our K-5 literacy program with leveled reading book rooms in each school and we are using common assessments to assess student reading levels. This year

we are implementing Empowering Writers which is a comprehensive writing program for grades 1-5 giving us a solid reading and writing foundation to build on. Our Envisions Math Program is in the second full year of implementation for K-5 and this program provides content and continuity to prepare students with a solid foundation of computational and analytical skills to mastery the rigors of secondary level mathematics. The Middle School has implemented a complimentary program Big Ideas Math for grades 6 and 7 which will provide the bridge from elementary to high school. We have invested in the STARS Assessment system which allows teachers in Grades 2-9 to monitor student growth as well as to prepare interventions to insure student progress. This allows for data informed teaching and progress monitoring which will provide real time data and solutions for teachers and students.

The new science standards for K-8 need to be implemented and this will require a significant investment in books, materials, and professional development, estimated at a minimum of \$150,000. This has been cut out of the past two budgets along with the assistant superintendent position but both are integral to providing the support for the highest quality educational opportunities for our students. High School instructional materials and classroom supplies that had not been updated for a decade were budgeted and purchased in 2015 and 2016 and are enhancing a rigorous high school curriculum but need continuous review to prioritize where needs are from year to year.

We continue to have several important areas to address including: evaluating social studies curriculum, supporting social and emotional learning for many of our students, including Digital Citizenship as a part of K-12 curriculum, project based learning, addressing increased numbers of English language learners, and continued integration of technology supporting teaching and learning. These areas must be studied, resources allocated, and solutions implemented.

It cannot be stated often enough or with enough emphasis, the District needs to fully fund a position of curriculum leadership to continue the ongoing work of ensuring that BMRSD has an up to date, comprehensive, and effective curriculum for all students, in all grades, in all classrooms. If this cannot happen soon, then we will repeat the mistakes of the past (2009-2015) which have put us at a distinct disadvantage in offering our students relevant and quality educational opportunities to meet the demands of an ever changing world they will inherit.

IMPROVING INFRASTRUCTURE

All of our schools are in need of infrastructure improvements, with BMRHS and JFK facing the most immediate and pressing issues. AFM and MES have areas that need to be addressed and FWHMS has the fewest immediate concerns; but all schools must be included in the long term operation and maintenance planning for the District.

The District had Facility Overviews completed by NESDEC in 2015 of JFK and AFM as well as the High School and these reports are on the website and have served as the basis for our

application this past spring to the Mass School Building Authority. JFK is in the queue and is going through the process which will hopefully end in approval for renovations in spring 2018. The District will learn if BMRHS has been included in this round of funding by December 15, 2017. Much of the determination has to do with how many other projects are being considered and how much funding MSBA has to apply to the neediest facilities.

The installation of new roofs funded partially by MSBA on Millville Elementary, JFK and AFM Elementary and the High School were cost effective as the Massachusetts School Building Authority underwrote over 57% of the cost. However, it means that they must be maintained properly to get the maximum return on the investment as well as to provide safe educational environments for the next generation of students. We have met with consultants and are looking at all solar opportunities to help defray operational expenses.

Certainly, few would disagree that forty-seven and fifty-two year old schools need to have original building systems replaced. That these schools were allowed to deteriorate to the current condition is now ancient history. The District's facility and maintenance needs must be a part of both Blackstone and Millville's financial planning; as Blackstone will need to plan for a multimillion dollar renovation of JFK and a larger amount of its share of renovations of BMRHS and Millville must plan for a six figure much needed and urgent repair to MES as well as its share of the renovations of BMRHS. As an example, if the High School project was approved by MSBA and the total cost was \$25M, then MSBA would (hopefully) reimburse the District approximately 57% of the cost with the towns sharing the remaining 43% of the cost. MSBA would assume \$14,250,000 in this example, Blackstone approximately 71% of the remainder (based on enrollment) or \$7,632,500 and Millville's share would be 29% or \$3,117,500. Also for consideration are the repairs needed at MES as the water tank, oil tank, and fire-suppression system need immediate attention. The boilers, windows, and HVAC system will also need to be included in Millville's long term planning.

All of our schools get praise from vendors and visitors alike as to how well-maintained they are and how good they look for their age. This is a tribute to our custodial staff who go above and beyond every day to make sure that students and staff learn and work in a safe environment as well as protecting the investment of the taxpayers of our towns by their diligence in all they do to keep the buildings looking and functioning so well. This is made even more challenging this year as, due to budget limitations, we reduced an already thin custodial staff by 16%.

BUDGET PROJECTIONS

BMRSD General Fund 3 Year Budget Projection

Expenditure	FY18 Proposed	FY18 Actual	FY19 Projection	FY20 Projection	FY21 Projection
Administration(1000)	\$1,069,263	\$949,328	\$968,314	\$987,680	\$1,007,431
Instructional Services(2000)	\$13,151,860	\$12,978,059	\$13,367,401	\$13,701,586	\$14,044,127
Other School Services(3000)	\$2,514,998	\$2,288,515	\$2,357,170	\$2,416,099	\$2,476,502
Operations & Maint.(4000)	\$1,652,670	\$1,659,029	\$1,692,210	\$1,726,054	\$1,760,575
Fixed Charges(5000)	\$3,985,193	\$3,999,041	\$4,159,003	\$4,242,183	\$4,327,027
Fixed Assets(7000)	\$13,068	\$13,068	\$13,068	\$13,068	\$0
Out of District Tuition(9000)	\$612,200	\$571,432	\$600,000	\$630,000	\$661,500
Grand Total	\$22,999,252	\$22,458,471	\$23,157,166	\$23,716,670	\$24,277,162

These are the major cost centers that we account for, manage to, and report annually to DESE. Other School Services (3000) includes transportation, athletics, and music. Fixed Charges (5000) are made up of our benefits, primarily health insurance. As you will see in the General Fund Budget History chart below, the District's operating budget growth was restricted from FY2009-FY2015. The total increase during these six years was \$327,092 or a total percentage increase over six years of 1.6%. There were very few if any other districts in the state that saw this small an increase over these six years; years that saw new regulations, laws, and mandates on everything from special education, to curriculum and frameworks, to bullying, to accountability...and the list goes on.

The State Auditor's report released October 18, 2017 titled "Updating the Structure and Finance of MA Regional School Districts" bears that out, as for FY16, BMRSD ranked 56th out of 58 regional school districts in per pupil expenditure based upon enrollment. To many stakeholders credit, the budget increased during FY15-FY18 by \$1,135,947 or a total percentage increase over three years of 5.3%. We are catching up but there is more work to be done to properly fund BMRSD to provide our students with the best educational opportunities.

One important accounting factor to be considered in future planning is fulfilling the Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB) recommendation that funds must be set aside each year to meet Other Post-Employment Benefits (OPEB).

BUDGET HISTORY AND PER PUPIL EXPENDITURES

BMRSD General Fund Budget History

Fiscal Year	Actual Budget	Percentage Inc.-(Dec.)
FY09	\$20,995,432	
FY10	\$20,738,376	(1.2)
FY11	\$20,540,430	(1.0)
FY12	\$20,455,470	(0.4)
FY13	\$20,975,054	2.5
FY14	\$21,365,250	1.8
FY15	\$21,322,524	(0.2)
FY16	\$21,791,340	2.2
FY17	\$22,017,480	1.0
FY18	\$22,458,471	2.0
FY19	\$23,157,166	3.1
FY20	\$23,716,670	2.4
FY21	\$24,277,162	2.4

FY16 Per Pupil Expenditures

Norfolk Agricultural	\$22,039
Tri County	\$19,303
Blackstone Valley Tech	\$18,989
State Average	\$15,526
Mendon-Upton	\$15,033
Bellingham	\$14,351
Uxbridge	\$13,926
Milford	\$13,883
Blackstone-Millville	\$13,330

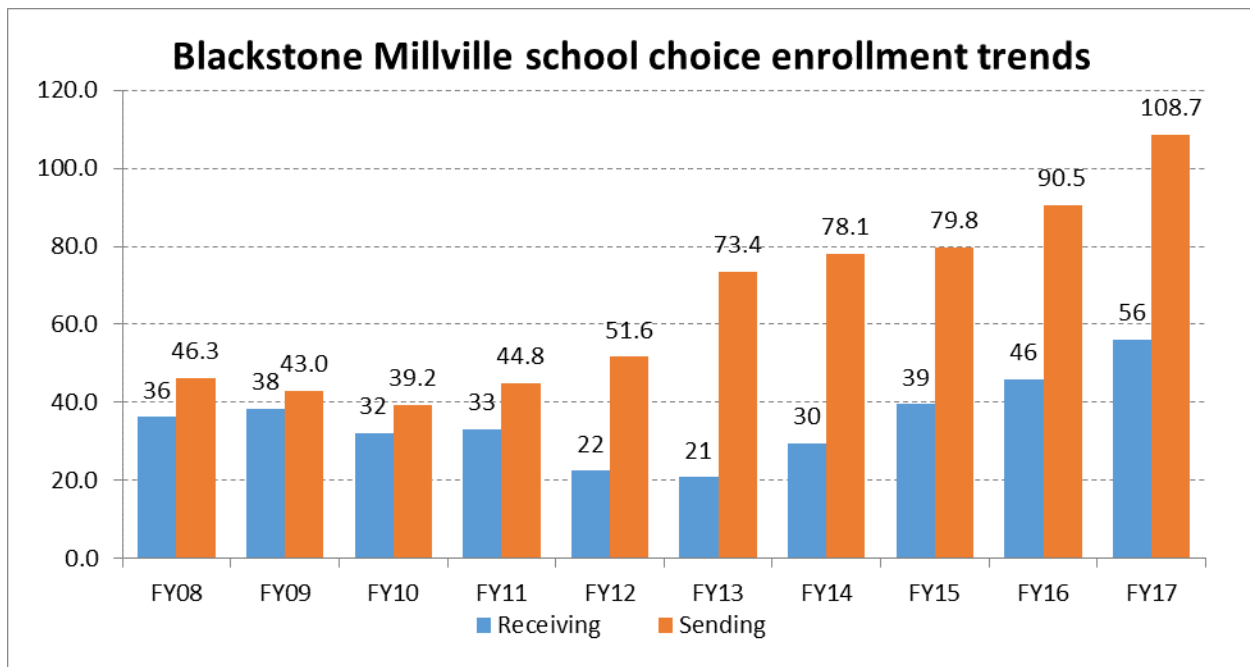
Another way to look at our funding levels is if we were at the state average for what we spent per pupil in FY16, we would have added \$3,807,864 to our operational budget. That is $15,526 - 13,330 = 2,196 \times 1,734$ (number of students) for a total budget in FY16 of $\$21,791,340 + \$3,807,864 = \$25,599,204$. That is spending at the state average of \$15,526 per pupil. The three year projected budget for FY19-FY21 has modest but systematic increases to meet our fixed costs which in FY18 are 94.4% of the budget as well as to sustain the growth needed in discretionary spending for curriculum, technology, supplies, athletics, and music which make up the rest (5.6%) of the FY18 budget.

The school choice enrollment charts that follow show the increase in students who choice out over the past ten years and the net increase in tuition charged which has a decreasing effect on the total state education aid for Blackstone and Millville's individual cherry sheets. One noticeable trend is that over the past ten years, the uneven budgets and minimal and unpredictable increases correspond to an increase in students who choose to choice out of the District, causing the cycle of lowered budgets moving students and the state dollars attached to them away from BMRSD. Over these past ten years, there have been five superintendents and that lack of continuity of stewardship does not help long term growth or sustainability.

SCHOOL CHOICE ENROLLMENT HISTORY

Blackstone-Millville Choice Enrollment and Tuition from 2008-2017

	Receiving		Sending	
FY	FTE Pupils	Tuition	FTE Pupils	Tuition
2008	36.2	\$218,144	46.3	\$257,576
2009	38.4	\$240,959	43.0	\$236,625
2010	32.1	\$198,647	39.2	\$212,553
2011	33.0	\$209,891	44.8	\$260,317
2012	22.4	\$146,900	51.6	\$278,091
2013	20.8	\$118,375	73.4	\$417,316
2014	29.5	\$147,596	78.1	\$467,866
2015	39.5	\$197,350	79.8	\$449,871
2016	45.8	\$246,347	90.5	\$507,522
2017	56.0	\$302,193	108.7	\$608,818



CONCLUSIONS

Blackstone-Millville Regional School District has demonstrated remarkable resiliency to have survived a decade of challenges; from unpredictable budgets, to turnover in staff, to five leadership changes, to a lack of support from certain stakeholders in both towns. There is much to be proud of in our District. My message to the entire staff at our back to school convocations is:

Be proud of where you work, be proud of what you do, be proud of who you are.

The choice is clear, do we continue to repeat the mistakes of the past ten years or do we learn from them and find the will to move forward as one educational community, supported by two towns willing to take on the planning and advocacy to create the sustainability and long term viability which is a universal goal. I have witnessed first-hand for three plus years the work of an incredibly dedicated, professional, and talented group of educators and staff who do their very best every day to provide the most outstanding education possible to every student with limited resources. With more support from just a few more residents, taxpayers, and town officials, this District would be able to furnish every student with the very best educational opportunities because we would have the additional resources and planned growth to accomplish just that. My hope is that all who read this Three Year Strategic and Financial Plan would come to the same conclusion.

Respectfully submitted,

Allen W. Himmelberger
Superintendent of Schools
Blackstone-Millville Regional School District

November 9, 2017

Sources Used In Compiling This Report:

1. Department of Elementary and Secondary Education website, www.doe.mass.edu
School Finance: Statistical Comparisons
2. Office of the State Auditor, *Updating the Structure and Finance of Massachusetts Regional School Districts*, Boston, MA, October 18, 2017
3. Blackstone-Millville Regional School District, Budget Reports for FY2009-FY2018