

Proposal to Newfound Area School District – Common Opportunities

Proposed by Bridgewater, Hebron and Groton to the Newfound Area School District

1. Background -- Legal Authority

The Governor recently signed HB 349 into law. This law is called enabling legislation. It grants legal authority to the Towns of Bridgewater, Hebron, and Groton to withdraw from the 7-town Newfound Area School District and establish a 3-town school district based on a K-8 model.

This authority is separate and distinct from the standard RSA 195 withdrawal process.

The creation of the new school district is contingent upon a majority vote in each of the 3 Towns at the 2024 annual town or special meeting. If voters approve, the effective operational date of the new school district is July 1, 2025.

This bill received widespread bi-partisan support in the legislature. It passed unanimously in both the House and Senate. All three state senators representing the 7-town Newfound Area School District (NASD) voted in favor and voiced strong support in committee hearings.

This bill also received overwhelming local support. Over 100 people from the three Towns attended both hearings and more than 350 citizens voiced their approval by signing in online in support of the bill.

Such widespread legislative and popular support confirms this excellent concept and a once-in-a-generation opportunity to improve education outcomes. Moreover, a smaller tight-knit school district allows greater voter input and control over education curriculum and costs, and shorter bus rides for Groton's students.

2. Next Steps.

The new law sets out a series of sequential steps over the next two years culminating in the July 1, 2025, operational date of the new school district.

The first step requires the Bridgewater, Hebron and Groton Select Boards to appoint a committee Planning Team to begin administrative planning for the new district "prior to the adoption vote" in 2024. **This Planning Team has been appointed.**

This Planning Team will begin 3-Town discussions on draft **Articles of Agreement** and a **capital budget** for the new school district. It will also begin preliminary discussions with the NASD on common opportunities like tuition agreements and superintendent services and transportation contracts.

The next step takes place at the 2024 annual town or special meeting. After the vote by the 3 towns to adopt the provisions of this act, the State Board of Education issues a “certificate of withdrawal” from the Newfound Area School District.

Follow-on steps include a special election for a new 3-Town School Board and Budget Committee. The act requires new School Board members to organize promptly “to take any action necessary to carry out the provisions of this law.”

Our vision is simple: we aspire to improve educational outcomes for our children with an innovative alternative to a traditional Middle School. We strive to do this by fulfilling the provisions of this act to establish a 3-Town school district and reconfiguring the Village District School to a K-8 model.

3. Elementary School Grades.

The responsibility of the current K-5 students in our towns will fall to the new Bridgewater-Hebron-Groton SAU. This will alter the availability of the BHVS for SAU4. We understand that several valuable educational programs serving the community are currently utilizing the space specifically the pre-K and some special education programs. If we are able to construct a close cooperative model between the districts, we can envision the continuation of a lease arrangement for those programs.

4. Middle School Grades.

Our Planning Team is considering an expansion of the grades served at the Village District School to include Middle School grades. This transition to a K-8 may take place over several years. We understand the withdrawal of the middle school students from NASD will result in a loss of revenue.

During that transition, we are willing to consider a model that potentially preserves a significant amount of that revenue for the NASD. We are open to a proposal from the district to enter a trial 2–3-year middle school tuition agreement with the possibility of renewal by mutual agreement.

There are three benefits to NASD;

- external revenue source, not dependent on NASD tax revenue; which generally augments arguments for bond ratings in the event of a bond issue
- continuity in staffing; and
- continuity in the educational community at large, the immediate loss of a large number of students has an impact on, sports, clubs and activities as well as classroom contribution.

5. High School Grades.

The Planning Team is also welcoming proposals for high school tuition agreements. As noted above, we understand that the withdrawal of our students will result in a loss of educational continuity and a loss of revenue for the NASD. We are willing to consider a model that potentially preserves much that revenue for the NASD.

To that end, we are open to a discussion with the NASD about a high school tuition agreement.

There are five benefits to NASD;

- external revenue source, not dependent on NASD tax revenue;
- continuity in staffing;
- maintenance of curricular breadth;
- a second, dependable revenue source for bonding/capital improvements;
- continuity in community.

6. Food Service, Curriculum, Transportation and other contracts.

Many of these contracts are multi-year and predicated on levels of utilization which may or may not be met after our exit. Depending on the outcome of the discussions in items number 3 and 4, the opportunity may exist for both SAUs to preserve preferential pricing based on combined volume.

7. Contracting for SAU Services.

Another common opportunity exists in the concept of contracting for SAU services. This model has been successfully used by the Middleton School District and provides revenue to the Governor Wentworth School District's SAU operations.

Our Team is entertaining discussions regarding various models for SAU Services. We are open to a proposal that would entail our new school district contracting with SAU 4 for SAU Services. This could yield the following potential benefits:

- Continuity in SAU staffing;
- Continuity in SAU revenue;
- Continued economies of scale;
- A Non-NASD revenue source;
- Opportunities for collaboration.