



GATEWAY REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Blandford Chester Huntington Middlefield Montgomery Russell
12 Littleville Road, Huntington, MA 01050

Project 211: Fix Funding Formula MA
Pegg Dragon -Blumenthal
School Committee Member 4 years
Gateway Regional School District
12 Littleville Avenue by
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I live in Huntington which is in western MA and have served on Gateway Regional School District's School Committee for 4 years. GRSD serves six rural towns-Huntington, Russell, Montgomery, Chester, Middlefield and Blandford. We have non-functioning counties in this state. Years ago after MA dissolved the county government structure, they then forced rural towns to form districts and to give up local elementary, middle and high schools. All of western MA has been divided into districts that cross the original county lines. At GRSD, we now have 2 elementary schools instead of the original 6 and one middle and high school (same building).

In most of the rural area, west of the Connecticut River, populations of towns are small. GRSD is largely mountainous rural land that totals 159.1 square miles. A high percentage of this area is state owned, park-land, not taxable by town, and not able to be privately developed. People from all over the state can come and use all the State-owned Conservation Property, but the pittance we receive as reimbursement means the tax burden falls on the residents of our six towns. We as tax payers, with schools are largest expense, must pay for all other expenses-road, police, town employees, fire, ambulance, etc. The combined population of the 6 towns of GRSD is 3751 people, with most towns having declining populations.

If the Federal Education Department closes School and sends aid funds back to Massachusetts, funds will be heavily distributed to Boston and its suburbs and the entire rural area, especially west of the Connecticut River will not receive what we need to provide adequate education.

This is happening now. We struggle to pay higher wages to attract quality teachers to rural MA. GRSD School Committee recently raised wages for teachers and substitute teachers to one of highest in region to compete and attract teachers. Some teachers agree to work beyond their contract to cover the lack of substitutes and because we must offer very small high school classes to have students receive the education they are entitled to.

While helpful to students, School Choice has harmed our GRSD high school because it is a one way policy- in grade 9-20% of our students leave for other schools. We are mandated to pay transportation and education costs to high school students who leave for vocational schools. And although we have developed 2 good Certification programs-Welding and Early Childhood, not offered in other choice districts, we can not offer these programs to other school students because we lack 5 options for students before they can transfer. In our school, we can only offer "unique" (not offered by other schools in the choice) programs according to state and that just is not possible. We had brochures ready, but could not send them to attract students so we can maintain student population and diversify.

We were denied by DESE aid for our very popular after school enrichment program that was the only program available for our population and serving at least 40 students per day. Because city programs, where students had multiple options, had the same number of 40 but consistent bodies attending, the state gave them aid over us.

Rural School Aid was promised of \$60 million. The real figure was a small fraction of that. School Transportation costs are a big expense in rural MA and students even primary grade students may commute up to 1 hour to and from school twice a day.

I heard President Trump wants to distribute Federal Education financial resources to different districts within the states. That would be great but the rural school districts in MA are governed by the State and they are "In Charge" and prefer huge schools systems, 15,000 students, and city education. Please remember us in these rural towns and districts in the Western Berkshires.

Sincerely,

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