

DRAFT

4. Flexible School Governance Is Essential to the Function, Sustainability and Excellence of Public Education (*Legislative Action Required*)

a. Provide districts with a wider array of governance options that would successfully address the typical challenges that cause towns and districts to back away or not consider regionalization. For example, expand the definition of what a school district is. Give towns the authority to create flexible cooperative agreements under 10-158(a) and recognize such agreements as a school district. This keeps the local boards of education intact (although they could be made smaller), maintains local fiscal controls **and autonomy**, and gives all towns in the partnership an equal voice as to the direction of their school district. If circumstances change, the partners will have the flexibility to adjust — something they don't have the authority to do in a traditional regional school district as defined by the state. **Because the local LEA interfaces with the federal government for performance reporting and grants, the LEA agreement will be in effect for at least three years following adoption. Per statute, teachers maintain their years of service when moved into a cooperative agreement, additional legislation should be drafted to allow them to keep years of service when moved out.**

The RPIP account, to facilitate flexible school district governance, could be used to pilot or for transition costs.

b. Enable regional school districts that have diminished enrollments resulting in decreased opportunities for students and disproportionately high tuition rates to initiate a comprehensive study regarding options to dissolve or reconstitute (add or delete grades to a regional system) their regional arrangement by a majority vote of the districts/towns involved; the current law requires a unanimous vote of each town. Dissolution of or withdrawal from a regional school district happens in a similar manner to formation of a regional district. A study committee is formed and, if recommended, the subject of dissolution or withdrawal is put to simultaneous referenda in each of the involved towns.

For the regional district to be dissolved, or for one or more towns to leave the regional district, all towns must vote affirmatively. The dissolution process cannot be initiated for at least three years after either a district is formed or a previous dissolution attempt. The further intent is to allow either most of the participating towns' legislative body or boards of education, to initiate this process.

c. Waive education space standard requirements for renovating existing facilities following regionalizing or housing inter-district cooperative programs. One of the only incentives offered to school districts regionalizing or jointly operating educational programs is a 10% bonus on construction reimbursement grants along with a favorable calculation of the overall grant percentage. Those grants are only available if the facility being renovated or constructed is within strict space standards set by DAS. This means that many districts consolidating and maintaining the use of existing facilities are not eligible for the bonus nor most of the construction reimbursement grant.

d. Enabling legislation be adopted granting voters in towns belonging to regional school districts the statutory authority to establish regional finance boards by a region-wide majority vote.

Members of regional finance boards would be appointed from local Boards of Finance to oversee the regional school district budget approval process.

15 d. Amend the school building project grant process (Section 10-283) to require that the grant be reviewed and approved by the Department of Administrative Services in consultation with SDE on any proposed school building project. Additionally, adding new requirements that such projects include “efforts made by such board to collaborate with other local or regional boards of education to reduce under-enrollment in the schools under the jurisdiction of such board and documentation that the application meets evidence-based practices on a school's size, enrollment and academic program, and documentation of the existing condition of the building that is the subject of a renovation, alteration or extension application”