

**NORTHAMPTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

**STRATEGIC PLAN**

January, 2009

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## **Strategic Planning Committee**

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Kathy Casale, Teacher, Bridge Street School  
Barbara Considine, Parent, Leeds School  
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Andrea Egitto, Teacher, Ryan Road School  
Joel Feldman, Parent, Bridge Street School  
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Claire Higgins, Mayor  
Michael Holroyde, Parent, Ryan Road School,  
Catherine Kay, Parent, J.F. Middle School  
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## **Future Management Systems, Inc. Consultants**

William Allen  
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## **Northampton Public Schools**

### **Strategic Plan**

#### **Overview**

From August through December, 2008, the Northampton Public School District carried out a strategic planning process. The purpose of this process was to provide a framework to guide the decisions of the school system over the next several years.

A Strategic Planning Committee (SPC) representing a cross section of the community was appointed by Mayor Higgins to work with Future Management Systems, Inc. consultants who facilitated the planning process. The strategic planning process began with an orientation meeting of the SPC in August to discuss the process/procedures and various activities that would be employed in developing a strategic plan. Over the ensuing weeks three focus groups were conducted along with in person and telephone interviews to solicit information and viewpoints from the community. At the same time the SPC met to review school system records and reports, as well as information from a wide range of external sources.

In setting the agenda for the strategic planning process the Request for Quotations issued in June stated in part, “The Northampton Public Schools are faced with an extraordinary challenge – to continue to provide high quality educational services with ever increasing costs and with drastically reduced revenues.” The statement was in reference to increases in health insurance, wages and utilities. No one, at that time, imagined the fiscal crisis that has overtaken the world since June and no one knows what the eventual impact of the crisis will be on our lives or the future of the school system.

What we do know is that the economy has become a major challenge. How this challenge will be met remains to be seen. There are many who believe the challenge will be met through the education of our children. The development of a strategic plan is essential to preserve the community’s core values for education.

The Strategic Planning Committee has tried to anticipate the economic difficulties facing Northampton in developing this strategic plan. The plan looks toward supporting the continued improvement of student performance, controlling expenses and seeking new revenue while adhering to core values.

#### **The Community’s Perceptions**

During the first three months of the strategic planning process an external assessment of the school system was undertaken to determine community perceptions of the school systems

strengths/successes, opportunities for growth and improvement and trends that would be likely to influence the district over the next several years. The perceptions were obtained through three focus groups and fourteen interviews of individuals representing a cross section of the community. **(See: Appendix A-External Environmental Scan.)**

The sense that emerged from this process is that there is a general satisfaction with the school system. At the same time a clear belief emerged that the school system (and city) is facing significant financial problems.

The focus groups and interviews revealed the core values of the community as they relate to the school system:

- A commitment to equity and meeting the needs of a diverse student body;
- A commitment to providing a strong educational program;
- A commitment to focusing on the whole child (academics, social, emotional, fine arts and physical);
- A commitment to small, community schools; and,
- A commitment to maintaining small class size(s).

The core values served to guide the Strategic Planning Committee as they conducted their review and developed their recommendations.

### **The School System**

The Northampton Public Schools are doing a good job educating the students they serve. The goal of the Northampton Public Schools is to engage each student through challenging academic experiences that stimulate thinking, foster creativity and encourage inquiry. The school system strives to help students become capable and confident lifelong learners who will contribute to the community and succeed in an evolving society. An internal scan of records and reports portrays a school system that is focused upon success for each student. **(See: Appendix B-Internal Scan.)**

Seven school systems with similar school enrollments and socio-economic profiles were identified by the SPC to serve as a comparison group. The communities are: Longmeadow, Ludlow, Gardner, East Longmeadow, Hudson, Belchertown and South Hadley. Northampton compared very well to this group of communities. **(See Appendix C-Comparison Communities.)** Among this group Northampton's 10<sup>th</sup> grade students ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> in MCAS performance and the Northampton student's performance on the SAT ranked 1<sup>st</sup>. Another indicator of the success of the Northampton Public Schools is the fact that 83% of the graduating class in 2008 stated they were planning to attend college in the Fall.

Under the leadership of School Superintendent Dr. Isabelina Rodriguez a successful completion of initiatives across the school system has taken place. The initiatives, the focus of the District

Improvement Plan, have been completed in the areas of: equal access and student achievement, curriculum and professional development, facilities management, financial management and school and community relations. These accomplishments were achieved through the dedication and hard work of the school systems leadership team, principals, teachers and support staff.

These district wide accomplishments, as well as the continued improvement of student performance, have taken place in the face of ongoing losses of teaching, clerical and administrative positions. At the same time, the budgets for teaching supplies and textbooks were reduced and fees continued to increase. (See **Appendix D-School System Losses.**)

The school system has been following a School Improvement Plan for the past three years that has resulted in steady progress and improvement. This strategic plan recommends that the improvement effort already underway be continued. How to fund this ongoing and essential effort is the question to be resolved.

### **Mission Statement**

The mission of the Northampton Public Schools, in partnership with parents, guardians and the Northampton community, is to promote and support high achievement by each student in a safe, healthy, secure environment and to enable each student to become a critical thinker and a socially responsible citizen in a global society.

The Strategic Planning Committee formulated recommendations in the context of this mission statement, the community's core values for the school system and the feedback from the focus groups and interviews. The recommendations are presented in three (3) parts. The first part contains the strategic themes and goals to which the school system's improvement plan shall be aligned over the next five years. The second part contains recommendations in specific program areas for continued development or exploration. The third part contains recommendations for possible savings and revenue sources for the school committee to consider as they face the difficult task of funding the school system in the future.

### **Recommendations – Themes and Goals**

Theme 1 - Learning Results: The Northampton Public School System is committed to ensuring equal access to education for each student.

Goal 1A: Provide a balanced, coordinated and comprehensive K – 12 curriculum that will meet the academic needs of each student.

Goal 1B: Provide instruction, services and support for the wide range of student needs to ensure continuous academic growth, improvement and success.

## Theme 2 - Professional Development

Goal: Provide a coordinated professional development program focused upon supporting instruction and curriculum improvement.

## Theme 3 – Finances and Operations

Goal: Develop a multi-year financial plan that clearly describes the relationship between the budget, instruction and student performance.

## Theme 4 – Community Connections and Communications

Goal: Create a school system that is respectful and welcoming of the diverse members of the community and integrating them into the school culture.

### **District Improvement Plan**

The Northampton Public Schools have been following a District Improvement Plan for the past four years. The District Improvement Plan is a well designed plan that has, with some success, been able to focus the school system’s resources and energy on the improvement of student performance and efforts to reduce the achievement gap.

The District Improvement Plan articulates goals, milestones, outcomes and responsibilities that reflect the themes and goals that emerged during the strategic planning process. The findings of the strategic planning process have validated the work that has been accomplished over the past four years and strongly supports the continuation of those efforts.

The challenge now will be to support and sustain the work that is underway.

(The District Improvement Plan is available at the Office of the Superintendent or the District’s web site: [www.nps.northampton.ma.us](http://www.nps.northampton.ma.us))

### **Recommendations – Program Consideration**

The Strategic Planning Committee explored several areas that emerged during the overall review of school system programs. **(See Appendix E- Program Recommendations.)** As a result of the review the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Continue to focus on the improvement of minority student achievement.
2. Continue the development of cost effective special education programming.

3. Consider fully implementing the middle school model at the John F. Kennedy Middle School.
4. Continue to study the elimination of curriculum gaps that may result from the long block schedule at Northampton High School.
5. Consider joining the Virtual High School Program.

### **Recommendations – Revenue/Savings**

A major area of consideration for the Strategic Planning Committee was to review all of the possible cost savings and/or revenue opportunities that are available to the school committee for consideration. The review was extensive and resulted in five recommendations.

**(See Appendix F-Revenue/Savings Recommendations.)**

1. School Choice: It is recommended that the number of seats available for out of district school choice students be expanded to the maximum possible.
2. Regionalization of the School System: It is recommended that the school committee explore regionalizing the school system or services and/or programs with other communities as soon as possible.
3. Consolidating Some Services with the City: It is recommended that the school committee continue exploring the consolidation of some services with the city.
4. Consolidating Central Administration: It is recommended that the special education office be moved into the central office.
5. Proposition 2 ½ Override: It is recommended that a Proposition 2 ½ Override be placed before the voters.

### **Savings Options Explored – No Recommendation**

There were two areas in which savings could be realized that were not endorsed by the Strategic Planning Committee. The two areas are closing one elementary school and limiting school bus transportation to that which is required by law. **(See Appendix G-School Closing – School Bus Transportation.)**

The options were thoroughly reviewed. However, the SPC cannot recommend either of them to the School Committee because each is in conflict with the core values the community has for the school system. The Strategic Planning Committee recognizes that it is the responsibility of the school committee to review and consider both of these options as they look to the future of the school system.



## **Conclusion**

The Strategic Planning Committee conducted a thorough review of the school system's operations. The Northampton Public Schools are well managed and are focused on the continued improvement of student performance during a period of forced reduction of programs and personnel.

The financial crisis that has overtaken the country presents both problems and opportunities. The recommendations that are made represent a plan to address the problems and opportunities that confront the Northampton School Committee, the school system and the community.

## **Appendix A**

### External Environmental Scan

**Northampton Public Schools**  
**Strategic Planning Process**  
**External Environmental Scan**

**Future Management Systems, Inc.**  
**October 7, 2008**

## **Northampton Public Schools**

### **External Environmental Scan**

During the first three months of the Northampton strategic planning process Future Management Systems, Inc. conducted an external environmental scan to assess organizational readiness and analyze trends that could impact the strategic planning process. The assessment of organizational readiness focused on determining perceptions of members of the Northampton community about the school system's strengths/successes, opportunities for growth and improvement and trends that would likely influence the school system over the next several years. The perceptions were obtained through three focus groups conducted during September and early October and interviews of fourteen individuals representing a cross section of the community during the same time period.

The sense that emerged from this process is that there is a general satisfaction with the school system and that the school system (and the city) is facing significant financial problems.

#### **Strengths/Successes**

The strengths/successes of the school system are seen by many to be:

- Small, community elementary schools.
- Small class size.
- Focus on the whole child (safe, nurturing, supportive environment).
- Excellent and committed teachers and principals.
- Quality and well maintained facilities.

#### **Opportunities for Growth and Improvement**

The opportunities for growth and improvement that emerged are:

- Multi-year (long term) financial planning.
- Greener approach to operations.
- Increased staff diversity (cultural, linguistic and racial).
- Support differentiated instruction/challenge all students.
- More coordination of curriculum and programs.
- Expand professional development.
- Continue to improve classroom instruction.
- More access to cultural opportunities (art, music, languages).
- Address the achievement gap.
- Change high school start time (later).

- Restore lost positions and programs.
- Build non-traditional partnerships between the schools and Community/businesses.
- Weed out teachers who are not committed.

**Comment:**

The overriding issue that emerged from both the focus groups and the interviews is that of financial planning for the school system. It is an issue that cuts across all aspects of the school system, as well as the community. The formula for providing state aide to Northampton in the form of Chapter 70 funding has not been adequate nor has it kept pace with increasing operational costs; the residents of Northampton are being asked to pay more in local property taxes to support the schools; and, the school system is trying to increase revenue from external sources. There is a clear sense that increased revenue for the operations of the schools will have to be sought to maintain the existing services.

There is a strongly held view that one of the strengths of the school system has been small class size from pre-K through high school. In addition many expressed the belief that the small, community elementary schools are an important asset.

The opportunities for growth and improvement that were of a higher priority fell into four areas. The first, as mentioned above, was financial planning. Secondly, there is a widely held view that the school system should seek to employ a more diverse staff (cultural, linguistic and racial). Third, three opportunities were identified that relate to the classroom and teaching: curriculum and instruction, coordination of curriculum and expanded professional development. Finally, many expressed the opinion that the school system’s operations should reflect a “greener” approach.

**Core Values**

During the course of conducting the focus groups and the interviews, as well as the review of school system documents, the values that the community holds for the school system were revealed. The core values are:

- A commitment to equity and meeting the needs of a diverse student body;
- A commitment to providing a strong educational program;
- A commitment to focusing on the whole child;
- A commitment to small, community elementary schools; and,
- A commitment to maintaining small class size(s).

## **Trends**

The participants in the focus groups and those who were interviewed were asked to identify trends that might influence the operation of the school system over the next several years. There was a fair level of consistency in the responses.

- Demographic changes: Aging population, fewer students.
- Revenue vs. Expenditures/Funding formula.
  - Energy cost increases
  - Increases in health insurance costs
- Standardized testing (MCAS)
- Technology

## **Comment:**

While there is a general agreement that the issue of funding the schools must be faced and resolved, some disagreement was expressed in the area of demographic trends. Some of those participating in the last focus group (10/01/08) expressed the view that the number of students enrolling in the school system is not in decline and that their review of data indicates that enrollment will remain steady or increase somewhat.

The information provided to us by the school system indicates a declining trend in school enrollment. Some of this decline has been offset by admitting students from other communities under the provisions of the school choice program.

The city's Director of Planning and Development said during an interview that the city's overall population growth is flat. He does not believe the student enrollment will increase. He pointed out that the "Hospital Hill" development is the biggest source of a potential population bubble, but considering a number of factors he believes the number of children likely to reside in these homes will not cause an increase to the school population.

## **Conclusion**

The Strategic Planning Committee is in the position of being able to move forward with the next phase of the planning process, that of identifying the strategic focus for the Northampton Public Schools for the next five years. The internal and external scans have identified areas of potential strategic focus within the context of the following themes:

1. Learning results (Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment)
2. Professional Development
3. Operations
4. Community Connection/Communication

The task that remains is to agree upon the areas of focus and to develop the strategic goals and/or objectives and to identify the resources that are available to support them.

## **Methodology**

The methodology employed in completing the external scan included conducting three focus groups, conducting fourteen interviews and reviewing archival records.

1. Focus Groups: A focus group is a form of quantitative research in which a group of people are asked their opinions or attitudes toward, in this case, the school system. Focus groups are an important tool for acquiring feedback. There are limitations with all forms of qualitative research, but we believe in this instance the data/feedback obtained are valid.

Three (3) focus groups were conducted in September and early October. The first two focus groups were comprised of invitees from a representative cross section of the community.\* Approximately 80% of the 150 people who were invited to participate did so. The third focus group was one for which an “open invitation” had been extended through local media outlets. About 30 residents participated in this session.

Each session was held in the evening and was two (2) hours long. The participants were asked to individually respond to four questions after which they were asked to share and combine their responses with others sitting at their tables. The responses for each table were collected on large sheets of paper and posted on the wall. At the conclusion of each session as the participants left the room they were given the opportunity to vote for their choices of the most significant priority responses from among those posted.

2. Interviews; Fourteen (14) individuals were interviewed between August and November. The individuals interviewed were selected from among lists that were provided by the mayor and superintendent of schools and they represented a cross section of the community consistent with those who were invited to participate in the focus groups.

The interviews lasted from one-half hour to one hour. Several questions were asked that paralleled those that were asked during the focus groups and the responses to the questions followed very closely the feedback that was obtained from those groups.

3. Archival Record Review: a significant source of information obtained during the strategic planning process has come from records that are maintained by the school department, the city and the Commonwealth. All of the records that were reviewed are cited at appropriate points in the report.

### **\*Northampton Focus Group Invitees**

- All elected city officials
- All city department heads (police, fire, DPW, etc.)
- Representatives from city appointed committees
- Key business leaders
- Heads of local and state agencies (government and not for profit groups)
- School administrators
- Teacher representative from each school
- Union leadership
- Parent representative from each school council

These invitees received a letter of invitation from the Northampton School Committee to participate in one or the other of the first two focus group meetings in September.

An “open invitation” to the Northampton community to participate in the third focus group meeting in late September was issued through local media outlets.



## **Appendix B**

### **Internal Environmental Scan**

**Internal Scan**

**Prepared for**

**Northampton Public Schools Strategic Planning Committee**

**By**

***Future Management Systems***

**October 7, 2008**

**Internal Scan  
Northampton Public Schools**

As result of an internal scan of school department documents and reports the following trends in enrollment, student achievement, finance (budget), transportation, substitute teachers, legal expenses, overtime expense, out of district tuition and utility costs have been determined.

**District Enrollment K-12**

1989	3,084	Male	1,408
2004	2,923	Female	1,385
2008	2,793	Total	2,793

Student enrollment appears to be declining. The Strategic Planning Committee believes the matter of future enrollment is uncertain. However, the City's Director of Planning and Development believes the city's school age population will continue to decline over the next twenty (20) years. (See Northampton Schools Strategic Planning: Demographic Background and Sustainable Northampton)

**District Enrollment by Race and Ethnicity 2007-2008**

<b><i>Race</i></b>	<b><i>% of District</i></b>
African American	3.5
Asian	4.5
Hispanic	13.2
Native American	0.2
White	75.3
Multi Race-non Hispanic	3.3

**District Enrollment**

***% of District***

(Source: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education/Indicators)

Grade 9 drop out rate	1.9%
Attendance rate	94.9%
Average # of days absent	8.8%
In school suspension rate	7.6%
Out of school suspension	4.1%
Retention rate 2006-2007	0.9%
Graduation rate	90.2%
First language not English	8.1%
Limited English proficient	1.6%

	<b>Northampton K-12</b>	<b>State</b>
Low income	27.5%	29.5%
Special Education	20.1%	16.9%

Plans of High School graduates

College	83%
Other post secondary	1%
Work	6%
Military	4%

**Student Achievement**

Relative to the question of a student achievement gap for the years 2004 to 2008 the data suggests the following:

The percentage of white, ALANA, (*African American, Latino, Asian, Native American*) low income and SPED students achieving proficiency on MCAS tests with performance levels of “proficient”, “advanced”, or, for third grade, “Proficient +” in grades 3,4,5,6,7,8,9, and 10 (Sept 30, 2008) is as follows:

<b>English</b>			
White	2004	81%	2008 81%
ALANA	2004	59%	2008 70%
Difference		22%	11%
<i>Gap closing</i>			
Not low income	2004	79%	2008 80%
Low income	2004	43%	2008 48%
Difference		36%	32%
<i>Gap closing</i>			
Not SPED	2004	79%	2008 81%
SPED	2004	23%	2008 25%
Difference		56%	56%
<i>No change</i>			

**Math**

White	2004	60%	2008	61%
ALANA	2004	39%	2008	40%
Difference		21%		21%

*No change*

Not low income	2004	55%	2008	60%
Low income	2004	23%	2008	25%
Difference		32%		35%

*Gap widening*

Not SPED	2004	57%	2008	61%
SPED	2004	10%	2008	18%
Difference		47%		43%

*Gap closing*

**Budget**

Chapter 70 funding (State assistance to public schools) trend.

**FY 2003**

Student enrollment	2,985
Ch 70 aid	\$8,032,387
Required net school spending (Education Reform Foundation Budget)	\$21,870,648
Actual net school spending	\$24,137,732 ( <i>includes municipal indirect spending</i> )
\$\$\$ over requirement	\$2,267,084
% over requirement	10.4

**FY 2008**

Student enrollment	2,858 (127 decline)
Ch 70 aid	\$7,068,616
Required net school spending	\$24,994,181
Actual net school spending	\$29,107,743 ( <i>includes municipal indirect spending</i> )
\$\$\$ over requirement	\$4,113,562
% over requirement	16.5

State assistance is declining and local contribution is increasing. This will more than likely continue for the foreseeable future due to steady or declining enrollment, outdated Foundation Formula and an uncertain economy.

**FY 2009 Budget**

Local appropriation	\$23,187,479
Total grants, State and Federal	\$1,397,666
Total other funds such as School Choice, revolving accounts, rental income, bus fees, circuit breaker and donations	\$2,792,102
Total budget	<u>\$27,377,247</u> (does not include municipal indirect spending)

New funds available in FY 2009 = \$510,136

This budget shows a growing reliance upon “soft money” (grants, choice, etc.) totaling \$4,189,768 in FY 2009. It is further noted that \$600,000 of this sum is “one time” funding.

**Transportation**

FY 2008 Year to date	Regular	\$475,233.60
	Fuel escalation clause	23,842.30
	SPED	412,678.73
	NCLB	12,451.05
Total appropriation		985,277.00
Estimated year end		\$925,932.80

Currently the school district transports 1,340 K-12 students. State law requires transportation be provided for students in grades K-6 who live two miles or more from the school they attend. There are approximately 350 students in this category.

**Substitute Teachers**

FY 2004 Budget \$251,590 Actual \$474,959.08 (conversion to Munis software)  
 FY 2008 Budget \$350,000 Actual \$338,242.19

**Legal Expenses**  
**Regular & SPED**

FY 2004 Budget \$57,200    Actual \$46,852  
FY 2008 Budget \$108,800    Actual \$111,527.66

**Overtime Expense**

Technology staff, clerical, custodial, secretary to school committee

FY 2004 Budget \$48,000    Actual \$103,135.51 (*conversion to Munis software*)  
FY 2008 Budget \$90,208    Actual \$68,019.28

**Out of District Tuition from Local Budget**

FY 2004	\$900,873.00
FY 2008	\$1,297,761.14

**Utility Costs**

**Gas, electricity, water, sewer**

FY 2004	\$592,965
FY 2007	\$968,673.54
FY 2008	\$837,786.76

Average utility increase over the past four years is 16.7%

**Observations**

There has been a decline in student population and a growing reliance upon incoming school choice students to maintain enrollment numbers. It appears that there is some local conflict over the validity of enrollment trends. According to the local planners office Northampton is flat in terms of population growth and this somewhat bucks the downward trend seen in other cities. The city is benefiting from a perception that it is a good place in which to retire and live, which helps with overall population, but does not bring increasing numbers of children into the school system. The trend then is an increase in empty nesters, and a decline in school age children, along with a decrease in 18 to 22 year olds who are electing to leave the city—the so called missing cohort.

Stated plans of high school seniors, as opposed to what they actually end up doing, is something the school department is pursuing with assistance from Northeastern University. NU is matching HS student ID #'s with College ID #'s to determine where students have actually ended up.

Closing the achievement gap (based on MCAS proficiency) between white, ALANA, low income and SPED students is showing some progress in English with little change in math.

The local school budget (FY2009) shows a decline in state assistance and an increasing reliance upon local funding as well as “soft money” in the form of state/federal grants and school choice income. There appears to be a continuing conflict between what is desired and what the city can afford.

The increasing cost of transporting school children appears to be a concern with eligibility for all at one end of the continuum as opposed to eligibility for those entitled to be transported by law at the other end—a difference of 1,000 students.

Substitute teachers, legal expenses, overtime expense, out of district tuition payments and utility costs are areas that are trending up or up and down.

The possibility of school closing and redistricting is a question that remains to be answered and more information will be provided after further interviews with the School, Planning and Central Services Departments.



## **Appendix C**

### Comparison Communities

**NORTHAMPTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
STRATEGIC PLANNING  
COMPARISON COMMUNITIES**

<i>COMMUNITY</i>	<i>STUDENTS FTE/ ENROLLMENT</i>	<i>PER PUPIL EXPENDITURE</i>	<i>TEACHER RATIO</i>	<i>SPED ENROLLMENT</i>	<i>LOW INCOME</i>	<i>1ST LANGUAGE NOT ENGLISH</i>	<i>SPED % OF BUDGET</i>	<i>SCHOOL CHOICE</i>	<i>08 NET SCHOOL CHOICE</i>
LONGMEADOW	3201.6 3157	\$10,140.0 0	236 13.4 TO 1	17.0%	3.8%	3.7%	22.1%	YES K-12	\$390,929
LUDLOW	3087.6 3111	\$10,087.0 0	216 14.4 TO 1	17.4%	18.0%	8.3%	22.0%	YES K-12	\$517,734
GARDNER	2924.6 2914	\$9,532.00	181 16.1 TO 1	17.0%	34.8%	6.3%	24.2%	YES K-12	\$562,528
NORTHAMPTON	2855.8 2793	\$10,982.0 0	215 13.0 TO 1	20.1%	27.5%	8.1%	21.6%	YES K12	\$643,247
EAST LONGMEADOW	2850.5 2863	\$9,692.00	201 14.3 TO 1	22.7%	6.7%	2.3%	24.6%	NO	(\$39,519)
HUDSON	2812.9 2904	\$11,531.0 0	214 13.6 TO 1	20.8%	14.9%	12.7%	24.1%	YES K-12	\$658,743
BELCHERTOWN	2689.5 2681	\$9,164.00	168 16.0 TO 1	16.0%	13.3%	2.0%	25.6%	YES K, 4- 5,8,11- 12	(\$132,477)
SOUTH HADLEY	2370.9 2285	\$10,325.0 0	166 13.8 TO 1	16.4%	16.1%	1.7%	22.3%	YES K-4, 8-9	\$391,329

**NORTHAMPTON PULIC SCHOOLS  
STRATEGIC PLANNING  
COMPARISON COMMUNITIES**

<b>MCAS</b>						<b>SAT</b>		
<i>COMMUNITY</i>	<i>SUBJECT</i>	<i>5TH GR. % PROF/ADV</i>	<i><u>RANK</u> (OF 912)</i>	<i>10TH GR. % PROF/ADV</i>	<i>RANK (OF 349)</i>	<i>READING</i>	<i>WRITING</i>	<i>MA</i>
LONGMEADOW	ENGLISH	78%	59	90%	52			
	MATH	67%	66	84%	79	554	554	56
LUDLOW	ENGLISH	56%	225	77%	159			
	MATH	49%	195	72%	167	478	468	49
GARDNER	ENGLISH	64%	160	76%	164			
	MATH	36%	268	67%	211	491	484	48
NORTHAMPTON	ENGLISH	75%	75	88%	71			
	MATH	50%	183	83%	84	575	563	57
EAST LONGMEADOW	ENGLISH	76%	68	88%	71			
	MATH	65%	75	82%	94	490	494	51
HUDSON	ENGLISH	66%	150	78%	149			
	MATH	56%	143	70%	188	506	509	51
BELCHERTOWN	ENGLISH	59%	205	84%	109			
	MATH	43%	239	75%	151	509	507	50
SOUTH HADLEY	ENGLISH	56%	225	74%	183			
	MATH	36%	268	71%	179	484	488	50

## **Appendix D**

### **School System Losses (Budget Reductions)**

**NORTHAMPTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
BUDGET REDUCTIONS  
PERSONNEL AND PROGRAMS**

**FY08:**

1.0 Receptionist/Clerical in Superintendent's Office  
0.20 Reduce Payroll Position by 20% in Superintendent's Office  
0.25 Reduce Central Registration/School Choice Position by 25% in Superintendent's Office  
4.00 ESP's  
0.40 ELL Position at Jackson Street School  
2.0 Classroom Teachers at Leeds and Ryan Road  
0.83 Business Teacher at NHS  
0.60 Foreign Language at JFK  
9.28 Total Positions Cut

Also cut IOWA's, delayed purchase of Social Studies Textbooks, cuts to supplies

**FY07:**

Increased Bus Fees and Athletic Fees  
Reduced District Dr.  
Eliminated Elementary Instrumental Music  
Cut Supplies

**In the recent past have eliminated:**

Eliminated Grant Writer Position  
Elementary Remedial Reading  
Elementary Vice Principals  
Elementary PE was eliminated in FY04 but brought back after Pothole Grant  
Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum  
Supplies  
Maintenance  
Elementary Curriculum Coordinator

**ELEMENTARY BUDGET CUTS SINCE 1980'S**

- Art and Music reduced to one 40-minute period per week (from two)
- PE reduced to one 30-minute period for 2002-2003 school year, eliminated for half of 2003-2004 school year, restored to two 30minute periods in February 2004
- FLES (Foreign Language in the Elementary Schools)

- Elementary Science Coordinator
- Elementary Health Teacher
- Elementary Librarian
- Desegregation/Civil Rights/School Choice Coordinator (1996)
- Elementary Vice Principals (2003)
- Recess and Playground Teacher Aides (2004)
- Elementary Curriculum Coordinator (2003)
- Elementary School Counselors (reduced from 8 FTE to 4 FTE – 2002)
- Elementary English as a Second Language Teachers (by 1.6 FTE) 2003
- Elementary Transitional Bilingual Education Teacher (2003)
- Title I Math teachers (3 FTE) 2003
- Title I Reading teachers (4FTE) 2002
- 1<sup>st</sup> Grade classroom aides 2002
- Custodians (4 part-time) 2002
- Classroom teachers – difficult to determine how many since some were through declining enrollment but also some have been cut by increasing class size at upper grades over the years

JFK Staffing reductions 1998 - 2008

FY	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	Change
English	6	6	6	6	6	5.2	5.2	5.2	5.2	5.2	5	-1
Reading	5	5	5	5	4.4	3	3	3	4	4	4	-1
Phys. Ed.	4.8	4.8	4.8	4.8	4.8	4	4	4	4	4	4	-0.8
Health	2	2	2	2	2.1	0	0	0	0	0	0	-2.1
Grade 6	11	11	11	11	10	10	9	10	9	9	9	-2
Exploratory	11	11	11	11	11	9	9	9	9	9	9	-2
ELL	1.8	1.8	2	2.2	2	2	0.4	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.6	-1.4
World Language	4.4	4.4	4.8	5.2	5.2	5.2	5	5	5	4.8	4.6	-0.6
School Adj. Counsel.	1.4	1.4	1.4	1.4	1.4	1	1	1	1	1	1	-0.4
ESP	not avail.	not avail.	not avail.	not avail.	not avail.	not avail.	not avail.	not avail.	not avail.	not avail.	not avail.	-1
Band	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	-0.5
Custodian	7	7	7	7	8	8	7	7	7	7	7	-1
Total												-12.2

**FY 03:** Health was eliminated as an every other day half year course for 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders to a unit taught in Physical Education. JFK changed the daily schedule from an 8 period day to a 7 period day due to budget cuts. In addition to the reductions indicated above, teacher team meeting time was reduced from a period every day to a period every other day. Grade 6 World Language was changed from every other day for a full year to every day for 12 weeks. Band was reduced from an every day class to every other day.

## **Appendix E**

### **Program Recommendations**

Improving Minority Student Achievement  
Special Education  
Middle School Model  
Northampton High School – Long Block Schedule  
Virtual High School



## **Improving Minority Student Achievement**

The Strategic Planning Committee (SPC) explored the question of an achievement gap between white and minority students defined as African American, Latino, Asian, Native American (ALANA), low income and SPED and determined the following for grades 3, 4,5,6,7,8,9 and 10 in the aggregate:

- Data for the years 2004 to 2008 indicate the gap between white and ALANA students achieving proficiency on the MCAS **English assessment** test is closing. Similarly, the gap between Not low income and Low income is also closing. The gap between Not SPED and SPED students for the same time period has not changed.
- Data for the years 2004 to 2008 indicate the gap between white and ALANA students achieving proficiency on the MCAS **math assessment** test has not changed. The gap between Not low income and Low income has widened slightly while the gap between Not SPED and SPED is closing.

The district continues to make progress in narrowing the achievement gap.

### **The strengths associated with this effort are:**

- Continuing program support for minority students as defined above;
- Continuing effort to understand the lives of minority students and the barriers to school achievement;
- Continuing effort to improve access to care such as nursing and counseling services;
- Continuing to help parents become more comfortable with their school;
- Continuing to provide tutoring at public housing;
- Continuing to explore summer school tuition remission and or scholarships; and,
- Continuing membership in the Education Alliance Network for Diversity at Brown University. The Alliance is committed to developing cultural awareness, providing high-level, challenging, culturally relevant curriculum and instruction, collaborating with parents and families and making classroom assessment equitable and valid for all students.

### **The negative aspects of this effort are:**

- None

### **Other considerations are:**

- How will funding for these initiatives be supported in the future?
- Explore membership in the Minority Student Achievement network.

**The background information relative to narrowing the achievement gap between white and minority students that was reviewed by the Strategic Planning Committee included:**

- Presentation of district analysis of MCAS results by Bill Dornbusch, District Technology Coordinator
- Internal Scan prepared by Future Management Systems
- Minority Student Achievement Network Overview

## **Special Education**

The Strategic Planning Committee (SPC) explored special education programming in the district and determined that overall the SPED Department is doing a good job meeting the needs of children in its care. When compared to seven (Longmeadow, Ludlow, Belchertown, Hudson, South Hadley, Gardner and East Longmeadow) other similar communities the Northampton SPED Department fared very well. Comparatively speaking, Northampton ranked second highest (20.1%) in the percentage of students enrolled in special education programs while ranking lowest in the percent of the district budget (21.6%) spent on special education.

While the percentage of students receiving special services is higher than comparison communities, as well as the state average, the percentage of the overall budget allocated to students with special needs reflects the economic efficiency of the department. Another area worthy of note is a comparison that was done to answer the question of how the SPED program is doing with regard to MCAS performance when compared to other communities similar to Northampton. Four communities were examined (Ludlow, Gardner, So Hadley and Longmeadow) and Northampton ranked second in overall performance for grades 3, 8 and 10. It is also worth noting that Northampton performed better than three other communities in the group that also have early intervention programs. The last accomplishment that speaks to the ongoing success of the SPED department is the 2006-2007 graduation rate for Northampton students with IEP's, which was 71.9%. This graduation rate exceeded the state target of 61.7% by 10.2%.

### **The pros associated with this program are:**

- Continuing early identification of potential special needs students through the Community Partnership program.
- Continuing effort to collaborate with willing partners to reduce the cost of out of district transportation
- Continuing effort to identify less costly quality alternatives for out of district placements
- Continuing effort to support more professional development opportunities for special needs teachers in the area of a three tiered reading approach

### **The cons associated with this program are:**

- None

### **Other considerations are:**

- Explore the creation of a therapeutic pre-school
- Examine the use of Para-professionals and duty assignments for elementary teachers

**The background information relative to SPED programming that was reviewed by the Strategic Planning Committee included:**

- Presentation by Craig Jurgensen, Director of Special Education
- October 1, SIMS Data: nature of primary Disability (DOE 36)
- Northampton School Department SPED STAFF FOR FY 2009 BUDGET report
- School District Profile, DESE
- Northampton Public Schools Strategic Planning Comparison Communities, data source DESE
- Comparative Data on Sub-group performance assessment, data source DESE

**Recommendation:**

Move SPED Department office to the Central School Department Office Complex.

## **Middle School Model**

The Strategic Planning Committee (SPC) explored the Middle School Model that is in place at JFK Middle School. The JFK School Council and the school community fully embrace the best practices of the middle school model, and are dedicated to educating and supporting students consistent with the recommendations of “Turning Points” (Carnegie Corporation, 1998) as described below:

- Teach a curriculum grounded in rigorous, public academic standards based on how students learn best;
- Use instructional methods designed to prepare all students to achieve high standards and become lifelong learners;
- Staff middle grade schools with teachers who are experts at teaching young adolescents, and engage teachers in ongoing, targeted professional development opportunities;
- Organize relationships for learning to create a climate of intellectual development and a caring community of shared educational purpose;
- Govern democratically, through direct or representative participation by all school and staff members;
- Provide a safe and healthy school environment as part of improving academic performance and developing caring and ethical citizens; and,
- Involve parents/guardians and communities in supporting student learning and healthy development.

### **The strengths of this model are:**

#### *Teaming*

- Smaller learning environments for students;
- Parent/guardian communication;
- Integrated curriculum; and,
- Team meetings to support instruction, curriculum and students.

#### *Organizing relationships for learning and support*

- Nurturing community for students;
- Safe, supportive environment fostering trust and encouraging risk-taking;
- Embedded support for continued individual social and academic progress;
- Exploratory classes;
- Parent/guardian involvement; and,
- Opportunities for community-service learning.

### **The problems associated with this model are:**

None

**Other considerations:**

The performance of JFK students on the MCAS English assessment test at the Advanced/proficient levels in 2008 exceeded the state average in grade 6, 7 and 8. In math at the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade levels their performance nearly equaled the state average, while grade 6 math was 9 points below the state average. Overall JFK made AYP in 2008 in English for all sub-groups with a performance rating of “very high” and an improvement rating that is “on target.” In math JFK did not make AYP in 2008 by a matter of points (7.3) in the aggregate and by several points to fractions of a point for sub-groups with a performance rating of “low” and an improvement rating of “no change”.

**Recommendation:**

In order to fully implement the Middle School Model the following suggestions are made:

- Strengthen the flexible block schedule to make better use of instructional time;
- Provide sufficient team time to improve planning and the delivery of the curriculum;
- Organize teams that are inclusive of SPED, Reading specialists and other Specialist teachers; and,
- Establish a student advisory program.

**The background information relative to the Middle School Model that was reviewed by the Strategic Planning Committee included:**

Mass DESE School and District Profiles/Directory

Breaking Ranks in the Middle, NASSP (National Association of Secondary School Principals)

NMSA Research Summary: Characteristics of Exemplary Schools for Young Adolescents (Dec 2007)

This We Believe: Successful Schools for Young Adolescents, National Middle School Association (2003)

Teaming: Still and Essential Strategy for Middle Level Education, Middle Level Issues, 2006

## **Northampton High School Long Block Schedule**

The Strategic Planning Committee (SPC) explored the Long Block schedule that has been in use at the High School for the past 11 years. The long block schedule utilizes four 85 minute teaching periods (blocks) per day, with no student study halls. A traditional schedule often includes seven 43 – 45 minute periods per day, including a study hall. In this longer period schedule a year is compressed into a semester. Overall the block schedule has been very successful as evidenced by the achievement scores posted by Northampton High School students when compared to scores for students in seven similar districts, as well as the state as a whole.

With respect to grade 10 MCAS scores Northampton tied for second highest in English (advanced/proficient) and was second in math (advanced /proficient). In the state comparison, Northampton ranked 71 out of 349 in English and 84 out of 349 in math. With regard to SAT scores in reading, writing and math Northampton ranked first in the comparative group, outpacing Longmeadow and Hudson by a significant margin. After an extensive examination and discussion the SPC determined that the advantages of the Long Block outweigh any disadvantage that might exist. Simply put, the Long Block schedule has been successful while costing no more than the traditional schedule. In addition, the long block supports the districts commitment to equity and meeting the needs of a diverse student body quite well.

### **The pros associated with this schedule are:**

- High quality instructional time is increased and students become more engaged in active learning
- Student and teacher effort is focused on fewer concentrated courses per semester which reduces stress and fragmentation
- Teachers are able to constantly reinforce what is being taught in longer class periods
- Multiple teaching strategies can more easily be employed in a longer period
- Different learning styles can be accommodated more easily in a longer period
- More courses are offered per year increasing the elective choices that students have.
- There are 3-4 transitions (passing time) during the school day which limits disruptions and improves school safety

### **The cons associated with this schedule are:**

- Scheduling conflicts may cause gaps to occur
- A few subjects may not be conducive to long blocks of time

### **Recommendation:**

- Further study of the elimination of gaps in curriculum and instruction

The background information relative to the Long Block schedule that was reviewed by the Strategic Planning Committee included:

- A presentation on the Long Block schedule by Nancy Athas, Principal, and Bryan Lombardi and Chip Kaufmann, Vice Principals, of Northampton High School
- Northampton Public Schools Strategic Planning Comparison Communities Report (Longmeadow, Ludlow, Gardner, Northampton, East Longmeadow, Hudson, Belchertown, South Hadley), data source state DESE
- Northampton High School Class Size Report



## **Virtual High School Membership**

The Strategic Planning Committee (SPC) explored membership in the Virtual High School (VHS) program to make available to students the opportunity to take credit classes 24 hours a day, seven days a week via the internet. Through the VHS students would be able to work cooperatively online with others from a wide variety of ethnicities, backgrounds and geographic locations. The VHS program would be a suitable alternative to offering low enrollment courses and could be done at a much reduced cost. The program could also help to solve problems that develop as a result of scheduling conflicts. The Virtual Classroom is a non-profit organization that offers content- rich, credit bearing high school courses to students across the country and around the world.

### **The pros associated with this program are:**

- Classes are student- centered and encourage collaboration among students. Students read lessons, work on and submit their assignments, participate in group projects, and contribute to class discussions at any time, as long as they meet due dates for class assignments and keep up with the general flow of the class.
- The entire range of student abilities is reflected in the VHS Course Catalogue- from Advanced Placement and honors level classes to courses offered for remediation and credit recovery.
- Average class size is 18.
- VHS and VHS courses are accredited by the Middle States Commission on Secondary Education.
- There are presently 78 Massachusetts High Schools and Collaboratives participating in VHS.

### **The cons associated with this program are:**

- None

### **Other Considerations are:**

- Individual schools participating in VHS free a high school teacher from her/his normal teaching responsibilities one period a day to teach a VHS course online. Teachers who elect to participate must complete an online professional development course to learn online teaching pedagogy and methods.
- Schools considering membership in VHS need to have consistent and adequate access to the Internet from the high school, computers that VHS students can use to access their NetCourse, and internet browsers on each VHS computer

**The background information relative to the Virtual High School that was reviewed by the Strategic Planning Committee included:**

- [www.govhs.org](http://www.govhs.org)

## **Appendix F**

Revenue/Savings Recommendation

School Choice

Regionalization of the School System and/or

Consolidating Some Management Services in the City

## **Northampton Public Schools**

### **Strategic Planning Committee Recommendations**

#### **School Choice:**

We recommend that the school committee increase the number of seats allocated for school choice on a space available basis to maximize revenue from this program. We further recommend that the school committee embrace school choice as an important and viable program; and, that decisions related to advertizing for openings and accepting new students be made as early as possible each year.

Pro: Increasing the number of seats available for out of district students will increase revenue. Approximately \$5,000 per student

Con: Will lead to a small increase in class size.

#### **Discussion:**

The Northampton Public Schools have been participating in the school choice program since the 1998 – 1999 school year. The number of school choice students reached its maximum in 2004 – 2005 with 226 enrollees. Since reaching that high point the number of out-of-district school choice students has annually declined to 179 during the current school year.

The decline in student participation has been as a result of the school system delaying the advertisement of available slots and subsequent decisions about admission. Decisions about the availability of slots for the current (2008 – 2009) school year were not made until June, well after the time when many parents need to make such a decision. In addition the school committee has been perceived as unenthusiastic about continuing to participate in the school choice program because it has a negative impact on nearby school systems.

The revenue realized from the school choice program is \$5000 per student and the revenue stream generated has been an important factor in the school budget. The school system expects to realize about \$895,000 in revenue from the program this year (2008 – 2009). The potential for developing increased revenue from this program in the future will depend on the aggressiveness of the school system to reach out to potential new participants and the continued availability of seats for new students.

Population projections indicated that at best the number of school age children in Northampton will slowly decline into the future which should continue to generate available school choice seats in the school system. However, it should be noted that the

recommendation to expand the school choice program is predicated upon the assumption that there is room in the schools and class sizes stay within the limits agreed to by the district's administrative team.

Recommendation: Increase the number of openings for school choice.

### **Background Information - School Choice:**

- 1989 – 2000 Data on Student Enrollment of Northampton Public Schools and Northampton Residents.
- School Finance: Statistical Comparisons – Northampton.
- Trends in School Choice Pupils and Tuition.
- Comparison of Northampton Enrollment with and without School Choice.
- Comparison of Students Attending NPS and Leaving NPS over 20 years.
- Comparison of School Choice Incoming and School Choice and Charter Outgoing.
- Comparison of those leaving for Charters, School Choice and Private Schools.
- Percentage of Northampton Students that are residents that choose private school.
- Actual Enrollment for School Year 2008 – 2009 (11/04/08).
- Long Term Trends in Enrollment (1989 – 2008).
- Governor's Task Force on Consolidation.

### **Regionalization of the School System and/or Central Services:**

The Strategic Planning Committee recommends that the Northampton School Committee convey their interest in regionalizing the school system and/or central administrative services and programs with communities that are proximal to Northampton. The number of students in the school system has fallen below a level that will allow for cost effective administration and other program or services. Recently the Governor's Readiness Finance Commission has encouraged communities to begin exploring regionalization as they are, as is the case with Northampton, operating what is considered smaller school systems. Northampton's centralized location surrounded by communities operating even smaller local or already regionalized school districts appears to make it a prime candidate for exploring the regionalization option.

Pro: Economy of scale and potential for reducing operating costs.

Con: Loss of local identity and control.

Discussion:

The process of regionalization is complex and requires some time to complete. A potential partner or partners must be identified; an agreement must be approved; votes must be taken; and, state level approvals must be granted. At the same time the issue of incentives supporting regionalization must be clearly identified and understood.

Are there educational and fiscal incentives associated regionalization? Will the city's children receive as good an education as they do now? What are the financial savings? What are the incentives that the commonwealth will provide?

Recommendation: Begin discussions with other communities regarding regionalization as soon as possible.

### **Consolidating Some Management Services in the City:**

It is recommended that the School Committee continue its exploration of the consolidation of some management services with the City. In the recent past some City and school system human resources and maintenance functions have been successfully consolidated resulting in some cost savings.

Pro: Could lead to savings in operating expenses.

Con: Services could be less responsive because of interdepartmental communication difficulties.

Discussion:

As with the option of regionalization, the consolidation of some management services would require discussion and clarification. How will the legislated separation of the City and school system responsibilities be achieved and autonomy be maintained? What savings will be realized? Would a consolidation of these services at this time have an impact on moving forward with regionalization.

Recommendation: Continue to explore the consolidation of management services.

There were no documents associated with the review of this option.

### **Proposition 2 ½ Override**

Since the adoption of Prop 21/2 by a majority of Massachusetts voters in 1980 (implemented in fiscal 1982) a local community cannot raise the local property tax by more than 2.5% of the total cash value of all taxable property in the community. As a result of this tax limitation Northampton's ability to make independent decisions about financing has been constrained. While a 2.5% levy limit might have made sense in 1980 it does not take into consideration cost increases that cities and towns are experiencing in 2008-2009, i.e., health insurance, heat, light, transportation, unfunded mandatory programs and the like.

The requirements of 2 ½, then, limits the city's capacity to use property tax increases to raise revenues to fund its total budget (for all city programs and expenses). In addition, the city must get state approval in order to levy any new taxes (e.g., a meals tax).

[This may change in the near future. It was introduced and defeated in the last legislative session, but will have a good chance of passing when reintroduced this year]

Over the past decade, the School Department and the city has continuously instituted spending cuts and introduced efficiencies in response to revenue shortfalls and while these efficiencies have been beneficial, even enabling school programs to continue to succeed, we now find ourselves at a point where there are few additional cuts that can be made without dismantling school programs essential to the maintenance of a viable learning community.

In order to preserve the quality and success of the Northampton school system, we believe that a Proposition 2 ½ Override should be placed before the city's voters. Our deliberations have convinced us that an override is necessary to support the school budget within the overall city budget.

Recommendation: That a Proposition 2 ½ Override be placed before the voters.

### **Other Options Considered**

The Strategic Planning Committee considered other areas as sources of savings or improved operations. These areas were:

- Addition of preschools at each elementary school.
- Horace Mann Charter Schools (Charter School Technical Advisory 03 – 1)
- Reorganizing grade level configurations K – 8.

## **Appendix G**

### School Closing – School Bus Transportation

## **School Closing – School Bus Transportation**

The Strategic Planning Committee (SPC) explored two (2) areas as possible sources of savings, closing an elementary school and reducing school bus transportation to the state required level. The SPC feels very strongly in both instances that although choosing to recommend either or both of these strategies would result in savings, both strategies are in conflict with core values that the community holds for the school system. Specifically, a consideration of the values of a commitment to small, community elementary schools, small class size and a commitment to equity and meeting the needs of a diverse student body.

The SPC believes that the Northampton School Committee should consider the pros and cons associated with implementing either or both of the two strategies within the context of the core values. The implementation of either strategy represents significant policy shifts which only the school committee can make.

### **School Closing:**

Closing one of the elementary schools would reduce the number of elementary schools in the district from four to three. The three remaining schools would be redistricted to contain between four hundred twenty to four hundred forty students each which would be accomplished by relocating over two hundred fifty students. The value conflict in this instance is with the community's commitment to small, community elementary schools.

The pros associated with this action are:

- Operational cost savings of \$200,000 to \$400,000
- Class size could be maintained at current levels

The cons associated with this action are:

- Classroom space will be committed to regular and special education which could limit the availability of classrooms for art, music and computer labs.
- Additional school choice slots would be limited, resulting in reduced revenue
- Increase in basic transportation costs

Other considerations are:

- Community programs may be displaced
- Accommodating existing programs
- Families deciding to send their children to school elsewhere
- Current school choice enrollees may leave Northampton



The background information regarding the closing of an elementary school that was reviewed by the Strategic Planning Committee is included in Appendix A.

### **Background Information - Closing a School**

- Analysis of Projected Savings if Northampton Public Schools Reduces Number of Elementary Schools from Four to Three
- 1989 – 2009 Data on Student Enrollment
- Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education – Long -term trends in individual districts’ grade PK to 12 enrollment; Trends in School Choice Pupils and Tuition;
- Comparison of Northampton Enrollment with and without School Choice; Comparison of Students Attending NPS and Leaving NPS over 20 years; Comparison of School Choice Incoming and School Choice and Charter Outgoing; Comparison of those leaving for Charters, School Choice and Private Schools; Percentage of Northampton Students that are residents that choose private school
- Actual Enrollment for School Year 2008 – 2009
- Elementary School Facilities Overview, David Pomerantz
- Northampton Student Enrollment in Smith Vocational-Agricultural High School (SVAHS) 2001 – 2008
- Northampton Schools Strategic Planning: Demographic Background and Sustainable Northampton. City of Northampton Planning and Development Department
- Population Projections for Massachusetts Communities (Northampton), MISER, The Massachusetts Institute for Social and Economic Research at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, 2003. NB: MISER ceased operations in 2003

The information cited above is available at the Office of the Superintendent or on-line at: [www.nps.northampton.ma.us/](http://www.nps.northampton.ma.us/).

### **Reducing School Bus Transportation to State Required Limit**

The SPC reviewed the legal requirement for the provision of school bus transportation within the context of the policy being followed by the Northampton Public Schools. The law requires that school districts transport students in grades K– 6 who live two miles from their school.

It has been the policy of the Northampton School Committee to provide a wide range of transportation options for students. The committee has provided the transportation support described below because of safety and concerns about equity:

- K – 6 students living two or more miles from their school are transported free of charge in accordance with state law, MGL Ch 71, Sec. 68;
- K – 6 students living 1.5 miles to less than 2 miles from their school may ride free (School Committee Policy);
- K – 6 students living less than 1.5 miles from school on streets with no sidewalks may purchase bus passes;
- 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students living 1.5 miles or more from school may purchase bus passes;
- 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students living less than 1.5 miles from school on streets with no sidewalks may purchase bus passes;
- High School Students living more than 1.5 miles from school may purchase bus passes;
- K - 12 students who live more than 1.5 miles from school and who are income eligible or are on an IEP are not charged

There is clearly an opportunity to realize cost savings if the school system were to follow the state requirement. However, it is also clear that a decision to limit transportation would fall disproportionately on low income students because nearly all of the low income housing in Northampton is located within the two mile limit for required transportation. Such a decision would be at odds with the core value of a commitment to equity and meeting the needs of a diverse student body.

The pro associated with limiting transportation to the level required by law is:

- Operational cost savings of \$145,000 to \$205,000.

The cons associated with this action are:

- Disproportionate impact on low income students,
- Attendance and tardiness will likely increase,
- Student achievement will likely be reduced,
- Phased redistricting of the elementary schools.

### **Background Information - School Bus Transportation**

- Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 71, Section 68, “Duty of Towns to Maintain Schools, Pupil Transportation; School Building Committee Representation.
- Northampton School Committee transportation policy.
- Transportation: Policy Review – Options

- Transportation Savings Projections 2009, (03/19/08).
- Estimate of Projected Savings...Regular Education Transportation to State Mandated Minimum, (12/10/08).
- Transportation Report, Joy Winnie (04/09/08).

The information cited above is available at the Office of the Superintendent or on-line at:  
[www.nps.northampton.ma.us/](http://www.nps.northampton.ma.us/)