

Gateway Regional School District

Regional Study Committee

Changes/Amendments to Regional Agreement – Spring 2019

What is a Regional Agreement?

A Regional Agreement is a document which describes how a regional school district functions and its legal and financial intersection with the member towns.

When was the Gateway Regional School District Regional Agreement Written?

The Regional Agreement was first adopted on June 1, 1959 and later amended ten (10) times, the last being May 10, 1976, prior to these recommended amendments.

Why Are Amendments Necessary?

1) Education Reform Act of 1993 – updated and changed laws relating to school districts; 2) Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) – added and modified regulations relating to school districts; and 3) opportunity to update Agreement to meet current interests/practices of the District

Process for Amendments

School Committee appoints ad hoc Regional Study Committee (combined with the Facilitated Discussion Committee) to study issues and recommend amendments to the School Committee → School Committee reviews Study Committee's recommendations and votes to support (or make further changes) → amendments are reviewed by District/Town Counsels and DESE (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education) → voters in all member towns vote on School Committee recommendations (must be approved in all member towns) → Commissioner of DESE determines final approval

Regional Study Committee Recommended Changes

- School Committee Representation [Section II (C)]: The number of School Committee members from each town will remain the same. The law ("one person, one vote") requires that each school committee member must represent approximately the same number of total community members. The current Committee configuration does not meet this law. The amendment establishes weighted votes to make the School

Committee representation fair for the members of all towns. In the future, School Committee representation will be as follows:

Blandford – 2 members with 1.2 votes each = 2.4 total votes

Chester – 2 members with 1.3 votes each = 2.6 total votes

Huntington – 4 members with 1.0 votes each = 4.0 total votes

Middlefield – 2 members with 0.5 votes each = 1.0 total votes

Montgomery – 2 members with 0.8 votes each = 1.6 total votes

Russell – 3 members with 1.1 votes each = 3.3 total votes

15 School Committee members (same as current) & 15 total votes (actually, total votes total 14.9 – closest rounding to 1/10th)

- Leasing of Schools [Section IV (B)]: Currently all school buildings and the land on which they stand is owned by the Regional School District. This amendment provides for future possible leasing and how to potentially return school buildings and land to the town in which they stand.
- Budget Process [Section V]: These amendments simply clarify and make more specific the process requiring the School Committee to develop an annual budget. There is no substantive change.
- Apportionment of Assessments [Section VI]: These amendments also clarify and make more specific how member towns are assessed to support the budget. The fact that all four (4) parts of the budget (appropriated costs, capital costs, transportation costs, and debt) continue to be assessed according to student populations. This amendment also provides an opportunity for the member towns to vote on an alternative assessment [Section VI (B) (2)]. This five-year pilot plan has been approved by DESE and allows each of the six member towns to pay the same assessment increase. In order to use this alternative assessment, all six member towns must approve. Language has been inserted that makes it clear that if the Regional School Committee votes to increase the budget after it has been approved, any town whose assessment is increased must vote to approve the increase.
- Incurring of Debt [Section VII]: Language has been added to comply with the dual process to incur debt allowable by law – (a) bringing a request to incur debt for a capital project to each member town for a vote or (b) creating a request to incur debt by a six member town ballot vote.
- Admission of New Member Towns [Section X]: Added language allows the School Committee to negotiate additional compensation as a “buy-in” to the District.
- Withdrawal of Member Towns [Section XI]: Stronger and clarifying language has been added to ensure that a member town which wants to withdraw from the District pays ALL of its financial obligations to the District prior to leaving the District.
- Regional Agreement Review [Section XII]: Language has been added which requires the School Committee to set up an ad hoc committee at least every five (5) years to review the Regional Agreement and make a recommendation to the School Committee about any potential amendments.