

Interstate Merger Feasibility Study and Implementation Support



Case Study

The Client

North Berkshire School Union, Clarksburg, MA

The Project

Proposed Interstate Merger – School Districts Clarksburg, MA, and Stamford, VT

The Challenge

As school systems across the U.S. face increased demands for services in the context of limited financial resources, many districts that serve small or decreasing numbers of students consider consolidation with nearby systems as one possible way to meet current fiscal and educational challenges. The school districts of Clarksburg, MA, and Stamford, VT, asked PCG to conduct a feasibility study and produce a road map focused on the merger of two small districts that are located on the border between Massachusetts and Vermont. This merger would be the first of its kind between these two states.

The PCG Approach

PCG staff applied its expertise to conduct a feasibility study that culminated in a Recommendations Roadmap report. The roadmap was used to inform and guide decision-making while the communities of Clarksburg and Stamford work toward a merged interstate district. The report detailed the opportunities, challenges, and fiscal ramifications of two proposed paths forward:

1. A merged district with a new grade configuration across the two buildings
2. A merged district with no change to the current grade/school configuration

Both proposed approaches were compared to maintaining current operations.

To inform the roadmap report, PCG designed a three-phase approach. In Phase I, PCG began Project Initiation. The goal of this phase was to develop a shared understanding and vision for the project. This phase culminated in a detailed project plan that included weekly project management meetings and project controls to keep the timeline intact.

Phase II focused on data collection and analysis. Data included policies, practices, and information related to facilities; staffing; transportation; food services; utilities; technologies; current course offerings; teacher retirement; school choice policies; fees and participation rates; a long-term facilities plan and immediate facility needs; services to special populations; and enrollment projections. To obtain some data, PCG conducted both face-to-face and phone

interviews with various stakeholders. Additionally, PCG carried out an analysis of Vermont and Massachusetts state requirements to ensure the roadmap produced for the merger was compliant with all regulations. The study also included a literature review to seek out promising practices and national trends in school district consolidations.

Phase III completed the Recommendations Roadmap and Action Plan. This plan was presented at a joint town meeting to ensure all stakeholders were well informed. PCG also conducted a stakeholder validation process that included a survey, a public comment forum, and other communication opportunities throughout both communities. Upon project completion, both districts have engaged with PCG to continue planning for the proposed merger.

Key Deliverables From PCG Include:

- Delivery and implementation of a detailed project management plan.
- Reviewed nearly 100 documents or data that focused on the following areas: District Policies and Procedures; General Operations/Staffing; Academics/Curriculum; Student Programming; Student Services; Transportation; Facilities; and Finances.
- Conducted 25 interviews/focus groups with various stakeholders.
- Facilitated a series of joint town meetings to ensure public transparency.
- Coordinated with the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Vermont Agency of Education, and elected officials, to receive guidance for the merger.
- Developed a Recommendations Roadmap that was presented to both towns.

To learn more, contact us today.

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