

# Planning Forward

## A Report on Planning Options for The Westbrook Public Schools



December 8, 2015

## Background

Like most Connecticut school districts, Westbrook has experienced declining enrollment and is forecasted to continue to do so through the second half of this decade. While the decreases from year to year can and have been managed with modest adjustments, the cumulative impact of enrollment decline has and will continue to have profound impact on the programs and structure of the district. It is important for the community to evaluate the structure and organization of its district and either affirm that it is the best design for Westbrook or identify changes that will deliver a better option.

## Purpose of the *Planning Forward Study*

To engage representative stakeholders in focused study, analysis and evaluation of possible organizational and programmatic structures for the Westbrook Public Schools.

## Limitations of the Study

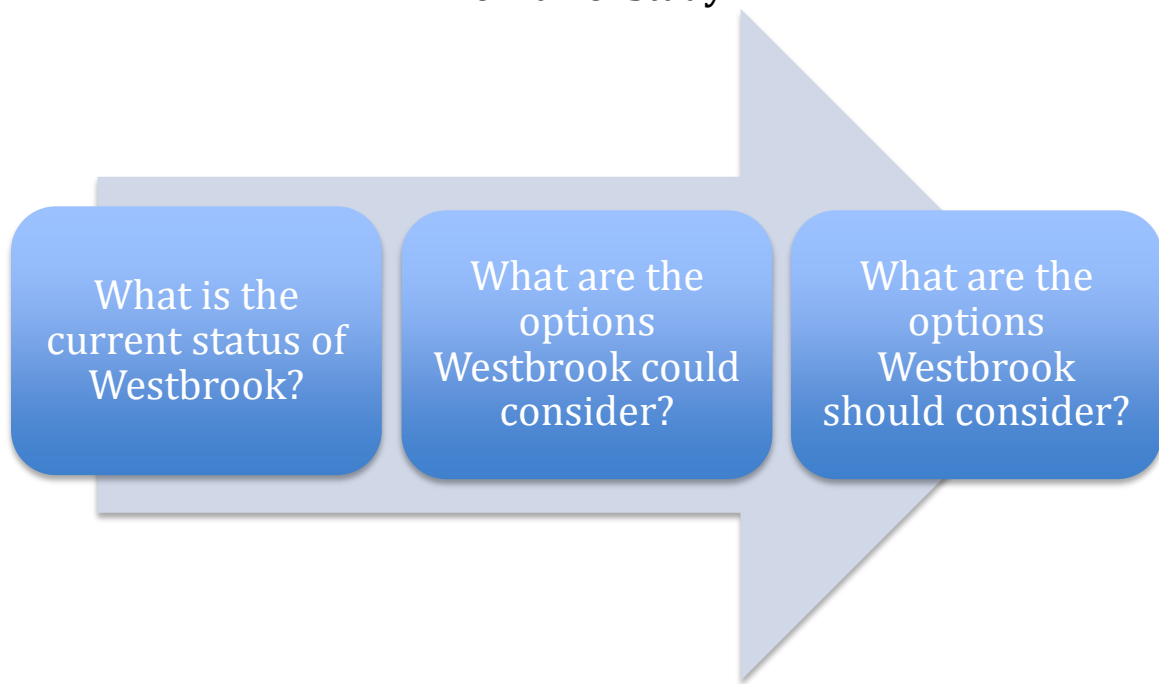
The study was designed to explore options on a conceptual level. As an advisory project, committee members understood that they would excavate some critical data and perspectives but that their role was advisory and preliminary to possible Board actions.

## The Committee

Twenty-seven individuals participated in this committee as representative stakeholders. They included students, parents, community members, certified teaching staff, non-certified staff, administrators, Board of Education members, and the Superintendent.

Dr. Elizabeth Osga from NESDEC (New England School Development Council) facilitated the work of the committee.

## The Plan of Study



### Session 1: Understanding Westbrook's Data-November 2

- Study of Westbrook's data including enrollment trends, expenditures, program scope, student achievement and performance
- Comparison and contrast with other Connecticut districts

### Session 2: Exploring Small District Structures and Designs-November 23

- Understanding scale and its relationship to programs, expenditures, etc.
- Review of alternate structures/designs (grade restructuring, collaborative arrangements, regionalization, tuition-out, etc.)

### Session 3: Evaluating Options for Westbrook

- Apply the options to Westbrook
- Evaluate the options

## Westbrook's Current Status

### Community

Westbrook is a small coastal community on Long Island Sound. Its 21.4 square miles includes 15.7 square miles of land and the balance water. In addition to its year-round homes, Westbrook has 14 beach associations that feature homes for seasonal and year-round occupants.

Key Inferences about the community data:

- Westbrook has limited land for development.
- Seasonal property owners pay taxes on some of the most expensive properties in Westbrook and are not likely to have direct connections with the schools.

### Enrollment

Key data points from NESDEC's report on Westbrook's enrollment projections:

- The current K-12 enrollment is 748.
- This represents a 231 student decrease over the last 10 years (-25.1%).
- Enrollment is expected to drop to 512 students over the next decade (-31.6%).
- The changes in school populations are projected to be:

School	Current Enrollment	Projected
Westbrook High School	294	174
Westbrook Middle School	226	144
Daisy Ingraham Elementary School	262	234

Inferences about the enrollment data:

- A high school of 174 students will have significantly greater challenges in maintaining academic breadth and viable extracurricular offerings than a high school of 294.
- Changes in team structures and shared staffing will be needed for a middle school that shrinks from 226 to 144 students.
- With the elementary enrollment decline projected to be modest (current 262 to 228 at low point), needed changes will be minimal at that level.

## **Program Data**

### **Key data points about programs:**

- Average class sizes in Westbrook are close to state averages for grades and courses reported on the Strategic School Profiles.
- The commitment to serve student needs and interests means that some class sizes are very small.
- WHS offers 15 science courses.
- WHS offers 9 technology courses.
- WHS offers two world languages (French and Spanish).
- WHS offers 7 art courses, 14 music courses, and 4 theatre courses.
- WHS offers more UCONN courses than AP (Advanced Placement) courses.
- WHS offers opportunities for independent study.
- WMS serves its students in a full middle school model with four grade level-teams.
- The district has a growing population of students who are not fluent in English (currently 50 students).
- The district offers a total of 29 extracurricular activities.
- Nine (of the 29) activities are CIAC sanctioned sports, with a heavy emphasis on “running”.

### **Key inferences about program data:**

- Westbrook has a large number of course offerings for a small number of students.
- The breadth of Westbrook programs help to develop the “whole child” (academic, social, emotional, physical).
- Increasing numbers of English Language Learners have created needs for additional personnel/programming.
- Program offerings have resulted in student success.
- Significant levels of student participation have made it possible to sustain the breath of extracurricular activities.
- The District may need something more than “running” sports. (Running sports do not require large team rosters.)

## **Performance Data**

### **Key data points about performance data:**

- Connecticut Mastery Test Science Performance -Grades 5 and 8 is above State average (for both goal and proficient levels).
- English/Language Arts/Literacy- Grades 4-8- at least 75% at level 3 (out of 4 levels) or above; Grade 3 -65% at level 3 or above.
- Math- Grades 4-8- at least 55% at level 3 or above.
- Grade 10 Connecticut Academic Performance Test (2013) -all subjects- 89% of students were at or above proficient level.
- 2015 Smarter Balance (new test) at or above proficient level (85%).
- 2015 SAT- Students scored above state average in all areas.
- Class of 2015-88% went to college, 11% entered employment, 1% entered military service.

### **Key inferences about performance data:**

- The district has strong academic performance across all grades as shown in a variety of current and past performance measures.
- Smaller classes lend to more personalized learning and achievement.
- Teachers/staff are interested in student performance outcomes.
- The above could be attractive to families with children < age 18.
- Personal connections (teachers/students) increase learning.
- The high percentage of college enrollment meets/exceeds community expectations.
- Students internalize higher aspirations for post secondary paths.

## **Financial Data**

### **Key data points about Westbrook's financial status:**

- Over 60 % of the town budget is attributed to the school district.
- Westbrook's education budget increased steadily 2009-2014.
- Westbrook has one of the highest per pupil costs on the shoreline (\$19642.21).
- Westbrook's wealth-rank is 33<sup>rd</sup> in the State.
- The towns in Westbrook's DRG (District Reference Group) are small.
- Of the 34 towns in Westbrook's DRG
  - 16 have a wealth-rank in the triple digits
  - 18 have wealth-rank in the double digits.
- The grand list increased significantly after the 2006 revaluation but decreased significantly after the 2011 revaluation, creating a dip and then a rise in mill rates.
- Westbrook's 2014 Mill rate = 21.79.
- Westbrook's 2005 Mill rate = 20.18.
- Westbrook housing values: increased - 2005 – 2012; decreased – 2012-2014.
- The District per pupil expenditures are 19% higher than the average for other PK-12 districts in the area of instructional staff and services, which is the largest categorical expense for districts.
- The District expenditures for Student Support Services are low when compared to other PK-12 districts (41% lower).

### **Key inferences about financial data:**

- Westbrook's wealth ranking suggests it can better afford to support its schools than many other Connecticut communities.
- Fewer students mean an increase in per pupil expenditures.
- Taxpayers may not be willing to continue to support the schools at the same level as enrollment declines.
- Fewer students mean fewer parents to vote "yes" for the budget.
- Lack of jobs can make it difficult to keep people in town.
- Houses are expensive in Westbrook making it difficult for families to move to or stay in the town.

# About Scale

As Westbrook considers its options, it is important to consider the impact of scale. This study used the following chart to define ***school scale***.

	Large	Medium	Small	Critically Small*
High Schools	1000+	500-1000	Under 500	Under 300
Middle Schools	600+	300-600	Under 300	Under 200
Elementary Schools	500+	200-500	Under 200	Under 150

*\*The point at which viability begins to be questioned because of program sustainability, economic efficiency, & social limitations.*

In applying these scale definitions to Westbrook's schools, it is apparent that both the middle school and the high school will fall to a critically small size.

## **Class Size Scale**

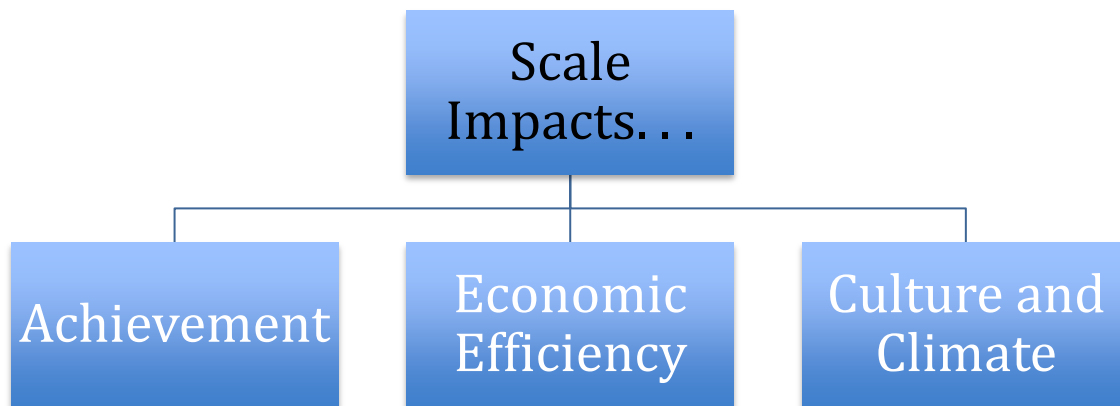
Large Size Class= 25 students and+

Medium Size Class=20-24

Small Size Class=Under 20

The majority of class sizes in Westbrook fall in the small class size range.





#### Scale Impacts Student Achievement

- Class Size—current research suggests classes 15-20 are optimum for student achievement; this size range also supports learning approaches that are collaborative and engaging.
- School Size—small schools yield better student achievement for students in poverty; larger schools have a positive effect on affluent populations but the effect is not statistically significant.
- District Size—little to no research impacting student achievement.

#### Scale Impacts Economic Efficiency

- Per pupil expenditures are generally highest for small schools and districts.
- Per pupil expenditures are generally lower for medium-sized schools and districts.
- The economic advantage of size generally fades for large schools and districts.
- The per pupil cost of educating students at the high school level is generally higher than the cost of educating K-8 students.
- Small high schools generally have higher per pupil expenditures than medium or large high schools.
- Per pupil expenditures or regional high schools generally follow the rules for economic efficiencies—if they are small, the costs are high; if they are medium-large, the costs are lower.
- High schools that are augmented with students from other districts generally have lower per pupil expenditures for the host community and generally offer tuition bargains to sending towns.

### Scale Impacts Culture & Climate

- Smaller schools offer greater parent participation, better student engagement in school, more positive school climates, warmer relationships between adults and students, more opportunity for school involvement.  
*-National School Climate Center*
- Smaller schools are deemed particularly valuable to students in disadvantaged circumstances.
- Schools play a much larger role in community identity and connection in small towns than in large ones. They are centers of pride, culture, and activity.

## Options Westbrook Could Consider

Do nothing

Regionalize

Tuition-out students

Restructure district schools

Apply one or more partial solutions

### **Do Nothing**

One response to declining enrollment could be to do nothing and simply to allow the decline to continue without planned strategy. Change would still be inevitable. The district would assume a reactive rather than a proactive stance.

### **Regionalization**

Regionalization is the union of two or more towns in the formation of a single district under specific state regulations. It can involve all or just some grade levels.

Regionalization is neither a quick process to form nor to disband. It involves a complex legal agreement. Each community must contribute assets in proportion to the size of its membership.

A region has its own governing board with each member town having representation in proportion to its share in the district. Regional districts are their own financial entities.

Economic efficiencies are related to scale; small regional costs per pupil are high; larger ones are lower.

### **Tuition-Out Students**

Districts can elect to tuition-out some or all of their students. In practice, Connecticut districts have used tuition-out at the secondary level and not at the elementary level.

When districts tuition-out students, they enter into contracts with one or more other districts for the education of their students. The contracts are multi-year and can be as short as just a few years or as long as 10 years or more. The receiving districts are typically, but not always, bordering districts. The sending district is responsible for providing transportation.

Tuition-out tends to be financially advantageous for both the receiving and the sending districts. Receiving districts benefit from tuition students by spreading the foundational costs of running schools over a larger population. Sending districts find that their per pupil costs are significantly lower than they would be if they tried to maintain their own schools for small populations. Special education rates are generally “full freight” rates for sending towns.

While there is no voting representation on the Board of Education for sending districts, some agreements do provide a non-voting seat.

### **Redistricting or Restructuring the Grade Level Configurations**

Districts with declining enrollment often look within their own organizational structure to determine if there are ways to redistrict or restructure their schools. If they have multiple schools at a given level, they may consider combining, redistricting and/or school closure.

Schools may also consider if it is possible and desirable to consolidate or change school levels. Current educational practice promotes a three school level model (elementary, middle, and high school). There are Connecticut districts that operate with fewer and greater numbers of levels.

### **Apply One or More Partial Solutions**

Districts with declining enrollments may elect to engage one or more strategies that partially address the issues associated with declining enrollment. The following are representative of those strategies.

#### **Tuition-in students**

Districts are often eager to tuition-in students. It not only helps to sustain programs but it helps to reduce per pupil costs. The most successful “tuition-in” examples are state approved magnet schools and districts that contract with others that DO NOT have a high school.

Beyond these opportunities, districts sometimes create policies that enable individual students to enroll on a private pay basis or accept students from other districts under limited circumstances. These policies tend to yield few students. More fruitful efforts can be found when districts offer low or no cost tuition to the children of staff members.

#### Program Specific Collaborative

- Two or more districts agree to share a combined program; example: football team
- Two or more districts agree to share personnel; example: Chinese teacher

*Collaborative programs do not necessarily yield savings but often “save” a program by yielding sufficient participants or full time staff members who otherwise would leave because of part time status.*

#### Distance/remote learning

- Districts buy into a distance learning program
- Students choose from a wide array of on-line courses
- Students take the selected courses via the internet
- It is most common in high schools but more middle school opportunities are emerging

#### Strategic Staffing Plan

Districts create a 5-10 year staffing plan that aligns with the projected enrollment and program needs for the district. The plan not only includes adjustments for enrollment changes, but also considers certifications, likely retirements, and program evolution. The plan is used to guide the hiring of new staff, the development of existing staff and staff assignments.

#### Space use

Districts seek to strategically lease-out or use space that is no longer needed for education. Potential tenants could be before/after school care providers, private preschool providers, recreational activities, lessons, higher education providers, etc.

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## Options Westbrook Should Consider

### *Analysis and Evaluation of Options for Application to Westbrook*

In order to consider the options in context, five scenarios were created. Committee members analyzed the scenarios individually before contributing to a shared analysis and evaluation.

The following criteria were used to prompt thinking and discussion:

1. Preserve community identity and pride
2. Afford local autonomy
3. Offer sufficient flexibility if changes are needed.
4. Afford a strong human capital component (good staff and students, supportive families)
5. Feature broad program offerings
6. Offer optimum class sizes for personalization.
7. Offer optimum class sizes for collaborative learning
8. Help populate a broad range of competitive athletics
9. Encourage a broad range of extracurricular activities (non athletic)
10. Avoid extreme travel/transportation of students
11. Achieve satisfactory economic efficiency
12. Provide education in a district with similar (or better) rankings to Westbrook
13. Increase opportunities for diversity for students

### **Scenario 1: Stay the Course with the Existing School Organization and Structures**

Description:

Westbrook will continue to be a PK-12 district, educating its students in three school levels (PK-4; 5-8; 9-12). The current enrollment projections suggest that the elementary school will bottom at 234, the middle school will bottom at 144, and the high school will bottom at 174.

While remaining small, the elementary school program structure will not require much change to adapt to the expected decrease in enrollment. The middle school will need to make significant changes in its teaming structures as each grade level cohort will be too small to warrant its own dedicated team of core teachers. Certification matters will challenge the middle school staffing plan. In order to provide special subject area teachers with full time assignments, they will likely need to have assignments that are split between school levels.

The number of full time faculty members at Westbrook High School will decline as the enrollment declines. Elective offerings will decrease and some programs may be threatened with extinction. The need to share staff with other levels will require that schedules accommodate other levels. Even with continuing high levels of student engagement, some athletic and extracurricular activities may not be sustainable.

Per pupil expenditures in Westbrook will continue to rise despite the contraction of programs. The community will likely have mixed response. Legacy and loyalty will be strong voices for supporting the schools. Those greatly influenced by economic efficiency will likely challenge expenditures.

While the highly prized culture and climate will continue to be valued by the members of the Westbrook Public Schools, the very small size of the schools may not make Westbrook the most attractive option to families who are relocating to the Connecticut shoreline area.

Analysis and Evaluation of Possibility 1 (Stay the Course)

Potential Payoffs	Limitations
Maintaining the existing school structure preserves community pride in the schools and autonomy in decision - making. The strong human capital component of the district continues to offer personalization and education that is highly valued and ranked.	It is clearly recognized that further decline in enrollment will make it very difficult to maintain academic program breadth and to field competitive athletic teams and a broad array of other extracurricular activities. Even with diminished programming, staff reductions will be needed, per pupil costs will rise, creating escalating criticism from taxpayers.
Evaluative Summary	
The committee agreed that the current organization and structure would not be easily sustained or accepted without some modifications.	

## **Scenario 2: Form a Region with One or More Neighboring Towns**



Description:

Westbrook will pursue regionalization with one or more area districts or it will seek to join an established region. As a small member town in the region, high school students will most certainly be attending high school in another town. It is also possible that middle school students will attend a regional middle school located beyond the borders of Westbrook. Elementary students are likely to continue to attend school in Westbrook. The elementary experience may extend through grade 5, depending on the regional arrangements. Because Westbrook is a geographically small town and I-95 provides quick access to nearby towns, out of town travel times should not be excessive. Nonetheless, parents are not likely to welcome the added distance.

Westbrook may very well find itself a 20-35% member of a region. Its representation on a regional governing board will be in proportion to its membership. Its financial obligations will also be in proportion to its membership. The risk of high cost special education placement will be shared proportionately by all member towns, regardless of residence of placed students.

The regional schools that Westbrook students will attend are likely to be small to medium-small. The benefits of small-medium schools will still be part of the educational experience of students. The regional schools will likely provide more program options to students than what size-diminished Westbrook schools could do both academically and in extra-curricular offerings. Given the ranking status of potential regional partners, students will not likely be attending schools that are deemed lower in quality according to key indicators (academic performance results, AP offerings, class size, etc.).

There is likely to be some economic benefit that results from regionalization. The amount will be dependent upon the actual scales of economy that are achieved.

The road to regionalization will be complex. It will likely involve passionate debate among Westbrook citizens who will weigh the trade-off of losing the pride and identity of its own middle and high schools for potential economic and program benefit.

Regionalization does require the approval of partner communities. The union would be solidified with an intricate contract that defines the roles and responsibilities of its members. Regionalization is not a quick process; de-regionalization is not either.

### Analysis and Evaluation of Possibility 2 (Regionalization)

Potential Payoffs	Limitations
Regionalization offers promise of broad academic, athletic and extracurricular programming. The committee acknowledges that the potential partners for regionalization would likely offer a strong human capital component and would not offer a lower quality or rank of education. Westbrook could expect some moderation of its per pupil costs, although the degree would largely depend on the scale of the region.	Three factors were identified as significant limitations of regionalization. First, the loss of its own schools would have a negative impact on community pride and identity. Secondly, the town's small size would give limited voice in the governance of the region. Westbrook is not likely to be satisfied with such status. Third, regionalization is a complex and binding decision. Should the partnership not work out well or circumstances change, Westbrook would be hamstrung by its decision to regionalize. In addition to these major factors, added travel time for students would not be welcomed.
Evaluative Summary	
While regionalization could address program issues of scale and may indeed result in some cost savings, the committee was repelled by the negative consequences of the option. Several committee members have the history of talks between Westbrook and a neighboring town about regionalization some 20 years ago. The asset buy-in contribution for Westbrook into a regional agreement was huge and the representation in the governance structure would have been very small. These factors caused the town to reject the option then and would continue to be leading reasons for rejecting it now.	

### **Scenario 3: Tuition-Out Students**

Description:

Westbrook will pursue agreements with one or more neighboring districts to educate its high school students. The most likely districts would be one or more of the direct neighbors (Old Saybrook, Region 4 and/or Clinton, but the advantage of easy travel on I-95 could make Madison and/or Region 18 considerations).

The tuition-out partnerships would likely necessitate multi-year agreements. If a single agreement is achieved, the receiving district would likely want some assurances that accommodations needed to accept the full population would pay off. Agreements would address the specific terms of service and include duration, tuition rates, limits or quotas of students, etc. While it is possible that a single district partnership might include a non-voting representative to the Board of Education, it should not be assumed that representation would be part of the agreement.

Westbrook's possible high school choices are good ones. The area high schools are in the small-medium size range and generally have high rankings. If Westbrook entered multiple agreements, student choice would be available.

In considering this option, it is important to recognize that enrollments at neighboring districts are also declining. Adding students to their high schools would enable them to maintain broad offerings and economic efficiency. These benefits would likely predispose districts to court tuition students. Economies of scale would likely result in lower per pupil costs.

The loss of Westbrook High School would be felt by past and present students and might be best done over a several year phase-out. As in the regionalization scenario, passion and debate can be expected.

Analysis and Evaluation of Possibility 3 (Tuition-Out Students)

Potential Payoffs	Limitations
Tuition-out offers some key solutions for the programming challenges of a very small district. Students would have more academic and extracurricular offerings without sacrificing the assets of good class sizes, high rankings, and good human capital. Students would interact with more students, possibly contributing to more diversity experiences. The option also is the most promising for furnishing relief from very high per pupil costs.	Surrendering the future of any of the local schools is a particularly difficult thought for Westbrook's stakeholders. Surrendering without having a voice in the governance of the replacement option makes it even more unthinkable.
Evaluative Summary	
The potential program benefits for students are undeniable. The option preserves academic quality factors. It increases program opportunities while likely cutting costs for the community. The negatives rest in the area of culture and climate and are considered significant by the committee members. The lack of voice in decisions about their schools is particularly troubling for this enlightened and involved community,	

## **Scenario 4: Re-structure/reorganize the Grade Levels of District Schools**

### **Description:**

Westbrook's current school organization of three school levels (PK-4, 5-8 and 9-12) is consistent with common patterns in Connecticut and consistent with current programming practices in education. With only one school at each level, consolidation of same level schools is not a consideration. The district could consider, however, restructuring grade level ranges of its schools and/or eliminating a school facility. To illustrate this possibility, the scenario will pose that all students would attend school on the current middle-high school campus and the current elementary facility would no longer be used for PK-12 education. The school organization would collapse into two levels, elementary (PK-6) and secondary (7-12).

The location of the PK-6 school in the McVeigh Road facility would require facility adaptation for younger students. Among the adaptations would be casework in classrooms, bathroom fixtures and location, and playground facilities. The facility would need to be carefully evaluated to ensure all program needs would be served. Decisions on how to locate grade 7-8 students within the secondary area would need to be thoughtfully done. The community would need to decide how best to proceed with the vacated elementary building. Once abandoned for school use, it could not be reopened as a school without meeting all current code standards.

With common scheduling in the secondary school (7-12), teacher certification would be optimized. This would come at the expense of the middle school model for grades 7 and 8. As part of the elementary school, grades 5 and 6 could potentially retain more middle school features as teacher certification for those grades allows many teachers to teach multiple subjects. It would be fair to say that the disbanding of the middle school would make the grade 5 and 6 experience for elementary in nature while grade 7 & 8 would drift toward a high school model.

Such reorganization would result in some cost savings. Facility use costs would be reduced, although it should be noted that they would not be totally eliminated for the town unless the building was sold. The administrative and foundational costs of operating two schools as opposed to three would be lower.

The reorganization would not address the endangerment of academic or extracurricular breadth. It would have some change on school climate as grade ranges would be extended.

#### Analysis and Evaluation of Possibility 4 (Restructuring)

Potential Payoffs	Limitations
The district would retain the full education of all levels of education PK-12. Such autonomy is important to the community. There is some economic benefit to be derived. However, in calculating the gains from collapsing three school levels into two, it would be important to note that some of the financial gains could be offset with renovations/adaptations/additions that might be necessary to accommodate the new grades arrangements.	The loss of the middle school as its own unique and critical part of a P-12 education would be a programmatic and morale loss. It could be viewed as a regressive event in the history of Westbrook's schools. Restructuring would do little to nothing to address academic and extracurricular program breadth as the low numbers of students at the secondary level would continue to exist.
Evaluative Summary	
Committee members were very concerned with the regressive element of this possibility. It was noted that Westbrook was once organized in this grade-level arrangement and that the establishment of the middle school was considered an important step forward. With the option doing nothing to address the program breadth issues, the committee found the potential cost savings to be inadequate to justify the loss of the middle school concept.	

## **Scenario 5 Partial Solutions (One or more could be considered)**

Strategy A: Tuition-in Students	<p>The district would seek to add students (and revenue) to the schools. The following possibilities could be evaluated so as to determine realistic effectiveness:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set policy and advertise for private pay students</li> <li>• Set policy and communicate to other districts that Westbrook is willing to be a choice option</li> <li>• Open Westbrook Schools to the children of staff at no or low cost tuition</li> </ul>
Strategy B Program Specific Collaborative Efforts	<p>Identify endangered and/or desired programs. Seek partners who could practically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer collaborative extracurricular programs</li> <li>• Share teaching staff (strategic scheduling necessary)</li> <li>• Allow students do take courses at other schools/colleges</li> </ul>
Strategy C Distance/On-line Learning	<p>Expand distance/on-line learning to account for diminished offerings. Could require that all students take at least one on-line course during their high school years.</p>
Strategy D Develop a staffing plan that will enable best adaptations to forecasted changes	<p>Create a 5-10 year staffing projection that aligns with the enrollment projection. Support staff in expanding their certification flexibility. Hire new employees whose certifications and background align with the changing needs.</p>
Strategy E Make available school facility space available to non district use	<p>Lease space to other organizations or partners. This could include regional programs, college/university programs, private preschool providers, providers of private lessons and after school activities, etc.</p>

### Analysis and Evaluation of Possibility 5 (Partial Solutions)

Potential Payoffs	Limitations
<p><u>Tuition-in</u> can build some enrollment and possibly diversify the enrollment. The additional enrollment would help to retain programs and staff; it would bring in some revenue; it would help to attract and retain staff; and it would boost climate and morale.</p>	<p>Westbrook's location does not make it ideal for attracting students as it is a distance from urban areas and its neighboring communities have quality school districts. It was also noted that other districts might also be competing for students with this same goal. Depending on the scheme, it could change the identity of the district. Special education costs need to be clear and protect district's interests. There is question as to whether or not enough students could be attracted to make a difference.</p>
<p><u>Collaborative efforts</u> can result in more course opportunities and more athletic and extracurricular options. Shared staff can enable the district to retain some staff and programs that might otherwise be lost. It could also reduce some costs. There is potential for more diversity experiences for students.</p>	<p>The coordination of schedules is a real challenge in collaborative programming. Financial arrangements, including personnel contracts, need to be addressed satisfactorily. Shared employees do not necessarily identify with schools as well as dedicated ones. Transportation would need to be addressed. Control over programs changes. Partners need to be located.</p>
<p><u>Distance/on-line courses</u> can help to personalize learning and offer more choices. It offers learning in a mode that students love. "Hybrid or blended" learning is an increasing trend in 21<sup>st</sup> century education. On-line learning is a cost effective way to meet many needs.</p>	<p>Distance/on-line courses offer limited interactions for students. The quality of instruction can vary. While there is a core group of students who can do it alone, others will require support. The IT department will need to flex to accommodate an expanded use of technology. There is some concern about how much on-line learning might increase in the future and the impact on the teaching staff.</p>
<p><u>A 5-10 Year Staffing Plan</u> can help to tailor the staff to the needs of the district. It would lend itself to interdisciplinary experiences as individuals with multiple certifications would undoubtedly be part of the plan. It can motivate teachers to enhance their</p>	<p>The inevitable reduction in staff may very well include the loss of seasoned teachers and specialists. There would be some limitations on available candidates who fit the staffing plan needs. There would be an increase in teacher preps. Some teachers would be teaching in</p>



teaching certificates and become more well-rounded teachers. This represents orderly change.	areas that are not their main interests. This could lead to “Jacks of all trades; masters of none”. Expanding certification has some expense associated with it—for district or teachers? Contractual issues would need to be assessed.
<u>Alternate uses of space</u> could produce some income. Potential partnerships are waiting to be formed. Some of these partnerships would be very beneficial to parents and families. A college partnership could be beneficial to expanding educational opportunities to students, staff, and all members of the community.	The district does become a “landlord” and must deal with the administrative/contractual details of managing tenants and their needs. Issues of security and liability would need to be addressed. The management of personnel who are not employees of the district would need to be addressed, especially if they do not share the school climate vision. Partners need to be attracted.
Evaluation Summary	
A number of partial solutions have been noted. Many variations of these and other strategies could assist the district in addressing the consequences of declining enrollment. Each strategy needs to be carefully considered to ensure that its pay-off will be commensurate with the investment in developing it. Given that these options preserve the identity and autonomy of the district, while offering some collective response to the challenges of declining enrollment, the committee was most interested in this option as a focus for addressing challenges.	

## **Conclusion**

This committee was composed of stakeholders who are highly committed to the best interests of Westbrook, its schools, its people, and its children. Committee members worked hard to suppress their biases and to process the issues with logic and reason, while keeping true to the values of Westbrook. The results of the committee's work are credible and worthy of serious consideration.

The committee is not ready to surrender the structure and organization of the school district to the options of regionalization, tuition-out, or restructuring. At the same time, it took a hard look at the realities of the current status. It fully recognized that dwindling enrollments that lead to diminished programs and rising per pupil costs are neither acceptable nor sustainable.

The greatest promise was believed to be in the application of a number of partial solutions suggested by the fifth scenario. None of these individually resolves all of the current challenges nor do they collectively resolve them fully. However, opportunities to promote broad programming, expand enrollment, and address financial concerns are all worth pursuing. The possible strategies can be customized and adjusted as needed without creating irreversible consequences. The committee does not see this as easy and certain but rather as the best course of action at this time.

## **Committee Membership**

### Board of Education

Lee Bridgewater  
Michelle Palumbo  
Maureen Westbrook  
Marti White

### Parents

Sheridan Bauman  
Sylvia Guinan  
Jason Otrin

### Faculty & Staff

Chet Bialicki  
Joanna Brother  
Diana Burns  
Marianne Winslow  
Tiffini Hovey  
Maggie Vincent

### Facilitator (NESDEC)

Elizabeth Osga

### Community Leaders and Members

Noel Bishop  
Paul Connelly  
Gary Gavigan  
Jim Crawford  
Tony Cozza  
Lester Scott

### Student

Allyson Schenck  
Turner Davis

### Administration

Patricia Ciccone  
Cori DiMaggio  
Madeline Illinger  
Ruth Rose  
Tara Winch  
Lesley Wisocki

## Data Sources for Westbrook Study

<u>Enrollment Data</u>	<u>Performance Data</u>
Fall 2015 Enrollment by Grade-Westbrook Public Schools	2015 SBAC Test Results in ELA and Math
2015 Enrollment Report-compiled by NESDEC	2015 CAPT and CMT Science Test Results
	2013 CAPT Results
	2015 SAT Results
	2015 ACT Results
	Class of 2015 Post Grad Plans
<u>Financial Data</u>	<u>Program Data</u>
NCEP (Net current expenditure per pupil 2014-15)-from SDE Website	Course list for WHS—from on-line program of studies
10 Year Budget Trends for Westbrook Schools-Town Financial Report	Athletic & extracurricular activities-provided by business office
Grand List & Real Estate Tax Info for Westbrook-Town Financial Report	Staffing chart-created from data provided by business office
Select audited expenditures for Westbrook-from Strategic School Profile*	Selected information from Strategic School Profile*

\*The Strategic School Profiles are published by the state. The most recent profile that is available on the SDE websites