

Canterbury Withdrawal Study Minority Report

November 2023

A stumble may prevent a fall - English Proverb

This is a minority report of those members of the 2023 Withdrawal Study Committee not in favor of Canterbury withdrawing from the Shaker Regional School District.

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ABSTRACT

In March 2022 and 2023, the Town of Canterbury initiated a study to explore the feasibility and suitability of withdrawing from the Shaker Regional School District, a move aimed at providing more educational, athletic, and extracurricular options at a potentially reduced cost per student. The study, conducted by a committee, considered various options for the withdrawal plan, with a focus on transportation and potential tuition agreements with neighboring school districts. The report's findings emphasize that withdrawal is not economically or educationally justified.

- A survey was sent out to residents of Canterbury and Belmont in July 2023 to gauge their opinions on the matter. While the majority of respondents were content with the current school district, the survey highlighted concerns about transportation and limited options for students.
- The estimated financial costs of Canterbury's withdrawal from the Shaker Regional School District were examined, including operating costs, salaries, benefits, transportation, and other expenses. The study concluded that the cost of withdrawing and tuitioning students to other districts could potentially be higher than the in-district cost, and the overhead costs of operating an independent district were substantial.
- The study also considered the impact of withdrawal on the Town of Belmont, focusing on potential financial implications. It was determined that the small number of Canterbury students attending Belmont Middle and High School would result in a financial challenge if Belmont chose not to be the Anchor School and Canterbury did not tuition the majority of their students there.

In conclusion, the study found that there were numerous unaddressed questions and challenges surrounding Canterbury's withdrawal from the Shaker Regional School District. The report recommends that the Shaker Regional School District should work on improving communication and public relations. The findings also suggest that the committee's efforts and report could serve as a foundation for discussions aimed at enhancing educational opportunities within the existing school district. The study advises the school board to establish sub-committees to evaluate existing programs, courses, and staffing patterns and recommends potential solutions, such as creating an Innovation Incentive Trust Fund for teachers. It also highlights the need to assess bus ride durations for students and explore opportunities to reduce transportation time. Furthermore, the report suggests monitoring school choice trends, periodically assessing open enrollment options with surrounding districts and encourages parents to engage with the school district on their concerns.

INTRODUCTION

In March 2022 and 2023 the Town of Canterbury voted in favor to instruct the Shaker Regional School District School Board to form a committee (herein referred to as “the Committee”) to initiate a review of the feasibility and suitability of Canterbury’s withdrawal from the Shaker Regional School District in an effort to provide additional options for educational, athletic and extracurricular activities at a potentially lower cost per student.

When considering available options, the Committee included Belmont High School (BHS) and Belmont Middle School (BMS) as requested by the voters. The intent of the original warrant article was clear that the townspeople of Canterbury never wanted to take Belmont away from Canterbury Students. The 2022 Committee was dissolved in early 2023, as it was deemed that they needed funding for a Consultant and an Attorney to finish their work.

The 2023 Committee was formed as a result of the March 2023 Town Meeting with funding. At that meeting, many residents stated that they supported the study and that although they did not support withdrawal they felt that we could use the information from the study to help improve the current school district.

As you will see from our findings there are no compelling economic or educational reasons to justify Canterbury’s withdrawal from the Shaker Regional School District as a matter of fact it would result in a greater financial burden on Canterbury as well as Belmont residents.

FINDINGS

Withdrawal Plan

Due to the low number of Canterbury students and the location of the various schools the committee is looking at, there were three options to explore:

1. Pick an anchor school for Middle and High School and only transport to those schools. Any parent choosing to select a different school that we have tuition agreements with would need to provide their own transportation for their students.(Easiest to implement and most cost effective)
2. Only provide transportation to Middle Schools (Could be costly based on where students are located)
3. Transport to all schools (Most Costly)

The committee selected Option 1 with the intent to ask Belmont to be the Anchor School for Middle and High School. As transportation routes were already in place and the original warrant article instructed to include Belmont, it made the most sense to pursue this option.

The following school districts have stated that they would be willing to enter into Tuition Agreements with Canterbury for Middle and High School

- Bow School District
 - Please note that Bow would be unable to accept Middle School Students and could potentially only accept a handful of students each year due to class size capacity. Their existing agreements with Dunbarton and Hooksett would take priority over Canterbury.
- Shaker Regional School District
 - Please note that the future Belmont School District would be the ones to enter into this agreement as Shaker Regional School District would cease to exist if Withdrawal were to happen.
- Concord School District
- Laconia School District
- Winnisquam School District

As of October 5th, 2023 Canterbury students consisted of:

- Elementary Students 110
 - 8 Of these students are currently attending Belmont Elementary School. Those students would need to attend Canterbury Elementary School unless they were there as part of an IEP. If the student was there as part of an IEP a tuition agreement would need to be made with Belmont Elementary School and transportation would need to be provided by the town of Canterbury
 - Please note that there are 4 students (Not included in the numbers above) that are Belmont Students attending Canterbury Elementary School. Those students would need to attend Belmont Elementary School unless they were there as part of an IEP. If the student was there as part of an IEP a tuition agreement would need to be made with Canterbury Elementary School
- Middle School Students 58

- High School Students 55

SURVEY RESULTS

In July 2023 the Committee sent a survey out to residents of both Canterbury and Belmont.

Canterbury Residents

- 94 Respondents, 77.7% had a child enrolled in the district
- **82% of Parents currently use district transportation**
 - Average bus ride 33 Minutes
 - Shortest bus ride 5 Minutes
 - Longest bus ride 90 Minutes
- **Majority of respondents felt that it is important to have transportation provided for Middle and High School students**
- If we had choice for High School, the following would be respondents first choice
 - **Belmont 41.1%**
 - Bow 18.9%
 - Concord 22.2%
 - Laconia 1.1%
 - Winnisquam 16.7%
- If we had choice for Middle School, the following would be respondents first choice
 - **Belmont 38.4%**
 - Bow 19.2% (At the time of the survey we were unaware the Bow would not accept Middle School Students)
 - Concord 21.9%
 - Laconia 1.4%
 - Winnisquam 19.2%
- What is the most important reason for considering a school outside of SAU 80?
 - Extra Curricular 2.2%
 - Other 7.8%
 - Geography/Bus Ride Length 7.8%
 - None 20%
 - Academic Opportunities 25.6%
 - All of the above 36.7%
- Do you feel that your child's educational needs have been met at the SRSD? 1-10 , 1 = Lowest, 10 = Highest
 - **61% of respondents stated 7 or better**
 - **This shows us that the majority of survey respondents were content with the current school district.**
- What is your most limiting factor to supporting Canterbury's withdrawal from the Shaker Regional School District?

- Academics 5.4%
- District Commitment 6.5%
- Other 17.2%
- Geography 17.2%
- Financial 17.2%
- None 36.6%
- This question was followed by a section for comments. Of the 26 comments received, only 6 of them supported withdrawal, the other 20 were against it.
- What is one opportunity you would like to have available to your child that is not currently available at Shaker Regional School District?
 - Before & After School Care, Foreign Languages, Vocational Classes, Student Resources, After School Club Transportation and ROTC 2.2% for each category
 - **Please note that some of these items are already available to current students**
 - Academic Rigor, Foreign Language and Extra Curricular 4.3% for each category
 - Diversity 6.5%
 - Technical/Vocational Classes 8.7%
 - **Please note that current students have the ability to attend vocational programs at Concord, Laconia and Winnisquam. Strategic scheduling allows for students to use a study hall period for transportation to these schools to prevent missing academic classes.**
 - Expanded Course Catalog 17.45%
 - More AP Classes 13%
 - Sports 26.1%
 - Of these respondents, we were able to break them down into the following based on comments:
 - Swimming 8.3%
 - Female Sports 8.3%
 - Lacrosse 8.3%
 - Fishing Team 8.3%
 - Football 8.3%
 - Cheerleading 16.7%
 - More Options 41.7%

TOWN OF CANTERBURY ESTIMATED FINANCIAL COSTS:

In order to determine the estimated financial costs if Canterbury were to withdraw from the Shaker Regional School District, the Committee considered the following:

Estimated Operating Costs of Canterbury Elementary:

At the Committee's request, Shaker Regional School District created a preliminary budget for the estimated operating cost of Canterbury Elementary School totalling \$3,228,643.66 with the following items of note:

- Using the 2022-2023 Budget and the 2022-2023 Expended amounts
- If costs were not Canterbury specific in the 2022-2023 Budget they typically used the 5-year Apportionment average, which is roughly 23.8%.
- Some of the items were not conducive to apportioning. For example, School Board Dues, Audit, Superintendent Dues. Dues and audits are typically a set rate.
- Costs that are Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) specific (i.e., Longevity and Severance) were not included.
- Services that are considered District-Wide (Superintendent, Director of Curriculum, Special Education, Business Office) were apportioned based on the 23.8%.

The committee then summarized the provided budget into the following categories and items of note

- Salaries \$1,353,909.39
 - Additional administrative positions would need to be hired for Business Administration, Special Education, Buildings & Grounds, and Food Services
 - Teachers choosing to stay would need to form a new Union and a new CBA would need to be negotiated
 - Superintendent Services and IT Services will need to be contracted out or hired on
 - Further research determined that a one school district could potentially utilize part time staff for some of the administrative positions but that finding candidates to fill these positions would be very difficult.
 - Both Shaker Regional and Concord School District said they would be willing to discuss contracting Superintendent Services to Canterbury but were unable to provide cost estimates. The committee recognizes that this could be potentially problematic resulting in asking employees of said districts to do double the amount of work by creating two budgets, two public hearings, two district meetings etc.
- Benefits \$361,415.00
 - Current benefits costs are based on volume pricing that the district gets as a whole.
 - Canterbury could go through Health Trust or School Care and get combined with other small districts for a group rate
- Transportation \$267,725.00
 - Transportation costs are based on the long standing relationship between Shaker Regional and First Student. If Canterbury were to withdraw, it would be a net new contract with whomever provides transportation unless the future Belmont School District agreed to bill Canterbury for their bus services and kept Canterbury transportation as part of their contract.
- All Other Costs \$1,245,594.27
 - Items that are district wide need to be adjusted to reflect 100% of the true cost ex. Software, Food Service Cost etc
 - New equipment would need to be purchased for buildings and grounds maintenance.

- A Server Room will need to be built at Canterbury Elementary School and computer servers will need to be purchased.
- Space at Canterbury Elementary School would need to be evaluated to determine what max capacity is as well as office space for new staff positions if Canterbury were to withdraw.

Budget assuming we tuition all students back to Belmont Middle and High School

Estimated Cost to Run Canterbury Elementary School	\$3,228,643.66
Does not include unknown variables listed as bullet points under Salaries, Benefits, Transportation and All Other Costs above. The committee discussed that this could be an addition 1-2 million add to the budget	
Estimated Tuition Costs	
Middle School	\$1,244,794.00
High School	\$885,440.00
Estimated Budget	\$5,358,877.66
Additional Estimate for Unknown Variables	\$1,000,000.00 - \$2,000,000.00
Total Budget Estimates	
- Additional \$1,000,000 in unknown variables	\$6,358,877.66
- Additional \$2,000,000 in unknown variables	\$7,358,877.66
2022-2023 Tax Assessment	(\$4,744,918.00)
Total Budget Overages	
- Factors in \$1,000,000 in unknown variables	\$1,613,959.66
- Factors in \$2,000,000 in unknown variables	\$2,358,877.66

Buy Out of Long Term Debt and Capital Improvement Costs

All assets including computer equipment for Students and Staff would need to be included in the buyout negotiations. Impact of Separation/Severance is unknown

Repayment of Capital Improvement Costs paid by the Town of Belmont since district creation	\$1,538,081.74
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Long Term Debt Buyout (Copier and Chromebook Leases):	\$234,425.13
Total Estimated Cost of Buy Out	\$1,772,506.87

Tuition Comparison:

The Committee contacted the following school districts inquiring if they would be willing to take in Canterbury students in grades 6-12. It should be noted that in their initial inquiries to these outside districts the Committee explained that they are looking at options for Canterbury based on the wording of the warrant article. The following districts stated that they would be open to accepting Canterbury students and provided their Programs of Studies, Extracurricular Activities and estimated Tuition Rates for this year:

High School	Belmont*	Bow**	Concord***	Laconia	Winnisquam
Tuition Cost/yr	TBD - Future Belmont School Board and Voters would need to approve	\$18,587	\$17,000 - \$24,000	Est \$20,000	\$18,804
# of Students	374	616	1,425	600	446
Middle School	Belmont	N/A	Concord*	Laconia	Winnisquam
Tuition Cost/yr	TBD - Future Belmont School Board and Voters would need to approve	N/A	\$18,000 - \$19,500	Est \$20,000	\$18,394
# of Students	330	N/A	808	420	376
Agreement Type	TBD - Future Belmont School Board and Voters would need to approve	MOU	Tuition Contract	Tuition Contract	Tuition Contract
Agreement Length	TBD - Future Belmont School Board and Voters would need to approve	5 Years	Depends on Terms, willing to do multi-year	Willing to do multi year	Depends on Board Approval, willing to do multi year

*The Shaker Regional School District and School Board would cease to exist if Withdrawal were to be successful. The future Belmont School District, School Board and Voters would need to set the tuition rates, agreement type, length and determination IF Belmont would be the anchor school for Canterbury.

**Bow indicated that it could only accept a limited number of Canterbury students in a given year for High School only and that their existing agreements with Dunbarton and Hooksett would take precedence over Canterbury students.

***Concord provided a range and stated that the rate would be dependent on the number of students attending and the type of contract that would be in place. The estimated tuition rate could be between \$18k - \$19.5k for middle school and \$17k - \$24k for high school. This amount is dependent on a number of factors including but not limited to:

- The length and percentage of students committed to attending the Concord School District.
- The ability to have choice.
- The option to attend Concord Regional Technical Center with choice.

IMPACT TO TOWN OF BELMONT IF CANTERBURY WERE TO WITHDRAW

Due to the small number of Canterbury students attending Belmont Middle and High School the impact on Belmont has been difficult to determine. It is believed that class size and offerings would not be impacted but the true impact would be financial.

The committee reviewed the budget provided by the SAU of the estimated costs to run Canterbury Elementary School and deducted all apportioned costs for District Wide Resources and estimated the following:

Estimated Canterbury Elementary School Specific Items in Budget	\$2,353,822.15
2022-2023 Canterbury Tax Assessment	(\$4,744,918.00)
Total Estimated Shortcomings in Annual Operating Budget for Belmont <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not include potential Tuition received from Canterbury students 	\$2,391,095.85

CONCLUSIONS

Transportation Restrictions

Transportation for students is an important consideration as indicated by the survey. For parents, transportation or lack thereof can disrupt their daily work schedules, family budgets for additional childcare and issues of safety. The proposed withdrawal plan limits the options that would be available to students as transportation would only be provided to one school district. This would most likely cause

a reduction in the amount of students able to attend schools outside of Belmont as survey results showed transportation was deemed significantly important and 82% of parents responding currently using district transportation.

Satisfaction With The District

Survey respondents indicated they were relatively happy with the way things are, many would continue to send their students to Belmont Middle School and Belmont High School. However, parents would not have a voice at the table if the withdrawal was realized. In addition, withdrawal could seriously jeopardize Canterbury's pride and joy, Canterbury Elementary School, as staffing patterns could change due to CBA RIF provisions.

Current Offerings

Survey results indicated that parents and community members may not be aware of the offerings available at Belmont Middle and High School and that the school has the opportunity to correct this with communication

District Commitment

The Shaker Regional School district was formed out of necessity as surrounding towns were no longer willing to accept Canterbury Students. Withdrawing from Shaker Regional potentially puts future students in this same situation, please note the following:

- Bow was only willing to engage in a five year agreement with Canterbury and made it clear that they may only be able to accept a small number of high school students in any given year as they put a cap on their class sizes.
- Concord is growing, there are potentially 950 units being developed on Monitor Way and a proposal for approximately 600 at the Steeplegate Mall Location. With additional affordable housing options available, it would be unrealistic to assume that their enrollment would not increase as well. This could result in future Canterbury students not being able to attend as Concord's own students would take priority over other towns.
- Tuition agreements will not be a permanent solution, as they will need to be renewed. It should also be expected that tuition costs would be increased over the length of the agreement.
- Withdrawing from the district and pursuing this option would result in Canterbury not having any school board seats for Middle and High School thus losing its voice at the table.

Cost of Withdrawal

The committee was unable to determine the "true" costs of withdrawal. The cost to tuition students to other districts appears to be greater than our in-district cost. In addition, there are limitations on the placement of students in other districts.

Overhead costs for operating our own district appeared to be very costly. Central office professional services: food service director, facilities director, special ed director, guidance / placement

/transportation, IT, business administrator positions would be costly, difficult to fill either on a contract or part-time basis and expected high turn-over rate.

It is estimated that for every \$360,000.00 that the town of Canterbury would need to raise above and beyond the current assessment for education is about \$1.00 per \$1,000. **Withdrawal could result in potentially a \$3.00 - \$9.00 increase to the current tax rate.**

Other

State testing results indicated Belmont Middle School and Belmont High School both had better proficiency scores than 3 of the 4 other schools compared. Although Bow had the highest scores, it would not accept middle school students and would limit the number of high school students.

Recommendations

- Shaker Regional School District appears to have a communications/public relations problem. It would be beneficial for the district to explore the possibility of adding a dedicated position to assist with assessing and improving communications. Oyster River Cooperative School District has added this position in recent years and it has shown to be very effective. It may behoove the district to reach out to them and discuss this.
- The committee's efforts and report could be utilized as a springboard for discussions to improve educational opportunities within the existing Shaker Regional School District. The committee should debrief its work and then schedule a joint meeting with the school board to engage in a real conversation aimed at recognizing and dealing with the concerns expressed that have resulted in the formation of several withdrawal proposal committees in the past half century.
 - The School Board may want to create a sub-committee to evaluate existing programs, courses, and staffing patterns and make recommendations to the board. The committee should include board members, administrators, teachers, parents, business ,students, alumni, and other stakeholders.
 - While Bow, Laconia, Concord and Winnisquam offered more courses with a greater diversity of topics, Belmont could develop additional courses based upon student interests.
 - The School District may want to develop an Innovation Incentive Trust Fund for its teachers in developing new courses or adapting existing courses from other schools to implement in Shaker. Incentives could be monetary, additional days off (CBA), advanced degrees course credit increase, or other.
 - The School District may want to consider establishing an Adjunct Faculty Trust Fund and work towards establishing an adjunct faculty to assist with teaching AP Classes and/or advanced courses and special projects.
 - Due to the length of bus rides for Middle and High School students, Shaker Regional may want to work with their transportation provider First Student to assess how long students are spending on the bus and opportunities to decrease that time.
 - School Choice has become more popular over the years and is not expected to decline any time soon. The school board may want to create a sub-committee to periodically assess Open Enrollment Options with surrounding districts.
- The committee encourages parents to approach the school district with concerns, actively participate in School Board Public Hearings and School District Budget Hearings