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# SCHOOL OPTIONS EXPLORATION COMMITTEE PRESENTATION

POSTED ON: SEPTEMBER 24, 2021 - 12:05PM

## Presentation to discuss Farmington River Regional School District

Date: Thursday, September 30, 2021 - 7:00pm to 9:00pm

Location:

DPW Garage

3 Silverbrook Rd

Sandisfield, MA 01255

Please bring your questions and concerns!

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/81885205303?pwd=R3NiVHlvN2s1MGpyNDNwSTBRUWROUT09>

Meeting ID: 818 8520 5303

Passcode: 489887



**The School Options Exploration Committee is an ad hoc committee formed by the Town of Sandisfield to study, evaluate and make recommendations on alternatives and/or continued participation in the Farmington River School District.**

# Ad-Hoc School Options Exploration Committee

## Role

Assist and make recommendations to Town Manager (Joanne Grybosh)

## Scope

Identify & evaluate improvements & alternatives to FRRSD

## Objective

Simultaneously improve both scholastic performance & financial efficiency

## Composition

### Chair

Joanne Grybosh

### Members

Barbara Cormier

Jennifer Hibbins

Carl Nett

Joanne Olson

Steve Seddon

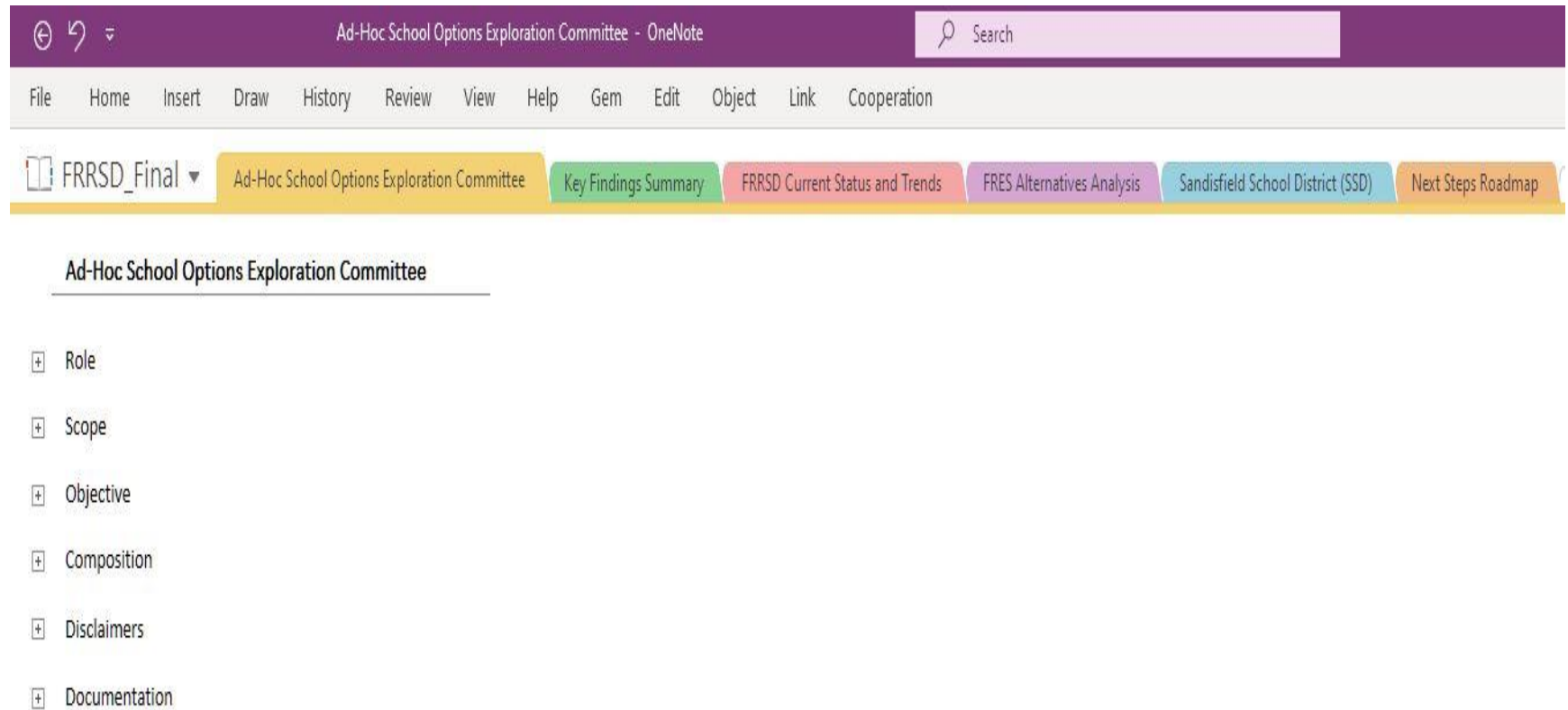
## Disclaimers

This committee work was completed in essence at the end of April, 2021, modulo final editing and polishing in preparation for formal presentation.

All statements contained herein represent the consensus (i.e., majority), informed personal OPINIONS of the ad-hoc committee members, expressed under their First Amendment right to free speech, and do not necessarily represent the views of the Sandisfield Select Board or for that matter any other party or entity, including any party or entity to which any committee member may have an affiliation with.

## Documentation

A comprehensive archive of the committee's work was created in the form of a Microsoft OneNote Notebook and submitted to the Select Board.



This handout provides a summary of the comprehensive archive.

The table of contents of this handout is as follows:

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## Key Findings Summary

**All significant issues of scholastic performance or financial efficiency in the Farmington River Regional School District (FRRSD) are wholly associated with the Farmington River Elementary School (FRES).**

There are no significant issues of scholastic performance or financial efficiency associated with the out-of-district tuition arrangements for the FRRSD middle school and high school pupils.

These out-of-district tuition arrangements provide quite acceptable scholastic performance at an extremely attractive per pupil cost.

The scholastic performance and financial efficiency of FRES have significantly deteriorated over the last several years, at an ever accelerating pace, to their current unacceptable levels.

With only modest additional deterioration of its scholastic performance, FRES will be designated/flagged an underperforming school in need of intervention/assistance by the MA Department of Elementary & Secondary Education (DESE).

These issues are ultimately a result of the FRRSD School Committee (SC) as a whole having been and continuing to be unwilling and/or unable to hold FRRSD administration accountable for the scholastic performance and financial efficiency of FRES.

**The ability of Sandisfield to change this situation is significantly impeded by the FRRSD Regional District Agreement (RDA), which positions Otis with the majority of the SC membership.**

It is highly unlikely in our opinion that the SC and/or the Town of Otis would ever agree to amend the RDA to give Sandisfield equal representation.

In our opinion the SC and the Town of Otis would be more likely to approve Sandisfield exiting the RDA and the district than to approve Sandisfield having equal representation on the SC.

There are strategies that Sandisfield can pursue to attempt to exit the RDA and FRRSD; however, these strategies may not be successful.

**While Sandisfield remains a part of the FRRSD, its SC members MUST work as a unified team and take BOLD action to attempt to improve the scholastic performance and financial efficiency of FRES.**

With bold action, we are confident that the scholastic performance of FRES could be returned to acceptable levels.

Even with bold action, it may not be possible to achieve acceptable financial efficiency of FRES, due to structural and external issues, and in any case significant improvement would likely be years in the making.

The Sandisfield SC team will require strong support from the Sandisfield Select Board, Finance Committee and its residents to make progress in this extremely challenging endeavor.

**Even if progress continues to be thwarted by the SC as a whole, steady, significant pressure from the Sandisfield SC team may result in the SC eventually agreeing to allow & support Sandisfield's exit from the RDA per the RDA exit procedure.**

**An extremely attractive alternative exists for Sandisfield if it can exit the RDA; namely, create the Sandisfield School District (SSD), which would tuition and transport all its pupils out-of-district.**

The SSD alternative would yield substantial improvements in both scholastic performance and financial efficiency for Sandisfield, well beyond that of any other alternative.

The SSD alternative would also position Sandisfield with significant leverage and control of its educational future, well beyond that of any other alternative.

## FRRSD Current Status and Trends

Note that no NG MCAS (MA standardized tests) testing was performed in 2020 due to COVID, and only limited testing was performed in Spring 2021, and those results have not yet been fully released; hence the most current data sets are from 2019.

These data sets are all pre-COVID (a good thing!), and hence reflective of "typical" performance.

The first data set that emerges post-COVID will likely be significantly "skewed" and may not be reflective of typical performance.

### FRES Peer Group Scholastic Performance & Financial Efficiency Comparisons

| School Name (School District)                | Enrollment (2020) |          |     |     |     | Per Pupil Expenditures (2019) |           | Teachers (2020) |                 |           |
|--|-------------------|----------|-----|-----|-----|-------------------------------|-----------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------|
|  | Grades            | # Pupils | SWD | HNS | EDS | Annual \$                     | Peer Rank | # FTE           | Pupils/Teachers | Peer Rank |
| Rowe Elementary (Rowe)                       | PK-6              | 73       | 30% | 56% | 34% | \$29,746                      | 11        | 8.3             | 8.8             | 2         |
| R. H. Conwell (Worthington)                  | PK-6              | 88       | 19% | 42% | 31% | \$16,803                      | 5         | 7.4             | 11.9            | 9         |
| Farmington River Elementary (FRRSD)          | PK-6              | 105      | 22% | 46% | 33% | \$28,612                      | 10        | 12.2            | 8.6             | 1         |
| Colrain Central (Mohawk Trail)               | PK-6              | 109      | 30% | 53% | 39% | \$24,212                      | 9         | 9.4             | 11.6            | 7         |
| Becket Washington School (Central Berkshire) | PK-5              | 113      | 25% | 58% | 43% | \$16,656                      | 4         | 9.6             | 11.8            | 8         |
| Chester Elementary (Gateway)                 | PK-5              | 120      | 27% | 46% | 34% | \$19,130                      | 8         | 11.6            | 10.3            | 3         |
| Wales Elementary (Wales)                     | PK-6              | 145      | 22% | 46% | 34% | \$15,279                      | 2         | 10.4            | 13.9            | 11        |
| Northfield Elementary (Pioneer Valley)       | PK-6              | 173      | 24% | 47% | 28% | \$18,970                      | 7         | 15.6            | 11.1            | 5         |
| Bernardston Elementary (Pioneer Valley)      | PK-6              | 184      | 29% | 46% | 31% | \$18,215                      | 6         | 16.7            | 11.0            | 4         |
| Lawrence W Pingree (Weymouth)                | K-4               | 199      | 22% | 42% | 32% | \$15,126                      | 1         | 17.3            | 11.5            | 6         |
| Stearns (Pittsfield)                         | K-5               | 230      | 22% | 46% | 38% | \$16,329                      | 3         | 18.7            | 12.3            | 10        |

SWD - Students w/ Disabilities

HNS - High Needs Students

EDS - Economically Disadvantaged Students

FRES has the second highest per pupil expenditures in the 11 member peer group, along with the smallest class sizes.

FRES's overall scholastic performance is the worst in the 11 member peer group.

Top scholastic performers are Beckett Washington, Lawrence W Pingree & Northfield Elementary.

There is no discernible correlation between scholastic performance on the one hand and either per pupil expenditures or class sizes on the other hand.



| School Name (School District)                | Enrollment (2020) |          |     |     |     | NG MCAS - % Meeting or Exceeding Expectations (2019) |           |      |           |         |           | AP (2019) |           | PTIT (2019) |           |
|--|-------------------|----------|-----|-----|-----|--|-----------|------|-----------|---------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-------------|-----------|
|  | Grades            | # Pupils | SWD | HNS | EDS | ELA  | Peer Rank | Math | Peer Rank | Science | Peer Rank | Score     | Peer Rank | Score       | Peer Rank |
| Rowe Elementary (Rowe)                       | PK-6              | 73       | 30% | 56% | 34% | 34%  | 11        | 34%  | 9         | 44%     | 5         | 21%       | 9         | 43%         | 7         |
| R. H. Conwell (Worthington)                  | PK-6              | 88       | 19% | 42% | 31% | 43%  | 9         | 36%  | 7         | 22%     | 10        | NA        | NA        | NA          | NA        |
| Farmington River Elementary (FRRSD)          | PK-6              | 105      | 22% | 46% | 33% | 41%  | 10        | 22%  | 11        | 42%     | 7         | 18%       | 10        | 27%         | 10        |
| Colrain Central (Mohawk Trail)               | PK-6              | 109      | 30% | 53% | 39% | 45%  | 6         | 43%  | 5         | 44%     | 5         | 24%       | 8         | 44%         | 6         |
| Becket Washington School (Central Berkshire) | PK-5              | 113      | 25% | 58% | 43% | 57%  | 3         | 57%  | 1         | 62%     | 2         | 71%       | 1         | 54%         | 3         |
| Chester Elementary (Gateway)                 | PK-5              | 120      | 27% | 46% | 34% | 55%  | 4         | 40%  | 6         | 56%     | 4         | 29%       | 6         | 41%         | 9         |
| Wales Elementary (Wales)                     | PK-6              | 145      | 22% | 46% | 34% | 49%  | 5         | 46%  | 4         | 68%     | 1         | 57%       | 4         | 42%         | 8         |
| Northfield Elementary (Pioneer Valley)       | PK-6              | 173      | 24% | 47% | 28% | 60%  | 2         | 55%  | 2         | 57%     | 3         | 71%       | 1         | 84%         | 2         |
| Bernardston Elementary (Pioneer Valley)      | PK-6              | 184      | 29% | 46% | 31% | 45%  | 6         | 35%  | 8         | 41%     | 8         | 44%       | 5         | 54%         | 3         |
| Lawrence W Pingree (Weymouth)                | K-4               | 199      | 22% | 42% | 32% | 65%  | 1         | 52%  | 3         | NA      | NA        | 65%       | 3         | 94%         | 1         |
| Stearns (Pittsfield)                         | K-5               | 230      | 22% | 46% | 38% | 45%  | 6         | 34%  | 9         | 23%     | 9         | 25%       | 7         | 46%         | 5         |

SWD - Students w/ Disabilities

HNS - High Needs Students

EDS - Economically Disadvantaged Students

NG MCAS - Next Gen MCAS tests (MA standardized tests)

ELA - English Language Arts

AP - Accountability Percentile

Accountability percentiles (1-99) indicate how a school is performing overall compared to other schools that administer similar MCAS tests. They are calculated by combining information related to achievement, growth, English learner progress, chronic absenteeism, high school completion, and advanced coursework completion. Schools with higher percentiles are generally higher performing, and schools with lower percentiles are generally lower performing.

PTIT - Progress Toward Improvement Targets

Massachusetts sets annual improvement targets for every district and school. Targets are set for achievement, growth, English learner progress, chronic absenteeism, high school completion, and advanced coursework completion. Districts and schools with a target percentage of 75% or higher are considered to be meeting or exceeding targets.

FRES ranks last in Math, PTIT & AP; next to last in ELA; 4th from last in Science.

FRES AP score is 14% below next highest ranking peer group member & 75% below that of highest ranking peer group member.

FRES PTIT score is 34% below next highest ranking peer group member & 71% below that of highest ranking peer group member.

FRES Math performance is 35% below next highest ranking peer group member & 61% below that of highest ranking peer group member.

FRES ELA performance is 37% below that of highest ranking peer group member.

FRES Science performance is 38% below that of highest ranking peer group member.

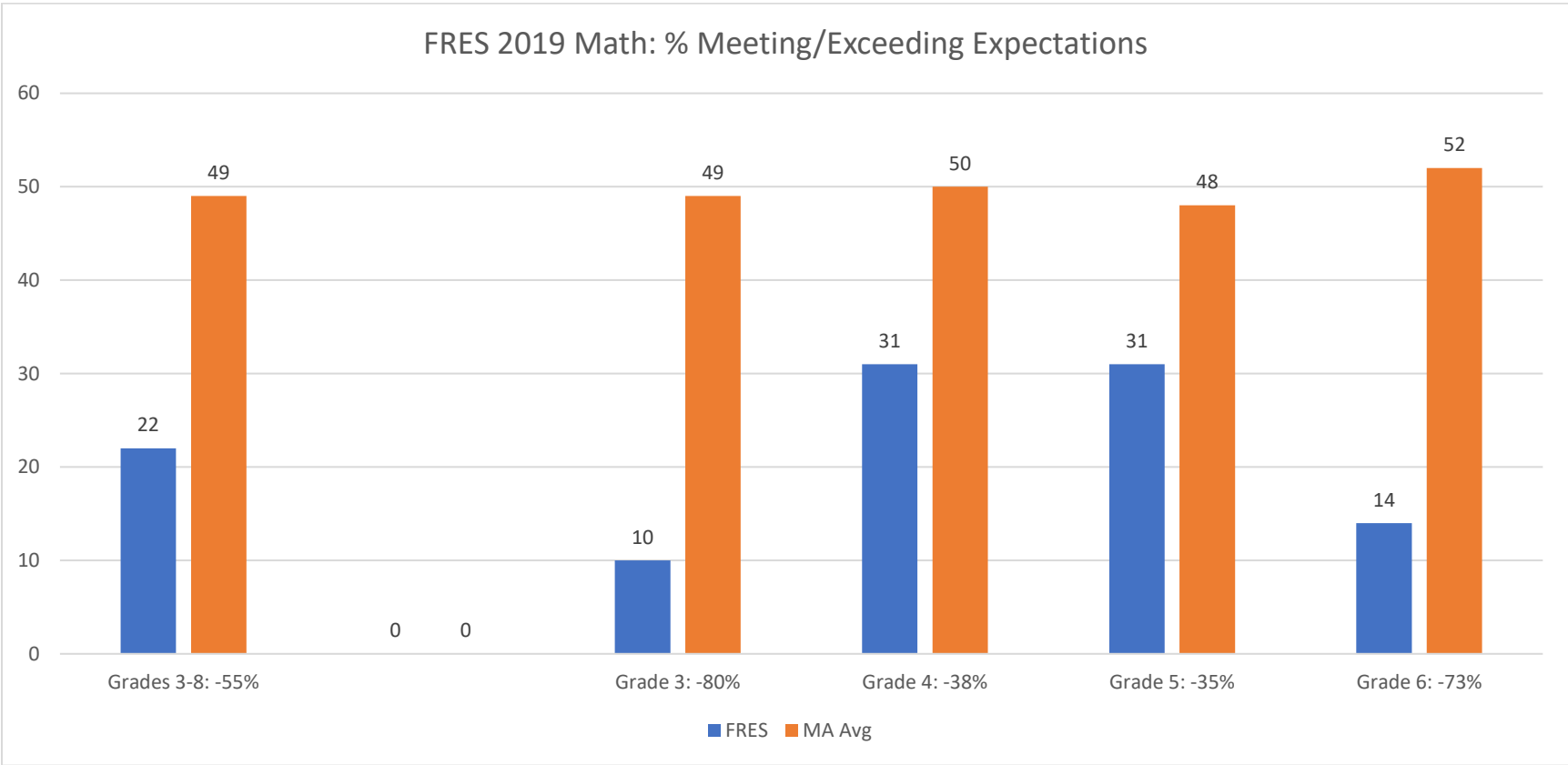
Beckett-Washington (BW) - located just 10 miles north of FRE up Rt. 8 - handily outperforms FRES in all respects.

BW expends 42% less per pupil than FRES, while having 37% larger class sizes than FRES.

FRES admin and SC members expressed no interest in a benchmarking visit to BW (which BW has indicated it would be willing to support).

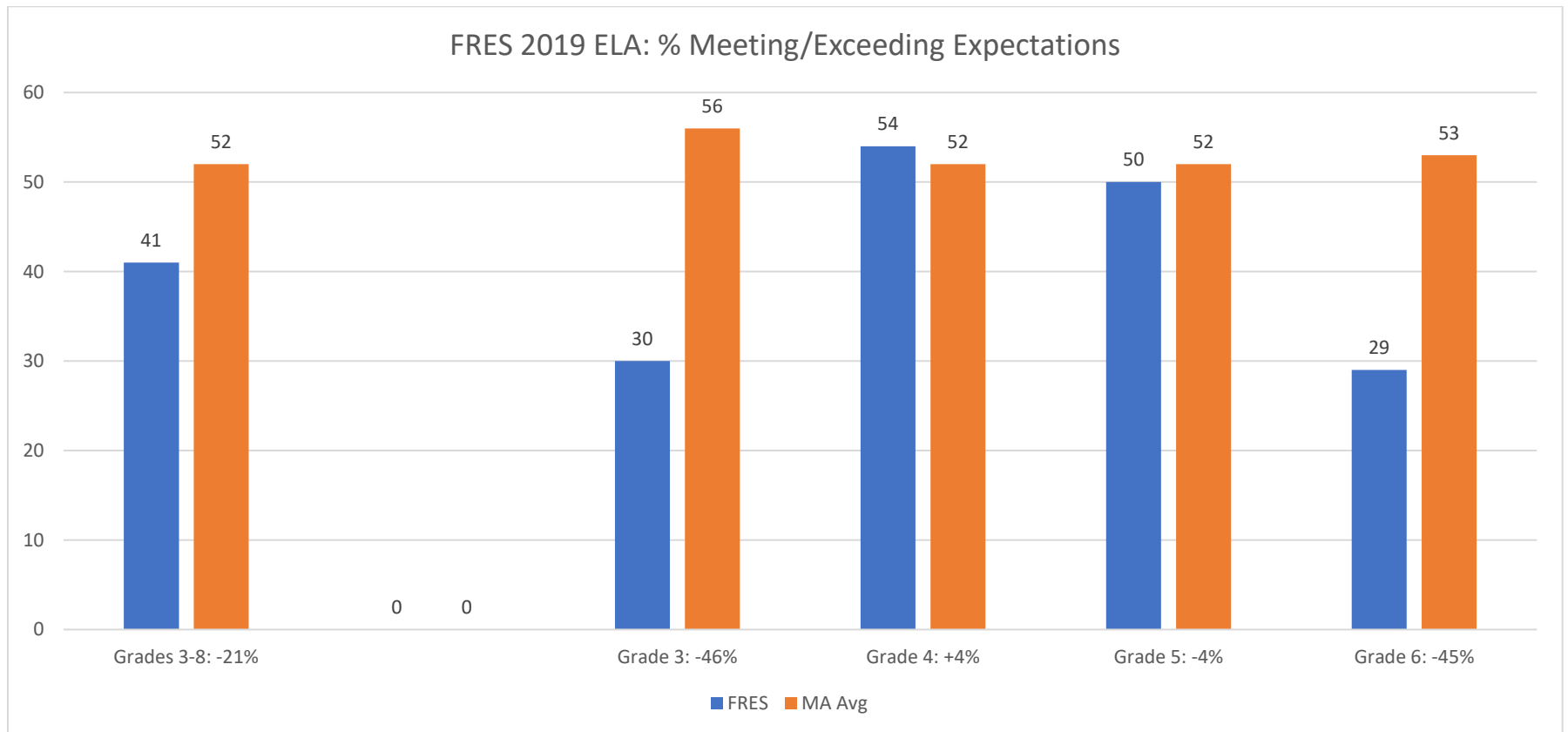
Breakdown of FRES Scholastic Performance Data by Grade Level (direct from MA DOE 2019 report card for FRES)

Math data

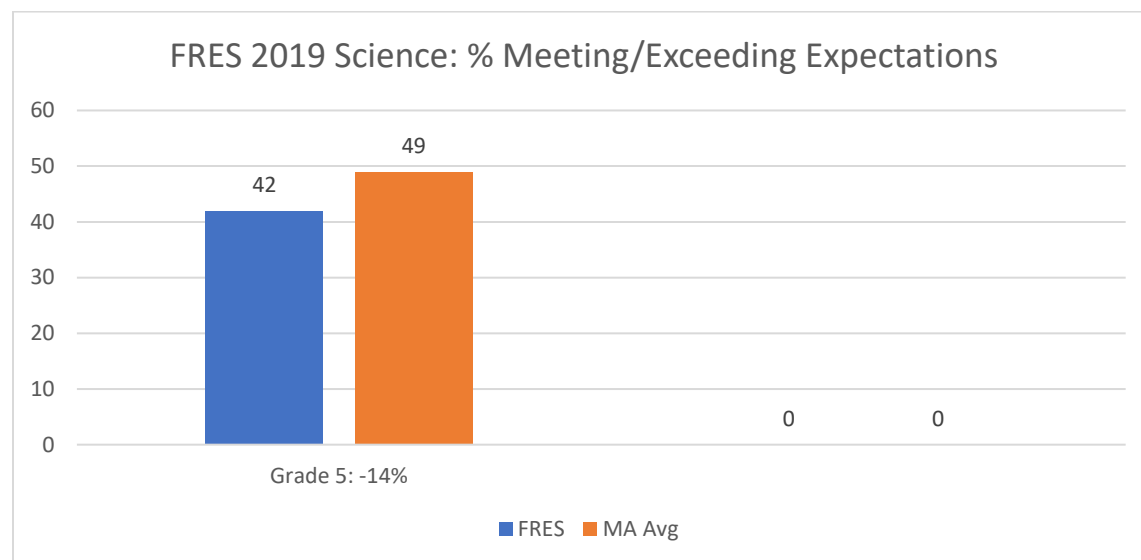




## ELA Data



## Science data



Raw data from MA DOE shows FRES has ZERO students exceeding expectations across the entire set of test results.

| Grade and Subject                      | Meeting or Exceeding Expectations |       | Exceeding Expectations |       | Meeting Expectations |       | Partially Meeting Expectations |       | Not Meeting Expectations |       | No. of Students Included |
|--|-----------------------------------|-------|------------------------|-------|----------------------|-------|--------------------------------|-------|--------------------------|-------|--------------------------|
|  | School                            | State | School                 | State | School               | State | School                         | State | School                   | State |                          |
| GRADE 03 - ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS       | 30                                | 56    | 0                      | 10    | 30                   | 46    | 50                             | 36    | 20                       | 8     | 10                       |
| GRADE 03 - MATHEMATICS                 | 10                                | 49    | 0                      | 9     | 10                   | 40    | 80                             | 38    | 10                       | 13    | 10                       |
| GRADE 04 - ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS       | 54                                | 52    | 0                      | 9     | 54                   | 43    | 38                             | 39    | 8                        | 9     | 13                       |
| GRADE 04 - MATHEMATICS                 | 31                                | 50    | 0                      | 8     | 31                   | 41    | 54                             | 39    | 15                       | 12    | 13                       |
| GRADE 05 - ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS       | 50                                | 52    | 0                      | 7     | 50                   | 45    | 50                             | 39    | 0                        | 9     | 12                       |
| GRADE 05 - MATHEMATICS                 | 31                                | 48    | 0                      | 6     | 31                   | 43    | 54                             | 42    | 15                       | 10    | 13                       |
| GRADE 05 - SCIENCE                     | 42                                | 49    | 0                      | 8     | 42                   | 40    | 58                             | 39    | 0                        | 12    | 12                       |
| GRADE 06 - ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS       | 29                                | 53    | 0                      | 13    | 29                   | 41    | 50                             | 33    | 21                       | 13    | 14                       |
| GRADE 06 - MATHEMATICS                 | 14                                | 52    | 0                      | 10    | 14                   | 41    | 64                             | 38    | 21                       | 10    | 14                       |
| GRADES 03 - 08 - ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS | 41                                | 52    | 0                      | 10    | 41                   | 42    | 47                             | 37    | 12                       | 11    | 49                       |
| GRADES 03 - 08 - MATHEMATICS           | 22                                | 49    | 0                      | 9     | 22                   | 40    | 62                             | 39    | 16                       | 12    | 50                       |
| GRADES 05 & 08 - SCIENCE               | 42                                | 48    | 0                      | 8     | 42                   | 39    | 58                             | 40    | 0                        | 12    | 12                       |

Note: Rows give % of tested pupils in each category (except for last column, which gives number of pupils tested in each category).

## FRES Scholastic Performance Ranking & Assessment by Schooldigger.com

Schooldigger.com provides both a ranking & an assessment of scholastic performance relative to other MA public elementary schools.

FRES Assessment: One star out of a possible five stars.

FRES Ranking: 768 out of 942.

Data such as this is widely used by real estate websites, and hence the poor scholastic performance is an impediment to families with elementary school pupils re-locating to Otis and Sandisfield.

This negatively impacts enrollment levels at FRES, which in turn negatively impacts the financial efficiency of FRES (more on this later).

The screenshot shows the Schooldigger.com website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with the SchoolDigger logo, buttons for 'Find a School' and 'School Rankings', and a search bar. Below this is a banner for 'Turtle diary.com' with the tagline 'Re-imagination of learning' and 'Make learning EASIER, SIMPLER & ENJOYABLE with'. The main content area is titled 'Farmington River Elementary' and displays the following information:

- Public PK, KG-6**
- Address:** 555 N Main Street, Otis, MA 01253
- Phone:** (413) 269-4466
- School Website:** [Link]
- District:** Farmington River Regional
- SchoolDigger Rank:** 768<sup>th</sup> of 942 Massachusetts Elementary Schools
- Assessment:** 1 star out of 5 (represented by 1 yellow star and 4 grey stars)
- Per Pupil Expenditures:** \$28,612
- Student/teacher ratio:** 8.6
- Number of students:** 105
- Racial breakdown:**
  - White: 99.0%
  - Hispanic: 1.0%
- Free/discounted lunch recipients:** 42.6%

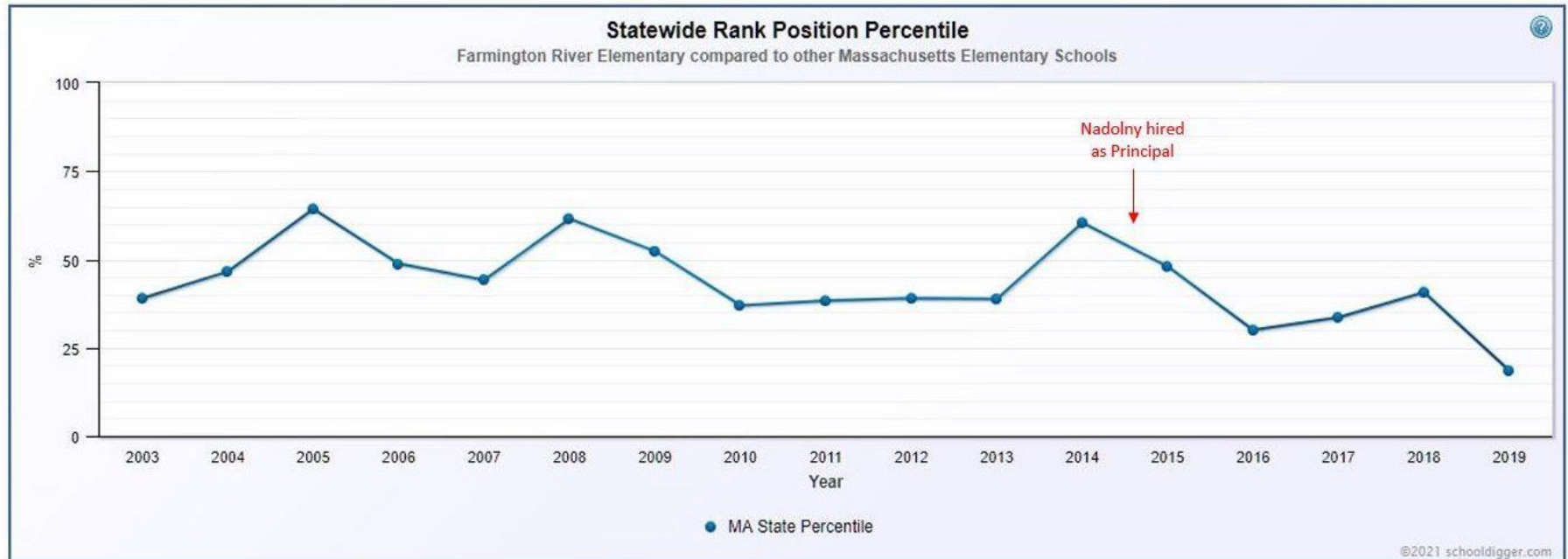
At the bottom, there are links to 'See top rated Massachusetts elementary schools' and 'Compare Farmington River Elementary to nearby elementary schools!'.

## FRES Scholastic Performance Historical Trend

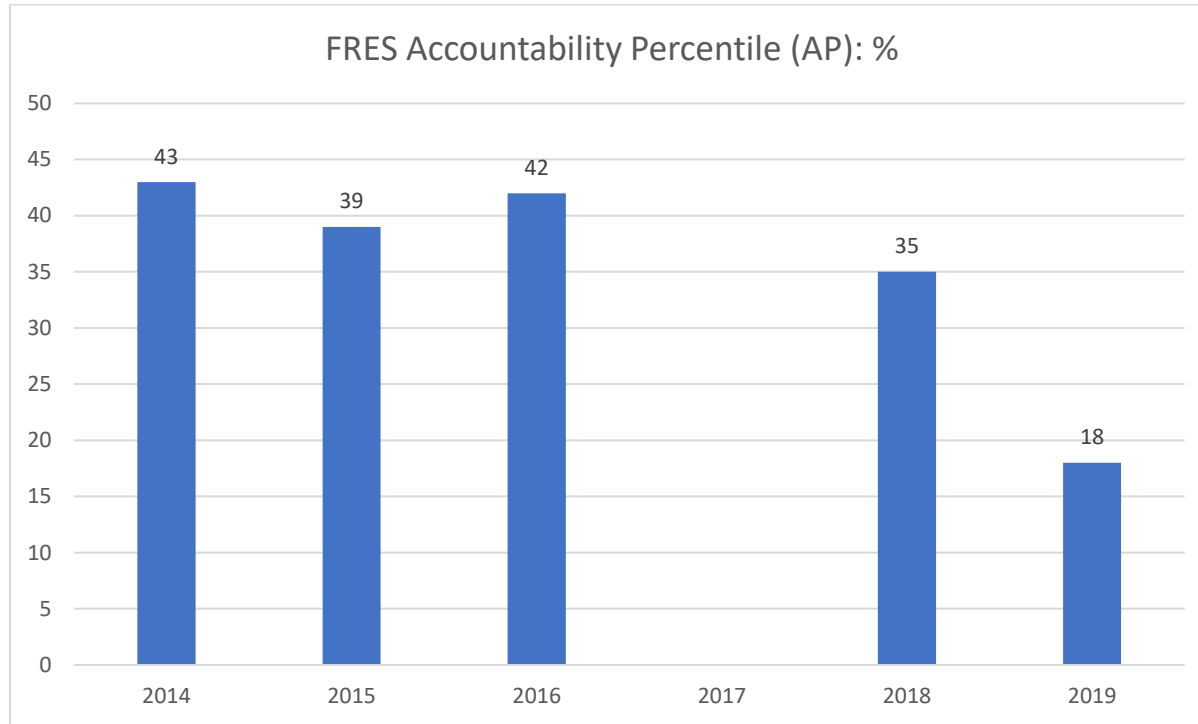
FRES ranking against other MA elementary schools - as measured by MCAS scores tabulated by Schooldigger.com - has deteriorated by 70% between 2014 (60%) to 2019 (18%).

This rapid, steep decline coincides with the hiring of Nadolny as Principal and subsequent placement into combined Principal/Superintendent role.

Given that FRES has achieved acceptable levels of scholastic performance in the past, we are confident that the scholastic performance of FRES could be returned to acceptable levels if bold, appropriate action were taken by the FRRSD admin and SC.



The FRES Accountability Percentile (AP) assigned by MA DOE has dropped by 58% over the same period, from 43% in 2014 to 18% in 2019.



Note: No AP scores were assigned to any MA schools in 2017 due to the evolution from MCAS to the Next Gen MCAS.

FRES is at risk of being designated/flagged as underperforming school in need of intervention/assistance by the MA DESE.

If/when the FRES AP drops to 10% or less, the state designates FRES as an underperforming school in need of assistance/intervention and takes appropriate actions.

The FRES AP dropped to 18% in 2019, from 35% in 2018, a drop of 49%, suggesting an accelerating rate of deterioration.

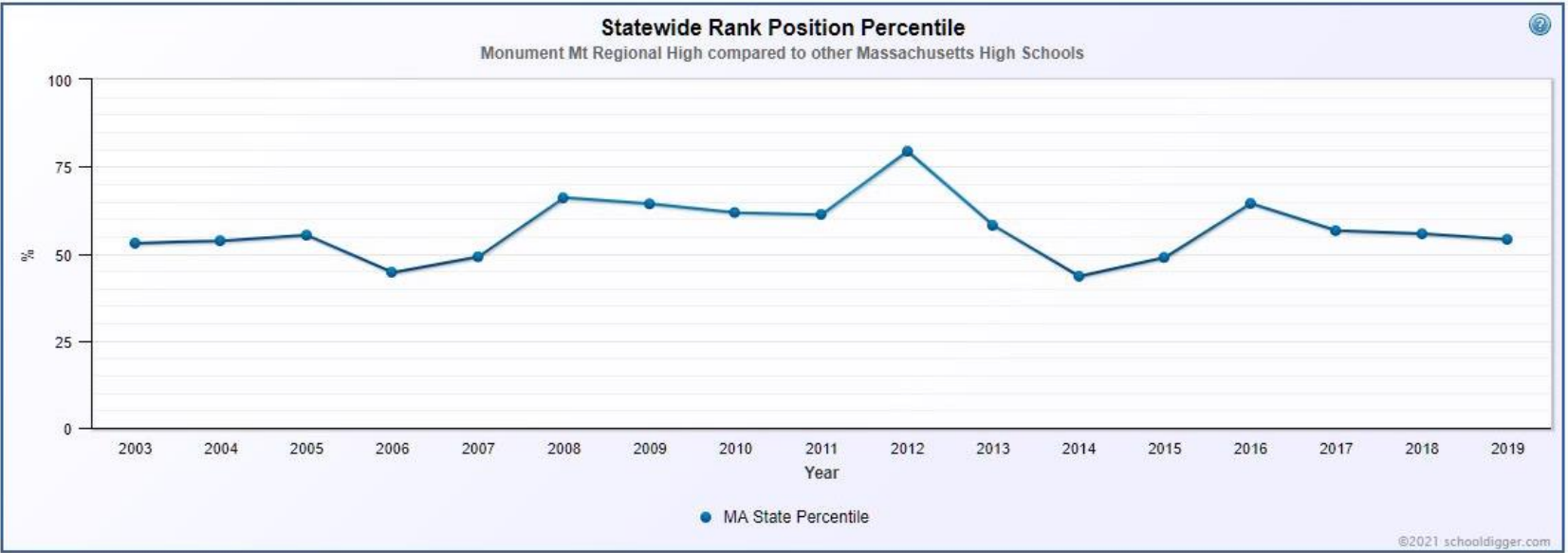
The same percentage drop in the next update would put the FRES AP at 9%, leading to designation as an underperforming school.

It is not clear when the next AP update will occur, as the state suspended MCAS testing in FY20 due to COVID, and did only limited MCAS testing in FY21, and may not update the AP scores using the FY21 test results due to the limited testing in FY21.

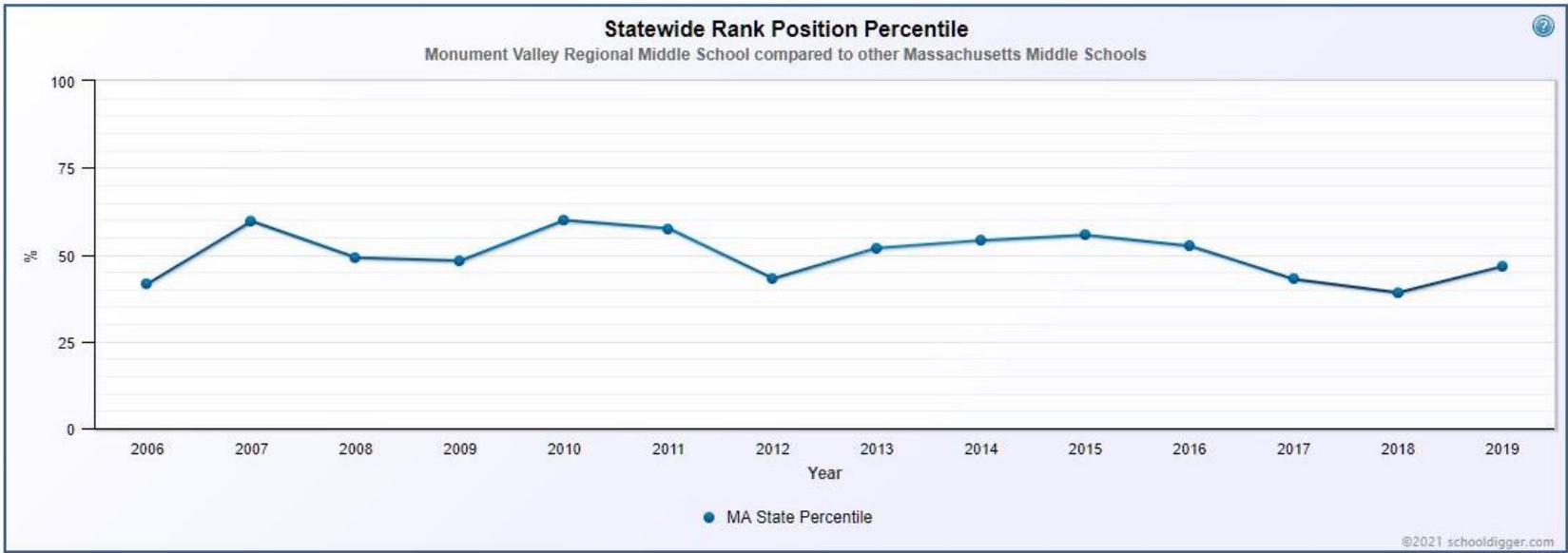
However, the latest the next AP update will occur will be Fall 2022, assuming full MCAS testing is performed in Spring 2022 (which is the current expectation).

FRRSD Scholastic Performance Data for Grades 7-12 (middle & high school grades, tuitioned out-of-district)

MMRHS



MVRMS



## FRRSD Financial Efficiency Comparisons to MA state averages

The data in this table of course considers both Otis & Sandisfield students.

Out-of-district pupils consist of all grade 7-12 pupils, along with grade PK-6 pupils that "choice-out" of FRES.

In-district pupils consist of those PK-6 eligible pupils that do not "choice-out" of FRES (i.e., pupils that actually attend FRES).

Note that out-of-district expenditures consist of both tuitions paid as well as out-of-district transportation costs.

Note that no administrative costs are included in the out-of-district expenditures, as MA DOE deems these "insignificant".

| FY2019 Farmington River Regional School District  | \$/Pupil        | MA Avg          | % MA Avg    |
|---|-----------------|-----------------|-------------|
| Administration                                    | \$1,504         | \$537           | 280%        |
| Instructional Leadership                          | \$2,316         | \$1,096         | 211%        |
| Teachers  | \$5,766         | \$6,419         | 90%         |
| Other Teaching Services                           | \$3,563         | \$1,400         | 254%        |
| Professional Development                          | \$273           | \$162           | 168%        |
| Instructional Materials, Equipment and Technology | \$1,073         | \$481           | 223%        |
| Guidance, Counseling and Testing                  | \$606           | \$536           | 113%        |
| Pupil Services                                    | \$4,058         | \$1,728         | 235%        |
| Operations and Maintenance                        | \$2,259         | \$1,298         | 174%        |
| Insurance, Retirement Programs and Other          | \$7,069         | \$2,924         | 242%        |
| <b>In-District Expenditures (118 pupils)</b>      | <b>\$28,487</b> | <b>\$16,581</b> | <b>172%</b> |
| <b>Total Expenditures (259 pupils)</b>            | <b>\$18,304</b> | <b>\$17,149</b> | <b>107%</b> |
| <b>Out-of-District Expenditures (141 pupils)</b>  | <b>\$9,834</b>  | <b>NA</b>       | <b>NA</b>   |

Source: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/finance/statistics/per-pupil-exp.html>

Note that FRRSD out-of-district per pupil expenditures are just 35% of its in-district per pupil expenditures.

Note also that FRRSD out-of-district per pupil expenditures are just 57% of the MA average total per pupil expenditures.

This data makes clear that tuitions paid today by FRRSD for upper grades (Grades 7-12, tuitioned out-of-district) are VERY cost effective.

There is substantial financial leverage gained by "tuitioning out" students into out-of-district schools.

This is a result of the tuitioning schools absorbing students w/o increasing fixed, already paid for overheads.

Sandisfield students in essence represent "free, unencumbered funds" for the tuitioning schools.

Substantial, highly attractive, financial leverage would be lost by Sandisfield being absorbed in full into any alternative school district.



| <b>FY2019 Farmington River Regional School District</b> | <b>\$/Pupil</b> | <b>MA Avg</b>   | <b>% MA Avg</b> |
|---|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Administration  | \$1,504         | \$537           | 280%            |
| Instructional Leadership                                | \$2,316         | \$1,096         | 211%            |
| Teachers  | \$5,766         | \$6,419         | 90%             |
| Other Teaching Services                                 | \$3,563         | \$1,400         | 254%            |
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| <b>Total Expenditures (259 pupils)</b>                  | <b>\$18,304</b> | <b>\$17,149</b> | <b>107%</b>     |
| <b>Out-of-District Expenditures (141 pupils)</b>        | <b>\$9,834</b>  | <b>NA</b>       | <b>NA</b>       |

Source: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/finance/statistics/per-pupil-exp.html>

Note that the FRRSD in-district per pupil expenditures are 1.72x MA averages, and 2.9x its out-of-district per pupil expenditures.

This data makes clear that FRRSD financial issues lie wholly with FRES, and that the FRES financial issues are very serious.

On a percentage basis, FRES runs most above the state averages in the "Administration" financial subcategory, at 2.80x the state average.

On an absolute cost basis, FRES runs most above the state averages in the "Insurance, Retirement Programs & Other" financial subcategory, at \$4,145 over the state per pupil average in this subcategory.

FRES runs under state averages in only 1 of the 10 financial subcategories - the "Teachers" subcategory - where it runs at 90% of the state average.

FRES runs between 2.11-2.80x the state averages in 6 of the remaining 9 financial subcategories.

FRES runs between 1.68-1.74x the state averages in 2 of the remaining 3 financial subcategories.

## FRRSD Current Administrative Costs Breakdown

Data for current administrative costs at FRRSD was obtained from Eric Jesner upon request from this committee in February 2021.

|  |           |            |
|--|-----------|------------|
| Superintendent                               | \$17,965  |            |
| Principal                                    | \$99,667  |            |
| Special Needs Administrator                  | \$105,904 |            |
| Business Manager                             | \$72,500  |            |
| Assistant to the Superintendent              | \$38,771  |            |
| Assistant to the Principal                   | \$33,946  | \$16.32/hr |
| Business Office Assistant / Office Assistant | \$50,274  |            |
|  |           |            |
|  | \$419,027 |            |

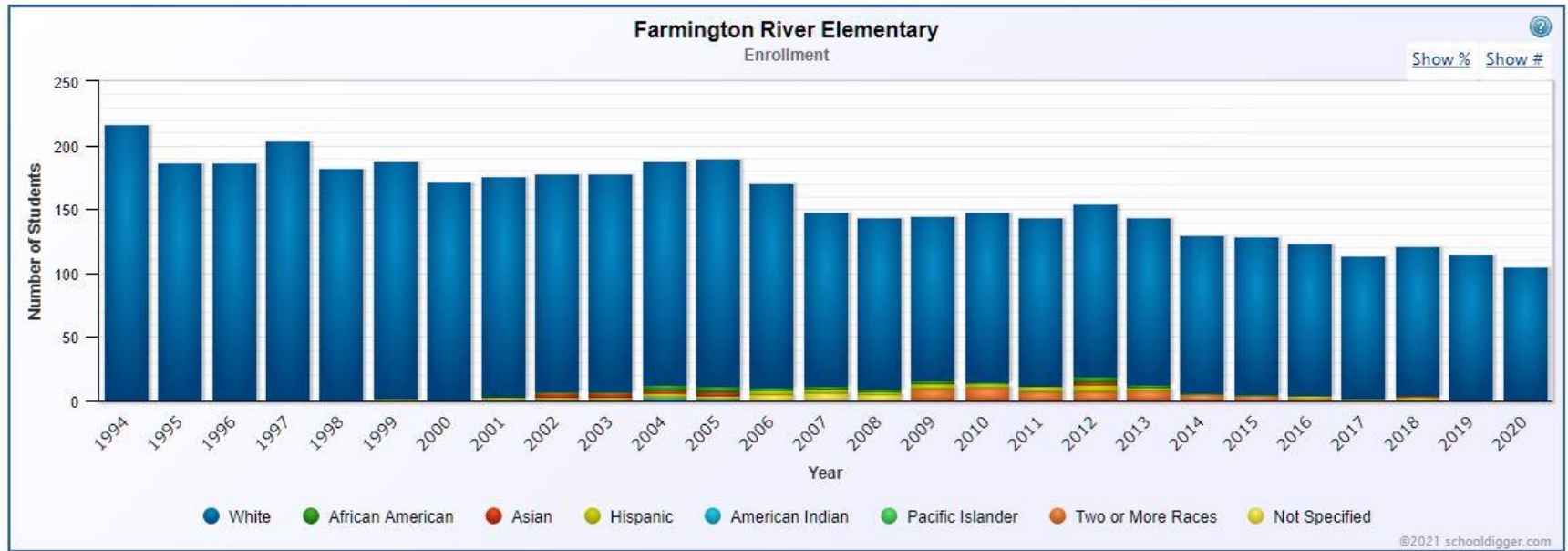
Note that Nadolny paid \$17,965 for 1 day/week as FRRSD Superintendent & \$99,667 for 5 days/week as FRES Principal.

## FRRSD Enrollment Data

### FRES Enrollment Historical Trend

Enrollment at FRES has steadily declined from 217 pupils in 1994 to 105 pupils in 2020 - a drop of 52% against ever increasing fixed infrastructure/overhead costs.

This has a dramatic negative impact on FRES annual per pupil expenditures due to “fixed” overhead/infrastructure costs.



With continued decreasing enrollment, annual per pupil expenditures will continue to rapidly rise.

Even with flat enrollment levels, annual per pupil expenditures will continue to rise due to ever increasing fixed infrastructure/overhead costs.

Without significantly increased enrollment levels it is highly unlikely that reasonable annual per pupil expenditure will ever be achieved.

These problems are amplified by the unwillingness of FRES administration & SC as a whole to make structural changes in the face of declining enrollment, like combining classes, etc.

We strongly believe that a key factor underlying the decline of FRES enrollment is its poor scholastic performance:

First, we strongly believe (supported by a survey conducted by this committee) that the poor scholastic performance of FRES contributes significantly to 20% of eligible pupils "choicing out" of FRES at present (details provided below).

Note that a 20% increase in enrollment would likely drop per pupil annual expenditures at FRES by considerably more than 20%, as FRRSD pays tuitions to other schools when its pupils choice out to those schools.

We also believe that the poor FRES scholastic performance discourages families with elementary school pupils from re-locating to Otis and Sandisfield, further negatively impacting enrollment levels (recall the schooldigger.com rating/ranking).

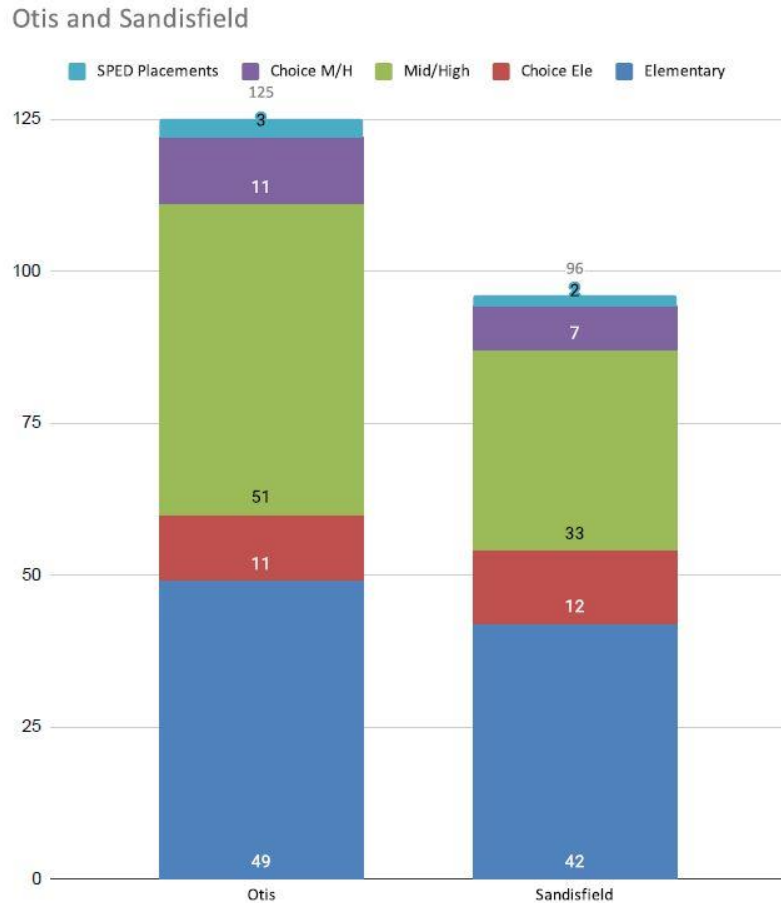
Due to the above, we feel strongly that improving the scholastic performance of FRES should be the highest priority going forward, as this will most directly benefit the FRES pupils, and it is a pre-requisite for significantly improving the financial efficiency of FRES.

However, even if the scholastic performance of FRES is significantly improved, it may not be possible to achieve acceptable FRES financial efficiency, and in any case significant improvement would likely be years in the making.

For example, if both Sandisfield and Otis real estate markets are overwhelmed by non-resident second homeowners without elementary age children purchasing available real estate, this could lead to FRES enrollment continuing to drop despite FRES scholastic improvements reducing the rate of choice outs and making these towns more attractive locations for families with elementary age children.

## FRRSD Current Enrollment

Overall enrollment data for FRRSD was provided by Eric Jesner upon request from this committee in February 2021.



Only  $49 + 42 = 91$  pupils actually attend FRES (42 from Sandisfield & 49 from Otis).

Approximately 20% of FRES eligible pupils "choice out" of FRES:  $(11 + 12) / (11 + 12 + 49 + 42) = 20\%$ .

Per a survey we conducted, the key reasons eligible students choice out of FRES are proximity/distance & scholastic performance.

Sandisfield has 96 total pupils within the FRRSD, comprised of 42 in-district students (FRES) and 54 out-of-district students.

The 54 Sandisfield out-of-district pupils are largely those attending MVRMS and MMRHS, but also include those than "choice out" of FRES, MVRMS and MMRHS, as well as SPED placements.

A breakdown of actual Sandisfield enrollment at FRES by grade level was also obtained from Eric Jesner upon request from this committee in February 2021.

Sandisfield Students per Grade as of October 2020-21 SIMS reporting. This is Farmington River only.

| Grade           | Number of students |
|-----------------|--------------------|
| ½ day PK        | 3                  |
| Early K         | 3                  |
| Kindergarten    | 7                  |
| 1 <sup>st</sup> | 9                  |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> | 5                  |
| 3 <sup>rd</sup> | 4                  |
| 4 <sup>th</sup> | 3                  |
| 5 <sup>th</sup> | 3                  |
| 6 <sup>th</sup> | 4                  |
|                 |                    |

Sandisfield has a total of 41 pupils attending FRES.

Sandisfield has just 4 or fewer pupils enrolled at FRES in each of grades 3-6.

It would likely be instructive to obtain and review a breakdown of Sandisfield FRES "choice outs" by grade level as it may reveal that "choice outs" dominantly impact grades 3-6.

## FRRSD School Committee (SC)

The slide is a presentation slide from the Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASCC). It features a dark blue header with the MASCC logo on the left and the text 'Tracy O'Connell Novick Massachusetts Association of School Committees' on the right. The main title 'What do school committees do?' is in white text on a blue background. Below the title, a quote in white text on a dark blue background describes the powers of a school committee. The quote is attributed to MGL ch. 71, sec.37.

**masc** Tracy O'Connell Novick  
Massachusetts Association of School Committees

### What do school committees do?

"The school committee in each city and town and each regional school district:  
shall have the power to select and to terminate the superintendent,  
shall review and approve budgets for public education in the district,  
and shall establish educational goals and policies for the schools in the district consistent with the requirements of law and statewide goals and standards established by the board of education." MGL ch. 71, sec.37

The main function of a SC is to set high standards & goals for the district administration and hold it accountable for district scholastic performance and financial efficiency.

Every MA SC is fully empowered by MGL to hold the district administration accountable (e.g., each MA SC has the ability to hire & fire the superintendent, to reject & approve budget requests, etc).

Unfortunately, the FRRSD SC as a whole has been and continues to be unwilling/unable to hold the FRRSD administration accountable for the scholastic performance and financial efficiency of FRES.

Indeed, never in the history of the FRRSD has the Superintendent ever been formally evaluated by the entire SC in a public meeting against prior goals established for the Superintendent by the SC.

To set annual goals for the Superintendent and to perform such an evaluation of the Superintendent each year is a perhaps the most important responsibility of a SC.



Sandisfield's ability to change this situation is severely impaired, given it is outnumbered by Otis by 4-3 on the SC (per the Regional District Agreement...details provided below).

The Otis majority also allows Otis to retain control of the SC chair position, further impairing Sandisfield's ability to change this situation.

Of paramount concern is that the SC as a whole has historically demonstrated and continues to demonstrate VERY LIMITED focus/interest in driving scholastic performance & financial efficiency.

In essence, the SC as a whole has historically functioned as an FRES fan club (i.e., as a "rubber stamp" for the administration) and glorified PTA not as a SC that holds the district administration accountable.

This may be due to some/all of the SC members never having taken the SC training required by MGL, which is necessary to understand the role, responsibilities, and proper procedures of the SC.

Note that all of Sandisfield's SC members have completed the required training.

## **FRRSD Regional District Agreement (RDA)**

The Regional District Agreement (RDA) is a major impediment to Sandisfield's desire to improve the scholastic performance & financial efficiency of FRES.

The RDA was approved by MA DOE on October 30, 1991, to be effective January 1, 1992.

There is no expiration date incorporated into the RDA (contract in perpetuity).

No amendments to the RDA have ever been implemented.

The RDA specifies 4 Otis and 3 Sandisfield SC members, with nearly all matters decided by majority vote per parliamentary law, and the Otis SC members routinely vote in concert with one another.

The RDA unfortunately provides only very limited, essentially moot means for changing the SC composition

This composition enables Otis SC members to keep agenda items proposed by and supported by Sandisfield SC members off meeting agendas, so they aren't discussed in a public meeting.

This composition also enables Otis SC members to pass/defeat nearly all motions by voting in concert with one another.

Fortunately, MGL states that a 2/3 vote (5 of 7 SC members) is needed to pass a budget through the SC prior to Town budget votes, so Sandisfield can stop a budget from passing by all its SC members voting against the budget.

All SC votes other than such budget votes are simple majority votes per parliamentary procedure e.g., Robert's Rules.

The RDA defines a quorum as a majority plus at least one member from each town.

As a result, the Otis SC members are not precluded by MA Open Meeting Law (OML) from discussing all matters amongst each other, and also with the FRRSD administration, outside of a public meeting.

Consequently, matters can be fully discussed and vote outcomes decided prior to any public meeting on the matter, devoid of input or opinions from Sandisfield SC members.

However, based on the quorum requirement, the SC can't transact any business if none of the Sandisfield SC members are present.

This is the only real lever Sandisfield SC members have to stop motions, other than budget votes, that all Otis SC members support, from passing.

Amendment of the RDA is extremely difficult, as amendment first requires a SC majority vote, or a 10% petition from a member town, followed by approval votes from both member towns.

It is highly unlikely in our opinion that the Otis SC members and/or the Town of Otis would ever agree to amend the RDA to give Sandisfield equal representation.

In our opinion Otis SC members and the Town of Otis would be more likely to approve Sandisfield exiting the RDA and the district than to approve Sandisfield having equal representation on the SC.

There are strategies that Sandisfield can pursue to attempt to exit the RDA; however, these strategies may not be successful.

The RDA contains a procedure for member withdrawal from the RDA.

This procedure first requires the SC vote on a withdrawal amendment, which would specify terms and conditions of the withdrawal.

If passed by the SC, the withdrawal amendment would then be voted on by each Town.

If this procedure failed to approve a release from the RDA, legal action could then be taken to try to break the RDA.

There is successful precedent for this in MA (Worthington withdrawal from Gateway Regional School District).

Such legal action could be a multi-year, expensive process with no guarantee of prevailing in court.

It is possible however that, to avoid the legal action, Otis might settle out-of-court to allow Sandisfield to exit the RDA.

## FRES Alternatives Analysis

All elementary schools within a 25 mile radius of the Rt. 57 firehouse were identified as possible alternatives to FRES

Certain types of schools (virtual, parochial, CT) were then eliminated from further consideration

From the list of remaining (MA public, non-virtual) schools, those schools with scholastics that were not clearly superior to those of FRES were eliminated from the list.

Schools with a driving time from the Rt. 57 firehouse (207 Sandisfield Road) to the school of 30 minutes or more were next eliminated from the list.

This resulted in a "short list" of three MA public elementary school alternatives to FRES.

| School Name<br>(School District)       | Enrollment<br>(2020) |          | NG MCAS -<br>% Meeting or Exceeding Expectations (2019) |          |      |          |         |          | AP<br>(2019) |          | PTIT<br>(2019) |          | Per Pupil Expenditures<br>(2019) |          | Teachers<br>(2020) |                 |          | Rt 57<br>Firehouse |
|--|----------------------|----------|---|----------|------|----------|---------|----------|--------------|----------|----------------|----------|----------------------------------|----------|--------------------|-----------------|----------|--------------------|
|  | Grades               | # Pupils | ELA   | Grp Rank | Math | Grp Rank | Science | Grp Rank | Score        | Grp Rank | Score          | Grp Rank | Annual \$                        | Grp Rank | # FTE              | Pupils/Teachers | Grp Rank |                    |
| New Marlborough Central (S. Berkshire) | PK-4                 | 77       | 64%   | 1        | 57%  | 1        | NA      | NA       | NA           | NA       | 55%            | 3        | \$22,703                         | 1        | 6.9                | 11.2            | 4        | 10 min             |
| Muddy Brook (Berkshire Hills)          | PK-4                 | 349      | 53%   | 2        | 36%  | 2        | NA      | NA       | 47%          | 1        | 73%            | 1        | \$24,101                         | 3        | 36.1               | 9.7             | 3        | 20 min             |
| Farmington River Elementary (FRRSD)    | PK-6                 | 105      | 41%   | 3        | 22%  | 4        | 42%     | 2        | 18%          | 3        | 27%            | 4        | \$28,612                         | 4        | 12.2               | 8.6             | 1        | 21 min             |
| Undermountain (Southern Berkshire)     | PK-5                 | 243      | 40%   | 4        | 34%  | 3        | 54%     | 1        | 31%          | 2        | 56%            | 2        | \$23,768                         | 2        | 25.7               | 9.5             | 2        | 24 min             |

NG MCAS - Next Gen MCAS tests (MA standardized tests)

ELA - English Language Arts

Accountability Percentile

Accountability percentiles (1-99) indicate how a school is performing overall compared to other schools that administer similar MCAS tests. They are calculated by combining information related to achievement, growth, English learner progress, chronic absenteeism, high school completion, and advanced coursework completion. Schools with higher percentiles are generally higher performing, and schools with lower percentiles are generally lower performing.

Progress Toward Improvement Targets

Massachusetts sets annual improvement targets for every district and school. Targets are set for achievement, growth, English learner progress, chronic absenteeism, high school completion, and advanced coursework completion. Districts and schools with a target percentage of 75% or higher are considered to be meeting or exceeding targets.

Note that New Marlborough Central was changed from PK-4 to PK-3 at the start of the Fall 2021 school year

(4th grade moved to Undermountain Elementary School)

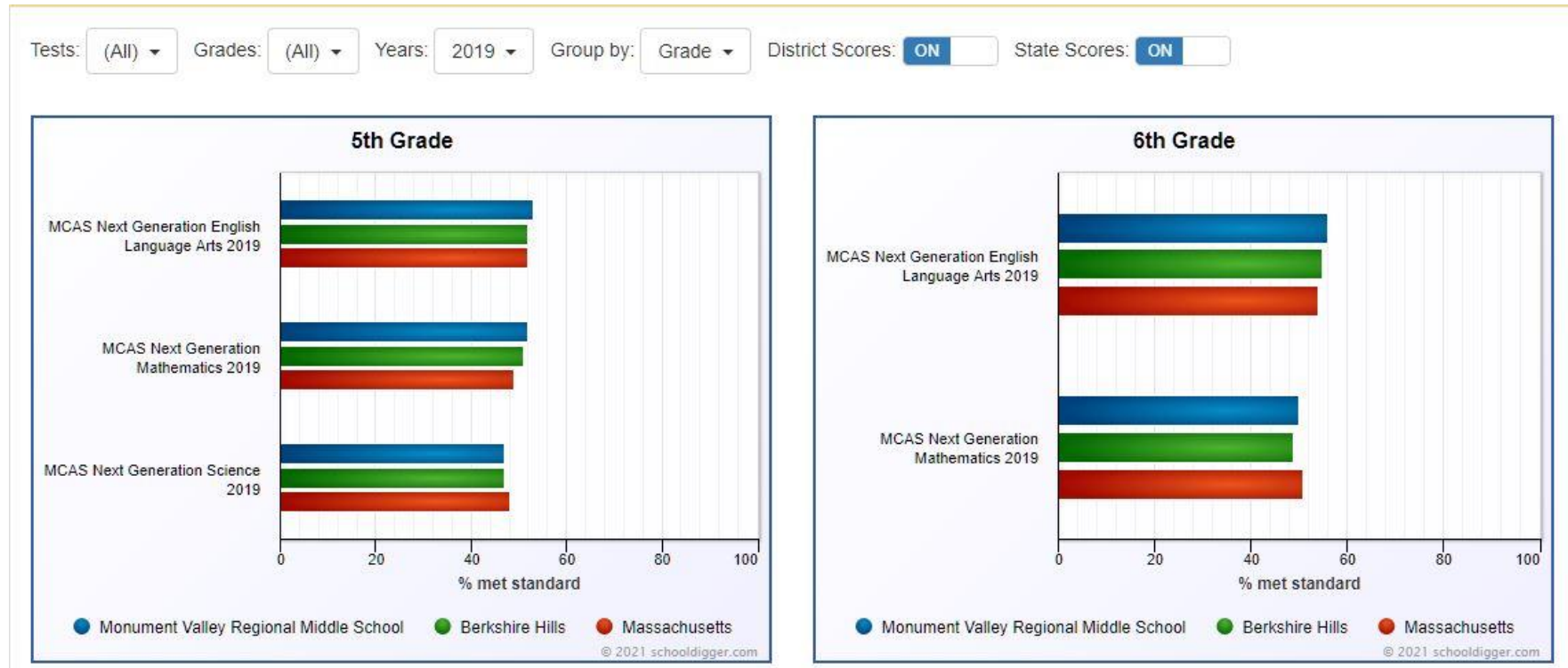
The committee then selected the following as the top alternatives to FRES: NMCES for grades PK-3, MBES for grade 4, MVRMS (a middle school) for grades 5-6.

NMCES was selected for grades PK-3 based on its superior scholastics and significantly shorter driving times from Rt. 57 firehouse compared to MBES and UES.

MBES was selected for Grade 4 based on its superior scholastics and shorter driving time from the Rt. 57 firehouse compared to UES.

MVRMS was selected for Grades 5-6 based on its excellent scholastics, the fact that grades 7-8 already attend MVRMS, and its driving time from the Rt. 57 firehouse being less than that of UES and equal to that of FRES.

Scholastic performance data for MVRMS validates selection of MVRMS for grades 5-6.



The MVRMS scholastic performance data raises the question of why grades 5 & 6 are even offered at FRES, given their very small class sizes, the superior academics at MVRMS, and given that the current tuition agreement for grades 7-8 covers these grades as well.

| Enrollment by Grade (2020-21) |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |   |   |   |    |    |    |    |       |
|-------------------------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|---|---|---|----|----|----|----|-------|
|                               | PK | K  | 1  | 2  | 3  | 4  | 5  | 6  | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | SP | Total |
| District                      | 18 | 16 | 17 | 10 | 12 | 14 | 10 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0  | 107   |
| Farmington River Elementary   | 18 | 16 | 17 | 10 | 12 | 14 | 10 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0  | 107   |

The selected schools all provide a "quantum leap" scholastic performance improvement from FRES

**NMCES:** +56% ELA, +159% Math; **MBES:** +29% ELA, +64% Math; **MVRMS:** +24% ELA, +105% Math.

The selected schools all have driving times from the Rt. 57 firehouse less than or equal to those of FRES

**NMCES:** -11 min; **MBES:** -1 min; **MVRMS:** -0 min.

Another advantage of the selected schools is that transportation would be limited to just two locations, New Marlborough and Great Barrington.

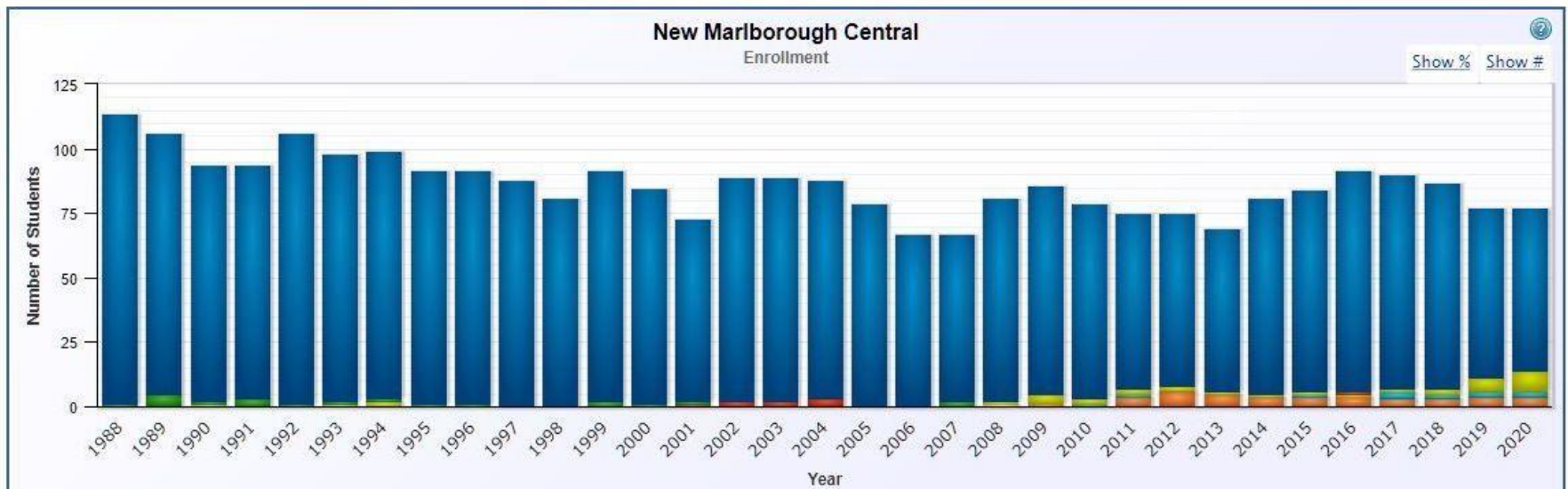
Sandisfield students could easily be absorbed by the receiving schools with no requirement for additional overhead/infrastructure.

MVRMS would have to absorb just 7 Sandisfield grade 5-6 pupils.

MBES would have to absorb just 3 Sandisfield grade 4 pupils.

NMCES would have to absorb 31 Sandisfield grade PK-3 pupils.

NMCES enrollment (77) was already down **37** students from its peak historical enrollment (114) **prior to** Grade 4 being moved to Undermountain.



This suggests that NMCES would be absolutely capable of and may be extremely interested in enrolling Sandisfield PK-3 pupils under a tuition agreement.

Based on all the above, we would foresee little to no risk to being able to negotiate attractive tuition agreements with the BHRSD and the SBRSD to have Sandisfield pupils attend schools in these districts per the above selections.

These tuition agreements would be FAR more financially attractive to Sandisfield than becoming a full-fledged member of either the BHRSD or the SBRSD for reasons discussed previously.

To implement this option Sandisfield would have to withdraw from the FRRSD and its RDA and form the Sandisfield School District (SSD).



## **Sandisfield School District (SSD)**

An extremely attractive alternative exists for Sandisfield if it can exit the FRRSD RDA; namely, create the Sandisfield School District (SSD), which would tuition and transport all its pupils out-of-district.

There is precedent for this in MA...5 MA towns operate in this fashion today, including Tyringham...in so called "non-operating" school districts.

SSD grades 5-12 would attend Monument Valley Regional Middle School (MVRMS) & Monument Mountain Regional High School (MMRHS) in the Berkshire Hills Regional School District (BHRSD).

This constitutes no change whatsoever for grades 7-12 but does represent a change for grades 5-6 which today attend FRES.

The current tuition contract between BHRSD & FRRSD is valid through June 2023.

The current tuition contract already covers grades 5-6 attending MVRMS at same pricing as grades 7-8, which is far less than the per pupil costs at FRES.

SSD would replicate all aspects of the current contract (including pricing) in a new tuition contract between SSD & BHRSD.

**THIS TUITION PRICING IS HIGHLY ATTRACTIVE AND WOULD BE LOST IF SANDISFIELD JOINED THE BHRSD!!!**

SSD grades PK-3 would attend New Marlborough Central Elementary School (NMCES) in the Southern Berkshire Regional School District (SBRSD).

This would constitute a change for grades PK-3, which attend FRES today.

SSD would target a tuition agreement between SSD & SBRSD in-line with existing middle & high school agreements at current pricing.

SSD grade 4 would attend Muddy Brook Elementary School (MBES) in the BHRSD.

This would constitute a change for grade 4, which attends FRES today.

SSD would target a tuition agreement between SSD & BHRSD in-line with existing middle school & high school agreements at current pricing.

Note: Our preference would have been to also send grade 4 to NMCES, but SBRSD decided to transfer grade 4 from NMCES to Undermountain Elementary School (UES), commencing Fall 2021.

The SSD alternative would yield substantial improvements in both scholastic performance and financial efficiency for Sandisfield, well beyond that of any other alternative.

#### Scholastic improvements

Grades PK-3: +159% MATH, +56% ELA

Grade 4: +64% MATH, +29% ELA

Grades 5-6: +105% MATH, +24% ELA

Grades PK-6: 64% to 159% improvement in MATH scholastic performance

Grades PK-6: 24% to 56% improvement in ELA scholastic performance

#### Financial Improvements

Estimate 55% reduction in annual per pupil expenditures for PK-6 students vs. FRES

Estimate 30% reduction in annual total per pupil expenditures vs. FRRSD

Estimate annual total per pupil expenditures 25% below MA average total per pupil expenditures

The SSD alternative would also position Sandisfield with significant leverage and control of its educational future, well beyond that of any other alternative.

As a full-fledged member of a large school district like BHRSD or SBRSD, Sandisfield would have little to no voice in decisions within the district and would also pay the full "going rate" for members of the district.

Tuitioning students out-of-district gives SSD high financial (and other) leverage, as the SSD pupils represent "free additional money" for the receiving district.

If Sandisfield were to join another school district (like BHRSD or SBRSD), instead of forming SSD, there would only be minimal - if any - financial benefit to Sandisfield.

## Supporting SSD Financial Model

Tuition expenditures estimated at \$9,241 per pupil annually (identical to current FRRSD out-of-district tuitions).

Transportation expenditures estimated at \$1,790 per pupil annually (identical to current overall FRRSD transportation costs)

Administration expenditures estimated at \$1,750 per pupil annually.

SSD administration estimated to be limited to 1 part-time and 2 full-time employees.

Part-time MA certified Superintendent (state requirement, 1 day per week).

Nadolny paid \$17,965 for 1 day / week as FRRSD Superintendent.

Full-time Operations Manager (very hands-on role).

Jesner paid \$72,500 for 5 days / week as FRRSD Business Manager.

Full-time Administrative Assistant (supports both Superintendent & Ops Manager).

FRRSD Superintendent Administrative Assistant paid \$38,771 for 5 days / week.

From above, estimate  $17,965 + 72,500 + 38,771 = \$129,236$  annual administrative salaries (before fringe benefits).

Sandisfield fringe benefits rate estimated to be approximately 30%.

Administration fringe benefits estimated to be  $129,236 * 0.30 = \$38,771$  annually.

Total annual administrative expenditures (with fringe benefits) estimated to be  $129,236 + 38,771 = \$168,007$ .

96 Sandisfield students currently in FRRSD.

Thus, SSD Administration expenditures estimated at  $168,007 / 96 = \$1,750$  per pupil annually.

Thus, SSD total expenditures estimated at  $9,241 + 1,790 + 1,750 = \$12,781$  per pupil annually.

Thus, SSD total expenditures estimated at  $9,241 + 1,790 + 1,750 = \$12,781$  per pupil annually.

This is 30% less than the \$18,304 total annual per pupil expenditures of FRRSD.

It's also 25% less than the \$17,149 MA average annual per pupil expenditures.

And it's also 55% less than the \$28,487 FRES annual per pupil expenditures.

The current FY22 assessment from FRRSD to Sandisfield is \$1,652,749.

This is AFTER state aid!

With 96 students at \$12,781 total annual expenditure per pupil, SSD annual expenditures would be \$1,226,976.

This is BEFORE state aid (TBD)!

Thus annual savings would be \$425,773 (a 26% reduction) PLUS whatever SSD gets in annual state aid (if any...TBD)!

The current FY22 FRRSD operating & maintenance budget is \$4,653,196.

The current FY22 FRRSD total operating & maintenance assessment is \$3,608,221 (Otis plus Sandisfield).

Thus, the FY22 FRRSD state aid received is 22% of its operating and maintenance budget.

If SSD received 22% of its \$1,226,976 operating & maintenance budget in state aid, the state aid to SSD would be \$269,935.

This would make the annual savings to Sandisfield from forming the SSD grow to  $425,773 + 269,935 = \$695,708$ .

Thus, the annual savings to Sandisfield from forming the SSD is estimated to be somewhere between \$426K to \$696K.

## Next Steps Roadmap

### FRRSD Next Steps

To make progress, it will be important for Sandisfield voters to elect as Sandisfield SC members only individuals that are willing to hold the FRRSD administration accountable for the scholastic performance & financial efficiency of FRES.

Sandisfield residents should also identify Otis residents that would be willing to hold the FRRSD administration accountable for the scholastic performance & financial efficiency of FRES and encourage them to run for election as an Otis SC member.

The Sandisfield SC members should function as a team and coordinate as a group on budget votes and quorum establishment as necessary to obtain necessary leverage on all key issues.

The Sandisfield SC team should make improving the scholastic performance of FRES its highest priority, as this will most directly benefit the FRES pupils, and it is a pre-requisite for significantly improving the financial efficiency of FRES.

The Sandisfield SC team should also prioritize driving structural changes at FRES, like combining classes, etc and also possibly moving 5th and 6th grade out of FRES and into MVRMS, to reduce fixed overhead costs.

The Sandisfield SC team should drive rigorous adherence to rules, procedures and laws into the SC at every possible opportunity.

The Sandisfield SC team should also drive implementation of "missing accountabilities" into the SC at every possible opportunity.

The Sandisfield SC team should drive transparency and public participation into the SC at every possible opportunity.

The Sandisfield SC team should be held accountable by the Sandisfield Select Board.

The Sandisfield Select Board should institute stipends for Sandisfield SC members that AGREE to work consistent with above framework.

## **SSD Next Steps**

Step 1: Sandisfield must validate the tuition costs associated with the SDD.

This entails discussion of the relevant tuition agreements with the SBRSD and the BHRSD.

Step 2: Sandisfield must validate the transportation costs associated with the SSD.

This entails discussion with potential transportation service providers (e.g., Dufor).

Step 3: Sandisfield must validate the administration costs associated with the SSD.

This entails validating the salary levels required to fill the 2 full-time and 1 part-time administrative positions.

Step 4: Sandisfield must validate the total cost savings realized by the formation of the SSD.

This entails rolling up all the data from Steps 1-3 above and comparing SSD costs to Sandisfield's current FRRSD costs.

Step 5: Sandisfield must validate that it can obtain approval to form the SSD - its own, non-operating school district.

This entails discussion with the MA DOE, specifically its DESE.

Step 6: Sandisfield must then decide whether it wishes to request a withdrawal from the FRRSD RDA.

This entails a Sandisfield town vote.

Step 7: If Sandisfield votes to request a withdrawal, it then follows the remainder of the withdrawal procedure specified in the RDA.

This would entail first a SC vote on a withdrawal amendment, followed both an Otis town vote and a Sandisfield town vote.

Step 8: If withdrawal is not approved under the withdrawal procedure specified in the RDA, Sandisfield must then decide whether it wants to pursue legal action to exit the FRRSD RDA.

If in Step 7 Sandisfield votes to request a withdrawal, it may be wise for Sandisfield to indicate upon commencing the RDA withdrawal process that it plans to take legal action if withdrawal is not approved under the RDA withdrawal process.