

Inequities in Monomoy's Elementary Per Pupil Budgets and the Challenges with the Loss of Elementary Enrollment

A Report by Monomoy Superintendent Dr. Scott Carpenter
to the MRSD School Committee
November 19, 2020



Over Two Decades of Gradual Demographic Shift

Happening across the Cape

Fewer young families with school-aged children

Tied to lack of affordable housing, cost of living, childcare options, retirement destination, and a growing “Airbnb” industry

The rate of attrition of young families varies by community, with Chatham having some of the greatest loss in recent years

Changes over the past decade since the vote to regionalize - December 6, 2010

FY12 - the last year Chatham and Harwich fiscally operated schools separately

Harwich Elementary (HES) enrollment = 579 including 6 children from Chatham

Chatham Elementary (CES) enrollment = 279 including 53 children from Harwich

FY21 - the present year, removing the COVID distance learning/homeschooling from the enrollment counts

HES enrollment = 512, including 10 children from Chatham, a 12% drop in HES enrollment since FY12

CES enrollment = 170, including 24 children from Harwich, a 39% drop in CES enrollment since FY12

Enrollment declines, particularly at CES, are exacerbating two dilemmas

Rapidly increasing per pupil budget difference between Monomoy's elementary schools, as CES per pupil costs skyrocket

Potentially compromised ability to provide an ideal teaching and learning environment at CES, when small size may inhibit a rich social environment for children and adequate professional collaboration for educators

Two very different conversations, inextricably interconnected

Per Pupil Budget Difference

Per Pupil Budget at Monomoy's Elementary Schools - FY12, FY21 & FY25

FY12	School Budget	Number of Students	Per Pupil Budget
Chatham Elementary	\$ 2,499,028	265	\$9,430
Harwich Elementary	\$ 4,999,819	589	\$8,489
Difference in Per Pupil Budgets			\$941

FY21	School Budget	Number of Students	Per Pupil Budget
Chatham Elementary	\$2,869,394	170	\$16,879
Harwich Elementary	\$6,085,214	512	\$11,885
Difference in Per Pupil Budgets			\$4,994

FY25 Projection	School Budget	Number of Students	Per Pupil Budget
Chatham Elementary	\$2,652,551	100	\$26,526
Harwich Elementary	\$6,462,331	470	\$13,750
Difference in Per Pupil Budgets			\$12,776

The inequity is
NOT that the
district is
providing a better
educational
experience at
CES

Monomoy painstakingly coordinates the educational program, curriculum, and offerings between our two elementary schools to ensure ALL students have access to the same excellent quality of education and opportunities.

The inequity is
how elementary
per pupil budget
differences
impact the
Harwich taxpayer

Per the Regional Agreement, Harwich and Chatham each pay a percentage of the district's operational costs based largely on the three-year rolling average of foundation enrollment. In FY13, Harwich paid 72%. In FY21, 74.35%. In FY25, likely 79%, and heading toward 87% by FY33. As the Regional Agreement is written, Harwich taxpayers pay a significant portion of the total per pupil budget differences between the two elementary schools.

Increasing Total Per Pupil Budget Differences: A Growing Concern

FY12 Per Pupil Budget

\$941 per pupil difference X 265 CES pupils = \$249,365

FY12 was the last year prior to fiscal regionalization. Chatham would have fully paid this difference; however, in FY13, when the district fully regionalized, Harwich would have been paying for a significant portion of the assessment (72%):

\$1,263 per pupil difference x 259 CES pupils = \$327,117

FY25 Per Pupil Budget

\$12,776 per pupil difference X 100 CES pupils = \$1,277,587

Looking merely four years into the future, the total per pupil difference since regionalization is projected to quadruple, with Harwich's share of the assessment beyond the minimum contribution also rising to about 79%.

FY21 Per Pupil Budget

\$4,994 per pupil difference X 170 CES pupils = \$848,980

The total per pupil difference hovered fluctuated in the a ranged similar to FY13 until the CES population began to rapidly contract in FY18. By FY21, the current fiscal situation, this difference nearly tripled. Compounding the challenge, Harwich's share of the assessment beyond the minimum contribution rose to 74.35%.

Note: *Because the district gets Ch. 70 state aid for children at each elementary school, school choice money that helps pay for staffing, and other revenue offsets, the true impact on the Harwich taxpayers is less than the total per pupil budget differences multiplied by the three-year average of foundation enrollment percentage. This is also further complicated by the fact that some Harwich children attend CES and vice versa.*

How to remedy the fiscal inequity

The funding mechanisms within the Regional Agreement would need to be amended, which would involve support of the Selectmen and approval of voters at both Town Meetings.

The School Committee has a 2020-2021 goal to establish a working group, early in the budget process, to discuss regional assessment at the elementary level.

This group would include Selectmen from both towns and their appointees.

Superintendent's Recommendation

The simplest and fairest way to deal with the growing dilemma of inequitable funding of the elementary schools would be to have each town pay for its own elementary school.

This would involve changing the funding mechanisms in the Regional Agreement.

Note: Any possible future elementary reconfiguration could complicate this recommendation, but there are ways to equitably address even those scenarios.

In **FY13**, if the newly voted upon Regional Agreement had a provision where towns paid for their own elementary schools, Chatham's assessment would have increased by **\$408,069**, and Harwich's would have been decreased by the same amount.

In **FY21**, if the towns were paying for their own elementary schools, Chatham's assessment would have increased by **\$572,537**, and Harwich's would decrease by the same amount.

In **FY25**, if the Regional Agreement is revised to have towns pay for their own elementary schools, it is projected that Chatham's assessment will be **\$738,426** higher than if the agreement was not amended, and Harwich's would be lowered by the same.

Addressing one misconception

If the district's Regional Agreement was amended to permit the placement of Harwich-resident children at CES (either through "redistricting" or the creation of "upper" and "lower" elementary schools), it **DOES NOT** solve this fiscal dilemma. Moving more Harwich children to CES will help equalize per pupil budget discrepancies, but it provides Harwich taxpayers no fiscal relief. It simply trades empty classrooms at CES for empty classrooms at HES.

Compromised Ability to Provide
an Ideal Teaching and Learning
Environment

The impact of small class sizes

Evidence in the literature on a positive impact on learning if elementary class size is reduced from the mid-20s to 15-18 students.

Monomoy budgets for and operates with small class sizes, 18 +/- 1 at the elementary level and 19 +/- 2 at the upper grades.

Coming into regionalization, Chatham Public had very small class sizes ... arguably too small.

There is not a body of literature on the effects of “too small.”

At some point, classes become too small for vibrant discussions and too small to for effective group dynamics.

The impact of a small school

The conversations and concerns about CES becoming too small began just over three years ago, when CES appeared to not have enough kindergarteners to fill three classrooms -- leading to a future with only two classrooms per grade level. Three years later, the pace of enrollment loss at CES finds the school heading toward only one classroom per grade level.

Some appreciate the intimacy of small. Others express concerns.

Imagine classes with the same group children for five consecutive years (K-4). What if a child has a major conflict with another? What if a student doesn't find a single friend within that class?

It's equally important for teachers to have peers to support them with best practices, professional development, sharing curricular resources, etc.

Neither the School Committee nor the Superintendent can unilaterally move children from HES to CES

Section V of the Regional Agreement reads:

There shall be no less than one elementary school in each member town. Students in the elementary grades shall attend schools in their towns of residence, except in special cases as defined by the Regional District School Committee.

Note: “special cases” here would be instances where a particular program for students with special needs is located in one building, but not the other. It would also apply to voluntary intra-district school choice.

Monomoy Elementary Reconfiguration Survey

In November 2017, the Monomoy Superintendent surveyed current and future elementary parents and elementary staff about potential options for elementary reconfiguration given the declining enrollment at CES. Families and staff were provided three options:

1. No reconfiguration. This would not require a change to the Regional Agreement
2. “Redistricting” – diverting some Harwich-resident children, living closest to the Chatham town line, from HES to CES. This would require a change to the Regional Agreement.
3. Forming “upper” and “lower” elementary schools – where potentially all preschool through Grade 2 students attend HES and all Grade 3 and 4 students attend CES (or vice versa). This would require a change to the Regional Agreement.

There were 453 respondents.

The results were presented at the November 30, 2017, School Committee meeting.

Monomoy Staff

Staff from both elementary schools favored enhanced peer collaboration and support by forming “upper” and “lower” elementary schools, where all teachers of the same grade level are located under one roof.

Staff Responses

Staff	No Change	8	10%
	“Redistrict”	16	21%
	“Upper” & “Lower”	54	69%
		78	



CES

#1 11%

#2 28%

#3 61

HES

#1 15%

#2 25%

#3 60%

90% indicate favoring some kind of change (#2 or #3)

Chatham Parents

Chatham parents least liked the option of “upper” and “lower” elementary schools, and the Chatham parents were nearly split between no reconfiguration and “redistricting,” with slightly more favoring the status quo.

Chatham Responses

Chatham Parents	No Change	49	42%	
	“Redistrict”	45	39%	
	“Upper” & “Lower”	22	19%	
		116		

58% indicate favoring some kind of change (#2 or #3)

Harwich Parents

Harwich parents went in the complete opposite direction, favoring formation of “upper” and “lower” schools slightly more than “redistricting.” Maintaining the status quo was the least common response.

Harwich Responses

Harwich Parents	No Change	54	24%
	“Redistrict”	78	35%
	“Upper” & “Lower”	94	42%
		226	



77% indicate favoring some kind of change (#2 or #3)

School Choice Parents

Parents of school choice students had similar preferences as the Monomoy elementary staff and the Harwich parents, favoring the formation of “upper” and “lower” schools.

Choice Responses

Choice Parents	No Change	3	9%
	“Redistrict”	11	33%
	“Upper” & “Lower”	19	58%
		33	



91% indicate favoring some kind of change (#2 or #3)

Much has changed in the three years since the reconfiguration survey.

Enrollment at CES is rapidly declining and there is now only one classroom of kindergarten students, requiring significant school choice applicants to fill it.

Enrollment at HES is now finding a relatively steady state of five classrooms per grade level, where once there was six.

There appears to be no evidence that these trends will reverse.

All of
Monomoy's
elementary
students could
fit "under one
roof" by FY25.

HES long operated as an elementary school with six classrooms per grade level. By FY25, CES' one classroom per grade and HES' five classrooms per grade could fit within HES, with all class sizes at 18 students or fewer.

This would require a change to the Regional Agreement.

There is the potential for fiscal relief* for both Harwich and Chatham taxpayers if all elementary children were educated together, but it leaves little wiggle room if there is a future baby boom.

**potentially saving Harwich around \$1.5 million/year and saving Chatham \$500,000/year, compared to operating two elementary schools under the current assessment approach.*

How to remedy one school potentially becoming “too small”

Any change to the elementary school configuration would require amending the Regional Agreement.

Amending the Regional Agreement would require support of the Selectmen and approval of voters at both Town Meetings.

The School Committee has a 2020-2021 goal to establish, organize, and lead a visioning session and/or community forum that includes representative stakeholders from Harwich and Chatham to discuss an elementary developmental program.

Superintendent's Recommendation

When “visioning” a future for Monomoy’s elementary schools, cost should not be the main factor in determining how best to educate children.

Survey current and future elementary families and elementary staff in December 2020. Adding a fourth/future option.

Report survey results to the School Committee and educational community.

Option 1:

No reconfiguration -- this is the only option that does not require amending the Regional Agreement

Option 2:

“Redistrict” some Harwich students to CES

Option 3:

Create a new elementary system with “upper” and “lower” elementary schools

Option 4:

House all Monomoy elementary students “under one roof” (FY25 or beyond)

Questions?