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For Immediate Release:

Berkshire County Education Task Force Recommends Single Countywide School District

Berkshire County – August 3, 2017 - On Saturday, July 15th, the Berkshire County Education Task Force voted overwhelmingly to recommend that over the next ten years all district public schools in Berkshire County join together to form a single countywide school district. This decision drew on a careful two-year study which included a comprehensive analysis about the educational and fiscal challenges facing the County, and after consideration of five different options. In the end it was decided that this option would best meet the educational and economic needs of the County.

The five proposed options were evaluated against 34 criteria that included educational, fiscal, and operational outcomes. Members concluded that voluntarily joining into a single countywide district holds the most promise for achieving essential educational priorities in the county, enhancing access for all students to high quality offerings and support services for those who need them;

- Improved and more equitable access to high quality career pathways, enrichment and elective courses, and co-curricular activities; and,
- Enhanced safety nets to support students' academic and life success, e.g., guidance counseling, reading services, curriculum for social-emotional learning, special education services.

Task Force members recognize that, "as enrollment continues to shrink and financial resources tighten even more without any of the economies of scale achieved through the other scenarios, there can be little question that the quality of education in Berkshire County will deteriorate." As a result, the overwhelming consensus was that the aspirational statement of a single district, while difficult to enact, will have the biggest positive impact on our students, our schools, and our communities.

These impacts will include substantial financial savings, and access to high quality educational programs and services county-wide (such as access to technology, more electives and co-curricular offerings, as well as specialized academic and student support services). This can provide an exciting opportunity to better align our schools with regional economic development opportunities and further brand our region as a preferred place to live, work, and raise a family.

The full Task Force report can be found at: <http://files.berkshireeducation.org/FinalReport.pdf>. Chair John Hockridge emphasized that the recommendation is an aspiration, and there is a lot more to come to fill in the details. The Task Force will immediately focus its efforts on developing an outreach plan and road map, including short and longer range action plans in order to advance the conversation and complex process of moving towards a single, unified Berkshire school district.

FAQs will be available on website soon.

The Berkshire County Education Task Force (BCETF) is a group of current and former school administrators and educators, school committee members, town administrators, and local business leaders who have concluded that the county's public schools face reductions in educational quality due to declining student enrollment and revenues that are not keeping pace with costs.

View the Phase I and Phase II reports and learn more about the BCETF online at www.berkshireeducation.org

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