

Amesbury Public Schools Long-Range Planning Report

Drafted: November 16, 2025

Presented: March 18, 2026

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1. Purpose and Charge of the Long-Range Planning Committee

The Long-Range Planning Committee (LRPC) is composed of School Committee members, educators, and Amesbury residents committed to identifying potential approaches to sustaining a rich and rigorous educational program in light of tightening financial constraints. The committee's charge was to develop a suite of targeted strategies for the School Committee, Mayor, City Council, and community to consider.

This report describes the work of the LRPC that was done from December 2024 through November 2025. During this time approximately a dozen core members attended meetings to work together or in smaller, focused working groups. All meetings were posted and the public was welcome at all sessions. Included here is background information and context for the LRPC efforts, information on the process undertaken by the Committee, and the approaches the LRPC generated.

The work described here was preceded by the LRPC's investigation of a plan to reconfigure and consolidate our schools to use our facilities more efficiently. The Abrahams Group was contracted to conduct a feasibility study that considered a variety of options including moving 7th and/or 8th grades to AHS, moving 3rd – 5th grades to AMS, closing Cashman Elementary School, and moving AIHS to AHS. The report considered available space, space needs by grade spans, potential cost savings, expenses, and timelines. The various configurations were complex and interconnected.

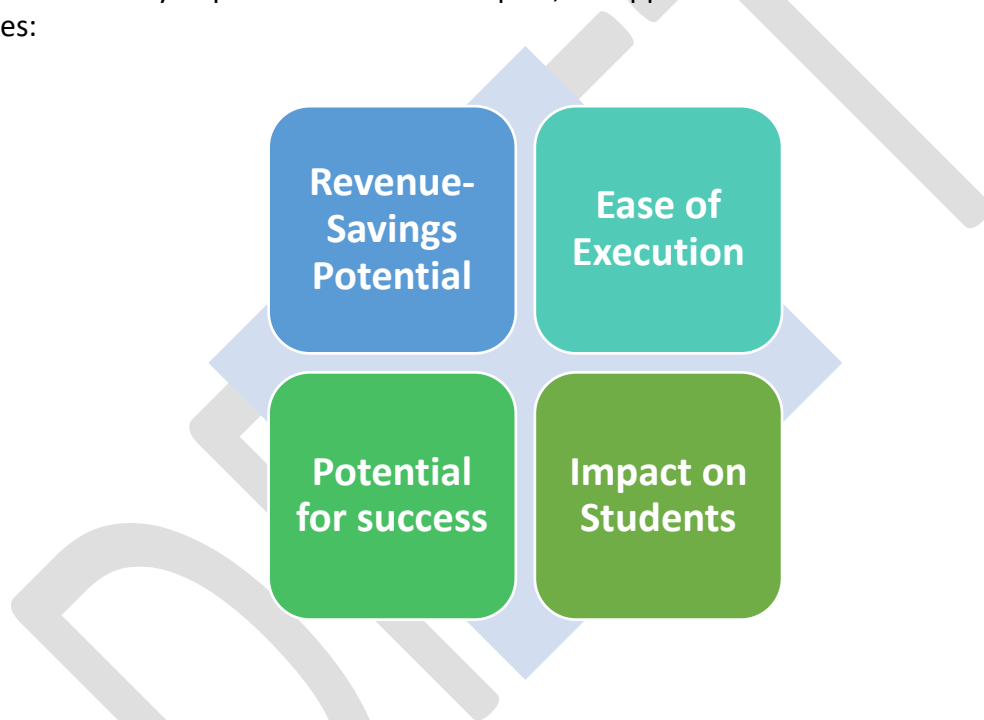
Nine meetings were held between August and October 2024 with families, teachers, district leadership, middle and high school students, and community members. The purpose of these community conversations was to introduce the challenges we were facing and how they developed over time, explore one proposal to address them, and seek input and ideas for alternative approaches. To learn about the merits and challenges of moving middle grades to a high school, interviews with nine superintendents and/or principals of middle-high schools were conducted to learn about the process and outcomes of combining grades, and a visit to Bellingham High School (grades 8-12) was made in the fall of 2025.

Coming so soon after Covid and the reconfiguration necessitated by the opening of the Sgt. Jordan Shay Memorial Lower Elementary School in Fall 2023, the community was exhausted and the prospect of enduring another significant change was beyond the capacity of the community. Exhaustion, coupled with trepidation about combining middle and high school students, these potential solutions were set aside, and the second phase of the LRPC began. The second phase brought together the core group who tasked themselves with generating potential solutions, drawing more directly on ideas and capacities within our community.

The LRPC continually challenged itself to widen the aperture, consider out-of-the-box ideas and question long held assumptions. As the historical data presented in the section below will show,

the decline in funding amid the growing needs of our district has been steady over many years. The interplay of state and federal policies and funding, economic and demographic trends, city and district resources and facilities, and the impact of the pandemic has created a complex landscape in which finding solutions to the challenges we face is increasingly difficult. With these conditions top of mind, the LRPC recognized that this moment may call for a different response, and perhaps multiple approaches.

Some of these ideas, therefore, will provoke immediate reactions, be seen as pie in the sky, unrealistic. In truth, some ideas in this report are considered without the constraints that will inevitably emerge as deeper analysis is undertaken since conducting a thorough analysis of each proposal was beyond the capabilities of our group. As we brainstormed and considered what ideas were worthy of presentation in this report, we applied a set of four criteria to inform our choices:



1. Will the idea generate revenue or increase cost-efficiency?
2. How easy, difficult, complex will it be to implement?
3. How likely is success, e.g., will revenue be generated, etc.?
4. What impact will it have on students, in particular, what level of disruption will it cause, and to what extent will the quality of the educational experience be impacted

As the work progresses, the scope will necessarily have to narrow to a handful of recommendations that will need further investigation and community buy-in.

2. Background and Context

Financial Trends

Amesbury, like many Massachusetts districts, faces a structural gap: the rising cost of running schools increases faster than the funding provided to operate them.

For FY26, the District calculated that maintaining **level services** (no new staff or programs, no expansion of offerings) required an increase of 8.44% over FY25. This increase is driven primarily by contractual salary increases, health insurance, transportation, and special education costs, among others. Ultimately, the School Committee approved a 7.71% increase over FY25, representing a total FY26 School Committee budget of \$40,869,300. Mayor Gove proposed a school budget, which contained a 5% (\$1,897,272) increase over the fiscal 2025 budget of \$37,945,439. The city council passed Gove's proposed school budget of \$39,842,711.

Last year's example depicts what Amesbury Public Schools has been experiencing for nearly two decades. This moment is not sudden. It is the result of long-term pressures that communities across Massachusetts are experiencing.

Public education continues to erode, not because people have stopped valuing it or even funding it, but because the economic and policy structures sustaining it no longer match the realities of actual cost of delivering public education.

As School Choice expands across the state, dollars and families leave the district. Families shift to River Valley Charter, Newburyport, Whittier, and area private schools. As the enrollment declines and needs increase, the cost of delivering essential services rises.

The state requires districts to provide mandated services—but does not fully fund those mandates. Programs like Circuit Breaker (intended to reimburse schools for the most expensive special education costs) are routinely underfunded, leaving districts to absorb the remaining costs locally. Meanwhile, Proposition 2½ caps how much communities can raise to meet these needs—no matter the circumstances, ultimately creating an impossible chasm to bridge.

The result is a slow, grinding form of scarcity:

- Resources and supports shrink or disappear
- Class sizes grow
- Buildings age without repair
- Fees rise
- Families fundraise to fill gaps
- Teachers leave feeling unsupported
- Trust erodes between families and schools

We've been cutting for more than a decade, except for brief periods of federal relief—moments of sugar-rush funding that felt lifesaving at the time but created cliffs when the aid expired. We're living on the edge of one of those cliffs right now.

Enrollment and Student Needs

Enrollment trends show:

K–12 enrollment in FY24–25 was 1,793 students.

The percentage of students requiring special education services has increased to 25%, significantly higher than the statewide average of 20%.

The number of English Learners (EL) nearly doubled from 45 students to 95 students in one year, necessitating the addition of staff.

These shifts mean the district must provide more intensive instructional and student support services than comparable districts of similar size.

What the Community Values

The LRPC undertook exercises with a broad set of stakeholders of the Amesbury community, these themes emerged:

Strengths of the Amesbury schools

- Knowing each child as an individual
- Small school environment with leadership and participation opportunities
- Whole-child support and social-emotional care
- Strong early intervention systems
- Amesbury's identity and traditions

However, families also expressed:

- Concern about academic rigor and consistency
- The desire to sustain and strengthen program offerings
- Deep stress about cuts and erosion of quality

As a result of these community-wide discussions, it was evident that a better understanding of education funding is needed, and the LRPC sees value in educating Amesbury's public about this process. This could include creating a short piece that illustrates the funding sources, their purposes, their trends over time and their trends in relation to the district's total budget. This document could form the backbone of a public information "campaign" with presentations to the different school site councils, SEPAC, boosters, teachers, community etc. If members of the

School Committee were involved in doing such workshops in partnership with members of the LRPC, it would also increase the public's understanding of and relationship with the School Committee as a decision-making body. We recognize that any change will require buy-in, public trust building before any major decisions are finalized.

3. Opportunities to Improve Financial Sustainability

The committee identified two primary strategic paths to addressing the core issues at hand: increasing revenue and cost savings. The committee's work focused on bucketing ideas in these two lanes. Below is an overview of the strategies that would address these two goals.



A. Increase Revenue

Strategy	Description	Notes
Community Advocacy/Override	Seek additional local tax increase	Attempted Nov. 4, 2025; not approved by voters
Attracting and Retaining Students	Undertake activities that keep children in district	Seek ways to invite children into our early childhood programs, engage 8 th grade students early before they look elsewhere. Continue with a robust program at the Innovation High School, consider expanding to middle schoolers.
State-Level Advocacy	Build regional coalition to update funding formulas	Ongoing light efforts, done in the past without much success.
Education Endowment	Create a community-funded long-term investment that generates a sustaining revenue stream	Recommended for development.

B. Reduce or Reorganize Costs

Strategy	Description	Notes
Regionalization	Share staff, programs, or services with neighboring communities	Benefits: cost savings + expanded offerings; Risk: reduced local control. Superintendent is actively exploring.

Strategy	Description	Notes
Facility Consolidation	Close or repurpose under-utilized buildings	May 2024 The Abrahms Group produced a report that explored better ways to use our buildings to identify cost savings. Some of their recommendations were met with skepticism from the community and efforts in this area stalled, largely due to concerns related to the Innovation High School More discovery and conversation are needed. Earlier community engagement must be a priority.
Deliver Education Differently	Redesign schedules, staffing models, or learning delivery	Must protect quality + student support. Teacher, School Leadership, Union participation is critical
Operational Efficiency	Identify costs that do not directly affect students	Least community disruption should be prioritized first, actively undertaken year after year. Few cuts remain available without significant impacts. Most waste has already been squeezed from the system.

In considering these approaches, nothing was ruled out, and the LRPC understood the following:

- They are not an exhaustive list of everything that should be pursued, but a reflection of the areas that the group believed to have the greatest potential.
- They are not mutually exclusive but can overlap and influence each other, e.g., delivering education differently may also increase retention of students in the district.
- One approach alone would not be sufficient but rather a suite of solutions was needed, ideally approaches that emerged from a holistic vision of the future of our district.
- None of the strategies offer an immediate resolution to the current financial struggles but rather a long-term approach that could result in greater opportunity for the district in the future.

Nothing was ruled out, but the group recognized that it was unrealistic to expect a deep dive into all these ideas and so debated the merits of each approach, the potential net gains and overall impact they would have on the district to identify those to explore further. The table below shows the application of our selection criteria to the strategies identified above, and those that we chose to explore further.

Heat Map

Strategy	Revenue Potential (Sm win to Lg win \$-\$\$\$\$)	Ease of Execution (Easy to Hard 1-5)	Student Disruption (Least to Most 1-5)	Likelihood of Success (unlikely to likely Red, Yellow, Green)	Notes
Community Advocacy / Override	\$\$	4	1	No	First attempt Nov. 4, 2025; failed
Attracting and Retaining Students	\$\$	2	1	Yes	Very little impact on students, significant work to execute
State-Level Advocacy	\$\$\$	1	1	No	Very difficult to impact State-wide issues. Requires years of effort with unpredictable outcomes.
Education Endowment	\$\$\$	2	1	Yes	Opportunity for success, no impact on children, but organizational structure and long commitment required.
Regionalization	\$\$	5	5	Maybe	Opportunity for savings, but very difficult to execute and significant impact on children and families. Additionally complexity since it involves working with other communities.
Facility Consolidation	\$\$\$	3.5	4	Maybe	Depending on the project there is potential for significant reductions, but the impacts on students could be felt if not executed effectively. Change management is essential.
Deliver Education Differently	TBD	1	3	Yes	Many opportunities here. Work with school personnel, who are the experts, would need to be explored for feasibility.
Operational Efficiency Audits	\$	5	5	No	This work has been done for years. Little to few opportunities remaining in this area.

4. Preliminary Recommendations

Given the strategies that rose to the top in our analysis, the LRPC considered recommendations for next steps:

- Undertake a retention program aimed at keeping children in our district. This should focus on bringing children into the district early, creating good relationships with families and reducing children exiting before high school.
- Explore a Public Education Endowment Fund
Possibly launch in collaboration with an independent 501(c)3 organization
- Conduct a Regional Shared Services Feasibility Study—look for opportunities, whole or in part such as only regionalizing middle/high school, specialized programs or shared sports and humanities extra-curricular. (Early stages are already in progress by the APS Superintendent)
- Evaluate Facilities Utilization & Building Capacity
Assess options for consolidation without compromising programming. Emphasizing the need to keep students in district.
- Develop a Community Engagement Strategy
Regardless of what strategies are pursued, engaging the community – families, residents, educators, students – in the process will be critical to gaining buy-in and ensuring success. This would include strengthening awareness of the true cost and value of public education and beginning to lay the seeds for foundational changes that will be necessary for the school system to be viable.

LRPC went on to build out in more detail the three top strategies as well as consolidation of facilities. These playbooks are included in the Addendum.

The saying, “Don’t let a crisis go to waste,” may be an apt one for Amesbury’s schools at this moment. We are facing a dismal budget landscape, the public’s voice regarding the override was clear, and the frustration with the distance between the educational experiences that we want to provide our students and the resources available is ever stronger. At the same time, we are surrounded by opportunities: a community that is rich in creativity, commitment, and can-do energy, new leadership for the district, and educators who are talented, dedicated, and experienced. Our hope is that the work outlined in this report provides a launching pad for the work to rebuild – or build anew – the education our children need and deserve.

Addendum

- 1. Attracting and Retaining Students to Amesbury**
- 2. Amesbury Public Schools Endowment Fund**
- 3. Delivering Education Differently**
- 4. Consolidation of Facilities**

Attracting and Retaining Students to Amesbury

Create various programs with the end purpose of keeping Amesbury's children in Amesbury Public Schools, while also luring those from surrounding towns to Choice into Amesbury.

The focus should be on capturing families early and then retaining them over time. The primary ways to keep people 'sticky' to Amesbury include:

- A welcoming environment and relationship building.
- Strong educational offerings with a distinct educational philosophy.
- Demonstrated educational results.
- Programming and extracurricular activities such as music, drama, and sports opportunities.
- Pride, connection and a sense of belonging.
- Unique educational orientation/experiences that distinguish Amesbury schools from others in the region

Possible efforts could include:

- Doubling down on orientation programs, marketing efforts
- Clarity on which programs bring the most value to children and families.
- Focus on early childhood programs
- Extra investments in middle school
- Creating more connective tissue between 8th graders and the high school, through opportunities to 'study-up' and 'play-up'
- Goals to get higher percentages of children involved beyond their school books
- Visible moments of joy (such as the things we already see in the Superintendent and Principal's newsletters and the School Committee showcases.

The opportunities in retention are endless, but particular care is required for ensuring value is matched with expectations. Communications and relationship building are key to the success of any retention program.

A sub-group of the full group further explored this topic and their notes follow:

Cost-Conscious Strategies for Attracting and Retaining Students in Amesbury Public Schools

Amesbury Public Schools is working to offer a strong, appealing educational experience at a time when financial resources are limited. Because we cannot simply add new programs or staff, our goal is to make smart, cost-effective improvements that help students feel connected, excited, and supported. These improvements also help attract new families and keep current students enrolled, which in turn strengthens the district's long-term financial stability. The strategies below describe ways we can improve and strengthen students' overall experience, thereby encouraging families to remain part of Amesbury's schools.

1. Strengthening Transitions Between Schools

Why transitions matter

Students most commonly leave Amesbury during transitions between schools. That pattern tells us that **the moment when a student moves from one school to another is a sensitive time**, when families make decisions about staying or going. When students shift from one school to the next—Shay to CES (2nd to 3rd), CES to Amesbury Middle School (5th to 6th), and AMS to AHS (8th to 9th)—they face new buildings, new teachers, and new routines. These changes can create anxiety for children and families, and if the transition feels uncertain, some choose to leave the district. Improving these experiences is one of the most cost-effective ways to keep students in Amesbury.

A. “Bridge Programs” — Helping Students Experience Their New School Early

Bridge programs give students a chance to get to know their next school before they officially move there. Students visit the building, meet teachers, try out classes, and get comfortable with the environment. When students feel “known” before they even arrive, they are much less likely to leave.

2nd to 3rd Grade (Shay to CES)

CES already attracts some students because of its special education programming. We can further broaden its appeal by creating a themed program—such as a STEM (science, technology, engineering, math) or creative expression program—that gives CES a clear identity, possibly one geared for children particularly motivated in those areas.

Example:

A STEM theme might include more hands-on science activities, building projects, and problem-solving centers.

A creative expression theme could include storytelling, movement, art, and music integrated into academic learning.

Such a program could be built using the ideas and materials advanced in our Playful Learning grant, which promotes fun, hands-on learning experiences and a Montessori-type philosophy.

Cost note:

No new staff needed; small investments in training or classroom materials may be required.

5th to 6th Grade (CES to AMS)

Currently, 5th graders visit AMS for tours and brief experiences. This could be expanded and made more impactful by allowing 5th graders to participate in short, hands-on activities in AMS classes like art, music, technology, or drama. This helps them discover new interests and see the exciting opportunities waiting for them.

Why this helps families stay in Amesbury:

Families often choose private schools at the 6th-grade level because they think the middle school won't offer enough support or engaging options. Showing students and families what AMS **actually** offers can change that perception. By engaging with 5th grade students in a more extended way, 5th and 6th grade faculty may gain more insights and ideas about how to better integrate and connect the learning experiences in both grades.

Cost note:

Uses existing teachers and spaces; main cost is organization and scheduling time.

B. "Looping" Through Team Teaching — Keeping Students with the Same Teacher Longer

What looping means:

Students stay with the same teacher for two years instead of just one. This deepens relationships, increases trust, and reduces the time spent at the beginning of each school year on routines and getting to know students.

Why parents like it:

Families often say, "I wish my child could stay with this teacher." Looping allows that.

The challenge:

Traditionally, looping can be hard on teachers because they must know two grade levels' curricula. However, **team teaching**, where two teachers share a group of students and one teacher specializes in math and science and the other specializes in English and social studies, would address this.

Why this works well:

- Teachers focus on fewer subjects
- Students benefit from two strong relationships
- Learning time increases because students feel settled more quickly
- Creates meaningful opportunities for collaboration, coherence, collegial in-class supports
- May lessen and/or alter (not eliminate) the need for other classroom supports

Cost note:

No additional staff needed; only adjustments to scheduling and planning time.

C. Moving 8th Grade to AHS — Giving Students an Earlier Start in High School

What this means:

8th graders would attend classes at the high school building instead of the middle school. They would still be 8th graders but would have earlier access to high school teachers, resources, and programs.

Why this helps:

- Students feel more comfortable entering 9th grade
- Families see the high school earlier, increasing confidence
- AMS gains space to support other programs (including AIHS)

Cost note:

Mostly logistical changes; minimal financial cost.

2. Offering More Personalized and Future-Focused Learning

A. “Mastery-Based Progression” — Students Move Ahead When Ready

Instead of moving through subjects based strictly on age or grade, students move forward when they have mastered the content. For example, a student could be stronger in math and take a higher-level class while staying at grade level in reading. A junior high model in the middle grades would enable that approach.

Why this matters:

Families often leave for private schools seeking individualized challenges. This gives students more personalized learning **within** Amesbury.

Cost note:

Can be done with current staff; requires planning time and targeted training. Depending on the grade level where implemented, scheduling changes

B. Creating and Strengthening “Pathways Programs”

Pathways programs help students explore future careers by connecting classroom learning to real-world experiences.

Early Childhood Education Pathway (Partnering With the YMCA)

This program would allow Amesbury High School students to work with young children while learning about child development, teaching, and caregiving.

How it works:

- A childcare center could operate inside AHS through the YMCA (already our after-school partner).
- High school students could take classes about early childhood education.
- Students could participate in internships within the childcare center.
- Students could earn certifications or credentials valued in the job market.

Why this attracts families:

It is hands-on, practical, and prepares students for real careers.

Cost savings:

- YMCA handles most operational costs
- We can apply for state CTE (career and technical education) funding
- Uses existing high school classrooms

Strengthening Existing Pathways (Health, Computer Science)

Many families don’t know these programs exist. Improving awareness is a low-cost way to increase enrollment and student engagement.

Cost note:

No major expenses; relies on better communication and course planning.

3. Improving Learning Spaces Without Major Spending

A. Enhancing Amesbury Innovation High School (AIHS)

AIHS move to AMS was an emergency, and very little could be done to enhance the unused classrooms for the immediate needs of the students. To make the school more inviting and supportive, improvements could include:

- Using donated or repurposed furniture

- Painting walls in welcoming colors
- Adding comfortable seating areas
- Bringing meaningful items from AIHS's former building
- Altering current room and/or adding additional rooms to increase access to much-needed private space

Engaging AIHS students in deciding what the alterations will be and engaging them in making some of the changes, will give them some control, comfort, and feel valued—critical for their sense of well-being as children and learners.

By moving the 8th grade to AHS, additional space would be available to give AIHS the room they need. There is a delicate balance between giving students the privacy and sense of safety they need and giving them the sense of inclusion and access to the learning spaces they desire. That balance is different for different students and likely evolves for individual students over time. This is one aspect of the AIHS model that makes it challenging for the school in a shared building. On the other hand, sharing AMS creates opportunities for building a middle-grade innovation school, for teachers from both schools to work together and learn from one another, for students' transition to AIHS can occur earlier in their educational career and perhaps enable them to transition gradually and successfully to AHS as upper class students. It may also increase opportunities for students to tuition into AIHS earlier in their career.

Cost note:

Most expenses are minimal; some labor can be done by employees, volunteers, and/or students.

B. Long-Term Space Planning

Over time, AIHS will need a permanent home. While that requires long-term planning and funding, the short-term improvements allow the program to grow without waiting for a major building project. A potential timeline over several years: AIHS improves the space and the school adjusts while another permanent space is found, AIHS moves into its new space, and leaves behind a new AIMS – Amesbury Innovation Middle School.

4. Improving Communication and Marketing

Many families who leave Amesbury do so not because they are unhappy, but because they simply don't know what our district offers. Improving communication is one of the **highest-impact, lowest-cost** strategies available. In addition to what is currently being done via social media, the following are possible outlets:

- Short videos showing what happens in classrooms
- Clear program descriptions on the website

- Quick guides explaining pathways, bridge programs, and looping
- Clear materials for realtors, daycares, and community organizations
- Expansion of the AHS newspaper

The existing high school newspaper could be re-imagined as a local paper for the Amesbury community. Students interested in particular issues, e.g., ecology and the environment, could take on assignments to cover the Conservation Commission, the Open Space Committee, etc. Meeting coverage could count toward community service, and/or fulfill project requirements for related courses. A partnership with the Newburyport Daily News could add value to the experience through staff mentorship. Payments from local businesses for advertising space could defray the cost of a faculty stipend. A fully electronic newspaper would require no printing or postage costs. The newspaper would publicize important school programs, events, accomplishments, etc., to the broader Amesbury community while also circulating local news that is currently available only through word of mouth, online communities, and local circulars such as the Chamber of Commerce.

Cost note:

Mostly staff time; possibly a very small stipend or reallocation of communication duties.

5. A Strategy Built for a Time of Limited Resources

Every strategy described above has been chosen because it is:

- **Cost-effective**
- **High-impact**
- **Designed to improve student experience immediately**
- **Built on existing staff, partnerships, and programs**

Attracting and retaining students is one of the strongest financial strategies available to Amesbury Public Schools. Each student who stays contributes to a more stable budget, which in turn protects our ability to offer programs, maintain staffing, and keep schools thriving.

Even with limited resources, Amesbury Public Schools can offer an educational experience that is engaging, supportive, and forward-thinking. By focusing on transitions, personalized learning, career pathways, improved environments, and stronger communication, the district can retain more students, attract new families, and ensure that Amesbury remains a place where students feel they belong and where they can see a bright future.

Amesbury Public Schools Endowment Fund

Purpose

To explore the creation of a sustainable endowment fund that generates long-term investment revenue to support Amesbury Public Schools' mission of delivering a best-in-class public education for all students—while helping reduce the financial strain on taxpayers.

Background: The Funding Challenge

Across Massachusetts, public education funding is under increasing pressure. State and federal contributions have failed to keep pace with inflation, unfunded mandates, and rising costs of special education, transportation, and staff compensation. Local communities, including Amesbury, have repeatedly filled the gap through Proposition 2½ overrides and temporary budget measures.

However, this model is not sustainable. Annual reliance on tax increases erodes community goodwill and burdens families and seniors. It also limits the district's ability to plan boldly for the future.

Amesbury has a proud tradition of community support, but it is time to pair that spirit with a modern financial mechanism—one that ensures excellence in perpetuity.

The Vision: An Endowment for the Future

Goal: Build a \$3 million Amesbury Education Endowment Fund whose annual investment returns can be used strategically to support innovation, enrichment, and equity across the district.

Purpose:

- To create an exemplar educational experience in both STEM and the Humanities.
- To lessen the long-term burden on taxpayers by diversifying revenue streams.
- To stabilize and strengthen Amesbury's ability to plan for sustained excellence.

Use of Proceeds:

Annual earnings could fund priorities such as:

- Smaller class sizes and innovative teaching models.
- Cutting-edge STEM and Humanities programs.
- Arts, music, and world language enrichment.
- Strategic investments in technology and 21st-century learning.
- Seed funding for special projects and teacher innovation grants.

The Approach: How We Get There

This endowment would be built over several years through coordinated, community-driven fundraising initiatives. Possible strategies include:

1. **Alumni Engagement:**
Create an Amesbury Alumni Network with annual giving opportunities, class reunions, and naming programs that celebrate graduates' legacy.
2. **Community & Business Partnerships:**
Invite local businesses and civic organizations to invest in the future workforce through sponsorships, challenge grants, and named funds.
3. **"Buy a Seat" and Other Symbolic Giving Campaigns:**
Sell engraved seats in performance halls, donor bricks at athletic complexes, or naming opportunities for innovation spaces.
4. **Unified Fundraising Strategy:**
Coordinate efforts among the PTO, PAG, Booster Club, and others to ensure campaigns are aligned, strategic, and mutually reinforcing rather than competing.
5. **Explore Partnering with an Established Entity:**
The Amesbury Educational Foundation (AEFI)—a 501(c)(3) organization—could be a natural partner and could manage donations, strategic giving, and collaborative governance. Alternative mechanisms could also be explored to ensure transparency, accountability, and tax-deductibility. Understanding that additional personnel and support would likely be needed to move this idea forward. Many conversations would be required.

Key Questions to Determine

Before moving forward, several questions merit consideration:

- What governance structure would oversee the endowment (e.g., a joint city–school–community advisory board)?
- Should the fund be managed independently by AEFI, or as a sub-fund with dedicated fiduciary oversight? Or might another 401c3 structure be required?
- How will investment policies be determined to ensure responsible stewardship and predictable returns?
- What is the optimal campaign timeline and fundraising target for each phase?
- How can we build early momentum with leadership gifts or a city matching program?
- How will the community be engaged, thanked, and kept informed to build lasting trust?

Next Steps

1. Form an Exploratory Committee with representation from the School Committee, Superintendent's Office, AEFI, and community stakeholders.
2. Conduct a Feasibility Study to gauge donor interest, partnership potential, and fundraising capacity.
3. Develop a Campaign Plan outlining targets, leadership, timelines, and communications strategies.
4. Launch a Founders Circle Initiative to secure the first \$500,000 in pledges and demonstrate early community buy-in.
5. Understand if a 501(c)3 is being organized by citizens for the AIHS

Closing Thought

Amesbury has always believed in the power of education to shape our children's futures and strengthen our community. By creating an endowment, we can move beyond short-term crisis management and invest in long-term excellence.

This is an opportunity to leave a legacy—one that ensures that every child in Amesbury Public Schools has access to the education, opportunities, and inspiration they deserve.

Delivering Education Differently

1. Restructure Time & Staffing (Without Sacrificing Quality)

Team Teaching + Multi-Grade "Studios"

Use larger flexible learning groups with two adults in the room:

- Licensed teacher + paraprofessional or AmeriCorps resident
- Students grouped by level/competency, not rigid grade lines
- Frees up specialists, reduces class-size pressure, preserves personalization

This is common in Vermont and works particularly well in humanities and STEM blocks.

"Master Teacher + Resident" Model

Like a teaching hospital:

- Veteran teachers coach "residents" (student teachers / fellows / paraprofessionals on pathway to licensure)

- Lowers costs long-term and improves pipeline stability
- Can be built through partnerships with Salem State, Endicott, UNH, Gordon, UMass

This increases adult presence without increasing full-salaried positions.

Consider strategic hires that cost money up-front, are not student facing, but bring value to students long-term.

- Grant Writers—driving more dollars into the schools.
- Volunteer/Parent/Community Liaison—extending labor force.
- More facilities support for proactive maintenance, rentals programs.

2. Shift Electives → Community-Powered or Partner-Powered

Community-Instructor Model

Leverage:

- Local tradespeople
- Artists
- Musicians
- Coaches
- Environmental educators
- Retired professionals

They teach enrichment blocks at small stipends (or volunteer in some cases).

Districts in Western MA have done this for woodworking, pottery, carpentry, outdoor ed, robotics, theater tech, and even canoe building.

Partnership Electives

Replace some in-house electives with:

- Outdoor leadership
- Local theater / dance studios
- Local maker spaces or tech startups
- Community music school instruction
- Libraries or historical societies

Students earn credit. The district reduces FTE cost.

3. Expand “Place-Based” and Outdoor Learning

Outdoor and community-based instruction:

- Reduces need for expensive materials

- Supports SPED and trauma-informed practice
- Builds strong experiential outcomes

Examples:

- Woodsom walks + watershed study (science)
- Local business data projects (math & economics)
- Historical site interpretation (ELA/history)
- Field ecology + habitat restoration (science + civics)

4. Rethink High School Structure

Career Pathways + More Dual Enrollment +Magnet School

Shift upper grades to:

- Early college credit (Salem State, Northern Essex, North Shore CC)
- Vocational sampling (CNC, culinary, graphic design, auto tech) through partnerships
- Work-based internships for credit

This cuts the number of daily in-building teaching blocks needed, reducing personnel load without cutting opportunities.

“4-Day Instruction + 1 Flex Day”

One day per week devoted to:

- Internships
- AP/Honors seminars
- Advisory & intervention
- Teacher planning
- IEP and MTSS meetings

This stabilizes staffing and reduces need for substitutes (a major cost).

Create a Magnet School

In the U.S. education system, magnet schools are public schools with specialized courses or curricula. Normally, a student will attend an elementary school, and this also determines the middle school and high school they attend unless they move. "Magnet" refers to how magnet schools accept students from different areas, pulling students out of the normal progression of schools. Attending them is voluntary.

5. Create a Community-Owned Revenue Engine (Sustainable)

Goal: Recurring, not one-off fundraising.

Facility as Economic Asset

Schools are often under-utilized real estate.

- Rent classrooms to adult ed programs, community colleges, yoga studios, nonprofits
- Host maker-space memberships or co-working after school hours
- Lease fields to club sports with equitable sliding scale

Consolidation of Facilities

Facilities consolidation within a single public school system is the process of closing schools and merging their student populations, staff, and operations into a fewer number of larger, existing, or newly constructed school facilities.

Optimizing Facility Use: Concentrating students and resources in a smaller number of facilities allows for more focused investment in upgraded learning environments and modern infrastructure, such as improved gyms, libraries, and science labs.

The primary goals are to achieve fiscal efficiency through operational savings and to enhance the quality and equity of educational opportunities by providing more robust and diverse programs that might not be feasible in smaller schools. While distinct from district consolidation (merging two or more independent districts into one), facilities consolidation within a single district aims for similar efficiencies but stays under one existing administrative umbrella. An additional benefit potential cited is added retention depending on the grade distributions.

This process typically involves:

- **Closing Underutilized Buildings:** Identifying and shutting down older, less efficient, or under-enrolled school buildings. Several of our schools are underutilized. Understanding possibilities would require a formal study.
- **Merging Student Populations:** Reassigning students from the closed schools to other campuses within the same district. This was initially explored because of an initial study by The Abrahams Group. Amesbury Innovation High School (AIHS) was targeted as a quick win, having the potential to save \$200,000 in annual rent. Citizens rejected it immediately. AIHS recently was moved to the middle school because of a boiler failure and roofing issues at their current location at the church. Decisions about their future are necessary.
- **Centralizing Resources:** Combining administrative, educational, and support services to streamline operations and eliminate duplicated programs. Much of this has already been

done in years past. Very few options remain here. Administration has been whittled down to four people, human resources and technology has combined with the city personnel, food services, transportation and cleaning services have been outsourced. Secretarial support and some support roles are jumping between buildings to make ends meet.

Considerations when consolidating school facilities or merging student populations:

Financial Impact & Long-Term Savings

- Will the consolidation actually reduce recurring costs (staffing, utilities, transportation, maintenance)?
- Are there upfront expenses (renovations, moving costs, technology updates) that need to be accurately modeled?
- Impact on Educational Quality

Will class sizes change?

- Can the merged school offer equal or better access to programs—arts, languages, AP classes, special education services, athletics, counseling?
- Student Well-Being, Culture, and Sense of Belonging
- How will school identity, traditions, social groups, and culture merge?
- What support is needed during the transition to maintain strong student connections and emotional safety?

Operational & Logistical Feasibility

- Capacity: Do the receiving buildings have enough classroom space, specialized rooms (science labs, gym, arts), and infrastructure?
- Transportation: Will bus routes, walkability, or commute times change?

Community Impact & Perception

- How will families, staff, and the broader community respond to the change?
- Will the process feel transparent, fair, and data-driven—and can you build trust throughout?
- Staffing, Labor, and Talent Retention
- Will staff need to be reassigned or reduced?
- How will you maintain morale and retain high-quality teachers and support staff during and after the transition?

The committee imagined configurations without constraints, of course due diligence would be required. Involving stakeholders would be essential. These are not recommendations, but examples of different ways of thinking.

Version 1

- a. Move 8th gr to AHS
- b. Move AIHS to AMS (add 8th graders to AIHS)
- c. Move central office to AMS

Version 2

- a. Move 8th gr to AHS
- b. Move 5th gr to AMS
- c. Move AIHS to CES
- d. Move central office to AMS

Version 3

- a. Move AIHS to AHS
- b. Move central office to AMS
- c. Move 5th gr to AMS

Version 4

- a. 8th gr to AHS
- b. AIHS to AMS (add 8th graders to AIHS)
- c. Central Office to AMS
create early childhood care at AHS

Version 5 (based on the closing of CES)

- a. Move 7th & 8th gr to AHS (staggered start times)
- b. Move AIHS to AMS (add 8th graders to AIHS)
- c. Move 3rd, 4th, 5th gr to AMS (rent modular classrooms?)
- d. Move Central Office to old City Hall
Start planning for new wing to AHS for gr 6-8

A preliminary study was conducted by the Abrahams Group and released publicly June 3, 2024.

https://www.amesburyma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/4689/June-3-Packet?bidId&fbclid=IwY2xjawOBnvVleHRuA2FlbQlxMQBzcnRjBmFwcF9pZBAyMjlwMzcxNzg4MjAwODkyAAEeWN3w6s0hwxilnIKCF79UWYC_0jdMN2GxYGLY_kxeEDvZD--TVlqp7tb56xU_aem_XFQpPtQtsb0HO0JGBYqxKA