

Dear Bristol and South Bristol Families,

We're excited to share the news that our school boards are partnering to actively explore the formation of a more independent administrative structure called an Educational Service Center (ESC).

Our neighboring towns have a history of working together to support our students and we look forward to continued collaboration through the creation of this ESC. We currently share programming and staff for music, athletics and outside learning opportunities. Bristol Consolidated School (BCS) and South Bristol School (SBS) staff partner on professional development and training opportunities and our ongoing collaboration illustrates a shared philosophy of student-centered education. We see value in expanded opportunities for joint programming and anticipate greater flexibility to share resources as we move into this new model with guidance from the Department of Education.

If we move ahead with this, we want to assure everyone that Bristol Consolidated School and South Bristol School will remain independent schools with independent boards and will be funded by their independent communities. The services provided by the jointly-funded and jointly-governed ESC would simply replace the administrative and financial tasks currently managed by the AOS central office. The ESC would mostly function "behind the scenes" and students, parents, and teachers should expect only minimal disruptions to their school experience during the transition to this new administrative model. Services provided by the ESC would include superintendent, business office, special education, and IT, as well as the administration of facility maintenance, nutrition, and transportation. We are excited to imagine an administrative team focused specifically on the needs of our students and staff, and located right here in our communities.

More details can be found on the school websites and we encourage anyone with questions or concerns to attend their community school board meetings, or to email their questions and concerns to their school board chairs.

Sincerely,

Members of the Bristol Consolidated School and South Bristol School Restructuring Committee:

John Armentrout, South Bristol resident, SBS staff, Restructuring Committee Co-Chair  
Emile Lugosch, Bristol resident, BCS board member, Restructuring Committee Co-Chair  
Christina Bradbury, Bristol resident, BCS staff  
Darin Carlucci, BCS board chair  
Becky Cooper, BCS board member  
Christian Cotz, SBS board member  
John Cough, BCS staff member  
Angela Farrin, South Bristol resident, school volunteer  
Sarah Kennedy, BCS parent  
Sara Mitchell, SBS board member  
Andy Mullin BCS, BCS staff  
Jennifer M. Ribeiro, BCS principal  
Laurie Stiles, SBS principal

## **Stronger Communities, Stronger Educations: Making the Move to an ESC**

### **Introduction**

In the first weeks of August, the school boards of Bristol and South Bristol voted unanimously to start the two-part application process for creating a joint Educational Service Center (ESC) on July 1, 2026. Joining this Center would remove the two schools from AOS 93. On July 28, 2025, the Bristol and South Bristol schools' joint restructuring committee voted to recommend this course of action to their school committees.

### **Background**

The committee was created in the spring of 2023 during the AOS-wide restructuring efforts that culminated in the fall of 2024 with Great Salt Bay School announcing it planned to withdraw from the AOS and create its own school district as of July 1, 2025. After a year spent reviewing several different future possible paths of their own, the Bristol/South Bristol committee decided that forming a two-town Educational Service Center promises the most autonomy for the schools and towns, builds on an already thriving partnership between the two neighboring schools, and is the most cost-effective and least disruptive option.

### **Benefits of an ESC, Part I**

Of the 17 AOS systems originally created during the Baldacci administration (ca. 2010), at least nine have dissolved or are in the process of doing so, and more than 40 towns have withdrawn from the consolidation effort.

The ESC model was created by the Maine Department of Education around 2019 to allow for a more flexible approach to inter-local educational support. It encourages collaboration between independent school units through customized and shared resources, rather than simply consolidating administrative support.

On the surface, an ESC is very much like an AOS. It contains a central office that ensures its member schools have access to the services they need, including financial and contractual, transportation, nutrition, special education, superintendent services, and facilities maintenance. That central office is overseen by an Executive Director (rather than a superintendent) and governed by a board made up of representatives from the participating towns.

The ESC model also offers two other major benefits.

First, the board will be composed of members who have equal voting power. Second, the cost-sharing arrangement will be exclusive to the two peninsula towns, narrowing the margin for dissatisfaction, and keeping local funds within the community.

### **Why the AOS model no longer works for Bristol and South Bristol**

Contrast this with the AOS model, in which each board member's vote is weighted according to their town's student population. Currently, that gives South Bristol 13.7% of the vote, and Bristol 34.1%, while Jefferson carries 30.7% and Nobleboro 21.6%. This proportional representation made sense when the budget was also divided proportionally, as it had been.

But in the fall of 2024, with Great Salt Bay's withdrawal, the new, smaller AOS board rewrote the cost-sharing agreement, moving the four schools closer to an equal division of AOS costs. In the current model, South Bristol carries 18% of the AOS costs, Bristol pays 28%, Jefferson pays 30%, and Nobleboro 24%. The stated goal was to move toward an eventual parity where each school would pay 25% of the cost, regardless of their student population or of their voting share. Because of the weighted voting system, Bristol and South Bristol lack the ability, even collectively, to prevent motions being approved even if they are in complete disagreement with them.

### **Benefits of an ESC, Part II**

In the ESC model, however, Bristol and South Bristol will be able to arrive at a cost-sharing agreement that supports a localized, cooperative, and mutually beneficial administrative unit that coordinates services for two collaborative and philosophically aligned schools and communities. Each town will have equal say on the board, and the current schools and school boards will remain largely unchanged.

### **Next Steps**

Part 1 of the application process is simple and straightforward and is already complete. Part 2 of the application is more complex, requires far more detailed planning, and is due before the end of October, which means the restructuring committee has a lot of work to do and a short amount of time to do it. We are excited by all the benefits forming an ESC holds and will continue to update the community through our school board and select board meetings, the Lincoln County News, when possible, as well as through our town offices and social media outlets.