



Henry P. Becton Regional High School

C-ER Regional High School District | Proudly serving the communities of Carlstadt, East Rutherford and Maywood

Dr. Dario Sforza, Superintendent of Schools

Jessenia Kan, Business Administrator/Board Secretary

February 9, 2024

Dear Becton Regional High School Community and Residents of the Carlstadt, East Rutherford, and Maywood Communities:

As we march ever closer to our upcoming referendum next month, we wanted to respond to some recent developments in the community and [news](#). Specifically, on January 17, 2024 the Borough Mayor and Council of the Borough of Carlstadt passed a [resolution](#) opposing the current draft of the Becton Regional High School referendum. We find the resolution to be equal parts confounding, disappointing, and inappropriate.

This referendum is years in the making. We have spent months of time and extensive resources to collaborate with community leaders in both Carlstadt and East Rutherford on the referendum, dating back to at least June of 2022. For such a resolution, with its vague and summary language, to be passed on the eve of the referendum is disconcerting. While we knew going into this process, and acknowledged throughout it, that we may never reach a consensus on every issue with all constituents of each affected community, we still endeavored to be as inclusive and sensitive as possible the entire way. We have conducted near countless internal, formal, and informal meetings, including numerous meetings with community leaders in both Carlstadt and East Rutherford. We sent out multiple surveys to our community and middle schools, met extensively with financial advisors, attorneys, architects, and other experts, and absorbed feedback from our many community leaders and residents. We undertook these collaborative efforts with an eye towards the future and in an effort to enhance the education of Becton Regional High School current and future students—which of course includes Carlstadt—for years to come. But now this resolution stymies those efforts, threatens progress, and ignores the collaborative nature of our attempts to improve the quality of education available to our students. **Worst of all it jeopardizes the precious sanctity of an impartial process by which the community of voters is to determine the results of an election, including the fate of this public school referendum.**

We understand that we may never win the support of each and every individual or constituent who will vote on the referendum. While we certainly wish that we could have a unanimous consensus, as we believe strongly in what we have proposed, we recognize discord of opinion is inherent in the very nature and beauty of our state's electoral system—there is the right to make an informed decision that aligns with one's personal beliefs. As residents of Carlstadt, individual Council members certainly are free to vote on the referendum how they see fit when the time comes; however, **there is a distinction between voting on this referendum in an individual's capacity, and using one's public office to take official action which runs the risk of swaying the electorate, thereby potentially vitiating those individuals' underlying preferences. That is the line which never should be crossed when a municipal entity attempts to become involved in a Board of Education matter, especially an election of this magnitude.**

Indeed, New Jersey enjoys a long and storied history of upholding broad protections for speech and expression, including the freedom from municipal interference guaranteed to local Boards of Education. While coterminous with the municipalities they serve, Boards of Education in this state exist separate, distinct, and free from control by municipal governing bodies within their territorial limits, consistent with the provisions of the education laws of this state. As an independent and autonomous



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corporate instrumentality of government, the Carlstadt-East Rutherford Regional High School District Board of Education is not subject to the direction or the political will of the Carlstadt Mayor or Borough Council, nor any other governing body of the municipalities within which the Board functions. Unless any express limitation is provided for by law, the Board's sphere of operation, and its individual trustees, should remain unintruded by governing municipal bodies.

This referendum, unquestionably, falls squarely within the purview of the Carlstadt-East Rutherford Regional High School District Board of Education as it proudly discharges its duties to best serve the students of Carlstadt, East Rutherford, and Maywood. The Council's resolution represents an unwarranted intrusion into school affairs and upon the Board's efforts in this regard. This cannot be countenanced.

Preserving the full and free expression of the popular will is integral to our democracy, and is a core American value which remains a paramount goal to be served when moving forward with this special election referendum. That is why, in the coming weeks, we have scheduled numerous information sessions for the public to come and learn about the various proposed projects. With that in mind we are disheartened to report that one of our upcoming referendum community sessions, which was set far in advance to be held at the Carlstadt Public School Media Center, has been canceled. We have been informed that, since the passage of the Council's resolution, Becton Regional's permission to host the community session **in-person** at Carlstadt Public School has been revoked. This is tremendously disappointing. The Media Center is open to the public for any number of groups to meet and share information with the public—but, all of a sudden, not for Becton Regional and this referendum. **This sudden about-face raises the question: does the Carlstadt Board of Education not want to make widely available for its community this critical fact-based information about the referendum prior to the vote? And, if so, why not?**

In our view, the suppression of the availability of information to the community is as dangerous to the fundamental tenets of our democracy and a free-flowing public discourse as it is a disservice to those community members who wished to have a convenient and collaborative forum, at their local school they are most familiar with, to attend to learn about the referendum, but will now have to attend via other means instead. That said, we still encourage any and all who wish to learn more about the referendum to please attend the forums, virtually or in person, whenever and wherever possible.

There is no place for improper partisan political interference in education or in school board elections. The Carlstadt-East Rutherford Regional High School District Board of Education strenuously objects to any attempts of political interloping and will take every available measure to ensure, for the benefit of all Becton Regional High School students both future and present, that this referendum enjoys an election, along with all other school affairs, unencumbered by any unwarranted political interference, including but not limited to reserving all legal rights to ensure that a fair and honest election occurs unimpeded by any undue intrusion.

We have the opportunity to forever change the trajectory of our students' lives and our communities this upcoming March 12th. We are proud of the work we have put in towards achieving that goal, and so we look forward to speaking more about our undeterred vision to pave the way for the future of education at Becton Regional High School at an upcoming community referendum information sessions, the first from February 1st which can be viewed on <https://bectonevolution.com/events/>, and the remaining sessions which are summarized on the next page.



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Session #1 already held on February 1, 2024 Watch on https://bectonevolution.com/events/	Session #2 already held on February 7, 2024
Session #3 When: Tuesday, February 13, 2024 at 6:30pm Who: Carlstadt All Residents Where: In-Person Hybrid Virtual Only	In-Person: Carlstadt PS Media Center, 550 Washington St., Carlstadt Virtual: https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83690586525
New Session #3 When: Tuesday, February 13, 2024 at 6:30pm Who: All Residents Where: In-Person at Becton Regional HS & Virtual -Hybrid	In-Person: PAC at Henry P. Becton Regional High School, 120 Paterson Ave., East Rutherford Hybrid: https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83690586525
Session #4 When: Thursday, February 22, 2024 at 6:30pm Who: All Residents Where: In-Person at Becton Regional HS & Virtual -Hybrid	In-Person: PAC at Henry P. Becton Regional High School, 120 Paterson Ave., East Rutherford Hybrid: https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83121995672

Sincerely,

Dr. Dario Sforza
Superintendent of Schools

Dr. Steven Lahullier, Carlstadt
President, C-ER Board of Education

Mr. Bruce Young, Carlstadt
Chair, C-ER Board of Education
Referendum Committee

Mrs. Emily Landolfi, East Rutherford
Vice President, C-ER Board of Education