

A Feasibility Study on Regionalization and Shared
Services in the Watchung Hills Regional, Warren, Long
Hill, Watchung, and Green Brook School Districts

Rowan School Regionalization Institute
November 2025

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	3
INTRODUCTION.....	17
Study Purpose.....	17
Consolidation Options.....	18
Consultant Backgrounds.....	19
GOVERNANCE and LAW.....	21
1. School District Profiles.....	21
2. Constitutional, Statutory, and Case Law Review.....	26
3. Election Process and Board Composition.....	27
4. State Monitoring Status.....	31
5. Stakeholder Input.....	32
6. Transition Features.....	37
7. Potential Political Issues.....	39
8. Governance and Legal Impact.....	39
DEMOGRAPHY and FACILITIES.....	41
9. Municipal Profiles.....	41
10. Housing Starts.....	46
11. Enrollment History.....	48
12. Enrollment Projections.....	49
13. Disaggregated Enrollments.....	52
14. Facility Utilization.....	56
15. Demographic Impact.....	62
EDUCATION and PROGRAM.....	64
16. Curriculum and Instruction.....	65
17. Performance Measures.....	83
18. Special Programs.....	96
19. Extracurricular Programs.....	106
20. School and District Staffing.....	109
21. Educational and Programmatic Impact.....	125
FINANCE and OPERATIONS.....	131
22. Operating Expenses and Potential Cost Savings.....	131
23. State Aid and Local Tax Levies.....	136
24. Borrowing Margin and Debt Allocation.....	175
25. Collective Bargaining Agreements.....	178
26. Shared Services.....	188
27. Contracted Services.....	193
28. Tuition.....	198
29. Reserves.....	203
30. Financial and Operational Impact.....	204
FINDINGS and RECOMMENDATIONS.....	210

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study outlines the potential consolidation or expansion of shared services among five New Jersey (NJ) school districts under the School Regionalization Efficiency Program (SREP), which supports public school districts and governing bodies across the state who wish to study the feasibility of school district regionalization and/or consolidation to improve efficiency and reduce costs.

The intent of this study is to examine relevant data in order to provide recommendations on the feasibility of consolidating operations to enlarge the current limited purpose, grades 9-12, regional Watchung Hills Regional School District (Watchung Hills) into one all purpose, grades pre-kindergarten (pK) to 12, regional school district. Concurrently, the study will investigate opportunities to share services more effectively and efficiently among Watchung Hills and its four constituent districts: the grades pK-8 Warren Township School District (Warren); the grades pK-8 Long Hill Township School District (Long Hill); the grades pK-8 Watchung Borough School District (Watchung); and the grades pK-8 Green Brook Township School District (Green Brook), which is not a constituent but sends its high school students to Watchung Hills on a tuition basis.

The reorganization options to be studied include:

1. All Districts Regional: Expanding the limited purpose, grades 9-12, Watchung Hills Regional into an all purpose, grades pK-12 regional school district including the municipalities of Warren Township, Long Hill Township, Watchung Borough, and Green Brook Township.
2. Current Constituents Regional: Expanding the limited purpose, grades 9-12, Watchung Hills Regional into an all purpose, grades pK-12, regional school district including the current constituent municipalities of Warren Township, Long Hill Township, and Watchung Borough with Green Brook Township entering into a revised send-receive agreement with the enlarged regional.
3. Status Quo: Maintaining the status quo with opportunities to better align educational programs and support services while reducing or controlling the costs of educating students in each district through the expansion of shared services and other efficiencies.

The Sweeney Center for Public Policy and Rowan University's College of Education formed the Rowan School Regionalization Institute to assess the new school regionalization law, make policy recommendations, and conduct regionalization studies for interested school districts. The Sweeney Center is led by Mark Magyar, who developed the new school regionalization law and has advised over three dozen districts. The Institute retained a team of expert consultants with deep experience in school administration, governance, law, finance, operations, and demographics to conduct this feasibility study. This includes: consultant and former Warren Township school board member and NJ School Boards Association Senior Manager of Field Services Kathleen Helewa; attorney and former Commissioner of Education Lucille Davy; former superintendents Scott A. Oswald and

G. Kennedy Greene; school business analysts Brian Diamante and Donna Snyder-DeVita; demographic analyst George Sundell; and transportation analyst Ray Kuehner. The study was commissioned by the Watchung Hills Regional and Watchung Borough Boards of Education with the support of the other districts to examine the feasibility of regionalization or expanded shared services across the districts.

Governance and Law

Students in grades 9-12 from Warren, Long Hill, and Watchung attend Watchung Hills as constituent districts. Green Brook is not a constituent district, but sends its grades 9-12 students to Watchung Hills on a tuition basis through a send-receive relationship.

In order to consolidate Watchung Hills and the four elementary districts into a single grades pK-12 district, the districts would have to agree to enlarge Watchung Hills. Should the respective boards of education decide to pursue creation of an enlarged regional, state law requires that the voters of each of the constituent district communities will first determine whether they support such a change. Voters would also be asked to approve the inclusion of Green Brook as a new constituent member of the expanded regional district. If approved, the voters of Green Brook would choose if they wish to join the new regional as a constituent member, or if they wish to continue their send-receive relationship on a tuition basis, as they had with the limited purpose regional. Should Green Brook opt out of consolidating itself with the enlarged regional district, and wish to continue to send its grades 9-12 students to Watchung Hills on a tuition basis, a revised send-receive agreement would need to be negotiated.

An enlarged regional district with Green Brook would have four constituent municipalities and also a nine member elected board of education (i.e., five from Warren, two from Long Hill, one from Watchung, and one from Green Brook). An enlarged regional district without Green Brook would have three constituent municipalities and a nine member board of education (i.e., five from Warren, two from Long Hill, and two from Watchung), all elected by their constituent municipalities. Under this latter configuration, representation for Green Brook on the Watchung Hills board would occur only if the number of students sent by Green Brook reaches 10% or more of the high school student population. In such a case, one seat would be added to the board for Green Brook, with that representative being selected by the Green Brook Board of Education from among its members at its annual reorganization meeting. Under this scenario, the Watchung Hills Regional Board of Education would have 10 rather than 9 members, but the Green Brook representative would have voting rights only on matters that pertain to the high school.

The Division of Local Government Services, which provided the grant that funded this study, has offered implementation grants of up to \$400,000 under the Local Efficiency Achievement Program to cover one-time costs for regionalization and shared services initiatives. Discussion among district leaders and boards of education, followed by the development and approval of specific contracts, would be necessary to design and adopt shared services between the schools in the region.

The NJ Quality Single Accountability Continuum (NJQSAC) is the NJ Department of Education's (NJDOE) monitoring and self-evaluation system for public school districts. It includes the evaluation of five key components: Instruction and Program, Fiscal Management, Governance, Operations, and Personnel. Districts that score 80% or higher in all components are designated as "high-performing".

Recent district NJQSAC results found that Watchung Hills (2023-24), Warren (2023-24), Watchung (2022-23), and Long Hill (2021-22) met or exceeded the high-performing standard in all five areas. Green Brook (2023-24) met or exceeded that standard in four of five areas and missed the standard for Instruction and Program by one point. Future NJQSAC reviews are scheduled for Watchung in 2025-26; and Watchung Hills, Warren, and Green Brook in 2026-27. Long Hill is awaiting results from its 2024-25 review and should be scheduled by NJDOE for 2027-28.

A survey prepared by the study team was taken by 372 Watchung Hills 9th grade students to learn their perspectives on how well their elementary experiences prepared them for their first year in high school in various subject areas. The results varied between students from the different sending districts and between the subject areas. The vast majority of students from all of the districts felt adequately prepared for high school in each subject area. Notable exceptions were the lower ratings by Watchung students of either a 1 or 2 out of 5 regarding their readiness for ninth-grade science (24.6%) and the frequency of middle school science experiments (26.2%).

In April 2025, members of the study team visited Watchung Hills Regional High School (HS) for an open-invitation town hall meeting. Concerns brought forth by participants included new residential building, the resulting influx in new students with changing demographics and support for multilingual learners; curriculum coordination and the hope that standardized test scores could be elevated; supporting the social-emotional needs of all students, middle school students in particular, with the possible consideration of a regional middle school; preserving the protections afforded in current collective bargaining agreements; and savings to taxpayers. Also noted were the desire for each of the schools to be able to enjoy their own unique culture, and for the educational experience for students in districts with high-quality academic programs not to be diminished in any way.

No major political issues were identified with the proposed regionalization. After reviewing this feasibility study, the districts will consider recommendations to their boards on next steps, potentially following a similar process as the recently formed Henry Hudson Regional School District.

Demography

The four municipalities which are part of Watchung Hills Regional are contiguous to Warren Township, the municipality where the high school is located. Warren Township, Watchung Borough, and Green Brook Township are located in Somerset County, while Long Hill Township is in Morris County.

Between 2018 and 2023, Warren Township and Watchung Borough experienced increases in population at 1.3% and 6.1%, respectively, while Long Hill Township (-0.6%) and Green Brook Township (-2.5%) experienced slight declines in population. Median household income has increased in all four communities, but there is a significant difference between the highest income levels and the lowest: Warren Township's median household income is currently \$189.4K (up 15%); Watchung Borough's is \$166.5K (up 8.6%); Long Hill Township's is \$165.1K (up 15.8%); and Green Brook Township's is \$218.9K (up 57.7%). Yet even as median incomes increase, there is a projected rise in the percentage of students who qualify for free and reduced meals with an estimated 16.4% total percentage of the student population predicted for 2029-30. This aligns with the actual increases of economically disadvantaged students which all four school districts have been experiencing since 2019.

The number of live births is a key data point in predicting future kindergarten enrollment. The potential for population growth in Warren and Long Hill Townships is indicated by comparing birth rates to total population. Watchung Borough and Green Brook Township's birth rates are declining. Median age has risen in three of the four municipalities, with only Warren experiencing a decline of 1.9 years.

After years of relatively stagnant or declining enrollment, all four municipalities began undergoing significant housing growth during the year this study was conducted, which presented unexpected enrollment challenges for Warren heading into this school year and will pose significant staffing and fiscal challenges in all of the districts over the next five years. While combined enrollment in the five districts declined from 5,769 in the 2019-20 school year to 5,522 in 2024-25, enrollment began climbing to 5,689 this year and is projected to grow to 6,479 by the 2029-30 school year.

That projected increase of 957 students across all of the districts would represent a 17% increase in enrollment that will fall principally on property taxpayers in the four municipalities because state aid makes up such a small percentage of overall district budgets. The fiscal challenges of continuing to provide a high-quality education to Warren, Long Hill, Watchung, and Green Brook students is a compelling argument for residents to consider full grades pK-12 regionalization or a massive expansion of coordinated shared services in an effort to control costs for taxpayers.

The estimated potential classroom availability data demonstrates that the schools in the Watchung Hills region have a wide variety in terms of physical capacities. An all purpose regional would have greater flexibility to make efficient usage of classroom space based upon a new regionalized administration's consideration of efficient use of and reconfiguration of space while preserving and elevating student outcomes. For example, there are opportunities for expanding preschool programs in an all purpose regional, as classroom availability in the enlarged district could accommodate the projected three- and four-year old universe.

Education and Program

This section of the feasibility study examined the educational impact of potentially regionalizing Watchung Hills with its current constituent members and Green Brook into a single all purpose, grades pK-12, regional school district, or a merger of all of the constituent districts while preserving the send-receive relationship with Green Brook. It analyzed curricular programs, achievement results, specialized programs, extracurricular offerings, school climate, staffing patterns, and professional development opportunities. The study examined whether regionalization or a greater degree of shared services would provide higher quality and more equitable education, produce additional benefits or challenges, and/or impact special population services. Data collection methods included analysis of public state and local documents, data provided by the districts, and in person meetings with various administrators and ninth grade teachers in multiple subject areas.

This analysis examines the instructional time and materials differences among the four elementary districts whose students attend Watchung Hills Regional HS. Significant instructional variations exist in the core subjects of English language arts (ELA), Mathematics (Math), Science, and Social Studies. For instance in ELA, none of the four elementary districts use common programs in grades K-8, and they further differ in supplementary materials and instructional time. Math instruction shows similar disparities, although Warren and Long Hill will be using iReady for their students as of September 2025. Math instructional times vary by as much as 80 minutes daily for the same grade level across districts. Science and Social Studies also demonstrate considerable differences in both content and time allocation. Several of the grades pK-8 districts use curricula that have been developed in-house across all of the above-mentioned subject areas. There are differences in World Language offerings between the high school and the elementary districts. For example, all five districts offer Spanish but only Watchung Hills and Warren offer Mandarin Chinese, and the high school is the only one that offers Italian. Four of the districts offer French with Green Brook being the exception. Variations in the student learning experience between the districts extend to other content areas, such as physical education, art, music, and technology/STEAM education.

The disparities in curricula, instructional time, and assessment tools result in students having significantly different educational experiences before entering high school. This analysis suggests that aligning programs, assessment tools, and instructional time across districts could lead to more consistent student skills, better informed instruction at the higher grade levels, and a more cohesive educational experience overall. This alignment has the potential to benefit both students and educators by creating a more standardized and effective approach to education across the districts.

Whether regionalization occurs or not, the creation of a central regional curriculum office or a shared director of curriculum for grades pK-12 could provide cohesive direction, support, and coordination for curriculum and instructional practices across the region, potentially leading to elevated student achievement and stronger preparation for high school. Such coordination could increase efficiency by eliminating any duplicative efforts where they may or could occur, which could help districts both financially and academically, while potentially preserving important instructional support systems.

The study also examines standardized assessment results across the districts, focusing on the NJ Student Learning Assessments (NJSLA) for ELA and Math. Watchung Hills data shows the high school consistently exceeds the state average in all areas, with the exception of Algebra I, which may be attributed to advanced students taking Algebra I in middle school, with less mathematically-inclined students taking it in ninth grade. Likewise, the elementary and middle school data from Warren, Long Hill, Watchung, and Green Brook show performance which is consistently higher than the state average. It is important to note that although exceeding the state averages is commendable, the school districts of the Watchung Hills region historically focus on elevating their own year-over-year results. Test scores have been increasing since the State's return to NJSLA testing after the years of the COVID-19 pandemic when the assessments were suspended. Most NJSLA scores in the region have not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels, although Black and Hispanic students have achieved notably higher success in post-pandemic years. There are areas of variability across the subjects and different grade levels. In sum, even with some areas for continual improvement, the overall picture in the Watchung Hills region is one of achievement and a commitment to academic success.

NJDOE data indicate that students are largely demonstrating typical growth in grades 4-8 in ELA and in grades 4-7 in Math across multiple years. No other elementary grade levels are subject to growth measurement. When comparing growth across the grades pK-8 districts, results are mixed with each district outpacing the others in at least one of the four years in ELA, and Warren outpacing the others in Math for three of four years during which those assessments were made between 2016-17 and 2022-23. Each of the elementary districts met the federal accountability standard for student growth in ELA and Math during each of the years studied, with the sole exception of Watchung having fallen one point shy in Math during the 2017-18 school year.

Even among these high-performing schools and districts, the range of student growth scores in the region provides an opportunity for district leaders working within a regional setting to examine the programs and instructional practices that are yielding the highest levels of student growth demonstrated in core subjects, and to infuse those practices throughout a larger district that would serve more children than the four grades pK-8 districts do individually. By combining district- and building-level supervisory staff and reassigning responsibilities closely aligned to areas of expertise, a regional school district also has the ability to better serve and provide targeted support to the teachers preparing students to meet or exceed academic standards and leave high school being college and career ready.

The four- and five-year graduation rates at Watchung Hills exceed the state averages for all subgroups. Most graduates attend postsecondary schools within sixteen months of graduation with the majority of students opting for four-year rather than two-year institutions. Watchung Hills surpasses the state average of graduates attending any institution of higher education by an average of eighteen percentage points.

Not unlike school districts across the State, absenteeism has risen in each of the five districts since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019-20. Chronic absenteeism has been linked generally to

higher dropout rates. In each of the districts in this study, chronic absenteeism remains higher than pre-pandemic levels. Incidents of violence, vandalism, bullying, and substance offenses tend to increase as students move into schools that serve the higher grade levels, as do in-school or out-of-school suspensions. Among the grades pK-8 districts, Green Brook has a lower percentage of such incidents than its peer districts in the region. Recognizing that school climate profoundly impacts attendance and discipline, regionalization could provide the capacity to identify and initiate best practices for climate and culture initiatives in a larger all purpose regional that smaller districts might struggle to provide independently, thereby benefiting all students and positively impacting the future of the children throughout the region.

Access to early childhood education establishes a firm footing for academic success throughout a child's lifetime. It is a growing demand across the State, in part due to new focus and funding opportunities from the NJDOE. All four of the grades pK-8 districts in the region offer preschool for general and special education students. Warren sought but did not receive the preschool expansion aid grant in the past school year, and space constraints in Watchung prevent their programs from expanding. A fully regionalized school district could address issues of space for preschool via the greater flexibility a larger district can offer, and also ensure consistent program quality by consolidating oversight efforts in one common office. For instance, an early childhood supervisor supported by the preschool expansion aid could oversee and focus upon that specific program and its direct connection to grades K-3 programming to ensure smooth transitions and aligned curricula.

Special education is an area with great potential for joint action. Consolidating child study team staff within one larger district or through a shared services initiative may provide greater levels of expertise to meet the unique needs of students. It may also provide opportunities for greater alignment in terms of eligibility criteria and determinations. The percentage of total enrollment by classified students ranges from 13.2% to 19.7%, and there are noteworthy disparities among the percentages of students with specific classifications.

The elementary special education directors noted that they have made successful efforts over the past several years in reducing out-of-district placements by developing in-house programs to meet student needs in a less restrictive environment. Their in-district placement rates of between 94% to 96% reflect that success and are noticeably higher than the high school rate of 82.7%, which likely resulted from the previously higher elementary numbers. To put it into a financial context, 30 students being placed out-of-district costs Watchung Hills over \$3.5 million in tuition and \$1.6 million for 27 transportation routes.

It should be expected that as these children move on from elementary school that the in-district high school percentage should rise concurrently. To ensure this continuity, it is recommended that placements continue to be a regular dialogue among all of the directors. It was noted that high school case managers are invited to 8th grade IEP meetings, which is a positive sign. Since many of these meetings happen later in the year when time is short to develop appropriate high school programs, consideration should be given to having high school staff attend IEP meetings for 7th, and

perhaps even 6th, grade students. This can allow for development of high school programming to meet educational needs in-district well in advance of the arrival of those students.

Just as the opportunity exists to take advantage of additional special education expertise and resources in a consolidated department of a single all purpose regional, students who benefit from extra support via multi-tiered systems of support would benefit from such an arrangement as well. Common screeners and support mechanisms, regular and consistent progress monitoring, and aligned professional development to support these learners throughout a larger district, while still being able to address individual needs in a small school environment, enriches the educational experience for students and aims to reduce the rate of classification.

The percentage of multilingual learners for whom English is not their primary language has traditionally been low in the Watchung Hills region, though it has been increasing over the last few years. Currently, Watchung has the highest percentage at 6.4% and Long Hill has the lowest at 3.5%. Students are supported by different methods in each of the districts. Student achievement data for multilingual learners is limited in its public reporting in some districts due to the few numbers of students who qualify for these services. The data that is available shows sharp test score declines after the pandemic, as was the case statewide. Warren's NJSLA scores in ELA and Math for this subgroup were on an upward trajectory in 2021-22 and 2022-23, but Long Hill and Green Brook have experienced declines. Data for multilingual learners at Watchung Hills is not available for the post-pandemic years, but it is notable that in 2018-19, the students were achieving below the state average in both English and Math, and lagged behind Warren during the same year by 55 and 48 percentage points respectively. As stated for other student subgroups, an all purpose regional could present an opportunity for common programming and support that could elevate the academic performance of all multilingual learners across the region.

Support for gifted students is offered at each of the schools, though little overlap exists among those programs. As students identified as gifted progress through middle school and into high school, they will have had completely different experiences, which raises questions of equity among these learners. Further collaboration through regionalization or shared services would help to ensure that students received similar and equitable levels of services prior to high school, where they will likely enroll in advanced coursework.

All of the districts in this region offer popular extracurricular activities for their students including sports. Watchung Hills has long and rightly prided itself on the number of diverse extra curricular opportunities offered to its students. There are multiple options offered by the elementary districts as well. Clubs and activities differ from district to district, and in some instances from school to school within the same district. Maintaining or expanding the number of students available to take part in specialized activities, such as clubs, instrumental music, theatre, or athletic teams enhance not only the student experience, but also the quality of those programs and better prepare middle school students for high school athletic competitions and fine arts performances and programming.

The largest portion of any school district's budget comprises costs attributed to supporting its staff through salaries and benefits. This would continue to be the case should an enlargement of the regional district take place. Extensive research has shown the significant impact educational personnel have on student learning experiences and success.

Projecting staffing needs for newly consolidated districts is nuanced and based on a great deal of context, such as recognizing the high level of multi-tasking that personnel, especially administrators, perform in smaller districts. It is notable that in the Watchung Hills region, there is a minimal amount of shared services in place currently, which may exacerbate that fact for these districts. Should an expanded all purpose district be formed, several supervisory positions could be shared within the current configuration.

Importantly, a fully regionalized district would have only one superintendent and one business administrator. This would discontinue the replication of administrative duties which must be performed by each of the five different school districts, replication which requires both time and money draining resources from other productive uses. It should be noted that in a fully regionalized district, other administrative positions may need to be created, such as assistant superintendent or directors of different areas of operation to ensure optimal functionality of the enlarged district. The opportunities for efficiency will be more available by combining some positions on district office position rosters even with school-level staff remaining relatively constant.

Finance and Operations

The analysis in this section examines the financial implications of expanding the limited purpose Watchung Hills into an all purpose, grades pK-12, regional school district versus remaining in the status quo configuration with greater shared services arrangements. Two scenarios for the expansion of the regional district are considered: one including Watchung Hills and all of the grades pK-8 districts (all districts regional); and another joining Watchung Hills with its current constituents of Warren, Long Hill, and Watchung with Green Brook sending students to the high school on a tuition basis as it currently does (current constituents regional).

Budgetary costs per pupil for each district in the Watchung Hills region are compared in this report to their state peers. Watchung and Long Hill exhibit per pupil spending below the state median. The budgets of all districts in this study prioritize classroom instruction, exceeding state medians in direct spending on students, with percentages ranging from 79.6% in Warren to 74.7% in Watchung Hills. Primary attention and commitment to students are demonstrated in each district budget. Whereas spending which directly impacts students is generally viewed favorably by taxpayers, lower spending on administration is often raised by the public as an area to realize potential efficiencies. It is notable that all of the districts are close to the state median of 10% on administrative spending, ranging from 11.2% in Long Hill to 8.3% in Warren.

The study identifies potential cost savings from consolidating audit processes, professional services, and administrative staffing in both the all districts and current constituents regionalization scenarios.

Projected cost savings, which are not all-inclusive, are estimated at approximately \$2.7 million in the all districts scenario and \$2.0 million in the current constituents scenario. In both cases, all existing educational programs are expected to be maintained. The majority of specified savings come from consolidating administrative personnel, including superintendents, business administrators, and various director and assistant positions. In each scenario, however, some of that savings would be partially offset by salary guide adjustments and necessary investments in new positions and restructuring to serve the enlarged regionalized district optimally. The assumptions underlying the cost projections are supported by the study's Education and Program domain as well as the Shared Services section.

It is important to note that these cost savings do not include the potential financial efficiencies and educational benefits that could occur from consolidating and coordinating operations such as curriculum and textbook purchases, in-district special education programs, student transportation, technology infrastructure, central office functions, unified contract negotiations, and the potential for self-funded health insurance that may be viable in a regionalized district. Each of these would require further exploration and consideration by a regional board of education and administration or joint actions by the districts as currently structured.

To estimate state aid, the consultants implemented a model approximating the formula in the School Funding Reform Act. The model reflects the demographic, enrollment, property valuation, and aggregate income trends of each participating district. Beginning in FY 2026, several methodology changes were introduced by the State, including caps on annual aid increases and decreases (6% and 3%, respectively). These caps, while enacted through temporary budget language, are assumed by the consultants to continue through the study period due to their stabilizing effect on the State's overall budget and K-12 formula aid obligations.

Under these assumptions, the model projects that regionalization would result in modest annual state aid benefits relative to the status quo of approximately \$82,000 in both scenarios. However, if the State removes the aid caps and returns to full formula funding, remaining as separate districts would yield higher total aid. Under an uncapped aid paradigm, the separate districts would receive \$119,000 - \$124,000 more in aggregate state aid annually than the enlarged regional district. These modest state aid impacts from regionalization are minimal compared to total operating budgets.

NJ law requires regional districts to allocate costs based on either equalized property valuation, student enrollment, or any combination of both methods. These approaches represent fundamentally different philosophies about fairness and community responsibility. Equalized valuation-based apportionment distributes costs based on community wealth, benefiting Long Hill and Green Brook since their property wealth is lower relative to their student population. Conversely, enrollment-based apportionment allocates costs according to service usage, benefiting Warren and Watchung since they have fewer students relative to their property wealth.

For the all districts scenario, the model identified an optimal ratio of 77% EPV to 23% ENR. In the current constituents scenario, an optimal ratio of 97% EPV to 3% ENR was identified. However,

while optimal in that each ratio allocates the tax levy impacts as equitably as possible to all communities, there is no combination of standard apportionment parameters that produces universal tax benefits to all communities in either regionalization configuration. Warren, Long Hill, and Green Brook would stand to see reductions in tax liability in an enlarged regional relative to the status quo while Watchung would see tax increases.

An alternative approach is provided through P.L.2021, c.40, which permits a board of education to establish a transitional methodology, not to exceed ten years, of the apportionment method adopted by the voters provided that the methodology is agreed to by all participating districts. A possible transitional methodology has been developed with the goal of keeping tax impacts positive for all districts for the first five years of the regional's operation and then provide a gradual phase-in towards formulaic apportionment under the optimal weights of 77% EPV and 23% ENR. This approach gives each community ample time to plan for the long-term distribution of tax responsibility while immediately realizing the educational and programmatic benefits of regionalization in the short-term. A similar transitional method could be developed for the current constituents configuration.

When school districts merge into a regional, state law requires that the debt and other financial obligations of the individual districts become the shared responsibility of the new regional. Rather than viewing existing debt in isolation, communities should consider both the immediate and shared benefits of recently improved facilities and the long-term capital needs across all buildings that the regional district will ultimately need to address.

Four of the five districts in this study have bonded, long-term debt currently.¹ Additionally, Watchung also has an arbitrage rebate of \$323,724 payable as of June 30, 2024. According to the NJ audit program, “A school district may not be required to remit arbitrage rebate payments until several years into the future, but it still must recognize a liability for rebateable arbitrage as soon as it is both probable and measurable that a liability has been incurred.” Also of note, Watchung Hills added a four-year lease purchase of \$640,000 in July 2024 for technology equipment, classroom furniture, building security, and athletic improvements.

All of the districts in the region have short term debt. Short term debt is a multi-year obligation authorized by the school district, but budgeted for in the annual budget process. Energy savings and improvement plans and subscription-based information technology arrangements are two short term debts that the districts in this region utilize and were considered significant enough to be included in the study. The latter are an area to be explored for sharing services, and regionalization may lead to savings due to economies of scale.

The consultants examined the districts’ collective bargaining agreements in light of potential regionalization. According to state law, the salary guide and terms and conditions of employment of the largest constituent school district shall apply in full after three years following the formation of the regional district or until a successor agreement is negotiated with the majority representative of

¹ Warren does not currently have any debt.

the new school district, whichever occurs first. The salary guide and terms and conditions of employment that will apply are based upon the terms and conditions of employment of the largest constituent district made up of the identical grade levels. In the event that there is no constituent district made up of only the identical grade levels, the salary guide and terms and conditions of employment that will apply are based upon the terms and conditions of employment of the largest constituent district containing the identical grade levels. This means that Warren's agreement would govern all grades pK-8 staff and Watchung Hills would govern all grades 9-12 staff if a successor agreement were not completed within three years of the regionalization. A successor agreement would need to be negotiated between the new board of education and the new association representatives.

This report compares the main employment agreements between the districts, which demonstrate variations in areas such as recognition clauses, grievance processes, school calendars, working conditions, service requirements, leaves of absence, tuition reimbursement, and insurance coverages. This information is provided to serve as a basis to aid the negotiations process should the districts decide to form an all purpose regional district, or to be used simply as points for comparison and synthesis in future negotiations.

In addition to a basic review of steps and salary levels that would require attention to bring the guides into alignment, consultants estimated the financial implications of aligning teacher salary guides. Due to data availability, a complete simulation was only possible for Green Brook. Green Brook's results were then scaled to estimate impacts for Long Hill and Watchung. This scaling was based on relative staffing and salary guide structure similarities. The analysis yields a total cost of \$525,000 in the all districts scenario and \$377,000 for the current constituents scenario. These estimated costs were included in the broader cost savings calculations described earlier in this study.

One of the driving forces for this study was to examine best practices in shared services for the districts of the Watchung Hills region to consider. This report finds that most of the districts in this study participate in some shared services, but the practice is not extensive and sharing of personnel is minimal. Opportunities exist across the region for shared central office director roles in areas such as transportation, special services, curriculum, and professional development. There are also opportunities for sharing non-administrative personnel. School counselors are in high demand and sharing counselors who can serve schools throughout the region would allow for a continuity of care for students in the region while reducing costs to the individual districts. The development of expanded shared services initiatives can also be a positive critical step in building working relationships and cooperation among districts that provides impetus toward later regionalization. However, it behooves districts to strive to keep administrative turnover to a minimum, as instability in important roles creates fertile ground for errors and suboptimal functioning of key district operations and student support. It can be very challenging in practice for an individual to work for more than one district, each having its own culture, leadership, and board of education, to name a few factors. An enlarged all purpose, grades pK-12, regional district would negate those concerns.

It should be noted that if regionalization occurs, the formation of a well staffed, grades pK-12, regional administrative office with some school level staffing would result in many business office operations being done by a single district instead of five, four in the current constituents scenario. More personnel and time for these functions would allow for more robust exploration of grants, alternative funding, purchasing cooperatives, and other money saving options. Expertise in one hub would also likely result in more accurate and timely reports issued from that office. A novel approach towards shared services in the absence of full regionalization would be for the districts to explore the formation of a regional administrative office which could accomplish all of the above for the districts which participate. Outside of consolidating or sharing personnel, a joint curriculum office or consortium, as is in place for the school districts of the Northern Valley region of Bergen County, would be an endeavor worthy of investigation.

Transportation packaging and tiering is well thought out and efficient in all five districts. Four of the five districts are below state averages for cost per package with Watchung Hills notably so. Green Brook has an especially high cost per package that is substantially above state averages. Rebidding this transportation contract could potentially result in lower costs. Across the region, the addition of a single transportation supervisor would provide for a regular evaluation of bus stops, routes, and tiering to enhance and improve busing efficiency. Should regionalization occur, the enlarged all purpose district may also want to consider purchasing some of its own vehicles and hiring at least some of its own drivers to mitigate having all transportation in the hands of an external contractor.

Since Green Brook is not currently a constituent district of Watchung Hills but rather sends its students to the high school on a tuition basis, and because two of the configuration scenarios which are being examined preserve this arrangement, this report details the complex process of determining and adjusting tuition rates in send-receive relationships. It is noted that Green Brook and Watchung Hills deviate from the standard practice of setting tuition rates, having cooperatively entered into contracts which set tuition rates for three consecutive school years at a time. The analysis examines the rates set by those contracts compared to the formula that the State uses to reconcile tuition rates between sending and receiving districts. In the event that an all purpose regional were to be formed including Green Brook, tuition would no longer be an issue going forward. However, the enlarged regional would need to resolve two years of tuition reconciliation with Green Brook. This report identifies two possibilities: (a) the new regional absorbs the reconciliation; or (b) the tax levy is adjusted for the first two years as a final reconciliation for the municipalities that are involved. Should the status quo model prevail, tuition between Green Brook and Watchung Hills would continue to be governed by the agreement currently in place through 2027.

The analysis also briefly mentions the potential for shared services in special education programs, though it does not provide a detailed financial analysis of special education tuition due to the variable nature of these needs and populations.

The State allows various types of reserve accounts, each legally restricted for specific purposes, and sometimes capped. Reserve accounts are a method of budgeting for certain types of future expenses.

The districts in this study use five types of reserves: capital, unemployment, tuition, maintenance and emergency; but none of the five districts uses all five types of reserve accounts. All of the districts in this study use capital and unemployment reserves. Unemployment reserves cover benefit costs. Capital reserves are restricted by state statute and must be included in the certified budget. Warren's capital reserves are the highest among all of the reserve balances at just over \$6.9 million; however, the March 2025 referendum used most of this and only \$1 million is expected to be retained.

Tuition reserves are for districts in send-receive relationships, capped at 10% of estimated tuition costs; so only Green Brook and Watchung Hills need to use tuition reserves. Warren, Long Hill, Green Brook, and Watchung Hills use maintenance reserves, which are capped at 4% of the school facilities' replacement cost. Warren and Long Hill use emergency reserves, which may not exceed \$250,000 or one percent of the district's general fund budget up to a maximum of \$1,000,000, whichever is greater. As school budgets tighten, the use of emergency reserve accounts to address unanticipated expenditures from the general fund are starting to become more common.

INTRODUCTION

Study Purpose

The School Regionalization Efficiency Program (SREP) supports public school districts and governing bodies across the State of New Jersey (NJ) that wish to study the feasibility of school district regionalization or consolidation. NJ Public Law 2021, Chapter 402 (P.L.2021, c.402), the legislative act that created the SREP, was signed into law by Governor Murphy on January 18, 2022, after passing both houses of the State Legislature. It created a grant program within the Division of Local Government Services in the Department of Community Affairs, the purpose of which is to provide for the reimbursement of eligible costs associated with conducting feasibility studies that support the creation of meaningful and implementable plans to form or expand regional school districts.

In order to be eligible for a grant, applicant boards of education or certain municipal governing bodies are required to meet criteria, namely that the proposed regionalization:

- does not increase or exacerbate the segregation of students enrolled in the school districts seeking to consolidate or, as applicable, in the school districts from which a school district is seeking to withdraw by racial, socio-economic, ability, or English language learner status;
- to the maximum extent practicable, will lead to the establishment of a limited purpose or all purpose regional school district;
- consolidates school districts that are in close geographic proximity to each other. School districts need not be immediately contiguous as long as the consolidation and any geographic separation is not so large as to contradict the potential for improved efficiency and cost savings;
- possesses the potential for improved efficiency and cost savings;
- possesses the potential to advance an enhanced learning environment for participating districts;
- coordinates curriculum across schools and grades throughout the proposed limited purpose or all purpose regional school district; and
- reflects a documented commitment from the participating districts to make good faith efforts to implement the recommendations of the feasibility study that promote efficiency and quality of education.²

² P.L.2021, c.402

The intent of this study is to examine relevant data in order to provide recommendations on the feasibility of consolidating operations to enlarge the current limited purpose, grades 9-12, Watchung Hills Regional School District (Watchung Hills) into one all purpose, grades pre-kindergarten (pK) to 12, regional school district. Concurrently, the study will investigate opportunities to share services more effectively and efficiently among Watchung Hills and its four constituent districts: the grades pK-8 Warren Township School District (Warren); the grades pK-8 Long Hill Township School District (Long Hill); the grades pK-8 Watchung Borough School District (Watchung); and the grades pK-8 Green Brook Township School District (Green Brook), which is not a constituent but sends its high school students to Watchung Hills on a tuition basis.

The study will analyze district operations in the following areas, which make up the four major domains of this project: Governance and Law; Demography; Education and Program; and Finance and Operations. Each of these considerations must be studied to understand the overall impact of the potential formation of an all purpose, regional school district. The Governance and Law domain focuses on an examination of school district profiles; constitutional, statutory, and case law; election process and board composition; state monitoring status; stakeholder input; transition features; and potential political issues. The Demography domain looks at municipal profiles; housing starts; enrollment history and projections; disaggregated enrollments; potential school facility capacities, and the racial and other impacts of regionalization. The Education and Program domain examines the curriculum and instructional factors, performance measures, special programs, extracurricular programs, and school and district staffing. The Finance and Operations domain explores operating expenses, school aid and local tax levy projections, borrowing margin and debt allocation, collective bargaining agreements, shared services, contracted services, tuition, and reserves.

Consolidation Options

The boards of education of Watchung Hills, Warren, Long Hill, Watchung, and Green Brook have expressed an interest in examining the feasibility of reorganizing their school districts or seeking ways in which to expand shared services across their schools and districts. The options being studied include:

1. All Districts Regional pK-12: Expanding the limited purpose, grades 9-12, Watchung Hills Regional into an all purpose, grades pK-12 regional school district including the municipalities of Warren Township, Long Hill Township, Watchung Borough, and Green Brook Township;
2. Current Constituent Regional pK-12: Expanding the limited purpose, grades 9-12, Watchung Hills Regional into an all purpose, grades pK-12, regional school district including the current constituent municipalities of Warren Township, Long Hill Township, and Watchung Borough with Green Brook Township entering into a revised send-receive agreement with the enlarged regional; and

3. Status Quo: Maintaining the status quo with opportunities to better align educational programs and support services while reducing or controlling the costs of educating students in each district through the expansion of shared services and other efficiencies.

This study examines the potential impacts of regionalization as outlined above. Any referendum or vote to regionalize that does not include the options as designed for this study would completely change the analysis and findings produced herein.

Consultant Backgrounds

The Sweeney Center for Public Policy and the Rowan University College of Education formed the Rowan School Regionalization Institute to assess the impact of the school regionalization law,³ make recommendations on policies to advance regionalization, and conduct feasibility studies for interested districts. As the lead agency, the Watchung Hills Regional Board of Education retained the Institute to prepare this study to address the requirements of its SREP grant.

The Rowan University School Regionalization Institute is led by Director Mark Magyar, MLIR, who developed the new regionalization law as policy director for the NJ Senate Majority Office. He has met with superintendents and board members from dozens of school districts to advise them on regionalization issues. The Institute retained the following expert consultants to collaborate on this study:

Kathleen Helewa, consultant with KHEC LLC, which serves boards of education, charter school boards of trustees, and public school districts statewide on matters of governance. She has lived in Warren Township for 25 years, and served as a member of its board of education until 2016, when she resigned to work for the NJ School Boards Association until 2023. Ms. Helewa served as the lead investigator of the study.

Scott A. Oswald, Ed.D., adjunct professor in the Colleges of Education at Stockton and Rowan Universities. He is a former shared superintendent of schools in Collingswood and Oaklyn (Camden County), past executive committee member of the NJ Association of School Administrators, and past president of the Camden County Association of School Administrators. Dr. Oswald served as the co-project manager and focused on the Education & Program domain.

Donna Snyder-DeVita, M.A., consultant with The Diamante Group LLC. She was the Sussex County representative to the NJ Association of School Business Officials board, chaired its education committee, and served on many other statewide committees. She served as a NJ school business official for many years with demonstrated expertise in all areas of school business management. Ms. Snyder-DeVita served as the co-project manager and focused on the Finance & Operations domain.

³ P.L.2021, c.402

Lucille Davy, Esq., attorney, certified K-12 mathematics teacher, and former NJ Commissioner of Education. She developed school regionalization initiatives both as Commissioner and as co-chair of the Legislature's Economic and Fiscal Policy Workgroup. Ms. Davy focused on the Governance & Law and Education & Program domains.

Brian Diamante, president and chief executive officer of The Diamante Group LLC, a school data services provider. He is the senior director of data and research at NJPCSA and has over a decade of education finance experience. Mr. Diamante focused on the Finance & Operations domain.

G. Kennedy Greene, Ed.D., adjunct associate professor in the Department of Education Policy and Social Analysis at Teachers College, Columbia University. He is a former superintendent of schools in Newton (Sussex County) and past president of the NJ Association of School Administrators. Dr. Greene served as editor of the study.

Ray Kuehner, school transportation consultant. He is a former school transportation supervisor and past president of the NJ School Transportation Supervisors Association. Mr. Kuehner focused on the Finance & Operations domain.

George Sundell, CEO of Sundance Associates. The firm provides services including facilities planning, demographic analysis, redistricting, community relations and participation programs, and grant writing to public school systems throughout NJ. Mr. Sundell focused on the Demography domain.

Arisahi Mora Lázaro, Rowan University assistant, served as a data researcher.

GOVERNANCE and LAW

1. School District Profiles

While the primary intent of the feasibility study is to examine the pros and cons of forming an all purpose regional school district from several existing districts, it is important to understand that each school and community has its own unique characteristics, including norms, traditions, and points of community and school pride. The information contained in this section was gathered as a result of site visits and interviews of school staff, review of NJ School Performance Reports, and insights from district websites and information provided by staff.

FIGURE 1
Map of the Watchung Hills Region



Watchung Hills

Watchung Hills is a grades 9-12, comprehensive, regional high school district located in Warren Township, Somerset County. The district educates its students in one school, Watchung Hills Regional High School (HS), serving students from its constituent school districts in Warren Township and Watchung Borough in Somerset County and Long Hill Township in Morris County. Watchung Hills also receives students from Green Brook Township in Somerset County on a tuition basis via a send-receive agreement. All of the districts are contiguous to Warren Township.

According to the NJ Department of Education (NJDOE), Watchung Hills had an enrollment of approximately 1,700 students in the 2023-24 school year.

The district embraces its mission statement and guiding principles:

WHRHS is a learning community that encourages all students to embrace change today in preparation for the challenges of tomorrow. We empower students to grow intellectually and socially. Within an environment that values wellness and respects all voices, our students explore their talents and excel beyond their expectations.

In order to achieve our mission, we will ...

- Consider the social emotional needs of students in making educational decisions.
- Embrace and manage change as an opportunity for improvement.
- Engage parents and guardians in the education of their children.
- Foster a school culture that is based on collaboration, caring and mutual respect.
- Maintain open channels of communication among members of our school community.
- Prioritize learning as a process and not a product.
- Promote school spirit among students, staff and constituents.
- Plan culturally responsive learning activities in equitable classrooms.
- Provide opportunities for students to grow in maturity and independence.
- Value and support each student's distinctive journey.

Watchung Hills Regional HS opened in 1957. The district has a five-year strategic plan that matures in 2025. The four goal areas for the current strategic plan are: social/emotional growth and wellness; pathways to educational success for all; creativity, innovation, and critical thinking; and diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Dr. Elizabeth Jewett has served as the district's superintendent since 2013. In 2021, NJDOE designated the school as a Lighthouse District in recognition of its success in increasing diversity in the workplace.

Warren

Warren is a grades pK-8 public school district located in Warren Township, Somerset County. The district educates its students in five schools: one neighborhood school serving grades K-5 and preschool students from throughout the district (Mount Horeb School), three neighborhood elementary schools serving grades K-5 (Central School, Woodland School, Angelo L. Tomaso School), and Warren Middle School (MS) serving students in grades 6-8.

Warren is a constituent district of Watchung Hills. After leaving 8th grade, students attend Watchung Hills Regional HS, Somerset County Vocational-Technical HS located about ten miles away from Warren Middle School in Bridgewater, or private/parochial secondary schools. According to NJDOE, Warren had an enrollment of approximately 1,670 students in the 2023-24 school year.

The district is guided by its mission statement:

The mission of the Warren Township School District is to provide, through a safe, nurturing yet challenging environment, all students with an outstanding education that engages students and fosters academic excellence, healthy social and emotional development, and a lifelong passion for learning.

The district had a five-year strategic plan that recently matured in 2025. The four goal areas for that strategic plan were: competencies; voice and engagement; equity and consistency; and health, wellness, and safety. The board of education approved a new strategic plan for years 2025-30 in May 2025 with three goal areas: elevating student learning; student and staff well-being and planning for growth.

Dr. Matthew Mingle has served as the district's superintendent since 2016. In 2019, the Woodland School was awarded national Blue Ribbon School status.

Long Hill

Long Hill is a grades pK-8 public school district located in Long Hill Township, Morris County. The township, which was known as Passaic Township until 1992, borders Somerset and Union Counties and incorporates the communities of Gillette, Stirling, Meyersville, Homestead Park, and Millington. The district educates its students in three schools: Gillette Elementary School (ES) serving grades pK-1; Millington ES serving grades 2-5; and Central MS, serving grades 6-8.

Long Hill is a constituent district of Watchung Hills. After leaving 8th grade, students attend Watchung Hills Regional HS located less than three miles from Central MS, the schools of the Morris County Vocational School District with five campuses ranging from 20 to 38 miles distance from Central MS, or private/parochial secondary schools. According to NJDOE, Long Hill had an enrollment of approximately 850 students in the 2023-24 school year.

The district is guided by its mission and belief statements:

We believe that it is the responsibility of the Long Hill Township Board of Education to provide an educational climate that stresses high academic achievement and will permit students to grow socially, physically, intellectually, morally and emotionally so that they may become happy, useful and self-supporting citizens, within the limits of their individual abilities and interests. We believe in each individual's worth and dignity as a person.

We believe:

- Education is a growth process by which people learn to think and act more effectively.
- We must provide a safe, pleasant environment for learning.
- Respect for the policies of a democratic government is desirable.
- Students should acquire an understanding of and a respect for the traditions, customs and heritage of the country.
- Students should be encouraged to use leisure time wisely.

Students should be taught that education, in its broadest sense, can become a lifelong pursuit for everyone.

Our responsibility extends to encouraging a close relationship among students, teachers, administrators, and the community. We seek to prepare our students to function in a rapidly changing world with an awareness of the past, an understanding of the present and an optimistic preparation for the future.

The district has a five-year strategic plan that matures in 2025 and encompasses four goal areas: learning; community connectedness/communication; facilities and finance; and culture and climate/environment. In April 2025, the board approved a new strategic plan for 2025-30. The goal areas of the new plan are: teaching and learning - inspiring innovation; culture of respect and well-being; future-focused facilities; and building community.

Dr. George Alexis has served as the district's superintendent since 2023. He is a former superintendent of Watchung and a former principal of Watchung Hills Regional HS. The Long Hill Board of Education was certified as a Master Board in 2019 by the NJ School Boards Association after becoming the first certified board of education in Morris County as an "example of effective governance in action." The board was re-certified in 2024.

Watchung

Watchung is a grades pK-8 public school district located in Watchung Borough, Somerset County. The district educates its students in two schools: Bayberry ES serves grades pK-4, and Valley View MS serves grades 5-8.

Watchung is a constituent district of Watchung Hills. After leaving 8th grade, students attend Watchung Hills Regional HS less than two miles from Valley View MS, the Somerset County Vocational-Technical HS located about eleven miles away from Valley View MS in Bridgewater, or private/parochial secondary schools. According to NJDOE, Watchung had an enrollment of approximately 675 students in the 2023-2024 school year.

The district is guided by its vision statement:

The Watchung Borough School District is committed to inspiring learners to explore, inquire, and collaborate on their joyful journey toward discovery, independent thinking, and creative problem solving. Our culture of acceptance and inclusion provides the foundation for learning and social and emotional growth. Through reflection and ethical decision-making, we continue to learn and grow, embrace differences, and prepare for an increasingly complex, ever-changing world.

The district's strategic plan matured in 2023 and underwent revision via a series of planning meetings in the winter of 2024-25, which were open to all school district stakeholders. In March 2025, the goal areas for the new strategic plan were identified as: student learning and achievement; professional learning / capacity building; communication and community engagement; and school culture and climate.

Dr. Julie Glazer, has served as district superintendent since 2023. The Watchung Board of Education earned recognition as a Certified Board from the NJ School Boards Association in 2025.

Green Brook

Green Brook is a grades pK-8 public school district located in Green Brook Township, Somerset County. The district educates its students in two schools: Irene E. Feldkirchner ES serves grades pk-4, and Green Brook MS serves grades 5 through 8.

Green Brook has a longstanding, send-receive, tuition-based relationship with Watchung Hills located about six miles from Green Brook MS. According to NJDOE, Green Brook had an enrollment of approximately 725 students in the 2023-24 school year.

The district is guided by its mission statement:

We develop independent learners so they may have Achievement, Empowerment, Inspiration, Opportunity, and Unity.

Its vision statement is:

We will help all children reach high levels of achievement and prepare each student for a successful future as lifelong learners.

The district also has a values statement:

Our values, based on our character attributes, are the foundation of our genuine relationship with students, parents, and each other. Together, we create safe, positive climates for learning and working environments that prepare children and reinforce for adults to be empathetic citizens of the world.

- We care by being compassionate and kind towards all members of our community.
- We are cooperative and committed to working collaboratively and valuing the contributions of others for a common purpose.
- We value honesty by demonstrating integrity in our words and actions.
- We are truthful and trustworthy.
- We respect differences, and treat everyone fairly and equitably. We are inclusive.
- By treating others, ourselves, and our environment with high regard and value, we are respectful.

The district has a strategic plan which is regularly renewed. Its four focus areas are: student achievement; social-emotional wellness; programs and opportunities; and operations, budget, and staffing.

Dr. James Bigsby, has served as district superintendent since 2019, and has worked in the district for eleven years. Feldkirchner ES was recognized as a national Blue Ribbon School in 1999.

2. Constitutional, Statutory, and Case Law Review

This study examines the expansion of Watchung Hills from a limited purpose regional school district serving students in grades 9-12 into an all purpose regional that would serve students in grades pK-12 from the four municipalities whose high school students currently attend Watchung Hills Regional HS, whether as constituent members (i.e., Warren Township, Long Hill Township, and Watchung Borough) or under a send-receive, tuition-based agreement (i.e., Green Brook Township). Two specific consolidation scenarios are being considered: (1) all four districts joining together to expand Watchung Hills into an all purpose, grades pK-12, regional district that would include all students in these districts; or (2) the existing three constituent districts enlarging Watchung Hills into an all purpose regional with Green Brook continuing to send its students in grades 9-12 to the high school on a tuition basis.

N.J.S.A. 18A:13-33.2 provides the authority to convert a limited purpose regional district to an all purpose regional. The law requires that the proposal be submitted to the voters of *each of the constituent districts* of the regional (emphasis added), in this case Warren Township, Long Hill Township and Watchung Borough, rather than to the voters at large of the regional district. Under the law, the proposal shall be considered adopted if a *majority of the voters in a majority of the constituent districts that constitute the limited purpose regional district vote to form an all purpose regional district*. In this case, a proposal would be submitted to the voters of Warren, Long Hill, and Watchung to expand Watchung Hills from a limited purpose, grades 9-12 district to an all purpose, grades pK-12 district.

Voters would also be asked to approve the inclusion of Green Brook as a new constituent member of the expanded all purpose regional. If approved, the voters of Green Brook would then be asked whether they agree to join the expanded regional as constituent members of the district, or if they prefer to continue their send-receive relationship to educate their students in grades 9 to 12. Pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:13-33.2.a: “Notwithstanding any law, rule, or regulation to the contrary, a board of education of a constituent district of a limited purpose regional district that does not vote to join an all purpose regional district pursuant to the provisions of this subsection may continue to send such students as were enrolled in the limited purpose regional district to the schools that were established as part of the limited purpose regional district.” If approved by the voters as outlined above, the board of education of the regional district and the board(s) of education of one or more local districts determined to enlarge the regional shall proceed with the regionalization plan.⁴

3. Election Process and Board Composition

If the voters of the participating municipalities decide to enlarge the regional school district, all members are chosen at the next annual school election in accordance with N.J.S.A. 18A:13-33.3.b. In accordance with N.J.S.A. 18A:13-33.2.b, the constituent districts constituting the limited purpose regional shall calculate and apportion the member of the board of education of the newly formed all purpose regional upon the basis of a proportional number of pupils enrolled from each constituent district that constitutes the limited purpose regional, with each district having at least one member. In the alternative, the constituent districts may, by resolution, propose to calculate and apportion membership of the board of education of the newly formed all purpose regional among the constituent districts as nearly as may be according to the number of their inhabitants, except each shall have at least one member.⁵

Pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:13-8, the board of education of a regional district shall consist of nine members unless it consists of more than nine constituent districts. If a proposal to add additional purposes to a limited purpose regional is adopted pursuant to the provisions of N.J.S.A. 18A:13-33.2.a, the constituent districts constituting the limited purpose regional shall calculate and apportion the membership of the board of education.

As described in N.J.S.A. 18A:13-33.3.a, the members of the interim board of education of the newly created all purpose regional, who shall serve until the election of the first elected members of the enlarged regional pursuant to the provisions of subsection b. of this section, shall be selected as follows:

- (1) two-thirds shall be selected from among the members of the boards of education or governing bodies of the constituent districts constituting the limited purpose regional; and
- (2) one-third shall be selected from among the members of the board of education of the limited purpose regional proposing to add additional purposes.

⁴ N.J.S.A.18A:13-44.1.a

⁵ N.J.S.A. 18A:13-33.3.a

Table 1 shows the current apportionment of members of the Watchung Hills Regional Board of Education.

TABLE 1
Current Membership, Watchung Hills Regional Board of Education

Municipality	Number of Board Members
Warren	5
Long Hill	2
Watchung	2
Green Brook ⁶	1

Interim Board of Education

As noted previously, two scenarios are being considered: (1) an all districts regional, where all five school districts expand the existing regional; and (2) a current constituents regional, where only Warren, Long Hill and Watchung form the all purpose regional with Green Brook continuing as a sending district to the high school.

The interim board of education for the newly enlarged all purpose regional would have one-third, or three, of its members selected from among the members of the existing Watchung Hills Regional Board of Education. The remaining two-thirds, or six members, would be selected from among the members of the elementary boards of education that agreed to join the expanded regional district.

Table 2 reflects the recommendation for the interim board with nine members: three from the Watchung Hills Board (with two from Warren Township and one from Long Hill Township), three from Warren, one each from Long Hill, Watchung, and Green Brook, if all four districts agreed to expand Watchung Hills into an all purpose regional serving grades pK-12. The interim board would reflect the same composition as the final board that would be elected in the next school election.

⁶ The Green Brook representative is appointed for a one-year term at the annual reorganization meeting of the Green Brook Board of Education.

TABLE 2
Interim Apportionment, Watchung Hills Regional Board of Education,
All Districts Regional, Grades pK-12

	Number of Interim Board Members
Watchung Hills	3 (2 Warren, 1 Long Hill)
Warren	3
Long Hill	1
Watchung	1
Green Brook	1

Table 3 reflects the recommendation for the interim board that would have nine members: three from the current Watchung Hills board (with two from Warren Township and one from Long Hill Township), three from the Warren board, one from the Long Hill board, and two from the Watchung board. Green Brook would not have a guaranteed seat on the expanded Watchung Hills board, if it did not join as a constituent member. However, if the number of students sent by Green Brook reaches 10% or more of the Watchung Hills Regional HS student population, a seat would be added to the board for Green Brook as it is now. The Watchung Hills board would then have 10 rather than 9 members.

TABLE 3
Interim Apportionment, Watchung Hills Regional Board of Education,
Current Constituents Regional, Grades pK-12

	Number of Interim Board Members
Watchung Hills	3 (2 Warren, 1 Long Hill)
Warren	3
Long Hill	1
Watchung	2

Newly Elected Board of Education

The first elected members of the enlarged regional district shall be elected in accordance with the proposal to calculate and apportion membership of the board of education, adopted pursuant to the statute, at the annual election to be held in the calendar year first succeeding the year in which the

election for the creation of the district was held.⁷ State law also requires that the initial terms of the first elected board be staggered,⁸ and in this case it would be three members elected for three years, three for two years, and three for one year. With regard to the order in which seats shall be filled in either scenario, statute requires that in regionals having nine members, three members shall be elected for three years, three for two years and three for one year.

Terms shall be allocated to the constituent districts to the extent of apportioned membership on the regional board of education, starting with the allocation of the terms of three years by allocating one of such terms to each of the constituent districts in the alphabetical order of the names of such districts and continuing in such order with allocation of the terms of two years and with allocation of the terms of one year.⁹

In this case, if based on current enrollment projections and population as we recommend, board seats for the all districts regional scenario would be apportioned, alphabetically, as follows: Green Brook - one for a 3-year term; Long Hill - one for a three-year term and one for a two-year term; Warren - one for a three-year term, one for a two-year term, and three for a one-year term; and Watchung - one for a two-year term. Thereafter, all members would be elected for three-year terms.

TABLE 4
Newly Elected Member Apportionment, Watchung Hills Regional Board of Education,
All Districts Regional, Grades pK-12

Municipality	Number of Elected Board Members
Warren	5
Long Hill	2
Watchung	1
Green Brook	1

Initially, the seats on the board in the current constituents regional scenario would be apportioned as follows: Long Hill - one for a three-year term and one for a two-year term; Warren - one for a three-year term, one for a two-year term, and three for one-year terms; and Watchung - one for a three-year term and one for a two-year term. Thereafter, all members would be elected for three-year terms.

⁷ N.J.S.A. 18A:33-33.3.b

⁸ N.J.S.A. 18A:13-46.1

⁹ N.J.S.A. 18A:13-38.1

TABLE 5
 Newly Elected Member Apportionment, Watchung Hills Regional Board of Education,
 Current Constituents Regional, Grades pK-12

Municipality	Number of Elected Board Members
Warren	5
Long Hill	2
Watchung	2

One final note: the law also provides that districts are prohibited from consolidating, regionalizing or withdrawing from a regional district if it will increase or exacerbate the segregation of students by racial, socioeconomic, disability or English language learner status.¹⁰ That statute does not apply to this region since all students in the communities currently attending the limited purpose regional would remain in attendance with their peers in the all purpose regional and there would be no increased segregative effects.

4. State Monitoring Status

The State’s Quality Single Accountability Continuum (NJQSAC) is the NJ Department of Education’s (NJDOE) monitoring and self-evaluation system for public school districts. It is a single comprehensive reporting approach that consolidates and incorporates the monitoring requirements of applicable state laws and programs and complements federally required improvements. The system focuses on monitoring and evaluating school districts in five key areas that have been identified to be essential factors in effective systems. These components are Instruction and Program, Fiscal Management, Governance, Operations, and Personnel. A district that achieves a score of 80% or higher in each of these five components is designated as “high-performing”.

Watchung Hills underwent its most recent NJQSAC review during the 2023-24 school year. During that cycle, the district met or exceeded the standard for a high-performing school district in all five areas: Instruction and Program 85%; Fiscal Management 96%; Governance 100%; Operations 95%; and Personnel 95%. As a result, Watchung Hills was designated as high-performing by NJDOE. The next review should be scheduled during the 2026-27 school year.

Warren also underwent its most recent NJQSAC review during the 2023-24 school year. During that cycle, the district met or exceeded the standard for a high-performing school district in all five areas: Instruction and Program 81%; Fiscal Management 100%; Governance 100%; Operations 98%; and

¹⁰ N.J.S.A. 18A:13-47.11

Personnel 100%. As a result, Warren was designated as high-performing by NJDOE. The next review should be scheduled during the 2026-27 school year.

Long Hill underwent its most recently completed NJQSAC review during the 2021-22 school year. During that cycle, the district met or exceeded the standard for a high-performing school district in all five areas: Instruction and Program 86%; Fiscal Management 100%; Governance 100%; Operations 89%; and Personnel 100%. As a result, Long Hill was designated as high-performing by NJDOE. A subsequent review was held during the 2024-25 school year, but results have not been finalized to date.

Watchung underwent its most recent NJQSAC review during the 2022-23 school year. During that cycle, the district met or exceeded the standard for a high-performing school district in all five areas: Instruction and Program 84%; Fiscal Management 94%; Governance 100%; Operations 100%; and Personnel 93%. As a result, Watchung was designated as high-performing by NJDOE. The next review should be scheduled during the 2025-26 school year.

Green Brook underwent its most recent NJQSAC review during the 2023-24 school year. During that cycle, the district met or exceeded the standard for a high-performing school district in four of the five areas: Fiscal Management 94%; Governance 88%; Operations 95%; and Personnel 95%. In the area of Instruction and Program, Green Brook was awarded a score of 79%, falling just shy of meeting the standard and requiring a district improvement plan. The next review should be scheduled during the 2026-2027 school year.

Each district scored admirably in its most recently completed NJQSAC cycles (2021-22 for Long Hill; 2022-23 for Watchung; 2023-24 for Watchung Hills, Warren, and Green Brook). Watchung Hills, Warren, Long Hill, and Watchung were recognized as high performing districts, and Green Brook was deemed high performing in all areas but one that was missed by a single point. Additional alignment among the districts through a consolidation of the boards of education could aid in reducing the time spent on completing the self evaluation and review. That time may then be redirected toward students, staff, and program development.

5. Stakeholder Input

Student Survey

A voluntary survey was given to 9th grade students at Watchung Hills Regional HS in April 2025. Students were asked about various aspects of their middle school academic experiences, including how prepared they felt they were in the core subject areas of English Language Arts (ELA), Mathematics (Math), and Science. Data was disaggregated based upon the middle school each student attended. 372 students responded to the survey, and the results are provided in Tables 6 through 12.

ELA

Students were asked how much reading they were assigned to do in middle school and whether the reading skills they developed prepared them for the reading they were expected to do in 9th grade. The results demonstrate that Warren and Watchung students reported doing the most reading in middle school (approximately 64% from both districts responding with a 4 or 5) and Watchung students reporting the highest level of preparation for 9th grade, with 82% responding with a 4 or 5. Students who attended Green Brook reported doing the most writing in middle school and having the highest level of preparation for the writing that was required in 9th grade classes, with 87% and 64% responding with a 4 or 5 to the respective questions.

TABLE 6
Amount of Middle School Reading Assigned ¹¹

Response	Warren	Long Hill	Watchung	Green Brook
5	14.7%	1.4%	8.2%	13.3%
4	49.7%	50.7%	55.7%	41.3%
3	28.2%	38.0%	34.4%	40.0%
2	6.7%	9.9%	1.6%	5.3%
1	0.6%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

TABLE 7
Preparation for 9th grade Reading Expectations ¹²

Response	Warren	Long Hill	Watchung	Green Brook
5	25.8%	32.4%	26.2%	34.0%
4	42.3%	39.4%	55.7%	42.7%
3	25.2%	25.4%	14.8%	25.3%
2	6.1%	2.8%	3.2%	8.0%
1	0.6%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

¹¹ Tables 6 and 8 have a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being “not much at all” and 5 being “a lot”.

¹² Tables 7 and 9 have a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being “not prepared at all” and 5 being “very well prepared”.

TABLE 8
Amount of Middle School Writing Assigned

Response	Warren	Long Hill	Watchung	Green Brook
5	20.9%	25.4%	13.1%	33.8%
4	53.4%	38.0%	50.8%	53.2%
3	20.2%	29.5%	32.8%	11.7%
2	4.9%	14.1%	0.0%	1.3%
1	0.6%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

TABLE 9
Preparation for 9th grade Writing Expectations

Response	Warren	Long Hill	Watchung	Green Brook
5	20.9%	16.9%	21.3%	18.2%
4	39.3%	43.7%	33.8%	45.9%
3	30.7%	26.8%	36.1%	28.6%
2	8.6%	11.3%	4.9%	7.8%
1	0.6%	1.4%	0.0%	0.0%

Math

More than half of the students who responded to the survey are taking Geometry in 9th grade, about 30% are in Algebra 1, 10% are in Algebra 2, and a small number of students are in another math class. When asked whether they were less prepared, more prepared, or better prepared than other students in their 9th grade Math classes, the vast majority said they were as well prepared as other students. In rating their level of preparation, Green Brook had the most responses of either 4 or 5.

TABLE 10
Preparation for 9th grade Math Class ¹³

Response	Warren	Long Hill	Watchung	Green Brook
5	39.9%	29.6%	27.9%	45.4%
4	35.6%	29.6%	39.3%	31.2%
3	14.7%	21.1%	26.2%	15.6%
2	6.7%	11.3%	3.3%	7.8%
1	3.0%	8.5%	3.3%	0.0%

Science

Almost every student who responded to the survey is taking Biology in 9th grade. When asked how well prepared they were for their 9th grade science class, the responses were quite varied. When asked how often they did experiments in middle school science classes, students from Warren reported doing them significantly more frequently (66% responded with a 4 or 5) than those in the other middle schools.

TABLE 11
Preparation for 9th grade Science Class ¹⁴

Response	Warren	Long Hill	Watchung	Green Brook
5	20.9%	18.3%	3.3%	24.7%
4	42.9%	38.2%	26.2%	36.4%
3	25.8%	26.8%	45.9%	29.9%
2	9.9%	11.3%	23.0%	9.1%
1	0.6%	5.6%	1.6%	0.0%

¹³ Scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being “not prepared at all” and 5 being “very well prepared”.

¹⁴ Scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being “not prepared at all” and 5 being “very well prepared”.

TABLE 12
Frequency of Experiments in Middle School ¹⁵

Response	Warren	Long Hill	Watchung	Green Brook
5	25.8%	9.9%	4.9%	6.5%
4	40.5%	24.0%	26.2%	35.1%
3	29.4%	39.4%	42.6%	45.4%
2	3.7%	22.5%	26.2%	11.7%
1	0.6%	4.2%	0.0%	1.3%

Town Hall Meeting

On the evening of April 10, 2025, Watchung Hills Regional HS hosted a town hall meeting for interested members of the region’s communities to meet with members of the study team, ask questions, and give their perspectives about the aims of the feasibility study. Nearly thirty people attended and wanted to be sure that the study would take into account new residential building projects and the resulting influx of new residents in the region. It was noted by one attendee that the demographics of the towns will likely change as a result, and more support for multilingual learners would be an optimal recommendation from the study.

The team was asked if the study would investigate separate curricula and the possible advantages of having unique grades pK-8 school districts, as long as the curriculum met the mandated learning standards. Participants noted the value of curriculum coordination among the districts to ensure a smooth transition to high school and a productive first part of 9th grade. A resident remarked that test scores in some all purpose regionals in communities similar to Watchung Hills have higher student outcomes, perhaps because of their grades pK-12 configuration rather than being a regional high school district like Watchung Hills.

Middle school students were mentioned by several participants. A desire for robust conversations between teachers in grades 5-6 was noted, and a concern was voiced with the onslaught of immediately accessible social media and online information with the resulting stress that can have on middle school students of today. It was mentioned that there may be opportunities to better serve the mental health of middle school students if those grades were to be consolidated in a reconfigured district. The idea of adding the middle school grades to the limited purpose regional was posited.

One participant was concerned with the merger of five districts, each with its own collective bargaining agreement for its teachers, into one with a single agreement. It was noted by the team

¹⁵ Scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being “never or hardly ever” and 5 being “all the time”.

that the current legislation on school regionalization modifies older versions which did not address some problematic aspects of that issue. In fact, the NJ Education Association collaborated on drafting the current language of the law, which has protections for tenure and seniority. It was also noted by the team that this study's aim is not to eliminate teachers or classrooms.

The question of where cost savings would be found was also asked. Discussion followed that only anecdotal information has addressed that question for many years. The results of this study will provide needed data on where cost savings might be realized, whether via shared services or some form of regionalization. The team noted that finding opportunities for tax cuts is not the driving objective of the study; rather, it is identifying opportunities for improved student outcomes.

The team was asked directly if the quality of education in the highest performing districts in the region would be reduced as a result of regionalization. The response was that the study will focus on elevating student achievement for all districts. A participant brought forth that every town in the Watchung Hills region is special, and residents do not want to lose that. The team assured the participants that this is a common concern in feasibility studies and appreciates that any changes would not predicate communities forfeiting their uniqueness.

6. Transition Features

The initial SREP grant application was filed by Watchung Hills and Watchung, who are the grant recipients. After the grant was approved by the NJ Department of Community Affairs, Watchung Hills and Watchung invited Long Hill, Warren, and Green Brook to participate in the steering committee process, and the three districts sent representatives.

The Steering Committee followed a model used in Monmouth County by the Henry Hudson Regional, Highlands, and Atlantic Highlands school districts that guided their successful September 2023 referendum vote to regionalize into a grades pK-12 district effective July 1, 2024. Several members of the Rowan School Regionalization Institute team were involved in the Henry Hudson initiative.

The Steering Committee met at the start of the project to provide guidance regarding the scope of the project and their expectations. Subsequent meetings supported the study team's work by coordinating data collection and interviews with district administrators and ninth grade teachers. The Committee's role was to ensure that information was shared with the leadership of all districts and governing bodies on an ongoing basis and periodically throughout the process of development of this study. The Steering Committee provided valuable input to the study team throughout the process. In addition, opportunity for public engagement was provided through online and in-person meetings.

The Steering Committee and administrative teams served as a forum for district representatives to discuss critical interim planning decisions affecting the districts leading up to successful completion of the study and to any potential regionalization vote or decision to explore additional shared services.

Upon receipt and review of draft versions of this study, members of the Steering Committee assisted in its finalization, and will take a supporting role in presenting the findings at a public town hall meeting. It is encouraged that members of the Steering Committee take a lead role in leading the discussion surrounding this final report at their respective individual board of education meetings. These gatherings will provide multiple opportunities for the boards to receive feedback and input from all members of the participating communities. The Steering Committee can then discuss the study findings and public response in order to consider making a recommendation to their respective boards on next steps to pursue regionalization or specific shared services.

Regionalization

The Watchung Hills Regional Board of Education would need to submit an application to the NJ Commissioner of Education for approval to hold a referendum to expand the current limited purpose regional into an all purpose, grades pK-12, regional school district. The application would include the specific language to be used on the referendum ballot, including implementation date, cost share, and apportionment of seats on the fully regionalized board.¹⁶

Approval by the Education Commissioner would need to be received at least sixty days prior to a proposed regionalization vote, which can be held on any of the four specified capital referendum dates in September, December, January and April, or at the November general election. The State would pay the full cost of any special election for school regionalization.

Under existing state statutes, the expansion of Watchung Hills into an all purpose regional would require the approval of a majority of voters in a majority of the constituent municipalities for their individual school districts to merge into the enlarged regional district. It is important to note again that Green Brook is not currently a constituent district of Watchung Hills, but rather sends its students to the high school on a tuition basis, and its voters would not be deciding whether to expand the regional district.

If regionalization is approved, representatives to an interim regional board of education would be selected to guide the transition to regionalization as detailed earlier in this section. Transition to an enlarged regional is generally timed to occur at the beginning of the school fiscal year on July 1 with implementation of a new budget for the regional adopted in accordance with state budget timelines.

For example, in the case of the new Henry Hudson Regional, voters passed their regionalization referendum in late September 2023, members were appointed to the new interim board in October 2023, and the enlarged regional began operation on July 1, 2024. This provided nine months for implementation planning. The appointed interim board continued to serve through January 1, 2025, when the new board elected by voters in November 2024 was sworn into office.

If voters in Warren, Long Hill, and Watchung approve expanding the current limited purpose regional into an all purpose regional, an interim board could be formed. This board would serve until January 1st following a July 1st regionalization. A similar schedule could also be followed if

¹⁶ N.J.S.A. 18A:13-33

Green Brook voters are invited and choose to join this expanded regional after its approval by Warren, Long Hill, and Watchung voters.

Shared Services

If a proposal to expand Watchung Hills from a limited purpose regional to an all purpose regional does not move forward, a discussion among district leaders and boards of education to maximize opportunities for shared services among the districts would be encouraged. Thereafter, the development and approval of specific contracts would be necessary to design and adopt shared services agreements between the schools and districts. Boards of education have the authority to expand shared services by a board vote.

Implementation Grants

Should the referendum to regionalize succeed, the Division of Local Government Services, which provided the grant that funded this study, may also offer implementation grants to cover one-time costs for regionalization and shared services initiatives. Henry Hudson received a \$400,000 grant to cover those implementation costs. The program has been funded annually and it may be available if a regionalization moves forward here. Members of the Rowan School Regionalization Institute team would continue to provide expertise through the regionalization planning, referendum, and implementation process, as they did for Henry Hudson Regional.

It is beyond the scope of this report to develop a detailed implementation plan and identify all the associated costs of regionalization. However, the following task items should be considered: legal review of redundant contracts, systems integration, accounting/legal/expert review of benefits, collective bargaining negotiations costs, rebranding, auditing and accounting of financials, which could be potentially covered by the aforementioned grant funding. Election costs for each district would be covered in full by the State under S3488.

7. Potential Political Issues

No specific potential political issues were identified by either the Steering Committee or other stakeholders.

8. Governance and Legal Impact

The grant for this study was obtained by Watchung Hills and Watchung to assist in determining whether the current limited purpose, grades 9-12, regional school district should be expanded into an all purpose, grades pK-12, regional school district for all constituent and sending districts or whether the existing constituent districts would expand into an all purpose regional and continue receiving high school students from Green Brook. Although Warren, Long Hill and Green Brook did not participate in the grant application submission, all three had representation on the steering committee and provided data for the study.

Should the regional board of education decide to pursue expansion of the limited purpose regional, state law requires that the voters of each of the constituent districts will determine whether they support such expansion. If a majority of voters in a majority of the constituent districts decide to move forward, the existing limited purpose regional would be expanded into an all purpose regional. Under the regionalization law, the state government would pay for the full expense of that referendum with no cost to property taxpayers.

If a proposal to expand the regional district is not passed by voters in two of the three constituent districts, Watchung Hills would remain a limited purpose, grades 9-12, regional school district, and the individual grades pK-8 districts would continue to operate as they currently do.

Each district scored admirably in its most recently completed NJQSAC cycles (2021-22 for Long Hill, 2022-23 for Watchung, and 2023-24 for Watchung Hills, Warren, and Green Brook). Watchung Hills, Warren, Long Hill, and Watchung were recognized as high performing districts, and Green Brook was deemed high performing in all areas but one that was missed by a single point. Additional alignment among the districts through a consolidation of the boards of education could aid in strengthening those scores in a more universal manner while reducing the time spent on completing the self evaluation and review. That time may then be redirected toward students, staff, and program development.

Stakeholder input was an important feature of this study. The districts created a steering committee to guide the outline of what was to be studied and to review and comment on an initial draft report. Watchung Hills Regional HS hosted a town hall meeting for interested members of the region's communities to meet with members of the study team, ask questions, and give their perspectives about the aims of the feasibility study. Nearly thirty people attended and provided useful input to the team. Some selected staff interviews were also held to gather insights that documentary evidence would not be able to provide.

372 Watchung Hills HS 9th grade students took a voluntary survey in April 2025 about various aspects of their middle school academic experiences, including how prepared they felt they were in the core subject areas of ELA, Math, and Science. Watchung students reported doing the most reading in middle school and having the highest levels of preparation for 9th grade, while students who attended Green Brook reported the same for writing. The vast majority of the students said they were as well prepared in Math as other students with Green Brook rating their level of preparation highest. The responses on preparation for Science were quite varied. When asked how often they did experiments in middle school science classes, students from Warren reported doing them significantly more frequently than those in the other middle schools.

DEMOGRAPHY and FACILITIES

9. Municipal Profiles

The following section provides information regarding selected demographic characteristics for each of the four municipalities in the Watchung Hills region of NJ. They include the Townships of Warren and Green Brook and the Borough of Watchung in Somerset County and the Township of Long Hill in Morris County. Warren, Watchung, and Long Hill have grades pK-8 school districts, and are constituent members of the grades 9-12 Watchung Hills Regional School District. Green Brook also has its own grades pK-8 school district, but it is not a constituent member of the high school regional, having instead a send-receive agreement to allow its grades 9-12 students to attend there. Tables 13 through 16 display the specific changes in selected demographic characteristics over the period between 2018 and 2023.¹⁷

Warren Township

TABLE 13
Selected Demographic Characteristics, Warren Township

	2018		2023		Change	% Change
Population	15,783		15,962		179	1.1%
Housing Units	5,362		5,751		389	7.3%
Median Age	46.6		44.7		-1.9	-4.1%
Median Income	\$165,030		\$189,393		\$24,363	14.8%
Mean Income	\$240,018		\$290,709		\$50,691	21.1%
Race	2018	% of Population	2023	% of Population	Change	% Change
Hispanic/Latino	872	5.5%	1,114	7.0%	242	27.8%
White	11,559	73.2%	10,799	67.7%	-760	-6.6%
Black	146	0.9%	525	3.3%	379	259.6%
Asian	2,888	18.3%	2,733	17.1%	-155	-5.4%
MR	318	2.0%	646	4.1%	328	103.1%
NA/AK	0	0.0%	9	0.1%	9	
HI/PI	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	
Other Alone	0	0.0%	136	0.9%	136	

¹⁷ American Community Survey, United States Department of the Census; NA/AK = Native American or Alaskan, HI/PI = Hawaiian or Pacific Islander. ACS survey data is used in our demographic projections because the 2023 surveys provide more up-to-date projections than the older 2020 Census report. However, ACS survey data can miss smaller population percentages in its racial/ethnicity estimates, as it did in projecting Long Hill's and Green Brook's Black population at zero when NJDOE reports show that there are Black students in both districts. We note this discrepancy in our data tables.

Warren Township has a total area of 19.64 square miles (50.86 km²), and has the largest and most diverse population of the four participating municipalities, with a total of 15,962 as of 2023. The overall population has been relatively stable between 2018 and 2023 with a negligible gain of 179 persons (1.1%). There have been changes in the racial makeup, with increases in the Hispanic (27.8%, 242 persons), Multiracial (103.1%, 328 persons) and Black (259.6%, 379 persons) populations, and decreases in the White (-6.6%, 760 persons) and Asian (-5.4%, 155 persons) populations. The median age has decreased by 1.9 years to 44.7. The township is one of the State’s highest-income communities, which have trended upward, with median household income increasing nearly 15% since 2018 to \$189,393.

Long Hill Township

TABLE 14
Selected Demographic Characteristics, Long Hill Township

	2018		2023		Change	% Change
Population	8,659		8,609		-50	-0.6%
Housing Units	3,194		3,038		-156	-4.9%
Median Age	43.4		42.1		-1.3	-3.0%
Median Income	\$142,527		\$165,112		\$22,585	15.8%
Mean Income	\$190,082		\$211,586		\$21,504	11.3%
Race	2018	% of Population	2023	% of Population	Change	% Change
Hispanic/Latino	304	3.5%	1,176	13.7%	872	286.8%
White	7,898	91.2%	6,468	75.1%	-1,430	-18.1%
Black	59	0.7%	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Asian	308	3.6%	613	7.1%	305	99.0%
Two or More Races	78	0.9%	306	3.6%	228	292.3%
NA/AK	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	
HI/PI	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	
Other Alone	12	0.1%	46	0.5%	34	283.3%

Long Hill Township spans a total area of 12.06 square miles (31.22 km²) with the Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge covering 7,455 acres (3,017 ha) of it. In terms of population, Long Hill is the second largest at 8,609 residents, which represents a slight decline of about -.5% (50 persons) since 2018. It has also seen important shifts in its racial demographics, with decreases among Whites (-18.1%, 1,430 persons) and increases among the Hispanic (286%, 872 persons), Asian (99.0%, 305 persons) and Multiracial (292.3%, 228 persons) populations. The median age has increased 1.3 years to 42.1, while median household incomes have increased 15.8% to \$165,112.

Watchung Borough

Watchung Borough spans a total area of 6.04 square miles (15.6 km²) and is the smallest of the four communities in terms of population with 6,429 residents, representing an increase of 6.5% (395 persons) since 2018. This has been accompanied by increased racial and ethnic diversity, with decreases in Hispanic (32.7%, 277 persons) and Asian (-14.5%, 125 persons) residents and increases in Black (87.0%, from 46 to 86 persons), White (10.9%, from 4,246 to 4,707 persons) and Multiracial (1,533.3% from 18 to 294 persons) residents. Median age has increased 1.9 years. The borough is one of the State's highest-income communities, and median household income has risen 8.6% to \$166,536.

TABLE 15
Selected Demographic Characteristics, Watchung Borough

	2018		2023		Change	% Change
Population	6,034		6,429		395	6.5%
Housing Units	2,213		2,429		216	9.8%
Median Age	44.5		46.4		1.9	4.3%
H Median Income	\$153,341		\$166,536		\$13,195	8.6%
H Mean Income	\$191,722		\$235,064		\$43,342	22.6%
Race	2018	% of Population	2023	% of Population	Change	% Change
Hispanic/Latino	848	14.1%	571	8.9%	-277	-32.7%
White	4,246	70.4%	4,707	73.2%	461	10.9%
Black	46	0.8%	86	1.3%	40	87.0%
Asian	862	14.3%	737	11.5%	-125	-14.5%
Two or More Races	18	0.3%	294	4.6%	276	1533.3%
NA/AK	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	
HI/PI	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	
MR	14	0.2%	34	0.5%	20	142.9%

Green Brook Township

Green Brook Township has a total area of 4.42 square miles (11.43 km²) and the third largest population in the region with 6,982 residents. It has experienced a -2.4% change in its population since 2018. Like the previous municipalities, it has seen shifts in its racial and ethnic demographics, with increases in Hispanic (21.8%, from 999 to 1,217 persons), Multiracial (217.1%, from 35 to 111 persons), and Asian (8.0% from 1,645 to 1,777 persons) populations and decreases in the White (-5.4%, from 4,093 to 3,870 persons) population. The median age has increased 3.0 years, while median household income has risen over 57.7% to \$218,864.

TABLE 16
Selected Demographic Characteristics, Green Brook Township

	2018		2023		Change	% Change
Population	7,158		6,982		-176	-2.5%
Housing Units	2,272		2,381		109	4.8%
Median Age	43.5		46.5		3	6.9%
Median Income	\$138,750		\$218,864		\$80,114	57.7%
Mean Income	\$170,687		\$223,514		\$52,827	30.9%
Race	2018	% of Population	2023	% of Population	Change	% Change
Hispanic/Latino	999	14.0%	1,217	17.4%	218	21.8%
White	4,093	57.2%	3,870	55.4%	-223	-5.4%
Black	386	5.4%	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Asian	1,645	23.0%	1,777	25.5%	132	8.0%
Two or More Races	35	0.5%	111	1.6%	76	217.1%
NA/AK	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	
HI/PI	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	
Other Alone	0	0.0%	7	0.1%	7	

Birth Data

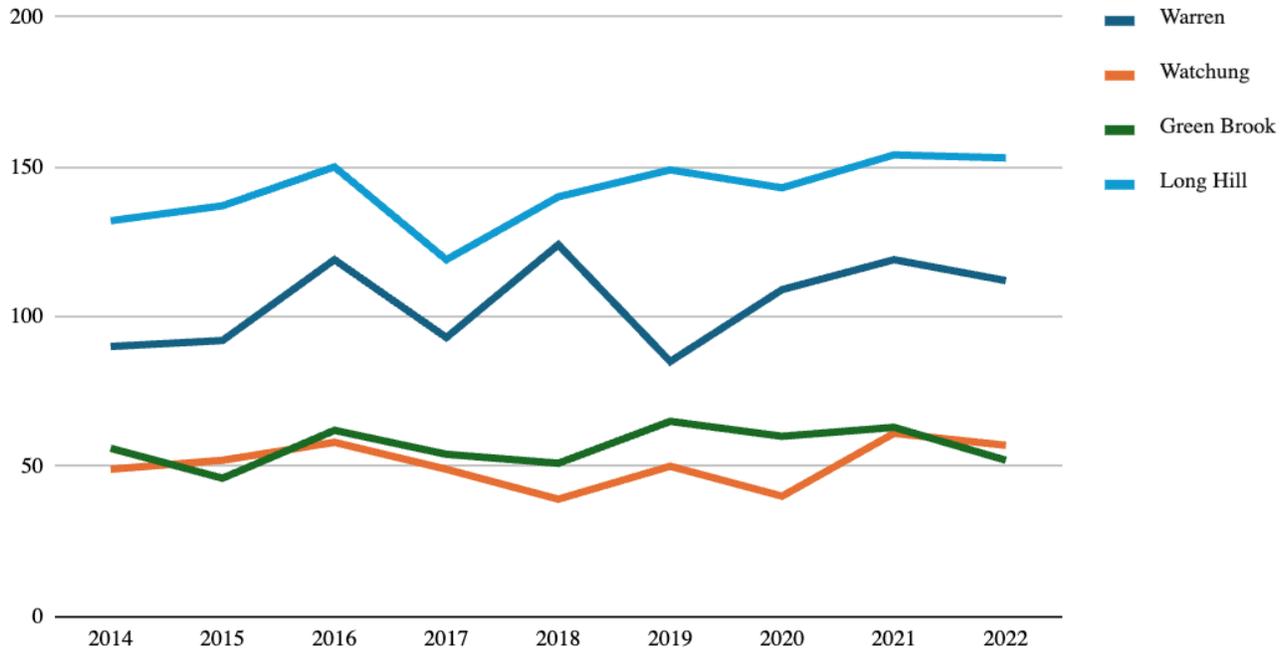
Tracking the number of children born in a municipality is important in demographic studies in order to project kindergarten enrollment over future years by seeing trends over the recent past. The data is also useful in evaluating the relative health of a municipality, as population growth is often the result of a desire by parents and others to move into and stay in a community. Births in the Watchung Hills region have been averaging 357 per year and trending 12+ births each year for the last six years. Table 17 and Chart 1 document the recent history of live births in the Watchung Hills region.¹⁸

TABLE 17
Live Births by Municipality, 2014-22

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023 6 Yr Avg	2024 Roll Avg
Warren	90	92	119	93	124	85	109	119	112	107	109
Long Hill	132	137	150	119	140	149	143	154	153	143	147
Watchung	49	52	58	49	39	50	40	61	57	49	49
Green Brook	56	46	62	54	51	65	60	63	52	58	58
TOTAL	327	327	389	315	354	349	352	397	374	357	364

¹⁸ NJ Department of Health

CHART 1
Live Births by Municipality



Comparing birth data to total population is one way to look at community health through relative potential for organic growth in a municipality (i.e., at least replacement level) apart from other factors such as family mobility. Table 18 presents that perspective, showing Long Hill Township, Watchung Borough, and Green Brook Township having increases in births relative to population, while Warren Township births have decreased relative to population.

TABLE 18
Comparing Live Births to Total Population

	Births 2018	Population 2018	% Births to Population 2018	Births est. 2023	Population 2023	% Births to Population 2023
Warren	124	15,783	0.78%	109	15,962	0.68%
Long Hill	140	8,659	1.62%	147	8,609	1.71%
Watchung	39	6,034	0.64%	49	6,429	0.76%
Green Brook	51	7,158	0.71%	58	6,982	0.83%
TOTAL	354	37,634	0.94%	364	37,982	0.96%

10. Housing Starts

Another factor that impacts enrollment is new housing construction that may be coming into a community. Tables 19 and 20 look at recent certificates of occupancy and building permits issued by each municipality.¹⁹

TABLE 19
Certificates of Occupancy Issued, 2018-23

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	TOTAL	6 yr avg
Warren	18	25	28	21	97	119	308	51.3
Long Hill	0	1	0	2	2	1	6	1.0
Watchung	10	6	4	9	8	12	49	8.2
Green Brook	2	0	25	10	0	4	41	6.8
TOTAL	30	32	57	42	107	136	404	67.3

TABLE 20
Building Permits Issued, 2018-23

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	TOTAL
Warren	25	23	38	176	125	90	477
Long Hill	25	1	1	4	3	3	37
Watchung	1	13	4	15	2	9	44
Green Brook	2	69	10	1	1	3	86
TOTAL	53	106	53	196	131	105	644

Only Warren Township experienced significant housing development from 2018 to 2023. While Warren Township averaged 51 occupancies per year for the last 6 years, the other three municipalities each averaged less than 10 occupancies per year. In the period 2018-23, 644 building permits were issued in the four municipalities and only 404 (62%) were followed by occupancy permits.

Research indicates that there are several planned major housing developments above the recent averages in all of the four municipalities that would impact school enrollment at this time. Descriptions of the anticipated new housing are found in the 2025 Housing Element and Fair Share Plan (HE&FSP) adopted by each municipality and available online.²⁰ The tables above comport with the level of increases/decreases in population in each of the communities. As a percentage of the total units in each community, there is anticipated to be significant increases in housing.

¹⁹ NJ Department of Community Affairs

²⁰ <https://www.njcourts.gov/courts/civil/affordable-housing/somerset>

Affordable housing (popularly known as COAH) mandates have recently been issued for present and prospective need obligations at a level of a combined 603 units for the four municipalities. They are defined for each municipality as: Warren Township 262 units; Long Hill Township 102 units; Watchung Borough 119 units; and Green Brook Township 120 units. Specific properties and projects are identified in the 2025 HE&FSP as adopted by each municipality. The impact of that accelerated residential construction is added to the standard enrollment projection. Compliance with the obligations and scheduling of occupancies needs to be monitored on a municipal and project basis.

In determining the student yield from new housing, the unit counts by the number of bedrooms, the percentage of market rate and affordable units, the type of housing (e.g., single family, townhouses, apartments), property value, and development size among other characteristics are used to determine a Public School Age Children (PSAC) multiplier.

Extensive tables of the PSAC multipliers are found in *Who Lives in New Jersey Housing?* (Rutgers University Center for Urban Policy Research) and *School Age Children in New Jersey Rental Apartments* (Rutgers University Center for Real Estate). The latter report provides multipliers that are well differentiated between market rate and affordable units.

The impact of previous new housing in each municipality will have been built into the standard survival ratios for each school district's enrollment projections. Therefore, only the impact of the above average new construction will be added to the standard projection. For example, the HE&FSP in Warren Township identifies four Round 3 and three Round 4 projects for a total 866 units. A reasonable scheduling of those 7 projects over seven years provides that 35.6% of the units will be above the annual average of 84+ units. While total student yield is 866 students, only 128 students are added to the standard projection that includes the impact of the prior average of 84+ units per year.

Similarly, Watchung Borough with 272 units proposed from three projects will yield 168 students of which 84% are above the prior average and 142 will be added to the standard projection. Green Brook Township with 499 units proposed from seven projects will yield 318 students of which 93% are above the prior average and 296 will be added to the standard projection. Long Hill Township with 191 units proposed from three projects will yield 119 students of which 100% are above the prior average and all 119 will be added to the standard projection.

It is imperative to understand that the student yields stated above are for grades pK-12 students. In the projections only the proportionate counts are added to the elementary and high school district projections. For example, in Long Hill Township where 119 students are added to the standard projection, only 9+ will be added to each grade. That is 82 will be added to the elementary projection and the balance is added as a component of the high school projection.

11. Enrollment History

Table 21 shows the combined enrollment history for each of the school districts in this region by grade level. The intent is to calculate combined average grade level survival ratios in order to project the total enrollment in a potential grades pK-12, regional school district.

TABLE 21
Enrollment History, 2019-20 to 2024-25 ²¹

2019-20	Births	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	K-5	6-8	9-12	SC	PK	Total	
Watchung Hills											462	462	484	460	0	0	1901	28	0	1929	
Warren	90	130	151	151	168	159	156	164	166	182	0	0	0	0	915	512	0	109	49	1585	
Long Hill	76	91	96	102	96	101	98	84	83	102	0	0	0	0	584	269	0	0	36	889	
Watchung	49	60	67	60	60	64	59	62	82	68	0	0	0	0	370	212	0	1	14	597	
Green Brook	56	53	68	65	75	75	86	96	99	103	0	0	0	0	422	298	0	13	34	767	
TOTAL	271	334	382	378	399	399	399	406	430	455	462	462	484	460	2291	1291	1901	151	133	0	5767
2020-21	Births	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	K-5	6-8	9-12	SC	PK	Total	
Watchung Hills											438	439	499	489	0	0	1865	25	0	1890	
Warren	92	124	149	156	154	176	176	167	183	188	0	0	0	0	935	538	0	6	33	1512	
Long Hill	91	65	82	88	87	91	95	96	81	84	0	0	0	0	508	261	0	2	22	793	
Watchung	52	54	63	62	60	56	64	54	63	76	0	0	0	0	359	193	0	28	20	600	
Green Brook	46	42	56	67	69	72	75	91	93	101	0	0	0	0	381	285	0	11	23	700	
TOTAL	281	285	350	373	370	395	410	408	420	449	438	439	499	489	2183	1277	1865	72	98	0	5495
2021-22	Births	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	K-5	6-8	9-12	SC	PK	Total	
Watchung Hills											438	423	429	492	0	0	1782	17	0	1799	
Warren	119	159	156	156	163	157	182	175	164	176	0	0	0	0	973	515	0	8	44	1540	
Long Hill	88	86	90	80	94	86	95	90	95	85	0	0	0	0	531	270	0	2	27	830	
Watchung	58	55	63	75	68	67	66	68	56	63	0	0	0	0	394	187	0	3	26	610	
Green Brook	62	72	55	62	69	77	78	82	94	95	0	0	0	0	413	271	0	6	37	727	
TOTAL	327	372	364	373	394	387	421	415	409	419	438	423	429	492	2311	1243	1782	36	134	0	5506
2022-23	Births	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	K-5	6-8	9-12	SC	PK	Total	
Watchung Hills											428	413	426	434	0	0	1701	13	0	1714	
Warren	93	155	175	174	168	179	165	182	180	171	0	0	0	0	1016	533	0	5	72	1626	
Long Hill	65	78	94	92	83	90	87	98	86	94	0	0	0	0	524	278	0	1	29	832	
Watchung	49	83	61	73	73	78	66	65	68	55	0	0	0	0	434	188	0	6	36	664	
Green Brook	54	72	78	53	65	71	76	85	86	98					415	269	0	3	40	727	
TOTAL	261	388	408	392	389	418	394	430	420	418	428	413	426	434	2389	1268	1701	28	177	0	5563
2023-24	Births	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	K-5	6-8	9-12	SC	PK	Total	
Watchung Hills											390	416	414	427	0	0	1647	19	0	1666	
Warren	124	146	172	185	186	172	183	167	190	181	0	0	0	0	1044	538	0	10	77	1669	
Long Hill	89	87	80	97	93	88	89	94	100	85	0	0	0	0	534	279	0	9	32	854	
Watchung	39	59	87	62	76	80	72	70	64	71	0	0	0	0	436	205	0	6	28	675	
Green Brook	51	70	75	87	56	67	72	75	84	88					427	247	0	7	44	725	
TOTAL	303	362	414	431	411	407	416	406	438	425	390	416	414	427	2441	1269	1647	51	181	0	5589
2024-25	Births	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	K-5	6-8	9-12	SC	PK	Total	
Watchung Hills											399	380	410	415	0	0	1604	19	0	1623	
Warren	85	149	147	182	183	189	175	184	169	192	0	0	0	0	1025	545	0	11	82	1663	
Long Hill	84	91	89	81	102	93	86	91	93	99	0	0	0	0	542	283	0	3	33	861	
Watchung	50	71	62	86	65	72	78	71	63	64	0	0	0	0	434	198	0	6	29	667	
Green Brook	65	59	73	77	87	59	69	72	78	84					424	234	0	6	44	708	
TOTAL	284	370	371	426	437	413	408	418	403	439	399	380	410	415	2425	1260	1604	45	188	0	5522
Average S/R	1.235	1.106	1.044	1.032	1.028	1.022	1.020	1.013	1.016	0.966	0.961	0.996	1.003								

²¹ NJDOE's Standards Measurement and Resource for Teaching (NJSMART); SC = self-contained special education students; PK = preschool/prekindergarten students

The enrollment history in the Watchung Hills region from 2019-20 to 2024-25 shows overall decreases of 4.1% from 5,767 to 5,522 students. That said, there was a large one-year drop from 2019-20 to 2020-21 and greater stability over the more recent five years. This data is used to calculate combined average survival ratios to project the total enrollment for a potential grades pK-12 regional school district. The average migration ratios across grades K-12 indicate that the number of students transitioning from one grade level to the next is 1.017, a slightly increasing but relatively consistent flow of students through the school system.

12. Enrollment Projections

This study used a standard cohort survival model plus impact of above average new housing for the projections. A cohort model tracks students as they move year to year from grade to grade and develops growth ratios between grade levels. For example, if there are 100 students in grade one in a given year and in the next year when these students become second graders the number increases to 104, that would be a growth rate of 4% or a cohort survival ratio of 1.04. This growth/decline ratio between years and grades is calculated for six years of enrollment providing five growth/decline ratios for each grade to grade and year to year change. The average of the five ratios between each grade then serves as the multiplier for future growth between each grade. If the average ratio is 1.2 and the last historical year for grade one enrollment is 100, then the projection for the next second grade would be 120 students. This averaged, grade to grade survival ratio is applied to all grade levels for the next five years to complete the 5-year projection.

The kindergarten ratio is generally projected by calculating the difference between live births attributable to a community and student enrollment in kindergarten five years later. A six-year average of live births was used for the live births to kindergarten ratio in the fifth year of the projection (2029-2030) when those births 5 years earlier (2024) were not yet available in the data.

TABLE 22
Enrollment Projections for Combined School Districts, 2025-26 to 2029-30

Year	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	K-5	6-8	9-12	K-12	SC	pK	Total
2025-26	367	414	391	444	455	428	420	428	415	429	388	384	416	2499	1264	1617	5380	63	245	5689
2026-27	428	419	443	415	471	479	448	438	448	413	425	399	397	2655	1335	1635	5625	65	237	5927
2027-28	416	491	454	474	446	501	506	472	463	451	415	441	418	2782	1441	1726	5949	67	192	6207
2028-29	381	469	521	477	498	466	520	522	490	457	443	423	452	2812	1532	1776	6120	68	197	6385
2029-30	379	429	495	544	500	518	482	535	539	481	447	449	432	2865	1556	1809	6229	68	182	6479

Table 22 projects future enrollments of the combined districts from 2025-26 to 2029-30. A comparison of the 2024-25 actual enrollment of 5,522 students with the 2029-30 projection of 6,479 shows an increase of 957 students and a material averaged change of approximately 68 students per grade over 14 grade levels. That projected increase would represent a 17% increase in enrollment over a five-year period, which will pose significant educational and fiscal challenges for school

officials. An enlargement of the current limited purpose, regional district into an all-purpose, regional district would not alter the overall enrollment projections in any way.

CHART 2
Regional Enrollment Trends, 2019-20 to 2029-30

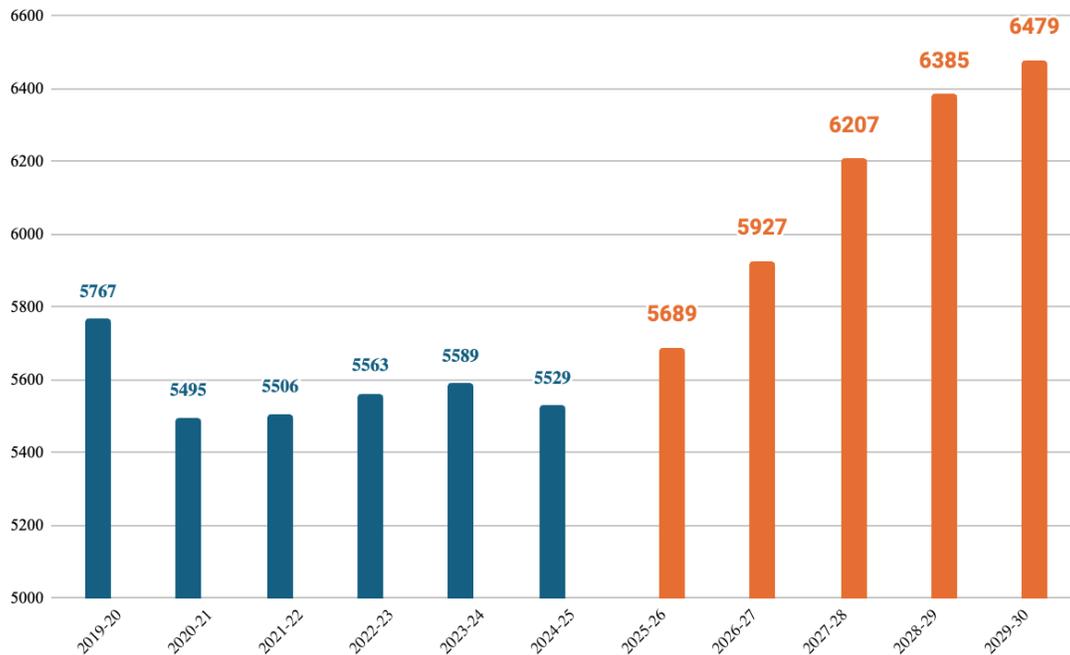


TABLE 23
Enrollment Projections, Grades pK-8, 2025-26 to 2029-30

2025-26	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	K-5	6-8	SC	PK	Total
Warren	160	169	157	190	192	199	179	192	175	1067	546	27	69	1709
Long Hill	85	99	88	81	101	92	87	90	94	547	270	3	66	886
Watchung	52	77	65	89	68	73	78	70	62	425	211	9	64	708
Green Brook	70	69	80	84	94	64	76	77	84	461	236	7	46	751
TOTAL	367	414	391	444	455	428	420	428	415	2499	1264	46	245	4054
2026-27	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	K-5	6-8	SC	PK	Total
Warren	174	180	180	164	199	201	203	186	198	1097	587	28	69	1782
Long Hill	98	97	103	93	85	105	98	90	95	582	284	3	66	935
Watchung	84	61	85	72	97	73	77	81	73	471	232	10	64	777
Green Brook	73	81	75	86	90	99	70	80	82	505	233	7	38	782
TOTAL	428	419	443	415	471	479	448	438	448	2655	1335	48	237	4275
2027-28	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	K-5	6-8	SC	PK	Total
Warren	165	197	193	189	173	210	206	212	194	1125	611	29	80	1846
Long Hill	107	110	100	106	96	88	110	100	94	606	304	3	34	947
Watchung	80	96	69	93	80	103	78	81	86	522	245	10	36	813
Green Brook	65	88	92	86	97	100	112	79	90	528	281	7	42	859
TOTAL	416	491	454	474	446	501	506	472	463	2782	1441	49	192	4464

2028-29	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	K-5	6-8	SC	PK	Total
Warren	159	189	213	204	200	184	217	217	222	1149	656	30	81	1916
Long Hill	89	117	110	101	107	96	90	109	102	620	301	3	34	957
Watchung	65	87	102	72	98	82	104	78	81	507	264	10	41	821
Green Brook	68	76	96	100	93	103	109	118	85	536	311	7	42	897
TOTAL	381	469	521	477	498	466	520	522	490	2812	1532	50	197	4592
2029-30	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	K-5	6-8	SC	PK	Total
Warren	158	182	203	224	215	212	190	227	227	1195	644	30	81	1950
Long Hill	88	96	116	110	100	106	97	89	110	616	296	3	28	943
Watchung	65	72	93	106	77	101	83	104	78	514	265	10	31	820
Green Brook	67	79	83	104	107	99	112	114	124	540	350	8	42	940
TOTAL	379	429	495	544	500	518	482	535	539	2865	1556	51	182	4653

CHART 3
Enrollment Projections, Grades pK-8, 2025-26 to 2029-30

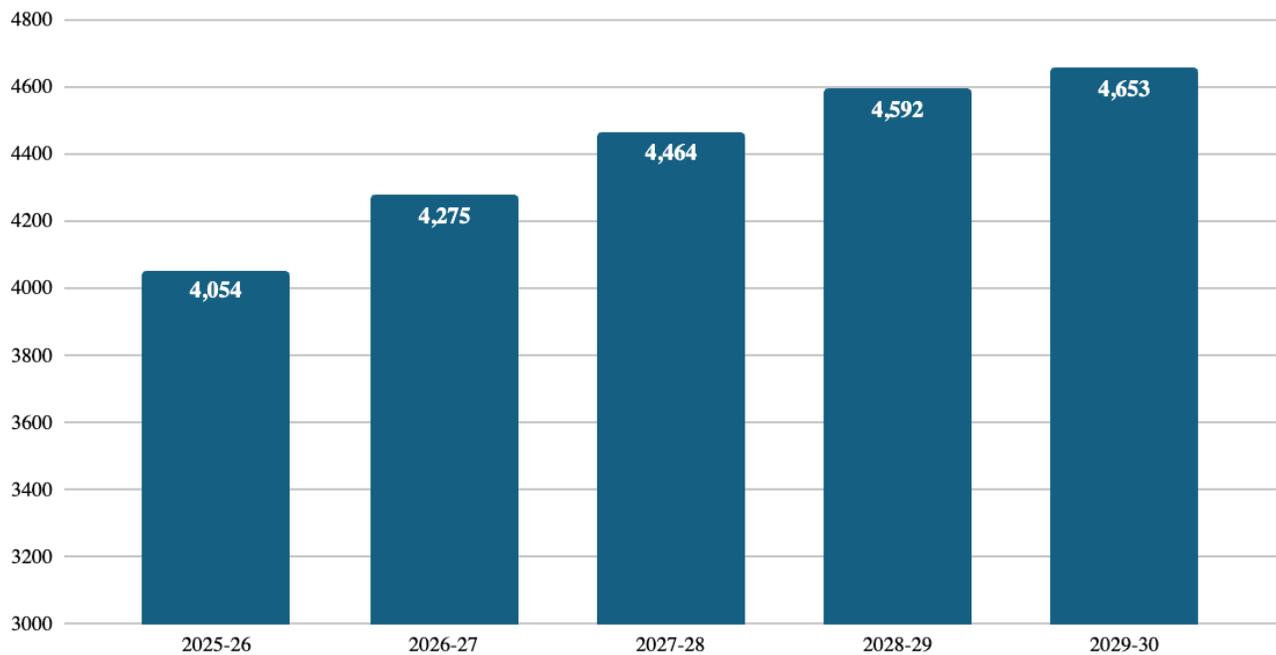
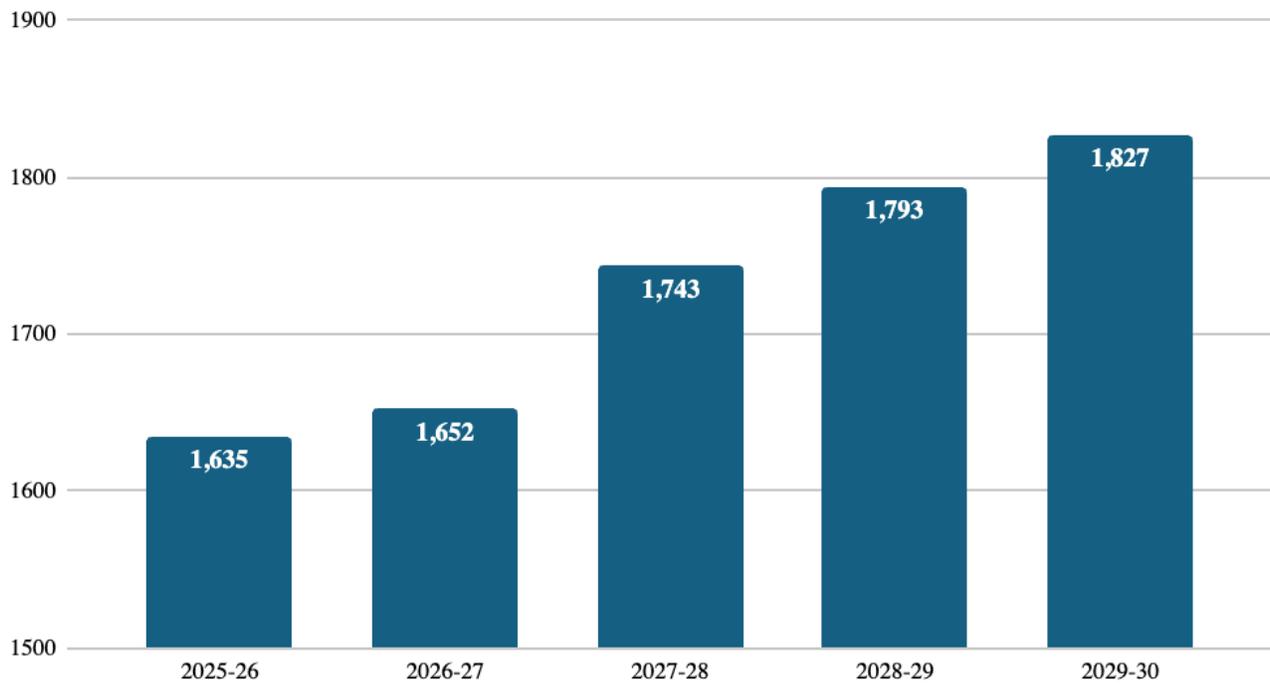


Table 23 and Chart 3 show the elementary projections over the next five years. Elementary enrollment peaks in 2029-30 at 4,653 students, or growth of 754 students over 5 years from 2024-25. Table 24 and Chart 4 provide the same grade level and year enrollment projection breakdown for high school students. The secondary school enrollment is projected to peak at 1,827 students in 2029-30, the fifth year of the projection for a projection period growth of 192 students.

TABLE 24
Enrollment Projections, Grades 9-12, 2025-26 to 2029-30

Year	9	10	11	12	9-12	SC	Total
2025-26	429	388	384	416	1617	18	1,635
2026-27	413	425	399	397	1635	17	1,652
2027-28	451	415	441	418	1726	17	1,743
2028-29	457	443	423	452	1776	18	1,793
2029-30	481	447	449	432	1809	18	1,827

CHART 4
Enrollment Projections, Grades 9-12, 2025-26 to 2029-30



13. Disaggregated Enrollments

Enrollment statistics separated into specific demographic categories—such as race, ethnicity, socioeconomic background, or ability status—constitute disaggregated enrollment data. This granular breakdown allows educational institutions to examine performance patterns across different student populations, recognize inequities, and create focused support programs.

Tables 25 through 28 provide disaggregated data for the students in the five school districts in the Watchung Hills region over the past five years. As expected, changes in race, ethnicity, and income largely mirror the trends in each community.²² Given that the scenario contemplated would not

²² See Tables 13 through 16

change the composition of districts in this region, there is expected to be no impact on racial and other demographic groups from an all purpose, grades pK-12 regionalization.

TABLE 25
Enrollment History, Disaggregated by Race and Ethnicity ²³

2019-20	Enr	White	%	Black	%	Hispan	%	Asian	%	NA/AK	%	HI/PI	%	MR	%
Watchung Hills	1929	1200	62.2%	63	3.3%	230	11.92%	364	18.9%	2	0.1%	6	0.3%	64	3.3%
Warren	1585	922	58.2%	28	1.8%	175	11.04%	361	22.8%	2	0.1%	4	0.3%	93	5.9%
Long Hill	889	667	75.0%	8	0.9%	132	14.85%	61	6.9%	1	0.1%	1	0.1%	19	2.1%
Watchung	597	331	55.4%	38	6.4%	61	10.22%	136	22.8%	1	0.2%	2	0.3%	28	4.7%
Green Brook	767	355	46.3%	44	5.7%	132	17.21%	199	25.9%	0	0.0%	1	0.1%	36	4.7%
TOTAL	5767	3475	60.3%	181	3.1%	730	12.7%	1121	19.4%	6	0.1%	14	0.2%	240	4.2%
2020-21	Enr	White	%	Black	%	Hispan	%	Asian	%	NA/AK	%	HI/PI	%	MR	%
Watchung Hills	1890	1156	61.2%	76	4.0%	220	11.64%	371	19.6%	3	0.2%	6	0.3%	58	3.1%
Warren	793	582	73.4%	5	0.6%	120	15.13%	61	7.7%	0	0.0%	1	0.1%	24	3.0%
Long Hill	1512	867	57.3%	29	1.9%	180	11.90%	343	22.7%	1	0.1%	4	0.3%	88	5.8%
Watchung	600	327	54.5%	42	7.0%	68	11.33%	129	21.5%	1	0.2%	2	0.3%	31	5.2%
Green Brook	700	314	44.9%	41	5.9%	133	19.00%	175	25.0%	0	0.0%	2	0.3%	35	5.0%
TOTAL	5495	3246	59.1%	193	3.5%	721	13.1%	1079	19.6%	5	0.1%	15	0.3%	236	4.3%
2021-22	Enr	White	%	Black	%	Hispan	%	Asian	%	NA/AK	%	HI/PI	%	MR	%
Watchung Hills	1799	1044	58.0%	77	4.3%	242	13.45%	374	20.8%	1	0.1%	4	0.2%	57	3.2%
Warren	1540	860	55.8%	34	2.2%	189	12.27%	362	23.5%	2	0.1%	3	0.2%	90	5.8%
Long Hill	830	619	74.6%	5	0.6%	125	15.06%	60	7.2%	1	0.1%	1	0.1%	19	2.3%
Watchung	610	333	54.6%	40	6.6%	81	13.28%	120	19.7%	0	0.0%	2	0.3%	34	5.6%
Green Brook	727	322	44.3%	38	5.2%	145	19.94%	180	24.8%	2	0.3%	2	0.3%	38	5.2%
TOTAL	5506	3178	57.7%	194	3.5%	782	14.2%	1096	19.9%	6	0.1%	12	0.2%	238	4.3%
2022-23	Enr	White	%	Black	%	Hispan	%	Asian	%	NA/AK	%	HI/PI	%	MR	%
Watchung Hills	1714	948	55.3%	89	5.2%	273	15.93%	337	19.7%	3	0.2%	4	0.2%	60	3.5%
Warren	1626	920	56.6%	41	2.5%	211	12.98%	357	22.0%	2	0.1%	3	0.2%	92	5.7%
Long Hill	832	604	72.6%	7	0.8%	128	15.38%	67	8.1%	0	0.0%	1	0.1%	25	3.0%
Watchung	664	337	50.8%	49	7.4%	101	15.21%	145	21.8%	0	0.0%	1	0.2%	31	4.7%
Green Brook	727	321	44.2%	33	4.5%	156	21.46%	178	24.5%	2	0.3%	2	0.3%	35	4.8%
TOTAL	5563	3130	56.3%	219	3.9%	869	15.6%	1084	19.5%	7	0.1%	11	0.2%	243	4.4%
2023-24	Enr	White	%	Black	%	Hispan	%	Asian	%	NA/AK	%	HI/PI	%	MR	%
Watchung Hills	1666	901	54.1%	86	5.2%	277	16.63%	334	20.0%	4	0.2%	3	0.2%	61	3.7%
Warren	1669	915	54.8%	53	3.2%	225	13.48%	375	22.5%	2	0.1%	1	0.1%	98	5.9%
Long Hill	854	615	72.0%	7	0.8%	136	15.93%	66	7.7%	0	0.0%	1	0.1%	29	3.4%
Watchung	675	343	50.8%	50	7.4%	114	16.89%	133	19.7%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	35	5.2%
Green Brook	725	303	41.8%	36	5.0%	174	24.00%	164	22.6%	2	0.3%	3	0.4%	43	5.9%
TOTAL	5589	3077	55.1%	232	4.2%	926	16.6%	1072	19.2%	8	0.1%	8	0.1%	266	4.8%
2024-25	Enr	White	%	Black	%	Hispan	%	Asian	%	NA/AK	%	HI/PI	%	MR	%
Watchung Hills	1623	841	51.8%	76	4.7%	295	18.18%	346	21.3%	5	0.3%	2	0.1%	58	3.6%
Warren	1663	886	53.3%	65	3.9%	225	13.53%	384	23.1%	4	0.2%	1	0.1%	98	5.9%
Long Hill	861	624	72.5%	10	1.2%	142	16.49%	54	6.3%	0	0.0%	1	0.1%	30	3.5%
Watchung	667	336	50.4%	42	6.3%	118	17.69%	128	19.2%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	43	6.4%
Green Brook	708	296	41.8%	35	5.0%	170	24.00%	160	22.6%	2	0.3%	3	0.4%	42	5.9%
TOTAL	5522	2983	54.0%	228	4.1%	950	17.20%	1072	19.4%	11	0.2%	7	0.1%	271	4.9%

²³ Enr = Enrollment, Hispan = Hispanic, MR = Multiracial

TABLE 26
Regional Enrollment History and Trend
Aggregated by Race and Ethnicity, 2019-20 to 2029-30

	Enr	White	%	Black	%	Hispan	%	Asian	%	NA/AK	%	HI/PI	%	MR	%
2019-20	5767	3475	60.3%	181	3.1%	730	12.7%	1121	19.4%	6	0.1%	14	0.2%	240	4.2%
2020-21	5495	3246	59.1%	193	3.5%	721	13.1%	1079	19.6%	5	0.1%	15	0.3%	236	4.3%
2021-22	5506	3178	57.7%	194	3.5%	782	14.2%	1096	19.9%	6	0.1%	12	0.2%	238	4.3%
2022-23	5563	3130	56.3%	219	3.9%	869	15.6%	1084	19.5%	7	0.1%	11	0.2%	243	4.4%
2023-24	5589	3077	55.1%	232	4.2%	926	16.6%	1072	19.2%	8	0.1%	8	0.1%	266	4.8%
2024-25	5522	2983	54.0%	228	4.1%	950	17.2%	1072	19.4%	11	0.2%	7	0.1%	271	4.9%
2025-26	5689	2992	52.6%	254	4.5%	1044	18.3%	1099	19.3%	11	0.2%	6	0.1%	284	5.0%
2026-27	5927	3041	51.3%	277	4.7%	1146	19.3%	1142	19.3%	13	0.2%	4	0.1%	304	5.1%
2027-28	6207	3106	50.0%	303	4.9%	1261	20.3%	1193	19.2%	14	0.2%	3	0.0%	328	5.3%
2028-29	6385	3114	48.8%	325	5.1%	1360	21.3%	1223	19.2%	16	0.2%	1	0.0%	347	5.4%
2029-30	6479	3077	47.5%	343	5.3%	1444	22.3%	1238	19.1%	17	0.3%	-1	0.0%	361	5.6%

TABLE 27
Enrollment History, Disaggregated by Income and Language ²⁴

2019-20	Enr	ED	%	ML	%
Watchung Hills	1929	25	1.3%	20	1.0%
Warren	1585	7	0.4%	25	1.6%
Long Hill	889	21	2.4%	40	4.5%
Watchung	597	3	0.5%	0	0.0%
Green Brook	767	55	7.2%	12	1.6%
TOTAL	5,767	111	1.9%	97	1.7%
2020-21	Enr	ED	%	ML	%
Watchung Hills	1890	10	0.5%	17	0.9%
Warren	1512	3	0.2%	61	4.0%
Long Hill	793	37	4.7%	53	6.7%
Watchung	600	4	0.7%	0	0.0%
Green Brook	700	49	7.0%	10	1.4%
TOTAL	5,495	103	1.9%	141	2.6%
2021-22	Enr	ED	%	ML	%
Watchung Hills	1799	30	1.7%	20	1.1%
Warren	1540	25	1.6%	64	4.2%
Long Hill	830	43	5.2%	43	5.2%
Watchung	610	0	0.0%	7	1.1%
Green Brook	727	38	5.2%	8	1.1%
TOTAL	5,506	136	2.5%	142	2.6%

²⁴ District student information systems; ED = economically disadvantaged students as measured by families qualifying for free or reduced price meals, ML = students identified as multilingual learners, also identified as English language learners.

2022-23	Enr	ED	%	ML	%
Watchung Hills	1714	44	2.6%	25	1.5%
Warren	1626	50	3.1%	66	4.1%
Long Hill	832	48	5.8%	41	4.9%
Watchung	664	0	0.0%	11	1.7%
Green Brook	727	88	12.1%	14	1.9%
TOTAL	5,563	230	4.1%	157	2.8%
2023-24	Enr	ED	%	ML	%
Watchung Hills	1666	47	2.8%	47	2.8%
Warren	1669	102	6.1%	60	3.6%
Long Hill	854	57	6.7%	38	4.4%
Watchung	675	0	0.0%	22	3.3%
Green Brook	725	102	14.1%	16	2.2%
TOTAL	5,589	308	5.5%	183	3.3%
2024-25	Enr	ED	%	ML	%
Watchung Hills	1623	56	3.5%	29	1.8%
Warren	1663	148	8.9%	69	4.1%
Long Hill	861	85	9.9%	37	4.3%
Watchung	667	11	1.6%	30	4.5%
Green Brook	708	135	19.1%	19	2.7%
TOTAL	5,522	435	7.9%	184	3.3%

TABLE 28
Regional Enrollment History and Trend
Aggregated by Income and Language, 2019-20 to 2029-30

	Enr	ED	%	ML	%
2019-20	5,767	111	1.9%	97	1.7%
2020-21	5,495	103	1.9%	141	2.6%
2021-22	5,506	136	2.5%	142	2.6%
2022-23	5,563	230	4.1%	157	2.8%
2023-24	5,589	308	5.5%	183	3.3%
2024-25	5,522	435	7.9%	184	3.3%
2025-26	5,689	535	9.4%	209	3.7%
2026-27	5,927	661	11.2%	234	4.0%
2027-28	6,207	802	12.9%	262	4.2%
2028-29	6,385	938	14.7%	287	4.5%
2029-30	6,479	1,065	16.4%	309	4.8%

Future projections of disaggregated income and language data may be less necessary than that for overall enrollments, but the schools will still want to consider the trends. Increases in the number of Hispanic students/families provide an opportunity to evaluate the equity of access to resources and programs in the schools for this traditionally underserved group. Higher median household incomes combined with higher percentages of families qualifying for free and reduced meals indicate

exacerbated inequalities that increase the needs for certain kinds of at-risk programming designed to address the effects of lower income. Changes in cultural background present a moment to ensure that honoring the dignity of each student and developing an even greater sense of belonging in the schools' climate are priorities.

The data indicate that the overall enrollment in an all-purpose, grades pK-12, regional district will increase over the next five years adding approximately 957 students over 14 grade levels. Changes among disaggregated groups are opportunities to look more deeply into specific needs.

14. Facility Utilization

This section of the report models the projected use of estimated potentially available instructional space in each school building through a high-level evaluation of instructional space in the schools, and does not examine infrastructure such as roofs, heating systems, etc. The data used for this analysis came from detailed information describing capacity-generating instructional space in each school such as classroom numbers, sizes, use, as well as specialized spaces. The available classroom numbers presented are estimated and potential, and not based on current uses of each school's space. Should regionalization occur, a new district administration would need to examine availability of space and possible configuration modifications that best support student needs. Enrollment projections in this analysis are based on the demographic information projected in this domain rather than the average daily enrollments used for aid projections in the Finance and Operations domain.

Tables 29 through 38 provide grade level projections for each school building including:²⁵

- The number of general and self-contained special education classrooms needed for each grade level for each projected year. Full sized classrooms are those with at least 650 square feet of space. While there have been changes in size requirements for new classrooms, this does not apply to older buildings; therefore, the minimum used here is 650 square feet;
- The projected average class size for each grade level. While maximum class sizes may be designated by district policy, we used room capacity guidelines for the NJDOE's long range facilities plan for district practice for this study. These are 20 students in grades K-3 classrooms, 22 in grades 4-5, and 24 in grades 6-12. Guidelines for self-contained classrooms for special education range from 6 for grades K-6 students in autism classrooms to 12 for 6-12 graders in multiply disabled and resource classrooms;
- For preschool classrooms, the State maximum of 15 students was used, and all schools in this study have full day programs; and
- A summary of specialized instructional spaces labeled "Sp" for art, music, computers, physical education, etc.

²⁵ NJDOE Long Range Facility Plans

TABLE 29
Projected Room Utilization, Watchung Hills Regional HS, 2025-26 to 2029-30

	9	10	11	12	SC	Sp	Room Need	Rooms Available	Rooms Net
Students 2025-26	429	388	384	416	17				
Full Sized Rooms	19	17	16	18	2	51	123	132	9
Avg Class Size	23	23	24	24	9				
Students 2026-27	413	425	399	397	18				
Full Sized Rooms	18	19	17	17	2	51	124	132	8
Avg Class Size	23	23	24	24	9				
Students 2027-28	451	415	441	418	18				
Full Sized Rooms	19	18	19	18	2	51	127	132	5
Avg Class Size	24	24	24	24	9				
Students 2028-29	457	443	423	452	17				
Full Sized Rooms	20	19	18	19	2	51	129	132	3
Avg Class Size	23	24	24	24	9				
Students 2029-30	481	447	449	432	17				
Full Sized Rooms	20	20	20	18	2	51	131	132	1
Avg Class Size	24	23	23	24	9				

TABLE 30
Projected Room Utilization, Warren Elementary Schools, 2025-26 to 2029-30

	pK	K	1	2	3	4	5	SC	Sp	Rooms Need	Rooms Available	Rooms Net
Students 2025-26	69	160	169	157	190	192	199	13				
Full Sized Rooms	6	8	9	8	10	9	9	3	12	74	96	22
Avg Class Size	12	20	19	20	20	22	23	5				
Students 2026-27	69	174	180	180	164	199	201	13				
Full Sized Rooms	6	9	9	9	8	9	9	3	12	74	96	22
Avg Class Size	12	20	21	20	21	23	23	5				
Students 2027-28	80	165	197	193	189	173	210	13				
Full Sized Rooms	6	9	10	10	9	9	10	3	12	78	96	18
Avg Class Size	14	19	20	20	21	20	21	5				
Students 2028-29	81	159	189	213	204	200	184	13				
Full Sized Rooms	6	8	9	10	10	9	9	3	12	76	96	20
Avg Class Size	14	20	21	22	21	23	21	5				
Students 2029-30	81	158	182	203	224	215	212	14				
Full Sized Rooms	6	8	9	10	11	10	10	3	12	79	96	17
Avg Class Size	14	20	21	21	21	22	22	5				

TABLE 31
Projected Room Utilization, Warren MS, 2025-26 to 2029-30

	6	7	8	SC	Sp	Room Need	Rooms Available	Rooms Net
Students 2025-26	179	192	175	14				
Full Sized Rooms	8	8	8	3	27	54	59	5
Avg Class Size	23	24	22	5				
Students 2026-27	179	192	175	15				
Full Sized Rooms	8	8	8	3	27	54	59	5
Avg Class Size	23	24	22	6				
Students 2027-28	206	212	194	16				
Full Sized Rooms	9	9	9	3	27	57	59	2
Avg Class Size	23	24	22	6				
Students 2028-29	217	217	222	17				
Full Sized Rooms	10	10	10	3	27	60	59	-1
Avg Class Size	22	22	23	6				
Students 2029-30	190	227	227	16				
Full Sized Rooms	8	10	10	3	27	58	59	1
Avg Class Size	24	23	23	6				

TABLE 32
Projected Room Utilization, Gillette ES (Long Hill), 2025-26 to 2029-30

	pK	K	1	SC	Sp	Room Need	Rooms Available	Rooms Net
Students 2025-26	66	85	99	1				
Full Sized Rooms	4	4	5	1	1	15	16	1
Avg Class Size	13	22	20	1				
Students 2026-27	66	98	97	1				
Full Sized Rooms	3	5	5	1	1	15	16	1
Avg Class Size	22	20	19	1				
Students 2027-28	34	107	110	1				
Full Sized Rooms	3	5	6	1	1	16	16	0
Avg Class Size	11	21	18	1				
Students 2028-29	34	89	117	1				
Full Sized Rooms	3	5	6	1	1	16	16	0
Avg Class Size	11	18	20	1				
Students 2029-30	28	88	96	1				
Full Sized Rooms	2	5	5	1	1	14	16	2
Avg Class Size	14	18	19	1				

TABLE 33
 Projected Room Utilization, Millington ES (Long Hill), 2025-26 to 2029-30

	2	3	4	5	SC	Sp	Room Need	Rooms Available	Rooms Net
Students 2025-26	88	81	101	92	2				
Full Sized Rooms	5	5	5	5	1	6	27	36	9
Avg Class Size	18	17	21	19	2				
Students 2026-27	103	93	85	105	2				
Full Sized Rooms	5	5	4	5	1	6	26	36	10
Avg Class Size	21	19	22	22	2				
Students 2027-28	100	106	96	88	2				
Full Sized Rooms	5	5	5	4	1	6	26	36	10
Avg Class Size	20	21	20	22	2				
Students 2028-29	110	101	107	96	2				
Full Sized Rooms	6	5	5	5	1	6	28	36	8
Avg Class Size	18	20	22	20	2				
Students 2029-30	116	110	100	106	2				
Full Sized Rooms	6	6	5	5	1	6	29	36	7
Avg Class Size	19	18	21	22	2				

TABLE 34
 Projected Room Utilization, Central MS (Long Hill), 2025-26 to 2029-30

	6	7	8	SC	Sp	Room Need	Rooms Available	Rooms Net
Students 2025-26	87	90	94	1				
Full Sized Rooms	4	4	4	0	10	22	31	9
Avg Class Size	22	23	24					
Students 2026-27	98	90	95	1				
Full Sized Rooms	5	4	4	0	10	23	31	8
Avg Class Size	20	23	24					
Students 2027-28	110	100	94	1				
Full Sized Rooms	5	5	4	0	10	24	31	7
Avg Class Size	22	20	24					
Students 2028-29	90	109	102	1				
Full Sized Rooms	4	5	5	0	10	24	31	7
Avg Class Size	23	22	21					
Students 2029-30	97	89	110	1				
Full Sized Rooms	5	4	5	0	10	24	31	7
Avg Class Size	20	23	22					

TABLE 35
Projected Room Utilization, Bayberry ES (Watchung), 2025-26 to 2029-30

	pK	K	1	2	3	4	SC	Sp	Room Need	Rooms Available	Rooms Net
Students 2025-26	64	52	77	65	89	68	8				
Full Sized Rooms	3	3	4	4	5	3	1	4	27	35	8
Avg Class Size	22	18	20	17	18	23	8				
Students 2026-27	64	84	61	85	72	97	8				
Full Sized Rooms	3	4	3	5	4	5	1	4	29	35	6
Avg Class Size	22	21	21	18	18	20	9				
Students 2027-28	36	80	96	69	93	80	9				
Full Sized Rooms	3	4	5	4	5	4	1	4	30	35	5
Avg Class Size	12	20	20	18	19	21	9				
Students 2028-29	41	65	87	102	72	98	8				
Full Sized Rooms	2	4	5	5	4	5	1	4	30	35	5
Avg Class Size	21	17	18	21	19	20	9				
Students 2029-30	31	65	72	93	106	77	9				
Full Sized Rooms	3	4	4	5	6	4	1	4	31	35	4
Avg Class Size	11	17	18	19	18	20	9				

TABLE 36
Projected Room Utilization, Valley View MS (Watchung), 2025-26 to 2029-30

	5	6	7	8	SC	Sp	Room Need	Rooms Available	Rooms Net
Students 2025-26	73	78	70	62	1				
Full Sized Rooms	4	4	3	3	1	9	24	24	0
Avg Class Size	19	20	24	21	2				
Students 2026-27	73	77	81	73	1				
Full Sized Rooms	4	4	4	4	1	9	26	24	-2
Avg Class Size	19	20	21	19	2				
Students 2027-28	103	78	81	86	1				
Full Sized Rooms	5	4	4	4	1	9	27	24	-3
Avg Class Size	21	20	21	22	2				
Students 2028-29	82	104	78	81	1				
Full Sized Rooms	4	5	4	4	1	9	27	24	-3
Avg Class Size	21	21	20	21	2				
Students 2029-30	101	83	104	78	1				
Full Sized Rooms	5	4	5	4	1	9	28	24	-4
Avg Class Size	21	21	21	20	2				

TABLE 37
 Projected Room Utilization, Irene Feldkirchner ES (Green Brook), 2025-26 to 2029-30

	pK	K	1	2	3	4	SC	Sp	Room Need	Rooms Available	Rooms Net
Students 2025-26	46	70	69	80	84	94	4				
Full Sized Rooms	4	4	4	4	4	5	1	2	28	30	2
Avg Class Size	12	18	18	20	21	19	4				
Students 2026-27	38	73	81	75	86	90	4				
Full Sized Rooms	3	4	4	4	5	4	1	2	27	30	3
Avg Class Size	13	19	21	19	18	23	4				
Students 2027-28	42	65	88	92	86	97	4				
Full Sized Rooms	3	4	5	5	5	5	1	2	30	30	0
Avg Class Size	15	17	18	19	18	20	4				
Students 2028-29	42	68	76	96	100	93	4				
Full Sized Rooms	4	4	4	5	5	5	1	2	30	30	0
Avg Class Size	11	17	20	20	20	19	4				
Students 2029-30	42	67	79	83	104	107	4				
Full Sized Rooms	4	4	4	4	5	5	1	2	29	30	1
Avg Class Size	11	17	20	21	21	22	4				

TABLE 38
 Projected Room Utilization, Green Brook MS, 2025-26 to 2029-30

	5	6	7	8	SC	Sp	Room Need	Rooms Available	Rooms Net
Students 2025-26	64	76	77	84	3				
Full Sized Rooms	3	4	4	4	1	10	26	43	17
Avg Class Size	22	19	20	21	3				
Students 2026-27	99	70	80	82	3				
Full Sized Rooms	5	4	4	4	1	10	28	43	15
Avg Class Size	20	18	21	21	3				
Students 2027-28	100	112	79	90	3				
Full Sized Rooms	5	5	4	4	1	10	29	43	14
Avg Class Size	21	23	20	23	3				
Students 2028-29	103	109	118	85	3				
Full Sized Rooms	5	5	5	4	1	10	30	43	13
Avg Class Size	21	22	24	22	3				
Students 2029-30	99	112	114	124	4				
Full Sized Rooms	5	5	5	6	1	10	32	43	11
Avg Class Size	20	23	23	21	4				

The classroom availability data demonstrates that the schools in the Watchung Hills region have a wide variety in terms of physical capacities. By 2029-30, Valley View MS in Watchung is projected to be short by 4 classrooms. At that point, five of the region's thirteen schools will have few additional classrooms available for expanded use: Watchung Hills Regional HS (1); Warren MS (1); Gillette ES in Long Hill (2); Bayberry ES in Watchung (4); and Irene Feldkirchner ES in Green Brook (1). The opportunity to house additional or shared programming will be easier to consider in the following schools: Warren's elementary schools (17 potentially available classrooms in 4 schools); Green Brook MS (11); Millington ES in Long Hill (7); and Central MS in Long Hill (7).

However, those classroom availability numbers for 2029-30 would drop sharply if the districts want to maintain current class sizes, which ranged from 17.8 students in Warren to 19.2 in Watchung for the 2024-25 school year. For example, Warren would need to add one kindergarten and one 1st grade classroom, plus two each for grades 2-5 to maintain current class sizes, reducing its projected available space to 7 classrooms, while the addition of two classrooms each for grades 6-8 would leave Warren MS five classrooms short. Long Hill's extra capacity would drop to 5 classrooms each in Millington and Central because it would need to add additional 4th, 5th, 7th, and 8th grade classes to maintain current class sizes. Several other schools have grades that are just over current class size guidelines.

An all purpose, grades pK-12, regional school district would have greater flexibility to assign students and grade levels as needed to more effectively and efficiently use available classroom spaces. Minor grade level reassignments could make blocks of classrooms available for additional uses beyond the current assignments.

15. Demographic Impact

The study area includes four municipalities, the Townships of Warren and Green Brook and the Borough of Watchung in Somerset County and the Township of Long Hill in Morris County, each with a local school district. From 2018 to 2023, the municipal population totals remained relatively stable, although Watchung Borough experienced an overall growth of 6.5%. This masks significant changes in racial and ethnic makeup over the same time.

Based on housing permit and occupancy permit data, there appear to be no major housing developments planned that would significantly impact school enrollment in the near future except in Warren Township. The number of occupancy permits issued from 2018 to 2023 in Watchung Borough, Green Brook Township, and Long Hill Township are relatively low compared to the total housing units in each community and average 5.3 units per year per municipality, suggesting only marginal increases in housing. Occupancies from multiple residential developments in Warren Township account for 76% of all permits in the four municipality area, and the average yearly level is 51.3 units. This could impact enrollments depending on the age of the families moving in.

The enrollment history from 2019 to 2024 shows slight recovery increases following significant pandemic decreases in 2020. The historical data is used to calculate combined average survival

ratios between grades and years to project the total enrollment for a potential grades pK-12 regional school district. The total enrollment for the region of school districts has been slightly increasing over the recent four years with a decrease in the most recent fifth year. The average survival ratios across all grades indicate that the number of students transitioning from one grade level to the next is 1.02, suggesting a consistent and future increasing flow of students through the school system. On average in the future, every 100 students in one year and grade will increase to 102 students in the next year and grade.

Based on the enrollment projections for the combined school districts, the total grades pK-12 enrollment in the Watchung Hills region is expected to increase 957 students over the next five years to 6,479 students. That projection increase is for an average of 68 students per grade level. That projected increase would represent a 17% increase in enrollment over a five-year period, which will pose significant educational and fiscal challenges for school officials.

When examining the enrollment projections by elementary and secondary school levels, there are some differences. Elementary enrollment peaks in 2029-30 at 4,653 students, or growth of 754 students over 5 years from 2024-25. Table 24 and Chart 4 provide the same grade level and year enrollment projection breakdown for high school students. The secondary school enrollment is projected to peak at 1,827 students in 2029-30, the fifth year of the projection for a projection period growth of 192 students.

The racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic composition of the student population is expected to change, reflecting the demographic shifts in the communities served by the school districts. These changes present opportunities for the schools to evaluate and address the specific needs of various student groups and ensure equity in access to resources and programs.

The classroom availability data demonstrates that the schools in the Watchung Hills region have a wide variety in terms of physical capacities. By 2029-30, nine of the region's thirteen schools will have few additional classrooms available for expanded use. The opportunity to house additional or shared programming will be easier to consider in the other schools.

An all purpose regional would have greater flexibility to assign students and grade levels as needed to more effectively and efficiently use available classroom spaces. Given the projected enrollment growth over the next five years noted earlier, minor grade level reassignments could make classrooms available for additional uses beyond the current assignments.

EDUCATION and PROGRAM

This section of the feasibility study will examine the educational impact of the potential regionalization of the limited purpose Watchung Hills Regional School District with the Warren Township, Long Hill Township, Watchung Borough, and Green Brook Township Schools into one all purpose, grades pK-12, regional school district. The study will also examine and describe opportunities to better align educational programs and support services in the event that an all purpose regionalization is not possible or desirable. The document will identify means for reducing or controlling the costs of educating students in each district through the expansion of shared services and other efficiencies.

Throughout this section of the study, we will focus our attention primarily on the similarities and differences between Warren, Long Hill, Watchung, and Green Brook as they prepare their elementary students to enter ninth grade at Watchung Hills Regional HS. We will also look at potential shared services that may prove beneficial to students and their achievement.

This section of the study will examine curricular programs and philosophies, recent assessment results, the availability and impact of specialized programs, extracurricular offerings, and indicators of school climate and culture. It will also examine staffing patterns, talent acquisition and retention, and professional learning opportunities.

The following questions guide our investigation:

1. Will students in any newly proposed regional district have access to a higher quality, more equitable educational program in grades pK-12?
2. Will the creation of an enlarged regional district produce additional educational benefits or challenges for students and/or staff members when compared to the status quo?
3. Will any newly proposed regional school district provide benefits or challenges in serving students from special populations, including those with special learning needs, those whose first language is not English, those who benefit from enrichment programming, and those eligible for early childhood education?

Data in this domain were collected via state and local document review and in-person meetings. During these meetings, examiners met with district administrators, curriculum and special education directors, and ninth grade teachers in a wide range of instructional disciplines to discuss the educational preparedness of students entering from the four grades pK-8 districts.

16. Curriculum and Instruction

Since only students from districts participating in this study attend Watchung Hills Regional HS from grades 9 through 12, this study was conducted with a focus on the curricular programs offered by the elementary and middle schools in Warren, Long Hill, Watchung, and Green Brook, with a lesser emphasis on the programs offered at the high school. However, the benefits of program coordination between the elementary schools and the regional high school are important and will be included.

The NJ Student Learning Standards (NJSLS) serve as the foundation for education in the State. These standards outline the minimum knowledge and skills that students are expected to acquire at each grade level in various subject areas. The NJDOE regularly updates and revises these standards to ensure they align with current educational research and best practices.

By way of background information, school districts use the NJSLS as follows:

Adoption and Implementation

The NJDOE adopts and publishes the NJSLS, which cover the core subjects of English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, World Languages, Visual and Performing Arts, Comprehensive Health and Physical Education, and Computer Science and Design Thinking. The NJSLS also include standards in Career Readiness, Life Literacies, and Key Skills. Content and skills addressed in this latter group include Personal Financial Literacy, Career Awareness Exploration, Preparation and Training, Career and Technical Education, and Life Literacies and Key Skills. This last standard outlines key literacies and technical skills such as critical thinking, global and cultural awareness, and technology literacy that are crucial for students to develop for living and working in an interconnected global economy.

Curriculum Development

School districts, including those in this study, use the NJSLS as a guide to developing their curricula. They create instructional plans that ensure students have the opportunity to master the content and skills outlined in the standards. Districts may also design curriculum maps to show the progression of skills and knowledge from one grade level to the next.

Assessment and Accountability

The NJSLS influence the development of state assessments, which are used to measure student proficiency and growth. These assessments are designed to reflect the content and skills specified in the standards. Schools and districts are held accountable for student performance based on these assessments. Results may impact school ratings, teacher evaluations, and other aspects of the accountability system.

Monitoring and Adjustments

School districts regularly monitor student progress through various assessments and adjust instructional practices based on the data. This process ensures that students are meeting the standards and that any necessary interventions are implemented.

Professional Development

Teachers and administrators participate in professional development to understand the NJSLs and how to effectively implement them in the classroom. This training helps educators align their teaching practices with the standards.

Parent and Community Communication

Best practices suggest that schools communicate with parents and the community about the NJSLs, providing information on what students are expected to learn at each grade level. This transparency helps foster collaboration between educators, parents, and the community.

Curricular Philosophies, Content Focus, and Instructional Materials

Watchung Hills

Watchung Hills Regional HS offers semester and year-long courses based upon the NJSLs across the nine distinct content areas described above to prepare students for postsecondary success and teaching students the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in our rapidly changing world. In order to graduate, students are required to take four years of English, three years of History (World History, US History 1 and 2), three years of Math including Algebra 1 and Geometry, two years of World Language, four years of Health and Physical Education, one year of Visual and Performing Arts, one year of Career Readiness, Life Literacies, and Key Skills, or Career Technical Education, and one-half year of Financial, Economic, Business and Entrepreneurial Literacy. Advanced Placement (AP), honors (H), accelerated (A), and college prep (C) levels are offered in various content areas for required courses and electives as follows:

- English – English 1 H-A-C, English 2 H-A-C, English 3 H-A-C, English 4 H-A-C, AP English Language and Composition, AP English Literature and Composition, Creative Writing, Creating Writing 2 H, Comics and the Graphic Novel, Introduction to Philosophy, Journalism 1, Shakespeare;
- Math – Algebra 1 A-C, Geometry H-A-C, Algebra 2 H-A-C, PreCalculus with Trigonometry H-A-C, Advanced Math C, Algebra 3 C, Calculus A, Multivariable Calculus H, AP Calculus AB and BC, AP Computer Science Principles, AP Computer Science A, AP Statistics, Probability, Statistics H;
- Science & Engineering – Biology H-A-C, Chemistry H-A-C, Physics H-A-C, AP Biology, AP Chemistry, AP Environmental Science, AP Physics 1, AP Physics C - Mechanics/Electronics/Magnetism, Environmental Science, Forensic Science H-A, Astronomy, Human Biology A, Marine Biology, Modern Genetics, Organic Chemistry H;

- Social Studies – World History H-A-C, US History 1 H-A-C, US History 2 AP-A-C, AP Economics, AP European History, AP Human Geography, AP Psychology, AP US Government and Politics, African American Studies, Civics, Constitutional Law H, Economics, Holocaust and Genocide H, Human Behavior, Native American History, Social Justice, Sociology;
- World Language – Chinese (Mandarin) 1, Chinese 2 A, Chinese 3 H, Chinese 4 H, French 1, French 2 A-C, French 3 H-A-C, French 4 H-A, French 5 A, Italian 2 A, Italian 3 H, Italian 4 H, Spanish 1, Spanish 2 A-C, Spanish 3 H-A-C, Spanish 4 H-A, Spanish 5 A, AP Chinese Language and Culture, AP French Language and Culture, AP Italian Language and Culture, AP Spanish Language and Culture, Spanish Immersion and Culture 1, Spanish Immersion and Culture 2, Italian Immersion and Culture, English as Second Language;²⁶
- Visual and Performing Arts – AP Art History, AP Studio Art 2D Design, AP Studio Art 3D Design, Foundations of Graphic Arts, Intermediate Graphic Arts, Foundations of Photography, Intermediate Photography, Media Arts H, Foundations of Drawing, Intermediate Drawing, Foundations of Painting, Intermediate Painting, Fine Arts H, Foundations of Ceramics, Intermediate Ceramics, Ceramics H, Foundations of Crafts, Intermediate Crafts, Foundations of Jewelry, Intermediate Jewelry, Foundations of Sculpture, Intermediate Sculpture, 3D Design H, Chorus, Advanced Chorus H, Freshman Concert Band, Symphonic Band, Wood Ensemble, Orchestra, Music Appreciation, Music Theory, AP Music Theory, Keyboarding/Piano, Guitar, Foundations of Music Production, Intermediate Music Production, Cinema Studies, Foundations of Theatre Arts, Intermediate Theatre Arts, Theatre Production;
- Health and Physical Education – Health and Physical Education 9, 10, 11, 12; and
- Career Readiness, Life Literacies, and Key Skills – Foundations of Culinary Arts, Intermediate Culinary Arts, Culinary Arts H, Foundations of Hospitality, Hospitality Financial Management, TV/Broadcast Journalism, Foundations of Multimedia Production, Intermediate Multimedia Production, Advanced Multimedia Production, Foundations of Wood Arts, Intermediate Wood Arts, Wood Arts H, Accounting 1 A, Accounting 2 H-A, Introduction to Engineering Design A, CAD Architecture, Principles of Engineering A, Digital Electronics, Civil Engineering & Architecture A, Aerospace Engineering, Robotics A, Learning Style Inventory, Career Interest Profiler, College and Career Search, Senior Survey, Foundations of Computer Science, Intermediate Applications of Computer Science, Concepts in Business and Technology, Cybersecurity, Digital Marketing, Economics, Entrepreneurship, Introduction to Mobile App Development, Law Leadership & Ethics, Marketing H, Sports & Entertainment Management, Stock Market Investing, Personal Finance, Child Development and Intermediate Child Development

²⁶ Students who meet the criteria for the State Seal of Biliteracy offered by the NJDOE are eligible for that distinction. It is an award given in recognition of students who have studied and attained proficiency in at least one language in addition to English by high school graduation.

Warren

- An integrated preschool program includes tuition-paying general education students.
- The core resources for ELA in grades K-5 are Collaborative Classroom's Being a Reader and Being a Writer programs. There is daily reading/writing instructional time of 110-140 minutes. The district utilizes Systematic Instruction in Phonological Awareness, Phonics, and Sight Words; Sonday for intervention; and Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), iReady, and Collaborative Classroom for benchmark assessments. Students in grades 6-8 have 48 minutes per day of reading/writing instruction, using a locally developed program with mentor texts and writing pieces for each grade level. The iReady instructional path is used for intervention for these grade levels.
- Students in grades K-5 use the iReady Math program along with Instructional Path. There are 55-60 minutes of instructional time per day. Supplemental materials for intervention include iReady Path, Math Running Records, and a daily What I Need (WIN) intervention period. Grades 6-8 have 48 minutes of daily instruction using the iReady Instructional Path and Intervention, until students reach Algebra I, when they use *Algebra Structure and Method* for Algebra I and *Geometry for Enjoyment and Challenge for Geometry*. Additional resources include Delta Math, Kuta, GimKit, and other resources shared between the middle school and high school. District staff indicated the iReady Math for Algebra and Geometry are well aligned with the Watchung Hills math program.
- Students in grades K-5 use Mystery Science as a core resource and have 45-50 minutes of instruction every other day, rotating days with Social Studies. Students in grades 6 to 8 use a locally developed Next Generation Science Standards based science curriculum, with 48 minutes of daily instruction. It is anticipated that the science curriculum will be reviewed during the 2026-27 school year.
- A district-created Social Studies curriculum with curated resources is utilized for students in grades K-5, with 45-50 minutes of instruction per day, rotating with Science as noted above. Grades 6-8 also use a district created and curated curriculum, with 48 minutes of instruction per day. The district plans to review the Social Studies curriculum during the 2025-26 school year and expects revisions to units and resources.
- Students in grades K-5 have Physical Education three times every six days. Music, Art, and Library specials are done once every six days. There is Spanish instruction once per week for students in grades K-2 and three times over six days for students in grades 3-5.
- . In elementary grades, Spanish is the only offering. Grade 3-5 meet 3 days in a six day cycle for 25 minutes each meeting. Grade 2 meets once in a six day cycle for 25 minutes. K and 1 have exposure programs that occur in the spring for 8 meetings of 25 minutes each. In grades 5-8, World Languages, including Mandarin, French, and Spanish, are core subjects and classes meet every day over the course of the school year.

- There are 30 day cycles throughout the year that include innovation and design, informational literacy, public speaking, home economics, financial literacy, and instrumental or choral music.

Long Hill

- An integrated preschool program with three classes serves special and general education students, with general education students paying monthly tuition. There is also one self-contained special education class.
- The ELA curriculum has Readers and Writers Workshop as its foundation. Teachers also use Heggarty for kindergarten, Foundations for phonics development in grades K-3, and Morphology in grades K-4 for grammar. Finally, they use Framing Your Thoughts in grades K-3 to help students learn how to structure sentences.
- The district will begin using the iReady Math program in grades K-8 beginning in September 2025, which will replace Big Ideas, the program that has been used for the past four years in the elementary grades and the past six years in the middle school. The teacher tool box provides data for teachers and helps to identify students needing more support.
- Although the Science curriculum for grades K-4 is expected to change in the 2026-27 school year, the district currently uses Into Science in grades K-2 and Science Dimensions in grades 3-4. Students in grades 5-8 use Amplify Science. Middle school science also has a focus on lab work.
- In Social Studies, the district uses Holt and Newsela to supplement other materials identified with assistance from Watchung Hills teachers.
- The specials for grades K-5 include Art, Music, Physical Education (twice per week), and Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math (STEAM), which is keyboarding for grades K-2 and robotics for grades 3-5.
- Students in grades 6-8 have Physical Education every day and four cycle periods that include Art, Music, Geography and STEAM for grade 6, Art, Music, STEAM, Personal History Research Project for grade 7 and Career Explorations and Portfolio Development for grade 8. To meet world language requirements, students can choose French or Spanish as part of the daily schedule. Those needing supplemental reading and/or math skills have world language three days per week instead.

Watchung

- The district has two integrated preschool classes, with a 50 student waiting list because no additional space is available. There is also one preschool self-contained disabled class. Families pay tuition for general education preschool.

- Because of budgetary challenges, the district has not been able to purchase new textbooks or materials for the past ten years. Recently, the district has adopted new math and ELA materials, as indicated below.
- The district recently adopted materials from Houghton Mifflin for grades K-4. These ELA materials are based on the Science of Reading (SoR). Professional development with the material and SoR philosophy will be forthcoming during the 2025-26 school year. At the middle school grades, the district will continue to follow a SoR approach, but using authentic texts and novels, rather than a text series.
- After years of not adopting any new mathematics program, the district recently adopted standards-based programs Envisions Math for grades K-4 and Big Ideas Math for grades 5-8.
- The district does not use a text series in elementary Science, opting instead for FOSS kits and teacher-developed materials that align with the NJSLS. The grades K-4 curriculum includes a host of websites that teachers can use to support instruction. The grades 5-8 curriculum also lists FOSS materials and text as resources for instruction at the middle school level.
- For Social Studies, the elementary grades do not follow a text series. They do have a comprehensive social studies curriculum posted on their web site with many links and resources for teachers to use. Students in grades 5-8 use Pearson's *My World Interactive American History to 1877* textbook, according to the published curriculum.
- Elementary students have Physical Education 2-3 times per week, depending on grade level, and Library, Music, Art, and STEAM at least one period per week. World Language is taught through a cultural program, also one time per week. Each special is allocated 40 minutes of instructional time per scheduled block.
- Students in grades 5-8 have STEAM lab, Coding, Robotics, Art, Music, and Physical Education. French and Spanish are the world language options.

Green Brook

- The district provides an integrated preschool program with three classes that include students with disabilities. Green Brook provided a preschool spot to all families who applied for one in 2025. Should it become necessary, preschool expansion is possible with reconfiguration due to many open rooms at the middle school.
- The University of Florida Literacy Institute phonics program is used for grades K-2. All other ELA materials are teacher created.
- Students in grades K-4 use the Illustrative Math program. Other grades use teacher created materials.

- Students in Grades K-4 utilize teacher created materials for Science and Social Studies lessons.
- Students in grades K-4 have six related arts periods per week including one period of Art, one period of Innovation and Design (Computer Science, Design Thinking, Engineering, and Technology), one period of Music, one period of World Language, and two periods of Physical Education.
- Students in grades 5-8 have Global Studies/Ethics, Art, Technology, and Music once per week; Physical Education three times per week; and Spanish daily.

Potential Enrichment of Educational Programs

Whenever a school district configuration exists where students from separate districts find themselves coming together for the first time in a common school, challenges associated with curricular inconsistencies exist, as do opportunities associated with additional curriculum alignment. This is no different with the relationship between Warren, Long Hill, Watchung, and Green Brook, as they prepare to send their students to Watchung Hills.

High school teachers report that different levels of student preparedness exist among the sending districts, though those have become less acute over the years. Nonetheless, challenges remain as captured below.

ELA

The ELA programs for students from the four pK-8 districts have noticeable variation.

- Warren students learn to read and write using the Being a Reader and Being a Writer programs. The Being a Reader program includes instruction for each of the components that the SoR approach identifies as necessary for skilled reading to develop. In middle school, students use a locally developed program with mentor texts and writing pieces for each grade level.
- Long Hill uses a Readers and Writers Workshop approach to teaching literacy, while using Heggerty (kindergarten) and Foundations for phonics development in grades K-3. During the middle years, ELA instruction focuses on the development of reading comprehension, open-ended essay writing, vocabulary skills, test-taking strategies, grammar, the writing process, and research skills, as well as critical thinking and analysis. These skills are developed through the use of an integrated literature-based reading program.
- Watchung students learn to read using a Houghton Mifflin-based program tied to SoR. During the middle level years, students continue to learn using SoR strategies, but do so using authentic novels and texts, rather than a text series.

- For ELA, Green Brook has district and research-based programs and resources as well as the expertise of department staff. University of Florida Literacy Instituted Foundations is utilized for Tier 1 foundational reading instruction in grades K-2 along with supplemental resources including aligned decodable texts. These resources are also utilized for Tier 2 instruction for students in grades 3 and above based on individual need. As of September 2025, the district is piloting additional ELA programs including Great Minds Arts & Letters, The Center for Collaborative Classroom’s Being a Reader and Being a Writer, and 95% Group Core for Grades 3-5. Grades 6-8 are universally piloting Common Lit 360 Pro Plus. Upon completion of the pilot process, the district has budgeted for adoption of identified core resources and requisite curriculum revision projects.

The use of different programs across the four districts to teach and assess literacy development lead to disparate experiences and can result in different levels of preparation and outcomes for students as they progress through the grade levels and into high school. Using common programs, supplements, and universal screeners and assessment tools can certainly benefit students and teachers as these students head to high school with similar experiences and with assessment data that can be compared validly.

The amount of time students study ELA varies by district, and often by school and grade level within the district, as demonstrated below.

- Warren students in grades K-5 receive 110-140 minutes of daily instruction, while those in grades 6-8 receive 48 minutes.
- Long Hill students in grades K-3 receive 120 minutes of daily instruction, grade 4 receives 110 minutes, grade 5 receives 86 minutes and grades 6-8 receive 48 minutes.
- Watchung students in grades K-4 receive 120 minutes of daily instruction, while those in grade 5 receive 100 minutes, and grades 6-8 receive 50 minutes.
- Green Brook students in grades K-4 receive 130 minutes of daily instruction, which includes 30 minutes for foundational literacy building (i.e., phonics and word study). Students in grade 5 have 52 minutes of daily instruction, and an additional 2 periods per week, for a total of 364 minutes weekly. In grade 6, students receive 260 minutes of instruction per week. Some middle school students also receive additional reading intervention in lieu of World Language instruction, which may be applicable as part of a student's intervention plan.

Two of the differences in the area of preparation noted by high school teachers include:

- Teachers report significant differences between students from elementary districts in reading endurance and the students’ abilities to manage complex texts. Teachers claim students’ abilities to work independently outside of class vary greatly and require trial and error to determine what students can and cannot do.

- Teachers also report that students are reading markedly different materials during ELA instruction depending on their elementary districts. There was a time when 9th grade teachers could count on a foundation in certain topics (e.g., mythology), but that common foundation is no longer present. All teachers indicated it would be a huge benefit to get every middle school class on the same page in this regard.

Math

The Math curricula used across the districts in this region share some overlap, but are still inconsistent from school to school.

- Students from Warren and Long Hill use iReady math in grades K-8, with the exception of Algebra I and Geometry.
- Students from Watchung use Envisions Math in grades K-4, and Big Ideas Math in grades 5-8.
- Students from Green Brook utilize Illustrative Mathematics as a core resource in grades K-4. As of September 2025, Grade 5 is piloting Great Mind's Eureka Math Squared. For grades 6 to 8, Green Brook has district-developed curriculum that reflects the full expectations of New Jersey Learning Standards and is built upon a range of curated high-quality programs and resources as well as the expertise of department staff. Tier 3 Math intervention resources include Bridges Intervention and Delta Math OAISD. NWEA MAP Growth Math is the district's adaptive, standards-aligned benchmark assessment which is administered three times per school year to all grades 1-8 students. Green Brook offers supplemental resources for students and staff including Zearn, Math Fact Lap, Reflex Math, IXL Math, Math Milestones, & SERP's Math by Example.

Each program addresses instruction differently, often leading to different depths of understanding of mathematical content, which can lead to students having very different foundations for upper level classes. The amount of time students study Math also varies by district, and often school and grade level within the district, as demonstrated below.

- Warren students in grades K-5 receive 110-140 minutes of daily instruction, while students in grades 6-8 receive 48 minutes per day.
- Long Hill students in grades K-4 receive 60 minutes of daily instruction, while those in grade 5 receive 43 minutes and grades 6-8 receive 48 minutes.
- Watchung students in grades K-5 receive 80 minutes of daily instruction, while students in grades 6-8 receive 50 minutes.
- Green Brook students in grades K-4 receive 425 minutes of weekly instruction (average of 85 minutes daily). In grade 5, students receive 52 minutes of daily instruction, plus an additional two shortened periods of Math Lab per week, for a total of 302 minutes per week

(average of 73 minutes daily). Students in grade 6 receive 260 minutes of weekly instruction (average of 52 minutes daily).

Similarly to the case with ELA, Math curricular materials utilized by the four districts are quite varied, and that, combined with the variable amount of instructional time, means students have very different experiences in Math.

The existence of these differences are supported by high school teachers, who report significantly varied levels of preparation. There are seven different entry points in high school Math, which often lead to homogeneous groupings of students, hence reducing the differences teachers see day-to-day. The Math teachers in attendance agreed that greater curriculum coordination at the lower grade levels would lead to greater consistency and may reduce the number of entry points in high school.

Science and Social Studies

Science and Social Studies materials are even more diverse than Math and ELA programs. Science is addressed, as follows:

- Warren uses Mystery Science in grades K-5, 45-50 minutes rotating with Social Studies. At the middle school level, teachers use locally developed curriculum and lessons aligned with the NGSS, and classes meet 48 minutes per day.
- In Long Hill, elementary students learn science using HMH Into Science, followed by HMH Science Dimensions and Amplify during the upper elementary and middle school years. At the elementary level, science instruction occurs for 60 minutes every other day, rotating with Social Studies. Middle level classes meet for 48 minutes daily.
- Watchung students use FOSS kits and teacher-developed materials throughout their science experience, while Green Brook students learn science using teacher-generated materials.
- For Science, Green Brook has a district-developed curriculum that reflects the full expectations of NJSLs and is built upon high-quality programs and resources as well as the expertise of department staff. During the 2024-25 school year, selected grades K-5 classrooms piloted the Mystery Science Program with Mystery Pack Materials Kits. As of September 2025, all grades K-5 staff have access to the Mystery Science Program and Mystery Pack Materials Kits in a wider pilot. Grades 6-8 Science utilizes a range of resources including CK12 Science, Open Sci Ed, Stanford's NGSS Curriculum, and Gizmos. Grades K-4 alternate five periods of Science with five periods of Social Studies throughout the school year, for a total of 45 minutes per day. In Grade 5, students have five periods a week of Science for 52 minutes per day. In Grades 6-8, students have 5 days a week of Social Studies for 52 minutes per day.

Social Studies instruction is addressed as follows:

- Warren students in grades K-8 learn Social Studies using district-created materials. At the elementary level, students take Social Studies for 45-50 minutes, rotating with Science, and middle level classes meet for 48 minutes daily.
- Long Hill teachers use Holt Social Studies materials in grades K-8 combined with Newsela as a supplement. At the elementary level, Social Studies instruction occurs for 60 minutes every other day, rotating with Science. Middle level classes meet for 48 minutes daily.
- Watchung students do not use a textbook in grades K-4, but do use Pearson's My World Interactive American History in the middle grades.
- For Social Studies, Green Brook has district-developed curriculum that reflects the full expectations of NJSLs. The Social Studies curriculum is built upon high-quality programs and resources as well as the expertise of department staff. Grades K-4 alternate five periods of Social Studies with five periods of Science throughout the school year, for a total of 45 minutes per day. In Grade 5, students have three periods a week of Social Studies for 52 minutes per day. In Grades 6-8, students have 5 days a week of Social Studies for 52 minutes per day.

While most in the education field acknowledge that Social Studies and Science instruction often get overshadowed by Math and ELA, particularly at the elementary level, it is important to note that NJSLs exist in both disciplines and students are assessed in Science several times during their academic careers. Exposure to topics within these fields also builds the types of interest and curiosity that can lead to further study in high school and possibly post-secondary majors and career choices. The wide variety of instructional methods used to address these content areas most certainly leads to inconsistent levels of preparation for high school course content depending on the elementary district attended by the student.

Science teachers at the high school report that students enter high school with different experiences with hands-on experiments. They also note that students' organizational abilities required for science experiments and report writing are inconsistent. Science teachers indicate they have little idea what students are learning in middle school, and as a result, have to spend a good part of the 9th grade year assessing student skills before they can move into instruction and hands-on lab experiments.

The high school Social Studies teachers report that eighth grade U.S. History courses differ significantly from sending school to sending school. One teacher reported, "It takes until at least Halloween to get all students on the same page."

Other Content Areas

Similar to the variability in core subject instructional time, the four districts vary in the time spent on other content areas and how they are taught.

- Health and Physical Education (Elementary) – Warren students in grades K-5 have instruction three days per six day cycle. Watchung students have it two to three times per week, depending on grade level, while Long Hill and Green Brook students have it two times per week.
- Music and Art (Elementary) – Warren, Long Hill, Watchung, and Green Brook provide instruction one time per week per subject.
- Library (Elementary) – Warren and Watchung provide instruction one time per week. Long Hill provides an elementary library class, which meets once per week.
- Technology (Elementary) – Watchung students have STEAM class at least one period per week. Long Hill students have STEAM once per week, consisting of keyboarding for grades K-2 and robotics for grades 3-5. Green Brook offers Innovation and Design to all grades K-4 students one period week for a full-year. Preschool students have Innovation and Design once every three weeks, which integrates computer science, design thinking, engineering, and technology standards. Warren offers Innovation and Design for grades K-8.
- World Language (Elementary and Middle) – In elementary grades, Warren provides Spanish language instruction to grades 3-5 three times in a six day cycle and once in a six day cycle for grade 2. Kindergarten and grade 1 have Spanish exposure programs that occur in the spring for 8 meetings of 25 minutes each. World Languages (Mandarin, French, Spanish) are core subjects at Warren MS. Students enrolled in the courses meet every day over the course of the school year. Long Hill students meet World Language requirements by choosing French or Spanish as part of the daily schedule. Those needing supplemental reading and/or math skills have World Language three days per week instead. In Watchung, World Language instruction is taught once per week. At the middle school level, French and Spanish are the options. Green Brook students have Spanish instruction once per week in elementary school and daily at the middle school level.
- Other (Middle) – In Warren, there are 30-day cycles throughout the year that include innovation and design, informational literacy, public speaking, home economics, financial literacy, and instrumental or choral music. Long Hill students in grades 6-8 have physical education every day and four cycle periods that include art, music, geography and STEAM for grade 6; and art, music, STEAM, and Personal History Research Project for grade 7 and Career Explorations and Portfolio Development for grade 8. Watchung students have art, music and physical education as part of the middle school schedule. Students in grades 5-8 also have access to STEAM lab, coding, and robotics. Green Brook students in grades 5-8 have global studies/ethics, art, technology and music once per week and physical education three times per week.

The analysis demonstrates that students entering Watchung Hills from Warren, Long Hill, Watchung, and Green Brook have significantly different educational experiences. Having all students entering high school with shared experiences in terms of educational programs, philosophy, and time spent studying each of those content areas can offer several benefits to both students and teachers. By aligning programs, assessment tools, and time allotted to teaching each subject area:

- Teachers of high school grades should see greater consistency in student skills, which translates into lessons that meet the needs of more students.
- 9th grade staff members will have a much greater awareness of the skills students have likely mastered and those skills in which they will likely have to further develop
- Teachers of the lower grades can more easily share with the teachers of the upper grades the data and information they need to help them plan and adjust their instruction.
- The alignment of assessment tools allows elementary and secondary teachers to speak a common language when they have access to consistent data about student strengths and areas where additional support may be needed.

Consistency in the time allotted to instruction can produce more coherent results among students and better prepare them for success in high school. Overall, shared educational programs in grades K-8 can contribute to more cohesive approaches benefiting both students and educators alike.

Potential Improvements in Curriculum Coordination

Currently, Watchung Hills and the elementary districts share instructional resources with each other on a very limited basis. As such, and as demonstrated above, minimal curriculum coordination exists, resulting in significantly different experiences for students prior to entering high school.

Overall, one central regional curriculum office serving students in grades pK-12 can play a vital role in providing effective direction, support, and coordination for curriculum and instructional practices within the schools that comprise the region, potentially leading to improved student achievement and success. A coordinated curriculum in grades pK-8 would result in students reaching 9th grade with better-aligned sets of common experiences, allowing high school teachers to spend less time establishing a baseline of common understandings and expectations with students.

A centralized curriculum office can increase the efficiency with which it uses resources by eliminating duplicative efforts and services across the multiple districts. This can serve as a win for all of the districts both financially and academically. The types of efficiencies discussed here could ultimately help in expanding instructional support systems, such as interventionists and teachers of students with special needs, throughout the expanded district or within the currently existing districts.

Class Sizes

The State has identified suggested maximum class sizes as 20 for grades K-5, 22 for grades 6-8, and 24 for grades 9-12. The data in Table 39 show that all districts in the study are below or at least close to those suggested maximums at each grade level. Overall average class sizes are very favorable, which may provide more opportunities for personalized instruction. Regionalization of the districts may allow for decisions on more efficient placement or sharing of teaching staff.

TABLE 39
Average Class Sizes, 2024-25 ²⁷

	Warren	Long Hill	Watchung	Green Brook	Watchung Hills
Kindergarten	17	18	18	15	
Grade 1	19	18	16	25	
Grade 2	17	19	22	20	
Grade 3	16	19	13	23	
Grade 4	17	19	18	20	
Grade 5	20	19	20	18	
ELA 6	19	19	24	18	
ELA 7	17	19	21	16	
ELA 8	18	19	21	17	
ELA 9					18
Overall Average	17.8	18.8	19.2	19.1	18.0

Length of School Day and Instructional Time

The differences in overall instructional time that currently exist provide an opportunity to consider changes that would provide more similar amounts of time to every student. For example, Table 40 shows the difference in daily instructional time between Bayberry ES in Watchung and Gillette ES and Millington ES in Long Hill is 45 minutes per day or 135 hours over the course of a 180-day school year. Differences like this could have a profound effect on what students know and are able to do at each grade level. The alignment of the teacher day, student day, and instructional day across the districts, or in an all purpose regional, would provide all students with comparable preparation for success in high school.

²⁷ Grades K-5 class sizes are based on homerooms, and grades 6-9 are based on English language arts class sizes.

TABLE 40
Length of School Day and Instructional Time

District	School	Length of School Day	Instructional Time
Watchung Hills	Watchung Hills Reg High	6h 45m	5h 38m
Warren	Central Elementary	6h 40m	5h 50m
Warren	Mt. Horeb Elementary	6h 40m	5h 50m
Warren	Tomaso Elementary	6h 40m	5h 50m
Warren	Woodland Elementary	6h 40m	5h 50m
Warren	Warren Middle	6h 40m	5h 55m
Long Hill	Gillette Elementary	6h 10m	5h 15m
Long Hill	Millington Elementary	6h 10m	5h 15m
Long Hill	Central Middle	6h 30m	5h 55m
Watchung	Bayberry Elementary	6h 40m	6h 0m
Watchung	Valley View Middle	6h 40m	5h 46m
Green Brook	Feldkirchner Elementary	6h 45m	5h 55m
Green Brook	Green Brook Middle	6h 45m	5h 55m

Technology Access and Resources

All of the districts have made significant investments in technology and incorporate it into the delivery of instruction. Teachers utilize various programs to supplement instruction and monitor student progress, as well as for planning and collaboration.

Watchung Hills

High school students have had access to one-to-one devices since before the COVID-19 pandemic. Chromebooks are provided to every incoming 9th grader during the summer before they begin high school, while all new students are provided a Chromebook as part of the registration process. All faculty and staff have their own laptops. Teachers and students use Google Classroom on a regular basis.

Special course offerings include robotics, cybersecurity, an apps course, three levels of computer science (including both AP courses), a new design lab, podcasting, and an annual Hackathon.

The Project Lead the Way classrooms, the artistic labs, and the Learning Commons (i.e., media center) also have desktop computers for running designated course software. Additionally, with the opening of the Design Lab and the approval of two foundational courses, Watchung Hills plans to upgrade design thinking opportunities in the coming year.

Warren

Chromebooks for students in grades 1 and 2 are deployed on a 2:1 student to device ratio. As students enter grade 3, and through grade 8, that ratio becomes 1:1. According to the curriculum guides, the district offers a grades K-5 combined Library Science/STEM program in which students receive one quarter of Computer Science and one quarter of Innovation and Design. A course called Computer Tech is offered in grades K-5, Programming with Scratch in grade 6, Computer Science Excel in grade 7 that also includes financial literacy components, and Programming with Minecraft and Photoshop in grade 8.

Long Hill

The device ratio in Long Hill is currently 1:1 with Chromebooks for students in grades 2-8 with plans to achieve a 1:1 device ratio for all students beginning with the 2026-27 school year. The younger students in grades K-1 will be issued iPads.

Watchung

The student-to-device ratio is 1:1 in grades K-8, with students in grades K-1 issued iPads while students in grades 2-8 issued Chromebooks. The district employs a wide range of software access and subscriptions for student use. The district offers a robust STEAM program for students in grades K-8, including coding and robotics clubs.

Green Brook

Students in grades 1-8 have access to iPads at a 1:1 ratio. The teachers prefer iPads, which drove the original decision-making. The district is investigating the purchase and distribution of Chromebooks for the middle school for the 2025-26 school year. Technology-focused courses offered at the middle school are Arcade Game Design, Video Game Design, and Computer Animation. During the 2025-26 school year, a consolidated tech course called the Discovery Den will be offered at the elementary level once a week in a dedicated space.

Professional Development

Watchung Hills

Watchung Hills has several goals in its 2024-25 professional development plan:

- Understand the impact of AI and use it to enhance student learning and teacher effectiveness leading to high impact instructional practices for all faculty, and integrating technology to

maximize students participation and encourage student engagement, communication and critical thinking.

- Improve student engagement in learning through faculty professional development that results in the student learner’s experience being enriched, innovative, and personalized.
- Increase faculty knowledge and confidence regarding methods and services to promote social, emotional and mental health for themselves and their students. Addressing teacher wellness will include “Do What Matters Most” training and coaching.

The district will also provide all state-mandated periodic or annual trainings for staff, and administrators will participate in state-mandated training on legal issues impacting schools and students.

Warren

Warren’s 2024-25 professional development plan is focused on three main goals to improve student performance:

- Foster a supportive instructional culture, developing social emotional competencies to maximize growth, health, and social emotional wellness of students.
- Increase educators’ cultural proficiency to address the needs of growing diversity in the school community, incorporating culturally responsive teaching strategies.
- Increase student sense of belonging, building bridges to create a community where all are valued.

As part of the plan, student performance data will be analyzed and coaching practices will be implemented. In addition to highly skilled staff and administrators, collaborative classroom consultants will be engaged for professional development activities and coaching. The district will also provide all state-mandated periodic or annual trainings for all staff.

Long Hill

With a focus on raising student achievement, professional development goals for the 2024-25 school year include:

- Build capacity for engaging students in inquiry-based strategies, personalized learning, and critical and creative problem solving.
- Provide teachers with collaborative learning opportunities to enhance practice and the use of data-driven instructional decisions.
- Promote the social and emotional wellness of students and staff, multi-tiered systems of support, and strengthen the inclusive school community, improve student attendance, and increase parent engagement.

Professional learning will be provided on open staff days and throughout the school year in professional learning communities and grade level meetings. The district will use iReady for data-driven decision-making and will provide training on communication and parent engagement strategies. The district will also provide all of the state-mandated annual and periodic training required for staff.

Watchung

The district has a three-year plan to cultivate dynamic learning environments that foster critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and academic success, focusing on three main elements:

- Use problem-based learning tasks that are aligned with state standards and curriculum;
- Engage professional learning communities to use data to improve student achievement; and
- Advance collaborative planning to meet the range of needs of all students.

Green Brook

Several goals focused on multiple core content areas are in the 2024-25 professional development plan:

- Strengthen standards-aligned assessment practices with prioritization of the most important learning outcomes;
- Develop deeper understanding of differentiated, standards-based mathematics instruction, creating engaging and challenging learning experiences for all students;
- Increase knowledge of and alignment with 3-dimensional standards-based science instruction to promote critical thinking, problem solving, and inquiry skills through a comprehensive and interconnected view of science;
- Develop understanding of and implement evidence-based literacy assessment and best practices in literacy instruction with tiered systems of support;
- Understand and implement an evidence-based foundational skills literacy curriculum; and
- Increase responsive classroom strategies to create a positive and supportive classroom environment that fosters students' social, emotional, and academic growth.

This work will be accomplished through ongoing development sessions, team meetings, collaborative planning and the review of data and curricular resources. The district will also provide all of the state-mandated annual and periodic training required for staff.

17. Performance Measures ²⁸

State Assessment Scores (aggregated)

Standardized assessments provide a common metric for assessing the academic performance of students across different schools or districts. This subsection will look at several examples of NJ Student Learning Assessments (NJSLA) results across the districts. The NJSLA allow for a standardized evaluation of how well students are mastering key concepts and skills, as outlined in the NJSLS, in subjects like Math, Reading, Science, and College Readiness. The tables here indicate the percentage of students meeting or exceeding expectations in each area. Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on schools throughout the state, statewide assessments were suspended during the springs of 2020 and 2021, hence no data is available for those years.

Year-over-year comparisons of high school assessment data have been complicated by recent state-level changes. Since 2018, the state assessment system has undergone several revisions. The NJSLA replaced PARCC in 2018-19, which was followed by pandemic-related waivers for the classes of 2020-2023, allowing alternative pathways to demonstrate proficiency. In 2022-23, the NJ Graduation Proficiency Assessment (NJGPA) was introduced for 11th grade students, becoming the primary graduation assessment for the Class of 2025. This transition reflects the state's ongoing adaptation to pandemic-related disruptions and efforts to ensure alignment with NJSLS and postsecondary readiness.

TABLE 41
Percentage of Students Meeting or Exceeding NJSLA ELA Expectations, Watchung Hills
2019, 2022, 2023

	District 2019	State 2019	District 2022	State 2022	District 2023	State 2023
Grade 9	72%	56%	65%	49%	70%	52%
Grade 10	72%	58%				
Grade 11						
NJGPA ELA					90%	80%

²⁸ NJDOE School Performance Reports, unless otherwise noted

TABLE 42
 Percentage of Students Meeting or Exceeding NJSLA Math Expectations, Watchung Hills
 2019, 2022, 2023²⁹

	District 2019	State 2019	District 2022	State 2022	District 2023	State 2023
Algebra I	39%	42%	32%	35%	38%	35%
Geometry	40%	35%	59%	50%	58%	55%
Algebra II	48%	58%	91%	68%	97%	66%
NJGPA Math					73%	55%

Watchung Hills students consistently exceeded state averages in ELA across all tested grade levels and years. In Math, they outperformed the state in Geometry for all three years and in Algebra II for two of the three years. While Algebra I scores were below state averages for two years, this may be attributed to many advanced students taking Algebra I in middle school, resulting in a high school cohort primarily composed of students who find Math more challenging.

TABLE 43
 Percentage of Students Meeting or Exceeding NJSLA ELA Expectations, Elementary Districts³⁰
 2019, 2022, 2023

Grade	2019					2022					2023				
	WT	LH	WB	GB	SA	WT	LH	WB	GB	SA	WT	LH	WB	GB	SA
3	80%	69%	80%	77%	50%	61%	78%	51%	52%	42%	61%	55%	45%	48%	42%
4	76%	71%	70%	67%	57%	67%	75%	66%	57%	49%	72%	72%	73%	65%	51%
5	83%	74%	78%	71%	58%	75%	60%	78%	40%	50%	72%	70%	69%	46%	53%
6	72%	70%	84%	67%	56%	60%	64%	81%	53%	48%	63%	61%	66%	39%	49%
7	84%	78%	89%	81%	63%	65%	70%	79%	80%	53%	70%	74%	86%	84%	56%
8	82%	99%	97%	76%	63%	66%	67%	74%	63%	51%	60%	87%	78%	74%	55%

²⁹ End-of-course assessments in Math are offered to students enrolled in those courses regardless of grade levels.

³⁰ Warren (WT), Long Hill (LH), Watchung (WB), Green Brook (GB), State Average (SA), n/a = students did not enroll in course that year

TABLE 44
 Percentage of Students Meeting or Exceeding NJSLA Math Expectations, Elementary Districts
 2019, 2022, 2023

Grade	2019					2022					2023				
	WT	LH	WB	GB	SA	WT	LH	WB	GB	SA	WT	LH	WB	GB	SA
3	81%	81%	85%	80%	55%	67%	73%	71%	58%	45%	68%	66%	65%	49%	46%
4	72%	64%	72%	71%	51%	63%	63%	57%	51%	39%	68%	70%	62%	56%	44%
5	70%	67%	63%	68%	47%	63%	37%	65%	40%	36%	61%	60%	64%	42%	40%
6	64%	55%	57%	56%	41%	56%	44%	49%	47%	31%	64%	32%	57%	45%	34%
7	70%	56%	61%	61%	42%	63%	52%	51%	51%	34%	65%	61%	56%	55%	34%
8	29%	77%	31%	44%	29%	26%	42%	31%	34%	15%	59%	44%	32%	53%	18%
Alg I (8)	92%	100%	93%	97%	42%	89%	97%	89%	100%	35%	100%	96%	96%	100%	35%
Geom (8)	100%	n/a	n/a	100%	35%	100%	n/a	n/a	n/a	50%	100%	n/a	n/a	100%	55%

The region’s elementary districts delivered a generally positive picture of student achievement when compared to the state average. In both ELA and Math, these districts frequently demonstrate performance that not only meets but often exceeds state averages.

Looking at the data over time reveals a trend. Warren, Long Hill, and Watchung students consistently outperform the state ELA average. Green Brook also tends to perform well, though there are instances where their scores dip closer to or slightly below the state average. This suggests a strong foundation in literacy within the region, with some variability in specific grades or districts.

Math tells a similar story. Across the grades, the districts generally maintain a performance level above the state average. This is particularly notable in subjects like Algebra I and Geometry, where all districts show high percentages of students meeting or exceeding expectations, partially due to the fact that their strongest math students are enrolled in these subjects in middle school. While there are fluctuations from year to year and between districts, the overall trend indicates a solid grasp of mathematical concepts within these schools.

However, it is important to acknowledge that the data also reveals some variability. Certain districts may excel in a particular subject or grade level while showing less consistent results in others. Additionally, the state average itself serves as a baseline, and while exceeding it is commendable, it is crucial to continue striving for improvement and addressing any disparities that may exist within the region. In conclusion, the region’s elementary districts generally demonstrate strong student performance in both ELA and Math, frequently surpassing the state average. While there are areas of variability, the overall picture is one of achievement and a commitment to academic success.

State Assessment Scores (disaggregated)

Achievement gaps in standardized test scores refer to persistent disparities in academic performance between different groups of students. The gaps between racial/ethnic majority and minority students, or between wealthier students and their less economically advantaged peers, are evident in both pre- and post-pandemic scores. These persistent gaps are also observed along the lines of gender and ability.

Addressing achievement gaps requires that schools provide targeted support and resources to underserved students and communities, encourage a focus on culturally responsive teaching practices, and implement policies that foster inclusive and equitable learning environments for all students. Beginning in the younger grades, a more consistent program in ELA, Math, and Science would yield more common student experiences and could result in more productive professional learning communities, where teachers examine assessment data and the corresponding instructional strategies that foster those results.

TABLE 45
Percentage of Students Meeting or Exceeding NJSLA ELA Expectations
Disaggregated by Race, Ethnicity, Gender, Ability, Income and Language
Watchung Hills 2019, 2022, 2023³¹

	2019		2022		2023	
	WH	State	WH	State	WH	State
White	70%	67%	63%	58%	65%	61%
Asian	91%	83%	88%	78%	94%	80%
Black	41%	39%	54%	31%	66%	34%
Hispanic	53%	44%	46%	35%	61%	37%
Multiracial	78%	64%	78%	55%	77%	58%
Female	77%	65%	74%	55%	77%	57%
Male	67%	51%	57%	43%	64%	46%
Students with Disabilities	27%	23%	19%	18%	24%	19%
Economically Disadvantaged	23%	40%	40%	31%	*	33%
Multilingual Learners	10%	29%	*	22%	*	24%

³¹ WH = Watchung Hills. An asterisk (*) indicates that due to accountability calculations, data was not made public for groups of less than 20 students.

In ELA, the data reveals some clear trends and disparities across student groups. Asian students consistently lead in ELA performance across all years examined. In fact, their performance improved, reaching 94% in 2023. White students, while maintaining relatively high scores, experienced a dip from 70% in 2019 to 63% in 2022, before showing a small recovery to 65% in 2023. In contrast, Black and Hispanic students have historically shown lower performance in ELA. However, it is important to note the significant progress made by these groups, particularly Black students, who demonstrated a notable increase in their scores from 2019 to 2023. Multiracial students have shown more consistent performance across the years.

Gender also plays a role in ELA performance. Female students consistently outperform their male peers across all years. Both groups experienced a decrease in performance in 2022, but rebounded in 2023. When considering students with disabilities, the data indicates the lowest performance in ELA, with minimal improvement observed over the years. Economically disadvantaged students demonstrated substantial improvement from 2019 to 2022. However, data for this group in 2023 is not available. Similarly, multilingual learners show the lowest performance in ELA, and data for 2022 and 2023 are also not revealed.

TABLE 46
Percentage of Students Meeting or Exceeding NJSLA Math Expectations
Disaggregated by Race, Ethnicity, Gender, Ability, Income and Language
Watchung Hills 2019, 2022, 2023

	2019		2022		2023	
	WH	State	WH	State	WH	State
White	38%	54%	46%	46%	46%	49%
Asian	70%	76%	77%	71%	72%	73%
Black	*	23%	18%	16%	40%	18%
Hispanic	25%	29%	23%	20%	39%	22%
Multiracial	48%	53%	65%	44%	46%	46%
Female	38%	45%	47%	34%	48%	36%
Male	46%	44%	47%	37%	51%	40%
Students with Disabilities	*	17%	20%	15%	11%	16%
Economically Disadvantaged	20%	26%	54%	17%	36%	20%
Multilingual Learners	14%	25%	*	16%	*	18%

The Math data presents a similar landscape of disparities and progress. Once again, Asian students lead in performance, although their 2023 scores show a slight decrease compared to 2022 but remain above 2019 pre-pandemic levels. White students experienced a slight improvement from 2019 to 2022, and their performance remained stable in 2023. Black and Hispanic students, while starting from a lower base, have shown gains in Math performance over the years. Multiracial students improved from 2019 to 2022 but experienced a decrease in 2023.

In terms of gender, male students slightly outperformed female students in 2019 and 2023, while the reverse was true in 2022. Students with disabilities continue to show the lowest performance in Math, with a concerning decline in 2023. Economically disadvantaged students made significant strides from 2019 to 2022, but their performance decreased in 2023. Finally, multilingual learners demonstrated low performance in Math with data gaps in 2022 and 2023.

TABLE 47
Percentage of Students Meeting or Exceeding NJSLA ELA Expectations
Disaggregated by Race, Ethnicity, Gender, Ability, Income, and Language
Elementary Districts 2019, 2022, 2023

	2019					2022					2023				
	WT	LH	WB	GB	SA	WT	LH	WB	GB	SA	WT	LH	WB	GB	SA
White	78%	78%	86%	69%	67%	63%	73%	73%	54%	58%	64%	73%	68%	57%	61%
Asian	95%	*	88%	90%	83%	83%	79%	85%	76%	78%	82%	83%	83%	73%	80%
Black	56%	*	59%	*	38%	50%	*	46%	41%	31%	46%	*	61%	70%	34%
Hispanic	*	62%	74%	55%	44%	45%	43%	56%	44%	35%	52%	49%	47%	46%	37%
Multiracial	78%	*	*	*	64%	63%	80%	70%	74%	55%	76%	82%	84%	74%	58%
Female	86%	82%	84%	77%	65%	72%	73%	74%	68%	55%	71%	76%	71%	67%	57%
Male	74%	70%	82%	70%	51%	59%	64%	68%	48%	43%	63%	64%	67%	53%	46%
Students with Disabilities	38%	38%	59%	34%	23%	31%	31%	26%	18%	18%	34%	38%	20%	<10%	19%
Economically Disadvantaged	*	N	*	39%	40%	30%	18%	*	34%	31%	30%	27%	*	43%	33%
Multilingual Learners	65%	*	70%	*	29%	44%	33%	*	44%	22%	49%	28%	31%	38%	24%

In the realm of elementary ELA, the data paints a picture of both progress and persistent disparities across student subgroups. Asian students consistently demonstrate the strongest performance, a trend observed across 2019, 2022, and 2023. White students, while generally maintaining relatively high scores, experienced a slight downturn from 2019 to 2022, followed by a modest recovery in 2023. Conversely, Black and Hispanic students have traditionally faced challenges in ELA. However, it is important to highlight the notable progress made, particularly by Black students, who

generally demonstrated gains over the years. The same does not hold true for Hispanic students. Multiracial students have shown a more stable pattern in their ELA performance.

Gender also appears to be a factor in ELA outcomes. Female students consistently outperform their male counterparts across the years. Students with disabilities consistently demonstrate they struggle in ELA, with minimal improvement or even dips across the years. Economically disadvantaged students and multilingual learners showed some improvement across the region from 2019 to 2022, but data is limited in some districts due to numbers of students who qualify for these services.

TABLE 48
Percentage of Students Meeting or Exceeding NJSLA Math Expectations
Disaggregated by Race, Ethnicity, Gender, Ability, Income, and Language
Elementary Districts 2019, 2022, 2023

	2019					2022					2023				
	WT	LH	WB	GB	SA	WT	LH	WB	GB	SA	WT	LH	WB	GB	SA
White	68%	69%	69%	63%	54%	58%	57%	58%	45%	46%	66%	61%	63%	50%	49%
Asian	91%	*	83%	92%	76%	86%	71%	75%	77%	71%	85%	81%	80%	77%	73%
Black	31%	*	33%	*	23%	32%	*	42%	28%	16%	42%	*	42%	25%	18%
Hispanic	*	56%	49%	42%	29%	36%	30%	41%	34%	20%	44%	35%	33%	34%	22%
Multiracial	83%	*	*	*	53%	68%	90%	65%	70%	44%	75%	91%	79%	65%	46%
Female	72%	70%	67%	67%	45%	57%	52%	54%	51%	34%	63%	58%	55%	55%	36%
Male	71%	65%	69%	67%	44%	67%	59%	63%	52%	37%	72%	61%	68%	52%	40%
Students with Disabilities	34%	33%	36%	27%	17%	25%	22%	17%	11%	15%	33%	28%	21%	<10%	16%
Economically Disadvantaged	*	N	*	22%	26%	33%	21%	*	38%	17%	31%	23%	*	24%	20%
Multilingual Learners	62%	*	60%	*	25%	44%	26%	*	39%	16%	53%	23%	29%	33%	18%

The Math data from across the districts reveals a similar landscape of disparities and advancements. Asian students lead the way in math performance, although a slight decrease is seen in the latter years following the COVID-19 pandemic. White students showed decreases from 2019 to 2022, but, overall, their scores rebounded a bit in 2023. Black students, while starting from a lower point, have made some gains in math performance over the years studied. Hispanic student achievement in mathematics continues to decline. The data from Multiracial students demonstrated moderate growth, but not across all districts.

In terms of gender, male students slightly outperformed female students in 2022 and 2023, while female students slightly outperformed male students in 2019. Students with disabilities continue to show the lowest performance in math, with a decline observed between 2019 and 2023. While much

data remains unreported, economically disadvantaged students made some progress from 2019 to 2022, but their performance tailed off in 2023 in some districts. Finally, multilingual learners demonstrate low performance in math, with inconsistent progress across districts. These remain areas of challenge.

In summary, standardized test scores reveal persistent achievement gaps between different student groups. Disparities exist along racial, socioeconomic, gender, and ability lines. Addressing these gaps necessitates targeted support and resources for underserved students. Schools should prioritize culturally responsive teaching and promote inclusive learning environments. Consistent, aligned ELA and Math programs from early grades, along with data-driven professional learning communities, could improve student outcomes.

While racial disparities are evident, other patterns are less clear. Female students generally excel in ELA, while male students outperform females across most districts in Math. In some districts, however, female students match or exceed male students in math proficiency. Students with disabilities and economically disadvantaged students consistently lag behind the general student population. Regionalization offers an opportunity for districts to analyze successful programs and instructional practices for these subgroups.

Student Growth Scores

In their simplest form, student growth scores are a measure of how much student learning is increasing above standard expectations over a given period of time. The State uses a median student growth percentile (mSGP) model to indicate growth on statewide ELA and mathematics assessments. This mSGP is derived from each individual's student growth percentile (SGP) for ELA in grades 4-8 and for Math in grades 4-7. The SGP measures a student's academic progress from one year to the next compared to other students with similar prior test scores. Members of this similar group are called a student's academic peers, and the mSGP is the median score among those peers.

The mSGP falls between 1 and 99 and can be grouped into three levels. An mSGP below 35 indicates low growth, an mSGP between 35 and 65 indicates typical growth, and an mSGP greater than 65 indicates high growth.

The calculation of mSGPs relies on two consecutive years of assessment results to calculate individual student growth percentiles. Due to the cancellation of the NJSLA in both 2019-20 and 2020-21, SGPs were not calculated for 2019-20, 2020-21, or 2021-22, hence the selection of the data years in Tables 49 and 50.

TABLE 49
Median Student Growth Percentiles in ELA

	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2022-23
Warren	51%	57%	48%	48%
Long Hill	54%	48%	58%	56%
Watchung	46%	42%	62%	57%
Green Brook	51%	52%	57%	57%

The mSGP scores in ELA indicate that students are demonstrating typical growth across multiple years. When comparing mSGPs across districts, the results are mixed, with each district outpacing the others in at least one of the four years displayed. Districts achieving mSGP scores between 40.0-59.5 are considered as having met the federal accountability standard. As the data shows, each of these districts met the federal accountability standard during each of the years studied.

TABLE 50
Median Student Growth Percentiles in Math

	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2022-23
Warren	56%	58%	61%	62%
Long Hill	52%	48%	43%	51%
Watchung	41%	39%	67%	56%
Green Brook	44%	53%	56%	57%

The mSGPs in Math indicate that students are demonstrating typical growth here as well, although during the 2018-19 school year, students from Watchung jumped into the high growth range. With the exception of that single year, Warren students grow at a slightly higher rate than students at the other districts involved in this study. Just as with ELA, districts achieving mSGP scores between 40.0-59.5 are considered as having met the federal accountability standard. As the data shows, each of these districts met the federal accountability standard during each of the years studied, except Watchung during the 2017-18 school year, where it fell one point shy.

Even among relatively high-performing schools and districts, a range of student growth scores provides an opportunity for district leaders, working within a regional setting, to examine the programs and instructional practices that are yielding the highest levels of student growth demonstrated in ELA and Math. By combining district- and building-level supervisory staff and reassigning responsibilities closely aligned to areas of expertise, a regional school district has the opportunity to better serve and provide targeted support to the teachers preparing students to meet or exceed academic standards and leave high school being college and career ready.

College and Career Readiness

As shown in Table 51 and as seen with other assessments, the pandemic had multifaceted effects on the number of AP test takers and their results. Many students faced challenges in accessing resources and preparing for exams during the 2019-20 and 2020-21 school years, while others were impacted negatively during the years leading up to their scheduled exam, even as school returned to more normal schedules.

TABLE 51
AP Course Enrollment and Scores, Watchung Hills, 2018-19 to 2022-23

	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Number of AP Students	492	517	520	512	474
Number of AP Exams	1149	1273	1108	1099	1066
AP Students with Scores of 3+	1071	1134	934	961	1001
% of 11th & 12th grade students with one or more AP exams with a score of at least 3	42%	44%	35%	39%	41%

Examination of the Watchung Hills data yields some common, and perhaps expected, results. During the years when students returned to school post-pandemic, the percentage of eleventh and twelfth grade students enrolled at Watchung Hills who earned a score of 3 or higher on at least one AP exam dropped from a high of 44% in 2020 to a low of 35% in 2021, followed by steady increases during the subsequent two years. Since 2021, students scoring 3's or higher on the exams jumped from 84% in 2021 to 94% in 2023, a noteworthy increase.

Graduation and Postsecondary Enrollment

Watchung Hills is the only district in this study that awards high school diplomas and reports the post-secondary plans of its graduates. Its graduation data, across 4-year and 5-year cohorts, are noted in Table 52.

TABLE 52
Graduation Rates, Watchung Hills, 2020-2023

	2020 cohort		2021 cohort		2022 cohort		2023 cohort	
	School	State	School	State	School	State	School	State
4-yr graduation	n/a	n/a	97.3%	90.6%	97.1%	90.9%	97.8%	91.1%
5-yr graduation	97.9%	92.6%	99.0%	92.5%	98.2%	92.7%	n/a	n/a

Watchung Hills has higher graduation rates than the statewide rates for each of the 4-year and 5-year cohorts from 2020-23. These numbers demonstrate not only success in getting students to graduation in four years, but also success in encouraging students who need the extra time to persist.

TABLE 53
4-Year Graduation Profile, Cohort 2023
Disaggregated by Race, Ethnicity, Gender, Ability, Income, and Language, Watchung Hills

	Watchung Hills	State Average
Schoolwide	97.8%	91.1%
White	98.5%	95.0%
Hispanic	94.6%	85.8%
Black	100.0%	86.7%
Asian	96.9%	96.7%
Native	*	89.6%
Two or More Races	100.0%	93.0%
Female	99.0%	93.1%
Male	96.8%	89.1%
Students with Disabilities	91.8%	80.5%
Economically Disadvantaged	95.2%	86.6%
Multilingual Learners	*	73.6%

An examination of graduation rates by subgroups is important to get a complete picture of the school’s performance in meeting the needs of all of its students. Schoolwide, the 97.8% of members of the Class of 2023 who graduated on time closely mirrors the percentage of students from each subgroup, except students with disabilities who exhibited an on-time graduation rate of 91.8%. This number is sometimes misleading because students with special needs who qualify for an 18-21 year-old program often delay receipt of their diploma until after they complete these activities.

Table 54 documents the post-graduation plans for Watchung Hills students. The school’s postsecondary enrollment rates, as demonstrated by the percentage of graduates that have enrolled in 2-year and 4-year institutions within sixteen months of graduating from high school for each of the last three years, indicate a modest increase year-to-year. Of the students enrolled in any post-secondary institution, students from Watchung Hills are more likely to attend a 4-year institution than a 2-year one over each of the years examined for this study. This mirrors the statewide trend. Finally, as the table also demonstrates, Watchung Hills surpasses the state average of graduates attending any institution of higher education by an average of eighteen percentage points.

TABLE 54
Postsecondary Enrollment Rates, Watchung Hills, 2020-22

	Watchung Hills Class of 2021	State Average Class of 2021	Watchung Hills Class of 2022	State Average Class of 2022	Watchung Hills Class of 2023	State Average Class of 2023
% enrolled in any postsecondary institution	84.3%	67.7%	87.6%	68.5%	87.7%-90.4%	69.8% - 72.0%
% of enrolled students choosing 4-yr institution	87.7%	74.6%	88.5%	74.9%	87.3%	74.8%

School Climate

The State’s primary school climate measures are chronic absenteeism and student discipline. Chronic absenteeism refers to a situation where a student misses a significant number of school days, in this case defined as missing 10% or more of the school year for almost any reason excused or unexcused. Frequent absences can have a profound impact on education due to missed instructional time and lost opportunities for social interaction and social skills development. Students who are often absent tend to have lower academic achievement compared to their peers who attend school regularly. Chronic absenteeism has been linked to higher dropout rates as students who are frequently absent may become disengaged from school, leading them to eventually drop out before completing their education. This can have long-term consequences for their future opportunities and success.

The rates of chronic absenteeism for the school districts involved in this study are listed in Table 55. NJDOE recommends caution in comparing the 2021-2022 and 2022-23 chronic absenteeism rates with the rates from prior years, as the pandemic has impacted attendance rates over the last several years. In each of the districts involved in this study, chronic absenteeism surged during the COVID-19 pandemic disruption and remains higher than pre-pandemic levels today.

TABLE 55
Chronic Absenteeism Rates, 2018-19 to 2022-23 ³²

	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Watchung Hills	6.3%			17.8%	10.1%
Warren	3.4%			9.8%	11.0%
Long Hill	4.4%			5.4%	8.0%
Watchung	4.7%			11.7%	12.2%
Green Brook	4.8%			15.6%	11.8%

³² The COVID-19 pandemic closed schools, resulting in remote or hybrid learning schedules during 2019-20 and 2020-21.

TABLE 56
Safety and Disciplinary Data, 2022-23

	Violence, Vandalism, HIB, and Substance Offense Rate³³	% of Students Serving In-School Suspensions	% of Students Serving Out-of-School Suspensions	% of Students Serving Any Suspension
Watchung Hills	2.55	3.4%	0.8%	3.7%
Warren	1.25	0.7%	0.7%	1.3%
Long Hill	1.18	1.7%	0.7%	2.1%
Watchung	0.59	0.6%	2.4%	2.7%
Green Brook	0.80	0.4%	0.1%	0.5%

Perhaps not surprisingly, the incident rates of violence, vandalism, harassment-intimidation-bullying (HIB), and substance offense tend to increase as students move into schools that serve the higher grade levels, as indicated in Table 56. Among the grades pK-8 districts, Watchung and Long Hill students are recipients of more in-school or out-of-school suspensions than their peers in Warren and Green Brook. For comparison’s sake, the rate of incidents per 100 students enrolled across the State was 2.54 for the 2022-23 school year.

Potential Improvements in Performance Measures

Regionalization or well-designed shared services can improve educational effectiveness by aligning key areas like curriculum, professional development, and school culture. This alignment directly impacts student success, often reflected in assessment results and accountability measures, because these areas are inherently linked. Key benefits include:

- Greater curriculum cohesion and preparation. Shared academic programs ensure students receive consistent instruction and utilize common resources and strategies. This alignment prepares them better for assessments, especially as they move to departmentalized secondary schools. Centralized supervision under regionalization promotes this level of consistency.
- Streamlined approach to equity. Addressing achievement gaps, graduation rate disparities, and discipline inequalities becomes more manageable and effective within a unified system. Regionalization or shared services allow for dedicated resources and focused efforts to improve equity outcomes for all students.
- Centralized support for school climate. Recognizing that school climate profoundly impacts attendance and discipline, regionalization provides the capacity to consolidate efforts in this area. This allows for dedicated focus and resources on climate and culture initiatives, which smaller districts might struggle to provide independently, thereby benefiting all students in the partnership.

³³ Rate of offenses per 100 students

18. Special Programs

Preschool Education

Each of the elementary districts in this study operates a preschool program for three- and four-year old children with identified learning needs. They also include general education students on a tuition-basis based on available space and personnel.

Warren educates about 90 students in an inclusive preschool program. The district applied for state preschool expansion aid (PEA) without success and has since decided not to pursue state-funded preschool expansion in the short term. Warren continues to recruit general education students to keep inclusive ratios appropriate. Long Hill did not apply for PEA because it did not meet the criteria. The district operates three integrated preschool classes and one self-contained class with only special needs children whose needs are best met in that setting.

Watchung currently operates two integrated preschool classes and one self-contained class. The community did not want the district to pursue PEA, because it wanted preschool-aged students to attend the same schools they would attend as elementary school students. While there is available space in a centrally located church, there is not sufficient space in the elementary school.

Green Brook runs a preschool program similar to those listed above. Each fully integrated preschool class is staffed by a dually certified preschool teacher and two paraprofessionals. Additionally, for students who require more intervention, appropriately trained staff pushes in to provide services (e.g., ABA).

Some districts have expressed a desire to consider expanding their preschool programs in an all purpose regional. The State uses ninety percent of twice the number of students in 1st grade to estimate a “realistic” universe of preschool students. This is considered realistic, because parents are not required to enroll their children in district sponsored preschool. Some will make the decision to keep their three- and four-year old children at home, while others may send them to private options.

The total number of students in 1st grade in the Watchung Hills region during the 2024-25 school year was 371, which indicates a realistic preschool universe of approximately 668. At the state maximum of 15 students per classroom (and lower if some students have a need for a more self-contained environment), serving that population would require as many as 45 preschool classrooms. For the 2025-26 school year, the region is planning to support about half (22) that many.

One appealing opportunity given the facilities analysis done earlier in this study is to consider expansion of the preschool programs at the schools with capacity.³⁴ Long Hill could consider this option by reassigning first grade students to Millington ES, where there is projected to be ample classroom capacity over the five year period. Watchung could also consider preschool expansion with a projected 4 extra classrooms each in 2029-30. A unified grades pK-12 regional would have

³⁴ See Table 39

greater latitude to consolidate some preschool classrooms in buildings that could be more conveniently located to their families.

Special Education

Tables 57 to 59 breakdown the special education placements, classifications, and related services.

TABLE 57
Special Education Classification and Placement Data, 2024-25 ³⁵

	Watchung Hills	Warren	Long Hill	Watchung	Green Brook
Students Classified In-District	187	316	121	83	95
Students Classified Out-of-District	39	12	8	5	5
% of District Enrollment Classified	13.9%	19.7%	15.0%	13.2%	13.0%
% Classified Placed In-District	82.7%	96.3%	93.8%	94.3%	95.4%

TABLE 58
Students Receiving Related Services, 2023-24

	Watchung Hills	Warren	Long Hill	Watchung	Green Brook
Counseling Services ³⁶	43	73	25	9	14
Occupational Therapy	2	106	28	18	26
Physical Therapy	1	24	13	9	10
Speech Therapy	37	193	72	51	64
Other Related Services	22	113	7	29	21

³⁵ Staff interviews

³⁶ This counseling is typically provided by child study team members in addition to that received by all students.

TABLE 59
Percentages of Students in Special Education Classification Categories, 2023-24 ³⁷

	Watchung Hills	Warren	Long Hill	Watchung	Green Brook
Auditorily Impaired		0.3%			
Autistic	12.4%	8.8%	15.5%	15.9%	10.1%
Cognitively Impaired - Mild	0.9%	1.2%			
Cognitively Impaired - Moderate	1.3%	0.3%			
Communication Impaired	6.6%	10.1%	6.2%	1.1%	13.8%
Emotional Regulation Impaired	6.6%	2.1%	3.1%	1.1%	0.9%
Multiply Disabled	0.9%	1.2%	2.3%	2.3%	1.8%
Orthopedically Impaired				1.1%	
Other Health Impaired	38.9%	32.0%	26.3%	15.9%	19.3%
Preschool with Disability		7.6%	11.6%	4.5%	14.7%
Specific Learning Disability	31.0%	19.8%	20.9%	35.2%	33.0%
Speech and Language Impairment	0.4%	16.2%	14.0%	21.6%	6.4%
Traumatic Brain Injury	0.4%	0.3%			
Visual Impairment	0.4%			1.1%	
Total Classifications ³⁸	226	328	129	88	109
% of District Enrollment	13.9%	19.7%	15.0%	13.2%	15.3%

Watchung Hills

Watchung Hills offers a continuum of programming for students with special learning needs: pull-out resource; in-class resource; CARES self contained; and an 18-21 year-old transition program to meet the needs of district students.

It is important to note that the directors of special education in the grades pK-8 districts are making concerted efforts to educate students in their home districts by providing programming to meet the students’ needs. Data collected from the 2019-20 school year indicate that out-of-district placements have decreased in each of the elementary school districts, suggesting that should appropriate programming be available, many of those students will remain in-district through high school. While this may not be evident in Watchung Hills’ numbers to date, with proper planning, these

³⁷ NJ SMART

³⁸ Students can be classified in more than one category.

students should soon be reflected in the high school counts once they progress through the grade levels.

To ensure that the elementary districts and child study teams have a solid handle on the programs available at Watchung Hills and to further ensure that the high school child study teams know the needs of the students as their progress through the grades toward the school, the Watchung Hills Director of Special Services indicated that high school case managers attend IEP meetings for every classified 8th grade student.

Warren

Warren routinely operates a large preschool program for students with disabilities. Beyond preschool, the district staffs separate self-contained classes for students with autism, emotional regulation impairment, and learning and language disabilities. The resource model operates using an intervention approach. The middle school offers in-class resource classes for students with learning and language disabilities. Finally, the district is seeking to add classes for students with autism at the middle school level to address the larger population headed into their adolescent years.

Long Hill

Long Hill serves approximately a dozen preschool disabled students annually in two inclusion and one self-contained classes. For the 2025-26 school year, the district is planning a third inclusion class based on projected enrollment. The district also offers a grades K-1 self-contained class to serve students with autism and another to serve students in grades 2-5 with emotional regulation impairment and/or autism. In grades K-1, the district offers in-class resource services, currently with no students pulled out of class, while students in grades 2-5 are served through in-class and pullout resource programs. At the middle school level, there is a self-contained class for students with emotional regulation impairment. This program enrolls only a few students.

Watchung

Watchung offers services to students in two inclusion preschool classes (no self-contained preschool disabled class currently). Students in grades K-4 are served with two classes focused on meeting the needs of students with autism as well as in-class support and pull-out resource using a consultative model. Middle school students are served through in-class support and pull-out resource services with a class for students with autism planned for the 2025-26 school year.

Green Brook

Green Brook offers three integrated preschool classrooms, with one self-contained classroom. The elementary grades also offer one self-contained class for students with learning and language disabilities. In the middle grades, the district offers one class for students with learning and language disabilities and one for students with emotional regulation impairment. Additionally, the district has in-class resource programs available for all grade levels as well as pull-out resource options in both schools.

Multitiered Systems of Support

Often tied to education laws and regulations that require schools to provide support for struggling students, multitiered systems of support (MTSS) is a framework used in schools to proactively identify and assist students who need help academically, behaviorally, or socially. The three-tiered system ranges from Tier 1 universal supports, beginning with high-quality classroom programming for all students, to Tiers 2 and 3 targeted supports that usually take the form of small group or individual interventions, respectively. All identification and support is driven by data from screenings and progress monitoring to determine which interventions are working and which need adjustment.

Intervention and referral services (I&RS) are the MTSS vehicle used by NJ's grades pK-12 schools to support students who are experiencing academic, behavioral, or health difficulties that may be impacting their educational performance. The purpose of I&RS is to identify and assist students who are struggling before their issues escalate to the point of requiring more intensive interventions or special education classification. The process typically involves the identification of students at risk, followed by an assessment of the needs of those students. Once the needs are determined, the team develops an action plan that outlines the implementation of services they believe will support the student's success and then monitors and evaluates the effectiveness of those interventions, adjusting the plan as necessary.

Watchung Hills

Watchung Hills students benefit from a stable superintendent and board of education who are committed to supporting student needs of all kinds. Teachers review student data at the start of each school year to identify students who would benefit from MTSS. To support the growth of these students in ELA and Math, certified teachers staff a writing lab and a math lab for students who need the additional support. Students are scheduled into these labs in lieu of study halls. The culture of the support program is to provide individualized instruction to students in need. The district also operates an alternative program called Empower, where students are scheduled in small groups with a dedicated educational specialist and additional resources to better understand student academic and social emotional learning needs in an effort to move them forward toward graduation.

Warren

In Warren, the I&RS systems require parallel approaches to support the scheduling of services. The district is very supportive with necessary resources to provide interventions that are evidence-based for both entry and exit. Social-emotional interventions are discussed at much greater levels during the I&RS process than they ever were before and have resulted in the district learning that teachers are not as prepared to address this area in Tier 1. Warren uses the Genesis student information system for tracking progress.

Long Hill

Long Hill is in its first year with MTSS and receives support from Magnolia, a national consulting group. The district has held several trainings especially for Tier 1 with a full day in-service coming up and just formed data teams for small group instruction. The staff has cited a need to reduce I&RS plans and groupings to use data from i-Ready, NJSLA, and Foundations better. They are seeing a number of emotional and behavioral barriers getting in the way academically.

Watchung

The administration and staff in Watchung have determined that the district is not meeting its own expectations and standards in terms of student support through MTSS currently, but has recently invested in Foundations for interventions in the area of ELA and literacy.

Green Brook

Green Brook uses DIBELS as a universal literacy screener with progress monitoring. In Math, the district uses standards based screeners from its textbook series. Once in middle school, the district uses an I&RS team to plan and monitor the MTSS process. Green Brook employs one basic skills instructor for the elementary school. There is also a teacher at the middle school dedicated to providing reading support. In addition, some special education resource room teachers also provide basic skills instruction. For the 2025-26 school year, the elementary school master schedule was reconfigured to provide dedicated Tier 2 time in ELA and Math. One basic skills instructor for elementary and middle school makes it difficult to offer Tier 3 services, forcing Tier 2 services further into the classroom.

Multilingual Education

Each of the districts must adhere to NJ administrative code for bilingual education when crafting programming and schedules for students.³⁹ The low numbers of multilingual (ML) students in these schools do not require a full bilingual program, but eligible students must receive either English language services (ELS) or an English as a second language (ESL) program.

Watchung Hills

Watchung Hills reports a total of 29 students, or 1.8% of the student body, who qualify for ML services during the 2024-25 school year. Students are provided several levels of service as part of a comprehensive program, as follows:

- ML Foundations is designed to meet the needs of non-native speakers of English in high school. Students are placed in this first level class based on scores on standardized tests and the recommendation of their counselor. This course focuses on building foundational language proficiency focusing on those students who are new to English. Students receive instruction tailored to their personalized proficiency levels.

³⁹ N.J.A.C. 6A:15

- ML Intermediate is the continuation of ML Foundations. This course teaches students how to write coherent paragraphs, read graphic novels, and engage in group discussions while learning from their teachers' and their peers' lived experiences and multiple perspectives.
- ML Language Immersion is the final course in the ML sequence, where students are introduced to longer literary texts, additional open-ended expository essays, and technology platforms. Emphasis is placed on rigorous academic cross disciplinary learning and real-world applications.

Each of the three courses supports students who need additional help as they transition to core courses including the study of Literature, Science, Math, Art, and History.

Warren

Warren reports 69 students, or 4.1% of the student body, qualifying for ESL services during the 2024-25 school year. The district has established an ESL framework, revised in 2021, for each grade level from K-5 and three proficiency-level frameworks - beginning, intermediate, and advanced - for middle school students in grades 6-8. Furthermore, the district employs four dedicated ESL teachers. Every ML student receives one period of instruction per day from an ESL teacher. These ESL teachers then support the ML students, as available, in their core classes depending on need and scheduling.

Long Hill

Long Hill reports 37 students, or 4.3% of the student population, who qualify for ESL services during the 2024-25 school year. The curriculum materials include the Reach program from National Geographic, a comprehensive, content-based core ESL program for students in grades K-5. It is designed to provide active learning opportunities, scaffolded instruction, and flexibility to meet instructional priorities with the goal of moving MLs to language proficiency and reading independence. Long Hill has two certified ESL teachers who have trained other educators on sheltered instruction, and they have led professional learning communities for grades K-8. For the 2025-26 school year, specific teachers and all administrators will be trained in sheltered instruction. During the 2024-25 school year, the district began allowing Level I ML students to take iReady assessments in their primary language.

Watchung

Watchung reports 30 students, or 4.5% of the student population, who qualify for ESL services during the 2024-25 school year. The district employs four teachers who support ML students, though two of those four are world language teachers (one Spanish and one French) who support ESL students as well as teach their respective World Language courses. The district also employs two dedicated ESL teachers, so that each of the two schools have a teacher on site all day. The district uses sheltered instruction and ML students have a second period of ELA daily.

Green Brook

Green Brook reports 19 students, or 2.7% of the student body, who qualify for ESL services during the 2024-25 school year. In its English Language Learner Three-Year Plan, the district reports that the identification of students for ESL services begins with a home language survey offered to students as they enter the district. The ESL teachers oversee this process and identify students, accordingly. The district has no bilingual certified teachers on staff, but does employ a teacher with an ESL certificate who serves students in grades K-8. The ESL teacher also supports families in non-academic ways, such as filling out forms and documentation and touching base when report cards are issued to ensure they understand what they received. The teacher does a combination of push-in and pull-out, depending on the needs of the student, maintains a Google Classroom for classroom teachers to help support the instruction of ML students, and continues to monitor and support the students as they exit the ELL program. The district anticipates that specific teachers and all administrators will be trained in sheltered instruction during the 2025-26 school year.

Gifted Education

Watchung Hills

The gifted and talented program at Watchung Hills is offered through flexible scheduling that allows opportunities for students to engage with multiple academic, artistic, and musical competitions, as well as benefit from mentorship with teachers, supervisors, and directors. The district also provides substantial choice through a robust co-curricular program

Warren

Warren provides gifted and talented enrichment programs called REACH for students in grades K-5 and E2 for students in grades 6-8. These programs provide a combination of pull-out and enrichment services for identified and motivated students. At the elementary level, there are three full time teachers who provide overall enhancements to the curriculum as well as plan programs for identified students. Identification for REACH pull-out programs begins in grade 3. When students leave elementary school, they are exited from the REACH program. Upon entry into middle school, students are re-identified for the E2 program, which has one full time teacher.

Long Hill

Long Hill acknowledges the requirement to provide services to students enrolled in the district who are identified as being gifted and talented. The school district, through the implementation of the Futures Program for grades 4 and 5, provides a variety of learning experiences for these students. Activities are structured to support multiple dimensions of intelligence, develop leadership skills, foster independent study, research and decision making skills, and facilitate strong social and emotional growth through the development of interpersonal and communication skills. Students shall be identified for inclusion in the Futures Program based on multiple criteria that shall include, but not be limited to, standardized assessments, report card data, and teacher recommendation.

This program at Millington ES is a pull-out program for students in grades 4-5 that begins in the second marking period of the school year. Students use higher order thinking skills for project-based inquiry lessons to develop problem solving skills while working together. Futures raises metacognitive awareness in the application of logical reasoning and problem-solving strategies, comprehending and solving multi-step word problems, and developing the ability to explain concepts and processes.

Watchung

Watchung offers several programs to meet the needs of students who are identified as gifted. The Bayberry ES Lunch Time program is open to all 3rd and 4th grade students as an enrichment opportunity for students to pursue their interests, talents, or abilities that extend beyond the curriculum. Several cycles are held throughout the course of the school year and each session covers a new topic. Recent sessions have included theatre, science experiments, the history of math, and poetry.

SOAR is the pull-out, gifted and talented program. It is geared toward nurturing the academic, social, and emotional needs of identified gifted students. The aim of the SOAR program is to improve academic performance by engaging all students in meaningful, challenging, and enjoyable learning activities that develop higher-order thinking skills. In each grade level, SOAR comprises a sequence of units, the number of which increase in the higher grade levels. For example, kindergarten has three units, which focus on problem solving, designing, and discovery, up to five units in 5th grade, which range from TED Talks to Mock Trial to Invasive Plant Species.

Valley View MS students enter the Academic Tournaments Open to Middle Schools program that is sponsored each year by the Bridgewater-Raritan School District. This tournament is open to students in grades 6-8 and follows a quiz bowl format. Future City is a project-based learning program where students in grades 6-8 imagine, research, design, and build cities of the future. One of the recent themes of the design challenge was called Powering Our Future. Teams designed a resilient power grid for the future city that can withstand and quickly recover from the impacts of a natural disaster. In this program, students built a virtual city using Sim City, wrote an essay about their city, made a model of their city, and created a presentation highlighting the best parts of their city for their classmates. Model UN and a science fair are other activities that meet the needs of gifted students.

Green Brook

Green Brook uses Renzulli Learning to meet the needs of gifted learners districtwide. This is a research-driven, interactive, online system that empowers students through a personalized learning environment. Unlike traditional platforms, Renzulli Learning goes beyond simply teaching these skills. It incorporates proprietary assessment tools that identify individual strengths and areas for growth in critical thinking, creativity, and executive function. This data-driven approach enables educators to tailor instruction with precision, ensuring every student is challenged and engaged.

The district offers enrichment opportunities for all, as evidenced by their extensive enrichment course catalog. Gifted and talented education is offered in Math and ELA with entry based on NJSLA scores, other assessment results, and teacher recommendation. The district also offers a personal growth cycle, which is open to all students and focuses on interdisciplinary projects, some of which are based on student choice.

Potential Improvements in Special Programs

The ability to offer a high-quality preschool program to all families in a community can be a game changer for students and their families. As eligibility for PEA continues to expand across the state, a regional district may better be able to address issues of space and program quality by consolidating oversight efforts in one common office. This would also allow for an early childhood supervisor supported by PEA to oversee the program and its direct connection to K-3 programming to ensure smooth transitions and aligned curricula. The availability of appropriate space can often be addressed through the flexibility that comes with regionalization. This space can sometimes be located in-district, but often time requires the rental of outside facilities, which can be funded using PEA expansion funding.

Special education is an area with great potential for joint action. Consolidating child study team staff within one larger district can provide greater levels of expertise to meet the unique needs of students. It may also provide opportunities for greater alignment in terms of eligibility criteria and determinations. The percentage of total enrollment by classified students ranges from 13% to 20%, and there are noteworthy disparities among the percentages of students with specific classifications. There is overlap in the self-contained classes each district provides, and investigating a more common approach could lead to greater efficiencies and effectiveness with in-house programming.

The elementary special education directors noted that they have made successful efforts over the past several years to reduce out-of-district placements by developing in-house programs to meet student needs in a less restrictive environment. Their in-district placement rates of between 94% to 96% reflect that success and are noticeably higher than the high school rate of 82.7% resulting from the previously higher elementary numbers. To put it into a financial context, 30 students being placed out-of-district costs Watchung Hills over \$3.5 million in tuition and \$1.6 million for 27 transportation routes.⁴⁰ There is more specific analysis of special education transportation in the Finance and Operations domain.

It should be expected as these children move on from elementary school that the in-district high school percentage should rise concurrently. To ensure this continuity, it is recommended that placements continue to be a regular dialogue among all of the directors. It was noted that high school case managers are invited to 8th grade IEP meetings, which is a positive sign. Since many of these meetings happen later in the year when time is short to develop appropriate high school

⁴⁰ A direct comparison between the number of out-of-district special education placements and the associated transportation figures is not advisable. The two numbers often differ because some families of students with special needs opt to provide their own transportation. Furthermore, the transportation count may include non-classified students who are placed out-of-district for other reasons.

programs, consideration should be given to having high school staff attend IEP meetings for 7th, and perhaps even 6th, grade students. This can allow for consideration of high school programming to meet educational needs in-district well in advance of the arrival of those students.

Another area for potential collaboration is with related service providers, who are often contracted by smaller districts. These roles can be hired in-house by one district and their costs and time shared with others resulting in financial savings. This should also lead to greater stability, as full-time staff tend to remain in their positions for longer than part-time or contracted providers.

Much like services for students with special needs, students who benefit from the support of the MTSS process may further benefit by having staff who specialize by investing in common screeners and support mechanisms to have targeted discussions, address student needs, and monitor their progress. Taking full advantage of the additional expertise and resources available in the district while still addressing individual needs in a small school environment prior to the need for classification is one of the greatest benefits of regionalized resources or shared services.

Each of the elementary districts involved in this study report between 3% and 5% of their students eligible for ML services. Each district has a framework for directly meeting the needs of its ML students, but often the services are limited to one period or timeframe per day. ML students attending a regional district may benefit from a more robust ELL program, including not only direct instruction in an ELL class, but also teachers who have been trained to work using a sheltered instruction protocol. Access to a larger pool of ESL-certified teachers may also allow those teachers to support the students throughout the school day and offer support to their families on non-academic issues, such as better navigating school and community services.

The gifted education programs across each of the elementary districts are varied. There are a host of programs offered at each of the schools, though little overlap exists among those programs. As students identified as gifted progress through middle school and into high school, they will have had quite different experiences. Further collaboration through regionalization or shared services would help to ensure that students received similar and equitable levels of services prior to high school, where they will likely enroll in advanced coursework.

19. Extracurricular Programs

Watchung Hills

Watchung Hills offers a plethora of extracurricular programs in the form of athletics, the arts, and clubs. Athletic programs include:

Fall - Cheerleading, Cross Country (boys & girls), Field Hockey, Football, Gymnastics, Soccer (girls & boys), Tennis (girls), Volleyball (girls);

Winter - Basketball (boys & girls), Bowling, Cheerleading, Fencing, Ice Hockey, Swimming, Track (indoor), Wrestling; and

Spring - Baseball, Flag Football, Golf (girls & boys), Lacrosse (boys & girls), Tennis (boys), Track & Field, Softball, Ultimate Frisbee, Volleyball (boys).

Arts and other extracurricular activities include A La Mode, Academic Team, Active Minds, All School Council, ALS, Asian Culture Club, B.E.L.I.E.V. Club, Be the Change, Books at the Hills, CARE Club, Chemistry Olympiad, Choral Ensembles, Grade Level Councils, Computer Science Club, Culinary Club, Dance Ensemble, Diversity Club, Economics Club, Environmental Club, Fandom Club, Film Club, Folio, Future Business Leaders of America, Future Health Professionals, GLOW Club, GSA, Hispanic Student Alliance, Interact Community Service Club, Italian Club, Jazz Band Ensemble, Jewish Heritage Club, Marching Band, Math League, Mock Trial, Model UN, Muslim Student Association, National Art Honor Society, National Honor Society, Neuroscience, Peer Leadership Program, Photography Club, Project 7, Red Cross Club, Robotics, School Newspaper, School Store, Science Bowl Club, Science League, Script & Cue, Speech and Debate Club, Tri-M Music Honor Society, Waksman Molecular Biology, and Yearbook.

Warren

Warren offers middle school students an expansive group of clubs and after school activities. Among the clubs in which students in grades 6-8 can participate (unless otherwise noted) are A Capella Club, Animal Club, Art Club, Backstage Club, Battle of the Books, Board Games Club, Chess and Games of Strategy (grades 7-8), Community PEACE Club, Costume Club and Warren Wardrobe, Digital Art and Graphic Design, Drama Club, eClub, Enrichment Opportunities, Handwriting and Calligraphy, History Club, Homework Club, Honor Band (grades 7-8), Jazz Band, Minecraft Build Challenge (grades 6-7), Morning Basketball, Morning Chorus Club, Morning Sports Club, Music Club, Ping Pong Club, Solar Car Club (grades 7-8), Student Tech Support Team, Volleyball Club, WMS Music Outreach, and Yoga/Mindfulness.

There are different clubs available among the four Warren elementary schools. At Tomaso, students can participate in Archery (grade 5), Coloring Club (grades K-1), Crochet and Craft Club (grades 3-5), iBuild/Maker Club (grades 4-5), Sodoku and Online Puzzles Club (grades 3-5), and Visiting Author Club (grades 2-3). Central has Art Club (grades 3-5), ASL Club (grades K-5), Book Club (grade 5), Drama Club (grades 3-5), Poetry Club (grades 3-5), Social Game Club (grades 1-3), and Student Leadership (grades 4-5). Mt. Horeb has Amazing Animals (grades K-2), Book Club (grades K-1), Crafting for Calm (grades K-2), Drama Club (grades 3-5), Garden Club (grades 3-4), iBuild Club (grades 3-5), Gators Give Back Service Club (grades 4-5), Kids Crafts and Celebrations (grades 3-4), and Safety Patrol (grade 5). Clubs at Woodland include Art Club (grades 3-5), Creative Writing Club (grades 3-5), Cultural Club (grades 2-5), Paper Airplane Club (grades 2-3), Sports Club (grades 4-5), and Woodland Student Ambassadors (grades 4-5).

Long Hill

Long Hill students have a variety of extracurricular activities from which to choose. Clubs include Band, Booster Club, Choir, Chorus, Community Service, Debate Club, Environmental Club, Games Club, Green Team, Junior Model UN, Newspaper, Orchestra, Pens + Dreams, Robotics, and

Theater/School Play. Yearbook is offered at Millington ES and Central MS, and Student Council at Central MS. In addition to intramural sports, the district sports program includes Baseball (boys), Basketball (girls & boys), Cheerleading, Cross Country, Soccer (boys & girls), Softball (girls), and Track.

Watchung

Watchung offers after school sports for Valley View MS students throughout the school year to include interscholastic Baseball, Basketball (boys and girls), Softball, and Track & Field. Clubs offered to students in grades 5-8 include Coding & Robotics, Community Outreach, Environmental Club, Student Council, and Yearbook. Adventure Club, Art Club, Select Choir, and World Culture Club are also offered for students in grades 6-8.

Green Brook

At the middle school, Green Brook has several sports team opportunities for students such as Baseball (boys), Basketball (boys and girls), Cross Country, Soccer (girls and boys), Track & Field, and Volleyball (girls). In addition, the district offers robust music and performing arts programs. The Middle School Green Team has placed first and second in the statewide NJ Student Climate Challenge competition. In 2024-25, the Middle School Ethics Bowl Team came in first place at the NY/NJ Middle School Ethics Bowl Championship.

Potential Improvements in Extracurricular Programs

A healthy extracurricular program provides balance to an academic education by offering activities that engage student interest. While smaller middle schools certainly offer some benefits, their size can often limit the number of activities in which students may participate. In many schools, the same students participate in clubs, activities, and athletics, which due to competing time requirements, can further limit the number of students participating in a given activity even further. While cost considerations are a factor, expanding the number of students available to take part in specialized activities, such as clubs, instrumental music, and theatre, or athletic teams can enhance the quality of those programs and better prepare middle school students for high school athletic and academic competitions.

20. School and District Staffing

Watchung Hills

Watchung Hills serves a student population of approximately 1,700 and currently employs 187 certified staff members ⁴¹ (82% with masters or doctoral degrees) who have demonstrated expertise in all core content areas required under the state’s curricular standards as well as guidance, health, special education, and administration. There are 146 subject matter teachers.

Table 60 lists the number and type of certified staff positions in the school. Table 61 compares the staff experience and retention to state averages while Table 62 looks at student to staff ratios and staff salaries compared to the other 45 grades 9-12 peer school districts across the state.

TABLE 60
School Staff Positions, Watchung Hills, 2023-24 ⁴²

FTE	Position		FTE	Position
19.25	Math teachers		1	Family & Consumer Education teacher
16.6	English teachers		1	Bilingual Education teacher
22	Science teachers		11	Guidance counselors
18	Social Studies teachers		2	Student assistance counselors
12	Health & Physical Education teachers		3	School nurses
13.8	World Language teachers		8	Directors and supervisors
12.8	Arts teachers		3	Vice principals
18.6	Special education content teachers		1	Principal
4	Special education teachers			

District Administration

- 1 Superintendent
- 1 Director of curriculum and instruction
- 1 Director of human resources and staff development
- 1 Business administrator

⁴¹ Note: not all certified staff members are employed in full-time positions.

⁴² Each of the staff lists come from the districts either through the position control roster or a separately created document provided by the district; FTE = full time equivalent positions

TABLE 61
Staff Experience and Retention, Watchung Hills, 2022-23 ⁴³

	Watchung Hills	State Average
Average teacher years of experience in public schools	14.4	12.5
Average teacher years of experience in district	13.8	11.3
Percentage of teachers with 4+ years in district	86.9%	74.8%
One year retention of teachers	91.8%	88.4%
Percentage of teachers out-of-field	0.7%	2.4%
Average administrator years of experience in public schools	12.6	16.1
Average administrator years of experience in district	11.7	12.5
Percentage of administrators with 4+ years in district	68.8%	77.9%
One year retention of administrators	94.1%	86.6%

TABLE 62
Student to Staff Ratios and Staff Salaries, Watchung Hills, 2023-24 ⁴⁴

	Watchung Hills	Peer Rank	State Median
Ratio of Students to Classroom Teachers	11.8	19/46	11.3
Median Classroom Teacher Salary	\$93,614	34/46	\$92,892
Ratio of Students to Support Personnel	67.3	20/46	60.8
Median Support Personnel Salary	\$82,779	13/46	\$91,476
Ratio of Students to Administrators	105.2	20/46	93.1
Median Administrator Salary	\$163,226	44/46	\$144,212
Ratio of Faculty to Administrators	10.5	26/46	10.5

⁴³ NJDOE School Performance Reports

⁴⁴ NJDOE Taxpayers Guide to Education Spending; ranks are among the State's 46 school districts educating students in grades 9-12, highest to lowest for ratios and lowest to highest for salaries.

Warren

Warren serves approximately 1,670 students in grades pK-8 in five school buildings. Students in grades 9-12 attend Watchung Hills unless they choose other options. The district has 253 certificated staff members with 77% having masters degrees and 4% having doctorates.

TABLE 63
School Staff Positions, Central ES, Grades pK-5, 2023-24

FTE	Position		FTE	Position
3	Preschool teachers		1	ELL teacher
2	Kindergarten teachers		11	Special Education teachers
2	Grade 1 teachers		1	Instructional specialist
2	Grade 2 teachers		1	Librarian
4	Grade 3 teachers		3.5	Speech therapists
2	Grade 4 teachers		1.3	Occupational therapists
2	Grade 5 teachers		.5	Behavior analyst
3	ASAP (Math, Reading) teachers		1	School nurse
1	Music teacher		1	School counselor
.5	Art teacher		.8	School social worker
1.5	Health & Physical Education teachers		1.4	School psychologists
.5	World Language teacher		1	Learning disabilities teacher consultant
.75	REACH teacher (G&T)		1	Principal

TABLE 64
School Staff Positions, Woodland ES, Grades K-5, 2023-24

FTE	Position		FTE	Position
2	Kindergarten teachers		.75	ELL teacher
2	Grade 1 teachers		7	Special Education teachers
2	Grade 2 teachers		1	Instructional specialist
2	Grade 3 teachers		1	Librarian
2	Grade 4 teachers		1	Speech therapist

2	Grade 5 teachers	.6	Occupational therapist
3	ASAP (Math, Reading) teachers	1	School nurse
1	Music teacher	1	School counselor
.5	Reading specialist	.4	School social worker
1.5	Health & Physical Education teachers	1	School psychologist
.5	World Language teacher	1	Learning disabilities teacher consultant
.75	REACH teacher (G&T)	1	Principal

TABLE 65
School Staff Positions, Tomaso ES, Grades K-5, 2023-24

FTE	Position	FTE	Position
2	Kindergarten teachers	1	ELL teacher
2	Grade 1 teachers	9	Special Education teachers
2	Grade 2 teachers	1	Instructional specialist
2	Grade 3 teachers	1	Librarian
2	Grade 4 teachers	1	Speech therapist
3	Grade 5 teachers	.6	Occupational therapist
3	ASAP (Math, Reading) teachers	1	School nurse
1	Music teacher	1	School counselor
1.5	Health & Physical Education teachers	.2	School social worker
.5	World Language teacher	.5	School psychologist
.75	REACH teacher (G&T)	.5	Learning disabilities teacher consultant
.5	Behavior analyst	1	Principal

TABLE 66
School Staff Positions, Mount Horeb ES, Grades pK-5, 2023-24

FTE	Position		FTE	Position
4	Preschool teachers		1	Social Studies teacher
2	Kindergarten teachers		1	ELL teacher
2	Grade 1 teachers		9	Special Education teachers
3	Grade 2 teachers		1	Instructional specialist
2	Grade 3 teachers		1	Librarian
3	Grade 4 teachers		1.5	Speech therapists
2	Grade 5 teachers		1.1	Occupational therapists
2	ASAP (Math, Reading) teachers		1	School nurse
1.5	Reading specialists		1	School counselor
1	Music teacher		.8	School social worker
1.5	Health & Physical Education teachers		1	School psychologist
.5	World Language teacher		.5	Learning disabilities teacher consultant
.75	REACH teacher (G&T)		1	Principal

TABLE 67
School Staff Positions, Warren MS, Grades 6-8, 2023-24

FTE	Position		FTE	Position
2	Grade 6 ELA/ASAP teachers		5	Health & Physical Education teachers
2	Grade 6 Math/ASAP teachers		1	Home Arts teacher
2	Grade 6 Science teachers		3	Unified Arts teachers
2	Grade 6 Social Studies teachers		.25	ELL teacher
2	Grade 7 ELA/ASAP teachers		15	Special Education teachers
2	Grade 7 Math/ASAP teachers		1	E2 teacher (G&T)
2	Grade 7 Science teachers		1	Instructional specialist
1	Grade 7 Social Studies teacher		1	Librarian/media specialist

2	Grade 8 ELA/ASAP teachers		1	Speech therapist
2	Grade 8 Math/ASAP teachers		.4	Occupational therapist
2	Grade 8 Science teachers		1	School nurse
2	Grade 8 Social Studies teachers		3	Guidance counselors
1	Grade 6-7-8 Math teacher		.8	School social worker
.5	ASAP teacher		2	School psychologists
3	Spanish teachers		1	Learning disabilities teacher consultant
1	Mandarin teacher		1	Assistant principal
4	Music teachers		1	Principal
2	Art teachers			

District Administration

- 1 Superintendent
- 1 Assistant superintendent
- 1 Business administrator
- 2 District supervisors and 1 director of special services

TABLE 68
Staff Experience and Retention, Warren, 2022-23

	Warren	State Average
Average teacher years of experience in public schools	14.3	12.5
Average teacher years of experience in district	13.3	11.3
Percentage of teachers with 4+ years in district	80.2%	74.8%
One year retention of teachers	91.9%	88.4%
Percentage of teachers out-of-field	0.5%	2.4%
Average administrator years of experience in public schools	11.3	16.1
Average administrator years of experience in district	10.1	12.5
Percentage of administrators with 4+ years in district	84.6%	77.9%
One year retention of administrators	100%	86.6%

TABLE 69
Student to Staff Ratios and Staff Salaries, Warren, 2023-24 ⁴⁵

	Warren	Peer Rank	State Median
Ratio of Students to Classroom Teachers	8.4	73/76	9.8
Median Classroom Teacher Salary	\$89,025	68/76	\$74,275
Ratio of Students to Support Personnel	44.7	71/76	61.8
Median Support Personnel Salary	\$87,382	58/76	\$76,878
Ratio of Students to Administrators	128.2	44/76	117.4
Median Administrator Salary	\$153,083	61/76	\$131,992
Ratio of Faculty to Administrators	18.2	14/76	14.2

Long Hill

Long Hill serves approximately 860 students in grades pK-8 in three school buildings. The district has 99 certificated staff members with 61% of them having masters’ degrees.

TABLE 70
School Staff Positions, Gillette ES, Grades pK-1, 2023-24

FTE	Position		FTE	Position
1	Preschool disabilities teacher		1	SKIP teacher
9	Elementary teachers		1	Special Education teacher
.5	Music teacher		1	Basic skills teacher
.5	Art teacher		1	School nurse
1	Health & Physical Education teacher		1	Principal

⁴⁵ NJDOE Taxpayers Guide to Education Spending; ranks are among the State’s 76 K-8 school districts with more than 750 students, highest to lowest for ratios and lowest to highest for salaries.

TABLE 71
School Staff Positions, Millington ES, Grades 2-5, 2023-24

FTE	Position		FTE	Position
19	Elementary teachers		1	Media specialist
1	ELA teacher		1	Behavioral disability teacher
.45	Spanish teacher		6	Special Education teachers
1.5	Music teachers		1	ESL teacher
.8	Art teacher		1.6	Basic skills teachers
1	Health & Physical Education teacher		1	School nurse
1	Technology teacher		1	Principal

TABLE 72
School Staff Positions, Central MS, Grades 6-8, 2023-24

FTE	Position		FTE	Position
4	ELA teachers		.5	Art teacher
3	Math teachers		2	Health & Physical Education teachers
3	Science teachers		4	Special Education teachers
3	Social Studies teachers		1	Behavioral disability teacher
1	French teacher		.6	Basic skills teacher
1	Spanish teacher		1	Guidance counselor
1	STEAM teacher		1	School nurse
1	Music teacher		1	Principal

TABLE 73
District Administration and other District-Wide Staff, Long Hill, 2023-24

FTE	Position		FTE	Position
1	Superintendent		6	Physical therapists
.5	Business administrator		1	School counselor
1	Director of special services		2	School psychologists
1	Assistant principal		1	Learning disabilities teacher consultant
1	Technology coordinator		1	School social worker
3	Speech therapists		1	Reading specialist
1	Occupational therapist		1	pK disabilities teacher

TABLE 74
Staff Experience and Retention, Long Hill, 2022-23

	Long Hill	State Average
Average teacher years of experience in public schools	12.3	12.5
Average teacher years of experience in district	10.4	11.3
Percentage of teachers with 4+ years in district	69.5%	74.8%
One year retention of teachers	92.6%	88.4%
Percentage of teachers out-of-field	0%	2.4%
Average administrator years of experience in public schools	18.0	16.1
Average administrator years of experience in district	6.9	12.5
Percentage of administrators with 4+ years in district	57.1%	77.9%
One year retention of administrators	85.7%	86.6%

TABLE 75
Student to Staff Ratios and Staff Salaries, Long Hill, 2023-24 ⁴⁶

	Long Hill	Peer Rank	State Median
Ratio of Students to Classroom Teachers	10.7	29/76	9.8
Median Classroom Teacher Salary	\$78,410	48/76	\$74,275
Ratio of Students to Support Personnel	56.6	51/76	61.8
Median Support Personnel Salary	\$84,235	49/76	\$76,878
Ratio of Students to Administrators	122.0	52/76	117.4
Median Administrator Salary	\$145,253	53/76	\$131,992
Ratio of Faculty to Administrators	13.5	56/76	14.2

Watchung

Watchung serves approximately 675 students in grades pK-8. The district has 95 certificated staff members, more than 45% of whom have masters’ or doctoral degrees.

TABLE 76
School Staff Positions, Bayberry ES, Grades pK-4, 2023-24

FTE	Position	FTE	Position
2	Preschool teachers	1	ESL teacher
4	Kindergarten teachers	1	Music teacher
3	Grade 1 teachers	1	Instructional specialist
4	Grade 2 teachers	1	Resource teacher
3	Grade 3 teachers	7	Special education teachers
3	Grade 4 teachers	1	Guidance counselor
12	Elementary teachers	1	School nurse
1	STEM/SOAR teacher (G&T)	1	Principal
1	Health & Physical Education teacher		

⁴⁶ NJDOE Taxpayers Guide to Education Spending; ranks are among the State’s 76 K-8 school districts with more than 750 students, highest to lowest for ratios and lowest to highest for salaries.

TABLE 77
 School Staff Positions, Valley View MS, Grades 5-8, 2023-24

FTE	Position		FTE	Position
3	Grade 5 teachers		1	Music teacher
2	ELA teachers		2	Health & Physical Education teachers
2	Math teachers		2	Special Education teachers
1	Science teacher		1	Library/media specialist
2	Social Studies teachers		1	ESL teacher
1	French teacher		1	Guidance counselor
1	Spanish teacher		1	School nurse
1	STEM teacher (G&T)		1	Principal
10	Elementary level teachers			

TABLE 78
 District Administration and other District-Wide Staff, Watchung, 2023-24

FTE	Position		FTE	Position
1	Superintendent		2	Speech therapists
1	Business administrator		1	Occupational therapist
1	Director of special services		1	School psychologist
1	Technology manager		1	Learning disabilities teacher consultant
1	Music teacher		1	Behaviorist

TABLE 79
Staff Experience and Retention, Watchung, 2022-23

	Watchung	State Average
Average teacher years of experience in public schools	11.3	12.5
Average teacher years of experience in district	10.1	11.3
Percentage of teachers with 4+ years in district	61.9%	74.8%
One year retention of teachers	89.6%	88.4%
Percentage of teachers out-of-field	1.6%	2.4%
Average administrator years of experience in public schools	19.0	16.1
Average administrator years of experience in district	1.8	12.5
Percentage of administrators with 4+ years in district	0.0%	77.9%
One year retention of administrators	100%	86.6%

TABLE 80
Student to Staff Ratios and Staff Salaries, Watchung, 2023-24 ⁴⁷

	Watchung	Peer Rank	State Median
Ratio of Students to Classroom Teachers	10.4	23/64	9.8
Median Classroom Teacher Salary	\$71,415	36/64	\$74,275
Ratio of Students to Support Personnel	51.8	53/64	61.8
Median Support Personnel Salary	\$77,184	43/64	\$76,878
Ratio of Students to Administrators	141.5	18/64	117.4
Median Administrator Salary	\$136,459	49/64	\$131,992
Ratio of Faculty to Administrators	16.4	15/64	14.2

⁴⁷ NJDOE Taxpayers Guide to Education Spending, 2024 (2023-24 data). Ranks are among the State's 64 K-8 school districts with 401-750 students, highest to lowest for ratios and lowest to highest for salaries.

Green Brook

Green Brook serves approximately 725 students in grades pK-8 in two school buildings. The district has 88 certificated staff members, with 56% having masters' degrees.

TABLE 81
School Staff Positions, Irene Feldkirchner ES, Grades pK-4, 2023-24

FTE	Position		FTE	Position
3	Preschool teachers		1	Art teacher
4	Kindergarten teachers		1	Music teacher
4	Grade 1 teachers		1	LLD teacher
4	Grade 2 teachers		9	Special education teachers
3	Grade 3 teachers		1	School counselor
3	Grade 4 teachers		1	Wellness counselor
1	World Language teacher		1	School nurse
2	Health & Physical Education teachers		1	Principal

TABLE 82
School Staff Positions, Green Brook MS, Grades 5-8, 2023-24

FTE	Position		FTE	Position
4	Grade 5 teachers		1	Computer technology teacher
3	ELA teachers		2	Health & Physical Education teachers
4	Math teachers		7	Special Education teachers
3	Science teachers		2	Behavioral disabilities teachers
4	Social Studies teachers		1	LLD teacher
2	Spanish teachers		1	School counselor
2	Music teachers		1	Principal

TABLE 83
District Administration and other District-Wide Staff, Green Brook, 2023-24

FTE	Position		FTE	Position
1	Superintendent		2	Speech therapists
1	Assistant superintendent		1	Occupational therapist
1	Business administrator		2	School psychologists
1	Supervisor of teaching and learning		1	Learning disabilities teacher consultant
1	Bilingual/ESL teacher		1	School social worker
2	Basic skills teachers			

TABLE 84
Staff Experience and Retention, Green Brook, 2022-23

	Green Brook	State Average
Average teacher years of experience in public schools	10.8	12.5
Average teacher years of experience in district	10.1	11.3
Percentage of teachers with 4+ years in district	63.8%	74.8%
One year retention of teachers	80.5%	88.4%
Percentage of teachers out-of-field	2.5%	2.4%
Average administrator years of experience in public schools	10.0	16.1
Average administrator years of experience in district	3.2	12.5
Percentage of administrators with 4+ years in district	20.0%	77.9%
One year retention of administrators	80.0%	86.6%

TABLE 85
Student to Staff Ratios and Staff Salaries, Green Brook, 2023-24 ⁴⁸

	Green Brook	Peer Rank	State Median
Ratio of Students to Classroom Teachers	9.5	40/64	9.8
Median Classroom Teacher Salary	\$77,125	49/64	\$74,275
Ratio of Students to Support Personnel	69.5	22/64	61.8
Median Support Personnel Salary	\$80,745	48/64	\$76,878
Ratio of Students to Administrators	144.6	15/64	117.4
Median Administrator Salary	\$138,639	53/64	\$131,992
Ratio of Faculty to Administrators	17.4	11/64	14.2

Projected Staffing Needs

When considering whether to support regionalization, parents will likely be concerned about the impact of staffing decisions on their children’s education. Class sizes, subject and course offerings, and the ability of the instructional staff to meet the needs of individual students will undoubtedly be considered during discussions about how staff is assigned to each of the schools. While specific enrollment projections are an important metric when it comes to scheduling the actual number of sections of classes and hiring certificated staff to teach those sections, another way to examine instructional staff needs is through student-to-teacher ratios across consolidated districts.

In a grades pK-12 regionalized district, the board of education would need to work with district- and building-level administrators to determine staffing needs at each elementary grade level from kindergarten to grade 5, and within each subject area at the secondary level of grades 6 through 12. In a consolidated grades pK-12 district, staff members may be moved between grade levels or across schools within their areas of certification to best meet the needs of the students in the district. These intra-district transfers and reassignments have the potential over time to lead to increased staffing efficiencies and more effective assignments of teachers.

Salaries and benefits costs attributed to school staff typically account for a large majority of a school budget. Projecting staffing needs for consolidated districts is nuanced and based on a great deal of context. Having said that, those roles are often not captured in an employee’s specific job title. It is not uncommon for several staff members to have multiple roles in districts that are the sizes of those considering regionalization. The objective should be to provide equal or improved educational services to students through optimized staffing and operations wherever possible. This can mean

⁴⁸ NJDOE Taxpayers Guide to Education Spending; ranks are among the State’s 64 K-8 school districts with 401-750 students, highest to lowest for ratios and lowest to highest for salaries.

providing similar levels of service at a reduced expense or providing greater levels of service at approximately the same cost.

This study assumes that all existing schools will remain open and operate with most school-level positions remaining as they presently do if there is a district regionalization. Each school is expected to retain its administrative and teaching staff as well as other essential support positions such as nurses, counselors, library media specialists, and teaching assistants. At the school level, it would take largely the same staff to perform the other support functions as well.

As years pass following any regionalization, there will likely be opportunities to realize efficiencies through routine attrition and changing student needs. As such, it will be important for district- and school-level administrators to pay close attention to staffing needs in each school as these opportunities may present themselves.

What is evident is that minimal sharing of services within the region is currently in place. In the previous tables, there are more than a handful of staff members listed as less than full-time and some related services providers are currently outsourced. Sharing team members and related services providers does not necessarily mean the staff member becomes disconnected from the current school, but it does provide opportunities for the schools in the region to take advantage of continuity, efficiency, and expertise.

With school-level staff remaining relatively constant, the opportunities for efficiency will be more available by combining some positions on district office staffs. A single unified district would need only one superintendent and one business administrator, while assistant superintendent and assistant business administrator positions would likely need to be considered in the new structure. In addition to the highest level administrative positions within the districts, there also exist several supervisory position responsibilities and costs that could be shared across a regional district. Enhanced curriculum coordination and instructional supervision could only benefit the districts, including the teachers and their students.

Currently, there are administrative tasks replicated in five school districts that could be completed once. From the state monitoring system to district audits to routine report filings and countless other tasks, these responsibilities are done five times whenever each deadline for said report or data upload is completed. This replication costs both time and money and drains resources from other productive uses. The reduction of this overlap would almost certainly result in staffing efficiencies and the ability to save money or redirect funding back to educational programming.

21. Educational and Programmatic Impact

The data collection and analysis throughout this domain of the study makes it evident that the boards of education, school and district leaders, teachers, and other staff members in all of the school communities in the Watchung Hills region care deeply about the success of the students.

From curriculum development and implementation to staffing and supervision to professional learning and more, we were unable to identify any area where an all purpose, grades pK-12 regionalization of the communities currently served would be detrimental to the students or to their success. In fact, the study comes to the conclusion that a consolidation of the districts can only lead to additional opportunities for all students in a more effective and efficient manner.

At the start of this domain, three broad questions were presented that were to be addressed through data collection and analysis. We firmly believe we have sufficient data to address these questions successfully.

1. Will students in any newly proposed regional district have access to a higher quality, more equitable educational program in grades pK-12?

The team of consultants believes that students in a fully regionalized district will continue to receive the same or better access to quality education than they currently receive. The study of high performing schools is both substantial and complex, with specific findings varied. While each study includes nuances, most include the following common characteristics:⁴⁹

- A clear and shared focus
- High standards and expectations for all students
- Effective school leadership
- High levels of collaboration and communication
- Curriculum, instruction and assessments aligned with state standards
- Frequent monitoring of learning and teaching
- Focused professional development
- Supportive learning environment
- High level of family and community involvement

We believe all of the characteristics listed above are found in each of the existing districts. However, given the differences in programming leading into the high school, an expanded, all purpose, regional serving the students of Warren Township, Long Hill Township, Watchung Borough, and

⁴⁹ The Nine Characteristics of High Performing Schools, The Danielson Group

Green Brook Township should be able to identify and provide better-aligned approaches to meeting each of these characteristics, ultimately resulting in even stronger educational programs for students.

In the area of academic programs, each district uses a variety of resources and strategies in teaching ELA, Math, and other content areas. These strategies include universal screeners, high-quality content complemented by effective teaching and learning strategies, and interventions for both the struggling student and the high achiever. Each of these strategies, when implemented consistently throughout the region, can lead to a more equitable allocation of resources in both time and material for students who need the greatest levels of support.

While standardized test results provide valuable insights into school performance, it is important to recognize that they are just one measure of educational quality and should be considered alongside other factors such as graduation rates, student growth, teacher effectiveness, and school climate. Additionally, standardized tests should be used judiciously and in conjunction with other forms of assessment to provide a comprehensive understanding of student learning and school effectiveness.

When examining extracurricular opportunities, it is obvious that each district understands the importance of providing students with in-school and after-school activities that broaden their experiences and build the social emotional learning competencies outlined in the framework from the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. This organization has served as a leader in the global social emotional learning movement and a trusted voice in this rapidly growing field. All of the schools offer multiple extracurricular opportunities from clubs to organized athletics and the arts for students to grow both as individuals and as part of a team. What may limit a school or district's ability to provide a full complement of offerings in the arts, athletics, and clubs can often be attributed to a small student population in that district as well as budgetary restrictions.

While the work being done in each individual district supports the characteristics of high-performing schools listed above, we believe that the creation of an expanded regional school district comes with additional benefits.

2. Will the creation of an enlarged regional district produce additional educational benefits or challenges for students and/or staff members when compared to the status quo?

The team of consultants that analyzed the educational programs believe there are several opportunities for students and staff to benefit from the reorganization of the districts into one all purpose regional.

Academic Benefits

The consolidation of programs leading up to the start of grade 9 would ensure that all students have a similar foundation in reading, writing, math, and other content areas. Better aligned teaching strategies, instructional content, and time spent on each academic area can help mitigate discrepancies in literacy levels and mathematics skills among students entering middle and high school, creating a higher platform for academic success.

There would be opportunities for teachers to build upon the skills and knowledge gained from the aligned programs in a more informed manner, limiting the time spent reteaching or addressing gaps in understanding. Shared programs can also facilitate smoother transitions between grade levels and schools within a district. Teachers can align their curricula more effectively, knowing that students have been exposed to similar instructional materials and teaching methods in elementary and middle school. Finally, a better aligned system of schools leads to a supervisory structure that benefits new program implementation and new teacher induction. While mentoring and support are often associated with novice teachers, this same support benefits veteran teachers who are asked to implement new programs or instructional strategies.

Greater opportunities exist for authentic equity and inclusivity, made possible by reducing the unnecessary duplication of work across districts and redirecting resources toward ensuring that all students, regardless of background or prior educational experiences, have access to high-quality materials, instruction, and interventions. These steps help mitigate disparities in educational achievement and empower all students to succeed academically. As school funding changes from year-to-year, and not always in a positive direction, the continuation of much needed academic support services may be at risk, punctuating the need to streamline these services. Furthermore, comparative data on standardized test results can be used to inform education policy decisions and resource allocation within an expanded district.

Given the proximity of the districts involved in this study, the shared goal of advancing achievement for all students, there is much to be gained from better coordinating the student experiences at the grades pK-8 levels, whether through regionalization of the districts or the expansion of shared services. While regionalization and shared services have the potential to produce similar benefits, it is important to understand that shared services come with additional challenges. Working with and between multiple boards and central offices, those staff members participating in shared services are often stretched thin and are more inclined to look elsewhere for opportunities to serve just one board and one superintendent.

Professional Learning Benefits

Through the adoption of school-based professional learning communities led by a single office of curriculum and instruction, there would exist expanded opportunities for collaboration between educators to identify best practices and data-driven interventions that lead to sustained improvement. Educators can learn from each other and implement strategies that have been successful in other classrooms to enhance teaching and learning.

Opportunities for improved academic planning and preparation between schools would also be enhanced. By comparing the performance of their school to that of other schools within the district, with similar student bodies, educators would be able to identify trends, strengths, and areas for improvement, allowing for targeted interventions to support struggling readers and challenge advanced learners.

Again, there is much to be gained from better coordinating the staff experiences at the grades pK-12 levels, whether through regionalization of the districts or the expansion of shared services, to ensure that staff members can work with the same programs, data, and resources as they co-plan to meet the needs of students.

Communication and Collaboration Benefits

Improved collaboration and communication across schools within a single district fosters better communication between elementary and high school teachers as a shared vocabulary emerges. High school educators can more accurately gauge students' abilities and instructional needs based on their prior experiences with the shared program. Both of these outcomes can be achieved through regionalization of the districts or expanded levels of shared services through a centralized office of curriculum and instruction.

Sustainable Leadership Practices

As noted above, while the use of shared services is one means of controlling financial obligations within a school district, these sharing arrangements do not come without cost. The toll on human capital can be dramatic as shared leaders and staff are frequently faced with increased obligations from accountability measures to public meeting requirements to the frequency of school and community responsibilities. These issues and others bring the sustainability of these shared services arrangements into question. Regionalization allows district leadership and staff to focus more of their time and attention on school improvement and efficiency efforts and less on repetitive compliance-driven tasks.

3. Will any newly proposed regional district provide benefits or challenges in serving students from special populations, including those with special learning needs, those whose first language is not English, those who benefit from enrichment programming, and those eligible for early childhood education?

Preschool Students

Children who attend a high-quality preschool tend to be more prepared for kindergarten, which leads to higher academic achievement in other grades. When children do not attend early schooling, they can miss out on developing valuable social and emotional skills as well. Currently, none of the eligible districts in this region take advantage of the state's preschool expansion funding, a significant source of monies being used by school districts throughout the state. Many eligible districts statewide have insufficient space to accommodate the preschool expansion program. Should preschool funding continue to expand, as it has over the past eight years, this may become an issue for all districts in this region. Working as one all purpose regional, the staff could research available space within the confines of the larger region and potentially expand its preschool offerings. As per current NJDOE guidelines, school districts taking advantage of state funding must commit to hiring a preschool instructional coach, a preschool intervention and referral specialist, and a community and parent involvement specialist. By combining the resources for which each district

is currently eligible and hiring one person per twenty regional preschool classrooms to serve each of these roles across the expanded program, an all purpose regional could consolidate resources, freeing up funding to expand preschool to benefit students and families across the region.

Operating a preschool program under a shared services agreement, while possible, comes with complications. Preschool funding is allocated by district with only students domiciled in that district eligible to attend. While sharing staff like a preschool instructional coach and interventionist is certainly possible and selecting a common curriculum is relatively easy, identifying and sharing space within the communities or the greater region could prove challenging. For example, only students from Warren Township would be able to attend a Warren-sponsored program, even if excess seats were available. If Warren had an enrollment of ten students in one of its classrooms and Watchung had a waiting list of five students, those students would not be able to attend the Warren state-funded preschool program under the current structure of the districts. A regionalized school district would address that concern.

Students Identified with Special Needs

Each of the school districts involved in the study has students with special needs placed in out-of-district settings. It was reported by the districts that they had 69 students placed out-of-district, 30 from the elementary districts and 39 from the high school. Each of these placements is restrictive and costly in terms of tuition and transportation, and they provide opportunities for the school districts to realize efficiencies while educating these students in-district in potentially less restrictive environments. It is important to note that the elementary districts have begun to develop programs to keep students in-district, which should eventually translate to the high school. Once a student is placed out-of-district initially, that placement becomes his or her school, and it can be difficult to convince families that the student can be educated locally, even when appropriate programming exists. The greater the number of students kept in-district at the elementary level, the greater the chance the high school can reduce its out-of-district placement numbers and continue to educate those students in their least restrictive environment.

Leaders in each of the districts indicate that there are existing challenges in the area of special education, including school placements with staffing issues, which causes students to have to travel further and increases transportation costs. While there remains some concern about the ability of the school districts to program for several of these placements, it is important to realize that properly staffed public school programs can often match or exceed the services provided by private schools for the disabled.

This is an area where regionalization or increased shared services between districts could reap significant benefits. Warren is already providing a special education placement for a Long Hill student. Building programs from the earliest of ages to meet the needs of these students and others with similar needs has the potential to benefit the students, their classmates, and the communities by enhancing inclusivity throughout the region. Launching and maintaining such programs requires a certain number of students, which would prove more achievable in a larger, all purpose regional or in

a region where child study team members and related services staff operated as a single department of special services. An added benefit of initiating these programs in-house is the opportunity to attract tuition students to the region, offsetting local costs.

Students Identified as Multilingual Learners

The population of multilingual learners in each district is relatively small, ranging from between 3% and 5% of the student population in any given district. Numbers this low can make it difficult to establish a comprehensive program to address the needs of these learners. By pooling resources across an all purpose regional or sharing staff and consistent programming across the districts, planning for this important subset of the student population becomes more impactful and efficient. As our state and nation continue to grow more diverse, well-researched and funded programs also position the district to meet the needs of the multilingual learner population for years to come.

Students Identified as Gifted

Students identified as exceptionally gifted make up a small percentage of the student body in almost all school districts. The coordination of programming for students so identified can help better meet the needs of this talented group of young people by pooling resources, including staffing, to provide exemplary programs that align well on a K-12 continuum. Giftedness comes in many forms and aligning programs across an expanded regional district offers the opportunity to better target programs to the gifts of the young people included in the program, while preparing students for the opportunities that await them in the future.

FINANCE and OPERATIONS

This domain of the study examines the financial implications of the regionalization of Watchung Hills, Warren, Long Hill, Watchung, and Green Brook. As described in the Consolidation Options part of the Introduction, the scenarios being considered in this study are:

- All Districts Regional pK-12: Expanding the limited purpose, grades 9-12, Watchung Hills Regional into an all purpose, grades pK-12 regional school district including the municipalities of Warren Township, Long Hill Township, Watchung Borough, and Green Brook Township.
- Current Constituents Regional pK-12: Expanding the limited purpose, grades 9-12, Watchung Hills Regional into an all purpose, grades pK-12 school district including the current constituent municipalities of Warren Township, Long Hill Township, and Watchung Borough with Green Brook Township entering into a revised send-receive agreement with the enlarged regional.
- Status Quo: Maintaining the status quo with opportunities to better align educational programs and support services while reducing or controlling the costs of educating students in each district through the expansion of shared services and other efficiencies.

22. Operating Expenses and Potential Cost Savings

Budgetary Costs per Student

Tables 86 through 90 highlight the spending priorities of each district through budgetary per student costs broken into five categories by the State: classroom instruction, support services, administration, operations and maintenance, and extracurriculars.⁵⁰ Each category then ranks the districts against their peers across the state in terms of grade-level structure.⁵¹

Budgetary costs per student are comparable among districts in a way that total costs are not. Total costs include items such as expenditures funded by restricted grants, pension contributions, tuition payments to other districts and private schools for students with disabilities, debt service expenditures, and principal and interest payments for the lease purchase of land and buildings.

⁵⁰ NJDOE Taxpayers' Guide to Education Spending; K-8 state medians are for all K-8s regardless of enrollment

⁵¹ Ranking is from lowest to highest spending among NJ's 64 grades K-8 school districts with 401-750 students (Watchung and Green Brook), among its 76 grades K-8 districts with over 751 students (Warren and Long Hill), and among its 46 grades 7-12/9-12 districts (Watchung Hills).

TABLE 86
Budgetary Per Student Costs, Watchung Hills, 2023-24

	\$ Per Pupil	Peer Rank	% of Total	State Median \$	State Median %
TOTAL	\$22,505	26/46		\$22,702	
Classroom Instruction	\$11,832	21/46	52.6%	\$12,358	54.4%
Support Services	\$3,735	27/46	16.6%	\$3,751	16.5%
Administration	\$2,414	33/46	10.7%	\$2,273	10.0%
Operations and Maintenance	\$3,257	34/46	14.5%	\$2,935	12.9%
Extracurriculars	\$1,242	22/46	5.5%	\$1,333	5.9%

TABLE 87
Budgetary Per Student Costs, Warren, 2023-24

	\$ Per Pupil	Peer Rank	% of Total	State Median \$	State Median %
TOTAL	\$26,172	74/76		\$20,554	
Classroom Instruction	\$15,293	75/76	58.4%	\$12,212	59.4%
Support Services	\$5,451	74/76	20.8%	\$3,804	18.5%
Administration	\$2,163	46/76	8.3%	\$2,114	10.3%
Operations and Maintenance	\$2,925	72/76	11.2%	\$2,389	11.6%
Extracurriculars	\$117	22/73	0.4%	\$178	0.9%

TABLE 88
Budgetary Per Student Costs, Long Hill, 2023-24

	\$ Per Pupil	Peer Rank	% of Total	State Median \$	State Median %
TOTAL	\$20,392	41/76		\$20,554	
Classroom Instruction	\$10,740	12/76	52.7%	\$12,212	59.4%
Support Services	\$4,320	62/76	21.2%	\$3,804	18.5%
Administration	\$2,284	60/76	11.2%	\$2,114	10.3%
Operations and Maintenance	\$2,864	69/76	14.0%	\$2,389	11.6%
Extracurriculars	\$137	30/73	0.7%	\$178	0.9%

TABLE 89
Budgetary Per Student Costs, Watchung, 2023-24

	\$ Per Pupil	Peer Rank	% of Total	State Median \$	State Median %
TOTAL	\$19,245	22/64		\$20,554	
Classroom Instruction	\$11,828	33/64	61.5%	\$12,212	59.4%
Support Services	\$3,177	22/64	16.5%	\$3,804	18.5%
Administration	\$2,006	27/64	10.4%	\$2,114	10.3%
Operations and Maintenance	\$2,036	22/64	10.6%	\$2,389	11.6%
Extracurriculars	\$166	22/63	0.9%	\$178	0.9%

TABLE 90
Budgetary Per Student Costs, Green Brook, 2023-24

	\$ Per Pupil	Peer Rank	% of Total	State Median \$	State Median %
TOTAL	\$22,312	48/64		\$20,554	
Classroom Instruction	\$12,529	43/64	56.2%	\$12,212	59.4%
Support Services	\$4,718	54/64	21.1%	\$3,804	18.5%
Administration	\$2,349	52/64	10.5%	\$2,114	10.3%
Operations and Maintenance	\$2,351	34/64	10.5%	\$2,389	11.6%
Extracurriculars	\$333	52/63	1.5%	\$178	0.9%

Per the state definition, the elementary districts are in two separate peer groups: Green Brook and Watchung are considered medium enrollment; Long Hill and Warren are considered large. Watchung (\$19,245) is more than \$1,000 below the state median, and Long Hill (\$20,392) is just under it. Green Brook (\$22,312) and Warren (\$26,172) are well above the state median. Low student enrollments make it difficult to be efficient financially. Watchung Hills (\$22,505) is just under the state median of \$22,702.

It is clear that all five districts prioritize direct spending on students in terms of the percentage of dollars allocated to classroom instruction. Watchung at 61.5% is exceptional in this regard, above the state median of 59.4% for elementary school districts. Green Brook, Long Hill and Warren, while under the state median, all spend more than 50% of the total budgetary cost on classroom instruction. Watchung Hills (52.6%) is very close to the state median of 54.4% for the high school peer group. This is a positive indicator as the spending is on direct student academic experiences, and therefore, should receive primary attention and commitment in the district budgets.

Another item worth noting is that Warren at 8.3% is well below the state median of 10.3% in administrative spending. Green Brook (10.5%), Watchung (10.6%) and Long Hill (11.2%) are only slightly above. Watchung Hills at 10.7% is also very close to the state median of 10.0% for high

school districts. Lower spending on administration is often identified by the public as an area to realize potential efficiencies in education.

Cost Savings

Table 91 presents specific, but not all-inclusive, cost savings that could be anticipated in an enlarged, all purpose, regional school district under the all districts scenario, and Table 92 presents the cost savings that could be anticipated under the current constituents scenario. Despite the cost savings identified and presented in the table, all existing programs are anticipated to be maintained.

The primary areas targeted for cost reduction include audit processes, professional services, and administrative and support staffing. The Projected Staffing Needs under the Education and Program domain and the Shared Services section in this domain provide additional support for these projections, particularly with regard to staff consolidation.

TABLE 91
Anticipated Cost Savings, All Districts Regional

Items	Savings Amount
Superintendents (5 to 1)	829,597
Assistant Superintendents (1 to 2)	-185,073
Business Administrators (5 to 1)	629,082
Assistant Business Administrators (4 to 1)	252,149
Curriculum and Instruction Directors (3 to 1)	290,950
Special Education Directors (5 to 1)	537,369
Technology Directors (5 to 1)	422,242
Facilities Directors (2 to 1 plus 1 assistant)	9,625
Principals (no change)	0
Treasurers of School Monies (5 to 1)	35,000
Reduction in Audit Costs	105,384
Reduction in Legal Costs	204,343
Reduction in Dues and Fees	50,848
Default Salary Guide Alignment Cost	-525,000
Total Estimated Cost Savings	2,656,516

TABLE 92
Anticipated Cost Savings, Current Constituents Regional

Items	Savings Amount
Superintendents (4 to 1)	605,587
Assistant Superintendents (1 to 2)	-185,073
Business Administrators (4 to 1)	459,216
Assistant Business Administrators (3 to 1)	164,476
Curriculum and Instruction Directors (3 to 1)	290,950
Special Education Directors (4 to 1)	390,011
Technology Directors (4 to 1)	347,113
Facilities Directors (2 to 1 plus 1 assistant)	9,625
Principals (no change)	0
Treasurers of School Monies (4 to 1)	25,000
Reduction in Audit Costs	86,384
Reduction in Legal Costs	176,062
Reduction in Dues and Fees	48,524
Default Salary Guide Alignment Cost	-377,000
Total Estimated Cost Savings	2,040,875

Both regionalization scenarios project financial benefits. The estimated cost savings of \$2,656,516 in the all districts scenario and \$2,040,875 with current constituents would come primarily from consolidating administrative functions and reducing duplication across the districts. However, these savings are partially offset by necessary investments in both existing positions that assume more responsibility, and new positions to serve the regional district created by restructuring.

Examining administrative and support staffing under the current constituents scenario, there would be a reduction from four superintendent positions to one plus the addition of an assistant superintendent (\$605,587 in savings), business administrators from four to one (\$459,216), special education directors from four to one (\$390,011), technology directors from four to one (\$347,113), facilities directors from two to one plus an assistant (\$9,625), and treasurer of school monies from four to one (\$25,000).

Regarding audit processes and professional services, audit cost estimates were derived by comparing current expenditures across constituent districts with the projected cost of a single audit for the

enlarged regional. Similarly, legal services costs were estimated based on current average expenses, with the expectation that these services could also be consolidated.

Under the all districts scenario, higher savings of \$2,656,516 would be realized through the consolidation of five superintendent positions to one plus the addition of an assistant superintendent (\$829,597 in savings), a reduction from nine business administrators and assistant business administrators to one of each (\$881,231) and other administrative roles.

Aligning the salary guides for teaching staff creates an offset to the savings and are labeled as Default Salary Guide Alignment Cost in the tables. P.L.2021, c.402 outlines the conditions of regional district formation, among those being provisions for the main collective bargaining agreements. If the new district does not reach a successor agreement within three years, interpretation of the law suggests that in both scenarios (with and without Green Brook), grades pK-8 would be governed by the Warren agreement and Watchung Hills would stand as the grades 9-12 prevailing agreement. The approximate additional costs would be \$377,000 for the current constituent and \$525,000 for all districts. The individual collective bargaining agreements are analyzed in more detail later in this domain.

It is important to note that these cost savings do not include the potential financial efficiencies and educational benefits that could occur from consolidating and coordinating operations such as curriculum and textbook purchases, in-district special education programs, student transportation, technology infrastructure, central office functions, unified contract negotiations, and the potential for self-insured health benefit plans that may be viable in a regionalized district. Self insurance funding is also available on a shared basis as State law authorizes two or more local units, whether local units or school boards, to create a self-insurance fund to offer contributory or non-contributory group health insurance or group term life insurance. Each of these would require further exploration and consideration by a regional board of education and administration or joint actions by the districts as currently structured.

23. State Aid and Local Tax Levies

This section examines the state aid and local tax implications of the three aforementioned restructuring scenarios for Watchung Hills, Warren, Long Hill, Watchung, and Green Brook. The analysis that follows looks at financial data from the participating districts and public data sources to identify potential benefits and implementation challenges. While detailed supporting data appears in the accompanying tables, this narrative will highlight key findings and their meaning for each scenario.

Key Assumptions

General Assumptions

- It is the view of the consultants that voters in the municipalities of Warren Township, Long Hill Township, Watchung Borough, and Green Brook Township would be motivated to

approve a question where there exists the possibility for tax savings or only minimal tax increases relative to the status quo that are offset by important benefits to educational programs.

- The tax levies and rates projected in the analysis are for the purposes of studying the differences between the status quo and the regionalization scenarios and are not intended to serve as predictions of future tax levies and rates.
- Estimates of participating district enrollment in school years 2026 through 2030 were used in the determination of state aid and in the allocation of both equalized valuations and tax levies. The enrollment predictions rely on the conclusions produced by this study's demographer and on other projection methods where demographer projections were unavailable.
- Where a starting date is required for analysis, it is assumed the enlarged regional district would begin operation on July 1, 2026.

Financial Assumptions

- Future tax levies would reflect the maximum two percent annual increase, not including statutory exemptions, and no banked cap would be utilized to increase levies beyond the two percent.
- NJ would continue to provide state aid pursuant to the School Funding Reform Act of 2008 (SFRA), as modified by what is widely known as Senate Bill 2 (S2) and methodology changes introduced in the fiscal year (FY) 2026 appropriations act. It is the consultants' belief that these policies are more likely to be continued than not as they greatly reduce and stabilize the amount of additional state aid required in subsequent budget years.
- The provisions of P.L.2021, c.402, which modify how state aid is calculated for a regional school district created or expanded following the completion of a feasibility study funded with an SREP grant, would apply to each participating district and to any expanded regional school district.
- Debt service aid for the expanded regional would be an aggregate of the five districts' debt service aid.
- The equalized value of real property in each community would continue in a manner consistent with secular trends present between FY 1985 to FY 2025. The trend patterns reflect cyclical increasing, peaking, and declining equalized valuation trends over 15-18 year cycles.
- State aid benefits provided pursuant to P.L.2021, c.402's slower phase-out schedule would not count towards the state aid for the budget year in which it is applicable and are

considered by the consultants to be a bonus appropriation due to how recently the law was changed and the lack of official guidance on the new rules.

Operational Assumptions

- Existing shared services agreements between the participating districts would terminate upon consolidation.
- Transportation needs would not be altered in the regional configurations being analyzed, and therefore, there will be no impact on student seat time, distance traveled, or cost when compared to the status quo as there has been no discussion of any intent to change the schools that students are attending. Note that any necessitated rebidding of transportation contracts may alter costs.
- The operating budget for the expanded regional would be an aggregate of the district budgets less the cost savings outlined earlier in this domain.
- Any cost reductions to the budget, including personnel outlined in this study, would be approved by the board of education of the expanded regional.

Asset/Liability Assumptions

- Existing assets and debt among the districts would become the shared assets and debt of the expanded regional.
- Costs related to school building conditions, including educational adequacy, planned expansions, and maintenance would be assumed by the expanded regional, and therefore, do not impact this analysis.

Legal Assumptions

- P.L.2021, c.402 provides a specific transition mechanism when a regional district is formed that allows for existing employee contracts to continue until their expiration, or, for up to three years following regionalization, whichever occurs first, at which point the salary guide and terms/conditions of the largest constituent district's agreement would apply until a successor agreement is negotiated. An estimate of costs stemming from aligning the existing district salary guides was calculated and is included in the cost savings used in the model.
- P.L.2021, c.402 states that newly created or expanded regional school districts shall, "... receive State school aid in an amount that is the greater of: (a) the amount of State school aid that the newly created regional school district would receive as a regional school district; or (b) the sum of the amount of State school aid received by each school district constituting the newly created regional school district prior to the creation of such regional school district."⁵² State aid analysis in this study follows the consultants' interpretation that this statutory

⁵² N.J.S.A. 18A:7F-68(4c)

language establishes the pre-regionalization sum of state aid as a fixed baseline for comparison. This means using the actual aid amounts received by the constituent districts immediately prior to regionalization, rather than calculating what these districts might have hypothetically received in future years had they remained separate entities.

- According to multiple state government sources, the legislative intent of the language cited above was that state aid should be calculated not just *prior to* the creation of the regional school district, *but in each subsequent year* (emphasis added), such that the new regional district would continue to receive the greater of the regional combined amount or the sum of the separate district amounts if calculated in the year in question. Consultants have requested an interpretation from the Department of Education that would clarify and confirm the original legislative intent. Consultants have also engaged with leaders of the State Legislature to propose amendments to the current language to clarify and confirm that intent, and extend that method of calculation through the 2033-34 school year. In that case, the aid calculations in this study would represent a conservative estimate of the potential state aid impacts of regionalization.

State Aid Calculations and Methodology

Prior to the 2024-25 school year and since its enactment and implementation in the 2008-09 school year, the SFRA formula for K-12 education was never fully funded in any annual state budget. The persistent underfunding eventually led to significant legislative updates known as the S2 legislation enacted in 2018. S2 provided a six-year phase-in schedule in order to achieve full funding of the SFRA formula by the 2024-25 school year. At the time of writing in early 2025, the 2024-25 school year is well underway and full funding of the SFRA formula was indeed the policy implemented.

However, state aid figures for the FY 2026 school year have been distributed to school districts and reflect several methodology changes that deviate from the full-funding paradigm finally achieved in FY 2025. First, three year average equalized values and aggregate district income values were used in the formula's determination of "local fair share", the amount each district is expected to raise locally through school taxes. Secondly, a change was made to how special education funding is provided. Rather than providing state aid based on a static classification rate applied to each district's total enrollment, the state instead based aid on actual district counts of special education and speech-only students. Third, the state restricted the amount each district's state aid could increase or decrease relative to the prior year. Increases were capped at 6% while decreases were capped at 3%.

All of the factors discussed above were implemented through budgetary language provisions and therefore apply only to FY 2026. They are not permanent changes. Despite not being permanent, it is the consultants' belief that these policies are more likely to be continued than not as they greatly reduce and stabilize the amount of additional state aid required in subsequent budget years.

In an effort to provide clarity, state aid was analyzed both where the described changes are held true for all years in the study period and also where the changes are only applied to FY 2026 and then revert back to the default mechanisms in the statutory SFRA funding formula.

For the purpose of estimating state aid in both the status quo and regionalization scenarios outlined above, the consultants implemented a model approximating the SFRA funding formula. State aid estimates for future years are based on the enrollment, demographic, property value, and aggregate income trends in each participating school district and municipality.

Historical trends were analyzed and used to estimate future values of both equalized valuations for each municipality and aggregate income in each participating district. Enrollments used in the model have been estimated by the study's demographer utilizing a cohort-survival methodology, wherever possible. Where required, other projection methods were also utilized in various sub-calculations within the model.

The model first determines each participating district's adequacy budget, local fair share, and the resulting equalization aid. Three other aid categories – special education categorical aid, security categorical aid, and transportation categorical aid – are calculated and added to the equalization aid to determine a district's total uncapped state aid. Additionally, school choice aid is included in the total where relevant.

As part of the changes enacted under S2, a check is performed each year after the SFRA formula amounts are determined. Current year formula amounts are compared to the amount of state aid received by the district in the prior year. This comparison is called the state aid differential. A positive differential means that the district received more aid in the prior year than the formula would provide in the current year while a negative differential means that a district's prior year state aid was less than is needed for the current year.

Through FY 2025, districts with positive state aid differentials had prior year funding reduced to match the current year formula amount and districts with negative state aid differentials had funding increased to match current year formula amounts. Despite the S2 period coming to an end in FY 2025, state aid differentials are significant to this financial impact analysis because P.L.2021, c.402 provides a means for school districts participating in an SREP grant who have a positive state aid differential to preserve state aid that might otherwise be removed each year prior to regionalization.⁵³

The model calculates state aid differentials pursuant to the formula defined in S2 to determine eligibility for any state aid benefit a district may qualify for under P.L.2021, c.402. This process is performed for each participating district in the status quo scenario and, where applicable, for the consolidated all-purpose regional school district in that scenario. All estimated P.L.2021, c.402 benefits are summarized later in this subsection.

⁵³ This is described in detail in a later section.

The figures generated from running the model represent a comprehensive estimate of state aid for FY 2027 through FY 2030 that reflect the expectations of both the study’s financial and demographic experts and that are informed by the most up-to-date data.

State Aid History in the Region

Historically, none of the districts in the region have received equalization aid and all rely instead on the State’s three categorical aid groups, which are provided to all districts regardless of wealth and income. Equalization is not provided because each district’s equalized valuation (i.e., property values) and aggregate income factors are such that local fair share under the SFRA formula is higher than the adequacy budget. When this is the case, in the eyes of the state’s formula, a district is able to raise the vast majority of funds needed for its public education through local school taxes.

Tables 93 through 97 present the state aid received by each participating school district for FY 2021 through FY 2026.⁵⁴

TABLE 93
Actual State Aid, Watchung Hills, FY 2021-26

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Equalization Aid	0	0	0	0	0	0
Transportation Aid	616,602	616,602	623,622	801,052	896,644	901,260
Special Education Aid	960,039	1,290,941	1,502,805	1,512,388	1,547,361	1,623,635
Security Aid	83,096	83,096	125,373	126,458	129,276	183,642
Adjustment Aid	0	0	0	0	0	0
School Choice Aid	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total State Aid	1,659,737	1,990,639	2,251,800	2,439,898	2,573,281	2,708,537
Prior Year State Aid	1,589,377	1,659,737	1,990,639	2,251,800	2,439,898	2,573,281
YoY Difference (\$)	70,360	330,902	261,161	188,098	133,383	135,256
YoY Difference (%)	4.43%	19.94%	13.12%	8.35%	5.47%	5.26%

State aid for Watchung Hills increased by 55% between FY 2021 and FY 2025 despite declining enrollment with the regional benefiting from the state’s broader efforts to fully fund the SFRA formula. Increases in underlying SFRA formula variables worked to increase the district’s adequacy budget and completely offset its enrollment declines. The \$135,256 (5.26%) increase for FY 2026 stems primarily from continued upward revisions to underlying SFRA formula variables – for example, SFRA provided an increase of \$1,180 in funding for every high school student – in addition to a small, but increasing, percentage of students qualifying for free and reduced price meals, which are funded at higher levels.

⁵⁴ State School Aid Summaries, NJDOE Office of School Finance

TABLE 94
Actual State Aid, Warren, FY 2021-26

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Equalization Aid	0	0	0	0	0	0
Transportation Aid	387,630	431,284	482,889	1,120,126	1,120,126	871,514
Special Education Aid	1,317,723	1,488,204	1,556,717	1,754,941	1,876,312	2,217,106
Security Aid	34,560	127,811	130,164	147,819	147,819	244,293
Adjustment Aid	0	0	0	0	0	0
School Choice Aid	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total State Aid	1,739,913	2,047,299	2,169,770	3,022,886	3,144,257	3,332,913
Prior Year State Aid	1,658,159	1,739,913	2,047,299	2,169,770	3,022,886	3,144,257
YoY Difference (\$)	81,754	307,386	122,471	853,116	121,371	188,656
YoY Difference (%)	4.93%	17.67%	5.98%	39.32%	4.02%	6.00%

Examining the five year period from FY 2021 to FY 2025, Warren experienced annual state aid increases in all years of the S2 period. The steady increasing trend in categorical aid is due to two primary factors. First, K-8 average daily enrollment has steadily increased by approximately 155 students over the period. Second, there have been sharp annual increases in statewide formula funding since 2020, which was allocated annually to districts who required additional formula aid. Warren joins Watchung Hills as the only other district in the region to see a scheduled increase in state aid for FY 2026. In this first year post-S2, state aid continued to increase; however, the NJDOE’s introduction of a 6% cap on aid increases relative to prior year state aid meant that Warren received roughly 62% of the increase it would have seen if no caps were in place. Total state aid received by Warren has increased by 92% over the period.

TABLE 95
Actual State Aid, Long Hill, FY 2021-26

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Equalization Aid	0	0	0	0	0	0
Transportation Aid	171,428	171,428	171,428	268,424	330,906	308,679
Special Education Aid	637,649	767,301	874,433	911,645	994,255	931,928
Security Aid	13,945	13,945	71,907	78,115	88,345	130,494
Adjustment Aid	0	0	0	0	0	0
School Choice Aid	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total State Aid	823,022	952,674	1,117,768	1,258,184	1,413,506	1,371,101
Prior Year State Aid	788,191	823,022	952,674	1,117,768	1,258,184	1,413,506
YoY Difference (\$)	34,831	129,652	165,094	140,416	155,322	-42,405
YoY Difference (%)	4.42%	15.75%	17.33%	12.56%	12.34%	-3.00%

Long Hill experienced steady state aid increases throughout the S2 period driven by broader statewide formula aid increases, increases in several of underlying variables used by the SFRA formula, and a rising enrollment trend. Over the five-year period from FY 2021-25, state aid increased by \$590,000 (71%) before declining by the maximum allowed 3% in FY 2026. Under the NJDOE’s new, post-S2 capped methodology, Long Hill’s FY 2026 three-percent aid reduction was lower than the 3.4% cut that would have otherwise been felt due to a slight projected enrollment decline and the downstream impacts of that decline on special education and transportation funding.

TABLE 96
Actual State Aid, Watchung, FY 2021-26

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Equalization Aid	0	0	0	0	0	0
Transportation Aid	160,229	160,229	222,795	336,135	451,320	488,086
Special Education Aid	442,886	560,244	613,252	720,524	807,647	692,472
Security Aid	12,631	12,631	51,205	60,043	67,026	105,655
Adjustment Aid	0	0	0	0	0	0
School Choice Aid	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total State Aid	615,746	733,104	887,252	1,116,702	1,325,993	1,286,213
Prior Year State Aid	592,997	615,746	733,104	887,252	1,116,702	1,325,993
YoY Difference (\$)	22,749	117,358	154,148	229,450	209,291	-39,780
YoY Difference (%)	3.84%	19.06%	21.03%	25.86%	18.74%	-3.00%

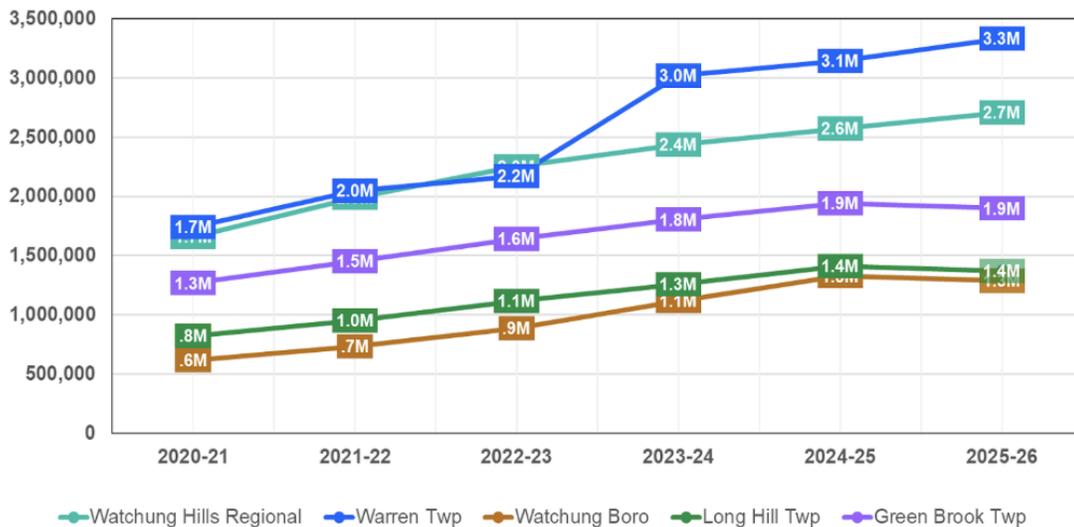
Watchung’s state aid has generally seen steady increases throughout the S2 period. As was the case in Warren, the increases were driven by broader statewide formula aid increases, increases in several underlying variables used by the SFRA formula, especially the special education classification rate, and a rising enrollment trend. Over the six year period, Watchung’s state aid increased by 209%, more than doubling its level from 2021 and adding roughly \$670,000. In FY 2026, under the NJDOE’s new, post-S2 capped methodology, Watchung saw its aid reduced by the maximum allowed 3%. In this case, the state’s cap on formula aid reductions muted the loss as Watchung’s cut was just 26% of the amount that would have otherwise been removed. The reduction in formula aid was primarily driven by the NJDOE’s methodology change to use actual counts of special education students instead of its historical practice of applying a static statewide classification rate to total enrollment. This change saw funded average daily special education enrollment drop from 107 in FY 2025 to 79 in FY 2026. If NJDOE had not made this change, Watchung would have been funded for approximately 108 special education students.

TABLE 97
Actual State Aid, Green Brook, FY 2021-26

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Equalization Aid	0	0	0	0	0	0
Transportation Aid	289,595	289,595	392,450	487,981	543,148	517,598
Special Education Aid	928,901	1,102,865	1,145,636	1,198,496	1,275,630	1,207,729
Security Aid	48,339	60,277	101,788	116,897	123,887	172,205
Adjustment Aid	0	0	0	0	0	0
School Choice Aid	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total State Aid	1,266,835	1,452,737	1,639,874	1,803,374	1,942,665	1,897,532
Prior Year State Aid	1,222,581	1,266,835	1,452,737	1,639,874	1,803,374	1,942,665
YoY Difference (\$)	44,254	185,902	187,137	163,500	139,291	-45,133
YoY Difference (%)	3.62%	14.67%	12.88%	9.97%	7.72%	-2.32%

Like the other districts, Green Brook saw consistent state aid increases over the five-year S2 period; however, unlike the other districts, its average daily enrollment steadily declined over the period from 1,114 in FY 2021 to a projected 1,044 in FY 2026. This discrepancy warrants an explanation. Despite the enrollment declines, formula variable increases ensured that Green Brook’s adequacy budget continued to rise as higher formula base costs offset the impact of lower enrollments. Like the other districts, Green Brook was consistently considered underaided by the S2 methodology and therefore saw aid increases phase-in through FY 2025. In FY 2026, Green Brook will see a slight reduction of state aid due to continued projected declines in average daily enrollment. Green Brook will see its full SFRA formula aid reduction since at 2.32%, the decline is less than the 3% maximum.

CHART 5
Actual State Aid in the Participating School Districts, FY 2021-26



Projected State Aid in the Status Quo Scenario

This portion presents the model's estimated state aid for each participating district from FY 2027 through FY 2030. The analysis focuses on the SFRA formula aid categories of equalization aid, special education categorical aid, security categorical aid, and transportation categorical aid. Since none of the districts in the region participate in the Interdistrict Public School Choice Program, school choice aid has been excluded. Adjustment aid has also been removed as it phased out completely with the conclusion of the S2 period in FY 2025.

Under a fully funded SFRA paradigm, a district's state aid in each year would be the amount determined by the SFRA funding formula. While seemingly straightforward, this differs significantly from how state aid was determined for nearly two decades prior to FY 2025. Under the old method, instead of receiving the full amount of aid determined by the formula, a district would receive or lose a pro-rata share of the difference between the pre-budget year aid and budget year formula aid. The exact pro-rata share followed a phase-in schedule outlined in S2.

Now that the S2 phase-in is complete, the SFRA formula should have dictated how state aid would be allocated to each school district moving forward. However, as discussed earlier, NJDOE introduced a series of methodology adjustments that altered SFRA parameters and imposed caps on state aid increases (6%) and decreases (3%). These caps, by tying funding to prior year allocations rather than full formula funding, effectively shifted K-12 education funding in NJ back to an off-formula model.

To provide clarity, state aid for this study was analyzed in two ways. First, where the described methodology changes were applied consistently across all years in the study period. Second, where the changes were applied exclusively to FY 2026, with subsequent years reverting back to the default SFRA mechanisms.

Unsurprisingly, the analysis found that in the absence of the caps, state aid would be higher in all districts as SFRA formula amounts are annually adjusted upwards for inflation. The exception is for Watchung Hills during the first two years of the projection (FY 2027 and FY 2028), in which the district would receive the same amount of state aid in either scenario as its annual aid increases continually fall below the 6% allowed maximum, ensuring full SFRA funding is received. During the final two years of the projection, however, Watchung Hills will join the remaining districts receiving aid increases capped at 6%.

For this reason, Tables 98 through 102 summarize the projections for status quo state aid with the capped methodology applied. An uncapped aid row has been added to highlight differences between the two scenarios. Actual FY 2026 figures are included for comparison.

TABLE 98
Projected State Aid, Watchung Hills, FY 2027-30 ⁵⁵

	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029	FY 2030
Equalization Aid	0	0	0	0	0
Transportation Aid	901,260	913,944	934,885	969,162	1,016,477
Special Education Aid	1,623,635	1,738,409	1,824,295	1,960,014	2,090,657
Security Aid	183,642	186,226	190,493	197,478	207,119
Total State Aid	2,708,537	2,838,579	2,949,673	3,126,654	3,314,253
Prior Year State Aid	2,573,281	2,708,537	2,838,579	2,949,673	3,126,654
YoY Difference (\$)	135,256	130,042	111,094	176,980	187,599
YoY Difference (%)	5.26%	4.80%	3.91%	6.00%	6.00%
Uncapped Aid	2,708,537	2,838,579	2,949,673	3,244,481	3,428,672

Watchung Hills is projected to experience mostly stable-to-increasing enrollment, resulting in increasing state aid from FY 2027 through FY 2030 and bolstered by annual inflationary adjustments to the underlying variables in the SFRA formula. Since annual aid increases throughout the initial two-year period (FY 2027 and FY 2028) remain below the 6% cap, there is no difference between capped and uncapped aid, with the regional effectively receiving full formula funding during those years. As stated above, the district will then continue to receive increases, but will be subject to the artificial 6% cap. Total state aid received during the final two years studied with caps in place runs below the uncapped aid amount from FY 2029 through FY 2030, with an average annual gap of about \$116,000 and a cumulative total of \$232,000.

TABLE 99
Projected State Aid, Warren, FY 2027-30

	FY 2026*	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029	FY 2030
Equalization Aid	0	0	0	0	0
Transportation Aid	871,514	902,786	941,122	984,238	1,029,242
Special Education Aid	2,217,106	2,377,044	2,539,934	2,709,424	2,889,978
Security Aid	244,293	253,059	263,805	275,891	288,506
Total State Aid	3,332,912	3,532,888	3,744,861	3,969,553	4,207,726
Prior Year State Aid	3,144,257	3,332,913	3,532,888	3,744,861	3,969,553
YoY Difference (\$)	188,655	199,975	211,973	224,692	238,173
YoY Difference (%)	6.00%	6.00%	6.00%	6.00%	6.00%
Uncapped Aid	3,450,736	3,680,268	3,905,863	4,102,451	4,351,535

⁵⁵ Actual FY 2026 state aid figures presented for continuity

In the status quo scenario, Warren continues operating its grades pK-8 district while students in grades 9-12 attend the regional high school. State aid is projected to increase throughout the studied period, driven largely by projected increases in enrollment and annual inflationary adjustments to the underlying variables in the SFRA formula. Total state aid received with caps in place runs below the uncapped aid amount from projected FY 2027 through projected FY 2030, with an average annual gap of \$146,000 and a cumulative total of \$585,000.

TABLE 100
Projected State Aid, Long Hill, FY 2027-30

	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029	FY 2030
Equalization Aid	0	0	0	0	0
Transportation Aid	308,679	283,243	294,274	304,473	317,693
Special Education Aid	931,928	1,050,384	1,121,891	1,199,815	1,278,987
Security Aid	130,494	119,740	124,404	128,715	134,304
Total State Aid	1,371,101	1,453,367	1,540,569	1,633,003	1,730,983
Prior Year State Aid	1,413,506	1,371,101	1,453,367	1,540,569	1,633,003
YoY Difference (\$)	-42,405	82,266	87,202	92,434	97,980
YoY Difference (%)	-3.00%	6.00%	6.00%	6.00%	6.00%
Uncapped Aid	1,364,949	1,576,315	1,706,588	1,852,697	1,926,117

State aid to Long Hill is projected to increase steadily over the period, from \$1.45 million in FY 2027 to \$1.73 million in FY 2030 driven largely by projected increases in enrollment and annual inflationary adjustments to the underlying variables in the SFRA formula. Outside of the actual FY 2026 figures, total state aid received with caps in place runs below the uncapped aid amount for all years in the studied period, with an average annual gap of \$176,000 and a cumulative total of \$704,000. In 2026, Long Hill will receive more than its uncapped aid amount due to the 3% cap on aid reductions. In that year, the SFRA formula would have dictated a reduction of \$49,000 but the caps limited the reduction to \$42,000. This one-year benefit slightly offsets some of the differences seen in subsequent years.

TABLE 101
Projected State Aid, Watchung, FY 2027-30

	FY 2026*	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029	FY 2030
Equalization Aid	0	0	0	0	0
Transportation Aid	488,086	419,045	436,202	451,945	473,812
Special Education Aid	692,472	853,631	914,563	982,124	1,047,436
Security Aid	105,655	90,710	94,424	97,832	102,566
Total State Aid	1,286,213	1,363,386	1,445,189	1,531,900	1,623,814
Prior Year State Aid	1,325,993	1,286,213	1,363,386	1,445,189	1,531,900
YoY Difference (\$)	-39,780	77,173	81,803	86,711	91,914
YoY Difference (%)	-3.00%	6.00%	6.00%	6.00%	6.00%
Uncapped Aid	1,173,627	1,454,367	1,635,790	1,849,446	1,915,992

From FY 2027-30, Watchung is projected to experience steadily increasing state aid driven largely by projected increases in enrollment and annual inflationary adjustments to the underlying variables in the SFRA formula. Outside of FY 2026, total state aid received with caps in place runs below the uncapped aid amount for all years in the studied period, with an average annual gap of \$223,000 and a cumulative total of \$891,000. In FY 2026, Watchung will receive more than its uncapped aid amount due to the 3% cap on aid reductions. In that year, the SFRA formula would have dictated a reduction of \$152,000, but the caps limited the reduction to just \$40,000. This one-year benefit offsets some of the differences seen in subsequent years.

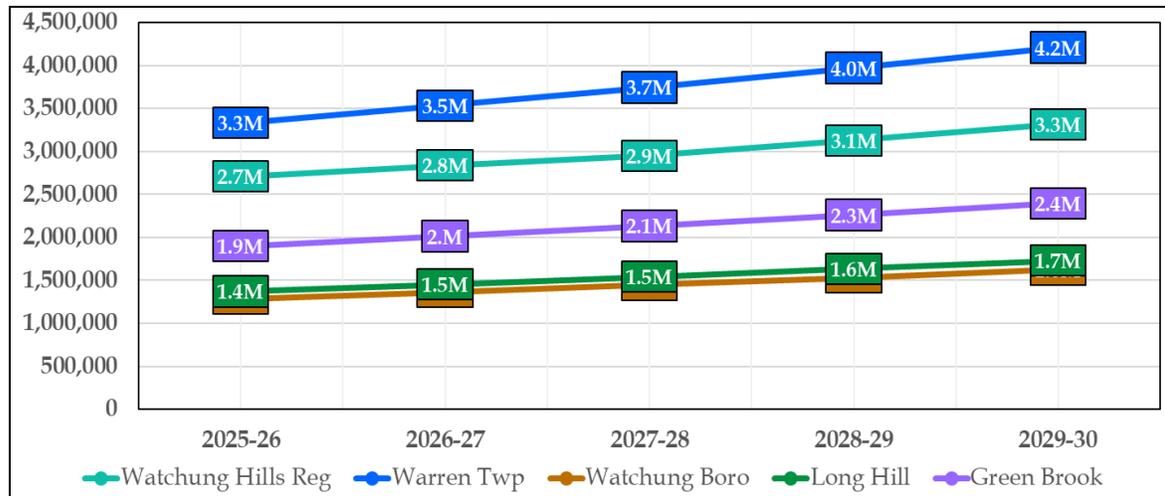
TABLE 102
Projected State Aid, Green Brook, FY 2027-30

	FY 2026*	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029	FY 2030
Equalization Aid	0	0	0	0	0
Transportation Aid	517,598	497,746	520,047	537,893	562,561
Special Education Aid	1,207,729	1,348,037	1,439,000	1,543,140	1,645,865
Security Aid	172,205	165,600	173,020	178,957	187,164
Total State Aid	1,897,532	2,011,384	2,132,067	2,259,991	2,395,590
Prior Year State Aid	1,942,665	1,897,532	2,011,384	2,132,067	2,259,991
YoY Difference (\$)	-45,134	113,852	120,683	127,924	135,599
YoY Difference (%)	-2.32%	6.00%	6.00%	6.00%	6.00%
Uncapped Aid	1,897,532	2,223,301	2,413,781	2,788,565	3,019,556

Though state aid to Green Brook decreased by about \$45,000 in FY 2026, aid is expected to increase over the next four years, from \$2.0 million in FY 2027 to \$2.4 million in FY 2030, driven by an increasing projected enrollment trend and annual inflationary adjustments to the underlying variables in the SFRA formula. Total state aid received with caps in place runs below the uncapped aid

amount for all years in the studied period, with an average annual gap of \$412,000 and a cumulative total of \$1.6 million.

CHART 6
Projected State Aid in the Participating School Districts, FY 2026-30



Projected State Aid for an Expanded All Purpose Regional School District

P.L.2021, c.402 updated several aspects of the law governing school district regionalization as it pertains to state aid. First, it created an alternative method of determining state aid for regional school districts participating in a feasibility study under a SREP grant. The alternative method held the expanded or newly created regional school district harmless to the prior year such that the new regional’s funding could not fall below the sum of all constituent district state aid in the year prior to regionalization. This is referred to as the “greater of” benefit in this subsection that follows.

Second, it created an incentive for school districts participating in feasibility studies under an SREP grant by slowing any state aid reductions that may occur through FY 2029. In practical terms, the incentive allowed districts to retain a modest amount of state aid that otherwise would have been removed. This is referred to as the “slower phase-out” benefit in this subsection that follows.

Having already presented estimated state aid under the status quo scenario for each participating district in the prior subsection, this one presents the comparable state aid figures for an expanded, all purpose, regional school district using two distinct scenarios. First, for a regional consisting of all five districts, namely Watchung Hills, Warren, Long Hill, Watchung, and Green Brook (all districts); and second, a regional consisting of the three communities that are currently constituents of Watchung Hills (current constituents) with Green Brook remaining in a send-receive relationship with the enlarged regional. As an enlarged regional, the elementary and middle school student counts, demographics, property values, and aggregate personal incomes of the constituent districts all shift into the regional for purposes of calculating state aid pursuant to the SFRA funding formula.

In the all districts scenario, Green Brook would become a constituent member of the enlarged regional, and therefore, would also have its enrollment, property value, and income counted in the regional district. The existing limited-purpose Watchung Hills state aid would all also be absorbed into the expanded regional.

In the current constituents scenario, Green Brook would continue operating as a grades pK-8 district and would continue to send high school students to the expanded regional through a send-receive relationship. Therefore, from a state aid perspective, it would retain the same state aid it would receive in the status quo scenario and the regional’s state aid would be reduced by a roughly equivalent amount.

TABLE 103
Projected Capped State Aid, All Districts Scenario, FY 2027-30⁵⁶

	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029	FY 2030
Equalization Aid	0	0	0	0
Transportation Aid	3,047,115	3,178,074	3,289,833	3,441,687
Special Education Aid	7,357,127	7,864,514	8,436,754	9,000,865
Security Aid	827,831	863,410	893,772	935,028
Total State Aid	11,232,074	11,905,998	12,620,358	13,377,580
Prior Year State Aid	10,596,296	11,232,074	11,905,998	12,620,358
YoY Difference (\$)	635,778	673,924	714,360	757,221
YoY Difference (%)	6.00%	6.00%	6.00%	6.00%

TABLE 104
Projected Capped State Aid, Current Constituents Scenario, FY 2027-30

	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029	FY 2030
Equalization Aid	0	0	0	0
Transportation Aid	2,551,239	2,659,711	2,753,986	2,881,568
Special Education Aid	6,007,861	6,424,502	6,892,215	7,353,171
Security Aid	661,589	689,718	714,166	747,251
Total State Aid	9,220,690	9,773,931	10,360,367	10,981,989
Prior Year State Aid	8,698,764	9,220,690	9,773,931	10,360,367
YoY Difference (\$)	521,926	553,241	586,436	621,622
YoY Difference (%)	6.00%	6.00%	6.00%	6.00%

Tables 103 and 104 present the projected state aid for the all-purpose regional district under each regional scenario where the FY 2026 caps on state aid are applied consistently in each future year. Tables 105 and 106 present comparable figures if caps are removed and full SFRA formula funding resumes beginning in FY 2027.

⁵⁶ The first year of operation of the enlarged regional is assumed to be the 2026-27 school year.

TABLE 105
Projected Uncapped State Aid, All Districts Scenario, FY 2027-30

	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029	FY 2030
Equalization Aid	0	0	0	0
Transportation Aid	3,157,715	3,329,415	3,580,722	3,740,106
Special Education Aid	7,624,166	8,239,025	9,182,737	9,781,303
Security Aid	857,879	904,526	972,800	1,016,101
Total State Aid	11,639,760	12,472,966	13,736,259	14,537,509
Prior Year State Aid	10,596,296	11,639,760	12,472,966	13,736,259
YoY Difference (\$)	1,043,464	833,205	1,263,293	801,251
YoY Difference (%)	9.85%	7.16%	10.13%	5.83%

TABLE 106
Projected Uncapped State Aid, Current Constituents Scenario, FY 2027-30

	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029	FY 2030
Equalization Aid	0	0	0	0
Transportation Aid	2,604,847	2,736,459	2,908,410	3,020,128
Special Education Aid	6,134,101	6,609,887	7,278,682	7,706,748
Security Aid	675,491	709,621	754,211	783,182
Total State Aid	9,414,439	10,055,967	10,941,304	11,510,058
Prior Year State Aid	8,698,764	9,414,439	10,055,967	10,941,304
YoY Difference (\$)	715,675	641,528	885,337	568,754
YoY Difference (%)	8.23%	6.81%	8.80%	5.20%

Following the trend of projected state aid in the separate districts, state aid in an enlarged regional under both scenarios is projected to increase each year in the period studied. Capped aid rises from \$11.2 million in FY 2027 to \$13.4 million in FY 2030 in the all districts scenario, and from \$9.2 million in FY 2027 to \$11 million in FY 2030 in the current constituents scenario. Uncapped aid rises from \$11.6 million in FY 2027 to \$14.5 million in FY 2030 in the all districts scenario, and from \$9.4 million in FY 2027 to \$11.5 million in FY 2030 in the current constituents scenario.

Beyond the discrepancies between capped and uncapped aid, the aid caps influence whether or not there is ultimately a state aid benefit to regionalization among these districts. If the cap methodology persists through FY 2030, total state aid for an enlarged regional would be higher than if the districts remained separate, creating a small state aid benefit to regionalization. However, if the state reverts to full SFRA funding without caps, state aid in the enlarged regional would be slightly lower than the combined total aid of the separate constituent districts, creating instead, a small benefit to remaining separate.

The tables below show the difference in state aid between an enlarged regional and the aggregate sum for all districts if they remain separate for each of the scenarios.

TABLE 107
Projected Capped State Aid Comparison, All Districts Scenario, FY 2027-30

	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029	FY 2030
Capped Aid in the Enlarged Regional	11,232,074	11,905,998	12,620,358	13,377,580
Capped Aid as Separate Districts	11,199,604	11,812,359	12,521,101	13,272,367
Difference	32,470	93,639	99,257	105,213
Better Scenario Financially	Regional	Regional	Regional	Regional

TABLE 108
Projected Capped State Aid Comparison, Current Constituents Scenario, FY 2027-30

	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029	FY 2030
Capped Aid in the Enlarged Regional	9,220,690	9,773,931	10,360,367	10,981,989
Capped Aid as Separate Districts	9,188,220	9,680,292	10,261,110	10,876,777
Difference	32,470	93,639	99,257	105,212
Better Scenario Financially	Regional	Regional	Regional	Regional

Tables 107 and 108 examine the capped aid scenario. With or without Green Brook, the enlarged regional would receive more state aid than the separate districts. In both the all districts and current constituents scenarios, the benefit to regionalization averages \$82,645 annually.

TABLE 109
Projected Uncapped State Aid Comparison, All Districts Scenario, FY 2027-30

	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029	FY 2030
Uncapped Aid in the Enlarged Regional	11,639,760	12,472,966	13,736,259	14,537,509
Uncapped Aid in the Status Quo	11,772,831	12,611,695	13,837,639	14,641,871
Difference	-133,071	-138,730	-101,381	-104,362
Better Scenario Financially	Status Quo	Status Quo	Status Quo	Status Quo

TABLE 110
Projected Uncapped State Aid Comparison, Current Constituents Scenario, FY 2027-30

	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029	FY 2030
Uncapped Aid in the Enlarged Regional	9,414,439	10,055,967	10,941,304	11,510,058
Uncapped Aid in the Status Quo	9,549,530	10,197,914	11,049,074	11,622,315
Difference	-135,091	-141,948	-107,771	-112,257
Better Scenario Financially	Status Quo	Status Quo	Status Quo	Status Quo

Tables 109 and 110 examine the uncapped aid scenario. With or without Green Brook, the enlarged regional would receive less state aid than the districts if left separately constituted. In the all districts

scenario, the benefit to remaining separate averages \$119,000 annually. In the current constituents scenario, the benefit to remaining separate averages \$124,000 annually.

The discrepancy in the benefit to regionalization is due to how the regional's state aid totals interact with the aid caps relative to how each individual district's state aid would be affected by the cap. Essentially, some of the individual districts would hit the 6% cap, while the enlarged regional would not. Despite the discrepancy described above, the relative impact to state aid under any scenario is modest when compared to total state aid or the operating budget of the regional.

Potential Benefits to State Aid

P.L.2021, c.402 dictates that newly created regional school districts shall, "... receive State school aid in an amount that is the greater of: (a) the amount of State school aid that the newly created regional school district would receive as a regional school district; or (b) the sum of the amount of State school aid received by each school district constituting the newly created regional school district prior to the creation of such regional school district." The state aid analysis in this study follows the consultants' interpretation that this statutory language establishes the pre-regionalization sum of state aid as a fixed baseline "hold harmless" amount for comparison. Actual state aid amounts received by the individual districts immediately prior to regionalization were analyzed and compared to projected state aid in the enlarged regional district under both consolidation scenarios, with and without Green Brook. As previously presented, state aid in the regional district under all scenarios studied showed an increasing trend. Therefore, there is no financial benefit to the regional school district under this hold harmless protection.

In addition to hold harmless protection, another provision of P.L.2021, c.402 offered districts who participate in regionalization studies an important protection against state aid losses by prorating the amount of state aid to be removed in the event a district would see less aid relative to the prior school year. The exact proportion used depends on the year and was defined in the legislation. To be eligible, a district: (1) must be a participating district in an SREP grant; (2) must have a positive state aid differential; and (3) must be within two years of the SREP grant application approval date. Only Watchung satisfies all three conditions.

However, the caps on state aid increases and decreases put into place in FY 2026 (described earlier in this subsection) nullify the effect of this protection by eliminating any scenario where an eligible district would be better off, and therefore, would voluntarily elect to receive state aid pursuant to the provision. For this reason, it is the consultant's belief that no P.L.2021, c.402 "slower-phase-out" benefit is available to any of the districts participating in this SREP grant.

Additionally, it should be noted that, to date, no district has yet been both eligible for and received the state aid benefit described above. P.L.2021, c.402 was enacted in early 2022, and the Department of Community Affairs only began awarding SREP grants in 2023. Even if the aid caps were not in effect, it remains unclear how NJDOE would implement this provision of the law.

Summary

Having described in detail the various factors and dynamics that impact the regional's state aid, a summary of the conclusions drawn from the above presentation of state aid is warranted.

1. Watchung Hills will see increases in capped state aid through FY 2030, receiving 5% and 4% increases in FY 2027 and FY 2028, and the maximum allowable increase of 6% in both FY 2029 and FY 2030.
2. Warren will see consistent 6% increases in capped state aid through FY 2030.
3. Long Hill will see its FY 2026 state aid reduction reversed and will receive steady capped state aid increases of 6% through FY 2030.
4. Watchung will see its FY 2026 state aid reduction reversed and will receive steady capped state aid increases of 6% through FY 2030.
5. Green Brook will see consistent 6% increases in capped state aid through FY 2030.
6. State aid in an expanded regional under the new capped aid methodology runs substantially below uncapped aid. With caps in place, the regional is expected to hit the 6% ceiling in each year through FY 2030 while increases would range from 6%-10% with no caps. Total aid in the regional would be \$1.2 million higher without caps.
7. With caps in place, the regional will receive more state aid than the total aggregate state aid of the constituent districts if they remain separate. With no caps in place, more aggregate state aid would be received by the constituent districts if they remain separate than in an expanded regional. While the opposing conclusions complicate decision making, the annual impact is minor (between \$83K and \$124K) in all scenarios.
8. The enlarged regional does not stand to benefit from the new "greater of" funding provision in school regionalization law. The hold harmless amount guaranteed by the provision is below the regional's estimated state aid through FY 2030.
9. No participating district in the region will benefit from the "slower phase-out" benefit introduced in P.L.2021, c.402.

Tax Levy Apportionment

Understanding tax distribution among participating communities represents one of the most critical aspects of every regionalization study as the fundamental question underlying all apportionment calculations is how tax burden will be shared among individual families in each community.

The purpose of this analysis is to: (1) evaluate the tax impact of regionalization on each municipality; (2) identify tax apportionment methods that minimize aggregate costs while distributing burden fairly among participating communities; (3) assess the feasibility of achieving

universal tax benefits across constituent districts; and (4) identify potential barriers to regionalization and possible mitigation strategies. This analysis is conducted in accordance with SREP guidelines, which require careful consideration of the tax impact on constituent municipalities as part of any regionalization effort.

Understanding Tax Apportionment Methods

In a regional district, each constituent municipality is responsible for the financial support of the district. In order to determine each municipality's share of the district's total costs, an apportionment method must be chosen. Current law provides that taxes may be apportioned on the basis of the portion of each municipality's equalized property valuation (EPV) allocated to the regional district; the number of students enrolled (ENR) in the regional district from each municipality; or any combination of apportionment based on EPVs and ENRs.

These two primary methods reflect fundamentally different approaches to sharing costs. EPV apportionment distributes expenses based on each community's capacity to pay, operating on the principle that wealthier communities should contribute proportionally more to support education. By contrast, ENR apportionment allocates costs according to each community's usage of the regional district's services, following a service-usage philosophy where communities contribute based on how many students they send to the district.⁵⁷

State law also permits any combination of these two methods, allowing communities to negotiate apportionment formulas that balance ability to pay with service utilization. This flexibility creates a spectrum of possible tax distributions, each producing different impacts on participating communities.

The fairness of tax apportionment methods in regional school districts has long been debated in NJ. At its core, this debate pits EPV methods, which benefit districts with lower property wealth, against ENR-based approaches, which tend to favor wealthier areas. This tension between apportionment strategies has been a recurring theme in school district regionalization since the original regionalization law was adopted in 1931 and reflects competing philosophies about fairness and community responsibility that extend far beyond technical formula considerations.

Analytical Methodology

The flexibility in combining apportionment methods creates extensive analytical possibilities. Since each method can be weighted anywhere from zero to one hundred percent in whole number increments, this analysis examined one hundred and one different apportionment scenarios. These scenarios range from pure property value apportionment on one end to pure enrollment apportionment on the other, and every possible combination in between.

⁵⁷ Equalized Property Valuations (EPVs) represent the estimated market value of all taxable property in a community. Aggregate assessed values are adjusted to ensure consistency across the state. Because local assessing practices vary, the state "equalizes" values so that property wealth can be fairly compared across municipalities for purposes such as distributing state aid and apportioning school taxes.

For example, one scenario might weight EPVs at 75% and ENR at 25%, while another might reverse these weightings. Each combination produces a unique distribution of tax responsibilities across the participating communities that reflect different balances of ability-to-pay and service-usage principles.

The detailed analysis that follows provides a foundation for informed decision-making about the most appropriate approach for the proposed regional district and allows stakeholders to understand the full range of possible outcomes under regionalization rather than being limited to a single apportionment assumption. The analysis identifies which apportionment scenarios would provide the greatest aggregate financial benefit to the participating municipalities, while also revealing how different scenarios might affect individual communities differently.

Historical and Projected Property Wealth

To evaluate the financial impact of regionalization, this analysis must project both scenarios into the future using consistent assumptions about growth and change over time. The consultants analyzed up to forty years of historical data on enrollments, equalized property valuations, and assessed property values to establish reliable projection methods for each participating community. These historical patterns provide the foundation for estimating future property values and enrollment changes that will affect each community's tax responsibility regardless of which consolidation scenario is chosen.

Under the status quo scenario, the projection methodology reflects typical growth patterns for school districts by assuming that each district's tax levy will increase by the maximum allowable two percent annually. This captures how costs would likely evolve if each community maintains its existing operating structure while accounting for normal inflation and program expansion.

For the regionalization scenarios, the same projection methods to estimate total costs for the combined regional district are applied. The methodology then incorporates identified cost savings stemming from regionalization efficiencies before using projected EPV and ENR figures to determine how net costs would be distributed among the communities through the process.

This approach ensures that both scenarios use identical assumptions about underlying economic and demographic trends, allowing the analysis to isolate the specific impacts of regionalization from other variables that affect costs over time. Tables 111 and 112 contain the historical and current EPVs for each municipality. Data for each year represent the EPVs used in state aid and tax apportionment calculations. For example, the EPVs listed for 2026 are from the 2024-25 fiscal year.

TABLE 111
Historical EPVs, FY 2021-26

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Warren	4,598,910,887	4,519,397,683	4,627,387,161	4,928,783,253	5,138,946,338	5,445,416,985
Long Hill	1,739,575,683	1,763,753,171	1,814,994,572	1,940,492,324	2,030,701,261	2,130,133,912
Watchung	1,811,198,928	1,818,799,510	1,857,268,587	1,985,898,746	2,081,248,843	2,130,054,945
Green Brook	1,411,675,094	1,424,256,545	1,524,555,051	1,681,749,195	1,795,482,184	1,829,457,480

TABLE 112
Projected EPVs, FY 2027-30

	2027	2028	2029	2030
Warren	5,773,620,489	6,020,648,366	6,188,095,898	6,231,822,908
Long Hill	2,224,647,811	2,293,471,841	2,333,061,845	2,374,606,364
Watchung	2,231,711,955	2,286,370,361	2,283,977,060	2,258,998,562
Green Brook	1,935,979,481	2,009,506,942	2,047,435,015	2,063,084,378

After reaching highs in around 2010, EPVs in each municipality mostly trended sideways through 2020 and have begun to rise through the present. The future projections factor in longer-term secular trends informed by historical data dating back to 1985. Based on those trends, equalized values were forecast for 2027 through 2030. EPVs are expected to rise in each municipality, peak at points over the next several years, flatten, and then begin to decline. Analysis of broader statewide EPVs shows consistent cyclical patterns to those in the individual communities which reinforces the credibility of the individual projections and suggests that local trends reflect broader economic forces in addition to each’s community-specific economic conditions.

The model indicates that EPVs will peak at different times across the participating communities. Watchung valuations are expected to peak earliest, beginning to reverse in 2029. Warren and Green Brook are projected to reach peak valuations in 2030, at which point their equalized values will begin declining. Long Hill is expected to experience the longest growth period, with valuations continuing to rise until peaking in 2032.

These varying peak timings reflect differences in local development patterns, property market dynamics, and demographic trends that influence each community's property wealth trajectory over time. Generally, the model anticipates the upward trend observed over the last decade to come to a conclusion around 2030 and begin to reverse for some period of time.

Under the current system, each municipality's total EPV is divided between its elementary district and the regional high school district based on student ENR patterns. The percentage of a municipality's students enrolled in grades K-8 determines the share of equalized value attributed to the elementary district, while the percentage of students in high school determines the portion allocated to the regional school district.

TABLE 113
EPVs Attributed to Each School District, FY 2022-26

	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Warren Total	4,519,397,683	4,627,387,161	4,928,783,253	5,138,946,338	5,445,416,985
K-8 Portion	2,917,271,204	3,035,565,978	3,326,928,696	3,579,790,019	3,800,356,514
9-12 Portion	1,602,126,479	1,591,821,183	1,601,854,557	1,559,156,319	1,645,060,471
Long Hill Total	1,763,753,171	1,814,994,572	1,940,492,324	2,030,701,261	2,130,133,912
K-8 Portion	1,209,758,300	1,278,663,676	1,371,539,975	1,416,820,270	1,523,897,801
9-12 Portion	553,994,871	536,330,896	568,952,349	613,880,991	606,236,111
Watchung Total	1,818,799,510	1,857,268,587	1,985,898,746	2,081,248,843	2,130,054,945
K-8 Portion	1,214,594,313	1,239,541,055	1,402,838,874	1,496,834,168	1,511,913,000
9-12 Portion	604,205,197	617,727,532	583,059,872	584,414,675	618,141,945

TABLE 114
EPV Percentages Attributed to Each School District, FY 2022-26

	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Warren K-8 Portion	64.6	65.6	67.5	69.7	69.8
Warren 9-12 Portion	35.5	34.4	32.5	30.3	30.2
Long Hill K-8 Portion	68.6	70.5	70.7	69.8	71.5
Long Hill 9-12 Portion	31.4	29.6	29.3	30.2	28.5
Watchung K-8 Portion	66.8	66.7	70.6	71.9	71.0
Watchung 9-12 Portion	33.2	33.3	29.4	28.1	29.0

The historical data reveal a significant trend in EPV allocation patterns over the past five years. While the three communities maintain similar allocation ratios, all three have experienced consistent declines in the share of EPV attributed to the regional high school. Warren’s regional allocation has decreased from 35.5% in FY 2022 to 30.2% in FY 2026, with K-8 allocation inversely increasing from 64.6% to 69.8%. Watchung shows a similar pattern, with regional allocation declining from 33.2% to 29.0%, while K-8 allocation rose from 66.8% to 71.0%. Long Hill also shows the same trend with regional allocation falling from 31.4% to 28.5% and K-8 allocation increasing from 68.6% to 71.5%.

This systematic shift across all three communities reflects similar demographic trends identified in the study's enrollment projections. The demographer's analysis shows that grades K-8 school enrollment is projected to increase by 754 students by 2030, while grades 9-12 enrollment is expected to increase more slowly and end the study period with 192 additional students. These enrollment patterns directly explain the declining share of equalized valuation attributed to the regional high school, as the allocation methodology bases property wealth distribution on student enrollment ratios between grade levels.

TABLE 115
EPVs Attributed to Each School District, Status Quo, FY 2027-30

	2027	2028	2029	2030
Warren Total	5,773,620,489	6,020,648,366	6,188,095,898	6,231,822,908
K-8 Portion	4,061,164,652	4,321,621,397	4,446,765,712	4,493,767,499
9-12 Portion	1,712,455,837	1,699,026,969	1,741,330,186	1,738,055,409
Long Hill Total	2,224,647,811	2,293,471,841	2,333,061,845	2,374,606,364
K-8 Portion	1,586,173,889	1,640,749,755	1,679,104,610	1,707,104,515
9-12 Portion	638,473,922	652,722,086	653,957,235	667,501,849
Watchung Total	2,231,711,955	2,286,370,361	2,283,977,060	2,258,998,562
K-8 Portion	1,603,931,382	1,672,937,193	1,674,611,980	1,657,427,245
9-12 Portion	627,780,573	613,433,168	609,365,080	601,571,317

TABLE 116
EPV Percentages Attributed to Each School District, Status Quo, FY 2027-30

	2027	2028	2029	2030
Warren K-8 Portion	70.2	71.1	70.6	70.7
Warren 9-12 Portion	29.8	28.9	29.5	29.3
Long Hill K-8 Portion	71.1	71.7	71.9	71.5
Long Hill 9-12 Portion	28.9	28.3	28.1	28.5
Watchung K-8 Portion	71.6	73.4	73.9	73.5
Watchung 9-12 Portion	28.4	26.6	26.2	26.5

The model indicates that grades K-8 allocation percentages will increase modestly in all three communities over the analysis period. Warren’s K-8 allocation is expected to rise from 70.2% to 70.7% by FY 2030, while Watchung’s allocation increases from 71.6% to 73.5%. Long Hill shows the smallest change with K-8 allocation rising from 71.1% to 71.5%. The consistency of these trends across all participating communities reflects the broader patterns identified in the demographer’s enrollment analysis. The demographer’s findings show growth is concentrated in elementary grades while high school enrollment increases lag, as it takes time for elementary and middle school students to age into high school.

Next, the percentages assigned to grades 9-12 are applied to the total community equalized valuations to calculate the equalized valuation attributed to Watchung Hills from all constituent municipalities. This allows us to examine the share of total regional district equalized valuation contributed by each community. Tables 117 and 118 present these figures historically and estimated through FY 2030.

TABLE 117
Allocation of EPV to Watchung Hills, FY 2022-26

	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Watchung Hills Total	2,760,326,547	2,745,879,611	2,753,866,778	2,757,451,985	2,869,438,528
Warren Portion	1,602,126,479	1,591,821,183	1,601,854,557	1,559,156,319	1,645,060,471
Long Hill Portion	553,994,871	536,330,896	568,952,349	613,880,991	606,236,111
Watchung Portion	604,205,197	617,727,532	583,059,872	584,414,675	618,141,945
Warren Share	58.0%	58.0%	58.2%	56.5%	57.3%
Long Hill Share	20.1%	19.5%	20.7%	22.3%	21.1%
Watchung Share	21.9%	22.5%	21.2%	21.2%	21.5%

The percentages shown in the previous table reflect that, at present, roughly 57% of Watchung Hills’ total EPV comes from Warren, 22% from Watchung, and the remaining 21% comes from Long Hill. These percentages become the basis of the tax levy apportionment calculation used to determine what tax amounts must be levied in each municipality.

TABLE 118
Allocation of EPV to Watchung Hills, Status Quo, FY 2027-30

	2027	2028	2029	2030
Watchung Hills Total	2,994,733,580	2,997,793,649	3,075,244,621	3,099,066,276
Warren Portion	1,718,229,458	1,740,569,443	1,822,394,242	1,823,431,383
Long Hill Portion	643,590,612	648,135,142	655,590,378	677,000,274
Watchung Portion	632,913,511	609,089,064	597,260,001	598,634,619
Warren Share	57.4%	58.1%	59.3%	58.8%
Long Hill Share	21.5%	21.6%	21.3%	21.8%
Watchung Share	21.1%	20.3%	19.4%	19.3%

Under the status quo scenario, the projection model indicates modest shifts in contribution patterns through FY 2030. Warren’s share of Watchung Hills’ total EPV will increase 1.4 percentage points to 58.8% by 2030. Long Hill’s share will increase by 0.3 percentage points to 21.8%, and Watchung’s share will decrease by 1.8 percentage points to 19.3%.

Under both of the regionalization scenarios being studied, the EPV picture changes considerably. Since all grades pK-8 districts would be consolidated, municipal EPVs will no longer be apportioned. Instead, each community’s total municipal EPV will be used for tax apportionment purposes in the regional. This will significantly expand the EPV base as grades K-8 property wealth, which currently represents approximately 70% of each municipality's total, becomes incorporated into the regional’s apportionment calculation. Additionally, in the all districts scenario, Green Brook will become a constituent district and will have its EPV added to the mix.

TABLE 119
Allocation of EPV, All Districts Scenario, FY 2027-30

	2027	2028	2029	2030
Warren	5,773,620,489	6,020,648,366	6,188,095,898	6,231,822,908
Long Hill	2,224,647,811	2,293,471,841	2,333,061,845	2,374,606,364
Watchung	2,231,711,955	2,286,370,361	2,283,977,060	2,258,998,562
Green Brook	1,935,979,481	2,009,506,942	2,047,435,015	2,063,084,378
Total EPV	12,165,959,737	12,609,997,510	12,852,569,817	12,928,512,211
Warren Share	47.5%	47.7%	48.1%	48.2%
Long Hill Share	18.3%	18.2%	18.2%	18.4%
Watchung Share	18.3%	18.1%	17.8%	17.5%
Green Brook Share	15.9%	15.9%	15.9%	16.0%

Table 119 presents how EPVs will be split between the four municipalities in the all districts scenario, and Table 120 presents the same for the current constituent scenario. These percentage distributions determine each community's share of the regional's tax burden under EPV-based apportionment. In an enlarged all-purpose regional district with all four municipalities as constituents, the total equalized valuation base climbs to a high of \$12.9 billion in FY 2030 from a starting point of \$12.2 billion in FY 2027. Warren will still represent the largest share at 47.5% in FY 2027 (48.2% by FY 2030), more than ten points less than it comprises in the status quo scenario (57.5%). Similarly, Watchung's share is also reduced when compared to its share in the status quo (18.3% vs. 21.1%). Long Hill's share drops relative to the status quo as well (18.3% vs. 21.4%) and the addition of Green Brook as a constituent would see it comprise 15.9% in FY 2027 and 16.0% by FY 2030.

TABLE 120
Allocation of EPV, Current Constituents Scenario, FY 2026-29

	2027	2028	2029	2030
Warren	5,773,620,489	6,020,648,366	6,188,095,898	6,231,822,908
Long Hill	2,224,647,811	2,293,471,841	2,333,061,845	2,374,606,364
Watchung	2,231,711,955	2,286,370,361	2,283,977,060	2,258,998,562
Total EPV	10,229,980,255	10,600,490,567	10,805,134,802	10,865,427,834
Warren Share	56.4%	56.8%	57.3%	57.4%
Long Hill Share	21.7%	21.6%	21.6%	21.9%
Watchung Share	21.8%	21.6%	21.1%	20.8%

In an enlarged regional consisting of just the three current constituents, the total EPV grows to \$10.9 billion by FY 2030. Warren again comprises the largest share at 56.4% and increases to 57.4% over the period. Watchung declines from 21.8% to 20.8%, and Long Hill remains stable over the period

with a slight growth trend rising from 21.7% to 21.9%. If the current method of apportioning costs amongst constituents in the existing Watchung Hills, which relies solely on equalized valuations, was applied to the expanded regional, the percentage figures in the tables above would describe the share of the total tax levy each community must pay.

The choice between scenarios creates different implications for tax burden distribution. In the four-municipality scenario, Warren’s reduced share means approximately 9-10 percentage points of the regional's tax burden would be redistributed to other communities. In the three-constituent scenario, this redistribution would be more modest, with Warren experiencing approximately a 1 percentage point reduction. For Watchung and Long Hill, the four-municipality scenario would reduce their shares by approximately 2-3 percentage points each, while the three-municipality scenario would maintain shares very close to current levels.

As previously mentioned, while EPV represents one method for apportioning costs among constituent communities, state law also permits using student enrollment. The following subsection examines the ENR patterns for the same time period and provides a comparison of how these two different apportionment methods would impact each municipality's share of the tax levy.

Historical and Projected Enrollment

State law requires regional districts to use average daily enrollment (ADE) for cost apportionment rather than point-in-time student counts. ADE represents the average number of students enrolled over the course of a school year, calculated by dividing the total number of days all students are enrolled by the number of days school is in session. The timing of cost apportionment calculations requires using prebudget year enrollments for planning purposes. For example, FY 2027 calculations will be based on actual attendance patterns from the 2025-26 school year, ensuring that apportionment reflects demonstrated enrollment patterns rather than projections.

TABLE 121
Historical Prebudget Year ADE by Municipality, FY 2022-26 ⁵⁸

	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Warren	2,331.5	2,302.0	2,346.5	2,328.5	2,308.5
Long Hill	1,181.0	1,181.0	1,171.5	1,212.5	1,189.5
Watchung	898.5	896.0	914.5	920.5	911.5
Green Brook	1,114.5	1,107.0	1,092.0	1,084.0	1,044.5
Total ENR	5,525.5	5,486.0	5,524.5	5,545.5	5,454.0
Warren Share	42.2%	42.0%	42.5%	42.0%	42.3%
Long Hill Share	21.4%	21.5%	21.2%	21.9%	21.8%
Watchung Share	16.3%	16.3%	16.6%	16.6%	16.7%
Green Brook Share	20.2%	20.2%	19.8%	19.5%	19.2%

⁵⁸ Comparable data unavailable for 2021; all enrollments presented are from the prebudget year

Total ADE across the four municipalities has fluctuated over the past five years, showing an overall declining trend from 5,526 students in FY 2022 to 5,454 in FY 2026. Examining each municipality, Warren consistently accounts for the largest share, maintaining approximately 2,300 students (42-43% of total) through the period. Warren’s enrollment has fluctuated between 2,302 and 2,347 with no clear directional trend. Long Hill shows more variability, with enrollment rising to 1,213 in FY 2025 before declining to 1,190 in FY 2026. Watchung has experienced the most consistent growth pattern, with enrollment increasing from 899 to 912. This steady upward trend aligns with the demographic analysis showing population growth in Watchung during this period. Green Brook has experienced a steady decline with enrollment falling from 1,115 to 1,045 over the period.

TABLE 122
Projected ADE in an All Purpose Regional, All Districts Scenario, FY 2027-30

	2027	2028	2029	2030
Warren	2,379.3	2,453.8	2,549.3	2,643.2
Long Hill	1,185.8	1,245.0	1,305.2	1,328.3
Watchung	913.0	985.7	1,067.0	1,077.5
Green Brook	1,099.1	1,163.2	1,274.0	1,333.3
Total ENR	5,577.3	5,847.6	6,195.5	6,382.4
Warren Share	42.7%	42.0%	41.1%	41.4%
Long Hill Share	21.3%	21.3%	21.1%	20.8%
Watchung Share	16.4%	16.9%	17.2%	16.9%
Green Brook Share	19.7%	19.9%	20.6%	20.9%

Total enrollment is projected to reverse its recent declining trend and increase steadily through FY 2030. ENR shares in Watchung and Green Brook are expected to increase by .5% and 1.2%, respectively, while Warren and Long Hill’s shares of total community ENR decline by 1.3.% and .5%, respectively.

TABLE 123
Projected ADE in an All Purpose Regional, Current Constituents Scenario, FY 2027-30

	2027	2028	2029	2030
Warren	2,379.3	2,453.8	2,549.3	2,643.2
Long Hill	1,185.8	1,245.0	1,305.2	1,328.3
Watchung	913.0	985.7	1,067.0	1,077.5
Total ENR	4,478.1	4,684.4	4,921.5	5,049.0
Warren Share	53.1%	52.4%	51.8%	52.4%
Long Hill Share	26.5%	26.6%	26.5%	26.3%
Watchung Share	20.4%	21.0%	21.7%	21.3%

Total ENR in the current constituents scenario reflects a similar reversal of recent trends, with ENR increasing from 4,478 in 2027 to 5,049 in 2030. In this scenario, Warren again comprises the largest share at 52%-53%, followed by Long Hill at roughly 26.5% and Watchung at 20%-22%.

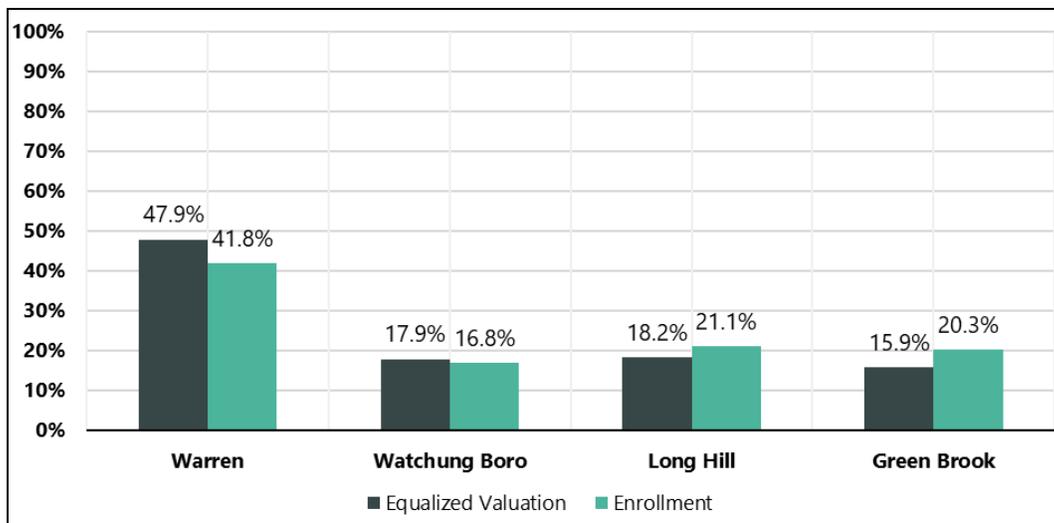
These ENR share changes have direct implications for cost apportionment under ENR-based scenarios. Communities with increasing ENR shares would bear proportionally larger shares of regional costs, while communities with declining shares would see their cost responsibilities decrease accordingly.

The patterns in ENR and EPV across municipalities warrant a direct comparison to fully understand their implications for tax apportionment. The following table and chart present average shares over the four-year period (FY 2027-30) using both methods and highlights the key differences between property values and student enrollment in the communities in the region over both regionalization scenarios.

TABLE 124
Summary Comparison, All Purpose Regional, All Districts Scenario, FY 2027-30

	Avg. EPV Share	Avg. ENR Share	Difference
Warren	47.9%	41.8%	6.1
Long Hill	18.2%	21.1%	-2.9
Watchung	17.9%	16.8%	1.1
Green Brook	15.9%	20.3%	-4.3

CHART 7
EPV Share vs ENR Share, All Purpose Regional, All Districts Scenario, FY 2026-29



The comparison reveals significant disparities in how costs would be allocated under each apportionment method. Warren would contribute 47.9% of costs under EPV but only 41.8% under

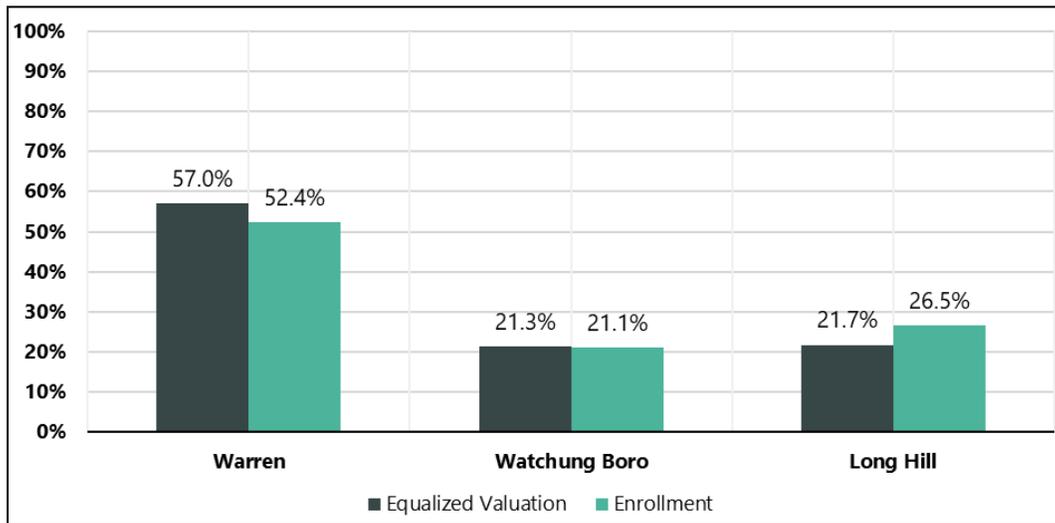
ENR-based apportionment, creating a 6.1 percentage point difference in its financial responsibility. Watchung would also pay more under EPV apportionment, contributing 17.9% of costs compared to 16.8% under ENR, a difference of 1.1 percentage points. These two communities have property wealth that exceeds their proportional ENR in the regional district. Long Hill and Green Brook show the inverse pattern. Long Hill would contribute 18.2% under EPV but 21.1% under ENR, meaning it would pay 2.9 percentage points more under the ENR method. Green Brook would contribute 15.9% under EPV apportionment but 20.3% under ENR, a difference of 4.3 percentage points.

These percentage differences translate directly into varying tax burden distributions depending on the apportionment method chosen. Warren and Watchung would benefit financially from ENR-based apportionment, as their property wealth exceeds their student ENR proportions. Long Hill and Green Brook would prefer EPV apportionment, as their student ENR exceeds their property wealth contributions.

TABLE 125
Summary Comparison, All-Purpose Regional, Current Constituents, FY 2027-30

	Avg. EPV Share	Avg. ENR Share	Difference
Warren	57.0%	52.4%	4.5%
Long Hill	21.7%	26.5%	-4.8%
Watchung	21.3%	21.1%	0.2%

CHART 8
EPV Share vs ENR Share, All Purpose Regional, Current Constituents Scenario, FY 2027-30



The contrast between apportionment methods is similar, yet less pronounced in the current constituents scenario. Warren again represents a significantly larger share of EPV (57.0%) compared to ENR (52.4%). Conversely, Long Hill shows the largest disparity in the opposite

direction, accounting for just 21.7% of EPV but 26.5% of ENR, a 4.8 percentage point difference. Watchung's shares are relatively comparable, differing from each other by just 0.2 percentage points.

Once again, these percentage differences translate directly into varying tax burden distributions depending on the apportionment method chosen. Warren and Watchung would benefit financially from ENR-based apportionment, as their property wealth exceeds their student ENR proportions. Long Hill would prefer EPV apportionment, as its student ENR exceeds its property wealth contributions.

Tax Impact Analysis

Given these disparities between EPV and ENR shares, it is important to examine how different combinations of the two methods would affect each municipality's tax contribution. The following tables present apportionment scenarios in ten-percentage-point increments, from 100% EPV to 100% ENR-based allocation.

It is important to note that tax levies are projected to increase annually in both the status quo and regionalization scenarios and that any potential tax savings or increases indicated in the tables below represent the difference between regionalization and maintaining separate districts in each given year, not changes from current tax levels. In other words, a projected savings typically means a smaller increase compared to the status quo, not necessarily a reduction from today's levels of taxation.

It should also be noted that the total tax levy impact estimates in the tables below are inclusive of cost savings that are described in detail elsewhere in this study. Additionally, the figures are presented under the assumption that such cost savings will be applied as tax relief by the future board of education of the enlarged all-purpose regional district, a decision that must be weighed against the educational programming needs of the students.

The tables that follow will present the comparative impact for a range of apportionment methods going from 100% based on EPV and 0% based on ENR through 0% EPV and 100% ENR. The values included in the table are averages over the period from FY 2027 through FY 2030. Positive numbers represent potential tax liability increases, while negative numbers represent potential reductions in tax liability relative to the status quo.

Table 126 illustrates the significant impact different apportionment ratios would have on each municipality. In the all districts scenario, Warren experiences its greatest tax benefit under ENR-heavy apportionment methods with potential savings reaching \$9.1 million annually under 100% ENR-based allocation. As the weighting shifts toward EPV, Warren's benefit decreases but still represents a tax savings of \$857,217 under 100% EPV apportionment. This pattern shows that Warren would benefit under any apportionment method, but the magnitude varies significantly based on what ratio is selected.

Watchung would face tax increases under all apportionment scenarios shown, with impacts ranging from \$1.0 million under 100% ENR to \$2.6 million under 100% EPV. Watchung would experience smaller tax increases under ENR-heavy methods compared to EPV-heavy ratios.

Long Hill shows mixed results depending on the apportionment method. Long Hill would face tax increases under ENR-heavy scenarios, reaching \$2.98 million under 100% ENR-based apportionment. However, Long Hill would experience tax savings under EPV-heavy scenarios, with benefits reaching \$1.2 million under 100% EPV. The inflection point occurs around the 70% EPV / 30% ENR combination.

Green Brook would also experience mixed results, with tax increases under ENR-heavy scenarios reaching \$2.7 million under 100% ENR. Green Brook would benefit significantly from EPV-heavy apportionment methods with savings reaching \$3 million under 100% EPV. Green Brook has an inflection point around 40% EPV / 60% ENR where the impact shifts from increases to savings as the weighting moves toward EPV.

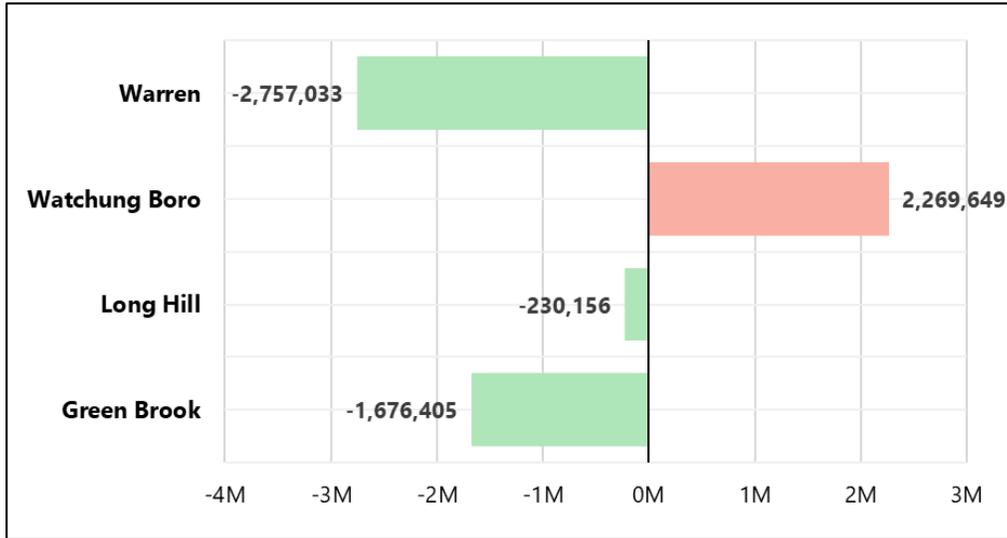
TABLE 126
Average Tax Impact, All Districts Scenario, FY 2027-30 ⁵⁹

	Warren	Long Hill	Watchung	Green Brook
100% EPV / 0% ENR	-857,217	-1,189,353	2,644,344	-2,991,718
90% EPV / 10% ENR	-1,683,224	-772,311	2,481,433	-2,419,843
80% EPV / 20% ENR	-2,509,231	-355,268	2,318,522	-1,847,967
77% EPV / 23% ENR	-2,757,033	-230,156	2,269,649	-1,676,405
70% EPV / 30% ENR	-3,335,237	61,773	2,155,612	-1,276,092
60% EPV / 40% ENR	-4,161,245	478,816	1,992,701	-704,217
50% EPV / 50% ENR	-4,987,252	895,858	1,829,791	-132,342
40% EPV / 60% ENR	-5,813,258	1,312,900	1,666,880	439,534
30% EPV / 70% ENR	-6,639,265	1,729,942	1,503,969	1,011,409
20% EPV / 80% ENR	-7,465,272	2,146,985	1,341,059	1,583,285
10% EPV / 90% ENR	-8,291,279	2,564,027	1,178,148	2,155,160
0% EPV / 100% ENR	-9,117,286	2,981,069	1,015,238	2,727,035

The model’s optimal ratio, which attempts to balance savings and minimize extreme impacts, would weight each community’s EPV at 77% and ENR at 23%. At this ratio, Warren, Long Hill, and Green Brook would all experience a reduction in total tax liability relative to what they would otherwise pay in the status quo. Watchung would see an increase in its tax liability relative to the status quo.

⁵⁹ Bold faced row is the model’s optimal ratio.

CHART 9
Average Tax Impact, All Districts Scenario, FY 2027-30
Optimal 77% EPV-23% ENR Ratio



While the model attempts to identify a combination that could provide benefits to all communities, no such outcome appears possible under current conditions. There is no combination of EPV and ENR parameters that produces tax savings for all municipalities without requiring substantially larger cost savings than currently projected.

TABLE 127
Average Tax Impact, Current Constituents Scenario, FY 2027-30

	Warren	Long Hill	Watchung
100% EPV / 0% ENR	-2,252,253	-1,721,398	2,118,392
97% EPV / 3% ENR	-2,406,950	-1,554,377	2,106,069
90% EPV / 10% ENR	-2,767,910	-1,164,663	2,077,314
80% EPV / 20% ENR	-3,283,567	-607,927	2,036,235
70% EPV / 30% ENR	-3,799,223	-51,192	1,995,157
60% EPV / 40% ENR	-4,314,880	505,543	1,954,079
50% EPV / 50% ENR	-4,830,537	1,062,278	1,913,000
40% EPV / 60% ENR	-5,346,194	1,619,013	1,871,922
30% EPV / 70% ENR	-5,861,850	2,175,748	1,830,844
20% EPV / 80% ENR	-6,377,507	2,732,483	1,789,765
10% EPV / 90% ENR	-6,893,164	3,289,219	1,748,687
0% EPV / 100% ENR	-7,408,821	3,845,953	1,707,609

CHART 10
Average Tax Impact, All Districts Scenario, FY 2027-30
Optimal 97% EPV-3% ENR Ratio

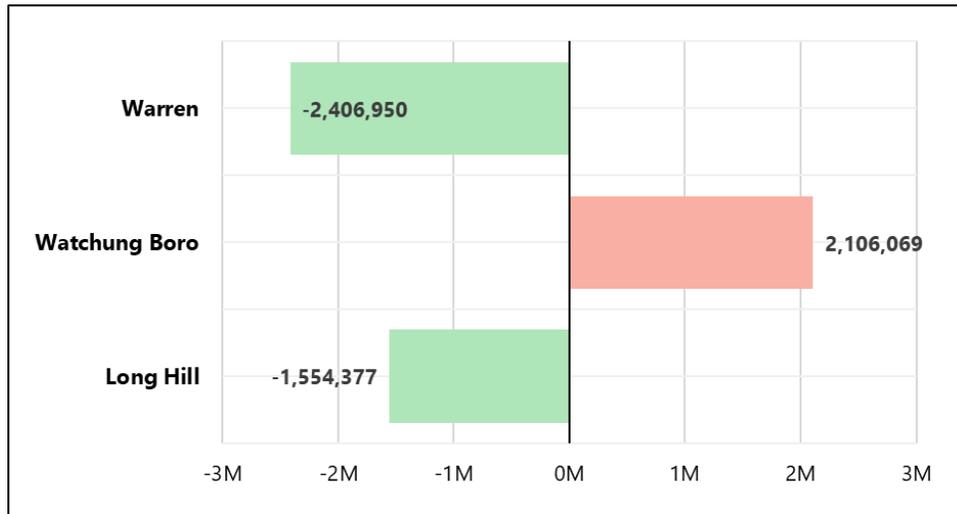


Table 127 and Chart 10 illustrate how the various apportionment ratios affect the three municipalities in the current constituents scenario. The patterns look very similar to the previous scenario with Long Hill benefiting significantly from EPV-heavy ratios, Watchung facing increased costs under EPV-heavy ratios, and Warren benefitting in all scenarios. Here, the model's optimal ratio of 97% EPV / 3% ENR again attempts to balance impacts across the municipalities. However, at this ratio, only Warren and Long Hill would experience savings (\$2.4 million and \$1.55 million, respectively), while Watchung would face increased costs of \$2.1 million, a similar pattern to that in the all districts scenario.

As with the all districts scenario, this analysis once again demonstrates that no combination of EPV and ENR parameters under traditional apportionment methods produces tax savings for all municipalities under current conditions. It is important to understand these financial outcomes in their proper context. The varying impacts across different apportionment ratios demonstrate the complex interplay between property wealth and student population in determining tax responsibility. Each district's outcome is shaped by both its relative property wealth and its proportion of students, with the selected apportionment ratio determining which factor carries more weight.

While operational efficiencies from regionalization can help reduce the total tax levy, the underlying mathematics of redistributing costs means that finding a ratio that benefits all communities remains challenging. Districts with significantly different proportions of property wealth versus student population will often see opposing effects under any given ratio. Therefore, decisions about regionalization in this region should consider the full spectrum of potential benefits – educational, operational, and programmatic – rather than focusing solely on tax impacts.

Tax Rate Implications

This subsection transforms the average tax impacts presented earlier from total dollars into tax rates, something more familiar to taxpayers, and provides a format consistent with other presentations of tax impacts during the annual school budget process. A community’s school tax rate is its total amount of school tax levy divided by its net valuation taxable (total assessed values) multiplied by 100.

TABLE 128
Status Quo Tax Rate per \$100 of Assessed Value, FY 2026

	Status Quo Tax Rate
Warren	1.1397
Long Hill	1.3667
Watchung	1.0113
Green Brook	1.3501

The tax rate analysis provides additional context to the financial impacts of regionalization. Currently, there is significant variation in total school tax rates across the municipalities, ranging from Watchung’s low of \$1.0113 per \$100 of assessed value to Long Hill’s high of \$1.3667.

When each total tax rate is separated for pK-8 and 9-12, some interesting dynamics emerge that help explain why Watchung experiences a negative tax impact under the proposed consolidation configurations. Table 129 presents the itemized tax rates.

TABLE 129
Status Quo Tax Rate per \$100 of Assessed Value, FY 2026 ⁶⁰

	pK-8 Rate	9-12 Rate	Status Quo Tax Rate
Warren	.7799	.3597	1.1397
Long Hill	.9585	.4083	1.3667
Watchung	.6599	.3514	1.0113
Green Brook	NA	NA	1.3501

Though FY 2026 regional tax rates are similar across communities, the separately operated grades pK-8 districts show significant variance, ranging from Watchung’s low of .6599 to Long Hill's high of .9585. This disparity is crucial and sheds light on why Watchung is disproportionately impacted during consolidation. The following tables will illustrate this by comparing FY 2026 rates with projected regional rates under both scenarios. The rates shown in the table are for comparison

⁶⁰ Note: Green Brook is not a constituent district of Watchung Hills, so its tax rate is not split.

purposes only and are not intended to be used as predictions of future actual tax rates which greatly depend on local assessment practices and future values of aggregate assessed property value.

TABLE 130
Average Tax Rate per \$100 of Assessed Value, All Purpose Regional, All Districts Scenario
Model Optimal Ratio of 77% EPV-23% ENR, FY 2027-30

	Status Quo			Enlarged Reg	Difference
	Tax Rate pK-8	Tax Rate Reg 9-12	Total School Tax Rate	Projected Tax Rate	
Warren	0.835	0.380	1.216	1.170	-0.045
Long Hill	1.010	0.418	1.429	1.417	-0.011
Watchung	0.704	0.346	1.050	1.147	0.097
Green Brook	-	-	1.399	1.315	-0.084

TABLE 131
Average Tax Rate per \$100 of Assessed Value, All Purpose Regional, Current Constituents Scenario
Model Optimal Ratio of 97% EPV-3% ENR, FY 2027-30

	Status Quo			Enlarged Reg	Difference
	Tax Rate pK-8	Tax Rate Reg 9-12	Total School Tax Rate	Projected Tax Rate	
Warren	0.835	0.380	1.216	1.176	-0.039
Long Hill	1.010	0.418	1.429	1.353	-0.076
Watchung	0.704	0.346	1.050	1.140	0.090

Under regionalization using traditional tax apportionment scenarios, Watchung is the only community where the total school tax rate increases under regionalization, even though its current total rate remains the lowest of all. Regionalization under the model’s optimal apportionment method splits tax effort across all communities based heavily on EPV in both scenarios. Therefore, communities with historically lower pK-8 tax rates, such as Watchung, see a greater shift.

While projected rates under a regional configuration are generally compared to current rates by those who will ultimately make the decision to regionalize, it may also be helpful to compare these rates to those in other Morris and Somerset county communities participating in regional school districts.

TABLE 132

Tax Rate per \$100 of Assessed Value, Somerset and Morris County Municipalities, January 2025

County	Municipality	School Tax Rate
Morris	Chatham Borough	1.021
Morris	Chatham Township	1.281
Morris	Chester Borough	1.302
Morris	Chester Township	1.740
Morris	Denville Township	1.890
Morris	Dover Town	1.365
Morris	East Hanover Township	1.381
Morris	Florham Park Borough	0.868
Morris	Hanover Township	1.179
Morris	Mendham Borough	1.607
Morris	Mendham Township	1.324
Morris	Morris Township	1.197
Morris	Morristown Town	0.775
Morris	Rockaway Borough	2.070
Morris	Rockaway Township	1.665
Morris	Victory Gardens Borough	1.725
Morris	Washington Township	2.076
Morris	Wharton Borough	1.872
Morris County Avg		1.521
Somerset	Bernardsville Borough	1.121
Somerset	Bridgewater Township	1.321
Somerset	Far Hills Borough	0.409
Somerset	Hillsborough Township	1.383
Somerset	Millstone Borough	0.884
Somerset	Montgomery Township	2.315
Somerset	Peapack and Gladstone Borough	0.780
Somerset	Raritan Borough	1.835
Somerset	Rocky Hill Borough	1.266
Somerset County Avg		1.285

Tax Apportionment Considerations and Insights

Having presented the projected tax impacts, two important points should be reiterated. First, the tax levies being apportioned in the regionalization scenarios are inclusive of cost savings described in a previous subsection. The cost savings total \$2,656,516 in the all districts scenario and \$2,040,875 in the current constituents scenario and include consolidation of duplicated administrative staff positions as well as some reductions in audit costs and other professional services.

Secondly, the savings are potential savings only, and the consultants do not mean to imply that the amounts shown in the table will necessarily be reflected in the future tax levies in each municipality.

It will be up to a future board of education of a grades pK-12 regional district to decide how to allocate any cost savings stemming from regionalization. Tax relief is one of many possible uses of such savings.

Tables 133 and 134 summarize the tax apportionment data at each of the model’s optimal ratios in both scenarios.

TABLE 133
Summary of Tax Apportionment Outputs at 77% EPV-23% ENR Ratio
All Districts Scenario, FY 2027-30

	2027	2028	2029	2030	4-year Avg.
Regional District Total Tax Levy	150,416,270	153,434,580	154,526,264	154,821,458	153,299,643
Warren Tax Levy	70,806,519	71,184,561	71,818,761	72,131,378	71,485,305
Long Hill Tax Levy	28,766,006	29,059,283	29,147,405	29,225,212	29,049,477
Watchung Levy	25,741,159	27,414,661	27,415,737	27,079,166	26,912,681
Green Brook Tax Levy	26,447,079	25,806,661	26,147,170	26,388,680	26,197,398
Warren Impact	1,470,314	2,718,214	3,217,271	3,622,333	2,757,033
Long Hill Impact	-102,014	310,021	488,437	224,179	230,156
Watchung Impact	-1,204,363	-2,654,622	-2,757,662	-2,461,948	-2,269,649
Green Brook Impact	1,180,557	2,345,956	1,804,918	1,374,188	1,676,405
	2027	2028	2029	2030	4-year Avg.
Warren Tax Rate Impact	-0.0241	-0.0445	-0.0527	-0.0593	-0.0451
Long Hill Tax Rate Impact	0.0050	-0.0151	-0.0238	-0.0109	-0.0112
Watchung Tax Rate Impact	0.0513	0.1131	0.1175	0.1049	0.0967
Green Brook Tax Rate Impact	-0.0593	-0.1177	-0.0906	-0.0690	-0.0841
Warren % of Tax Responsibility	47.1%	46.4%	46.5%	46.6%	46.6%
Long Hill % of Tax Responsibility	19.1%	18.9%	18.9%	18.9%	19.0%
Watchung % of Tax Responsibility	17.1%	17.9%	17.7%	17.5%	17.6%
Green Brook % of Tax Responsibility	17.6%	16.8%	16.9%	17.0%	17.1%
Potential Net Taxpayer Savings	2,688,986	2,750,155	2,755,773	2,761,729	2,739,160
Cumulative Benefit	2,688,986	5,439,140	8,194,913	10,956,641	

TABLE 134
Summary of Tax Apportionment Outputs at 97% EPV-3% ENR Ratio
Current Constituent Scenario, FY 2027-30

	2027	2028	2029	2030	4-year Avg.
Regional District Total Tax Levy	123,404,276	125,897,605	127,189,818	127,674,232	126,041,482
Warren Tax Levy	70,860,962	71,152,867	72,353,437	72,974,284	71,835,388
Long Hill Tax Levy	27,808,426	27,497,166	27,679,469	27,915,960	27,725,255
Watchung Boro Tax Levy	25,771,560	27,278,157	27,159,721	26,786,965	26,749,101
Warren Impact	1,415,871	2,749,908	2,682,595	2,779,427	2,406,950
Long Hill Impact	855,566	1,872,138	1,956,373	1,533,431	1,554,377
Watchung Boro Impact	-1,234,764	-2,518,118	-2,501,646	-2,169,747	-2,106,069
Warren Tax Rate Impact	57.4%	56.5%	56.9%	57.2%	57.0%
Long Hill Tax Rate Impact	22.5%	21.8%	21.8%	21.9%	22.0%
Watchung Boro Tax Rate Impact	20.9%	21.7%	21.4%	21.0%	21.2%
Warren % of Tax Responsibility	-0.0232	-0.0450	-0.0439	-0.0455	-0.0394
Long Hill % of Tax Responsibility	-0.0417	-0.0913	-0.0955	-0.0748	-0.0758
Watchung Boro % of Tax Responsibility	0.0526	0.1073	0.1066	0.0925	0.0898
Potential Net Taxpayer Savings	2,073,345	2,134,513	2,140,131	2,146,087	2,123,519
Cumulative Benefit	2,073,345	4,207,858	6,347,990	8,494,077	

Transitional Method of Apportionment

An alternative approach is provided through P.L.2021, c.402, which permits a board of education to establish a transitional methodology, not to exceed ten years, of the apportionment method adopted by the voters provided that the methodology is agreed to by all participating districts. The language is designed to address situations where standard apportionment methods may not benefit all communities during the consolidation process. The transitional method was envisioned as a tool to facilitate school district regionalization in cases where immediate implementation of a new apportionment method might create financial hardships or disparities among the participating districts. It provides a mechanism to smooth out potential tax impacts over time, making the regionalization process more palatable to all stakeholders.

As described in the prior subsection, the standard apportionment methods do not allow for universal tax benefits to all constituents in either regionalization scenario. However, a possible transitional methodology has been developed that would keep tax impacts positive for all districts for the first

five years of the regional's operation and then provide a gradual phase-in towards formulaic apportionment under the optimal weights of 77% EPV and 23% ENR.

The transitional shares for years one through five presented below were set so that all districts benefit compared to the status quo, based on tax modeling over ten years. Beginning in year six and continuing through year eight, each district's share will adjust in equal annual steps toward the permanent formula based 77% on equalized property values and 23% based on each district's share of total district enrollment. By year nine, each district's share of the regional district's total costs will be determined by the new permanent apportionment formula.

TABLE 135
Transitional Shares of Total Regional Tax Levy
"All Districts" Scenario

	Years 1-5: Fixed Shares					Years 6-8: Phase-in			Permanent
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9
Warren	47.7%	47.7%	47.7%	47.7%	47.7%	47.4%	47.1%	46.9%	46.5%
Long Hill	18.7%	18.7%	18.7%	18.7%	18.7%	18.8%	19.0%	19.1%	19.2%
Watchung	15.8%	15.8%	15.8%	15.8%	15.8%	16.1%	16.5%	16.8%	17.3%
Green Brook	17.8%	17.8%	17.8%	17.8%	17.8%	17.6%	17.4%	17.2%	17.0%

This transitional strategy maximizes the probability of tax savings for all districts in the first five years and avoids a scenario where some municipalities experience increases right away. Additionally, the fixed shares provide predictability and stability throughout the initial transition. In line with state law, the transitional shares will fully align with the permanent formula by year nine under this proposal, however, the phase-in could be extended through year ten. This gradual approach gives each community ample time to plan for the long-term distribution of tax responsibility while immediately realizing the educational and programmatic benefits of regionalization in the short-term.

24. Borrowing Margin and Debt Allocation

When school districts merge into a regional district, state law requires that all issued and outstanding bonds, notes, or other financial obligations of the individual districts become the shared responsibility of the new regional. The debt consolidation process is a standard and mandatory component of regionalization, designed to ensure equitable treatment of all member communities within the new configuration. Flexibility introduced by P.L. 2021, c.402 provides a new process for districts to address disparate debt levels or debt-related concerns that might otherwise be barriers to regionalization through the use of a transitional method of apportionment for up to ten years, provided that the transitional method is approved by the Commissioner of Education and is agreed to by all participating districts.

Some districts may enter regionalization carrying significant debt from recent building projects or renovations, while others may have minimal or no outstanding obligations. In the proposed regionalization scenarios, each community would share the responsibility of paying both principal and interest on all existing debt, regardless of which former district originally incurred it. This debt consolidation can be a contentious aspect of the regionalization process, but the consultants emphasize that a holistic view of facilities conditions and future needs should inform these discussions. Districts that have recently invested in facility improvements are contributing updated, modern spaces that will benefit all students in the regional. Conversely, districts entering with minimal debt may have deferred necessary facility improvements, potentially creating future capital expenditures that the regional will need to address. Rather than viewing existing debt in isolation, communities should consider both the immediate and shared benefits of recently improved facilities and the long-term capital needs across all buildings that the regional will ultimately need to address.

While a district may have many financial obligations, there are two types of debt, the obligation for which extends for more than one year. There is a distinct difference in both the methods of incurring and the accounting of the debt. Long term debt (i.e., bonds) is authorized by voters and expensed through the debt service fund. Short term debt is a multi-year obligation authorized by the school district, but budgeted for in the annual budget process. Energy savings and improvement plans (ESIPs) and subscription-based information technology arrangements (SBITAs) are two short term debts that the districts in this region utilize and were considered significant enough to be included in the study. The latter are an area to be explored for sharing services, and a merger may lead to savings due to economies of scale

The issuance of debt and all topics related to it, are strictly guided by state statute.⁶¹ Once a board of education has been authorized to issue bonds, they may authorize the issuance of temporary notes or loan bonds to fund the initial costs of the approved project as money is needed. Four of the five districts in this study currently have bonded debt. Additionally, Watchung has an arbitrage rebate payable of \$323,724 as of June 30, 2024. According to the NJ Audit Program, “A school district may not be required to remit arbitrage rebate payments until several years into the future, but it still must recognize as a liability for rebateable arbitrage as soon as it is both probable and measurable that a liability has been incurred.”

⁶¹ N.J.S.A. 18A:24

TABLE 136
Borrowing Margin as of June 30, 2024 ⁶²

	Avg Equalized Valuation Taxable Property	Debt Limit	Net Bonded School Debt	Legal Debt Margin
Watchung Hills	8,790,201,954	263,706,059	14,807,000	248,899,059
Warren	4,892,346,566	146,770,397	-	146,770,397
Long Hill	1,924,396,819	57,731,905	3,720,000	54,011,905
Watchung	1,973,458,568	59,203,757	15,734,000	43,469,757
CURRENT REGION	8,790,201,954	263,706,059	34,261,000	229,445,059
Green Brook	1,666,582,171	49,997,465	5,500,000	44,497,465
TOTAL	10,456,784,125	313,703,524	39,761,000	273,942,524

Tables 136 and 137 identify the borrowing margin and debt service amounts for each district as they currently exist. Warren passed an \$8.5M referendum on March 11, 2025. The project will have no tax impact as it is totally funded by the capital reserve account and the state contribution share. On July 11, 2024, Watchung Hills added a four-year lease purchase of \$640,000 for technology equipment, classroom furniture, building security, and athletic improvements. The consultants have confirmed with the school business administrators that no other debt was issued or incurred subsequent to the June 30, 2024 ACFR.

The legal debt limit determines how much bonded debt a district is allowed to incur. This is calculated by multiplying the average of the last three years of equalized valuations by the appropriate percentage for the district’s grade level.⁶³ For instance, a K-8 district uses three percent, a K-12 district is calculated at four percent. The amount of existing debt is then subtracted from the maximum allowable debt to determine the legal debt margin, also known as remaining available debt capacity. For bonded debt purposes, each school district is treated as an independent taxing authority with access to the full taxable base of the municipality it serves. As a result, there is overlap in the equalized valuations used for existing K–8 districts and the regional high school. Therefore, the equalized valuations for Watchung Hills and its constituent districts presented in the previous table are not summable.

⁶² Annual Comprehensive Financial Report (ACFR); Watchung Hills data includes all municipalities, but only debt for the high school district. Calculation for the region changes the margin calculation total debt and margin only.

⁶³ N.J.S.A. 18A:24-19

TABLE 137
Debt Service as of June 30, 2024 ⁶⁴

	2025			2026			2027		
	Debt	LP & ESIP	SBITA	Debt	LP & ESIP	SBITA	Debt	LP & ESIP	SBITA
Watchung Hills	3,669,432	694,235	-	3,677,303	682,290	-	3,686,986	680,487	-
Warren	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Long Hill	833,800	82,512	-	841,400	69,040	-	832,600	42,095	-
Watchung	1,206,539	31,978	-	1,128,369	28,978	-	1,135,969	31,979	-
SUBTOTAL	5,709,771	808,725	-	5,647,072	780,308	-	5,655,555	754,561	-
Green Brook	1,463,000	2,187	12,014	1,463,680	2,187	-	1,468,450	2,187	-
TOTAL	7,172,771	810,912	12,014	7,110,752	782,495	-	7,124,005	756,748	-
	2028			2029			2030 - 2043		
	Debt	LP & ESIP	SBITA	Debt	LP & ESIP	SBITA	Debt	LP & ESIP	SBITA
Watchung Hills	3,481,975	454,477	-	1,058,805	459,821	-	-	3,885,671	-
Warren	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Long Hill	838,000	-	-	832,000	-	-	-	-	-
Watchung	1,142,062	31,979	-	1,146,587	-	-	16,570,013	-	-
SUBTOTAL	5,462,037	486,456	-	3,037,392	459,821	-	16,570,013	3,885,671	-
Green Brook	1,467,180	1,276	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
TOTAL	6,929,217	487,732	-	3,037,392	459,821	-	16,570,013	3,885,671	-

25. Collective Bargaining Agreements

P.L.2021, c.402 outlines the conditions of regional district formation, among those being provisions for the main collective bargaining agreement (CBA). It states, "... the newly formed regional district shall recognize each majority representative of the existing bargaining units in the largest constituent district as the majority representatives of those separate bargaining units of employees." It notes further that if there is a classification of employees that does not have a CBA in the largest constituent district, the CBA of the next largest would apply.

... the salary guide and terms and conditions of employment, whether established through a collective negotiations agreement or past practice, of the largest constituent school district shall apply in full after three years following the formation of the regional district or until a successor agreement is negotiated with the majority representative of the new school district, whichever occurs first. The salary guide and terms and conditions of employment that will apply pursuant to the provisions of this subsection shall be based

⁶⁴ Annual Comprehensive Financial Report; LP = Lease Purchase

*upon the terms and conditions of employment of the largest constituent district made up of only the identical grade levels. In the event that there is no constituent district made up of only the identical grade levels, the salary guide and terms and conditions of employment that will apply pursuant to the provisions of this subsection shall be based upon the terms and conditions of employment of the largest constituent district containing the identical grade levels;*⁶⁵

As noted, a successor agreement would need to be negotiated between the new board and new association representatives. As was demonstrated in Tables 92 and 93, the consultants prepared an estimated calculation on what it would cost to align the district's staff to the governing salary guide in the event a successor agreement was not reached. To align the guides, the consultants worked with the following assumptions:

- For grades pK-8 staff, the Warren guide would apply as the largest district by staff count;
- For 9-12 staff, the Watchung Hills guide would remain in place;
- To align the guides in the most cost-effective way, Long Hill, Watchung, and Green Brook staff were moved to the guide step closest to their current salary without being lower;
- No eligible staff member would see a salary cut and many would see increases, as there is not always a perfect landing spot on the new guide; and
- Where an eligible staff member is earning more than the highest step for their given lane, the salary would be frozen until a successor agreement is negotiated.

The review of the main CBAs for each district intends to provide useful information to aid the negotiations process should the districts decide to form an all purpose regional, or can be used simply as points for comparison and synthesis in future negotiations. There are notable differences among the agreements throughout this comparative analysis. Personnel excluded in these main contracts may be represented in other collective bargaining agreements.

Expiration Dates

It is important to note that this analysis is based upon the CBAs in effect for the 2024-25 fiscal year. The expiration dates for those are: Watchung 2025; Long Hill 2026; Green Brook 2027; and Warren and Watchung Hills 2028. Should an enlarged all purpose regional be created prior to the expiration of an existing CBA, the statute's provisions as noted previously would hold. If it should occur after this date, the statute goes on to say,

... whenever the salary guide and terms and conditions of employment of one or more school districts seeking to join a newly formed or existing limited purpose or all purpose regional district is set to expire upon the formation of the new regional district, the school district may: (a) elect to adopt the expiring salary guide and terms and conditions of

⁶⁵ N.J.S.A. 18A:13-47.5

*employment for a period not to exceed one year or until a successor agreement is negotiated with the majority representative of the new regional district, whichever occurs first; or (b) elect to adopt the salary guide and terms and conditions of employment of the largest comparable district joining the new regional district.*⁶⁶

Recognition Clauses

The recognition clause identifies who is, and often who is not, represented by the primary CBA. All agreements include certificated staff, but there is variance on the inclusion of non-certificated staff. All primary CBAs exclude administrative personnel such as the superintendent, business administrator, principals, and supervisors. The differences between the recognition clauses are:

- Watchung Hills includes only certificated personnel, excluding the athletic director and department supervisors;
- Warren includes paraprofessionals and secretaries, excluding staff in the superintendent's and business offices;
- Long Hill includes paraprofessionals and secretaries, but excludes custodians as they have an external service contract;
- Watchung excludes everyone other than certificated staff; also excluded are behaviorists and psychologists as well as supervisory staff; and
- Green Brook includes classroom aides, secretaries, and custodians. It excludes lunch aides and staff in the superintendent's and business offices.

Grievance Procedures

The most important aspect of the grievance procedure is whether disputes end ultimately in binding or advisory arbitration. Green Brook and Watchung Hills have binding arbitration, while Warren and Watchung have advisory/non-binding arbitration. The most unique arbitration clause is in the Long Hill contract, which has advisory arbitration for the first three arbitrations, then moves to binding arbitration. The first grievance that reached that level occurred in May 1993; there was a second since then, but the district still has advisory arbitration.

School Calendars and Working Conditions

The staff work year differs from district to district ranging from 185 to 189 days. The Green Brook and Long Hill CBAs call for 185 days for staff members, with 180 pupil contact days and 5 inservice/orientation days. An interesting clause in Long Hill's contract is the conversion of an inservice day to a pupil contact day if 4 or more emergency days are used by April 5th. Warren and Watchung Hills both have 188 days, with 180 pupil contact days, 4 professional development, and 4 snow days that will be cancelled if not needed. Watchung's work year is not to exceed 189 days,

⁶⁶ N.J.S.A. 18A:13-47.5

with 180 pupil contact days plus four emergency, two orientation, and three staff development days.

The length of the staff workday in the districts is described in traditional fashion with the length of day ranging from 6 hours 45 minutes in Watchung Hills to 7 hours 15 minutes in Long Hill. Warren and Watchung staff work 7 hours, and Green Brook's work 7 hours 10 minutes. Some contracts have required arrival and departure times. Staff have a guaranteed, daily, duty free lunch in all contracts. Long Hill, Warren and Watchung have 30 minute lunches, Green Brook not less than 39 minutes, and Watchung Hills has a minimum of 25 minutes, 30 when possible.

Preparation time provides time to develop lessons, meet with colleagues or parents, or grade student work among other professional tasks. This section of the contract is worded differently throughout the region. Green Brook and Long Hill have one period per day, and Long Hill adds three group planning periods per week, with the other two periods being an assigned duty. Warren MS has one prep period per day and one team planning period, and the elementary schools have 300 minutes prep per week with an additional team planning time every six days. Watchung's Valley View MS staff get 280 minutes of preparation time per week, and Bayberry ES teachers have 265 minutes per week. Watchung Hills has four prep periods per week. They also have two productivity periods, during which they may be asked to cover classes or an absent teacher duty, PLCs, student assistance, or lesson planning. There is a 22.5 period maximum of coverage per school year for this clause.

Payments to staff who forfeit non-student contact time (preparation period or lunch period) cover a broad range, from \$25 per period in Long Hill, to \$40 in Watchung and \$42 in Green Brook. Warren's contract is silent on the terminology of payment for missing non-student contact time, but does address class coverage at \$50 per hour. Watchung Hills has a unique approach to this through the use of a four-day rotating drop schedule. Staff members have one prep period per day, but also have productivity periods as mentioned before. These periods have quite a bit of flexibility built into their definition. Staff may be asked to cover a class or duty, or if not needed for that, may use the time for professional development, student assistance, lesson planning, or collaborative time with their peers.

Extra service for activities such as overtime, student supervisory duties, faculty meetings, field trip chaperoning, etc. are unique to each contract. Most of the contracts include between one and two faculty meetings per month.

Salaries

Important employee safeguards were placed into P.L.2021, c.402 with regard to salaries. It provides that "the tenure and seniority rights of all employees ... except for superintendents ... shall be recognized and preserved; ... all periods of employment in any of the school districts shall count toward acquisition of tenure and seniority; and ... All statutory and contractual rights to accumulated sick leave, leave of absence, and pension of an employee that have been acquired through employment in any of the districts shall be recognized ..."⁶⁷

⁶⁷ N.J.S.A. 18A:13-47.10

TABLE 138
Salary Guides, 2024-25

	Watchung Hills	Warren	Long Hill	Watchung	Green Brook
Horizontal Steps	8	6	3	8	4
Vertical Steps	16	17	16	15	16
Salary - Step 1 BA	\$64,705	\$62,465	\$56,900	\$58,857	\$60,170
Salary - Step 5 MA	\$73,340	\$72,644	\$63,255	\$72,252	\$65,200
Salary - Step 10 MA+30	\$85,445	\$80,124	\$79,715	\$85,532	\$74,680

Table 138 shows some divergence in steps and salary levels that would require attention to bring the guides into alignment. Starting salaries at BA Step 1 in the grades pK-8 districts range from \$56,900 in Long Hill to \$62,465 in Warren, a difference of just over \$5,500. A new staff member at BA Step 1 at Watchung Hills will start at a salary of \$64,705. On the opposite end of the guide at the MA+30 level, there is a significant difference of almost \$11,000 with Watchung offering the highest salary at \$85,532 and Green Brook the lowest at \$74,680.

Aligning Salary Guides

The next step in this analysis was to estimate the financial implications of aligning salary guides across districts in accordance with the statutory requirements set forth in P.L. 2021, c.402, in the event that no successor collective bargaining agreement is negotiated within three years of regionalization. Specifically, it evaluates the cost impact of transitioning all eligible staff members to the applicable default salary guide and terms of employment, based on current staffing data and guide structures. The analysis is intended to support regionalization planning by providing a point-in-time estimate of costs associated with salary guide alignment.

Several methodological questions emerged during the analysis, including:

- Should eligible staff placement on the new guide be based on current step, salary, or a hybrid of both?
- How should disparities in lane structures and education levels be addressed?
- How should placement be handled when the new guide lacks an equivalent step?

Additionally, the consultants faced challenges with the data needed to provide such a snapshot analysis. Accurate modeling requires each district's active salary guide and detailed placement data for each eligible staff member, including their current step, education, and salary. This

information is typically drawn from scattergrams or position control rosters. In this case, the available data lacked the specificity required for a full analysis across all districts. As a result, estimates were used where actual data was unavailable. These estimates should be considered directional and approximate as actual costs will depend on future staffing and implementation decisions made by the regional board.

To align the various salary guides, the consultants worked with the following methodologies and assumptions:

- For grades pK-8 eligible staff members, the Warren guide would serve as the default guide due to its status as the largest grades pK-8 district by staff count;
- For grades 9-12 eligible staff members, the Watchung Hills guide would remain in use;
- Eligible staff from Long Hill, Watchung, and Green Brook were placed on the closest higher step of the Warren guide relative to their current salary;
- No eligible staff member would experience a salary reduction, and many would see increases as there was not always a perfect landing spot on the new guide; and
- Eligible staff members earning above the highest step in the new guide would have their salary frozen until a successor agreement is reached.

Due to data availability, a complete simulation was only possible for Green Brook. Green Brook's results were then scaled to estimate impacts for Long Hill and Watchung. This scaling was based on relative staffing and salary guide structure similarities.

TABLE 139
Salary Guide Simulation Summary, FY 2024-25

	FTE Staff Count	Steps	Lanes	MA or Higher	BA Salary Range	MA Salary Range
Long Hill	92.55	16	3	58.9%	\$56,900 - \$92,195	\$59,700 - \$94,995
Watchung	99	15	8	44.4%	\$58,857 - \$87,585	\$66,117 - \$94,845
Green Brook	86	16	4	54.7%	\$60,170 - \$88,670	\$62,700 - \$91,200

TABLE 140
Step Distribution by District, FY 2024-25

	% in Top Third	% in Middle Third	% in Bottom Third
Long Hill	17.5%	26.5%	56.0%
Watchung	60.6%	21.2%	18.2%
Green Brook	17.4%	29.1%	53.5%

Salary guide composition in Green Brook and Long Hill is quite comparable, with both containing similar concentrations of teaching staff at the top, middle, and bottom of their respective guides. Additionally, both have similar concentrations of eligible staff with advanced degrees. For this reason, using Green Brook's data as a basis to estimate costs in Long Hill should produce a reliable cost estimate.

When compared to Watchung, Green Brook looks quite different. Watchung's staff are more tightly concentrated at the top of the guide and below master's level. This suggests that using Green Brook as the basis of estimating the cost of moving Watchung staff likely over-estimates the cost and therefore should be interpreted as a conservative estimate. Estimated costs for aligning each district's staff to the Warren guide are: Green Brook \$148,000; Long Hill \$257,000 (scaled from Green Brook); and Watchung \$120,000 (scaled from Green Brook with a conservative estimate). The analysis yields a total cost of \$525,000 in the all districts scenario and \$377,000 for the current constituents scenario. These estimated costs were included in the broader cost savings calculations described earlier in this study.

As noted in the methodological questions above, alternate methods of aligning salary guides exist, including a step-to-step method where each teacher is placed on the equivalent step of the default salary guide. Because the default salary guide generally offers higher salaries, a step-to-step transition represents one of the most costly alignment options. Conversely, the next-higher method presented in the analysis above is typically among the least costly options available.

Under current law, if no successor agreement is reached within three years of regionalization, the board of the enlarged regional district has the authority to determine the salary guide alignment method. In such a scenario, it would be reasonable for the board to implement one of the least costly alignment options available until a negotiated successor agreement is in place.

However, the employee associations would likely seek to negotiate an alternative agreement before the three-year period expires. The salary guide that results from those negotiations may reflect hybrid methods of alignment or adjustments designed to mitigate inequities among employees with similar years of service from different districts. Therefore, while the next-higher method provides a valid baseline for estimating potential transition costs, actual post-regionalization costs could exceed those modeled here once collective bargaining occurs.

Leaves of Absence

Leaves of absence are generally in line with each other and fairly standard among other school district agreements. Warren has an unusual clause in that 10-month employees start with 10 sick days, then receive 12 sick days after six years of service. Long Hill takes it a step further with 12 sick days for 10-month employees and 14 days for 12-month employees when they are hired.

TABLE 141
Leaves of Absence

	Watchung Hills	Warren	Long Hill	Watchung	Green Brook
Employee Illness	10	10-month =10 until 6 yrs service then 12; 12-month = 12	10-month = 12 12-month = 14	10	10
Family Illness	5	2	Discretion of BOE with physician note	5	4
Personal Business	3	3	4 days, 2 can convert to sick	3	2
Bereavement	5	5 immediate, 3 other	5 days/yr except 5 days per parent, child, spouse; 5 days each death	5 immediate, 3 other family, 2 friend or other	5
Parental	as per law	as per law	as per law	as per law	as per law
Sabbatical	1 yr at 75% salary after 7 yrs in district	No	Emp with 8 yrs min eligible for one yr at 50% annual salary	N/A	Emp 7 yrs min; to complete residency Ed.D. or Ed.S.

As outlined in Table 141, there are many distinctions and nuances when it comes to leaves of absence. Employee illness and personal business in Long Hill indicate a flexibility towards employees with health issues. Warren adds extra days for 12-month employees. Bereavement and personal leaves are fairly consistent, though not identical. There are greater differences when examining family illness (none to 5). Sabbatical leaves do differ significantly, but are rarely used and would not typically be considered an impediment to resolving a contract. Each of these areas will need to be carefully examined and costed out during contract negotiations following any potential regionalization.

Tuition Reimbursements

Each CBA has a tuition reimbursement provision included with provisions being fairly consistent and differences centered on eligibility and the number of credits allowed annually. Each district has established a maximum cap that may be expended each fiscal year, with Warren’s allowance being the most generous. Details surrounding disbursement of those funds vary slightly but tend to be fairly consistent (i.e., split evenly fall, spring, and summer sessions or twice a year).

TABLE 142
Tuition Reimbursements

	Watchung Hills	Warren	Long Hill	Watchung	Green Brook
Eligibility	Employed 4 yrs or tenured	Max of 6 credits/teacher per semester	First year emp reimbursement after contract renewal	3 yrs in district	Non-tenured not eligible first year
Credits per year	18	18	9	Nontenured up to 6, tenured up to 12; pro-rated among staff if required	Tenured up to 9, nontenured up to 6
Rate per credit	80%	Rutgers tuition	Pro-rated for each of 3 semesters	100% Rutgers tuition and \$100 materials/class	100% Rutgers tuition
Maximum	\$90,750	\$175,000	\$35,000	\$24,000	\$35,000
Commitment	Employed by district at reimbursement time	2 yrs	Must be renewed for subsequent year unless RIF	2 yrs	1 yr

Insurance Coverages

Insurance coverages tend to be more divergent between school districts, and these districts are no exception. It is sometimes difficult to assess coverage from review of CBA’s, though Table 143 provides some comparisons based on available data. Even in the best of circumstances, insurance coverages are nuanced. What appears similar on paper can often be perceived as less than, once employees consider the in-network provider list and other specific details of the plan. It is recommended that any new regional board of education enlist the help of a benefits specialist to assist with the analysis and future negotiations of these plans. As recommended in the cost savings section, self-funded insurance could be an option to investigate given the scope of an all purpose regional, and on a shared basis, as well.

TABLE 143
Insurance Coverages

	Watchung Hills	Warren	Long Hill	Watchung	Green Brook
Medical	Emp must work 20 hrs min; SEHBP must choose POS; Tier 4 contributions; BC/BS NJEHBP; 2 plans, traditional with \$5 co-pay and 70/30 OON \$100 ded single, \$250 other cov, BOE bears 100% of premium cost for emp & fam	Emp must work 25 hrs min; if hired prior to 7/1/20 SEHBP base plan Direct 15; Tier IV ch 78 contributions, can purchase higher levels, pay premium difference; if hired after 7/1/20 SEHBP must enroll and make ch 44 contributions	Emp must work 25 hrs min if hired prior to 7/1/24; 30 hrs if hired after 7/1/24; SEHBP base plan Direct 1525; contributions capped at 9.5% fam, 6.5% AA or P/C, 5% single; emp can purchase higher levels pay premium difference	Emp must work 22 hrs min if hired prior to 7/1/13; 25 hrs if hired after 7/1/13; prior to 7/1/20 base plan is POS or PPO, contributions based upon ch 78; after this base plan is NJEHBP/GSHP, ch 44 contributions	Emp must work 30 hrs min if hired after 7/1/2010; 25 hrs if hired after 7/1/96, 20 hrs if prior. SEHBP any plan, NJEHBP/GSHP up to full fam at ch 44 rates; emp may purchase higher levels, pay premium diff at ch 78 rates
Prescription	No language in contract	No language in contract	Accessed through enrolled health plan	No language in contract	Per employee annual cap ⁶⁸
Dental	Emp only, BOE pays 100%	Emp only, max BOE \$515/yr; can pay premium diff to include fam; ded \$25	Delta Dental II-A; eligible all tenured emp and fam; ded \$25 single, \$75 fam; cap \$2,000/yr	Emp & fam; \$50 ded \$50 single, \$100 2 fam; \$150 ded 3 or more; 40% waiver	Delta Dental emp and fam, max benefit \$2k/yr; co-pay \$25 single, \$75 fam
Vision	No language in contract	No language in contract	No language in contract	Employee paid coverage	No language in contract
Coverage Waiver	Waiver \$1,291 single, \$2,874 AA, \$3,344 fam, \$1,907 P/C	CBA states BOE will have waiver, but amounts not stated, \$4,000 is district practice	Waiver annual payment; \$3,500 family; \$3,000 H/W	Hired prior to 6/30/19, \$4,000 single, \$5,000 AA/PC, \$8,000 fam; after 6/30/19 \$4,000 flat waiver	Waiver annual payment; \$3,500 fam; \$3,000 H/W or P/C; \$1,500 single; per sidebar incr to \$4,500 fam, \$4,000 A/A if at least 16 emp apply for A/A, P/C or fam waiver
Misc	Disability coverage for all emp with 65% FTE salary ⁶⁹		N/A	Disability coverage for all emp with 75% FTE salary	N/A

⁶⁸ BOE contribution: \$1,899 single; \$4,341 H/W; \$4,563 family; \$2,533 P/C; capped at 1/1/24 premium rates

⁶⁹ Until age 65, less Social Security disability payments (same for Watchung)

26. Shared Services

Public school contracts law governs all purchasing of goods and services for public school districts in NJ.⁷⁰ These regulations are very strict and compliance is mandatory. The school business administrator frequently holds a certification as a qualified purchasing agent to address these matters. In very large districts, a separate individual and staff may be responsible for purchasing. Compliance is evaluated regularly through a district's annual audit, grant compliance reviews, and state/federal program audits. NJDOE's Office of Fiscal Accountability and Compliance has general oversight of regulatory programs.

Shared services are permitted by statute, which states, "The boards of education of two or more districts may provide jointly by agreement for the provision and performance of goods and services for their respective districts, or one or more boards of education may provide for such provision or performance of goods or services by joint agreement with the governing body of any municipality or county."⁷¹ A shared service is defined by code as "any educational or administrative service required to be performed by a district board of education in which the school district, with district board of education approval, is able and willing to share in the costs and benefits of that service with another district board of education, municipality, or other governmental unit, as authorized by the Uniform Shared 12 Services and Consolidation Act at N.J.S.A. 40A:65-1 et seq."⁷² It should be noted that both a send-receive relationship between districts and school choice programs are addressed in other sections of code and statute and are not considered shared services.

Shared services among school districts, local municipalities, and other governmental agencies have long been promoted by the State as a cost savings measure. "Sharing services offers numerous benefits for participating communities. It reduces costs, delivers municipal services in a more efficient manner and increases value for each dollar spent while ensuring local units remain responsible stewards of the public trust."⁷³

Sometimes that philosophy holds true, and sometimes it does not. Purchasing cooperatives save the district hours in pre-purchasing regulation compliance by creating bid documents, soliciting bids, and awarding bids. They also save time and money by eliminating the need for legal review and advertising fees. State purchasing regulations can, however, result in the district receiving an inferior product due to the required stipulation of "equal to or better than". This requires careful attention to exactly what has been bid and awarded. Purchasing cooperatives may sometimes find it necessary to substitute a different item due to shortages in availability of the initially awarded item. The item could be better, not as good as, or simply not what was expected.

Most of the districts in this study participate in some shared services as indicated in Tables 144 and 145. This is consistent around the State, as documented in a 2007 study entitled "Shared Services in

⁷⁰ N.J.S.A. 18A:18A

⁷¹ N.J.S.A. 18A:18A-11

⁷² N.J.A.C. 6A:23-1.2

⁷³ Local Efficiency Achievement Program Guidelines, 2023

School Districts” commissioned by the NJ School Boards Association. While the study may be dated, the concepts it addresses continue to be promoted throughout the State today.

TABLE 144
Existing Shared Services, Personnel, 2024-25 ⁷⁴

	Watchung Hills	Warren	Long Hill	Watchung	Green Brook
Business Services			.5 BA shared with Bedminster, will be FT in 2025-26		
Facilities Supervisor					Also the twp public works supervisor
Clinician	Shared with Green Brook				Interlocal with Watchung Hills; est \$3,500
Transportation Coordinator	Shared with Watchung			Shared with Watchung Hills	
Communications Coordinator	Shared with Warren	Shared with Watchung Hills			

The cooperative sharing of personnel is minimal in this region of districts. An agreement exists between Green Brook and Watchung Hills for \$3,500 worth of a clinician’s time. The supervisor of buildings and grounds at Green Brook is also the township public works supervisor. Outside the region, the business administrator at Long Hill has been shared with Bedminster but will be full time in the new budget.

Not all positions lend themselves to sharing. While some people might assume that sharing of personnel makes sense given the size of a district or geographical proximity, there are other factors to consider. Unlike a regionalized district with one board of education, the superintendent and business administrator in a shared personnel relationship are the administrators of two separate school districts. This means that, in most cases, they contend with two different sets of budgets and collective bargaining agreements, twice as many evening meetings, and twice as many compliance activities, among other things. This requires a strong commitment on the part of the shared employees, and can be a factor that contributes to frequent turnover or burnout.

Turnover of administrative personnel, especially in small districts where one or two people are performing many different roles, creates more opportunities for errors and missed deadlines. Simply put, a one- or two-person office restricts opportunities for systems of checks and balances or internal controls, through no fault of those in the office. The lack of continuity of personnel in certain positions in the district, like that of business administrator, can create a situation where the staff are always catching up and would rarely allow time for exploring opportunities for efficiency.

⁷⁴ Data for Tables 145 and 146 gathered from business administrators and NJDOE User-Friendly Budgets

TABLE 145
Existing Shared Services, Non-Personnel, 2024-25

	Watchung Hills	Warren	Long Hill	Watchung	Green Brook
Education			Immersion students attend 6th gr sci; shared ESY w/ Watchung discontinued	Shared ESY w/ Long Hill discontinued	
Health Insurance	SHIF	N/A	N/A	SHIF	N/A
Liability & Property Insurance	SAIF	SAIF	MEIG	Diploma JIF	SAIF
Electricity, Heating Oil & Natural Gas		ACES	ACES		
Internet Services		DRLAP	E-RATE		NJDRLAP
Professional Development	Host training with MUJC	Annual update Watchung Hills	Annual update Watchung Hills	Annual update Watchung Hills	Annual update Watchung Hills
Special Education Services			MUJC & MCESC		
Transportation Abstracts, Bids, Quotes & Jointures	Reg ed to Watchung and Long Hill with JTPA; uses multiple ESC's; town offers salt, gas, diesel	Partners with other districts either directly or through ESC's; gasoline through twp	Watchung Hills reg & sp ed through JTPA; also uses SHRHS, MUJC, ESMC, SCESS	Watchung Hills provides reg ed through JTPA; borough provides vehicle fuel at cost	
Food Service	Long Hill		Watchung Hills ⁷⁵		
Miscellaneous	JTPA waste disposal with Watchung		Gas, shared equipment, recycling, facility use with municipality	JTPA waste with Watchung Hills; snow removal & field work by town	

Shared services between school districts, or between districts and municipalities can save money, generate invaluable positive public relations, and foster good relationships among entities. However, what is a good idea conceptually can be difficult to implement, especially if people try to, or need to, assign a financial value. The end result can be discord among the entities. The process requires flexibility, communication, and typically, trust among the entities.

As stated, there are some shared services occurring, but the group expressed a desire to explore the development of more agreements. As stated previously, LEAP grant funding could assist here. An

⁷⁵ Long Hill is moving to a participating provider from Roselle.

example was completed by Egg Harbor Township and the Egg Harbor Township BOE in 2023, in which Egg Harbor received a \$400,000 LEAP implementation grant to purchase new lighting for the high school soccer and multipurpose fields by entering into a 5 year sharing agreement giving the town access to the fields for resident recreational activities. Although things are going well, especially in the larger districts, it appears that this group could be better served from a financial cost efficiency standpoint with a well-staffed, regional administrative office with some school level staffing. The following business office operations could be combined for a single regionalized district or through shared services among some or all districts:

- Audit
- Payroll
- Human resources
- Accounts payable
- Transportation
- Purchasing
- Entitlement funds, competitive grant writing, grant administration
- Software licenses and support (human resources, accounting)
- Business administration
- Food service management companies/directors and software
- Facilities management
- Compliance reports
- Budget preparation
- School treasurer

A regional business office could not only handle these required functions, but allow time to explore grants, alternative funding, purchasing cooperatives, and other money saving options. In small districts, one or two people are expected to be the expert in all areas. While this may occur sometimes, it is very difficult to meet all state deadlines and handle day-to-day problems as well. The expertise of individuals in a particular area (e.g., grant writing/administration/reporting, fall student counts, transportation, facilities, food services) could be strengthened and should eventually save the district time and money. Equally important is the built-in support for critical positions. The consequences of an extended absence in a small district can be critical; specialized personnel in a larger district allow capacity for training secondary staff.

Similarly, the centralized administrative and educational reports could have individuals who become more experienced in, and familiar with, processing them. Some examples of these reports are:

- Quality Single Accountability Continuum (NJQSAC)
- School Safety Data System (SSDS)
- Standards Measurement and Resource for Teaching (NJSMART)
- Application for State School Aid (ASSA)
- Annual Comprehensive Financial Report (ACFR)
- Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Accountability Report

- Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC)
- Open Public Records Act (OPRA) Requests
- Fall Enrollment Report
- Certified and Non-Certified Staff Reports
- School Performance Reports
- State Budget Submission

Beyond a joint business office, other possible areas for exploration include:

- Directors - Although the districts use cooperatives, a regional transportation supervisor may be able to identify efficiencies without detrimental effects to current routes. A single facilities manager should be able to identify efficiencies, skill sets and equipment that could be shared, and projects that could be combined for cost savings. A shared special services director could enhance offerings among the schools and minimize transition issues from the elementary schools to the high school. Curriculum coordination at the grades pK-12 level can provide continuity of educational development, as well as identifying new programs that might be developed to enhance the educational opportunities. Professional development is important to these districts, and the creation of a position that would serve to identify needs and provide resources/training could strengthen the entire educational program.
- Curriculum - Outside of consolidating or sharing personnel, a shared curriculum office or consortium, as is in place for the school districts of the Northern Valley region of Bergen County, would be an endeavor worthy of investigation.
- Counselors - The availability of counselors is more important now than ever. Smaller schools often struggle to employ full-time counselors. Acting as a region, some counseling positions may be shared across schools, reducing the financial burden on one district while offering continuity of services within the region. Given the size of this region, there is also the opportunity for counselors to develop areas of special skill sets that could be shared among the schools.
- Staff Development - This region shows support to staff development through the financial commitment to tuition reimbursement. The group is large enough that it could also select common goals and share the training that would assist all districts. As mentioned above, the creation of a community-wide professional development director could be considered.
- Special Programs - The Education and Program domain suggests opportunities for sharing services in the areas of special education, multi-tiered systems of support, multilingual education, and preschool.

While there are opportunities for additional shared services, particularly among the smaller districts, it is important to remember that shared personnel are asked to serve two or more boards of education. These districts may have different workplace cultures, norms, scheduling, and collective bargaining agreements, which can impact the success of the shared service arrangements. Districts

entering regionalization can realize all of the benefits mentioned above while simultaneously reducing the duplication of efforts in areas such as budgeting, state compliance reporting, self-monitoring, and curriculum development. The reduction of this duplicative effort provides professional staff with time for program development, research, and innovation.

Maintaining the status quo with opportunities to better align educational programs and support services while reducing or controlling the costs of educating students in each district through the expansion of shared services and other efficiencies should be the ultimate goals of exploring shared services.

27. Contracted Services

Transportation Services

Transportation in NJ school districts has many facets to it. The primary function of a transportation department is to provide safe, efficient, and professional student transportation for the district's students. To achieve these objectives, districts should employ a supervisor who is trained, certified, and knowledgeable in all aspects of student transportation. That supervisor develops a routing of buses for general education students. The most cost-effective routing is a triple-tiered route package, which maximizes the utilization of each school vehicle and driver. District bell schedules play a crucial role in facilitating the implementation of such a system.

Additionally, the department must provide specialized transportation for the district's special needs students. The supervisor needs the child study team to supply detailed information on each student's specific needs when arranging this type of transportation. Some students may require special accommodations, such as a vehicle capable of carrying a wheelchair. Furthermore, some students may need an aide on the vehicle, and that aide may need to be medically certified.

Another topic that is commonly discussed is the issue of courtesy busing. Districts are required to transport any child in grades K-8 if they live two miles or more from the school, or grades 9-12 students if they live two and a half miles or more from the school.⁷⁶ Eligibility is calculated by measuring the shortest route from the home to the school. Even though a district is not required to provide transportation for students living within these limits, it is typical for students to be bused for other reasons such as hazardous walking routes, out-of-district placements, and special education students with transportation needs.

A primary difference between send-serve districts and a regional district is that the regional district is responsible for transporting students attending all of the region's schools, while sending districts are responsible for transporting their students to the receiving district. The proposed regionalization would result in little to no change as far as what schools the students attend, so there would likely be no change to any of the current transportation programs unless the district chooses to seek a higher level of efficiency or revised routes.

⁷⁶ N.J.S.A. 18A: 39.1

Current Status

The Watchung Hills transportation department has a full-time coordinator who has successfully completed the state-required school supervisor certification program through Rutgers University. The coordinator possesses extensive knowledge of state laws, statutes, and regulations regarding student transportation within the state. The district utilizes Transfinder management software to create and maintain bus routes as well as for student tracking. Watchung has a shared service agreement with Watchung Hills for the coordinator, who oversees the bidding, contracting, tiering and packaging of all of Watchung’s busing needs as well.

Warren and Green Brook each have full-time transportation coordinators with the state-required certification. In Green Brook, the business administrator has an active role in the operations of the department. Long Hill’s transportation is coordinated by three people doing aspects of the position. The person doing most of the coordination also performs the duties of accounts payable. The technology director creates the bus routes using Transfinder student transportation management software. The business administrator oversees much of the operation and answers many of the parent concerns and emails.

Regular Education Transportation

TABLE 146
Annual and Average per Route Costs, General Education, 2024-25

	Watchung Hills	Warren	Long Hill ⁷⁷	Watchung	Green Brook
Route Packages ⁷⁸	28	17	8	8	12
Annual Cost	\$1,030,084	\$1,095,365	\$551,765	\$620,247	\$1,462,113
Average Cost	\$36,799	\$64,434	\$68,971	\$77,531	\$121,843

A random survey of other districts in the state shows the average per package costs to be between \$85,000 and \$95,000, so the costs in this region can be considered reasonable and efficient with the exception of Green Brook.

Bell schedules are a critical component of running a school, and the importance cannot be understated. They affect every aspect of operation, from instruction to contractual obligations to transportation. In fact, the schedule is the initial focus of how a district derives transportation bid specifications, as the student’s arrival times must be coordinated with the bell schedule.

⁷⁷ Long Hill also provides subscription busing which is available on a first come, first served basis. The cost is \$900 per child with a \$2,000 cap per family. The additional revenue from this is approximately \$75,000.

⁷⁸ For Watchung Hills, these routes are the first tier in the packaging with the second and third tiers being routes for Watchung, Long Hill, or Warren.

TABLE 147
School Bell Schedules, 2024-25

School	District	Grade Levels	Start / End Times
Watchung Hills HS	Watchung Hills	9-12	7:30-2:15
AL Tomaso ES	Warren	K-5	8:10-2:50
Mt. Horeb ES	Warren	pK-5	8:50-3:30
Central ES	Warren	pK-5	8:50-3:30
Woodland ES	Warren	K-5	8:50-3:30
Warren MS	Warren	6-8	8:05-2:50
Gillette ES	Long Hill	pK-1	9:00-3:15
Millington ES	Long Hill	2-5	9:00-3:15
Central MS	Long Hill	6-8	8:10- 2:45
Bayberry ES	Watchung	pK-5	8:45-3:25
Valley View MS	Watchung	6-8	8:05-2:55
Feldkirchner ES	Green Brook	pK-4	9:10-3:45
Green Brook MS	Green Brook	5-8	8:02-3:04

Tiering Efficiency and Route Packaging

Tiering efficiency involves organizing each school's bell schedule and structuring the routes for each bus in levels or layers based on route times. Each route on a bus must be scheduled to ensure that the bus arrives at each school in accordance with the designated bell time for arrival. The greater the number of tiers assigned to a bus, the more efficient the bus becomes. For the purpose of bidding and contracting, each bus that has been tiered is considered one packaged bus. The total number of packaged buses constitutes a district's route packaging.

Overall, transportation packaging and tiering is well thought out and efficient in all five districts in this region. The bell times listed for Watchung and Long Hill were utilized to establish effective bus tiering. The two districts have been combined for transportation purposes as all busing contracts are held and administered by Watchung Hills. This integration has proven to be both effective and efficient based on the bell times. There are 16 route packages for the 2 districts. Of the 16 packages there are 8 packages for each district with 6 being double tiered, 3 per district. The 10 other packages are triple tiered with 5 per district.

The bell times specified for each school in Warren and Green Brook served as an excellent foundation for developing tiered route packages. Warren has 17 route packages with 3 being double tiered and 14 being triple tiered. The first tier of 15 of these route packages are high school routes

provided through Watchung Hills. Green Brook has 12 route packages with 1 being double tiered and 11 being triple tiered. None are provided through Watchung Hills, as Green Brook is not a constituent district.

Transportation Contracts

Watchung and Long Hill bid their transportation in 2023-2024. From that bid, the districts awarded one contract to two separate contractors leaving them with two transportation contracts. The bid did not break up and bid several packages on three or four different bids. The bid contained all the packages the districts had, which is considered best practice when bidding out transportation routes. If the routes are re-bid in the future, the districts should consider accepting a bulk bid discount to lower the overall cost.

Warren has 10 transportation contracts, all with the same vendor. These contracts have been renewed anywhere from 2 to 30 years. While the packaging and tiering is very efficient, the route on each package is on a different contract. The district should consider having all routes within a package from the same contract. While the average cost per package is very good, the district may want to consider combining all packages on a new bid, which would possibly encourage more competition and even lower rates.

Green Brook bid out their transportation in 2022-2023 and achieved the same result as Watchung and Long Hill. However, Green Brook should strongly consider rebidding their transportation. If in the past they did not accept or encourage bulk bid discounts, they should consider accepting bulk bid discounts and rebid. This could possibly help reduce their high average package costs.

Special Needs Transportation

Watchung, Long Hill, and Green Brook contract these special needs routes through an educational services commission. Warren's routes are run using district drivers and vehicles, and the district has done a nice job in packaging and tiering these routes to be more efficient. Twenty-five of Watchung Hills' routes are contracted through an educational services commission, and the other two are contracted with Warren.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ A direct comparison between the number of out-of-district special education placements and the associated transportation figures is not advisable. The two numbers often differ because some families of students with special needs opt to provide their own transportation. Furthermore, the transportation count may include non-classified students who are placed out-of-district for other reasons.

TABLE 148
Annual and Average per Route Costs, Special Needs, 2024-25

	Watchung Hills	Warren	Long Hill	Watchung	Green Brook
Out of District Routes	22	6	7	4	10
Out of District Students	28	6	13	5	12
Annual Cost	\$1,348,109	\$265,011	\$366,282	\$189,231	\$344,615
Average Cost	\$48,147	\$44,169	\$52,326	\$47,308	\$34,462
In-District Routes	3	21	0	1	0
In-District Students	11	35	0	8	0
Annual Cost	\$124,359	\$354,350	n/a	\$76,320	n/a
Average Cost	\$41,453	\$27,258	n/a	\$76,320	n/a

Potential Improvements in Transportation

There would be no impact on student seat time or distance traveled from a regionalization, as there has been no discussion of any intent to change the schools that students are attending. Existing bus stops could be utilized through a newly formed district with its own transportation supervisor. This role would provide for a regular evaluation of bus stops, routes, and tiering to enhance and improve busing efficiency. An enlarged all purpose regional might also want to consider purchasing more of its own vehicles and hiring at least some of its own drivers to mitigate having all transportation in the hands of an external contractor.

Having this structure would allow for much better, more efficient combinations as noted. The supervisor would be aware of the needs of all schools thus allowing them to identify combining students with a route or routes together. This would improve the overall cost effectiveness of all districts. Additionally, implementing regular reviews and updates of route efficiency data could further refine the system. By utilizing advanced software for route optimization and ensuring regular communication among districts, the transportation framework could adapt dynamically to changing needs. This proactive approach would not only enhance operational efficiency but also improve service quality for students requiring specialized transportation.

Watchung Hills may want to look at the possibility of additional programs to try and reduce the number of students it is sending out of the district. The district is currently spending over \$1.3 million on a limited number of students being transported. For comparison, the cost to provide buses for students in Warren, Watchung, and Long Hill combined is slightly double that at \$3.3 million.

Other Contracted Services

Long Hill issued a request for proposal for custodial, grounds, and maintenance services in March 2022. The district has a five-year contract with Pritchard Industries at a cost ranging from \$1.227 million in 2022 to \$1.403 million through 2026-27. There is a \$12,900 credit available to the district for on-going contract monitoring. Edvocate, a third party firm, performs the monitoring of Pritchard's contract compliance by conducting inspections, reviewing payroll records for accuracy and verifying boiler license requirements and testing.

Food service was not identified by the districts as an area to be studied. Overall, the region has a very low free and reduced lunch rate, ranging from 1.6% in Watchung to 19% in Green Brook. Watchung Hills and Green Brook both have contracts with Pomptonian but Watchung Hills does not participate in the National School Lunch Program. Warren and Long Hill have reached the level at which they need to participate in this program, and are currently receiving food from a participating provider in Roselle.

28. Tuition

As stated earlier in the study, Watchung Hills is a single-school, comprehensive, regional high school district with the constituent municipalities of Warren Township, Long Hill Township, and Watchung Borough. Green Brook Township is not a constituent municipality, so it pays a per pupil tuition cost to send its high school students to Watchung Hills Regional HS under a send-receive agreement.

Districts that participate in send-receive relationships often do so because the sending district is not large enough to provide a thorough and efficient education to a particular age group or classification of students. In some cases, the district may maintain a grades pK-6 or pK-8 school but send its 7-12 or 9-12 students to another high school. In others, the small district (including non-operating districts) may choose to send all of its students to another elementary school and then to a centralized high school. There are many possible configurations.

The send-receive structure can also be used for special education students, where a particular need cannot be addressed in the student's home district. As stated in the Education & Program domain of this study, there are opportunities for shared services of personnel for the provision of special education programs.

One thing that is similar in all send-receive relationships is the financial arrangement prescribed in statute. It should be recognized that some districts deviate slightly from this process. Sending districts are to provide the receiving district an estimate of their anticipated enrollment for the next school year by December 15th. The process is simple up to that point, but confusing to both lay people and many school officials from there forward. Following the determination of estimated enrollment from the sending district, the State sends the districts a certified tuition cost for two years prior in January and most use that to set an anticipated tuition rate so that districts can begin the budget process. The real estimated tuition rate is determined by most districts when the second

NJDOE state budget download is received, and it calculates the maximum estimated tuition that can be charged.

There are a few ways in which both sending and receiving districts can address financial concerns during the budget process. One is to over or underestimate the projected enrollment. Another is through negotiating the proposed tuition rate. Districts are provided a tuition rate in the state budget software that cannot be exceeded; however, sending districts may be charged a lower rate. As will be described below, both methods can result in large amounts due to, or from, the other district later on in the process. Once the districts have agreed upon the estimated number of students and an estimated tuition, the next part of the calculation begins.

After a district's financial records are audited, districts receive a certified tuition amount from the State for each group of grade levels for the school year that took place before the current one. They also receive a certified average daily enrollment (ADE) for the same year. To do an adjusted tuition calculation, the actual enrollment is multiplied by the actual tuition to determine how much should have been paid versus what was paid. This amount is added to, or subtracted from, the sending district's future budget in order to adjust estimated tuition to actual tuition.

Using this past school year as an example:

- By December 15th of the 2023-24 school year, the sending district estimates a number of students to be sent for the 2024-25 school year.
- In January 2024, the receiving district establishes a tentative tuition rate for the 2024-25 school year, so that all districts can work on their budgets for that school year.
- Later in January or early February, the receiving district should receive the certified tuition rate for 2022-23 based upon the district's audit and actual enrollment numbers. These actual numbers are compared to the estimated numbers for 2022-23 to come up with the actual tuition that should have been paid. Depending on the proposed versus actual, either district can end up owing money to the other. The projected numbers from January 2022 for 2022-23 are reconciled to actual numbers (post-audit) two years later in January 2024 for 2024-25.
- When the state budget download occurs, a district can determine from the software what the maximum allowed estimated tuition is. The districts may still choose to use a lower amount but should be careful in doing so, as reducing it too much can cause problems in the future year reconciliation process.
- The receiving district combines the projected numbers for 2024-25 and the actual amount that should have been paid for 2022-23 to come up with a total tuition due for the 2024-25 budget and a tuition contract is developed. The same process is used for each classification of special education programs.

Send-receive relationships can be very sensitive for a variety of reasons and financial concerns can certainly be a cause of contention. Occasionally, there are situations that call for the districts to cooperatively develop solutions that allow both parties in the send-receive relationship to deal with unusual circumstances. A common example of this is when one district has budgetary problems. The typical resolution is a board-approved written agreement between the two entities, generally with the knowledge and/or consent of the NJDOE county office.

Green Brook began sending its grades 9-12 students to Watchung Hills on a tuition basis in 1989. Based upon information provided, annual contracts existed and were submitted with both districts' annual budgets. A three-year agreement was created and put into place beginning with the 2021-22 school year with an expiration of June 30, 2024. The successor agreement, for a term beginning July 1, 2024 and ending June 30, 2027, was successfully executed in late April 2025. The terms of this contract allow the district to deviate from the state reconciliation process.

As is common in send-receive relationships, the reason for developing the initial multi-year tuition agreement was due to a conflict involving terms and conditions. In this case, Green Brook was not satisfied with the tuition rates that resulted from using the statutory calculation method. The initial agreement between these two districts deviates from the process significantly in that there is no reconciliation process unless doing so would be favorable to Green Brook.

TABLE 149

Contracted Tuition Rate per Student, Green Brook to Watchung Hills, 2020-21 to 2023-24 ⁸⁰

	Contracted Tuition	\$ Difference	% Change
2020-21	\$17,170	-	-
2021-22	\$18,000	\$830	4.8%
2022-23	\$18,360	\$360	2.0%
2023-24	\$18,727	\$367	2.0%

TABLE 150

Certified Tuition Rate per Student, Green Brook to Watchung Hills, 2020-21 to 2023-24

	Certified Tuition	\$ Difference	% Change
2020-21	\$17,630	-	-%
2021-22	\$19,086	\$1,456	8.3%
2022-23	\$20,244	\$1,158	6.1%
2023-24	\$20,809	\$565	2.8%

⁸⁰ NJDOE Homeroom and district personnel

Tables 149 to 154 document the recent tuition history between Green Brook and Watchung Hills, illustrating the difference between what the cost was under the initial contract and what it would have been if the districts had followed the standard send-receive formula produced by the State.

TABLE 151
Comparison of Contracted to Certified Tuition Rates per Student
Green Brook to Watchung Hills, 2020-21 to 2023-24

	Contracted Tuition	Certified Tuition	Difference
2020-21	\$17,170	\$17,630	-\$460
2021-22	\$18,000	\$19,086	-\$1,086
2022-23	\$18,360	\$20,244	-\$1,884
2023-24	\$18,727	\$20,809	-\$2,082

TABLE 152
Contracted ADE Cost per Student, Green Brook to Watchung Hills, 2020-21 to 2023-24

	Contracted Tuition	Reg Ed ADE	Contracted Total
2020-21	\$17,170	415.688	\$7,137,363
2021-22	\$18,000	389.600	\$7,012,800
2022-23	\$18,360	380.225	\$6,980,931
2023-24	\$18,727	379.925	\$7,114,931

TABLE 153
Certified ADE Cost per Student, Green Brook to Watchung Hills, 2020-21 to 2023-24

	Certified Tuition	Reg Ed ADE	Certified Total
2020-21	\$17,630	415.688	\$7,328,579
2021-22	\$19,086	389.600	\$7,435,906
2022-23	\$20,244	380.225	\$7,697,275
2023-24	\$20,809	379.925	\$7,905,859

TABLE 154
Comparison of Contractual to Certified ADE Cost
Green Brook to Watchung Hills, 2020-21 to 2023-24

	Contracted Tuition	Certified Tuition	Actual ADE	Contracted Total	Certified Total	Net Difference
2021-22	\$18,000	\$19,086	389.600	\$7,012,800	\$7,435,906	-\$423,106
2022-23	\$18,360	\$20,244	380.225	\$6,980,931	\$7,697,275	-\$716,344
2023-24	\$18,727	\$20,809	379.925	\$7,114,931	\$7,905,859	-\$790,928
TOTAL						-\$1,930,377

As Table 154 shows for the three years of this agreement, the Watchung Hills Board of Education accepted \$1,930,377 less than the total regular education tuition that would have been due if the fully reconciled state formula had been implemented. Again, the contract does allow this deviation from the statutory process to occur. Table 156 shows that the newly executed agreement includes tuition increases that will bring the payments closer to the actual certified per pupil cost, but are still less than the 2023-24 state certified cost.

TABLE 155
Projected Maximum Tuition Cost from 2024-25 Send-Receive Agreement
Green Brook to Watchung Hills, 2024-25 to 2026-27

	Actual / Projected ADE	Maximum Tuition Cost per Student	Total Projected Tuition Cost
2024-25	380	\$20,413	\$7,756,940
2025-26	351	\$21,433	\$7,522,983
2026-27	377	\$22,505	\$8,484,385

A detailed financial analysis of special education tuition is not conducted in this report due to the variable nature of special education needs and populations. The tuition calculations do follow the same process as for regular education students. As stated previously in the Education & Program section of this study, there are opportunities for shared services of personnel for the provision of special education programs.

In the event that all districts in the study go forward with an all districts regional, one of the issues to be resolved would be the two years of tuition reconciliations. The reconciliation process as explained above converts estimated tuition and enrollment to actual numbers two fiscal years later. Although there may be other options, the consultants see two possibilities: (a) the new regional absorbs the reconciliation; or (b) the tax levy is adjusted for the first two years as a final

reconciliation for the municipalities that are involved. A grades pK-12 regionalization would share all costs for all programs across all constituent districts, and tuition would no longer be an issue.

29. Reserves

NJ allows many different types of reserve accounts, each of which is legally restricted for specific purposes, and in some cases, has a cap for the dollar amount that may be reserved. Although some reserve accounts require deposits to be specified during budget preparation, other reserves are allowed to be identified at the end of the fiscal year in June, utilizing unspent appropriations or unanticipated revenues. The district audit reviews the reserve accounts to ensure that they do not exceed legal restrictions.

Only the six types of reserve accounts used by the districts in this study will be described here. They are capital, emergency, maintenance, tuition, and unemployment. All of the districts use capital and unemployment reserves, and none of them use all six types.

Most districts have a capital reserve account, and state statute and code provide the restrictions on it.⁸¹ Deposits are generally transferred by board resolution at year end, but may also be appropriated in the budget planning process. Expenses must be incorporated into the certified budget or approved by voters as a separate proposal. There is also the option of using the reserved funds to offset part or all of the debt service payments on bonded projects. The amount in the reserve is capped at the local share of project costs in the district's approved Long Range Facility Plan.

Tuition reserve accounts are restricted to districts in a send-receive relationship and cannot be used for special education tuition.⁸² The purpose is to budget for tuition adjustments based upon rates and attendance certified by the state compared to the originally budgeted amount. They are capped at up to 10% of the estimated tuition cost. Deposits to this type of account are usually a year-end calculation based upon available funds and anticipated tuition adjustments.

Maintenance reserve is the most common reserve account used across the state. Its balance cannot, at any time, exceed four percent of the replacement cost of the school district's school facilities for the current year.⁸³ To receive funding under the Education Facilities and Financing Act, districts are required to demonstrate a net investment in required maintenance of at least two percent of the replacement cost of the related school facility.⁸⁴

Unemployment reserves cover benefit costs. Districts may choose to fund their unemployment obligation in one of two ways. When using the benefit reimbursement method versus state contributions, standard practice is to establish an unemployment reserve account. As many districts face the challenges of reduced or, at best, stable state aid and have more restricted budgets, the

⁸¹ N.J.S.A. 7F-41, N.J.S.A. 18A 7G-31, N.J.S.A. 18A:21-2, N.J.A.C. 6A:23A-14.1

⁸² N.J.A.C. 6A:23A-17.1

⁸³ N.J.A.C. 6A:26A, N.J.S.A. 18A:7F-41

⁸⁴ To support the demonstration of this requirement, districts must include a schedule of required maintenance expenditures in the ACFR for each year by school facility as defined under N.J.A.C. 6A:26-1.2.

establishment of an emergency reserve to address future unanticipated general fund expenses is becoming more common.⁸⁵ This account may not exceed \$250,000 or one percent of the district’s general fund budget up to a maximum of \$1,000,000, whichever is greater.

TABLE 156
Reserve Accounts as of June 30, 2024 ⁸⁶

	Watchung Hills	Warren	Long Hill	Watchung	Green Brook	TOTAL
Capital	\$5,780,850	\$6,959,315	\$3,036,222	\$1,105,337	\$4,961,854	\$21,843,578
Emergency		\$11,659	\$250,000			\$261,659
Maintenance	\$1,153,209	\$118,800	\$960,976		\$1,065,917	\$3,298,902
Tuition	\$200,000				\$1,958,466	\$2,158,466
Unemployment	\$264,717	\$535,077	\$237,594	\$58,319	\$25,030	\$1,120,737
TOTAL	\$7,398,776	\$7,624,851	\$4,484,792	\$1,163,656	\$8,011,267	\$28,683,342

Warren’s capital reserves are the highest among all of the districts' reserve balances at just over \$6.9 million; however, the March 2025 referendum used most of this and only \$1 million is expected to be retained. Tuition reserves are for districts in send-receive relationships, so only Green Brook and Watchung Hills use them. Warren, Long Hill, Green Brook, and Watchung Hills use maintenance reserves, and Warren and Long Hill have emergency reserves.

30. Financial and Operational Impact

The consultants performed a comprehensive review and analysis of historical state aid, tax levies, property values, incomes, audits, enrollments, and other financial records, in order to analyze district operations, project future values, and estimate the financial impact of regionalizing for each participating district and municipality. The projections and analyses presented here are based on current data, trends, and assumptions. Actual outcomes may vary based on future economic conditions, policy decisions, and other factors that could impact school funding and operations. As such, this report should serve as a guide for informed decision-making, with the understanding that ongoing monitoring and potential adjustments may be necessary if the regionalization process moves forward.

Budgetary costs per student were examined comparing district spending priorities and efficiency to their peers across the state. There are times when state comparisons are easy to interpret, and others when they are not. For instance, per the state definition, the elementary districts are in two separate peer groups: Green Brook and Watchung are medium K-8s, and Long Hill and Warren are large K-8s; yet the State median of \$20,554 is for all K-8s. Watchung (\$19,245) is more than \$1,000

⁸⁵ N.J.S.A. 18A:7F-41, PL 2007, c62 (A1)

⁸⁶ Annual Comprehensive Financial Report, 2023

below the state median, and Long Hill (\$20,392) is just under that statistic. Green Brook (\$22,312) and Warren (\$26,172) are well above the state median. A low student enrollment makes it difficult to be efficient financially. Watchung Hills (\$22,505) is just under the state median of \$22,702 for total budgetary costs per student.

Another item worth noting is that Warren (8.3%) is well below the state median percentage (10.3%) in administrative spending, and Green Brook (10.5%), Watchung (10.6) and Long Hill (11.2%) are only slightly above. Watchung Hills (10.7%) is also very close to the state median of 10%. Lower spending on administration is often identified by the public as an area to realize potential efficiencies in education.

It is clear that all five districts prioritize direct spending on students in terms of the percentage of dollars allocated to classroom instruction. Watchung at 61.5% is exceptional in this regard, above the state median of 59.4% for elementary school districts. Green Brook, Long Hill, and Warren Township, while under the state median, all spend more than 50% of the total budgetary cost. Watchung Hills (52.6%) is very close to the state median of 54.4% for the high school peer group. This is a strong positive indicator as it provides direct student academic experiences, and therefore should receive primary attention and commitment in the district budget.

Both regionalization scenarios project modest financial benefits through identified cost savings. The all districts scenario generates cost savings of \$2,656,516 annually, while the current constituents scenario projects savings of \$2,040,875. These savings would come primarily from consolidating administrative functions and reducing duplicative services across the current constituent districts. They include the projected cost of moving staff to the appropriate default salary guides as identified by statute. There are other opportunities for savings through consolidating programs and operations that are not included in the calculations but are recommended earlier in the study such as curriculum and textbook purchases, in-district special education programs, student transportation, technology infrastructure, central office functions, unified contract negotiations, and the potential for self-insured health benefit plans that may be viable in a regionalized district.

Despite these cost savings, the consultants assume that all existing programs will be maintained. The actual implementation and allocation of any cost reductions would ultimately be determined by the board of education of the enlarged regional, or a collaborative effort by the existing districts, ensuring that decisions about resource allocation would be made with consideration of the specific needs and priorities of the students.

State aid calculations for both scenarios are based on the SFRA formula, as modified by both S2 and FY 2026 methodology updates. The updates necessitated an analysis of both capped aid and uncapped aid scenarios. In the capped aid scenario, where FY 2026 state aid caps of 6% on increases and 3% on reductions were applied consistently throughout the study period, the regional district in both consolidation scenarios (with or without Green Brook) would receive increased state aid annually. Relative to FY 2026, total aid increases between \$2.2 million and \$2.8 million depending on the scenario. In the uncapped aid scenario where full SFRA formula funding is

provided throughout the study period, state aid in the regional district under both consolidation scenarios (with or without Green Brook) would increase between \$2.8 million and \$3.9 million.

In order to assess whether there is a state aid benefit to regionalization, projected aid in the regional district must be compared to what the districts would have received if they remained separately constituted. This analysis produced an intriguing finding. If the FY 2026 state aid caps are maintained throughout the study period, more aggregate state aid would be received if the districts regionalize under either configuration. However, if aid caps are removed and the state returns to fully funding its SFRA formula, more aggregate state aid would be received by the districts if they remain separate.

Despite the discrepancy described above, the relative impact to state aid under any scenario is modest when compared to total state aid or the operating budget of the regional district. While recent legislative changes (i.e., P.L. 2021, c.402) provide two mechanisms that offer some protection against estimated reductions in aid, neither mechanism will provide a benefit to any districts in the region nor to an enlarged regional under either configuration.

Two primary methods for apportionment of a regional district's costs are permitted under state law — allocation based on equalized property valuation (EPV), which distributes costs according to each municipality's property wealth, and allocation based on student enrollment (ENR), which assigns costs in proportion to each community's utilization of the district's services. Disparities exist between property wealth and enrollment shares of each individual district. Opposing patterns of benefit are present where some districts in the region benefit more from apportionment ratios that weight EPVs heavier and other districts benefiting more from apportionment ratios that weight ENR heavier. These opposing patterns require careful consideration of various apportionment ratios to identify an optimal ratio that provides the most benefit to all communities.

For the all districts scenario, the model identified an optimal ratio of 77% EPV to 23% ENR. In the current constituents scenario, an optimal ratio of 97% EPV to 3% ENR was identified. However, while optimal in that each ratio allocates the tax levy as equitably as possible to all communities, there is no combination of standard apportionment parameters that produces universal tax benefits to all communities in either regionalization configuration. Warren, Long Hill, and Green Brook would stand to see reductions in tax liability in an enlarged regional relative to the status quo while Watchung would see tax increases.

An alternative approach is provided through P.L.2021, c.40, which permits a board of education to establish a transitional methodology, not to exceed ten years, of the apportionment method adopted by the voters provided that the methodology is agreed to by all participating districts. A possible transitional methodology has been developed with the goal of keeping tax impacts positive for all districts for the first five years of the regional's operation and then provide a gradual phase-in towards formulaic apportionment under the optimal weights of 77% EPV and 23% ENR. This approach gives each community ample time to plan for the long-term distribution of tax responsibility while immediately realizing the educational and programmatic benefits of

regionalization in the short-term. A similar transitional method could be developed for the current constituents configuration.

The amount of bonded debt in this region indicates a strong desire to keep facilities well maintained and upgraded, and the support of the community to do so. Warren is the only district that does not have bonded debt, in spite of the fact that in March 2025 they passed an \$8.5M referendum. Those projects will be funded through the capital reserve and the state share of the total cost. Unless there are negotiated changes, as permitted by law, any debt would become debt of the new regional district. Watchung also has an arbitrage rebate payable of \$323,724 as of June 30, 2024. Also of note, Watchung Hills added a 4-year lease purchase of \$640,000 in July 2024 for technology equipment, classroom furniture, building security and athletic improvements.

All of the districts in the region have short term debt. Short term debt is a multi-year obligation authorized by the school district, but budgeted for in the annual budget process. Energy savings and improvement plans and subscription-based information technology arrangements are two short term debts that the districts in this region utilize and were considered significant enough to be included in the study. The latter are an area to be explored for sharing services, and regionalization may lead to savings due to economies of scale.

A review of the main collective bargaining agreements provides a comparison of key aspects to help with potential negotiations if the districts decide to regionalize fully. The agreements have different expiration dates (one each in 2025, 2026 and 2027; Warren and Watchung expire in 2028). Recognition clauses are diverse and range from Green Brook's very inclusive agreement to Watchung and Watchung Hills recognizing only certificated staff. A major difference here is in the area of arbitration. Green Brook and Watchung Hills have binding arbitration, while Warren and Watchung have advisory/non binding arbitration.

There are slight differences in negotiations, grievance procedures, and association rights and privileges. The length of the school year ranges from 185 days to 189, though some include emergency days and Long Hill converts an inservice day to a pupil contact day if 4 or more emergency days are used by April 5th. The length of day varies from 6 hours and 45 minutes to 7 hours and 15 minutes. All contracts have a duty free lunch. There is a large variance in starting salaries and other topics would need coordination in a combined agreement.

Current law allows for the existing contracts to expire and then be renegotiated by the enlarged all purpose regionalized board of education. As is the case in most districts, significant effort will need to be focused on the salary and insurance issues to achieve a collective bargaining agreement for a fully regionalized district.

A relatively new law signed into law in July 2023, may make negotiations relative to paid time off easier to negotiate. The law expands the state-mandated 10 sick days per year to be used for other than employee only illness. Until this law was signed into effect, employees were only allowed to use sick days for their own illness; family illness, death in family, etc., were all separately negotiated as part of the contract.

A significant contractual discrepancy was noted in the area of tuition reimbursement, with annual caps ranging from \$35,000 in Green Brook and Long Hill to \$175,000 in Warren. Each district also has restrictions on eligibility requirements, with Watchung Hills requiring tenure, Green Brook first year teachers not being eligible at all, and Long Hill reimbursing first year teachers after their contract is renewed.

Shared services are permitted by statute and are promoted by the state as a cost saving measure, although their effectiveness can vary. The districts in the Watchung Hills region participate in the standard purchasing cooperatives, insurance, non-public funds administration services, and some transportation. Long Hill and Watchung Hills used to share food service, but National School Lunch Program requirements necessitated Long Hill working with a participating provider. Long Hill and Watchung shared an extended school year program in July 2024, but it is not being continued this year. Consultants were not able to identify significant shared personnel or services within the region. Watchung and Watchung Hills share a transportation coordinator, the Green Brook supervisor of buildings and grounds is also the township public works supervisor, and there is a \$3,500 interlocal agreement between Green Brook and Watchung Hills for a clinician.

As financial concerns continue to grow among school districts throughout the state, another option discussed throughout the study is the introduction of additional shared services between the districts within the region. There is little doubt that the expansion of shared services would benefit the students of the region by increasing the continuity and alignment of educational services. However, because these suggestions for additional shared services may be accepted in whole or in part and between a few or all districts involved in the region, it is difficult to quantify estimated cost savings and the distribution of those costs across districts. It is important to note that increasing shared services would not be an issue if regionalization occurs.

The time that the administrators spend duplicating planning and administrative duties (e.g., budgets, audits, board meetings, professional development, compliance activities) could be reduced significantly in a consolidated district. This would free up time that could be used to further benefit student achievement, focus on cost efficiencies, and achieve other district goals that simply cannot be addressed under the current time constraints.

The proposed regionalization does not result in students changing schools, so transportation would largely remain as it is. If the districts were to move to a centralized transportation coordinator, there may be opportunities for greater efficiencies in both cost and route design. In addition, the opportunity to buy buses and have district drivers exists for a larger district can be beneficial for special education, small group instruction, late buses, etc.

The send-receive relationship between Green Brook and Watchung Hills does have an overarching multi-year agreement, the first of which was a three-year agreement beginning with the 2021-22 school year that ended June 30, 2024. The successor agreement was executed in April 2025, and has significantly different agreed upon tuition rates, which will bring the districts closer to the state calculated rate over the course of the contract. The tuition section briefly discusses special

education tuition and suggests that a regionalization could allow for the creation or enhancement of special education programs across the districts, potentially leading to significant resource savings.

The State allows school districts to maintain various reserve accounts, each with specific legal restrictions and purposes. The districts in this study utilize five types of reserve accounts: capital; tuition; maintenance; unemployment; and emergency. Capital reserve accounts are restricted to the local share of project costs in the district's long range facility plan, while tuition reserve accounts are capped at 10% of the estimated tuition cost and are used by districts in send-receive relationships to budget for tuition adjustments. Maintenance reserve account balances cannot exceed 4% of the current year's replacement cost of the district's school facilities. Emergency reserve accounts to address future unanticipated general fund expenses are becoming more common.

As of June 30, 2024, the participating districts have varying balances in these reserve accounts, with Warren having the highest balance in capital reserves; however, the March 2025 referendum used most of this. The district website for the referendum states that approximately \$1 million will be retained. The tuition reserve in Green Brook will be used as the district adjusts to increasing tuition rates that will bring them closer to the actual per pupil cost at Watchung Hills. Watchung maintains the lowest reserves, with \$1.1M in capital and \$58k in unemployment.

FINDINGS and RECOMMENDATIONS

This feasibility study considered perspectives from governance and law, demography, education and program, and finance and operations. After analysis of the data gathered in each of these domains, the consultants have produced a series of findings and urge the boards of education of the Watchung Hills, Warren, Long Hill, and Green Brook School Districts to consider the recommendations offered below. Note: Any referendum or vote to regionalize that does not include the options as designed for this study would completely change the analysis and findings produced herein.

According to this study, **an enlarged regionalization with all five participating districts, or a consolidation of just the current constituent districts, would provide multiple opportunities for a more effective and efficient educational program.** From curriculum coordination and implementation to special programs to extracurricular activities and more, we identified many and varied reasons why an all purpose, grades pK-12 regionalization would have potential benefits for the success of all students. There are also multiple ways identified in which **services and personnel could be shared to produce greater effectiveness and efficiency through shared services agreements that can be implemented by school board vote.**

After five years of relatively stagnant or declining enrollment, all four municipalities are undergoing significant housing growth, with combined enrollment in the five districts projected to grow from 5,522 during the 2024-25 school year to 6,479 by 2029-30. That projected increase of 957 students across all of the districts would represent a 17% increase in enrollment over a five-year period that will pose significant educational and fiscal challenges for school officials with the cost falling principally on property taxpayers, because state aid makes up such a small percentage of overall district budgets. Whether state aid works better in a regional alignment than in the status quo situation will depend on whether the State continues to use its FY 2026 caps on future aid increases (6%) and decreases (-3%), though either one produces modest aid swings that would not discount the educational benefits noted previously. The fiscal challenges of continuing to provide a high quality education to Warren, Watchung, Long Hill and Green Brook students is a compelling argument for residents to consider full grades pK-12 regionalization or a massive expansion of coordinated shared services in an effort to control costs for taxpayers.

Regionalized cost savings can be identified conservatively at anywhere from \$2.0 million for the current constituents scenario to over \$2.6 million in the all districts scenario. These cost savings do not include the financial efficiencies and educational benefits that could occur from consolidating and coordinating operations such as curriculum and textbook purchases, in-district special education programs, student transportation, technology infrastructure, central office functions, unified contract negotiations, and the potential for self-insured health benefit plans that may be viable in a regionalized district.

Under traditional tax apportionment scenarios, Warren, Long Hill, and Green Brook stand to see reductions in tax liability in an enlarged regional district relative to the status quo while Watchung would see substantial increases. This is due to Watchung's low school tax rates compared to its

regional partners and its peers in Morris and Somerset County, which do not allow a comparable benefit for the borough in either regionalization scenario. **However, the new state regionalization law allows districts to create alternative tax apportionment formulas for the first ten years following regionalization, which would enable all districts, including Watchung, to share in the cost savings. Our recommendation for this alternative methodology is included in the report.**

The findings and recommendations that follow pertain to each domain of the study and can be referenced in context at the page numbers as noted.

Governance and Law

1. N.J.S.A. 18A:13-33.2 provides the authority to convert a limited purpose regional district to an all purpose regional district. The law requires that the proposal be submitted to the voters of *each of the constituent districts* of the regional district (emphasis added), in this case Warren Township, Long Hill Township and Watchung Borough, rather than to the voters at large of the regional district. Voters would also be asked to approve the inclusion of Green Brook as a new constituent member of the expanded all purpose regional district. If approved, the voters of Green Brook would then be asked whether they agree to join the expanded regional as constituent members of the district, or if they prefer to continue their send-receive relationship to educate their students in grades 9 to 12. (p. 26-27)
2. The interim board of education for the newly enlarged all purpose regional would have one-third, or three, of its members selected from among the members of the existing Watchung Hills Regional Board of Education. The remaining two-thirds, or six members, would be selected from among the members of the elementary boards of education that agreed to join the expanded regional district. (p. 28)
3. The recommendation for the interim board would have nine members: three from the Watchung Hills Board (with two from Warren Township and one from Long Hill Township), three from Warren, one each from Long Hill, Watchung, and Green Brook, if all four districts agreed to expand Watchung Hills into an all purpose regional serving grades pK-12. The interim board would reflect the same composition as the final board that would be elected in the next school election. (p. 28)
4. If Green Brook did not join as a constituent member of the expanded regional district, it would not have a guaranteed seat on the expanded Watchung Hills board. However, if the number of students sent by Green Brook reaches 10% or more of the Watchung Hills student population, a seat would be added to the board for Green Brook as it is now. The recommendation for that board would have ten members: three from the current Watchung Hills board (with two from Warren Township and one from Long Hill Township), three from the Warren board, one from the Long Hill board, two from the Watchung board, and the Green Brook representative. (p. 29)

5. The first elected members of the enlarged regional district shall be elected such that the initial terms be staggered, and in this case it would be three members elected for three years, three for two years, and three for one year. If the send-receive relationship is maintained, the Green Brook representative is appointed for a one-year term at the annual reorganization meeting of the Green Brook Board of Education. (p. 30)
6. The law provides that districts are prohibited from consolidating, regionalizing or withdrawing from a regional district if it will increase or exacerbate the segregation of students by racial, socioeconomic, disability or English language learner status. That statute, however, does not apply to this region since all students in the communities currently attending the limited purpose regional would remain in attendance with their peers in the all purpose regional and there would be no increased segregative effects. (p. 31)
7. The Watchung Hills Regional Board of Education would need to submit an application to the NJ Commissioner of Education for approval to hold a referendum to expand the current limited purpose regional into an all purpose, grades pK-12, regional school district. Should the referendum to regionalize succeed, the Division of Local Government Services, which provided the grant that funded this study, may also offer implementation grants to cover one-time costs for regionalization and shared services initiatives. (p. 38-39)
8. Should the referendum to regionalize succeed, the Division of Local Government Services, which provided the grant that funded this study, may also offer implementation grants to cover one-time costs for regionalization and shared services initiatives. The following task items should be considered: legal review of redundant contracts, systems integration, accounting/legal/expert review of benefits, collective bargaining negotiations costs, rebranding, auditing and accounting of financials, which could be potentially covered by the aforementioned grant funding. Election costs for each district would be covered in full by the State. (p. 39)
9. If a proposal to expand Watchung Hills from a limited purpose regional to an all purpose regional does not move forward, a discussion among district leadership and boards of education to maximize opportunities for shared services among the districts would be encouraged. Thereafter, the development and approval of specific contracts would be necessary to design and adopt shared services agreements between the schools and districts. (p. 39)

Demography

10. Births in the Watchung Hills region have been averaging 357 per year and trending 12+ births each year for the last six years. Warren Township and Long Hill Township have had the largest increases in births relative to population, while Watchung Borough and Green Brook Township births have decreased relative to population. (p. 44)

11. While Warren Township averaged 51 new housing occupancies per year for the last 6 years, the other three municipalities each averaged only 5 occupancies per year. In the period from 2018-23, 644 building permits were issued in the four municipalities and only 404 (62%) were followed by occupancy permits. (p. 46)
12. Research indicates that there are several planned major housing developments above the recent averages in all of the four municipalities that would impact school enrollment at this time. Descriptions of the anticipated new housing are found in the 2025 Housing Element and Fair Share Plan (HE&FSP) adopted by each municipality and available online. (p. 46)
13. Affordable housing (popularly known as COAH) mandates have recently been issued for present and prospective need obligations at a level of a combined 603 units for the four municipalities. They are defined for each municipality as: Warren Township 262 units; Long Hill Township 102 units; Watchung Borough 119 units; and Green Brook Township 120 units. Specific properties and projects are identified in the 2025 HE&FSP as adopted by each municipality. The impact of that accelerated residential construction is added to the standard enrollment projection. (p. 47)
14. The impact of previous new housing in each municipality will have been built into the standard survival ratios for each school district's enrollment projections. Therefore, only the impact of the above average new construction will be added to the standard projection. It is imperative to understand that the student yields are for grades pK-12 students. In the projections only the proportionate counts are added to the elementary and high school district projections. (p. 47)
15. The enrollment history in the Watchung Hills region from 2019-20 to 2024-25 shows overall decreases of 4.1% from 5,767 to 5,529 students. There was a large one-year drop from 2019-20 to 2020-21 and greater stability over the most recent five years. The average migration ratios across grades K-12 indicate that the number of students transitioning from one grade level to the next is 1.02, a slightly increasing but relatively consistent flow of students through the school system. (p. 49)
16. A comparison of the 2024-25 actual enrollment of 5,522 students with the 2029-30 projection of 6,479 shows an increase of 957 students and a material averaged change of approximately 68 students per grade over 14 grade levels. That projected increase would represent a 17% increase in enrollment over a five-year period that will pose significant educational and fiscal challenges for school officials. An enlargement of the current limited purpose, regional district into an all-purpose, regional district would not alter the overall enrollment projections in any way. (p. 49-50)
17. Elementary enrollment peaks in 2029-30 at 4,653 students, or growth of 747 students over 5 years. The secondary school enrollment is projected to peak at 1,827 students in 2029-30, the fifth year of the projection for a projection period growth of 192 students. (p. 51)

18. Given that the scenario contemplated would not change the composition of districts in this region, there is expected to be no impact on racial and other demographic groups from an all purpose, grades pK-12 regionalization. Increases in the number of Hispanic students/families provide an opportunity to evaluate the equity of access to resources and programs in the schools for this traditionally underserved group. Higher median household incomes combined with higher percentages of families qualifying for free and reduced meals indicate exacerbated inequalities that increase the needs for certain kinds of at-risk programming designed to address the effects of lower income. (p. 52-56)
19. Under current state standards for maximum class size, the classroom availability data demonstrates that the schools in the Watchung Hills region have a wide variety in terms of physical capacities. By 2029-30, Valley View MS in Watchung is projected to be short by 4 classrooms. At that point, five of the region's thirteen schools will have few additional classrooms available for expanded use: Watchung Hills Regional HS (1); Warren MS (1); Gillette ES in Long Hill (2); Bayberry ES in Watchung (4); and Irene Feldkirchner ES in Green Brook (1). The opportunity to house additional or shared programming will be easier to consider in the following schools: Warren's elementary schools (17 potentially available classrooms in 4 schools); Green Brook MS (11); Millington ES in Long Hill (7); and Central MS in Long Hill (7). (p. 62)
20. Classroom availability numbers for 2029-30 drop sharply if the districts want to maintain current class sizes, which ranged from 17.8 students in Warren to 19.2 in Watchung for the 2024-25 school year. For example, Warren would need to add one kindergarten and one 1st grade classroom, plus two each for grades 2-5 to maintain current class sizes, reducing its projected available space to 7 classrooms, while the addition of two classrooms each for grades 6-8 would leave Warren MS five classrooms short. Long Hill's extra capacity would drop to 5 classrooms each in Millington and Central because it would need to add additional 4th, 5th, 7th, and 8th grade classes to maintain current class sizes. Several other schools have grades that are just over current class size guidelines. (p. 62)
21. The racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic composition of the student population is expected to change, reflecting the demographic shifts in the communities served by the school districts. These changes present opportunities for the schools to evaluate and address the specific needs of various student groups and ensure equity in access to resources and programs. (p. 63)
22. An all purpose, grades pK-12, regional school district would have greater flexibility to assign students and grade levels as needed to more effectively and efficiently use available classroom spaces. Minor grade level reassignments could make blocks of classrooms available for additional uses beyond the current assignments. (p. 63)

Education and Program

23. The use of different programs across the four districts to teach and assess literacy development lead to disparate experiences, levels of preparation, and outcomes for students as they progress through the grade levels and into high school. Using common programs, supplements, and universal screeners and assessment tools can certainly benefit students and teachers as these students head to high school with similar experiences and with assessment data that can be compared validly. (p. 72)
24. Similarly to the case with ELA, Math curricular materials utilized by the four districts are quite varied, and that, combined with the variable amount of instructional time, means students have very different experiences in Math. The existence of these differences is supported by high school teachers, who report significantly varied levels of preparation. There are seven different entry points in high school Math, which often lead to homogeneous groupings of students, hence reducing the differences teachers see day-to-day. The WHRHS 9th grade Math teachers interviewed by RSRI agreed that greater curriculum coordination at the lower grade levels would lead to greater consistency and may reduce the number of entry points in high school. (p. 73-74)
25. The analysis demonstrates that students entering Watchung Hills from Warren, Long Hill, Watchung, and Green Brook have significantly different educational experiences. Having all students entering high school with shared experiences in terms of educational programs, philosophy, and time spent studying each of the content areas can offer several benefits to both students and teachers. Consistency in the time allotted to instruction can produce more coherent results among students and better prepare them for success in high school. Overall, shared educational programs in grades K-8 can contribute to more cohesive and effective approaches benefiting both students and educators alike. (p. 76-77)
26. Currently, Watchung Hills and the elementary districts share instructional resources with each other on a very limited basis. As such, minimal curriculum coordination exists, resulting in significantly different experiences for students prior to entering high school. Overall, one central regional curriculum office serving students in grades pK-12 can play a vital role in providing cohesive direction, support, and coordination for curriculum and instructional practices within the schools that comprise the region, ultimately leading to improved student achievement and success. A coordinated curriculum in grades pK-8 would result in students reaching 9th grade more equitably prepared for high school expectations and allow high school teachers to spend less time establishing a baseline of common understandings and expectations with students. (p. 77)
27. A centralized curriculum office can increase the efficiency with which it uses resources by eliminating duplicative efforts and services across the multiple districts. This can serve as a win for all of the districts, and ultimately the students, both financially and academically. The types of efficiencies discussed here could ultimately help in expanding instructional

support systems, such as interventionists and teachers of students with special needs, throughout the expanded district or within the currently existing districts. (p. 77)

28. The State has identified suggested maximum class sizes as 20 for grades K-5, 22 for grades 6-8, and 24 for grades 9-12. The data shows that all districts in this region are below or at least close to those suggested maximums. Class sizes are favorable, which may provide more opportunities for personalized instruction. Regionalization of the districts may allow for decisions on more efficient placement or sharing of teaching staff to reduce class sizes slightly at certain schools. (p. 77)
29. The differences in overall instructional time that currently exist provide an opportunity to consider changes that would provide more similar amounts of time to every student. The alignment of the teacher day, student day, and instructional day across the districts, or in an all purpose regional, would provide all students with comparable preparation for success in high school. (p. 78)
30. Watchung Hills students consistently exceeded state averages in ELA across all tested grade levels and years. In Math, they outperformed the state in Geometry for all three years and in Algebra II for two of the three years. (p. 84)
31. Warren, Long Hill, and Watchung students consistently outperform the state ELA average. Green Brook also tends to perform well, though there are instances where their scores dip closer to or slightly below the state average. This suggests a strong foundation in literacy within the region, with some variability in specific grades or districts. Math tells a similar story. Across the grades, the districts generally maintain a performance level above the state average. This is particularly notable in subjects like Algebra I and Geometry, where all districts show high percentages of students meeting or exceeding expectations, partially due to the fact that their strongest math students are enrolled in these subjects in middle school. While there are areas of variability, the overall picture is one of achievement and a commitment to academic success. (p. 85)
32. Standardized test scores reveal persistent achievement gaps between different student groups. Disparities exist along racial, socioeconomic, gender, and disability lines. Black and Hispanic students have traditionally faced challenges in ELA and Math. However, it is important to highlight the notable progress made, particularly by Black students, who generally demonstrated gains over the years. The same does not hold true for Hispanic students. Multiracial students have shown a more stable pattern in their ELA performance. (p. 89-90)
33. While racial disparities are evident, other patterns are less clear. Female students generally excel in ELA, while male students outperform females across most districts in Math. In some districts, female students match or exceed male students in math proficiency. Students with disabilities and economically disadvantaged students consistently lag behind the general

student population. Regionalization offers an opportunity for districts to analyze successful programs and instructional practices for these subgroups. (p. 90)

34. The mSGP scores in ELA and Math indicate that elementary students are demonstrating typical growth across multiple years. When comparing ELA growth across districts, the results are mixed, with each district outpacing the others in at least one of the four years displayed. Even among relatively high-performing schools and districts, a range of student growth scores provides an opportunity for district leaders, working within a regional setting, to examine the programs and instructional practices that are yielding the highest levels of student growth demonstrated in ELA and Math. (p. 91)
35. Examination of the Watchung Hills AP data yields some common, and perhaps expected, results. During the years when students returned to school post-pandemic, the percentage of eleventh and twelfth grade students enrolled at Watchung Hills who earned a score of 3 or higher on at least one AP exam dropped from a high of 44% in 2020 to a low of 35% in 2021, followed by steady increases during the subsequent two years. Of note is that since 2021, students scoring 3's or higher on the exams they took jumped from 84% in 2021 to 94% in 2023, a noteworthy increase. (p. 92)
36. Watchung Hills has higher graduation rates than the statewide rates for each of the 4-year and 5-year cohorts from 2020-23. These numbers demonstrate not only success in getting students to graduation in four years, but also success in encouraging students who need the extra time to persist. Schoolwide, the 97.8% of members of the Class of 2023 who graduated on time closely mirrors the percentage of students from each subgroup, except students with disabilities who exhibited an on-time graduation rate of 91.8%. This number is sometimes misleading because students with special needs who qualify for an 18-21 year-old program often delay receipt of their diploma until after they complete these activities. (p. 93)
37. The school's postsecondary enrollment rates indicate a modest increase year-to-year. Of the students enrolled in any post-secondary institution, students from Watchung Hills Regional HS are more likely to attend a 4-year institution than a 2-year institution over each of the years examined for this study. This mirrors the trend statewide. The school also surpasses the state average of graduates attending any institution of higher education by an average of eighteen percentage points. (p. 93)
38. Recognizing that school climate profoundly impacts attendance and discipline, regionalization provides the capacity to consolidate efforts in this area. This allows for dedicated focus and resources on climate and culture initiatives, which smaller districts might struggle to provide independently, thereby benefiting all students in the partnership. (p. 95)
39. Some districts have expressed a desire to consider expanding their preschool programs in an all purpose regional. There is a realistic preschool universe of approximately 668 children. At the state maximum of 15 students per classroom (and lower if some students have a need for a more self-contained environment), serving that population would require as many as 45

preschool classrooms. For the 2025-26 school year, the region is planning to support about half (22) that many. (p. 96)

40. One appealing opportunity given the facilities analysis done earlier in this study is to consider expansion of the preschool programs at the schools with capacity. Long Hill could consider this option by reassigning first grade students to Millington ES, where there is projected to be ample classroom capacity over the five year period. Watchung could also consider preschool expansion with a projected 4 extra classrooms in 2029-30. A unified grades pK-12 regional would have greater latitude to consolidate some preschool classrooms in buildings that could be more conveniently located to their families. (p. 96-97)
41. Special education is an area with great potential for joint action. Consolidating child study team staff within one larger district can provide greater levels of expertise to meet the unique needs of students. It may also provide opportunities for greater alignment in terms of eligibility criteria and determinations. The percentage of total enrollment by classified students ranges from 13% to 20%, and there are noteworthy disparities among the percentages of students with specific classifications. (p. 105)
42. The elementary special education directors noted that they have made successful efforts over the past several years in reducing out-of-district placements by developing in-house programs to meet student needs in a less restrictive environment. Their in-district placement rates of between 94% to 96% reflect that success and are noticeably higher than the high school rate of 82.7% resulting from the previously higher elementary numbers. To ensure this continuity, it is recommended that placements continue to be a regular dialogue among all of the directors. It was noted that high school case managers are invited to 8th grade IEP meetings, which is a positive sign. Since some of these meetings happen later in the year when time is short to develop appropriate high school programs, consideration should be given to having high school staff attend IEP meetings for 7th, and perhaps even 6th, grade students. This can allow for consideration of high school programming to meet educational needs in-district well in advance of the arrival of those students. (p. 105)
43. Much like services for students with special needs, students who benefit from the support of the multi-tiered systems of support process may further benefit by having staff who specialize by investing in common screeners and support mechanisms to have targeted discussions, address student needs, and monitor their progress. Taking full advantage of the additional expertise and resources available in the district while still addressing individual needs in a small school environment prior to the need for classification is one of the greatest benefits of regionalized resources or shared services. (p. 106)
44. Each district has a framework for directly meeting the needs of its multilingual students, but often the services are limited to one period or timeframe per day. ML students attending a regional district may benefit from a more robust ELL program, including not only direct instruction in an ELL class, but also teachers who have been trained to work using a

sheltered instruction protocol. Access to a larger pool of ESL-certified teachers may also allow those teachers to support the students throughout the school day and offer support to their families on non-academic issues, such as better navigating school and community services. (p. 106)

45. The gifted education programs across each of the elementary districts are varied. There are a host of programs offered at each of the schools, though little overlap exists among those programs. As students identified as gifted progress through middle school and into high school, they will have had quite different experiences. Further collaboration through regionalization or shared services would help to ensure that students received similar and equitable levels of services prior to high school, where they will likely enroll in advanced coursework. (p. 106)
46. A healthy extracurricular program provides balance to an academic education by offering activities that engage student interest. While smaller middle schools certainly offer some benefits, their size can often limit the number of activities in which students may participate. In many schools, the same students participate in clubs, activities, and athletics, which due to competing time requirements, can further limit the number of students participating in a given activity even further. While cost considerations are a factor, expanding the number of students available to take part in specialized activities, such as clubs, instrumental music, and theatre, or athletic teams can enhance the quality of those programs and better prepare middle school students for high school athletic and academic competitions. (p. 108)
47. This study assumes that all existing schools will remain open and operate with most school-level positions remaining as they presently do if there is a district regionalization. Each school is expected to retain its administrative and teaching staff as well as other essential support positions such as nurses, counselors, library media specialists, and teaching assistants. At the school level, it would take largely the same staff to perform the other support functions as well. (p. 124)
48. With school-level staff remaining relatively constant, the opportunities for efficiency will be more available by combining some positions on district office staffs. A single unified district would need only one superintendent and one business administrator, while assistant superintendent and assistant business administrator positions may need to be considered in the new structure. There also exist several supervisory position responsibilities and costs that could be shared across a regional district. Enhanced curriculum coordination and instructional supervision could only benefit the districts, including the teachers and their students. (p. 124)
49. Currently, there are administrative tasks replicated in five school districts that could be completed once. This replication costs both time and money and drains resources from other productive uses. The reduction of this overlap would almost certainly result in staffing

efficiencies and the ability to save money or redirect funding back to educational programming. (p. 124)

Finance and Operations

50. It is clear that all five districts prioritize direct spending on students in terms of the percentage of dollars allocated to classroom instruction. Watchung at 61.5% is exceptional in this regard, above the state median of 59.4% for elementary school districts. Green Brook, Long Hill and Warren, while under the state median, all spend more than 50% of the total budgetary cost on classroom instruction. Watchung Hills (52.6%) is very close to the state median of 54.4% for the high school peer group. This is a strong positive indicator as it provides direct student academic experiences, and therefore, should receive primary attention and commitment in the district budgets. (p. 133)
51. Another item worth noting is that Warren at 8.3% is well below the state median of 10.3% in administrative spending. Green Brook (10.5%), Watchung (10.6%) and Long Hill (11.2%) are only slightly above. Watchung Hills at 10.7% is also very close to the state median of 10.0% for high school districts. Lower spending on administration is often identified by the public as an area to realize potential efficiencies in education. (p. 133-134)
52. The primary areas targeted for cost reduction include audit processes, professional services, and administrative and support staffing. Both regionalization scenarios project specific financial benefits. The estimated cost savings of \$2,656,516 in the all districts scenario and \$2,040,875 for current constituents would come primarily from consolidating administrative functions and reducing duplication across the districts. (p. 135)
53. It is important to note that these cost savings in consolidating district offices and/or functions do not include the potential financial efficiencies and educational benefits that could occur from consolidating and coordinating operations such as curriculum and textbook purchases, in-district special education programs, student transportation, technology infrastructure, central office functions, unified contract negotiations, and the potential for self-insured health benefit plans that may be viable in a regionalized district. Each of these would require further exploration and consideration by a regional board of education and administration or joint actions by the districts as currently structured. (p. 136)
54. Following the trend of projected state aid in the separate districts, state aid in an enlarged regional under both scenarios is projected to increase each year in the period studied. Capped aid rises from \$11.2 million in FY 2027 to \$13.4 million in FY 2030 in the all districts scenario, and from \$9.2 million in FY 2027 to \$11 million in FY 2030 in the current constituents scenario. Uncapped aid rises from \$11.6 million in FY 2027 to \$14.5 million in FY 2030 in the all districts scenario, and from \$9.4 million in FY 2027 to \$11.5 million in FY 2030 in the current constituents scenario. (p. 151)

55. Beyond the discrepancies between capped and uncapped aid, aid caps influence whether or not there is a state aid benefit to regionalization. Operating as a single district, the aid cap creates an intriguing dynamic. If the cap methodology persists through FY 2030, total state aid for an enlarged regional would be higher than if the districts remained separate, creating a small state aid benefit to regionalization. However, if the state reverts to full SFRA funding without caps, state aid in the enlarged regional would be slightly lower than the combined total aid of the separate constituent districts, creating instead, a small benefit to remaining separate. Despite the discrepancy as described, the relative impact to state aid under any scenario is modest when compared to total state aid or the operating budget of the regional district. (p. 151-153)
56. After reaching highs in around 2010, EPVs in each municipality mostly trended sideways through 2020 and have begun to rise through the present. EPVs are expected to rise in each municipality, peak at points over the next several years, flatten, and then begin to decline. (p. 157)
57. Warren and Watchung would benefit financially from ENR-based apportionment, as their property wealth exceeds their student ENR proportions. Long Hill and Green Brook would prefer EPV apportionment, as their student ENR exceeds their property wealth contributions. (p. 165)
58. The model's optimal ratio, which attempts to balance savings and minimize extreme impacts, would weight each community's EPV at 77% and ENR at 23%. At this ratio, Warren, Long Hill, and Green Brook would all experience a reduction in total tax liability relative to what they would otherwise pay in the status quo. Watchung would see an increase in its tax liability relative to the status quo. (p. 168)
59. An alternative approach is provided through P.L.2021, c.40, which permits a board of education to establish a transitional methodology, not to exceed ten years, of the apportionment method adopted by the voters provided that the methodology is agreed to by all participating districts. A possible transitional methodology has been developed with the goal of keeping tax impacts positive for all districts for the first five years of the regional's operation and then provide a gradual phase-in towards formulaic apportionment under the optimal weights of 77% EPV and 23% ENR. This approach gives each community ample time to plan for the long-term distribution of tax responsibility while immediately realizing the educational and programmatic benefits of regionalization in the short-term. A similar transitional method could be developed for the current constituents configuration. (p. 175)
60. Short term debt is a multi-year obligation authorized by the school district, but budgeted for in the annual budget process. Energy savings and improvement plans and subscription-based information technology arrangements are two short term debts that the districts in this region utilize and were considered significant enough to be included in the study. The latter are an

area to be explored for sharing services, and regionalization may lead to savings due to economies of scale. (p. 176)

61. Four of the five districts in this study currently have bonded, long-term debt. Additionally, Watchung has an arbitrage rebate payable of \$323,724 payable as of June 30, 2024. Also of note, Watchung Hills added a 4-year lease purchase of \$640,000 in July 2024 for technology equipment, classroom furniture, building security and athletic improvements. (p. 176-177)
62. According to state law, the salary guide and terms and conditions of employment of the largest constituent school district shall apply in full after three years following the formation of the regional district or until a successor agreement is negotiated with the majority representative of the new school district, whichever occurs first. The salary guide and terms and conditions of employment that will apply pursuant to the provisions of this subsection shall be based upon the terms and conditions of employment of the largest constituent district made up of only the identical grade levels. This means that Warren's agreement would govern all grades pK-8 staff and Watchung Hills would govern all grades 9-12 staff if a successor agreement were not completed within three years of the regionalization. A successor agreement would need to be negotiated between the new board of education and the new association representatives. (p. 178-179)
63. The review of the main CBAs for each district intends to provide useful information to aid the negotiations process should the districts decide to form an all purpose regional, or can be used simply as points for comparison and synthesis in future negotiations. There are notable differences among the agreements throughout this comparative analysis. (p. 179)
64. In addition to a basic review of steps and salary levels that would require attention to bring the guides into alignment, consultants estimated the financial implications of aligning teacher salary guides. Due to data availability, a complete simulation was only possible for Green Brook. Green Brook's results were then scaled to estimate impacts for Long Hill and Watchung. This scaling was based on relative staffing and salary guide structure similarities. In total, the analysis yields a total cost of \$525,000 in the all districts scenario and \$377,000 for the current constituents scenario. These estimated costs were included in the broader cost savings calculations noted above. (p. 182-184)
65. The cooperative sharing of personnel is minimal in this region of districts, though not all positions lend themselves to sharing. Unlike a regionalized district with one board of education, the superintendent and business administrator in a shared personnel relationship are the administrators of two separate school districts. This requires a strong commitment on the part of the shared employees, and can be a factor that contributes to frequent turnover or burnout. (p. 189)
66. A regional business office could not only handle required business functions, but allow time to explore grants, alternative funding, purchasing cooperatives, and other money saving options. The expertise of individuals in a particular area (e.g., grant writing/administration/

reporting, fall student counts, transportation, facilities, food services) could be strengthened and should eventually save the district time and money. The centralized administrative and educational reports could have individuals who become more experienced in, and familiar with, processing them. (p. 191)

67. Beyond a joint business office, other possible areas for exploration include: regional directors for critical functions such as curriculum, professional development, special services, facilities and transportation; counseling; and programs such as special education, multi-tiered systems of support, multilingual education, and preschool. (p. 192)
68. Overall, transportation packaging and tiering is well thought out and efficient in all five districts. Four of the five districts are below state averages for cost per package with Watchung Hills notably so. Green Brook has an especially high cost per package that is substantially above state averages. Rebidding the district's transportation contract could potentially result in lower costs. (p. 194-196)
69. There would be no impact on student seat time or distance traveled from a regionalization, as there has been no discussion of any intent to change the schools that students are attending. Across the region, the addition of a single transportation supervisor would provide for a regular evaluation of bus stops, routes, and tiering to enhance and improve busing efficiency. By utilizing advanced software for route optimization and ensuring regular communication among districts, the transportation framework could adapt dynamically to changing needs. (p. 197)
70. Green Brook began sending its grades 9-12 students to Watchung Hills on a tuition basis in 1989. Based upon information provided, annual contracts existed and were submitted with both districts' annual budgets. A three-year agreement was created and put into place beginning with the 2021-22 school year with an expiration of June 30, 2024. The successor agreement, for a term beginning July 1, 2024 and ending June 30, 2027, was successfully executed in late April 2025. The terms of this contract allow the district to deviate from the state reconciliation process. The initial agreement between these two districts deviates from the process significantly in that there is no reconciliation process unless doing so would be favorable to Green Brook. (p. 200)
71. For the three years of the recent agreement, the Watchung Hills Board of Education accepted \$1,930,377 less from Green Brook than the total regular education tuition that would have been due if the fully reconciled state formula had been implemented. Again, the contract does allow this deviation from the statutory process to occur. The newly executed agreement includes tuition increases that will bring the payments closer to the actual certified per pupil cost, but are still less than the 2023-24 state certified cost. (p. 202)
72. The districts use only five types of reserve accounts: capital; emergency; maintenance; tuition; and unemployment. All of the districts use capital and unemployment reserves, and none of them use all six types. Warren's capital reserves are the highest among all of the

districts' reserve balances at just over \$6.9 million; however, the March 2025 referendum used most of this and only \$1 million is expected to be retained. Tuition reserves are for districts in send-receive relationships, so only Green Brook and Watchung Hills use them. Warren, Long Hill, Green Brook, and Watchung Hills use maintenance reserves, and Warren and Long Hill have emergency reserves. (p. 203-204)

APPENDIX

Watchung Hills Shared Services/Regionalization Feasibility Study Advisory Committee

Dr. Elizabeth Jewett, Superintendent, WHRHS
Dr. Julie Glazer, Superintendent, Watchung
Robert Morrison, Chair WHRHS BOE, Warren
William Scholts, Business Administrator, WHRHS
Tim Stys, former Business Administrator, WHRHS
Karen Bishop-Johnson, Business Administrator, Watchung
Michael Birnberg, WHRHS BOE President, Watchung
Jennifer Agugliaro, Watchung BOE President, Watchung
Manny Gonzales, Watchung BOE, Watchung
Mohamad Freij, Watchung BOE, Watchung
Janine Potter, WHRHS BOE, Green Brook
Lori Falzarano-Rozmerski, WHRHS BOE, Long Hill
Susan Ober, former WHRHS BOE, Long Hill
Heather Trumpore, WHRHS BOE, Warren
Ann Butler, Long Hill BOE, Long Hill
Patricia Zohn, Warren BOE President, Warren
Todd Weinstein, Warren BOE, Warren
Natalie Feuchtbaum, former Warren BOE, Warren
Jim Benscoter, Deputy Mayor, Green Brook
Guy Piserchia, Mayor, Long Hill
Vanessa Kian, Committee Person, Warren
George Lazo, former Committee Person, Warren
Ronald Jubin, Mayor, Watchung
Christine Ead, Council President, Watchung