



# Shared Services and Regionalization Study

**Watchung Hills Regional High School, Watchung Borough,  
Warren Township, Long Hill Township,  
and Green Brook Township School Districts**

Rowan School Regionalization Institute  
Public Presentation  
October 30, 2025

# Why are we here tonight? What is this study, exactly?

**We want to be very clear at the outset of this presentation: This is an information-only study.**

- This study was produced by an independent team of experts in NJ public school law, governance, demographics, education and programming, and finance to provide an overview of important considerations for local boards of education to know, consider and discuss on the topics of shared services and regionalization.
- It is not legislation.
- It is not a mandate for your districts to regionalize or to do anything differently than what your districts currently are doing.
- It does not force a referendum vote.
- No district or districts can be forced into a regionalized structure or forced to share services or personnel.
- Our investigation and study have been furnished at no-cost to any of your districts.
- Our study yields important information for everyone in the communities of the Watchung Hills region regarding your public school districts, which are excellent.

**Thank you for coming out tonight to learn about the study! We are excited to talk about it with you.**



## Format for tonight's session

**RSRI subject matter experts will present key findings** from the four major areas of the *Feasibility Study on Regionalization and Shared Services in the Watchung Hills Regional, Warren, Long Hill, Watchung, and Green Brook School Districts:*

- Demographics
- Education and Program
- Finance and Operations
- Governance and Law

After we've presented these key findings to you, we will have **time for Q&A from our in-person audience** tonight.

**An online copy of the full study will be accessible** to members of the public **on WHRHS's website** for the public's review..



## Contributing RSRI Team Members

- Mark Magyar - Director, Sweeney Center for Public Policy; Policy Director, NJ Senate Majority Office\*
- Scott Oswald, Ed.D– Adjunct professor, Stockton and Rowan Universities, Superintendent of Schools\*, NJASA Executive Committee member\*, President of the Camden County Association of School Administrators\*
- Kathy Helewa - Senior Manager of Field Services, NJSBA\*; BOE Member, Warren Township\*
- Lucille Davy, Esq. - Attorney at Law; NJ Commissioner of Education\*; K-12 Mathematics Teacher\*
- Ray Kuhner–President NJ School Transportation Supervisors Association\*, School Transportation Supervisor\*
- Donna Snyder-DeVita - School Business Administrator\*; County Representative, NJASBO\*
- Brian Diamante - CEO, The Diamante Group; Senior Director of Data and Research, NJPCSA
- George Sundell - CEO, Sundance Associates
- G. Kennedy Greene, Ed.D - Adjunct Associate Professor, Columbia University; Superintendent of Schools\*, President NJASA\*
- Ari Lazaro - Research Assistant, Rowan University

*\*Former roles*



# S.R.E.P. Grant

The School Regionalization Efficiency Program (SREP) was established to provide financial assistance and incentives to local government entities in the state of New Jersey, including school districts, to help them operate more efficiently and reduce costs. The program is administered by the state's Department of Community Affairs with main purposes that include:

- Encouraging local governments, including school districts, to implement shared services and consolidate operations to reduce costs and improve efficiency;
- Providing financial support for the study and implementation of shared services, consolidation, and other efficiency-related initiatives; and
- Supporting the development of local capacity to enable long-term, sustainable improvements in efficiency and effectiveness.



# Purpose of the Study

The boards of education of Watchung Hills Regional High School (WHRHS) and the Watchung Borough School District have expressed an interest in examining the feasibility of reorganizing their school districts with their fellow districts in the cluster - Warren Township, Long Hill, and Green Brook - and seeking ways in which to expand shared services across their schools and districts.

To that end, the WHRHS BOE and Watchung Borough BOE contracted with the Rowan School Regionalization Institute (RSRI) to conduct a Shared Services / Regionalization study for the districts in the Watchung Hills cluster.

Although the WHRHS and Watchung Borough School Districts are the SREP grant applicants, Warren, Long Hill and Green Brook were invited to send representatives to participate in a Steering Committee throughout the duration of the study and did so.



# Purpose of the Study

As per guidance from the WHRHS and the Watchung Borough Boards of Education, and with the agreement of the Steering Committee, the following options were studied by the RSRI team:

- Consolidating the limited-purpose Watchung Hills Regional with its current constituent school districts (i.e., Watchung Borough, Warren Township, Long Hill) into one all-purpose, grades pK-12, regional school district, and either:
  - allowing Green Brook, which is currently a sending district, to choose to join that all-purpose regional school district as a constituent school district; or
  - allowing Green Brook to have a send-receive agreement for its students in grades 9-12 with the new all-purpose regional school district
- 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.

*Note: This study examines the potential impacts of regionalization as outlined above. Any referendum or vote to regionalize that does not match one of these configurations would change the analysis and findings produced herein.*



# Assumptions used in the study

- The enrollment, aid, taxes (i.e., numbers) in the study represent a ***snapshot*** in time. Even the day after that snapshot, conditions (enrollment, account balances, classification) change.
- Projections are just that - projections. They are based on longitudinal data and trends. They are not exact and should not be expected to be exact. Students enroll and disenroll. Costs increase. Staff comes and goes. Things break. All of those may impact these projections.
- The process that we use relies on feedback and involvement with the Steering Committee, with school administrators and staff, with elected officials, and with teachers, students and the public in town hall meetings. This report has benefited from ongoing feedback and review.



# Sections of the Study

This study examines relevant data in order to provide recommendations to the boards of education in the following areas: Demographics; Education and Program; Finance and Operations, and Governance and Law..

- The Demographics portion looks at community profiles, enrollment history and projections, and the racial and other demographic impact of any regionalization.
- The Education and Program component includes an examination of the curricular and instructional factors, assessment results, special and co-curricular programs across the region, and staffing.
- The Finance and Operations segment explores state aid and local tax levies, operating expenses, short and long-term debt, transportation, collective bargaining, and other factors that impact the finances of each district.
- The Governance and Law section focuses on an examination of constitutional, statutory, and case law, as well as state monitoring results, transition features, and other legal/political issues.



# Demography - Housing Growth

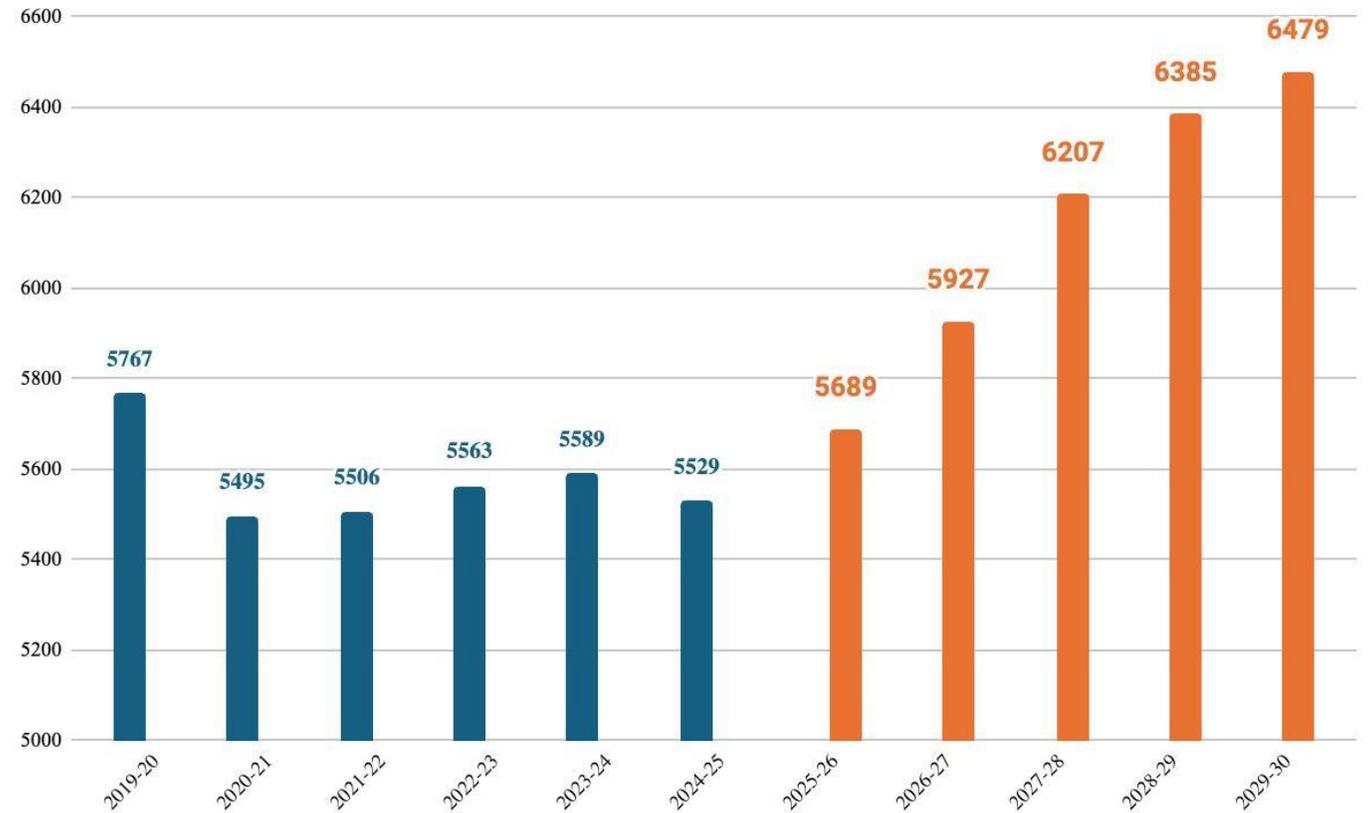
- Warren, Watchung, Long Hill and Green Brook are coming out of a period of relatively low housing and population growth.
- From 2018 to 2023, only 404 new certificates of occupancy were issued in the four towns, with most of them - 308 - being issued in Warren.
- After years of relatively stagnant or declining growth, **all four municipalities began undergoing significant housing growth** during the year this study was conducted,
  - Warren Township identifies four Round 3 and three Round 4 projects for a total 866 units.
  - Similarly, Watchung Borough has 277 units proposed from three projects
  - Green Brook Township has 499 units proposed from seven projects.
  - Long Hill Township with 191 units proposed from three projects



# Demography: The Impact on Enrollment

The impact of rapid housing growth has already presented unexpected staffing 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.

Projected Enrollment Growth through 2029-30





# Demography– Facilities Utilization

- **Projected enrollment growth at this level – whether it occurs by 2029-2030 or even a few years later – poses a significant challenges for school districts.**
- Our study used room capacity guidelines for the NJDOE's long range facilities plan for district practice. 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, the State maximum is 15 students.
- 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). By state standards, Warren's elementary schools show 17 potentially available classrooms in 4 schools); Green Brook MS (1); Millington ES in Long Hill (7); and Central MS in Long Hill (7).



# Demography– Facilities Utilization

- 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’s elementary schools 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.
- There are **opportunities for expanding pK programs in an all-purpose regional school district**, as total classroom availability in the new regional district would accommodate the projected pK universe for the cluster, or **through shared services contracts utilizing available space**.
- 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. There could also be opportunities to share facilities through shared services.



# Demography: The Challenges Ahead

- The racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic composition of the student population is also expected to change, reflecting the demographic shifts in all four communities. The percentage of economically disadvantaged students is expected to double across the cluster (from 7.9% in 2024-25 to 16.4% in 2029-30).

The **projected increase of 957 students across all of the districts through 2029-30 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.



# Education and Program - Guiding Questions

The following questions are guiding the Education and Program section of the study:

- *Will students in any newly proposed regional district have access to a **higher quality, more equitable educational program** in grades pK-12?*
- *Will the creation of a larger, regional pK-12 district produce **additional educational benefits or challenges for students and/or staff members** when compared to the status quo?*
- *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?*
- *Are there **opportunities via greater usage of shared services** across the school districts in the cluster to create a higher quality education for all students without engaging in full regionalization?*



# Education and Program - Access and Curriculum

The investigation yielded the following:

- All five districts in the cluster are **high-performing districts** as per QSAC, or just short of high-performing.
- The use of **different programs to teach and assess students and variations in instructional time across the four pK-8 districts** result in disparate experiences and can lead to different levels of preparation and outcomes for students as they progress through the grade levels and into high school.
- WHRHS 9th grade teachers report **significant differences** between students from the pK-8 districts in **reading endurance and managing complex texts**, and that students are reading **vastly different materials during ELA instruction** depending on their pK-8 district from which they come.
- The **Math curricula** used across the districts share **some overlap**, but **remains inconsistent** between districts; **instructional time also varies** (next slide).
- **Science and Social Studies instructional programming** across the districts **is even more diverse** than ELA and Math.



# Education and Program - Access and Curriculum

**Instructional time varies** between the four pK-8 districts in both individual subject matters and in the the instructional day, **in some cases widely.** Some examples are shown below.

- **Differences in daily ELA instruction** for K-4 students in the cluster: Green Brook provides 130 minutes per day, Watchung Borough provides 120 minutes per day, Long Hill provides 120 minutes for K-3 students and 110 minutes for grade 4 students daily, and Warren Township provides 110–140 minutes of ELA instruction daily, depending on grade level.
- **Differences in daily Math instruction** for K-4 students in the cluster: Warren Township provides 110-140 minutes daily, depending on grade level; Green Brook students receive an average of 85 minutes daily; Watchung Borough provides 80 minutes of Math instruction daily; and Long Hill students receive 60 minutes daily.
- **Science and Social Studies** instructional programming across the districts are even more diverse than ELA and Math. **Other content areas** across the pK-8 districts vary in offerings. When there is commonality (e.g., Physical Education), there are differing amounts of time spent on content across the districts.



# Education and Program - Access and Curriculum

The **length of the instructional day also varies** between schools and between districts as well.

- Watchung Hills Regional High School daily instructional time: 5 hours, 38 minutes
- Green Brook Middle School daily instructional time: 5 hours, 55 minutes
- Warren Middle School daily instructional time: 5 hours, 55 minutes
- Long Hill Central Middle School instructional time: 5 hours, 55 minutes
  
- Watchung Bayberry Elementary School daily instructional time: 6 hours, 0 minutes
- Green Brook Feldkirchner Elementary daily instructional time: 5 hours, 55 minutes
- Warren Township elementary schools' daily instructional time: 5 hours, 50 minutes
- Long Hill elementary schools' daily instructional time: 5 hours, 15 minutes

**An alignment of the teacher day, student day, and instructional day across the same grade levels in each of the districts or in a single regionalized district would provide all students with comparable preparation for high school.**



# Education and Program - Access and Curriculum

Regarding curriculum alignment, the study found that:

- **Aligning pK-8 programs, assessment tools, and instructional time** is a step toward **greater consistency in student skills**, which could ease the transition to high school. When using the same programs and terminology, eighth and ninth grade teachers could engage in **more data and information sharing** to help plan and adjust instruction between lower and upper grades. When teachers across the cluster speak **a common language about students'** strengths and supports, enrichment and interventions become more accessible.
- **One central regional curriculum office** serving students in grades pK-12 has the potential to **lead to improved student achievement** by providing **cohesive direction, support, and coordination for curriculum and instructional practices**. Students would be **more equitably prepared for high school**, and high school **teachers would spend less time establishing a baseline** of common understandings and expectations with students. A centralized curriculum office would **increase the efficiency of resource usage** by eliminating duplicative efforts and services, which would be **a win both academically and financially**.



# Education and Program - Access and Curriculum

One appealing opportunity a new all-purpose regional school district could offer is the **expansion of preschool programming**.

- Each of the pK-8 districts in the study operates pK for three- and four-year old children with special needs, and general education students on a tuition basis based on available space and personnel.
- Despite demand, Watchung Borough does not have the ability to expand its pK program because of space constraints.
- As noted earlier, greater classroom flexibility under **regionalization could allow for an expansion of pK** that would better accommodate the projected pK demand, and **would provide a consistent pK program** experience for students throughout the cluster.



# Education and Program - Access and Curriculum

In the realm of **special education**, the study found that:

- Special education directors are working to **keep more students in their home districts** by providing in-house programming. The pK-8 districts currently place 94% to 96% of students in-district. Watchung Hills Regional High School has a lower in-district placement rate due to a past higher rate of out-of-district placements from the cluster pK-8 districts. Year-round coordination of programs is necessary to properly plan for student needs across the region.
- **As pK-8 districts retain more students in-district, it is more likely those students will stay in-district for high school**, as long as their needs can be met. To prepare for this, WHRHS case managers attend IEP meetings for incoming 8th-grade students. It is important for the Regional High School to understand the needs of students in the pipeline. Consideration should also be given for WHRHS case managers to also attend IEP meetings for 6th and 7th graders. This would allow WHRHS to **better anticipate student needs and prepare programs** to keep them in the district through high school.



# Education and Program - Access and Curriculum

The study notes that:

- **Consolidating child study teams could improve collaboration and expertise, and help standardize eligibility criteria across districts;** classification rates in the cluster vary. For instance, in 2023-24, classification rates ranged from nearly 20% to about 13%.
- **A consolidated department and common support mechanisms** under regionalization or via shared services for students who need extra support via I&RS and MTSS by providing **common screeners, common progress monitoring, and aligned professional development** to support these learners **may reduce classification rates and is one of the greatest benefits of regionalized resources / additional shared services.**



# Education and Program - Access and Curriculum

Regarding multi-language learners, the study found that

- Low numbers of multi-lingual (ML) students in the individual districts (2%-4.5%) of the Watchung Hills cluster do not require a full bilingual program, but each district is obligated to ensure the unique needs of these students are being met. **Each district has a varied approach to meeting ML students' needs.**
- There is an **achievement gap for ML students** in the pK-8 districts in the cluster in ELA and Math NJSLA scores. Available data suggests that the achievement gap for ML students is even steeper in high school.
- **A regionalized district may offer ML students a more robust English as a Second Language program and access to a pool of ESL-certified teachers, which would benefit families as well as students.**
- As the number of ML students in the cluster rises, changes in cultural background of the student body present opportunities to develop an even greater sense of belonging within the culture of their school district.



# Education and Program - Access and Curriculum

In other special programming areas, the report notes that

- Each of the districts in the cluster provide programming for **Gifted & Talented** students (G&T). There is **little overlap** between districts. Further collaboration in G&T through shared services or regionalization would help to ensure that students throughout the cluster receive similar and equitable experiences prior to high school.
- Each district also offers robust **extra curricular programming** for its students, which varies between district to district and school to school. The larger student enrollment in a regionalized district may offer opportunities to expand the number of offerings of extra curricular activities and greater participation in extra curricular clubs, activities, and athletics.



# Education and Program - Instructional Support

Regarding staffing and administrative support, our investigation yielded the following:

- Under a unified district, the board of education would need to work with district and building-level administrators to determine staffing needs at each grade level (elementary level) and within each subject area (secondary level). This review has the potential, over time, to **lead to increased staffing efficiencies and improved achievement.**
- The formation of a unified district could **eliminate the need for redundant supervisory and curriculum positions** as curriculum itself is streamlined across the districts. Finally, **other administrative roles, such as those leading the child study team, technology, transportation, and facilities could be combined into a single leader in each area.**
- 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.



# Education and Program - Staffing Efficiencies

The investigation yielded the following:

- Under a unified district, the study assumes that all existing schools will remain open and most school-level positions will remain as they are. Because of these assumptions, **opportunities for efficiency are more likely to be found by combining district office and supervisory staff.** School- based efficiencies can and should be examined over time.
- **Child study team members** may be assigned at the school level or shared across the district, depending on case management and service loads.
- **Clerical/support staff** in each department could also present opportunities for restructuring in a unified pK-12 district.



# Finance and Operations

**STATE AID:** The consultants implemented a model approximating the SFRA funding formula to estimate state aid for fiscal years 2026 through 2030. This section also discusses the changes to state aid caps enacted for FY 2026, and the impact on all five districts versus benefits to a new regionalized district.

**TAX APPORTIONMENT:** Current law provides three apportionment methods based on equalized valuation, student enrollment, or a combination of both. The consultants model tax impacts based on historical and projected equalized valuations, school budgets, tax levies, and enrollments.

**COST SAVINGS, DEBT, COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AGREEMENTS, SHARED SERVICES, SEND/RECEIVE TUITIONS, OPERATING EXPENSES, RESERVES, and CONTRACTED SERVICES** were also analyzed.



# Finance and Operations - State School Aid

State aid was estimated for each district individually for the status quo and under the regional configurations.

Aid for FY 2026 included methodology adjustments expected to be applied in future years.

## Status Quo

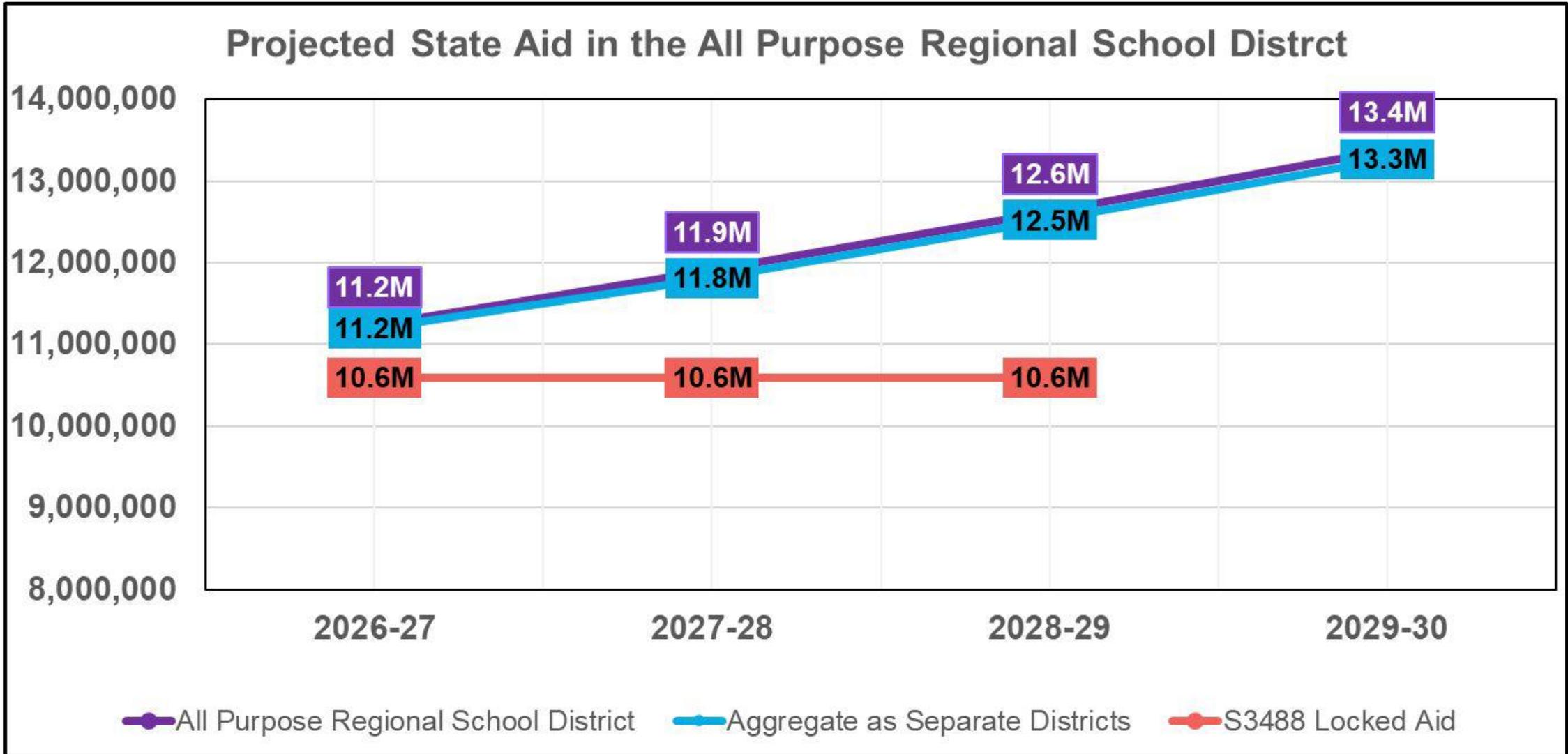
- State aid in each district is provided through the state's categorical aid for security, transportation, and special education.
- Categorical aid is driven in part by actual student counts, therefore, projected enrollment increases over the period are expected to result in additional state aid in all districts
- None of the districts in the cluster are eligible Equalization aid, generally the largest portion of state aid, due to the relatively high wealth and income of the districts.

## Regional Configurations

- Aggregate state aid is comparable to status quo aid in both configurations.



# Finance and Operations - State School Aid





# Finance and Operations - Cost Savings from Regionalization

The study identified that **both regionalization scenarios project financial benefits and annual cost savings**, primarily from consolidating administrative functions & reducing duplication.

- **Regionalization with all potential constituent districts (Warren Township, Watchung Borough, Long Hill, Green Brook) \$2,656,516.**

This cost savings accounts for: 5 superintendents → 1 (\$829,597); 10 BAs / ABAs → 1 BA, 1 ABA (\$881,231); 5 Special Education Directors → 1 (537,369); 3 Directors of Curriculum → 1 (\$290,950); 5 Technology Directors → 1 (\$422,242); and other administrative roles and duplicate costs (i.e., audit, legal, fees) ; offset 1 Assistant Superintendent → 2 (-\$185,073) and offset to align salary guides (-\$525,000).

- **Regionalization with current constituent districts only (Warren Township, Watchung Borough, and Long Hill) \$2,040,875.**

This cost savings accounts for: 4 superintendents → 1 (\$605,587); 4 BAs → 1 (\$459,216); 3 ABAs → 1 (\$164,476); 4 Special Education Directors → 1 (\$390,011); 4 Technology Directors → 1 (\$347,113); 3 Directors of Curriculum → 1 (\$290,950) and other administrative roles and duplicate costs (i.e., audit, legal, fees); offset 1 Assistant Superintendent → 2 (-185,073) and offset to align salary guides (\$377,000)

Note that savings would be partially offset by necessary investments in existing positions that assume more responsibility, and in new positions to serve the regional created by restructuring. **State implementation grants are available to cover consolidation costs.**



# Finance and Operations - Tax Impact

State regionalization law provides two sets of options for tax apportionment.

First, under the traditional scenario, where tax share is apportioned on a sliding scale from 100% based on property valuation to 100% based on enrollment regional scenario:

- Warren Twp would experience tax savings under all apportionment ratios.
- Watchung Boro would see its total school tax rate increase under regionalization, and would experience a higher tax burden relative to the status quo.
- Long Hill would experience substantial tax savings under roughly one-third of the apportionment ratios under regionalization, favoring those weighted more heavily towards community equalized valuation.
- Green Brook would experience substantial tax savings under about two-thirds of the apportionment ratios, favoring those more heavily weighted towards community equalized valuation.

*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.*



# Finance and Operations - Tax Impact

- The model is tasked with identifying an optimal ratio between EPV and ENR based apportionment by attempting to balance savings and minimize extreme impacts.
- The optimal ratio identified for the all constituents configuration would weight each community's EPV at 77% and ENR at 23%.
- The optimal ratio identified for the current constituents configuration would weight each community's EPV at 97% and ENR at 3%.

District	All Constituents 77% EPV / 23% ENR	Current Constituents 97% EPV / 3% ENR
Warren	-\$2.7M	-\$2.4M
Long Hill	-\$230K	-\$1.55M
Watchung Boro	+\$2.3M	+\$2.1M
Green Brook	-\$1.7M	-



# Finance and Operations - Transitional Method of Apportionment

State law permits a transitional method of regional cost apportionment for up to 10 years that allows taxpayers in all municipalities to share in savings:.

- A transitional method avoids abrupt tax impacts and provides a way to smooth the shift from the status quo to a new apportionment ratio.
- The regional high school currently apportions costs based 100% on equalized valuation (property wealth).
- The tax model utilized in this study identifies an optimal blended ratio based 77% on equalized valuation (property wealth) and 23% on enrollment (service usage) to balance tax impacts amongst the constituent communities moving forward.
- **Proposed Transitional Method**
  - Years 1-5: Apply a fixed set of shares that seek to ensure all districts experience tax benefits for the first five years of the enlarged regional district's operation. This provides stability and predictability through the initial years of the transition.
  - Years 6-8: Starting in year six, regional tax liability follows a gradual glidepath towards each district's formulaic share at a permanent ratio of 77% EPV / 23% ENR.
  - Years 9+: The enlarged regional district's costs are apportioned annually based 77% on each district's equalized valuation and 23% based on each district's share of enrollment.
  - *A full schedule could be developed for any apportionment ratio selected.*



# Finance and Operations - Debt Allocation & Borrowing Margin

- When school districts merge into a regional district, state law requires that the debt and other financial obligations of the individual districts become the shared responsibility of the new regional district.
- Four of the five districts in this study currently have bonded (long-term) debt.
- Taking on another district's debt can be a contentious discussion. 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 of all facilities that the regional will ultimately need to address.
- The law allows for the use of a transitional method of debt apportionment for up to 10 years (must be approved by the Commissioner of Education & districts must agree)
- All of the districts in the cluster have multi-year short term debt, which is budgeted in the annual budget process (equipment leases, etc.)



# Finance and Operations - Collective Bargaining Agreements

The RSRI consultants reviewed the districts' collective bargaining agreements in order to provide a comparison of key aspects to aid in potential negotiations if the districts decide to form an all-purpose, pK-12 regional district under the two consolidation scenarios.

- State regionalization law gives districts three years to reach a new joint contract. If a joint contract is not reached within three years of the formation of a regionalized district, for pK-8 teachers, the Warren Township contract, i.e., the largest district by staff count, would apply. For 9-12 teachers, the WHRHS guide would remain in place.
- As would be expected, there are differences in contract expiration dates, grievance procedures, working conditions and hours, salaries and association rights and privileges that would need to be negotiated.
- Insurance coverages tend to be divergent between the districts, with differences in medical, prescription, dental, and coverage waiver provisions.
- Significant effort will need to be focused on the salary and insurance issues in particular to achieve a collective bargaining agreement for a fully regionalized district. However, state implementation grants are available to cover these costs.



# Finance and Operations - Collective Bargaining Agreements

A salary guide alignment calculations was performed to determine an approximate cost of moving staff to the appropriate salary guide. Calculations were based on the following facts and assumptions:

- Salary guides show some differences that would require alignment.
- To align the guides in the most cost-effective way, Watchung Borough, Long Hill and Green Brook staff were moved to the step on the Warren Township guide that was closest to their current salary without being lower.
- No teaching staff member would see a reduction in salary. Many would see increases as there is not always a perfect landing spot on the new guide.
- State law provides full tenure and seniority protection if a regionalization occurs.
- The increased cost to move teaching staff was deducted from the Cost Savings calculations to determine a net cost savings.



# Finance and Operations - Shared Services

One of the driving forces for the impetus of this study was to examine **best practices in shared services** for the districts of the Watchung Hills cluster. Better alignment of 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.

- Almost all districts in the state participate in cooperative purchasing and sharing some services
- Sharing of personnel in the Watchung Hills cluster is minimal.
- Opportunities exist to share both administrative and non-administrative positions/services, and are identified in various domains of the study (e.g., transportation, special services, curriculum, professional development) and non-administrative positions and services.
- Such shared arrangements could **enhance student learning, provide operational efficiencies and reduce district costs.**



## Finance and Operations - Shared Services

Another best practice for districts is to **minimize administrative turnover**, as instability can lead to errors and operational issues. It can be challenging for individuals to work across multiple districts with distinct cultures, leadership, and school boards. An **enlarged, all-purpose pK-12 regionalized district** would eliminate these concerns.

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 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 worth investigation.



# Finance and Operations - Transportation

This report provides a general analysis of **transportation administration, bell schedules, and costs** across five districts for general and special education students.

- All five districts show efficient transportation packaging. Warren Township, Watchung Borough, Long Hill, and WHRHS are below state average costs per package. Where transportation costs are above state averages, a rebid of the transportation contract might save money. Many factors need to be considered before changing long standing routes.
- A single, cluster-wide transportation coordinator could further improve busing efficiency through regular evaluation of stops, routes, and tiering.
- Should regionalization occur, the new pK-12 district might also consider purchasing its own vehicles and hiring drivers to reduce reliance on external contractors. Again, many detailed aspects would need to be thoroughly evaluated (availability and cost of vehicles, maintenance and drivers, etc.)



# Finance and Operations - Tuition

A pK-12 regionalization would share all costs for all programs across all constituent districts; tuition would not be an issue within the regionalized municipalities.

- Currently, Green Brook is a non-constituent district of the regional HS; they are in a send-receive agreement with WHRHS and pay per-pupil tuition.
- They have used two, three-year tuition contracts (2021-2024 and 2024-2027)
- As allowed by statute, these board-approved contracts deviate from the state's standard tuition reconciliation procedures and formula
- If a "current constituents only" model of regionalization is adopted, Green Brook would need to enter into a new send-receive relationship with the newly formed district.
- Under the “status quo configuration”, the tuition arrangement between Green Brook and WHRHS would continue.



# Governance and Law - Background

Authority to convert a limited purpose regional district to an all purpose regional district is found in N.J.S.A. 18A:13-33.2.

The law requires that the proposal be submitted to the voters of each of the constituent districts of the regional district instead of at large to the voters of the regional district, and 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.

## Notes:

- **Green Brook is a not currently a constituent community.** Green Brook does not get a vote on regionalizing, but can vote to join the regional if it is approved by a majority of the voters in the current constituent districts.
- **Since Warren, Watchung Borough, and Long Hill are the only constituent municipalities,** 2 of the 3 would need to vote YES for regionalization to occur.



# Governance and Law - Transition

The law also outlines the process for determining the **composition of the new board of education.**

- Upon the initial formation of the new regional school district, an **interim board of education** would govern the new district.
- In order to form the interim BOE, two-thirds of the board members would be selected from the existing constituent pK-12 district boards, with one-third from the current Watchung Hills Regional High School board.
- The full interim board would serve until the next school board election; new members for the regional BOE would be elected over the next three election cycles.
- Once established, the elected board would have members apportioned based on the population of each constituent district.



# Governance and Law - Transition

The study provides the recommended interim and final BOE compositions for full regionalization with all districts:

- **Interim Board:** 3 members from the Watchung Hills BOE (2 from Warren, 1 from Long Hill), 3 from the Warren Township BOE, 1 from the Long Hill BOE, 1 from the Watchung Borough BOE, and 1 from the Green Brook BOE
- **Elected Board:** 5 from Warren Township, 2 from Long Hill, 1 from Watchung, and 1 from Green Brook



# Governance and Law - Transition and Racial Balance

The study provides the recommended interim and final BOE compositions for regionalization with current constituent districts only:

- **Interim Board:** 3 members from the Watchung Hills BOE (2 from Warren, 1 from Long Hill), 3 from the Warren Township BOE, 1 from the Long Hill BOE, 1 from the Watchung Borough BOE. If Green Brook students continue to comprise 10% or more of the high school population, the Green Brook BOE would appoint one of its members as a sending district representative to the new BOE.
- **Elected Board:** 5 from Warren Township, 2 from Long Hill, 2 from Watchung. If Green Brook students continue to comprise 10% or more of the high school population, the Green Brook BOE would appoint one of its members as a sending district representative to the new BOE.

No major legal issues were identified with the proposed **regionalization**, as it **would not increase student segregation**.



# Summary

- **Law and Governance** - There are no adverse factors that indicate a regionalization would be problematic.
- **Demography** - Although population is not expected to greatly change, projections indicate substantially growing racial, cultural, and economic differentiation in the cluster. An expansion of pK programming in two of the districts is not possible due to current space constraints, which regionalization would ameliorate.
- **Education and Program** - In subjects that range from ELA to physical education, the differences among individual districts' curricula, resources and supports for educators lead to unequal experiences among students. There are opportunities to better serve students who struggle to catch up with their new peers in the 9th grade, classmates whose education gets disrupted by the transition to a new high school district, and the teachers who are trying to give all students the best possible education at all grade levels.
- **Human Resources** - While shared services offers financial benefits, it is important to note that sharing across districts can take a toll on human resources as shared individuals have to duplicate efforts across multiple districts and answer to multiple Boards of Education.
- **Finance and Operations** - Long-term costs savings can be realized through the elimination of redundancies, efficiencies achieved through economies-of-scale, and a formula that includes a balance of equalized valuation and enrollment.



# Now—It's up to YOU!

This study is a **tool** for your local Boards of Education to use in their decision making.

There are findings in the study which your BOE may want to flesh out, some that may resonate strongly with your Board and community, and /or some your Board and community may not agree with.

There are 67 ultimate findings and recommendations in the study. Many are nuanced. There is not a "Yes" or "No" box to check on whether your districts should regionalization or enhance certain shared services.

It is the job and the duty of local Boards of Education to make those decisions—that is what governance is.

This should lead to collaborative conversations, starting at the BOE level.

It is our hope that this study strengthens those collaborations.

**We thank sincerely those who have engaged with our team in good faith to make our work stronger and relevant for your communities and your students.**