



# Report of the Superintendent

January 28, 2026

# *Our Student Representatives*

Bernardsville Middle School

***Teddy Quinn***

representing Wrestling

***Rahima Wellington***

representing Science Team

\*\*\*\*\*

Bernards High School

***Nolan Baker***

***Sophia Fazel-Sarjui***

## *In The News...*

### **BMS Students Selected for CJMEA Honors Choir**

Two talented choir students from Bernardsville Middle School have been selected for the prestigious CJMEA (Central Jersey Music Educators Association) Intermediate Honors Choir, a highly competitive ensemble that attracts hundreds of students from across the region. This is a remarkable accomplishment and a testament to the hard work, dedication, and musical talent of these young individuals.



The students chosen to represent BMS in the Honors Choir are Poppy Pickett (Treble voices Choir) and Ella Hunscher (Mixed voices Choir), both seventh graders who eagerly joined choir when they were in 4th grade at Bedwell Elementary School. In addition to singing, Poppy plays piano and even writes her own music. Ella plays the violin and is diligent about practicing. Poppy's favorite musician is Freya Skye, whom Ella enjoys, along with Taylor Swift and Girl in Red. "I am grateful to Ms. Jurgens, our BMS chorus teacher, for helping me prepare for the auditions. My family and I were so excited to hear the news that I was selected for the CJMEA Honors Choir," shared Poppy. Ella echoed the same sentiment, thankful to Ms. Jurgens who stayed after school many days to help the students prepare for the audition, giving sound advice and helpful critiques.

The CJMEA Intermediate Honors Choir is an extraordinary opportunity for Ella and Poppy to collaborate with some of the best young singers and conductors from the central New Jersey area. Their acceptance into this ensemble not only reflects their individual talents, but also embodies the collaborative spirit, dedication, and high standards of excellence that are at the heart of our BMS community and music programs. "It is a true honor for these students to be invited, and we are so proud to have them represent our school," said their Chorus Director, Allyssa Jurgens.

Poppy and Ella will be recognized at the upcoming Somerset Hills Board of Education Meeting on January 28th at 7:30pm in the BHS Community Room. Their CJMEA performance will be on March 1st at 3pm at Monroe Township High School. They will share their beautiful voices with about 120 other choir students from 21 schools across Hunterdon, Monmouth, Mercer, Somerset, Middlesex, and Union counties.

## In The News... **Ria Lewis Earns Global Recognition in International AI Competition**

Senior Ria Lewis received a Global Silver Award at the World Artificial Intelligence Competition for Youth (WAICY), an international event that drew more than 132,000 students from over 103 countries. Her project, *BridgeBot*, was recognized in the Large Language Model (LLM) track, one of the competition's most technically demanding categories.

*BridgeBot* is an AI-powered peaceful dialogue assistant designed to help young people navigate cross-cultural misunderstandings and polarized conversations. The system uses four distinct dialogue modules: Explain My Culture which helps users articulate cultural context without stereotyping; Reframe My Message which rewrites emotionally charged statements in neutral, respectful language; Perspective Switch which encourages understanding of alternative viewpoints; and Myth Buster which addresses misinformation while avoiding judgment or escalation. The project emphasizes safe, ethical, and empathetic AI responses rather than persuasion or debate.

Lewis developed the project independently, drawing on her interests in computer science, engineering, and civic innovation. Her work was evaluated by an international panel of judges, and her award certificate was signed by Professor David S. Touretzky of Carnegie Mellon University, a nationally recognized computer science educator.

WAICY is considered one of the largest global platforms for youth engagement in applied artificial intelligence, emphasizing ethical technology use and real-world problem solving. Lewis' achievement is an example of the growing presence of students on the global STEM stage and reflects increasing interest among young innovators in using technology to address complex social challenges.

Lewis has always loved to create and to build; but her work is equally shaped by a desire to bring positivity to others. Attentive to the world around her, she began to notice how misunderstandings rooted in religion, culture, and political beliefs often create unnecessary division, both locally and globally. This awareness led her to explore how artificial intelligence could be used for good to unite people, to welcome different perspectives, and to focus on peace.

As her former AP Computer Science Principles teacher Lisa Camuto shared, "This achievement not only highlights Ria's technical abilities, but also reflects her deep commitment to fostering understanding and meaningful dialogue in the world. She is genuinely dedicated to serving others - within her family, among her peers, and across the broader community - and this commitment inspires her ongoing efforts to make a lasting difference."



**Shout-out to  
Dunnder Media...**

**Thank you Macklin!**



## *In The News...*

# Bernards High School Made Honor Roll

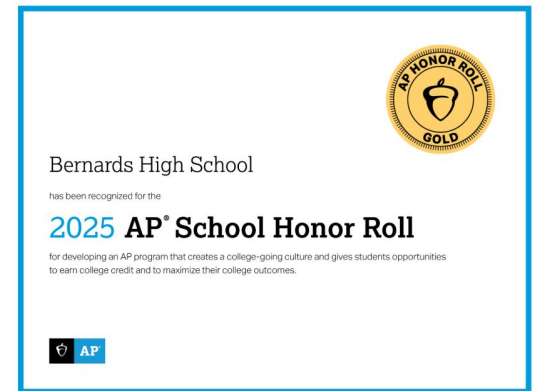
Bernards High School was named to the 2025 AP School Honor Roll as a Gold member! The AP School Honor Roll recognizes schools whose AP classes are delivering results and broadening access for students. Schools can earn the Honor Roll recognition annually, within four levels of distinction. In addition to having full-time grade 12 enrollments and being located in the United States, for a school to earn this recognition it must meet each of the following criteria for students in the most recent graduating class:

- College Culture: 40% or more of the graduating cohort took at least 1 AP Exam during high school.
- College Credit: 25% or more of the graduating cohort scored a 3 or higher on at least 1 AP Exam during high school.
- College Optimization: 2% or more of the graduating cohort took 5 or more AP Exams during high school. At least 1 of those exams was taken in 9th or 10th grade, so that students are spreading their AP experience across grades rather than feeling disproportionate pressure in any single year.

Bernards High School offers 19 AP courses, taught by stellar educators, all experts in their subject areas. In keeping with the mission of the high school, students think critically, construct solid arguments, and see many sides of important issues, all of which are skills that help them prepare for college and beyond.

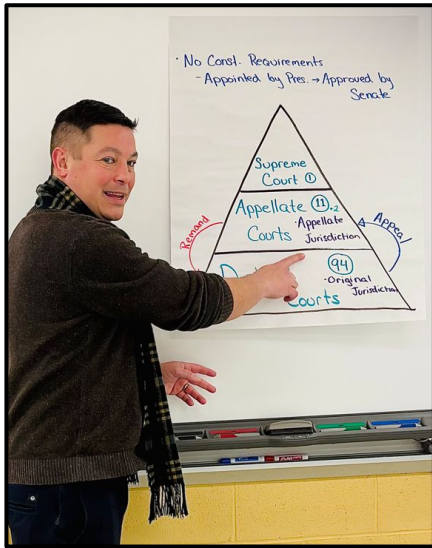
To earn this Gold distinction, Bernards High School had 72% of seniors who took at least one AP exam, 63% of seniors scoring a 3 or higher on at least one AP exam, and 16% of seniors who took 5 or more AP exams!

“Being recognized on the College Board’s AP School Honor Roll reflects our unwavering commitment to expanding access to rigorous coursework while ensuring students are supported to succeed. This achievement is a testament to the hard work and dedication of our teachers, counselors, students, and families who work together to foster a culture of academic growth and excellence,” said BHS Principal, Dr. Scott Neigel.



## In The News...

### Teaching Caring Matters!



### BMS Staff Spotlight: Shane Porter

Joining the Somerset Hills School District in 2004, Shane Porter has worked as a Social Studies teacher, impacting thousands of students at Bernardsville Middle School in their quest to learn about history, civics, government, and the world around them. His teaching philosophy is focused on creating an environment for students to feel like active participants in their own learning, as well as in society as contributing citizens. He incorporates inquiry-based learning and helps students to analyze documents and primary sources, which has become increasingly important over the years due to the evolution of technology and social media. In addition to emphasizing credibility on the internet as it applies to news as well as history, Mr. Porter prioritizes skill development such as note taking for clarity, comprehension, and retention, along with independence as it relates to study preparation.

Since he teaches Civics classes, many lessons revolve around current events and issues, in addition to their historical context. Year after year, Mr. Porter encourages respectful dialogue and reiterates to students and parents that his classroom is a safe space to learn and grow.

One of Mr. Porter's favorite units concluded prior to winter break. It was a congressional simulation where students created their own committees and leadership positions. As of the start of the new year, his 8th grade students are embarking on a unit related to the federal court system. One of his observations, spanning the last decade, is that children are now more aware; they follow and are in tune with cases at the federal level. They are also more adept at research and critical thinking, and he knows that discussions are happening even beyond his classroom with students having dinner table conversations with their family members about such topics.

In its second year at Bernardsville Middle School, the Capturing Kids' Hearts initiative has been a great addition to the school community, Mr. Porter expressed. "I feel it is validating what good teachers already do. We see the benefit in taking a few minutes from instructional time to show students we care about them." There are a variety of components to the program that include everyday routines, sharing "good things" and checking in with teachers and peers. Mr. Porter is a proud educator, engaged in the curriculum, who truly believes that "*teaching caring matters.*"

## In The News...

**Preparing  
for Battle!**

The Battle of the Books is a book-based, team trivia competition for Bedwell's 4th grade students, and is hosted by the HSA.

It will be a rockin' event, as the theme is Battle of the Books meets Battle of the Bands!



Teams are forming.  
Students are reading.  
**Excitement is growing!**

Battles are forthcoming...  
Elimination Round 3/11  
Championship 3/13



### Book Titles

- ★ Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing
- ★ The Lemonade War
- ★ The Talented Clementine
- ★ The Stonekeeper: A Graphic Novel (Amulet #1)
- ★ Fourth Grade Rats
- ★ The Guardian Test: (Legends of Lotus Island #1)
- ★ Babymouse: Rock Star
- ★ Love That Dog
- ★ Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Diper Overlode
- ★ Lily to the Rescue
- ★ What is Rock and Roll?
- ★ Fenway and Hattie

## In The News...

## Random Acts of... KINDNESS!

The BMS Random Acts of Kindness Club celebrated a very successful Sock Donation Drive this winter! Thanks to the generosity of students, staff, and families, more than 354 pairs of socks were collected and donated to [Brandon's Heart and Sole](#) to help support those in need in our community. This organization honors Brandon Lastfogel, a young man known for his big heart and generous spirit. Socks were a gift he asked for every Christmas, and in the years since his death, well over 50,000 socks have been donated to warm the hearts and soles of those less fortunate in the New Jersey area.



The kindness didn't stop there. RAK Club members also put together hot cocoa cups that were shared with our SHSD bus drivers as a small, but heartfelt way to say thank you for getting our students to and from school safely... every single day!



### THE FACTS

- More than 500,000 people are **homeless** in the US (2022)
- **22%** of homeless individuals are **disabled**
- **6%** of homeless people are **veterans**
- **5%** of the homeless are unaccompanied **youth**
- **37.9 million** people live in poverty in the US
- **Everyone needs socks!**

What's coming up? The next big RAK Club project is their animal shelter drive in May where they partner with a local animal shelter to collect much needed items for shelter pets waiting for their forever families! Students will then visit the shelter to deliver all the collected items and most importantly volunteer their time to give love and snuggles to deserving cats and dogs!

Special thanks to the compassionate and caring students of the RAK Club and to Suzanne Wertman and Kelly Liapis for all they do day in and day out. They shared, "We are so proud of our students for showing that kindness, gratitude, and service can make a big difference." *It certainly can!*

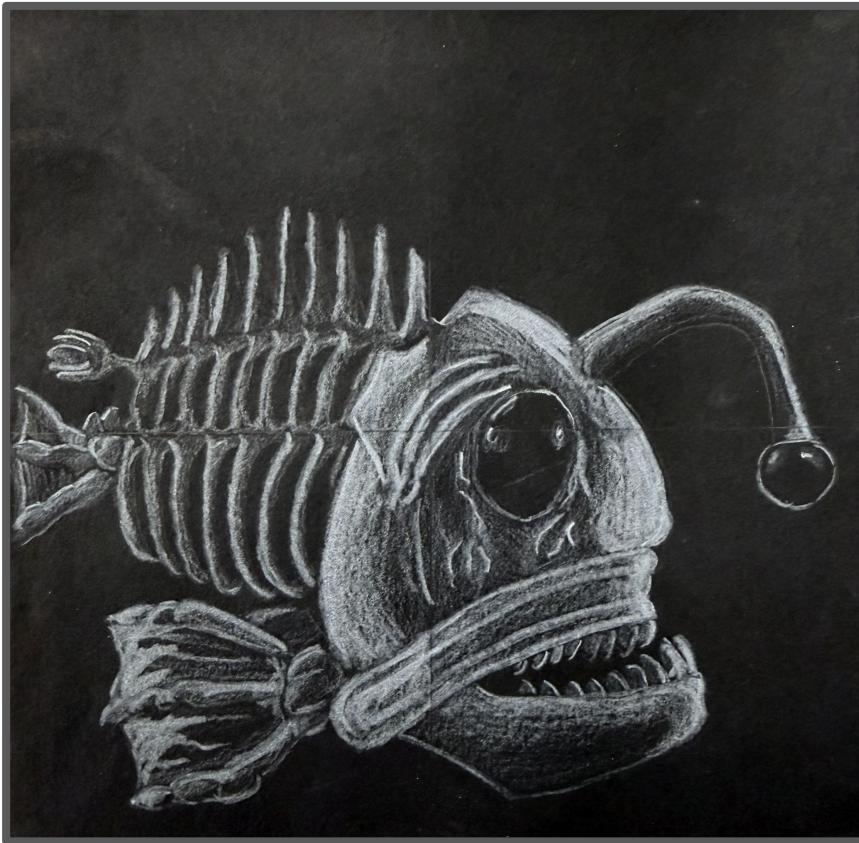


*In The News...*

**Art Matters!**

“At BMS, our 7th graders have been working on value drawing and watercolor landscapes, and our 8th graders on ceramics!”

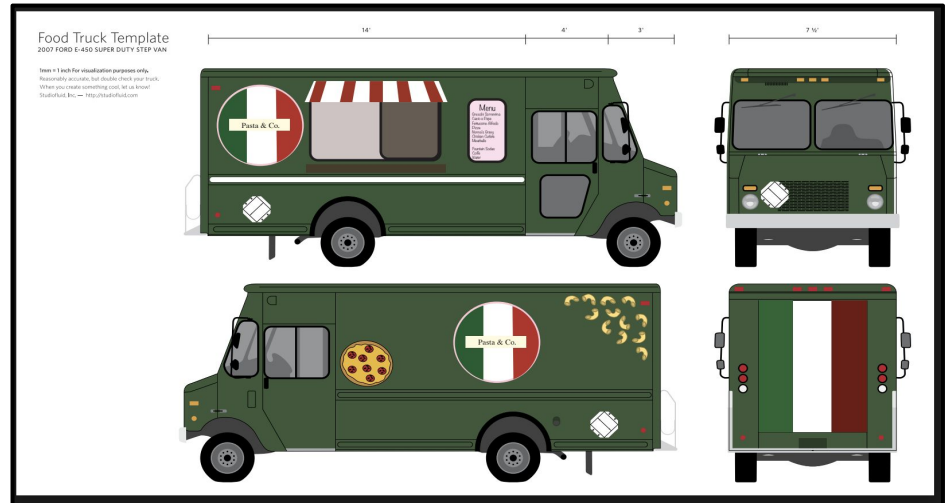
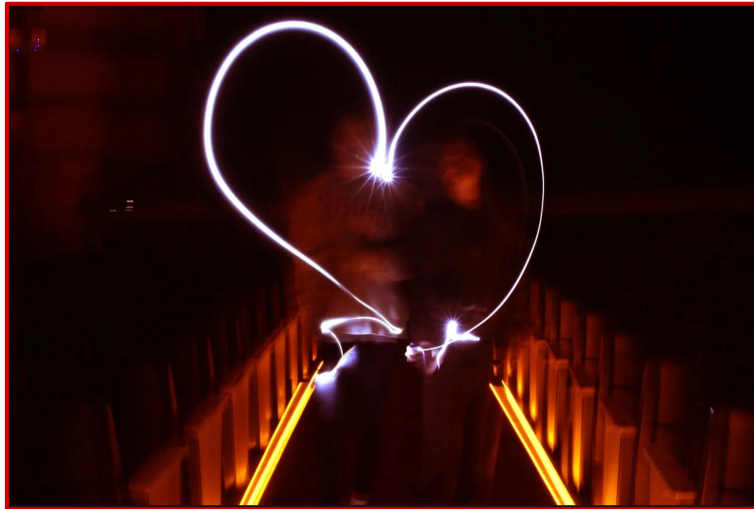
~Salome Chaffe, BMS Art Teacher





# Art Matters! “Check out some recent BHS art projects!” ~Kristina Rovtar, BHS Art Teacher

**Heart Light Painting** by Nora Gaspar, Katie Giebel, Lucy Spitaleri and Audrey Santoro



**Food Truck Project in Adobe Illustrator** by Chloe Cicalese

**Digital Art  
2 Honors:  
Fantasy  
Landscape**  
by Ben  
DeWitt



**Person Light Painting**  
by Tanner Pagel, Jack Morris, and Julian Bonk

## In The News...

### *Origami for Others*

Fourth grade students at Bedwell Elementary School have been working on a volunteer project called *Origami for Others* where they create origami with inspirational messages for people in the community. Students' origami projects are donated to local organizations with the intention of spreading joy to others with every folded project.

In the fall, students learned polyhedral origami (origami with multiple folded units that are put together like a puzzle) through their enrichment unit that focused on the mathematics of origami.

Geometry lessons included parallel and perpendicular lines, types of angles and transformations of shapes as students fold. They also developed their understanding of fractional parts and symmetry as origami helps blend these more challenging concepts into a fun hands-on activity. Over time the children created a hexahedron, transforming pinwheel, and truncated tetrahedron. Each project took multiple classes and through their careful folds, students built a growth mindset and strengthened their patience and focus through the repetitive nature of the steps.

Enrichment teacher Melissa Leonard introduced *Origami for Others* at the beginning of December, however it was an idea she has brought to life each year since 2018. She and her students discuss empathy and the impact and joy this project brings to others. These concepts were revisited each class as students were offered the opportunity to come in for recess once a week to fold for *Origami for Others* if they were interested.

As the project winds down this month, hundreds of origami creations and messages have been donated to the Matheny School, Holly Manor Nursing Home, The Residence Assisted Living and Nursing Home, Meals on Wheels of Morristown, and Heartworks (who will distribute the origami to local veterans).

“Through *Origami for Others*, students build empathy and discover that their creativity and hard work can serve a greater purpose. It’s been wonderful to see students so enthusiastic about contributing to this project by folding origami, adding uplifting messages and helping organize the donations,” said Leonard. “This project also reinforces ‘The Power of Yet’ and a growth mindset, which are ongoing themes in our Bedwell Enrichment classes. Students are reminded that if they make a mistake or find an origami fold challenging they can improve with continued perseverance and effort.”



We hope this origami reminds you day after day,  
That you're thought of warmly in each and every way.  
Each crease is made with love and care,  
A joyful wish that we hope to share.  
With kindness and hope in each design,  
We send you smiles one fold at a time.



Love,  
Bedwell Elementary School 4th Graders  
Bernardsville, New Jersey



Adaneli Tomas López, a senior at Bernards High School, was recognized by the school as the “Everyday Hero” for January.

*In The News...*

## BHS Everyday Hero

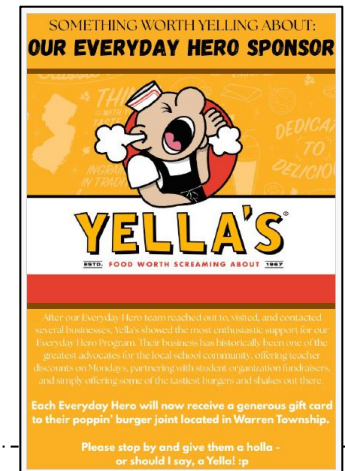


Nominees for the monthly Everyday Hero Program are students who have a positive influence on the student body through exemplary qualities. Selected students inspire others, are responsible and respectable and have a commitment to peers and the school community. Students are nominated by one or more teachers, selected by the Everyday Hero committee, and announced schoolwide by either Principal Scott Neigel or Assistant Principal Mike Corbett.

Adaneli exemplifies what it means to be an Everyday Hero through her consistent kindness and genuine care for everyone around her. Whether interacting with classmates or teachers, she approaches each person with a warmth and openness that makes our school community better. Her dedication shines through in everything she does; she gives her absolute best effort whether tackling challenging coursework, participating in school activities, or simply when committing to being a good friend. Perhaps most telling of her character is her thoughtfulness at this year’s homecoming dance, where she welcomed students she had never met onto the dance floor, transforming what could have been a lonely evening for others into a memorable and inclusive experience! Her actions remind us that true heroism isn’t always grand gestures—sometimes it’s simply seeing someone who needs a friend and choosing to be that person. Adaneli’s empathy, work ethic, and selfless spirit make her a role model for all of us, and she is deeply deserving of this month’s Everyday Hero recognition.

**Congratulations to January’s Everyday Hero, Adaneli Tomas López!**

And a special Thank You to **YELLA'S** in Warren Township, our Everyday Hero program sponsor. Their business continues to be an enthusiastic advocate for our school community by offering teacher discounts, partnering with student organization fundraisers, and now for our Everyday Heroes by awarding them with a generous gift card each month!



*Adaneli  
Tomas  
López*



13-1 so far...Go team!

In The News...

## Winter Sports Snaps



Ski Racer  
Maggie O'Donnell



Girls and Boys Sabre Squads



Congrats Gabrielle Ruedy!

**Shout-out  
to our  
Maintenance  
&  
Custodial  
Teams!**



## In The News...



## SHEF Presents...

The Somerset Hills Education Foundation (SHEF) is proud to present **Bernards High School's First Annual Summer Job Fair on February 23 from 7–9 PM in the BHS Media Center**. This free event is open to BHS students and the community and is designed to connect students with local businesses, nonprofits, and entrepreneurs offering summer jobs, paid positions, internships, mentorships, and volunteer opportunities (including roles that may fulfill service hour requirements.)

Students will have the chance to meet employers face-to-face, explore a wide range of opportunities, and begin building valuable real-world experience. With 10 local businesses already signed up, this inaugural event is shaping up to be an exciting and meaningful way for students to make their summer count.

Local business owners and nonprofit organizations are also encouraged to participate. This is a unique opportunity to connect directly with motivated, enthusiastic students while increasing visibility within the community. Whether you are seeking summer help, interns, short-term support, or future talent, your participation can make a lasting impact.

Students and organizations can register by scanning the QR codes on the flyer or by visiting <https://bit.ly/3NnJQSn>. Please read, share, and help spread the word.

**Opportunities Await!**

# Referendum 2026



## SOMERSET HILLS SCHOOL DISTRICT

*Upgrading Our Facilities to Support Our Educational Programs*

To keep up-to-date on the referendum scan the QR code below  
Please send questions to: [referenduminfo@shsd.org](mailto:referenduminfo@shsd.org)

# REFERENDUM 2026

**DISTRICT-WIDE FACILITIES RENOVATIONS PROGRAM**

**VOTE  TUESDAY, MARCH 10<sup>TH</sup>**



# *Referendum 2026*

## **Key Points**

- Total projected costs: \$38,024,257
- Total projected State Aid: \$11,344,849
- Financing rate used for projections: 4.00%
- Recent Bond sales: 3.75%
- Bedwell: Security Infrastructure, Security Vestibule, STEM, Roofing, ADA toilets, Kindergarten access
- BMS: Security Infrastructure, Science, Roofing
- BHS: Security Infrastructure, Science, STEM, Culinary Arts, Technology, Radio/TV/Podcasting

# *Referendum 2026*

Ballot Question Printing - In Process  
February 11, 2026 Public Presentation

Instagram: [shsd\\_referendum2026](#)  
Facebook: [Somerset Hills School District Referendum 2026](#)

# *Regionalization Study 2026*

## **Key Points**

Study Commencement: November 2025

Steering Committee: Nine total members between the two districts include Superintendent, Business Administrator, Board President, a BOE Committee Chairperson, and an at large member.

# *Regionalization Study 2026*

## **Key Points**

Advisory Committee: 21 total members between the two districts include school principals, teachers, elected municipal officials, and HSA representatives.

# *Regionalization Study 2026*

## **Key Points**

Advisory Committee and Steering Committee Joint Meeting:

January 29, 2026

February 5, 2026

# *Regionalization Study 2026*

## **Key Points: Workflow**

1. Develop proposed outline of study with Advisory Committee and Steering Committee input (December through February)
2. Data collection: March 2026 through June 2026
3. Develop analyses: Summer 2026 and Fall 2026
4. Make recommendations based on analyses, draft report, review report with Steering Committee and deliver report: by Thanksgiving 2026
5. Present findings publicly: by Winter Break 2026

# *Regionalization Study 2026*

## **Report Composition: How will it look?**

1. Executive Summary/Study Purpose
2. Introduction
3. Governance and Law
4. Education and Program
5. Demography and Facilities
6. Finance and Operations
7. Findings and Recommendations

# *School Climate Studies*

## **New Jersey School Climate Initiative**

Students Surveyed: 1,155

Staff Surveyed: 173

Parents and Caregivers Surveyed: 196

Areas surveyed: Academic culture, behavioral expectations, negative student interpersonal behaviors, prosocial student interpersonal behaviors, sense of physical safety, student voice, staff-student relationships, supports for social-emotional learning, family engagement, student sense of belonging, collegial support, leadership support, organizational resources and support

# *School Climate Studies*

## **New Jersey School Climate Initiative**

All results have been tallied

SHSD was accepted into a technical assistance cohort with the Rutgers University School of Applied Psychology and begins our work

All schools have Climate Teams who will begin working on data analysis

The District has a Climate Team who will begin working on data analysis

A strategic plan regarding climate and culture will be drafted based on the NJSCI survey administration (in part)

# *School Climate Studies*

## **Capturing Kids' Hearts @ BMS: Two Year Climate and Culture Survey**

Overall, 25 Likert-scale prompts were provided. For 18 prompts, BMS grade 5 students indicated that they perceived outcomes to be at or above the CKH National School Showcase (“NSS”) Baseline.

Students reflect the following for the Grade 5 survey, all of which met or exceeded the NSS Baseline:

- They like their teachers
- They have good relationships with their teachers
- They are treated respectfully by other students
- They get along well with other students
- They are comfortable speaking to the teacher about problems
- Teachers encourage them to be the best they can be

# *School Climate Studies*

## **Capturing Kids' Hearts: Two Year Climate and Culture Survey**

Overall, 26 Likert-scale prompts were provided. For 13 prompts, BMS grade 6, 7, and 8 students indicated that they perceived outcomes to be at or above the CKH National School Showcase (“NSS”) Baseline. Students reflect the following for the Grade 6, 7, and 8 survey, all of which met or exceeded the NSS Baseline:

- They feel they have at least one teacher who knows more about them than their grades alone
- They have the opportunity celebrate each other
- They agree that students and teachers make it known to all that bullying isn't tolerated
- They agree that their peers do not stand for bullying
- Teachers treat students with respect
- They've developed Social Contracts
- They know what happens and what the consequences are when Social Contracts are not followed
- They are participants in the outcomes of their education
- They experience consistent consequences
- They like their teachers
- They have good relationships with their teachers
- Students are treated respectfully by other students
- They are encouraged to be the best students they can be

# *School Climate Studies*

## **Capturing Kids' Hearts: Two Year Climate and Culture Survey**

The Teachers and Staff at BMS were surveyed in 2024-2025 and 2025-2026 regarding the schoolwide implementation. The Teachers and Staff indicated that all 20 prompts were above the NSS Baseline for overall implementation. Additionally, the two-year comparison of the implementation saw increases in 16 of 20 survey prompts. The remaining 4 survey prompts did not decrease.

Typically, student perceptions of similar prompts yield lower results than Teacher/Staff, but the data discrepancies fall within the NSS Baseline, even though Students rate some Teacher/Staff outputs lower.

The 2024-2025 and 2025-2026 surveys indicate unequivocally that Students feel supported by the Teachers/Staff. Additionally, there are opportunities for Leadership and Staff to facilitate Students' ownership of the CKH Process and deepen engagement with the outputs.

# *School Climate Studies*

## **Capturing Kids' Hearts: Two Year Climate and Culture Survey**

The Parents at BMS were surveyed in 2024-2025 and 2025-2026 regarding the schoolwide implementation. The Parents indicated that all 14 prompts were above the NSS Baseline for overall implementation. Additionally, the two-year comparison of the implementation saw increases in 10 of 14 survey prompts. The remaining 4 survey prompts did not decrease.

The 2026-2027 Parent survey will be expanded to include Parents who may not be active Home and School Association members.

# *School Climate Studies*

## **Capturing Kids' Hearts: Two Year Climate and Culture Survey**

The Leadership has embraced the CKH Process without hesitation and has implemented this work with fidelity, passion, and a focus on person-to-person growth.

There are significant correlations across all stakeholder surveys that chart the next level of work for Leadership at BMS. Specifically, the work to empower Students to serve as Social Contract Raters and Class Ambassadors while redoubling efforts to reinforce the tenets of the CKH Process. The Students are prepared for this next level of implementation.

# *School Climate Studies*

## **Capturing Kids' Hearts: Year Two**

**Mid-Implementation Report** to be issued to *Somerset Hills Board of Education* and *Somerset Hills Education Foundation* jointly on January 30, 2026.



## Stay Informed



[Messages from the Superintendent](#) (Third Thursday of every month and as needed)

[District News](#) (ongoing)

[Superintendent Reports](#) (posted after each Board meeting)

[Board Briefs](#) (Monday following each Board Meeting)

[Pathways](#) (Every other month)

[YouTube Channel](#) (ongoing)

School Friday Folders (Every Friday, except winter/spring break)

