

## **Voters Approve South Hunterdon Regionalization Plan, School Construction Proposals**

Voters in three southern Hunterdon County municipalities voted yesterday to approve a plan to merge three elementary school districts and a high school district into one Kindergarten-through-12th grade unit. The referendum represents the state's first regionalization of school districts since 1995.

“The New Jersey School Boards Association has always encouraged local school districts to consider the possible educational and financial benefits of regionalization,” said Dr. Lawrence S. Feinsod. “Study and advance planning are critical to ensuring the success of such proposals, with consideration of the educational value for the students, as well as financial savings and the apportionment of costs among constituent municipalities.”

The September 24 referendum will merge the South Hunterdon Regional High School District with three elementary school districts: Lambertville, Stockton and West Amwell. South Hunterdon Regional currently educates high school students from the three communities.

Until Tuesday, the most recent regionalization proposal to receive voter approval took place in Warren County in 1995, with the creation of the Great Meadows Regional School District, which serves elementary school students from Liberty Township and Independence Township. Previous successful school district mergers created the Somerset Hills Regional School District (1994), the School District of the Chathams (1986) and the Bordentown Regional School District (1982).

Currently 92 of the state's 574 operating school districts are regional, consolidated or merged systems, comprising two or more municipalities.

The South Hunterdon referendum asked voters to approve two separate questions to accomplish the regionalization. One question asked voters to dissolve the existing South Hunterdon Regional High School District. The other

asked voters to dissolve the three elementary school districts and to merge them into a single pre-Kindergarten through 12th grade unit.

***Construction Proposals Successful*** The last Tuesday in September is one of the five dates each year during which school boards may hold special elections to propose voter referendums, including construction plans.

Voters in three school districts – Hanover Park Regional, Northern Highlands Regional and Watchung Hills Regional – approved school construction referendums on Sept. 24. A project proposed by the Keyport school district was rejected.

Hanover Park Regional voters passed a \$9.8 million athletic and physical education field improvement project for Hanover Park High School and Whippany Park High School. Of that amount, \$2.8 million is eligible for state reimbursement.

Voters rejected a proposal from the Keyport school district in Monmouth County for \$4.9 million in improvements to the district's athletic field complex.

In the Northern Highlands Regional district, voters approved a \$2.8 million roof replacement project; approximately \$1.1 million is eligible for state reimbursement.

Watchung Hills Regional voters approved \$12.6 million in repairs and renovations to the district high school, of which \$5 million is eligible for state reimbursement.

Details of the Sept. 24 construction proposals are below.

## **New Jersey School Construction Referendums – Tuesday, Sept. 24, 2013**

### ***CONSTRUCTION REFERENDUMS STATEWIDE:***

Total amount approved: \$25,108,472 (\$30,068,409 requested)

Amount eligible for state reimbursement: \$8,953,702 (may include up-front school-construction grants, annual payments of debt service aid, or other state aid)

### ***BERGEN COUNTY***

## **Northern Highlands Regional - Passed**

Roof removal and replacement

Total amount: \$2,760,000

Amount eligible for state reimbursement: \$1,104,000

## ***MONMOUTH COUNTY***

### **Keyport – Rejected**

Improvements to the high school athletic field complex

Total amount: \$4,959,937

## ***MORRIS COUNTY***

### **Hanover Park Regional – Passed**

Athletic and physical education field work at Hanover Park High School and Whippany Park High School, including synthetic turf fields, replacement of tracks, re-grading and seeding fields, fencing, field drainage, dugout repairs, and repair and replacement of tennis court facilities.

Total amount: \$9,795,444

Amount eligible for state reimbursement: \$2,828,491

## ***SOMERSET COUNTY***

### **Watchung Hills Regional – Passed**

Undertake various repairs and renovations to the high school, including roof replacement, steam pipe replacement and driveway and parking lot work.

Total amount: \$12,553,028

Amount eligible for state reimbursement: \$5,021,211