

For Release September 2, 2014

Hunterdon County Board of Chosen Freeholders Support School Consolidation

The Hunterdon County Board of Chosen Freeholders is committed to responsible school district consolidation and to that end will consider in 2015 and beyond, a form of matching funds with local school boards in our county who complete a formal feasibility study and determine the level of educational benefits and/or financial savings to the tax payers to be achieved by consolidation.

The Freeholders have publicly expressed (Public meeting of August 5, 2014), that they are in full support of a referendum being placed on a November ballot in order to ascertain voter sentiment for school consolidation in Hunterdon County. The Freeholder Board, therefore, strongly encourages the public to join them and to contact members of their local school boards who are directly empowered to put such a referendum on a ballot for voter action.

The largest portion of our residents' Property Taxes goes to fund our schools, (roughly 70%).

Taxpayers in Hunterdon County spent \$391,477,379 in 2011-2012 to educate 22,178 public school students. The average amount spent per every student for that year was \$17,651.

Today there remain twenty-seven (27) independent school districts comprised of more than 3,340 employees in 50 buildings.

In August of 2011, according to a poll of 1,000 likely New Jersey voters conducted by Kean University's Center for History, Politics and Policy, sixty three percent (63%) favored "a decrease in property taxes, (if it meant) the merger of (their) town's schools with schools in neighboring towns in (their) home county."

The Freeholders believe that the time for this issue to receive serious consideration by our residents has come. There is a very real potential that by reducing administrative costs we can create both tax savings and increase direct classroom funding, both of which enhance the future of a successful educational delivery system in Hunterdon and the lives of our residents.

Following a recent Freeholder meeting, the Board contacted the County Superintendent of Schools, who was instrumental in the successful consolidation of the, now, South Hunterdon District to collaborate on this issue. The process for having a question placed on a ballot is governed by N.J.S.A. 18A:13-34 entitled Formation of Regional Districts; Referendum. It is evident per the statute that the state does not permit the county Freeholders to gauge the voters' sentiment on school issues via a ballot referendum.