



HENRY HUDSON REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

Atlantic Highlands Elementary, Highlands Elementary, and
Henry Hudson Regional Schools

December 5, 2024

Dear Members of the Henry Hudson Regional School Community,

The Board of Education would like to address the speculation and misinformation being circulated on social media and throughout the community regarding recent developments with Sea Bright's bid to withdraw from Shore Regional and Oceanport School Districts and become a constituent member of the Henry Hudson Regional School District. It has been reported that Sea Bright has been granted approval from the Commissioner of the Department of Education to formally withdraw from Oceanport and Shore Regional clearing the way for Sea Bright students to attend the Henry Hudson Regional School District. This is not accurate. The below letter serves to accurately layout the current situation and why the Board needs more information before any action can be taken.

On Wednesday, the New Jersey Appellate Division issued a decision regarding the Oceanport and Shore Regional School Districts' appeal of the former Acting Commissioner of Education's September 22, 2023 written decision to permit the municipal body of Sea Bright to petition the Department of Education on behalf of the taxpayers and students of Sea Bright to withdraw from Oceanport and Shore Regional. Wednesday's decision confirmed the former Acting Commissioner of Education's September 22, 2023 decision and affirmed that Sea Bright's governing municipal body had the right to petition the Commissioner for withdrawal from Oceanport and Shore Regional. At no time, has any Commissioner of Education or judge given Sea Bright permission to formally withdraw from Oceanport and Shore Regional. This decision simply allows the municipality of Sea Bright to submit a petition to seek the Commissioner's permission to withdraw.

There is currently a petition filed jointly by the municipal bodies of Highlands Borough and Sea Bright before the Commissioner seeking approval for withdrawal. At this time, neither the Board of Education nor the municipality of Atlantic Highlands have joined this petition. As per the process provided to all parties by the Interim Executive County Superintendent, an answer was required to be submitted regarding the petition no later than December 6, 2024. The Henry Hudson Regional School submitted their initial response November 25, updated by a supplemental letter on Monday, December 2, following the Appellate Court's decision.

While the Board's position has always been that once the regionalization of the former Highlands Elementary, Atlantic Highlands and Henry Hudson 7-12 School Districts was completed, and when all legal matters are settled, the Board would resume exploration of the possibility of Sea Bright becoming a constituent member, there are still important questions that have been posed that require a response. As we communicated throughout the referendum process, in community and Board presentations, and during earlier Board communication, the inclusion of Sea Bright brings no significant revenue to the operating budget of the district, but has the potential to add significant annual costs. The student population that could potentially attend our schools has minimal impact on current enrollment and therefore would not significantly impact state aid revenues, grant allocations or other outside revenue sources. The only potential financial incentive is tax savings. However, unless the appropriate tax levy apportionment and/or

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savings sharing agreement is reached, the taxpayers of Atlantic Highlands could potentially see little to no savings and even a significant increase in their school taxes.

Until the district receives adequate, verified, and detailed responses to the questions that have been asked since the initial feasibility study was released in 2019 and throughout this process, the Board is still not in a position to make an informed decision regarding Sea Bright's inclusion in the regional school district. Furthermore, the new regionalized district just became official on July 1, 2024. We have not had a full year of operation and are still working through many unforeseen challenges related to the consolidation of the three districts. We have not gone through a full budget cycle or created our first school budget, still have a legal challenge regarding our state aid pending before the Department of Education, as well as an active lawsuit brought by Sea Bright and Highlands against the Board related to its earlier settlement of the appellate litigation with Oceanport and Shore Regional.

The Board needs time to allow this new district to operate and grow and to give our administration, staff, and students time to focus on the most important task at hand, ensuring that our students receive the best possible education. While our focus as Board members is always to deliver a high-quality, public education in the most fiscally-responsible way to protect our taxpayers, we must take the time necessary to not only obtain the answers to the critical questions being asked regarding this potential merger but also to allow this new educational model to grow, develop, and flourish.

If you have questions, please attend a Board meeting or reach out to me, Mr. Cory Wingerter, the Board of Education President, at cwingerter@henryhudsonreg.k12.nj.us.

On behalf of the current Henry Hudson Regional School District, thank you for your continued support of our district.

Sincerely,



Mr. Cory Wingerter, President of the Board of Education