



South Hunterdon Regional School District
Referendum FAQ
shrsd.org/referendum

On November 2, 2021, the South Hunterdon Regional School District will be going out to referendum to fund a renovation of the Lambertville School into a district PreK-4 school and the building of a new 5-8 school on the high school campus. The total price for the referendum is \$33,412,000 however we will be receiving \$6,763,993.20 in state aid. This means the total impact on the taxpayer will be \$26,648,006.80. Below are some frequently asked questions about the project.

Why do we need to do this referendum now?

The South Hunterdon Board of Education began discussing facilities back in 2014 after regionalization. There was a study conducted by McKissick Associates in 2015 that included a community advisory board. Then a follow up report by McKissick in 2017. The Board of Education formed an Ad Hoc committee to discuss the options from the report for the next year. In 2019, USA Architects (district current architect) completed a facilities study once again with recommendations. All of the reports concluded that the Lambertville and West Amwell schools are not in compliance with federal ADA accessibility requirements, HVAC issues (heating and cooling), space for special education classes, undersized and outdated music and art rooms, undersized and outdated libraries, energy management systems that need to be replaced, no gym at West Amwell and safety and security needs. The final piece to the regionalization process is to ensure our school facilities provide the education our children deserve while setting up the district for the next 30 years. Click [here](#) for more information about these facility issues.

Fiscally, the timing is prudent due to the following:

- Interest Rates - interest rates are low and the Federal Reserve has indicated imminent increases.
- Debt Service Aid - the state will provide a 40% rebate on the renovation of the Lambertville School as well as \$2,223,993.20 towards the new 5-8 school.

Why doesn't the district pay for these projects within the existing school budgets?

Like most school districts, SHRSD struggles to fit large dollar maintenance projects into their annual operating budgets. South Hunterdon has followed the rules of a 2010 state law that capped general fund increases at 2% each year, without voter approval. In fact, the 2021-2022 budget was below the 2% cap for the first time in several years to lessen the tax impact on our

community. Using a 2% cap, the district has had to accommodate the typical rising costs of payroll, benefits, educational materials, contracted services, utilities and more all of which are typically above 2%.

What if costs end up lower than the estimates?

State rules impose strict oversight. There are only two ways a district can use proceeds from a Bond Referendum: The money can be used to overcome cost increases for projects that were approved as part of the Bond Referendum, or it can be used to pay down the bond debt. The Board of Education intends to pay down debt when practical in order to reduce the impact to taxpayers.

What if costs end up higher than the estimates?

The district is working with a team of construction and financial experts who pay close attention to trends in bond rates and construction costs. We are also well aware of the rise in construction costs/materials in the last several months. The estimates reflect careful planning and analysis which reflect the board's desire to be realistic in our planning. The construction estimates are designed to err on the side of being conservative. Low estimates could be harmful and shortsighted. The school board does not want to be forced into a position of downgrading roofing material, HVAC components, window quality or interior finishes to be able to complete everything so the project stays at or under bid.

How does supporting this plan help contain future costs?

Since the 2018-2019 school year, the district has spent **\$84,295** on maintenance items for the West Amwell School. Since the 2018-2019 school year, the district has spent **\$74,945** on maintenance items for the Lambertville School. That is a total of **\$159,240** over a three year span. This includes repairs for boilers, HVAC units for heating/cooling, kitchen appliances, electrical issues, trailer repairs, fire monitoring system, door hardware/locks. Keep in mind our buildings were not even used to full capacity from March 2020 - June 2021 due to covid. The reason why this number is so high is due to the fact that the mechanical items in each building are beyond their life expectancy and need to be replaced. The referendum will allow us to contain these costs moving forward rather than them increasing in years to come.

We anticipate that with a renovated Lambertville School and new 5-8 school we will save about \$100,000 in our annual budget on energy costs. We anticipate a \$500,000 savings by reducing the number of class sections in grades K-6 from 4 to 3. This would be accomplished by staff attrition and retirements.

What are the educational benefits of this plan?

- Educational equity for all students and bringing them all up to the highest standard.
- Brings our students/communities together from the start of their school experience.
- 21st century learning spaces for all students that provide the opportunity for collaboration, creativity, critical thinking and communication.
- Mental health age appropriate supports for our students (multi-sensory room)

- Utilizing teaching staff and other personnel more efficiently.
- Enhance the visual and performing arts programs for PreK-6.
- Provides our middle school students with a full middle school experience.
 - Extracurricular activities
 - Science Labs
 - Elective Choices
 - Co-curricular activities
- Allows for expansion of programming at the high school and 21st century learning spaces.
- Makes the high school more competitive and appealing compared to other high schools in the area.
- Creates learning environments (buildings) that are more age appropriate. Renovated/new facilities are designed for learners at each grade-level.
- Allows for grade level teams to join and collaborate regularly (all in the same building)
- Meets the enrollment needs based on the recent demographic study done on the district.
- Fosters greater consistency in the educational experiences (i.e. field trips, assemblies, materials, resources, PTO/PTA/LAEF sponsored events and experiences, etc.) of our students.
- As a community this will strengthen the Lambertville, Stockton, and West Amwell communication.

What additional courses can be run at the high school when more space is available with the 7th and 8th graders moving into the new school?

If the referendum passes, the 7th and 8th graders will move into the new school, creating a lot of new opportunities at the high school. The plan is to increase the amount of AP (advanced placement) course offerings, computer science, pre-engineering, tv/film/media production, expansion of FFA (Future Farmers of America) program, life skills program for special education students and podcasting.

Why are we not using the West Amwell site for the new 5-8 school?

In order to build a new 5-8 school on the West Amwell site, we would need to knock down the existing K-6 school. If we did that we would have no place to put the current students until the new 5-8 building was complete. Renting trailers to house the students would cost millions of dollars and cause a substantial interruption to our current students' education.

Will the new 5-8 school on the site of the high school impact the athletic fields?

No, the new school will be built in the area where the JV softball field is currently located. We will be building a new JV softball field either behind the new school or on West Amwell township property behind the municipal building.

How will a district PreK-4 school in Lambertville impact traffic?

Our West Amwell students will be taking a bus each day. We anticipate about 4 buses per day to transport students. We are also investigating providing busing to students in Lambertville in

hazardous areas rather than parents often driving them to school. This would reduce the amount of parent traffic in the morning and afternoon.

How will the 5-8 school be structured as there is a big difference between 5th and 8th grade?

There will be a two story wing in the school and the 5th and 6th graders will be on the bottom floor and 7th and 8th graders on the upper floor. They will be completely separated for classes. All four grade levels will use the common spaces separately such as the gym, cafeteria, library, etc.

Has a demographic study been done to show this plan makes sense for our enrollment?

Yes a complete demographic study was completed back in February. The current plan meets the enrollment needs of the study. Click [here](#) to see the demographic study.

Can the community benefit from this plan?

Yes, the new libraries at the Lambertville School and new 5-8 school can be used for community events, meetings and adult education programs. The full size gym at the new 5-8 school can be used for youth and adult recreation programs.

Can school facilities impact property values?

High performing schools with 21st century facilities raise property values. If you don't have children in the school system and decide to sell your home, there is a good chance people interested in buying your home will be concerned with the schools and their facilities. The reality is that schools and school facilities do matter for all community residents!

How much will this increase my property taxes?

Use these two tax calculators to figure it out. You only need the assessed value of your home which you can find on your annual tax bill. [Tax Calculator Google Sheets](#) [Tax Calculator Excel](#)

What happens if the Bond Referendum is not approved?

If voters do not approve the Bond Referendum on November 2, 2021, the district will continue to have two school buildings that are substandard for our students and staff as well as no ADA accessibility for students and community members. Unfortunately the projects in this referendum can not be completed using our annual budget that has a 2% cap. The only way South Hunterdon can effectively pay for this work is by referendum.