

Freehold Borough Schools Referendum Construction Project



Tuesday September 30, 2014 2 pm – 9 pm

Frequently asked questions

Why do we need a referendum?

Freehold Borough School district enrollment has grown substantially over the past several years. In just the past five years we have seen student enrollment grow 14.7%. Recently the Board commissioned a demographic study to determine if the growth trend will continue. The study confirmed that enrollment will continue to grow. To view the report log on to the district web site, www.freeholdboro.k12.nj.us.

The district has run out of room. Current in district enrollment is 1,621 and we have space capacity for 1,148 students.

Our facilities are aging, the core buildings and infrastructures are over 50 years old. An investment in our facilities will not only improve our district, it will help raise home values in Freehold Borough.

Why not merge with Freehold Township?

If a merger was to happen there is a good possibility that there will be no cost saving to the Borough taxpayer. The Borough will be required to take on the Township's debt and match the Township's teacher pay scale. Taxes will probably go up, not down. Below is the law regarding school district consolidation.

The Law regarding the consolidation of public school districts may be found at N.J.S.A. 18A. Here is how the process works:

1. The Board of Education wishing to consolidate its public school district into another public school district (Board #1) passes a resolution to move toward consolidation.
2. Board #1 then approaches the Board of Education it wishes to consolidate into (Board #2)
3. If Board #2 agrees, then it passes a similar resolution.
4. A feasibility study would then need to be conducted. The study would take several months to complete and consider issues such as; negotiated employment agreements,

tenure and pension rights, employee health benefits, etc. The cost of the study would be between \$50,000 and \$75,000; a cost which Board #1 would bear.

5. If the feasibility study is favorable for consolidation, then the matter is put to a vote by each Board of Education. It should be noted that Even if Board #1 votes to move to consolidation, Board #2 may still vote no.

6. If Board #2 votes against consolidation at any point during the process, then the matter is closed.

It should be noted that although the consolidation of public school districts does pose the potential for economic savings, there is a real possibility that consolidation may cause overall costs and property taxes to actually increase as a result. Specifically, N.J.S.A. 18A:6-31.4 mandates that the teachers' contracts that were in place in the largest district before consolidation become the new contracts for every teacher after consolidation. As such, should the largest district's teachers' contracts pay more than the other district, the cost of salaries would increase. Further, since the new board members may be composed by apportionment, there is the potential of larger district having more member representation on the new school board.

To date, the Freehold Borough Board of Education has not considered consolidation with the Freehold Township Board of Education to be beneficial to this District, nor has there been any indication from Freehold Township that they would be interested in such a proposition.

Voters failed to pass the 2005 referendum why waste the money asking again?

After the 2005 defeat the District did what it could to handle overcrowding. We increased class sizes to capacity, used every available space for classrooms, converted the libraries, gyms and a stage into make shift classrooms, rented space in a local church basement and now bus 126 students out of district to 6 rented classrooms in the Township. There's just no more room. Currently our in district enrollment is 1,621. The District's student space capacity is 1,158. We are over by 41%. Severe overcrowding has far reaching consequences. Not addressing the district's needs could lead to split sessions, degrading educational programs, and make our town unattractive to young families looking for a community raise a family. In turn we could see a decline in property values. *Good school districts make great communities.*

Why vote? The School Board will just turn around and do what it wants anyway.

This is just not true! Only the Freehold Borough voters can decide to pay to fund a building project. The School Board can present the referendum twice to voters, if voted down the second time the Board has the option to petition the Commissioner of Education and to initiate litigation to secure the necessary space through legal means. Since the NJ Constitution grants all New Jersey school age children a free and appropriate education the State may determine that the District will need to build to meet

education mandates, and the cost of the project could grow costing Freehold Borough taxpayers much more with no say in the project. The district does not want to follow this path. The quickest, cheapest and most efficient method to solve this problem is to pass the referendum. Supporting the referendum will cost a tax payer about \$278 annually on a home valued at \$255,600.

Why should Freehold voters take on more debt when the state doesn't provide the proper amount of state aid for the operating budget?

Nearly 50% of the Freehold Borough operating budget comes from the NJDOE. Our school district is over \$7 million under adequacy funded. The School Board and the Administration continue to work with State legislators continue to advocate for full funding. Even if the proper state aid were provided the district would still have to build more space to address the needs of our students.

Why do anything, can't you just keep renting instructional space here and there?

Use of rented space or space in other non public schools, must be brought up to NJDOE standards, the cost of which comes out of the operating budget. Modular units are a consideration but they can only to be used as a temporary solution. The District must have plans to build classrooms. We are year-to-year with the extra space in Freehold Twp and are at the mercy of the Township. Each year the school district reviews the cost of renting from the Township. Our rental agreement with the Township has helped meet our short term needs for more classroom space however it's a short term solution. If the Township experiences student growth or gets better offer from another renter, we'll be forced out leaving us without classrooms to education our kids. We've approached other districts with spare capacity but they have declined to take our students. Money spent for rent and busing students could be put to use funding textbooks, technology and teacher salaries. Looking at it another way, the district is currently paying over \$130,000 per year to rent classroom space. Those funds could be recovered and returned to supporting in district needs.

What's it going to cost me?

The project is estimated to cost \$278 annually. For the first time in five years the State has funding available to help offset the construction cost. The State will share the cost of the project, picking up 38% of the cost of the project through debt service aid.

Before we spend all this money to add classroom space has the Board of Education made sure all these kids are legally living in the Borough?

All students who reside in Freehold Borough are entitled to a free and appropriate public education, as guaranteed by the NJ Constitution. By law the District cannot ask immigration status, nor use it as a factor in enrollment. Currently the district has 22 immigrant students, (arrived in the past 3 years.)

In order to register their students for school parents must provide proof of residency. The registrant has sixty days (60) from the date of registration to satisfy

the residency requirements. If these requirements are not met within the specified amount of time, the child will not be allowed to attend school. The presentation of any combination of four of the following items as determined by the appropriate administrator showing a Freehold Borough address complies with the Board's policy that requires residence be verified:

- Valid Driver's License**
- Recent Utility Bill**
- Automobile Insurance Identification Card**
- Credit Card Bill**
- Written statement from the realtor stating that the parent/guardian has signed contract to purchase or rent home in Freehold Borough.**
- Tax Bill**
- Lease – The Board may require a copy of a lease if the person is a tenant or a sworn statement by the landlord acknowledging tenancy if there is no lease.**
- Official Mail (Bank, Government, Board of Education, etc.)**
- Public Assistance Documents or Notarized statements asserting parent and child's residence in Freehold Borough signed by the parent/guardian & landlord/homeowner.**

The Freehold Borough School district employs a Residency Officer who investigates charges of non residents attending school in the district and reports back to the Administration and the Board of Education. If warranted the Board of Education takes action.

I don't want to pay for all the illegal immigrants to go to school. What are you doing about that?

New Jersey law provides that a district must allow free attendance to any student over five and under 20 years of age, who is "domiciled" in the district. A student is domiciled in the district when he/she is living with a parent or legal guardian whose permanent home is located within the district. All residents, regardless of their immigration status, are entitled to free schooling if they are domiciled in the district. A student's immigration/visa status does not affect the student's eligibility to attend school. Neither the physical condition of an applicant's housing, nor an applicant's compliance with local housing ordinances or terms of a lease affects the pupil's eligibility to attend school. For example, a pupil who was domiciled year-round in a campground was entitled to a free education in the school district in which the campground was located even though year-round occupation of the seasonal campsite violated campground bylaws and local ordinances. The district also employs a residency officer who investigates reported violations to the law and reports back to the Administration and the Board of Education.

You're renting space from the Township now why not just continue to rent more space?

Each year the school district reviews the cost of renting from the Township. With our student population growing we have contracted to rent additional classrooms from the Township for the 2014-2015 school year, increasing our rental expense by 34%. Our rental agreement with the Township has helped meet our needs for more classroom space however it's a short term solution. If the Township experiences student growth or gets better offer from another renter, we'll be forced out of our rented space leaving us without classrooms to educate our kids.

The project cost, \$32,902,400 is a lot of money. Why do you have to have air conditioning a new cafeteria, locker rooms and a new gym?

As student enrollment grows we need to address all the needs of the student, not just classroom space. As for the gym...The State mandates required instructional time for each subject during the school day, which includes physical education. Park Avenue and Freehold Intermediate shares one gym between the two schools. Think of the gym as a classroom, as the student population grows the District can no longer accommodate the students physical education weekly requirements. If we cannot meet the required number of minutes by law with our current enrollment the State will hold the district accountable and could be subject penalties. If the District remains non-compliant the State could go as far as cutting much needed financial aid. As for the locker rooms, the State passed a law requiring specific safety requirements for locker rooms. The new law mandates the height and depth of the lockers. Since our core facilities date back to the 1950's, our locker rooms and bleachers became a safety hazard and did not meet the requirements of the new law. Disregarding the law, the District could be found negligent and vulnerable to lawsuits.

At the Freehold Learning Center the gym and the cafeteria are one room. Again as enrollment increases there is a need for more physical education instructional minutes and a larger cafeteria to accommodate additional students.

Since our overcrowded schools stem from immigration policies of our federal government, why should it rest on the backs of property owners to pay for it?"

Regardless of where the blame is placed, a 1982 Supreme Court decision held that states cannot constitutionally deny students a free public education on account of their immigration status. Recent history through several presidential administrations has shown that this immigration issue is not going away. Voting No on this referendum is not going to change our federal policies but, more likely lead to decay in quality of life and property values in our borough. If a referendum is defeated, the district will likely be compelled to have the needed construction turned over to the NJ Schools Development Authority and the resulting costs could well exceed the amount before the voters in this referendum.

Why should I care about the schools...I have no kids in the district.

Good Schools make Great Communities. All residents of Freehold Borough should be invested in our school district. As property owners we might one day want to downsize or relocate. Our Downtown makes the Boro a desirable place to live, however aging school facilities, overcrowded classes and split sessions are not appealing to potential home buyers, especially if they have children. We all benefit investing in the Freehold Borough Schools. Good for the kids and property owners. It also makes good business

sense as the Boro is responsible to provide the needed educational space. Supporting this reasonable referendum would stave off a more expensive, court-ordered action later on.

If you have questions that have not been addressed above please reach out Freehold Borough School District 280 Park Avenue Freehold, New Jersey 732 761 2100



September 30, 2014

Polls open 2 pm – 9 pm