

From: **Kelly Matos** <kmatos@highbridge.org>

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Subject: High Bridge School District Letter

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Cc: Natalie Ferry <nferry@highbridge.org>

Good Morning, Superintendent Hobaugh and HB School Board members!

I hope this email finds all of you well! I want to begin by thanking the board members for volunteering to serve our community and to all of you for working for our Borough's school district and students.

As we begin to prepare for another year's budget, our small community examines where each tax dollar goes and how it is spent. As a member of the Borough's governing body and a tax paying resident, I thoroughly read through the letter that the HB residents received from the School Board, regarding the High Bridge School District and the future of the schools. This topic is one of great importance and a hot topic of discussion as it effects all residents, so I would like to ask for your assistance in clarification and obtaining additional information regarding some of the statements made in this letter:

Evaluating Educational Opportunities

- "For over a decade, the Board has been exploring different ways to enhance educational opportunities for our students. This includes considering shared services, potential mergers, and regionalization options." - **Is there any written documentation that can be shared with the residents showing exactly what has been explored? What shared services have been researched and what mergers have been considered?**
- "We have engaged in discussions with several school districts in the North Hunterdon-Voorhees sending area, but there has been little interest in a full K - 8 merger." - **Is there interest in an elementary or middle school merger separately and not as just K - 8?**
- "Additionally, we have existing partnerships to share resources such as administrators, teachers, and business office personnel." - **Can you advise what partnerships are currently being shared and with which other municipalities? Is there an estimate of what these shared resources are saving the Borough taxpayers?**

- "We also collaborate on purchasing electricity, classroom supplies ..." - Please advise who these collaborations are with. Again, is there an estimate of what these shared resources are saving the Borough taxpayers?

Current Considerations:

- "... the possibility of sending our 5th - 8th grade students to another district and closing the Middle School. This option is being evaluated in terms of educational benefits ..." - Which potential suitable partners have been evaluated and what are the educational benefits HB students are receiving currently that are not offered in other districts? How are the HB students performing in standardized testing in comparison to other regional schools and in comparison to other schools state-wide?

School Budget and Financial Impact:

- "... school budget increases are limited to 2% per year unless a referendum is held. Additionally, a debt from a 1996 voter-approved referendum will be paid off in 2026, leading to a tax decrease in the 2027 budget." - Is the 1996 referendum the only referendum in existence since 1996? (If not, please advise all others that exist.) What was the amount from that 1996 referendum and what will the tax decrease be in 2027?

Special Education Costs:

- "High Bridge has a strong Special Education program that serves 42 students in grades 5 - 8."
- Are these all students that are HB residents? Are there any students (K - 8) that currently attend HB schools who are not HB residents?

- "If these students were educated in another district, the cost would exceed \$2.57 million plus transportation expenses." - Why? What would drive that cost to increase so dramatically?

State and Regionalized Considerations:

- "... the local high schools, North Hunterdon and Voorhees" ... "stated they are not interested in further mergers or expansion to K - 12" - When was this possible merger last evaluated? What reason did they give for not wanting to merge?

Local Impact and Community Considerations:

- "Additionally, staff changes would be necessary, which could affect new teachers being laid off, teacher placement, staff morale, instructional continuity and classroom sizes." - Can you provide a list of all current HB elementary and middle school grade levels with classroom size and whether the class has an aide?

- "If HB regionalized, we would no longer be able to offer free preschool within the district." - What is the annual cost, per taxpaying household, to offer free preschool? How many preschool students and classes do we currently have?

- "What happens to the Middle School once it is closed?" "... in order to reopen it, it would have to be aligned with the current Borough and State codes." - **Is this building significantly out of code to date?**

I would like to thank each of you in advance for your time and attention. I look forward to your responses. Have a wonderful week and enjoy the beautiful weather!

Kelly Matos
Borough of High Bridge, Council

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