

A Feasibility Study on the Regionalization of the
Delsea Regional High, Township of Franklin, and
Elk Township School Districts
(with the Borough of Newfield remaining a send-receive community)

Rowan School Regionalization Institute
May 2024

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Boards of Education of the limited-purpose Delsea Regional High School District, the Township of Franklin School District, the Elk Township School District, and the non-operating Borough of Newfield School District have expressed an interest in examining the feasibility of reorganizing their school districts. The reorganization options under consideration include (a) consolidating all limited-purpose districts into one all-purpose, pre-kindergarten (pK) to grade 12, regional school district, and (b) maintaining the status quo with opportunities to better align educational programs and support services while reducing or controlling the costs of educating students in each district through the expansion of shared services.

This regionalization study examines the unique characteristics of the Delsea Regional, Franklin Township, Elk Township, and Borough of Newfield School Districts. Delsea is a limited-purpose regional district serving students in grades 7-12. Franklin serves students in grades pK-6 across three schools, and Elk serves students in one K-6 building and a leased pK space in a neighboring district. Newfield is a non-operating district, with its pK-6 students attending Franklin's schools and its 7-12 students attending Delsea Regional on a send-receive, tuition basis.

The Sweeney Center for Public Policy and Rowan University's College of Education have formed the Rowan School Regionalization Institute to assess the new school regionalization law, make policy recommendations, and conduct regionalization studies for interested districts. The Sweeney Center is led by Mark Magyar, who developed the new school regionalization law and has advised over three dozen districts, while the Rowan College of Education is represented by Dr. David Lindenmuth, a former superintendent in multiple New Jersey counties. The Institute retained a team of expert consultants with deep experience in school administration, law, finance, and demographics. This includes Dr. G. Kennedy Greene as project manager, Dr. Scott Oswald as lead investigator, attorney and former Commissioner of Education Lucille Davy, school business experts Dr. Brian Falkowski and Donna Snyder-DeVita, education data specialist Brian Diamante, and demographic analyst Dr. Ross Haber. The study was commissioned by the Delsea Regional Board of Education, with the support of the Elk, Franklin, and Newfield Boards, to examine the feasibility of expanded regionalization across the area's districts.

Governance and Law

The study examines the potential expansion of the Delsea Regional High School District into an all-purpose, grades pK-12, regional district that would continue to serve students from the Township of Franklin, Elk Township, and the Borough of Newfield. The authority to convert a limited-purpose regional district to an all-purpose regional district is provided under New Jersey statute which requires the approval of a majority of voters in each municipality for their individual district to merge into the new regionalized district.

The law also outlines the process for determining the composition of the new board of education. Initially, two-thirds of the board members would be selected from the existing constituent district boards, with one-third from the current Delsea Regional board. Once established, the elected board would have members apportioned based on the population and enrollment of each constituent district. The study provides recommended interim and final board compositions.

Each of the existing operating districts have demonstrated high performance on the state's school district evaluation system, NJQSAC. Consolidating the districts could help further strengthen their NJQSAC scores through greater alignment, while also redirecting time spent on the evaluation process towards student and program development. Additionally, student survey data revealed some differences in academic experiences between the elementary districts that could be addressed through regionalization.

No major legal issues were identified with the proposed regionalization, as it would not increase student segregation. After reviewing this feasibility study, the districts will consider recommendations to their boards on next steps, potentially following a similar process as the recently formed Henry Hudson Regional School District. State implementation grants are available to help cover one-time regionalization costs.

Demography

The demographic information shows that Franklin is the largest and most diverse of the three municipalities, with a population of around 16,400 as of 2022. While the overall population has been relatively stable, there have been notable changes in the racial makeup, with increases in the Black, Hispanic, and multi-racial populations, and declines in the White and Asian populations. The median age has decreased, indicating an influx of younger families. Incomes have also trended upward, with median household income rising over 13% since 2018.

Elk has experienced healthy population growth of around 7% since 2018, reaching over 4,400 residents. It has also seen shifts in its racial demographics, with significant increases in Asian and multi-racial residents, and a decline in the Hispanic population. The median age has remained relatively stable, while incomes have risen sharply, with median household income increasing over 75%. Newfield, the smallest municipality, has seen its population grow by 16% since 2018, accompanied by increased racial and ethnic diversity, particularly in the Hispanic and Black populations. Incomes have also risen notably in Newfield over this period.

Based on the enrollment history and housing data provided for the school districts, there appear to be no major housing developments planned that would significantly impact school enrollment in the near future. The number of certificates of occupancy and building permits issued from 2018 to 2023 are relatively low compared to the total housing units in each community, suggesting only marginal increases in housing.

The enrollment history from 2018 to 2024 shows fluctuations in the number of students across the different grade levels and school districts. The data is being used to calculate combined average migration ratios to project the total enrollment for a potential pK-12 regional school district. The total enrollment for the cluster of school districts has remained relatively stable over the years, with minor variations. The average migration ratios indicate that the number of students transitioning from one grade level to the next is close to 1.0, suggesting a consistent flow of students through the school system.

Based on the enrollment projections for the combined school districts of Delsea, Franklin, Elk, and Newfield, the total enrollment is expected to remain relatively stable over the next five years. The projections, based on a modified cohort survival model, show a slight decrease from 3,356 students in 2023-24 to 3,310 students in 2028-29. This suggests that the potential expansion of the current limited purpose, 7-12 regional district into an all-purpose, pK-12 regional district would not significantly impact the overall enrollment projections.

When examining the enrollment projections by elementary and secondary school levels, there are some notable trends. The elementary school (K-6) enrollment is projected to increase slightly over the next five years, with the exception of a small decline in the 2025-26 school year. In contrast, the secondary school (7-12) enrollment is expected to decrease during the same period. However, the growth at the elementary level is likely to reverse the trend at the high school level once these students progress to the upper grades. The racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic composition of the student population is also expected to change, reflecting the demographic shifts in the communities served by the school districts. These changes present opportunities for the schools to evaluate and address the specific needs of various student groups and ensure equity in access to resources and programs.

Education & Program

This section of the feasibility study examines the potential educational impact of regionalizing the Delsea, Elk, Franklin, and Newfield school districts into a single, all-purpose, grades pK-12 regional school district. The study focuses on the similarities and differences between Franklin and Elk, as Newfield is a non-operating district whose students already attend Franklin and Delsea schools. The main objectives are to determine if students in the proposed regional district will have access to a higher quality, more equitable educational program, and whether the creation of a larger district will produce additional benefits or challenges for students and professionals compared to the current situation.

In English Language Arts (ELA), Franklin and Elk use different core programs and supplementary materials. Elk students receive more daily ELA instructional time than Franklin students. In Mathematics, both districts use the same core program, but vary in their supplementary tools and strategies. Franklin students receive slightly more daily mathematics instructional time than Elk students. Science, social studies, and special area subjects are offered in both districts, but the allocated time and delivery methods differ.

The study highlights the potential benefits of aligning educational programs, assessment tools, and instructional time across the districts. Consistency in these areas can lead to more cohesive and effective approaches to education, benefiting both students and educators as they transition to Delsea Regional Middle and High School.

Delsea and Elk currently share several administrative and supervisory positions, while Franklin employs its own curriculum and instructional support staff. The expiration of supplemental federal funding in September 2024 raises questions about the sustainability of some of these positions. The study suggests that a centralized curriculum office serving students in grades pK-12 can provide cohesive direction, support, and coordination for curriculum and instructional practices, which should lead to improved student achievement and success.

The professional development section of the study compares the 2023-24 professional learning plans of the three school districts. Delsea and Elk have similar plans due to their shared leadership, focusing on technology, mentoring, social and emotional wellness, professional learning communities, content and pedagogy, cultural proficiency, equity and access, and special education inclusion. Franklin's professional learning plan, while covering some similar topics, has a slightly different focus. It emphasizes social-emotional learning and equity, mathematics, ELA, and higher-order thinking and questioning. The study suggests that the common administrative leadership accompanying an expanded all-purpose regional district would enable administrators and supervisors to better support staff growth and development, ultimately impacting student educational outcomes.

Key findings on state assessment (NJSLA) data reveal that Elk and Franklin show no consistent differences in the percentage of students meeting or exceeding expectations on NJSLA ELA or Mathematics assessments. Data, however, does indicate the persistence of achievement gaps between White students and students of color, as well as along lines of socioeconomic status, gender, and ability. Student growth data indicates that the Elk students demonstrate higher levels of growth in ELA, while Franklin students show slightly higher growth in mathematics.

The examination of graduation and postsecondary attendance data from Delsea Regional High School reveals higher graduation rates than the state average for both 4-year and 5-year cohorts from 2019-2022. Delsea, however, lags behind the state average in graduates attending any institution of higher education, with more students attending 2-year institutions compared to the state average.

The study suggests that, across the board, a regional school district could benefit from examining the strategies employed by schools with more favorable outcomes in areas such as student growth, chronic absenteeism, and student discipline. By combining district- and building-level supervisory staff and aligning expertise with areas of responsibility, a regional district could better support teachers in preparing students to meet academic standards and become college and career ready.

In the area of special education, Delsea provides comprehensive programs for students with special needs, including life skills and transition programs, as well as in-class support and resource settings. Franklin offers an in-class resource program, a pull-out resource program, and self-contained

classrooms, along with related services such as counseling and therapy. Elk meets the needs of its students with special needs through in-class support and resource classes. In-district students are not educated in self-contained settings. There are opportunities to realize efficiencies in educating students with special needs by sharing resources and programs across the districts.

The English language learners (ELL) program serves students whose first language is not English. The percentage of ELL students is consistently low across the districts with no significant differences between them. Due to the low numbers, there appear to be opportunities to more efficiently educate ELL students in grades K-6 throughout the region.

High quality intervention programs are used to meet the needs of the students, often within the regular classroom. All districts in this study use a multi-tiered system of support framework to identify and assist students who need academic, behavioral, or social help. While intervention systems are present in each district, the criteria, tools, and processes for identifying and serving students differ from school to school. Unifying around a protocol for identifying and serving students in need of support would benefit every student by aligning staff training and resources. Gifted and talented programs vary from school-to-school. There is a lack of coordination of services across the districts to ensure comparable experiences for G&T students prior to seventh grade.

The preschool programs offered in each district are quite different. Elk has taken advantage of state preschool expansion funding to operate a high-quality preschool program, serving 50% of its designated preschool universe, while Franklin operates only a preschool program for students with special needs and offers inclusionary settings for nondisabled children on a tuition basis. By working together to identify their preschool universe and appropriate spaces for classrooms, the districts could provide the benefits of a universal, high-quality, preschool program to all students who are served by the regional district.

Franklin offers a wide array of clubs and activities for students, especially in grades 5 and 6, including student leadership, arts, and sports clubs. Elk offers fewer activities, primarily for students in grades 3-6, focusing on chorus, band, drama, and student government. There are no athletic clubs or after-school activities at the Aura School. Delsea Regional Middle and High Schools have an expansive selection of clubs, activities, arts, and athletics for students in grades 7 through 12. Aligning clubs and activities across the elementary schools has the potential to expand offerings and create common experiences for students, particularly in athletics and the arts, where skill development is essential for success.

The amount of instructional time varies among the schools in the districts. These differences provide an opportunity to schedule similar amounts of time to every student, which can be considered during the collective bargaining process.

Delsea's staff members are more experienced and have remained in the district longer than the average school in New Jersey, and salaries are competitive with peer school districts and the state as a whole. Student-to-administrator and student-to-teacher ratios sit near state averages, while the student-to-support personnel ratio exceeds the state average. Franklin's staff members earn

significantly lower salaries compared to peer school districts and the State, leading to concerns about staff turnover and its impact on teaching and learning. The district has average student-to-teacher and student-to-support personnel ratios, but higher student-to-administrator ratios. In Elk, certified staff members enjoy higher classroom teacher salaries than most peer school districts, reflecting staff experience. There exists slightly higher student-to-teacher ratios and an efficient administrative ratio with only one administrator, albeit due to shared services with Delsea.

Under a proposed fully regionalized district, the study assumes that all existing schools will remain open and most school-level positions will remain as they are. Because of these assumptions, opportunities for efficiency are more likely to be found by combining district office staffs, such as reducing the number of superintendent and business administrator positions and reviewing instructional supervisor roles. Child study team members may be assigned at the school level or shared across the district, depending on case management and service loads. Clerical staff in each department could also present opportunities for restructuring in a unified pK-12 district.

The study emphasizes the importance of working with district- and building-level administrators to determine staffing needs at each grade level and subject area to best meet the needs of the students they serve. Intra-district transfers and reassignments have the potential to lead to increased staffing efficiencies over time.

Finance & Operations

This section examines the financial implications of expanding the limited purpose Delsea Regional into an all-purpose, grades pK-12, regional school district. The analysis relies on internal and public financial data to determine efficiency based on aggregate savings in the enlarged district compared to the status quo. Key assumptions include voter approval, maximum 2% annual tax levy increases, cost reductions approved by the board, continued state aid under the School Funding Reform Act (SFRA), consistent trends in equalized property values, termination of shared services agreements upon consolidation, and the applicability of P.L.2021, c.402 provisions.

State aid calculations are based on the SFRA funding formula model, considering trends in enrollment, demographics, property values, and aggregate income. The model determines each district's adequacy budget, local fair share, equalization aid, and categorical aid to estimate total state aid for fiscal years 2026 through 2029. Tax levy apportionment in the newly formed regional district is determined by comparing the amounts owed by each constituent to the status quo scenario. The law allows for apportionment based on either equalized property values or student enrollment from each community, or a weighted combination of both methods.

The consultants implemented a model approximating the SFRA funding formula to estimate state aid for fiscal years 2026 through 2029. This section also discusses the changes enacted under the S2 legislation, which provided a phase-in schedule to achieve full funding of the SFRA formula by the 2024-25 school year.

Historical state aid data from 2020 to 2025 show fluctuations due to factors such as enrollment changes, demographic shifts, and changes in property values and aggregate personal incomes. Projections for state aid in the status quo scenario from 2026 through 2029 show varying trends for each district based on the SFRA model.

For the full regionalization scenario, the projections show that state aid would be roughly equivalent to the sum of the state aid received by each of the three participating districts. The section also discusses a provision in S3488 that allows participating districts with a positive state aid differential to elect to have their state aid reduced at a slower rate than it otherwise would be under SFRA. The analysis determines the eligibility of each participating district for this benefit and calculates the potential state aid benefit for those that qualify.

The apportionment of taxes in a regional district determines each constituent municipality's share of the total costs. Current law provides three apportionment methods based on equalized valuation, student enrollment, or a combination of both. The existing limited-purpose Delsea Regional district apportions tax levy based on 100% of the equalized valuations of Elk and Franklin. The consultants analyzed historical and projected equalized valuations, net valuation taxable, and other property value trends to estimate future equalized valuations in each municipality. These projected equalized valuations were then used to apportion the tax levy in the status quo and regionalization scenarios.

In the status quo scenario, Franklin's share of total Delsea equalized valuations is projected to rise to around 82% by 2029, while Elk's share will decline to 18%. In the regionalization scenario, where all elementary districts would be consolidated and Newfield would become a constituent district, Franklin's share of total equalized valuations would be lower at around 73%, Elk's share would remain at about 20%, and Newfield would be responsible for 7% of the total tax levy.

The potential tax impact of an enlarged all-purpose regional district is presented for various apportionment methods. The most balanced tax impacts for all three constituents arise in scenarios heavily weighted towards enrollment. A change to an enrollment-based apportionment method would be a departure from the current practice but could provide more flexibility and balance. There is also a possibility of a transitional apportionment method for up to ten years, which could phase in potential tax savings or increases. However, the actual use of any cost savings from regionalization would be decided by a future Board of Education of an enlarged, all-purpose, regional district.

An examination of budgetary costs per student shows that all three districts have overall spending that is very efficient compared to their peers, with a strong commitment to classroom instruction. Potential cost savings opportunities in an enlarged all-purpose regional district total an estimated \$1,000,000, through reductions in audit costs, professional services costs, district administrative and clerical staff, and a shared business administrator, while maintaining all existing programs. However, the removal of a tax deferral would result in an estimated new cost of \$177,000, leading to an average one-time net cost savings of \$823,000. This could amount to a total savings over a five-year period of some \$4.8 million.

Currently, each district except Newfield has debt service on the books, though Elk's debt will expire at the end of FY2024. The newly enlarged regional district would simply combine those debts into one lump sum moving forward.

The review of the main collective bargaining agreements provides a comparison of key aspects to aid in potential negotiations if the districts decide to form an all-purpose, pK-12 regional district. The CBAs have similar expiration dates, but vary in terms of salary guides and insurance coverages, among other things, that would require alignment.

Shared services are permitted by statute and are promoted by the state as a cost-saving measure, although their effectiveness can vary. The districts in the study participate in many shared services, including purchasing cooperatives, insurance, fuel, non-public funds and services, staff development, and transportation. Delsea and Elk have shared many administrative personnel over the years, which can lead to increased workload and potential turnover or burnout.

The proposed regionalization is unlikely to significantly impact transportation programs, as the schools that students attend would remain largely unchanged. The districts already strive to maximize shared services and cooperatives in transportation. Food service programs offer varying levels of breakfast and lunch services. The study suggests that, apart from potential savings due to economies of scale in purchasing or personnel, meal programs would not be significantly impacted by a grades pK-12 regionalization.

Newfield sends its grades pK-6 students to Franklin and its grades 7-12 students to Delsea. The process can be complex and lead to financial concerns and contention between districts. The Delsea-Newfield and Franklin-Newfield send-receive relationships operate with annual financial contracts, but there is a discrepancy in outstanding tuition invoices between Delsea and Newfield. The tuition dispute creates a potential debt for one district and an uncollectible receivable for the other, which would need to be addressed before a regionalization vote, possibly through an independent, third-party audit. A full regionalization could allow for the creation or enhancement of special education programs across the districts, potentially leading to significant resource savings.

As of June 30, 2023, the participating districts have varying balances in their reserve accounts, with Franklin having the highest balances in capital and maintenance reserves, and Newfield having a significant tuition reserve balance.

Data on facility use suggests that the instructional spaces of the schools can sustain the current and projected use, with the only potential future concern being the provision of full-day preschool programs. The section also discusses the Newfield school building, which is currently leased to Edgerton Christian Academy, and the potential financial implications of selling the building or continuing to lease it, considering the cost avoidance of tuition for Newfield residents attending Edgerton. Finding adequate space for future preschool expansion should be a priority for any new interim and elected Delsea Regional Board of Education.

INTRODUCTION

Study Purpose

The School Regionalization Efficiency Program (SREP) Grant supports public school districts and governing bodies across New Jersey who wish to study the feasibility of school district regionalization and/or consolidation.

The act that created the SREP (P.L.2021, c.402), was signed into law by Governor Phil Murphy on January 18, 2022, after passing both houses of the New Jersey State Legislature. It creates a grant program within the Division of Local Government Services in the Department of Community Affairs, the purpose of which is to provide for the reimbursement of eligible costs associated with conducting feasibility studies that support the creation of meaningful and implementable plans to form or expand regional school districts.

In order to be eligible for a grant, applicant boards of education or certain municipal governing bodies are required to meet criteria, namely that the proposed regionalization:

- does not increase or exacerbate the segregation of students enrolled in the school districts seeking to consolidate or, as applicable, in the school districts from which a school district is seeking to withdraw by racial, socio-economic, disability, or English Language Learner status;
- to the maximum extent practicable, will lead to the establishment of a limited purpose or all purpose regional school district;
- consolidates school districts that are in close geographic proximity to each other. School districts need not be immediately contiguous as long as the consolidation and any geographic separation is not so large as to contradict the potential for improved efficiency and cost savings;
- possesses the potential for improved efficiency and cost savings;
- possesses the potential to advance an enhanced learning environment for participating districts;
- coordinates curriculum across schools and grades throughout the proposed limited purpose or all purpose regional school district; and
- reflects a documented commitment from the participating districts to make good faith efforts to implement the recommendations of the feasibility study that promote efficiency and quality of education.

The purpose of this study was to examine relevant data in order to provide recommendations to the four boards of education in the following areas: governance and law; demographics; education and program; and finance and operations.

- The Governance and Law section focuses on an examination of constitutional, statutory, and case law, as well as state monitoring results, transition features, and other legal or political issues.
- The Demographics portion looks at community profiles, enrollment history and projections, and the racial and other demographic impact of any regionalization.
- The Education and Program component includes an examination of the curricular and instructional factors, assessment results, special and co-curricular programs across the region, and staffing.
- The Finance and Operations segment explores state aid and local tax levies, operating expenses, short and long-term debt, collective bargaining, and other factors that impact the finances of each district.

Consolidation Options

The Boards of Education of the limited-purpose Delsea Regional High School District, the Township of Franklin School District, the Elk Township School District, and the non-operating Borough of Newfield School District have expressed an interest in examining the feasibility of reorganizing their school districts. The reorganization options under consideration include:

- Consolidating all limited-purpose districts into one all purpose, pre-kindergarten (pK) to grade 12, regional school district; or
- Maintaining the status quo with opportunities to better align educational programs and support services while reducing or controlling the costs of educating students in each district through the expansion of shared services and other efficiencies.

This study examines the potential impacts of the full regionalization of the Elk Township School District, Township of Franklin School District, Borough of Newfield School District, and Delsea Regional High School District into one all-purpose, pK-12 Delsea Regional School District. Any referendum or vote to regionalize which does not include all four districts would completely change the analysis and findings produced herein.

Consultant Backgrounds

The Sweeney Center for Public Policy and the Rowan University College of Education have teamed up to form the Rowan School Regionalization Institute to assess the impact of the P.L.2021, c.402 school regionalization law, make recommendations on policies to advance regionalization, and conduct regionalization studies for interested districts.

The Sweeney Center is led by Director Mark Magyar, MLIR, who developed the new regionalization law as Policy Director for the N.J. Senate Majority Office and has met with superintendents and board members from more than three dozen districts to advise on regionalization issues. Mr. Magyar contributed to this study's Governance & Law section. The College of Education is represented by David Lindenmuth, Ed.D., Director of Rowan's Institute for Educational Leadership, who served as Superintendent of Schools in four districts in Burlington, Camden, Gloucester, and Salem counties.

As the lead agency, the Delsea Regional Board of Education retained the Rowan University School Regionalization Institute to prepare this study. The Institute retained the following expert consultants to collaborate on this undertaking:

G. Kennedy Greene, Ed.D. is a former Superintendent of the Newton Public Schools (Sussex County) and past president of the N.J. Association of School Administrators. He is currently an adjunct associate professor in the Department of Education Policy and Social Analysis at Teachers College, Columbia University. Dr. Greene served as the project manager, reviewing and contributing to all sections of this study.

Scott A. Oswald, Ed.D. is a former shared Superintendent of the Collingswood and Oaklyn Public Schools (Camden County) and past Executive Committee member of the N.J. Association of School Administrators and President of the Camden County Association of School Administrators. He is currently an adjunct professor in the Colleges of Education at both Stockton and Rowan Universities. Dr. Oswald served as the lead investigator and contributed to all sections of this study.

Lucille Davy, Esq. is an attorney, certified K-12 mathematics teacher, and former N.J. Commissioner of Education. She developed school regionalization initiatives both as Commissioner and as co-chair of the Legislature's Economic and Fiscal Policy Workgroup. Ms. Davy contributed to the Governance & Law and Education & Program sections.

Brian Falkowski, Ed.D. is owner of SBO Management LLC, which provides school business services, facility management, and professional development to client organizations. He has served as a N.J. school business official for many years with demonstrated expertise in all major areas of school business management. Dr. Falkowski contributed to the Finance & Operations section.

Donna Snyder-DeVita, M.A. is a consultant with SBO Management LLC and was the Sussex County representative to the N.J. Association of School Business Officials Board, chaired the Education Committee, and served on many other statewide committees. She served as a N.J. school business official for many years with demonstrated expertise in all major areas of school business management. Ms. Snyder-DeVita contributed to the Finance & Operations section.

Brian Diamante is co-owner of The Diamante Group LLC, a school data services provider, and has over a decade of education finance experience. Mr. Diamante contributed to the Finance & Operations section.

Ross Haber, Ed.D., is owner of Ross Haber Associates, which provides services to public school districts including demographic studies, enrollment projections, attendance zone analysis and redistricting, facility utilization studies, and transportation efficiency studies. Dr. Haber contributed to the Demographics and Finance & Operations sections.

Arisahi Mora Lázaro is a Rowan University graduate student and served as a data research assistant on this project.

GOVERNANCE & LAW

1. Constitutional, Statutory, and Case Law Review

This study examines the potential expansion of the Delsea Regional High School District (Delsea), a limited purpose school district serving students in grades 7 through 12, into an all-purpose, grades pK-12, regional school district that would continue to serve students from the Township of Franklin (Franklin), Elk Township (Elk), and the Borough of Newfield (Newfield). Newfield is a non-operating district and not part of the current limited purpose regional school district. It sends its grade pK-6 students to Franklin and its grade 7-12 students to Delsea.

Authority to convert a limited purpose regional district to an all purpose regional district is found in N.J.S.A. 18A:13-33.2. The law requires that the proposal be submitted to the voters of *each of the constituent districts* (emphasis added) of the regional district instead of at large to the voters of the regional district, and the proposal shall be considered adopted if a majority of the voters in a majority of the constituent districts that constitute the limited purpose regional district vote to form an all purpose regional district.¹ The board of education of a constituent district of the limited purpose district that does not vote to join the all purpose regional may continue to send students that were enrolled in the limited purpose regional district to schools that were established as part of the limited purpose regional district.²

¹ N.J.S.A. 18A:13-33.2.a

² N.J.S.A. 18A:13-33.2.b

If approved by the voters, the board of education of the regional district and the board or boards of education of one or more local districts determined to enlarge the regional district shall proceed with the regionalization plan in accordance with the provisions of the proposal.³

2. Election Process and Board Composition

N.J.S.A. 18A:13-46.2 authorizes the “board of education of a regional district and boards of one or more local districts to adopt a proposal to calculate and apportion the membership of the enlarged board of education according to each constituent district’s inhabitants, with each having at least one member.” The calculation and method of apportionment need not be approved by the state education commissioner. If the voters of the participating municipalities decide to enlarge the regional school district, all members are chosen at the next annual school election.⁴

Pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:13-8, the board of education of a regional district shall consist of nine members unless it consists of more than nine constituent districts. If there are nine or less constituent districts, the members of the board of education of the regional district shall be apportioned as nearly as possible to the number of each community’s inhabitants except that each constituent district shall have at least one member.

If a proposal to add additional purposes to a limited purpose regional district is adopted pursuant to the provisions of N.J.S.A. 18A:13-33.2.a, the constituent districts constituting the limited purpose regional district shall calculate and apportion the membership of the board of education of the newly formed all purpose regional district upon the basis of a proportional number of pupils enrolled from each constituent district that constitutes the limited purpose regional district.

Pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:13-33.3.a, the new members of the board of education of the newly created all purpose regional district, who shall serve until the election of the first elected members of the newly formed regional district pursuant to the provisions of subsection b. of this section, shall be selected as follows:

(1) two-thirds shall be selected from among the members of the boards of education or governing bodies of the constituent districts constituting the limited purpose regional district; and

(2) one-third shall be selected from among the members of the board of education of the limited purpose regional district proposing to add additional purposes, with such members selected according to the number of each constituent districts' inhabitants.

³ N.J.S.A. 18A:13-44.1.a

⁴ N.J.S.A. 18A:13-33.3.b

TABLE 1
Current Apportionment, Delsea Regional Board of Education

District	Number of BOE Members
Franklin	5
Elk	2
Newfield	0

Table 1 shows the current apportionment of the Delsea Regional Board of Education. The initial interim board of education for the new all purpose district would have one-third, or three, of its members selected from among the members of the existing Delsea Regional limited purpose district. The remaining two-thirds, or six, members would be selected from among the members of the boards of education or governing bodies of Franklin, Elk, and Newfield, apportioned according to each community's population.

TABLE 2
Interim Apportionment, pK-12 Regional Board of Education

Current BOE	Student Enrollment 2023-24	Elementary Percentage 2023-24	Number of Interim BOE Members
Delsea	n/a	n/a	3 (Franklin 2, Elk 1)
Franklin	1320	75.2%	4
Elk	301	17.2%	1
Newfield	134	7.6%	1

Table 2 reflects the recommendation that the interim board should have nine members: four from the Franklin board, three from the Delsea board (two from Franklin and one from Elk), another from the Elk board, and one from the Newfield board. The interim board would reflect the same composition as the final board that would be elected in the next school election as referenced in Table 3.

TABLE 3
Post-Interim Apportionment, pK-12 Regional Board of Education

Municipality	Number of Elected BOE Members
Franklin	6
Elk	2
Newfield	1

The first elected members of the newly formed regional district shall be elected in accordance with the proposal to calculate and apportion membership of the board of education, adopted pursuant to the statute, at the annual election to be held in the calendar year first succeeding the year in which the election for the creation of the district was held.⁵ State law also requires that the initial terms of the first elected board be staggered,⁶ and in this case it would be three members elected for three years, three for two years, and three for one year. If based on current enrollment projections, which we recommend, board membership of the newly-enlarged regional district would be as follows: Franklin - one for a 3-year term, two for 2-year terms, and three for 1-year terms; Elk - one for a 3-year and one for a 2-year; Newfield - one for a 3-year term. Thereafter, all members shall be elected for 3-year terms.

3. NJQSAC Status

New Jersey's Quality Single Accountability Continuum (NJQSAC) is the New Jersey Department of Education's (NJDOE) monitoring and district self-evaluation system for public school districts. It is a single comprehensive accountability system that consolidates and incorporates the monitoring requirements of applicable state laws and programs and complements federally required improvements. The system focuses on monitoring and evaluating school districts in five key components that have been identified to be essential factors in effective school districts. These components are Instruction and Program, Fiscal Management, Governance, Operations, and Personnel. A district that achieves a score of 80% or higher in each of these five components is designated as "high-performing."

Delsea most recently underwent a NJQSAC review during the 2014-15 school year. During that cycle, the district was designated a high-performing district, having earned the following scores in each of the five component areas: Instruction and Program 100%; Fiscal Management 100%; Governance 100%; Operations 95%; and Personnel 100%. The next review for Delsea should be scheduled during the 2024-25 school year.

Elk underwent a NJQSAC review during the 2021-22 school year. During that cycle, the district was designated as high-performing, having earned the following scores in each of the five component areas: Instruction and Program 83%; Fiscal Management 96%; Governance 100%; Operations 90%; and Personnel 94%. The next scheduled review for Elk should be during the 2024-25 school year.

Franklin has not undergone a comprehensive NJQSAC review since 2014-15, at which time the district was designated a high-performing district, having earned the following scores in each of the five component areas: Instruction and Program 81%; Fiscal Management 100%; Governance 100%; Operations 100%; and Personnel 100%. Due to delays caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, Franklin is scheduled for a NJQSAC review during the 2023-24 school year. Official scores will not be available until the NJDOE review process is complete and the scores are

⁵ N.J.S.A. 18A:33-33.3b

⁶ N.J.S.A. 18A:13-46.1

approved by the State Board of Education. In the interim, the district self-assessment indicates the following, preliminary scores: Instruction and Program 40%; Fiscal Management 100%; Governance 100%; Operations 100%; and Personnel 100%.

While each district scored admirably and was deemed high performing during its last NJQSAC review (2014-15 for Delsea and Franklin, 2021-22 for Elk), additional alignment among the districts through a consolidation of the boards of education could aid in strengthening those scores in a more universal manner while reducing the time spent on completing the self evaluation and review. That time may then be redirected toward students, staff, and program development.

4. Stakeholder Input

Steering Committee

Select board of education members and administrators from Delsea, Elk, Franklin, and Newfield were invited to participate in a steering committee to help provide direction, and seek clarification on issues impacting each community. Coordination of the Steering Committee was managed by the shared Delsea and Elk superintendent.

The committee members met initially in October 2023 to learn more about the process and establish approximate timelines for completion of each part of the study. After that initial meeting, steering committee members met approximately every 6-8 weeks to receive updates and have their questions addressed. Committee members were asked to go back and share information with their respective boards of education and collect any questions and feedback to share during the next steering committee meeting. Input from the Steering Committee assisted in guiding the entire study process.

Student Feedback

In early February 2024, the Rowan study team prepared a survey for students at Delsea Middle School to obtain information about their classroom experiences in reading, writing, science, mathematics, art, music, and physical education. Although 222 responses were received, the team analyzed data from 172 students who had attended either the Franklin or Elk elementary schools for the majority of their grades pK-6 education. Of those 172 responses, 130 were from students who attended the Franklin elementary schools (Janvier, Main Road, and Reutter), and 42 were from students who attended Elk's Aura Elementary School.

Here are some of the notable results from the survey:

- When asked how much reading they did in 6th grade (in all subject areas, not just language arts), 80% of Franklin students and 95% of Elk students responded with a 3, 4 or 5 on a scale of "1 to 5" where "1" was not much and "5" was a lot. Most students in both schools said they were well-prepared for 7th grade reading.

- Similarly, when asked how much time they spent learning science in 6th grade, more than 85% of Franklin students and 93% of Elk students responded with a 3, 4, or 5 on the same scale.
- Similar numbers of students felt well prepared for 7th grade science, though a much larger percentage of Elk students said they spent a lot of time on science in 6th grade. Spending less time on science in 6th grade, however, apparently did not impact the Franklin students' views about their preparedness.
- When asked how often they did hands-on science experiments in 6th grade, most students from both districts responded that they did not do many hands-on science experiments, although the results indicate that Elk students did more than the Franklin students.
- Overall, Elk student responses indicated they spent more time on reading, writing, and science in 6th grade than Franklin students.
- When asked how prepared they were to do 7th grade math, 68% of Franklin students and 86% of Elk students responded with a 4 or 5 (where "1" was not prepared at all and "5" was very well-prepared).
- Students in both schools felt well prepared for 7th grade math, although just over half of the Elk students and almost two-thirds of the Franklin students said there were 7th grade topics that were not covered, or weren't covered adequately, in 6th grade.
- For art, music, and physical education, the survey only asked students to report on what types of experiences they had and what ones were most memorable. Based upon the results, Franklin students had more robust experiences in these three content areas.

5. Transition Features

To guide this study process, the Delsea, Franklin, Elk and Newfield school districts established a steering committee, which included the Delsea/Elk shared superintendent and shared school business administrator, the Franklin Township superintendent and school business administrator, and multiple board members representing each of the four school districts.

This Steering Committee followed a model used in Monmouth County by the Henry Hudson Regional, Highlands, and Atlantic Highlands school districts that guided their successful September 2023 referendum vote to regionalize into a grades pK-12 district effective July 1, 2024. Several members of the Rowan School Regionalization Institute Team were involved in the Henry Hudson initiative.

The Delsea-Franklin-Elk-Newfield Steering Committee met periodically with the study team throughout the process to provide oversight and guidance, coordinate interviews and data collection, and ensure that information was shared with the leadership of all four districts on an ongoing basis. The Committee also served as a forum for district representatives to discuss

critical interim planning decisions affecting the districts leading up to a potential regionalization vote, which was particularly important given that the Delsea/Elk and Franklin superintendents are both planning to retire in the months ahead. The decision by the Delsea and Elk Boards of Education to include representatives from the Franklin Board of Education in their search for a new joint superintendent recognized a desire for the districts to work together more closely even prior to any decision on a regionalization referendum.

Upon receipt and review of this study, members of the Steering Committee intend to take the lead role in presenting the findings at a public town hall meeting and individual board of education meetings. These gatherings will provide multiple opportunities for the boards to receive feedback and input from all members of the participating communities including written comments. The Committee can then discuss the study findings and public response in order to consider a joint recommendation to their boards on next steps to pursue regionalization or specific shared services.

Approval by the various boards of education would be needed to move forward with an application to the state Commissioner of Education for approval to hold a referendum to expand Delsea Regional into a grades pK-12 district. The application would include the specific language to be used on the referendum ballot, including implementation date, cost share, and apportionment of seats on the new regionalized board.

Approval by the state Education Commissioner would need to be received at least sixty days prior to a proposed vote, which can be held on any of the four specified capital referendum dates in September, December, January and April, or at the November general election. The State would pay the full cost of any special election for school regionalization.

Under existing state statutes, expansion of Delsea into a grades pK-12 district would require the approval of a majority of voters in each municipality for their individual district to merge into the new regionalized district.

If regionalization is approved, the participating boards of education would appoint representatives during the following months to an interim regional board to guide the transition to regionalization as detailed earlier in this section. Transition to a newly regionalized district is generally timed to occur at the beginning of the school fiscal year on July 1 with implementation of a new budget for the regionalized district adopted in accordance with state budget timelines.

In the case of the new Henry Hudson Regional, voters passed their regionalization referendum in late September 2023, the three boards appointed members to the new interim board in October 2023, and the fully regionalized district will begin operation on July 1, 2024. This provides nine months for implementation planning. The appointed interim board will continue to serve through January 1, 2025, when a new board elected by voters in November 2024 will be sworn into office.

If the citizens of Franklin, Elk, and Newfield vote for regionalization, a similar schedule could be followed, with creation of an interim board that would serve until the January 1 following implementation of a July 1 regionalization, as described earlier in this section of the report.

The Division of Local Government Services, which provided the grant that funded this study, also offers implementation grants of up to \$400,000 under the Local Efficiency Achievement Program (LEAP) to cover one-time costs for regionalization and shared services initiatives. Henry Hudson recently applied for a \$400,000 LEAP grant to cover those implementation costs. The program has been funded annually, is included in the Governor’s proposed budget, and we anticipate it will be available if a regionalization moves forward here.

Members of the Rowan School Regionalization Institute team would continue to provide expertise through the regionalization planning, referendum, and implementation process, as they do for Henry Hudson Regional.

6. Other Legal or Political Issues

It should be noted that in early 2023, a feasibility study was conducted on the regionalization of the school districts in Elmer, Newfield and Pittsgrove, and termination of Newfield’s send-receive relationships with Franklin and Delsea.⁷ The Pittsgrove Board of Education had requested the study to determine the possibility of creating a new all purpose district among Pittsgrove, Elmer and Newfield. Although the study findings acknowledged that withdrawal of the Newfield students from Franklin and Delsea would cause an increase in the tax levy for both districts, it concluded that the financial impact would not be substantially negative.

7. Governance and Legal Impact

Overall, a proposed grades pK-12 regionalization of Delsea, Franklin, Elk, and Newfield poses no apparent legal concerns. The statutes cited under the section entitled “Election Process and Board Composition” would be expected to operate as written.

While each district scored admirably and was deemed high achieving during its last NJQSAC review (2014-2015 for Delsea and Franklin, 2021-2022 for Elk), additional alignment among the districts through a consolidation of the boards of education could aid in strengthening those scores in a more universal manner while reducing the time spent on completing the self evaluation and review. That time may then be redirected toward students, staff, and program development.

⁷ Porzio Compliance Services, Statistical Forecasting LLC, and Cea, S. (February 2023). A feasibility study on the regionalization of the communities of Elmer, Newfield and Pittsgrove and the termination of the Newfield sending-receiving relationships with Franklin and Delsea Regional.

A survey of Delsea Middle School students revealed several opportune areas to make academic experiences more unified that could better prepare all children for the more rigorous curricula of the upper grades.

Given that these three communities would be expanding an existing limited purpose district to an all purpose regional district that will continue to include all of their students, N.J.S.A.

18A:13-47.11, which prohibits districts from consolidating, regionalizing or withdrawing from a regional district that will increase or exacerbate the segregation of students by racial, socioeconomic, disability or English language learner status, is not applicable to this enlargement of the limited purpose Delsea Regional to an all purpose grades pK-12 given that there would be no change in the constituent districts.⁸

After receiving this study, the four districts intend to discuss the findings and public response in order to consider a joint recommendation to their boards on next steps to pursue regionalization or specific shared services. They may be guided by the current process going on to form the new Henry Hudson Regional in Monmouth County as well as state guidelines for merging existing school districts.

DEMOGRAPHY

8. Community Profiles

The following subsection provides information regarding selected demographic characteristics for each of the municipalities in the Delsea area of Gloucester County, New Jersey. Franklin and Elk have grades pK-6 school districts and are constituent municipalities of the grades 7-12 Delsea Regional. Newfield has a non-operating school district, which sends its grades pK-6 students to Franklin and its grades 7-12 students to Delsea Middle and High Schools.

Township of Franklin

Franklin is the largest and most diverse of the three municipalities in the Delsea area. The township spans a total of 56.39 square miles. Unincorporated localities and place names within, or partially within, the township include Blue Bell, Downstown, Forest Grove, Frankinville, Fries Mills, Iona, Janvier, Lake, Malaga, Marsh Lake, Piney Hollow, Plainville, Star Cross and Porchtown.⁹

Table 4 shows changes in selected demographic characteristics over a period between 2018 and 2022.¹⁰

⁸ The addition of Newfield to the regional would not change demographics, as it already sends students to these schools.

⁹ Community descriptions for all three municipalities come mainly from www.wikipedia.org.

¹⁰ American Community Survey, United States Department of the Census.

TABLE 4
Selected Demographic Characteristics, Township of Franklin

	2018		2022		Change	% Change
Population	16,505		16,418		-87	-0.5%
Housing Units	6,088		6,047		-41	-0.7%
Median Age	42		39.9		-2	-5.0%
Median Income	\$83,547		\$94,926		\$11,379	13.6%
Mean Income	\$93,724		\$110,472		\$16,748	17.9%
Race	2018	% of Population	2022	% of Population	Change	% Change
White	13,587	82.3%	12,681	77.2%	-906	-6.7%
Black	1,159	7.0%	1,567	9.5%	408	35.2%
Hispanic	1,163	7.0%	1,408	8.6%	245	21.1%
Two or more races	308	1.9%	485	3.0%	177	57.5%
Asian	288	1.7%	162	1.0%	-126	-43.8%
HI/PI & Native/AK	n/a	n/a	115	0.7%	115	n/a

Franklin's population has been stable overall with a marginal decrease of 87 residents (-0.5%) between 2018 and 2023. This masks some changes in the racial makeup of the community, as there have been important increases in the Black (35.2%), Hispanic (21.1%), and multi-racial communities (57.5%). This has been accompanied by a 906 person decrease in the White population (-6.7%) and a large percentage decline in the Asian community (-43.8%).

The median age has declined by two years, which indicates that younger families are moving into the community. There has been an overall increase in individual incomes.

Elk Township

Elk spans a total of 19.34 square miles. Unincorporated communities located partially or completely within the township include Aura, Ferrell, Hardingville, and Lawns.

TABLE 5
Selected Demographic Characteristics, Elk Township

	2018		2022		Change	% Change
Population	4,120		4,408		288	7.0%
Housing Units	1,588		1,672		84	5.3%
Median Age	43.7		44.5		0.80	1.8%
Median Income	\$82,581		\$145,431		\$62,840	76.1%
Mean Income	\$96,298		\$152,903		\$54,605	55.6%

Race	2018	% of Population	2022	% of Population	Change	% Change
White	3,430	83.3%	3,514	79.7%	84	2.4%
Black	438	10.6%	510	11.6%	72	16.4%
Hispanic	171	4.2%	118	2.7%	-53	-31.0%
Two or more races	49	1.2%	118	2.7%	69	140.8%
Asian	32	0.8%	148	3.4%	116	362.5%
HI/PI & Native/AK	n/a		n/a			

The population in Elk increased by 288 individuals between 2018 and 2022 for a healthy growth rate of 7.0%. Like Franklin, there were considerable fluctuations in the racial makeup of the township, though different in nature. There was significant growth among Asians (362.5%) and multi-racials (140.8%), more moderate increases among Blacks and Whites, and a significant decrease among Hispanics (-31.0%).

The median age in Elk increased marginally between 2018 and 2022. While the three communities had comparable incomes in 2018, Elk's incomes have expanded much more than the others over this time span.

Borough of Newfield

Newfield is by far the smallest of the three communities with a total area of 1.74 square miles. Newfield currently has a non-operating school district. There is a school building in the municipality, which is currently being leased to a non-public school.

TABLE 6
Selected Demographic Characteristics, Borough of Newfield

	2018		2022		Change	% Change
Population	1,572		1,830		258	16.4%
Housing Units	619		657		38	6.1%
Median Age	42.3		42.5		0.20	0.5%
Median Income	\$77,426		\$103,438		\$26,012	33.6%
Mean Income	\$97,746		\$122,728		\$24,982	25.6%
Race	2018	% of Population	2022	% of Population	Change	% Change
White	1,403	89.2%	1465	80.1%	62	4.4%
Black	18	1.1%	67	3.7%	49	272.2%
Hispanic	133	8.5%	285	15.6%	152	114.3%
Two or more races	11	0.7%	5	0.3%	-6	-54.5%
Asian	n/a				n/a	
HI/PI & Native/AK	7	0.4%	8	0.4%	1	14.3%

The population in Newfield has grown considerably by percentage between 2018 and 2022 (16.4%) though this comes from a small base. The borough is experiencing a significant racial diversification. While the White population remains above 80% of the total, there has been a more than doubling of the Hispanic population and a near quadrupling of the Black population over these years.

The median age in Newfield remained roughly the same between 2018 and 2022, while incomes showed strong growth over the same span.

Birth Data

Tracking the number of children born in a municipality is important in demographic studies in order to project kindergarten enrollment over future years by seeing trends over the recent past. The data is also useful in evaluating the relative health of a municipality, as population growth is often the result of a desire by parents and others to move into and stay in a community. Table 7 documents the recent history of live births in Franklin, Elk, and Newfield.¹¹

TABLE 7
Live Births by Municipality, 2013-23

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	TOTAL
Franklin	166	152	164	157	149	131	155	131	190	155	154	1704
Elk	42	32	33	30	33	38	40	38	50	37	37	410
Newfield	18	17	12	12	24	21	21	21	26	19	19	210
TOTAL	226	201	209	199	206	190	216	190	266	211	210	2324

Comparing birth data to total population is one way to look at community health through relative potential for organic growth in a municipality (i.e, at least replacement level) apart from other factors such as family mobility. Table 8 presents that perspective, showing Newfield has the highest birth rates relative to population in the region, while Elk and Franklin are demonstrating stability due to near replacement birth rate levels.

TABLE 8
Comparing Live Births to Total Population

	Births 2018	Population 2018	% Births to Population 2018	Births 2023	Population 2023	% Births to Population 2023
Franklin	131	16,505	0.79%	154	16,418	0.94%
Elk	38	4,120	0.92%	37	4,108	0.90%
Newfield	21	1,572	1.34%	19	1,830	1.04%

¹¹ New Jersey Department of Health, Vital Statistics. The municipal data for 2022 and 2023 are shaded and based on a five-year moving average, as this information has not yet been posted by the Department of Health.

9. Housing Starts

Another factor that impacts enrollment is new housing construction which may be coming into a community. Tables 9 and 10 look at recent certificates of occupancy and building permits issued by each municipality.¹²

TABLE 9
Certificates of Occupancy Issued, 2018-23

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	TOTAL
Franklin	14	2	4	1	10	13	44
Elk	2	0	0	3	2	2	9
Newfield	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	16	2	4	4	12	15	53

TABLE 10
Building Permits Issued, 2018-2023

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	TOTAL
Franklin	11	14	14	28	37	33	137
Elk	6	6	9	10	4	2	37
Newfield	0	n/a	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	17	20	23	38	41	35	174

Research indicates that there are no planned major housing developments in any of the three municipalities that might impact school enrollment at this time. The tables above comport with the level of increases in population in each of the communities. As a percentage of the total units in each community, these are marginal increases in housing with either approval for construction or those for which certificates of occupancy have been issued.

10. Enrollment History

Table 11 shows the combined enrollment history for each of the school districts in this cluster. The purpose of this table is to calculate combined average migration ratios in order to project the total enrollment in a potential pK-12 regional school district.

¹² New Jersey Department of Community Affairs

TABLE 11
Enrollment History, 2018-24¹³

Year	District	Births	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	K-6	7-12	K-12	SC	pK	Total
2018-19	Delsea									283	265	271	226	250	255		1550	1550	57		1607
	Franklin		175	182	190	167	214	197	200							1325		1325	39	33	1397
	Elk		48	46	47	38	47	42	58							326		326		33	359
	Newfield		18	12	13	10	14	15	15							97		97	8		105
	TOTAL	226	241	240	250	215	275	254	273	283	265	271	226	250	255	1748	1550	3298	104	66	3468
		1.066	1.012	1.054	1.036	1.028	0.993	1.028	1.018	0.972	1.019	0.908	0.978	0.948					0.032		
2019-20	Delsea									278	275	270	246	221	237		1527	1527	73		1600
	Franklin		175	183	194	200	171	216	201							1340		1340	42	39	1421
	Elk		37	40	47	45	37	43	42							291		291		32	323
	Newfield		18	21	12	14	13	14	18							110		110	5	2	117
	TOTAL	201	230	244	253	259	221	273	261	278	275	270	246	221	237	1741	1527	3268	120	73	3461
		1.144	0.965	1.000	0.976	0.954	0.995	0.971	0.992	0.978	1.022	0.911	0.972	0.950					0.037		
2020-21	Delsea									259	272	281	246	239	210		1507	1507	56		1563
	Franklin		134	170	184	186	188	165	201							1228		1228	50	24	1302
	Elk		53	34	39	43	41	39	48							297		297		14	311
	Newfield		20	18	21	18	18	16	16							127		127	10	3	140
	TOTAL	209	207	222	244	247	247	220	265	259	272	281	246	239	210	1652	1507	3159	116	41	3316
		0.990	1.116	0.977	1.020	1.008	0.996	1.023	0.958	0.942	1.074	0.907	0.984	0.946					0.037		
2021-22	Delsea									254	244	292	255	242	226		1513	1513	78		1591
	Franklin		147	146	169	189	181	182	172							1186		1186	37	40	1263
	Elk		35	64	31	38	50	47	38							303		303		26	329
	Newfield		21	21	17	22	18	17	15							131		131	9	1	141
	TOTAL	199	203	231	217	249	249	246	225	254	244	292	255	242	226	1620	1513	3133	117	67	3324
		1.020	1.069	1.082	1.065	1.052	1.004	1.033	0.964	1.071	1.041	0.942	1.043	0.992					0.037		
2022-23	Delsea									217	272	254	275	266	240		1524	1524	68		1592
	Franklin		171	160	165	178	199	178	193							1244		1244	48	34	1326
	Elk		41	34	64	33	42	53	44							311		311		23	334
	Newfield		22	23	21	20	21	19	17							143		143	8	1	152
	TOTAL	206	234	217	250	231	262	250	254	217	272	254	275	266	240	1698	1524	3222	124	58	3404
		1.136	1.009	1.014	0.968	0.957	0.969	1.016	0.984	1.051	1.048	1.055	1.000	0.969					0.038		
2023-24	Delsea									250	228	285	268	275	276		1582	1582	19		1601
	Franklin		160	177	167	171	173	195	192							1235		1235	48	37	1320
	Elk		41	38	33	52	30	40	44							278		278		23	301
	Newfield		17	21	20	19	18	19	18							132		132		2	134
	TOTAL	190	218	236	220	242	221	254	254	250	228	285	268	275	276	1645	1582	3227	67	62	3356
		1.147																	0.021		
	Average	1.088	1.034	1.026	1.013	1.000	0.992	1.014	0.984	1.003	1.041	0.945	0.995	0.961					0.034		

11. Enrollment Projections

This study used a modified cohort survival model for the projections. A cohort model tracks students as they move from grade to grade and develops growth ratios between grade levels. For example, if there are 100 students in grade one in a given year and when these students become second graders the number increases to 104, that would be a growth rate of 4% or 1.04. This growth/decline ratio is calculated for six years providing an average growth/decline ratio. This ratio then serves as the multiplier for future growth. If the average ratio is 1.2 and the last historical year for grade one enrollment is 100, then the projection for the next second grade

¹³ Data was provided by each district's administration from their student information systems.

would be 120 students. This is applied to all grade levels for the next five years to complete the projection.

Kindergarten is generally projected by calculating the difference between live births attributable to a community and student enrollment in kindergarten five years later. Because the focus of this study was to calculate the projections for the entire region, a five-year moving average (i.e. the most recent five years) of live births was used to project kindergarten.

Elk started a state-sponsored universal, full-day preschool program in January 2024 as this study was underway. Its grade pK students are housed in space rented in the Pitman School District. Currently, Franklin runs its preschool program at Janvier Elementary for special needs students and on a space-dependent, tuition basis for parents who would like to enroll their general education children.

The districts have expressed a desire to consider a more inclusive preschool program in an all purpose, grades pK-12, regional school district. The State uses ninety percent of twice the number of students in grade one to estimate a “realistic” universe of pK students. This is considered realistic, because parents are not required to enroll their children in district sponsored preschool. Some will make the decision to keep their three- and four-year old children at home, while others may send them to private options.

The total number of students in grade one in the Elk and Franklin schools during the 2023-24 school year is 236, which indicates a realistic pK universe of approximately 425. At the state maximum of 15 students per classroom (and lower if some students have a need for a more self-contained environment), serving that population would require as many as 30 classrooms, which are not available at the moment. Newfield leases its only school building at this time, and a separate facility study would need to be considered to determine the school’s potential usefulness for a future expanded preschool program. There is more detail on the educational value of early childhood education in the Education & Program section.

TABLE 12
Enrollment Projections for Combined School Districts, 2024-29

Year	Births	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	K-6	7-12	K-12	SC	PK	Total
2024-25	216	235	225	242	223	242	219	258	250	251	237	269	267	264	1644	1538	3182	107	60	3349
2025-26	190	207	243	231	245	223	240	222	253	251	261	224	268	256	1611	1513	3124	105	58	3287
2026-27	266	289	214	249	234	245	221	243	219	254	261	246	223	257	1695	1460	3155	106	61	3322
2027-28	211	229	299	219	252	234	243	224	239	219	264	246	245	214	1700	1427	3127	105	61	3293
2028-29	210	228	237	307	222	252	232	246	220	240	228	250	245	236	1724	1419	3143	106	61	3310

Table 12 projects future enrollments of the combined districts from 2024-25 to 2028-29. A comparison of the 2023-24 actual enrollment of 3,356 students with the 2028-29 projection of 3,310 shows a slight decrease and no material expected change. An enlargement of the current limited purpose, regional district into an all-purpose, regional district with the inclusion of Newfield in that district would not alter the overall enrollment projections in any way.

CHART 1
Cluster Enrollment Trends, 2018-29

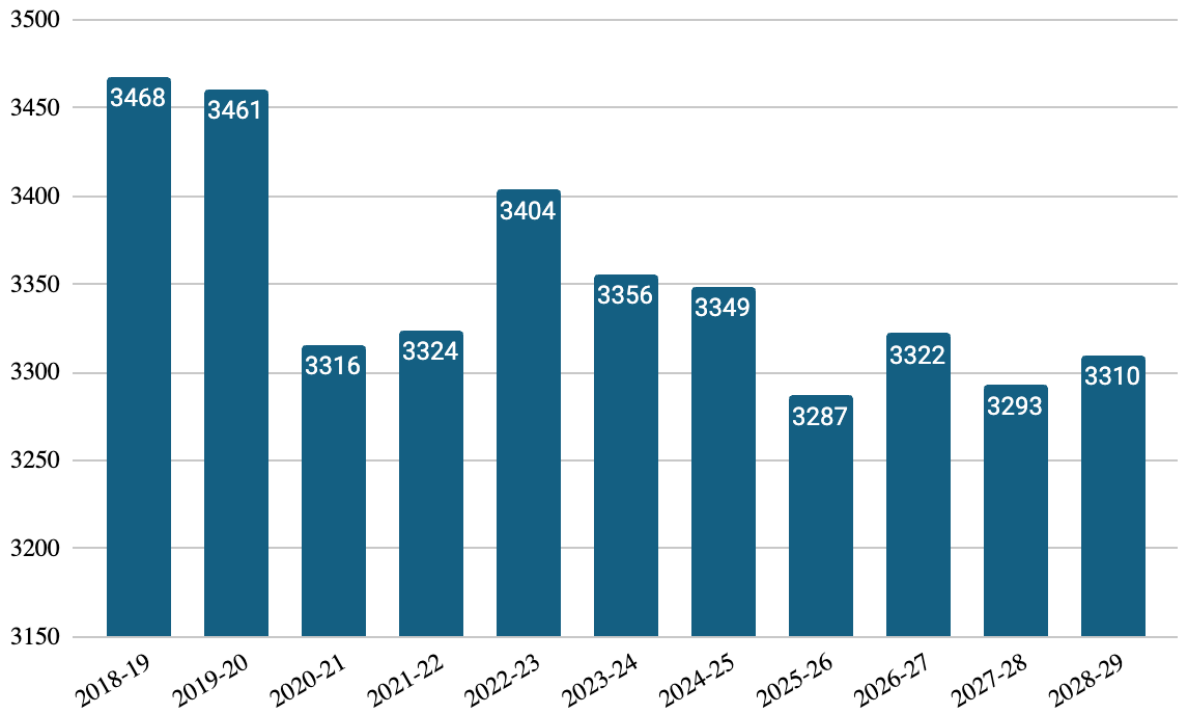


Chart 1 shows the history and projection for the entire region. The uncharacteristic enrollment drops in 2020-21 and 2021-22 were likely related to the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Long-range enrollment projections show more stability from 2024-25 on, and indicate that the district is not likely to see a return to the highest enrollment levels from 2018-19 and 2019-20. Table 13 breaks the projections down by current elementary school districts.

TABLE 13
Enrollment Projections for Elementary School Districts, 2024-29

2024-25											
	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	K-6	SC	PK	Total
Franklin	161	167	185	169	168	170	199	1219	42	30	1291
Elk	49	40	37	31	53	31	39	280	0	30	310
Newfield	25	18	20	23	21	18	20	145	7	0	152
Total	235	225	242	223	242	219	258	1644	49	60	1753

2025-26											
	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	K-6	SC	PK	Total
Franklin	136	170	175	187	167	165	173	1173	42	34	1249
Elk	46	46	39	35	31	54	30	281	0	24	305
Newfield	25	27	17	23	25	21	19	157	7	0	164
Total	207	243	231	245	223	240	222	1611	49	58	1718
2026-27											
	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	K-6	SC	PK	Total
Franklin	187	146	174	179	186	162	163	1197	43	35	1275
Elk	65	35	47	38	33	32	55	305	0	26	331
Newfield	37	33	28	17	26	27	25	193	7	0	200
Total	289	214	249	234	245	221	243	1695	50	61	1806
2027-28											
	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	K-6	SC	PK	Total
Franklin	156	192	142	180	182	186	163	1201	42	35	1278
Elk	47	72	46	45	34	32	33	309	0	26	335
Newfield	26	35	31	27	18	25	28	190	7	0	197
Total	229	299	219	252	234	243	224	1700	49	61	1810
2028-29											
	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	K-6	SC	PK	Total
Franklin	155	157	181	145	178	177	183	1176	42	35	1253
Elk	47	50	86	52	43	34	34	346	0	26	372
Newfield	26	30	40	25	31	21	29	202	6	0	208
Total	228	237	307	222	252	232	246	1724	48	61	1833

CHART 2
Elementary Enrollment Projections, 2024-2029

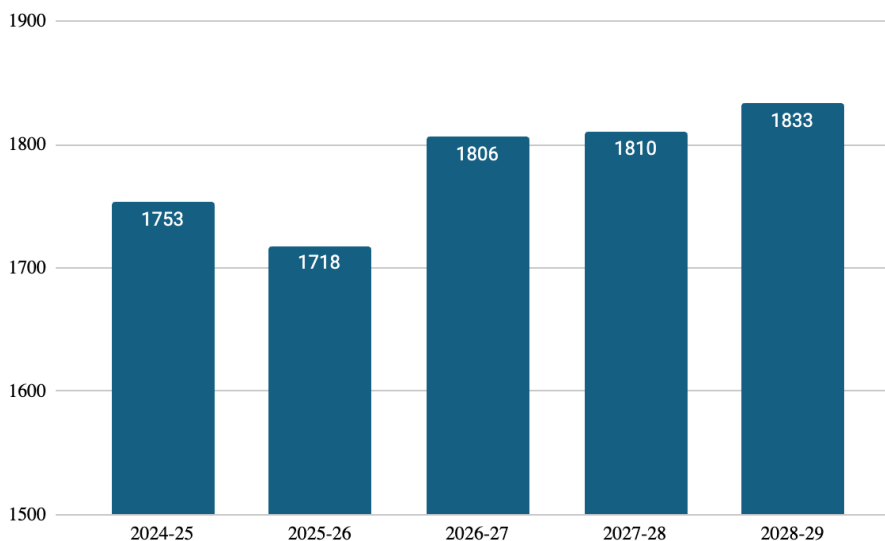


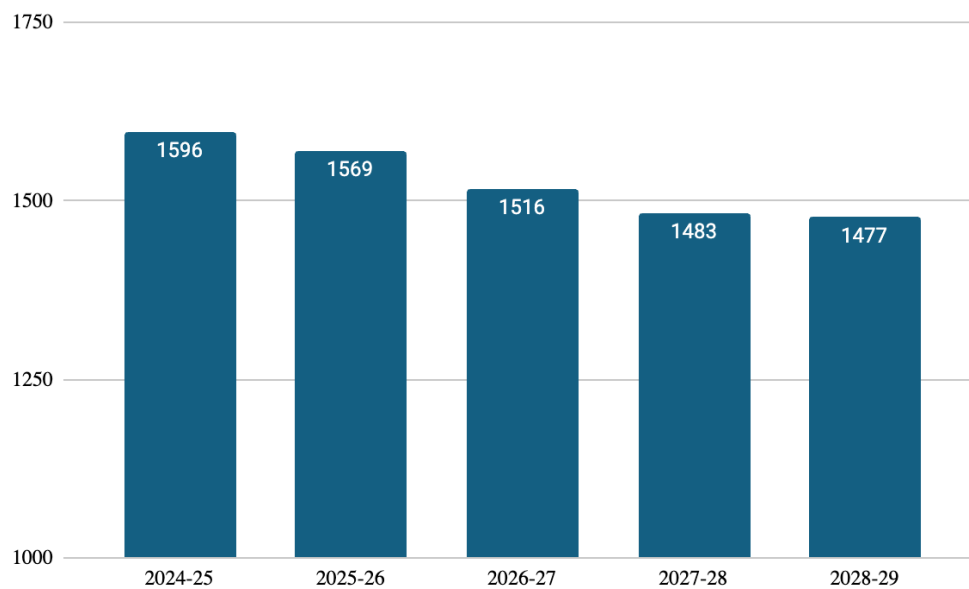
Table 13 and Chart 2 show the elementary projections over the next five years. Except for a slight decline during the 2025-26 school year, the K-6 enrollment is trending upward.

TABLE 14
Enrollment Projections for Middle/High School District, 2024-25 to 2028-29

Year	7	8	9	10	11	12	7-12	SC	Total
2024-25	250	251	237	269	267	264	1538	58	1596
2025-26	253	251	261	224	268	256	1513	56	1569
2026-27	219	254	261	246	223	257	1460	56	1516
2027-28	239	219	264	246	245	214	1427	56	1483
2028-29	220	240	228	250	245	236	1419	58	1477

Table 14 provides the same enrollment projection breakdown for the middle and high school district. Chart 3 shows that the secondary school enrollment is projected to decrease over the next five years. The growth indicated at the elementary school level should reverse the trend at the high school when the lower grade students begin to get into the upper grades.

CHART 3
Secondary Enrollment Projections, 2024-2029



12. Racial Impact and Other Demographic Impacts

Tables 15 and 16 provide some disaggregated data about the students in the four school districts over the past five years. As expected, changes in race, ethnicity, and income largely mirror the trends in each community.¹⁴

TABLE 15
Enrollment History, Disaggregated by Race and Ethnicity¹⁵

2018-19	Enr	White	%	Black	%	Hispan	%	Asian	%	NA/AL	%	HI/PI	%	MR	%	TOTAL
Delsea	1607	1249	77.72%	164	10.21%	114	7.09%	15	0.93%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	65	4.04%	1607
Franklin	1397	1101	78.81%	72	5.15%	146	10.45%	17	1.22%	1	0.07%	0	0.00%	61	4.37%	1397
Elk	359	231	64.35%	62	17.27%	56	15.60%	6	0.04%	0	0.00%	5	1.39%	4	1.11%	359
Newfield	105	94	89.52%	2	1.90%	9	8.57%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	105
TOTAL	3468	2675	77.13%	300	8.65%	325	9.37%	38	1.10%	1	0.03%	5	0.14%	130	3.75%	3468
2019-20	Enr	White	%	Black	%	Hispan	%	Asian	%	NA/AL	%	HI/PI	%	MR	%	TOTAL
Delsea	1600	1215	75.94%	178	11.13%	134	8.38%	13	0.81%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	60	3.75%	1600
Franklin	1421	1116	78.54%	76	5.35%	159	11.19%	13	0.91%	0	0.00%	1	0.07%	56	3.94%	1421
Elk	323	227	70.28%	42	13.00%	46	14.24%	6	1.86%	0	0.00%	1	0.31%	1	0.31%	323
Newfield	117	100	85.47%	3	2.56%	14	11.97%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	117
TOTAL	3461	2658	76.80%	299	8.64%	353	10.20%	32	0.92%	0	0.00%	2	0.06%	117	3.38%	3461
2020-21	Enr	White	%	Black	%	Hispan	%	Asian	%	NA/AL	%	HI/PI	%	MR	%	TOTAL
Delsea	1563	1170	74.86%	171	10.94%	139	8.89%	10	0.64%	1	0.06%	1	0.06%	71	4.54%	1563
Franklin	1302	1027	78.88%	64	4.92%	143	10.98%	9	4.38%	1	0.08%	1	0.08%	57	4.38%	1302
Elk	311	211	67.85%	48	15.43%	43	13.83%	7	2.25%	1	0.32%	1	0.32%	0	0.00%	311
Newfield	140	119	85.00%	4	2.86%	17	12.14%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	140
TOTAL	3316	2527	76.21%	287	8.66%	342	10.31%	26	0.78%	3	0.09%	3	0.09%	128	3.86%	3316
2021-22	Enr	White	%	Black	%	Hispan	%	Asian	%	NA/AL	%	HI/PI	%	MR	%	TOTAL
Delsea	1591	1046	65.74%	242	15.21%	251	15.78%	34	1.07%	0	0.00%	1	0.06%	17	1.07%	1591
Franklin	1263	985	77.99%	68	5.38%	141	11.16%	7	4.91%	2	0.16%	0	0.00%	62	4.91%	1263
Elk	329	219	66.57%	47	14.29%	50	15.20%	9	0.91%	0	0.00%	1	0.30%	3	0.91%	329
Newfield	141	125	88.65%	5	3.55%	11	7.80%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	141
TOTAL	3324	2375	71.45%	362	10.89%	453	13.63%	50	1.50%	2	0.06%	2	0.06%	82	2.47%	3326
2022-23	Enr	White	%	Black	%	Hispan	%	Asian	%	NA/AL	%	HI/PI	%	MR	%	TOTAL
Delsea	1592	1154	72.49%	168	10.55%	183	11.49%	8	0.50%	4	0.25%	1	0.06%	74	4.65%	1592
Franklin	1326	1026	77.38%	67	5.05%	159	11.99%	7	5.05%	1	0.08%	0	0.00%	67	5.05%	1326
Elk	334	213	63.77%	50	14.97%	56	16.77%	7	2.10%	0	0.00%	1	0.30%	7	2.10%	334
Newfield	152	123	80.92%	6	3.95%	23	15.13%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	152
TOTAL	3404	2516	73.91%	291	8.55%	421	12.37%	22	7.65%	5	0.15%	2	0.06%	148	4.35%	3404
2023-24	Enr	White	%	Black	%	Hispan	%	Asian	%	NA/AL	%	HI/PI	%	MR	%	TOTAL
Delsea	1601	1170	73.08%	189	11.81%	172	10.74%	14	0.87%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	56	3.50%	1601
Franklin	1320	1030	78.03%	58	4.39%	135	10.23%	42	3.18%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	55	4.17%	1320
Elk	301	210	69.77%	40	13.29%	51	16.94%	7	2.33%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	301
Newfield	134	107	79.85%	5	3.73%	22	16.42%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	134
TOTAL	3356	2517	75.00%	292	8.70%	380	11.32%	63	1.88%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	111	3.31%	3356
Average			75.08%		9.01%		11.20%		2.31%		0.05%		0.07%		3.52%	

¹⁴ See Tables 4, 5, and 6.

¹⁵ NA/AL = Native American or Alaskan, HI/PI = Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, MR = multiracial.

TABLE 16
Enrollment History, Disaggregated by Income and Language¹⁶

2018-19	Enr	FRL	%
Delsea	1607	356	22.15%
Franklin	1397	455	32.57%
Elk	359	108	30.08%
Newfield	105	31	29.52%
TOTAL	3468	950	27.39%
2019-20	Enr	FRL	%
Delsea	1600	230	14.38%
Franklin	1421	442	31.10%
Elk	323	58	17.96%
Newfield	117	35	29.91%
TOTAL	3461	765	22.10%
2020-21	Enr	FRL	%
Delsea	1563	202	12.92%
Franklin	1302	362	27.80%
Elk	311	100	32.15%
Newfield	140	31	22.14%
TOTAL	3316	695	20.96%
2021-22	Enr	FRL	%
Delsea	1591	189	11.88%
Franklin	1263	216	17.08%
Elk	329	69	20.97%
Newfield	141	30	21.28%
TOTAL	3324	504	15.15%
2022-23	Enr	FRL	%
Delsea	1592	251	15.77%
Franklin	1326	262	19.76%
Elk	334	83	24.85%
Newfield	152	17	11.18%
TOTAL	3404	613	18.01%
2023-24	Enr	FRL	%
Delsea	1601	279	17.43%
Franklin	1320	368	27.88%
Elk	301	73	24.25%
Newfield	134	34	25.37%
TOTAL	3356	754	22.47%

2018-19	Enr	ELL	%
Delsea	1607	3	0.19%
Franklin	1397	11	0.79%
Elk	359	3	0.84%
Newfield	105		
TOTAL	3468	17	0.49%
2019-20	Enr	ELL	%
Delsea	1600	5	0.31%
Franklin	1421	14	0.99%
Elk	323	8	2.48%
Newfield	117		
TOTAL	3461	27	0.78%
2020-21	Enr	ELL	%
Delsea	1563	5	0.32%
Franklin	1302	13	1.00%
Elk	311	10	3.22%
Newfield	140		
TOTAL	3316	28	0.84%
2021-22	Enr	ELL	%
Delsea	1591	7	0.44%
Franklin	1263	12	0.95%
Elk	329	12	3.65%
Newfield	141		
TOTAL	3324	31	0.93%
2022-23	Enr	ELL	%
Delsea	1592	12	0.75%
Franklin	1326	13	0.98%
Elk	334	8	2.40%
Newfield	152		
TOTAL	3404	33	0.97%
2023-24	Enr	ELL	%
Delsea	1601	7	0.44%
Franklin	1320	12	0.91%
Elk	301	8	2.66%
Newfield	134		
TOTAL	3356	27	0.80%

Future projections of disaggregated data may be less necessary than that for overall enrollments, but the schools will still want to consider the trends. Increases in the number of Hispanic and Black students/families provide an opportunity to evaluate the equity of access to resources and

¹⁶ Data was provided by each district's administration from their student information systems. FRL = students qualifying for free or reduced price meals, ELL = students identified as English language learners. Newfield's ELL students are accounted for in the Franklin data.

programs in the schools for these traditionally underserved groups. Changes in cultural background present a moment to ensure that honoring the dignity of each student and developing an even greater sense of belonging in the schools' climate are priorities. Higher household incomes combined with lower percentages of families qualifying for free and reduced meals should reduce the needs for certain kinds of at-risk programming designed to address the effects of lower income.

The data in this demography section indicates that the overall enrollment in an all-purpose, grades pK-12, regional district will remain relatively stable over the next five years. Changes among disaggregated groups are opportunities to look more deeply into those specific needs. The addition of Newfield as a member of the regional will not create any changes in enrollment, demographics, and/or socioeconomic status projected for the district. In summary, the data indicates that creating a grades pK-12 regional for the municipalities of Franklin, Elk, and Newfield will not create any demographic or enrollment changes in the school district.

EDUCATION & PROGRAM

This section of the feasibility study will examine the educational impact of the regionalization of the Delsea, Elk, Franklin, and Newfield school districts into one, all-purpose, grades pK-12, regional school district.

Because Newfield is a non-operating school district whose students already attend Franklin for grades pK-6 and Delsea for grades 7-12 via a send-receive agreement, we will focus on the similarities and differences between Franklin, serving students from the Township of Franklin and the Borough of Newfield, and Elk, serving only students from Elk Township. We will also look at possible educational enhancements or challenges that may be realized.

This section of the study will examine the existing profile of each school and then, by school or district, look at curricular programs and philosophies, most recent achievement results, the availability and impact of specialized programs, co-curricular offerings, and indicators of school climate and culture. It will also examine staffing patterns, talent acquisition and retention, and professional learning opportunities.

The following questions are guiding our investigation:

1. Will students in any newly proposed regional district have access to a higher quality, more equitable educational program in grades pK-12?
2. Will the creation of a larger, regional pK-12 district produce additional educational benefits or challenges for students and/or professionals when compared to the status quo?

3. Will any newly proposed regional district provide benefits or challenges in serving students from special populations, including those with special needs, those whose first language is not English, those who benefit from enrichment programming, and those eligible for early childhood education?

Data in this section were collected via state and local document review and site visits, where beneficial. During site visits, examiners met with administrators overseeing the educational programs and teachers who serve students in key instructional and transitional content and grade levels.

13. School District Profiles

While the primary purpose of the feasibility study is to examine the pros and cons of forming an expanded, all-purpose regional school district from several existing districts, it is important to understand that each existing school and community has its own unique characteristics, including norms, traditions, and points of community and school pride. This aspect of the study provides insight into some unique characteristics of each existing district. The information contained in this section was gathered as a result of site visits and interviews of school staff, review of New Jersey School Performance Reports, and a review of district websites and information provided by the districts.

Delsea

Delsea is a limited-purpose regional school district serving students in grades 7-12 in Delsea Regional Middle School and Delsea Regional High School. The district serves students from the Townships of Elk and Franklin and the Borough of Newfield, all in Gloucester County, New Jersey. The stated mission is, as a collaborative learning community that is passionately committed to educating all students, to develop life-long learners who demonstrate character and become valuable members of our community, country, and world. The vision statement, as approved by the Board of Education is, “Educating, inspiring, and empowering our students and staff to excellence. The pride of the community. The BEST in the nation.”

A Delsea site visit included meetings with key administrators to collect information that can be difficult to gather within a review of data. Interviews and observations that took place during these site visits informed this report.

Franklin

Franklin serves students in grades pK-6 in three schools: Mary F. Janvier School (grades pK-2); Main Road School (grades 3-4); and Caroline L. Reutter School (grades 5-6). The stated mission of the district, in partnership with students, families and the community, is to foster the unique potential of each individual student by providing an inclusive, safe and supportive learning environment. The vision of the district is to be a child centered community that empowers

students and equips them with the academic, social, and emotional foundation needed to become responsible citizens and lifelong learners.

Students from the Borough of Newfield attend Franklin for grades pK-6 in a send-receive relationship with tuition paid on a per-student basis.

Elk

Elk serves students in grades pK-6. Students in grades K-6 attend the Aura School, while those students entering pK are housed in a space rented from the Pitman School District. This space, known as the “Aura Early Learning Center”, is the location for all preschool learning.

Transportation is provided for students to the Center, while before- and after-care is provided at Aura School.

Elk’s stated mission is to strive to educate students and assist them in realizing their full potential as responsible, productive, contributing members of society by providing an educational environment in which students are challenged, differences are valued, and excellence is expected.

Newfield

As stated previously, Newfield is a non-operating school district. Its students are currently served by Franklin and Delsea. Services are provided on a send-receive, per-student tuition basis.

14. Curriculum & Instruction

Since all students in the region already attend Delsea from grades 7 through 12, this study was conducted with a focus on the programs offered by the elementary schools in Franklin and Elk with a lesser emphasis on the programs offered by Delsea. However, the benefits of program coordination between the elementary school districts and the regional high school district will be included.

The New Jersey Student Learning Standards (NJSLS) serve as the foundation for education in the state. These standards outline the minimum knowledge and skills that students are expected to acquire at each grade level in various subject areas. The New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) regularly updates and revises these standards to ensure they align with current educational research and best practices.

By way of background information, school districts in New Jersey use the NJSLS as follows:

Adoption and Implementation

The NJDOE adopts and publishes the NJSLS, which cover the core subjects of English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, World Languages, Visual and Performing Arts, Comprehensive Health and Physical Education, and Computer Science

and Design Thinking. The NJSLS also include standards in Career Readiness, Life Literacies, and Key Skills. Content and skills addressed in these standards include Personal Financial Literacy, Career Awareness Exploration, Preparation and Training, Career and Technical Education, and Life Literacies and Key Skills. This standard outlines key literacies and technical skills such as critical thinking, global and cultural awareness, and technology literacy that are crucial for students to develop to live and work in an interconnected global economy.

Curriculum Development

School districts, including those in this study, use the NJSLS as a guide to developing their curriculum. They create instructional plans that ensure students have the opportunity to master the content and skills outlined in the standards. Districts may also design curriculum maps to show the progression of skills and knowledge from one grade level to the next.

Assessment and Accountability

The NJSLS influence the development of state assessments, which are used to measure student proficiency and growth. These assessments are designed to reflect the content and skills specified in the standards. Schools and districts are held accountable for student performance based on these assessments. Results may impact school ratings, teacher evaluations, and other aspects of the accountability system.

Monitoring and Adjustments

School districts regularly monitor student progress through various assessments and adjust instructional practices based on the data. This process ensures that students are meeting the standards and that any necessary interventions are implemented.

Professional Development

Teachers and administrators participate in professional development to understand the NJSLS and how to effectively implement them in the classroom. This training helps educators align their teaching practices with the standards.

Parent and Community Communication

Best practices suggest that schools communicate with parents and the community about the NJSLS, providing information on what students are expected to learn at each grade level. This transparency helps foster collaboration between educators, parents, and the community.

Each school involved in this study has adopted curricula aligned with the most recent version of the NJSLS for the specific content area. The following includes specific highlights covering the areas of curriculum and instruction.

Delsea

Delsea employs an assistant superintendent, a supervisor of special services, two supervisors of instruction, and an evaluation and research coordinator, who oversee curriculum and instruction across the district. The assistant superintendent, supervisor of special services, and evaluation and research coordinator are also shared with Elk.

As all students are required to take English Language Arts (ELA) each year, we use these as a standard for class size.

TABLE 17
ELA Class Sizes, Delsea Regional High School, 2023-24

ELA Class	Average Class Size
English 1	27
English 1 Honors	14
English 2	22
English 2 Honors	22
English 3	19
English 3 AP	24
English 4	17
English 4 AP	12

With the exception, perhaps, of English 1 classes, where the average number of students bump above 25 per class, the class sizes at Delsea appear reasonable and, in some cases, favorable.

The high school is particularly proud of the following:

- The magnitude of its academic offerings, particularly the number of advanced placement classes offered to students given the size of the school. With more than 20 classes offered, Delsea ranks as one of the best in Gloucester County when it comes to advanced placement offerings.
- Its Perkins V federal education program, a program that invests in secondary and postsecondary career and technical education (CTE) programs across all fifty states and the territories. It is dedicated to increasing learner access to high-quality CTE programs of study, alignment of programs across grades 5-12, postsecondary and the workforce, and economic development. Perkins V is critical to ensuring programs meet the ever-changing needs of learners and employers.

- Its robust transition program for 18- to 21-year-old students with special needs. In this program, students learn job skills for part of the school day and then secure employment in the community with the assistance of job coaches. This program serves a very special subset of the Delsea population and can have a profound impact on the life of a young adult living with special needs.

TABLE 18
ELA Class Sizes, Delsea Regional Middle School, 2023-24

ELA Class	Average Class Size
English 7	16
English 7 Honors	19
English 8	20
English 8 Honors	20

Like the high school, the class sizes in the middle school appear favorable, allowing teachers to provide students with academic support and actionable feedback. In addition to its comprehensive program, the middle school is also proud to offer:

- A teaming approach and a house system, recently adopted to help better support students of middle school age, further strengthening the relationships between adults and students. One of the goals of this structure is to provide a safe and welcoming environment for students, each of whom enters from a significantly smaller school.

Both the high school and middle school have adopted several research-based approaches to teaching, learning, and supporting students that are currently in their infancy. The district will continue to work on fine tuning the implementation of these approaches until they become part of the culture of each school. Programs offered across both schools include:

English Language Arts

- The middle school offers both seventh and eighth grade students the opportunity to take ELA or the more rigorous Honors ELA. The school uses the Accelerated Reader program to encourage independent reading. Honors ELA includes additional expectations in reading and writing.
- The high school offers an array of core ELA courses at the traditional, Honors, and Advanced Placement levels. Students can also enroll in high interest electives such as Advanced Placement African American Studies, Creative Writing, Journalism, Public Speaking, Reading the Movies, Modern Sports and Society, and Diverse Voices in Literature.

- The reflections of seventh grade ELA teachers indicate that the students they receive from Elk are generally better prepared for the demands of their curriculum than those who arrive from Franklin. They report that about half of all Elk students enter 7th grade in an Honors ELA program.

Mathematics

- The middle school offers 7th grade students the opportunity to enroll in Math 7 or Honors Pre-Algebra. Students who enroll in Math 7 will progress to Math 8 in eighth grade, while those who enroll in Honors Pre-Algebra will have the opportunity to take Honors Algebra I in eighth grade. This puts the latter students on track to reach Honors or AP Calculus by their senior year in high school.
- High school students may enroll in the traditional sequence of high school mathematics courses including Algebra I and II, Geometry, Precalculus, and Calculus at the traditional, honors, and AP levels, as well as elective courses in Integrated Mathematics, Statistics, and Data Science.
- The reflections of the seventh grade mathematics teachers indicate that the students they receive from Elk have better mastered prerequisite mathematics skills, particularly mathematics facts and vocabulary.

Other Content Areas

- Middle school students may choose between Science 7 / 8 and Honors Science 7 / 8. Differences between the two levels of science include the rigor of the lessons taught, quantity of homework, and opportunities for science labs.
- At the high school level, students may choose traditional, Honors, and/or AP Biology, Chemistry, and Physics courses, as well as Applied Physical Science, Forensics, Anatomy and Physiology, and Nursing and Allied Health Sciences.
- The seventh grade science teachers indicate that Elk students are routinely able to tap into previous science knowledge on a deeper level than the students from Franklin, perhaps because the teachers believe that science is taught on a more regular basis in Elk. Furthermore, the middle school science teachers shared that the average reading level of the students arriving from Elk is nearly a full grade level ahead of those arriving from Franklin. This impacts the students' ability to read informational text, the type that is common in a science classroom.
- Middle school students choose between Social Studies 7/8 and Honors Social Studies 7/8. High school students may enroll in several levels of World History and United States History I and II, including Honors and AP levels. Students can also enroll in a full complement of electives including Psychology, Sociology, Modern Military History, Race, Gender, and Ethnicity in America, and Law Enforcement courses. Additional AP

courses are offered in Psychology, Modern European History, and U.S. Government and Politics.

- The seventh grade social studies teachers indicate that, overall, the students entering from Elk are better prepared for the rigor of the work expected at the middle school level.
- Other courses offered at the middle school include Music, Chorus, Band, Art, Health and Physical Education, Exploratory Spanish, Process Research, Learning for Success, and Technology and Design.
- The high school offers a multitude of additional courses in the areas of Business and Technology, CTE, Fine and Performing Arts, Physical Education, Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps, Spanish, French, and Italian.
- The CTE Department offers seventeen Perkins track programs with an additional four CTE programs not yet funded by Perkins. Programs include, but are not limited to those in accounting, marketing, web design, and computer science and engineering.

Miscellaneous Programs

- The high school received a Bipartisan Safer Communities Stronger Connections grant in the amount of \$1.3M. A multi-year federal grant, shared among three other districts including Elk, provided middle school staff with professional development, programs, and resources aimed at improving climate and culture within the building. A school-based climate team led these initiatives.

Franklin

TABLE 19
General Education Class Sizes, Franklin 2023-24

Homeroom	Average Class Size ¹⁷
Kindergarten	21
Grade 1	23
Grade 2	21
Grade 3	21
Grade 4	22
Grade 5	20
Grade 6	21

¹⁷ These class sizes are based on homerooms. The Caroline L. Reutter School runs a middle school style schedule, and instructional class sizes are often higher than homeroom class sizes.

Table 19 documents the homeroom class sizes in Franklin. The Mary F. Janvier School (Janvier) serves students in grades pK-2 with a half-day, inclusive preschool program and full-day kindergarten. Parents of the general education students pay tuition for their children to attend the inclusive preschool program.

The Main Road School (Main Road) serves students in grades 3-4. The school is proud of its focus on the social emotional growth of students as well as school wide activities to promote a positive learning environment. Instruction features student engagement and authentic learning. Finally, school leaders are proud of their strong community presence and involvement in school activities and events.

The Caroline L. Reutter School (Reutter) serves students in grades 5-6. The staff helps students build 21st century skills by making technology a part of each school day, with all students taking advantage of the one-to-one chromebook ratio. Further, each instructional classroom has an interactive board and digital imaging document projector. Like elsewhere in the district, instruction emphasizes student engagement and authentic learning. Finally, the school has an award-winning character development and social-emotional learning program through the character.org and the ADL along with earning bronze status through Sustainable Jersey.

In an effort to meet the needs of its learners, Franklin uses the following curriculum programs and materials with its students:

English Language Arts

- Franklin uses Benchmark Workshop from Benchmark Education as its core literacy program. Benchmark Workshop describes itself as strong in developing proficient readers with a consistent mini-lesson structure that includes modeling, guided practice, application, and transfer. Small-group texts build on whole-group lessons and connect to the same topic. The district also uses Benchmark Workshop for phonics supplemented, in part, with Orton Gillingham (OG) strategies and phonemic awareness opportunities in the classroom.
- Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) is used as the universal screener for students. Quick Phonics Assessment and Quick Spelling Survey from Read Naturally and iReady for ELA as further assessment tools.
- iReady for ELA and its Personalized Learning Path feature support students' literacy acquisition.
- Teachers in Franklin have undergone training in using the OG approach to teaching reading. This is a direct, explicit, multisensory, structured, sequential, diagnostic, and prescriptive way to teach reading, writing, and spelling. The method can be used with students for intervention and in small group work during the literacy block.

- Depending on the school, students receive between 87 and 100 minutes of daily ELA instructional time.

Mathematics

- Franklin uses ReadyMath as its core mathematics program. ReadyMath, from Curriculum Associates, claims it helps teachers create a rich classroom environment in which students at all levels become active, real-world problem solvers. Through teacher-led instruction, students develop mathematical reasoning, engage in discourse, and build strong mathematical habits. ReadyMath privileges mathematical discourse and hands-on manipulatives while supporting student progress with an adaptive online assessment tool.
- iReady is used for mathematics assessment and offers support through its MyPath feature.
- The Math Interview, a one-on-one teacher to student interview process that focuses on mental math and assessing a student's fluency and automaticity in mathematics, has been a focus in the district.
- Depending on the school, students receive between 85 and 87 minutes of daily mathematics instructional times.

Other Content Areas

- In grades K, 1, and 2, a comprehensive ELA/Science/Social Studies curriculum is offered, where students focus both on ELA instruction and building content knowledge across other content areas. Science and social studies are part of the instructional time allocated to ELA. In grades 3 and 4, Science and Social Studies are taught for half of the year during a 36-minute period. In grades 5 and 6, students receive 53 minutes of Science and Social Studies instruction for half of the year.
- Students are offered music, art, technology, health and physical education, and Spanish instruction. Spanish instruction begins in third grade. Specials meet one time per week for between 42 and 45 minutes. In addition, students have the opportunity to participate in Band and Chorus, which takes place during the WIN period, which stands for "What I Need".

Miscellaneous Programs

- Franklin offers a plethora of support systems for students and staff. For a K-6 elementary district, the availability of a curriculum supervisor, an instructional supervisor, several reading specialists, and instructional coaches serve to strengthen the academic program for students.

- The Main Road School also offers the Clayton Model universal, school-based social emotional learning (SEL) program that serves all students. It is an agile, responsive, trauma-informed intervention program structured to offer a network of support services spanning from individual student support, teacher resources and classroom strategies, and tools for parents to incorporate SEL strategies in the home.

Elk

The Aura School is committed to fostering a nurturing community of lifelong learners who are socially responsible thinkers that embrace cultural diversity. The district shares an assistant superintendent, supervisor of special services, and an evaluation and research coordinator with Delsea. Elk has always maintained small class sizes and is further committed to keeping classes small in kindergarten through grade 3.

TABLE 20
General Education Class Sizes, Elk, 2023-24

Homeroom	Average Class Size
Kindergarten	14
Grade 1	13
Grade 2	11
Grade 3	17
Grade 4	15
Grade 5	20
Grade 6	22

In an effort to meet the needs of its learners, the district uses the following curriculum programs and materials with its students:

English Language Arts

- The district subscribes to a “phonics first” but not “phonics only” philosophy when it comes to teaching its youngest learners how to read, believing that while a strong foundation in phonics is necessary to grow readers, rich and engaging texts are also critical. During literacy instruction, the district focuses on age-appropriate, structured phonics, knowledge building, and independent reading.
- The core program in ELA is American Reading Company’s ARC Core, which features high quality authentic text, a strong foundational skills component, and student writing products as a culminating unit assessment.

- DIBELS is used as the universal screener for students, while the Achieve 3000 Level Set assessment is used to establish an initial Lexile level at the start of the school year. This Lexile level updates routinely as students work within the platform.
- The American Reading Company's Independent Reading Level Assessment is used to assess literacy progression throughout the year. The District also uses the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment to monitor student progress in reading.
- Teachers in the district are trained in the OG Approach to teaching reading. This approach is used with students for intervention and in small group work during the literacy block.
- Students receive 120 minutes of daily ELA instructional time.

Mathematics

- Like Franklin, Elk uses ReadyMath as its core mathematics program.
- The Acadience Math Screener (previously published as DIBELS Math), a universal screening and progress-monitoring assessment that measures the acquisition of mathematics skills, is used as the universal screener in the area of mathematics. The district also uses iReady three times per year as a benchmark assessment system, aligning to its ReadyMath curricular materials. Finally, computer-based, adaptive STAR math assessments are used as confirming assessments in the area of mathematics.
- Students receive 80 minutes of daily mathematics instructional time.

Other Content Areas

- Students receive 40 minutes of daily instruction in science for one semester and social studies for the other semester.
- Elk students are offered music, art, technology, and health and physical education one time per week. Students also learn a world language 30 minutes per week. In addition, each student gets one additional special area elective weekly from a menu of choices, including, but not limited to, comics and cartoons, art, theater and show business, and unified physical education. In the upper grades, students may also select between band, chorus, and art show classes. Students may also take advantage of the "WIN" period.

Miscellaneous Programs

- Elk 4th, 5th, and 6th grade classes are departmentalized in all subject areas with team teaching taking place for at-risk students.
- Like Franklin, Elk offers the Clayton Model universal, school-based SEL program that serves all students.

- The Aura School also partnered with Delsea Regional Middle School to take advantage of a multi-year federal grant, shared among Delsea and two other districts, to provide staff with professional development, programs, and resources aimed at improving climate and culture within the building. A school-based climate team led these initiatives.

Cross-District Program Analysis

Whenever there exists a school configuration where students from separate districts find themselves coming together for the first time in a common middle or high school, challenges associated with curriculum inconsistencies exist, as do opportunities associated with additional curriculum alignment. This is no different with the relationship between Elk and Franklin, as they prepare to send their students to Delsea Regional Middle School.

English Language Arts

- Elk and Franklin use different programs to teach and assess literacy development. While Elk uses the American Reading Company program as its core, Franklin relies on the Benchmark Workshop from Benchmark Education. While both districts supplement their core programs with phonics instruction, those programs, too, are from different publishers. While both programs claim to address NJSLs, differences may still exist that lead to disparate experiences and outcomes for students.
- Elk and Franklin both use tools to support literacy instruction. Elk uses the Achieve3000 platform while Franklin uses iReady and its digital MyPath feature to customize support for students. The lack of common support systems, often used for benchmarking students and measuring their growth, makes useful comparisons difficult as students enter middle school.
- While students in Elk receive 120 minutes of daily ELA instructional time, students in Franklin receive between 87 and 100 minutes, depending on grade level. While this day-to-day difference in the amount of literacy instruction may not seem substantial on its surface, even under the best case 100-minute scenario, Elk students receive 3600 minutes, or 60 hours, of additional literacy instruction annually.

Mathematics

- Both Elk and Franklin schools use ReadyMath as the core mathematics program, supported by iReady for benchmark assessment purposes. Variation, however, occurs in the way math instruction is supplemented or supported across the districts. Franklin uses iReady's MyPath, while Elk does not use this individualized support.
- The Math Interview, a one-on-one teacher to student interview process that focuses on mental math, is used in Franklin. This strategy is not used in Elk, which could lead to different strengths and skill sets between the groups of students.

- Students in Elk receive 80 minutes of daily mathematics instructional time, while students in Franklin receive between 85 and 87 minutes. Even against the lower 85-minute timeframe, students in Franklin receive an additional 900 minutes, or 15 hours, of mathematics instruction annually.

Other Content Areas

- While science, social studies, and many of the special area subjects are consistent in that they are offered across both districts, the amount of time dedicated to those areas, and the manner in which these courses are offered, appears different between districts and even between schools within the district. While there may be a rationale for those within district variances, it is worth noting that the times dedicated to these subjects are not consistent across districts.
- As demonstrated by the student survey administered to students in grades 7 and 8 and discussed previously in this document, students arriving at Delsea Regional Middle School from Elk and Franklin have different educational experiences, specifically in the study of science.

The information above demonstrates that students entering Delsea from Elk and Franklin have different educational experiences. Having all students entering Delsea with shared experiences in terms of educational programs and philosophy, time spent studying each of those content areas, and the professional learning that accompanies these programs can offer several benefits.

By aligning programs, assessment tools, and time allotted to teaching each subject area:

1. Teachers of upper grades should see greater consistency in student skills, which translates into lessons that meet the needs of more students.
2. 7th and 9th grade staff members will have a much greater awareness of the skills students have likely mastered and those skills on which they will likely have to further develop. Teachers of the upper grades can more easily share with the teachers of the lower grades the data and information they need to help them plan and adjust their instruction. The alignment of assessment tools allows both sending and receiving teachers to speak a common language when they have access to consistent data about student strengths and areas where additional support may be needed.
3. Consistency in the time allotted to literacy instruction can produce more consistent results among students.

Overall, shared elementary educational programs can contribute to more cohesive and effective approaches to a student's education, benefiting both students and educators alike.

Cross-District Curriculum Coordination

Delsea and Elk currently share a superintendent, assistant superintendent, director of special services, and an evaluation and research coordinator. Delsea employs two supervisors of instruction who are currently shared temporarily using the American Recovery Program, Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ARP-ESSER) funds. Delsea also has instructional coaches that are funded by ARP-ESSER funds. As these funds are set to expire in September 2024, it is unclear whether the supervisor sharing arrangement or the support of instructional coaches will continue. Currently, none of these curriculum related positions are shared with Franklin.

Franklin employs a curriculum supervisor, instructional supervisor, reading specialists, interventionists, and several instructional coaches. The district previously employed a special education coach as well. These curriculum positions are not currently shared with Delsea or Elk. As some of these positions are funded using ARP-ESSER funds too, it is questionable as to whether these curriculum support positions can be sustained beyond the current school year.

Overall, one central Delsea Regional curriculum office serving students in grades pK-12 can play a vital role in providing cohesive direction, support, and coordination for curriculum and instructional practices within the district, ultimately leading to improved student achievement and success. With the expiration of ARP-ESSER funding in September 2024, a centralized curriculum office can increase the efficiency with which it uses resources by eliminating duplicative efforts and services. These efficiencies could ultimately preserve some of the instructional support systems, such as interventionists and coaches originally made possible by federal funding in a more sustainable manner.

Professional Development

Delsea

Delsea's 2023-24 professional learning plan includes multiple goals and activities:

- Technology - includes implementation of 21st century learning standards and supporting teachers by addressing individual areas of need.
- Mentoring - coaches will mentor non-tenured teachers.
- Social and emotional wellness - includes feedback from integrated health service providers/stakeholder surveys and providing support from student assistance counselors.
- Professional learning communities - including a focus on professional growth on an individualized basis with research and evidence-based strategies through the implementation of job-embedded professional development and support for PLCs.
- Content and pedagogy professional development - in collaboration with PLCs, review standards and identify content areas that need attention.

- Cultural proficiency, equity and access - goals developed from stakeholder survey results and feedback, examine school-based practices (e.g., discipline, curriculum, classroom management) and incorporate student voice.
- Special education inclusion and access - address teacher needs and incorporate PLC feedback and stakeholder results, and have the child study team and teachers work together to identify professional development needs.

In addition, all state mandated professional development will be addressed, including addressing reading disabilities, suicide prevention, drug prevention, school safety, Title IX, and HIB. Funding will be allocated from Title II and Title IV resources, with a strong reliance on in-district expertise to deliver the staff development. The collective bargaining agreement provides for five full days of teacher directed professional development.

Elk

Elk's 2023-24 professional learning plan is similar to the Delsea plan, largely because Delsea provides the administrative support, although some of the activities are different because Elk is an elementary school district:

- Technology - educational technology coach to work with teachers to address needs.
- Mentoring - novice teachers will be supported by instructional coaches.
- Social and emotional wellness - review feedback from integrated health service providers/stakeholder surveys and review supports and accommodations.
- Professional learning communities - support individual professional growth with research and evidence-based instructional strategies through job-embedded professional development and collaborative conversations by the PLCs.
- Content and pedagogy professional development - review standards and identify content areas that need attention, with PLC discussions of implementation and curriculum equity and access.
- Cultural proficiency, equity and access - goals developed from stakeholder survey results and feedback, examine school-based practices (discipline, curriculum, classroom management), incorporate student voice, identify areas of inequity and contract with a diversity consultant.
- Special education inclusion and access - address teacher needs and incorporate PLC feedback and stakeholder results, child study team to work with teachers to address individual professional development needs.

Elk will also utilize Title II and Title IV funds and rely primarily on in-district expertise to provide professional development. The contract allows five full days of teacher directed

professional development activities, which include PLCs, articulation, personalized district directed professional development, individualized professional learning, and state mandated professional development.

Franklin

Franklin's 2023-24 professional learning plan includes several goals and activities:

- Social emotional learning and equity - continued implementation of morning meetings and midday check-ins, strengthen classroom procedures and culture for learning, use feedback to identify professional development to address specific behaviors and disadvantages, provide coaching to support teachers and school climate teams.
- Math - provide differentiated professional development to help students gain deeper conceptual understanding by analyzing student data and identifying professional development needs, providing coaches to support teachers.
- ELA - differentiated professional development to incorporate best practice instructional strategies to strengthen fluency and comprehension in literature and information texts, use data analysis to identify students needing support, and provide instructional coaches to support teachers.
- Higher order thinking and questioning - provide professional development on effective methods using the Danielson rubric, instructional coaches to support teachers, design activities and learning experiences to engage students in creative thinking, critical thinking, problem solving, and collaboration with peers.
- In addition, all state mandated professional development will be addressed using an online system that allows for tracking to ensure compliance. This training includes addressing reading disabilities, suicide prevention, drug prevention, school safety, Title IX, and HIB.

Title II and local budget funds will be used to defray the costs of staff development. The district schedules five full-days of professional development for staff.

The similarity of professional learning plans between Delsea and Elk is no accident as they share leadership. With the common administrative leadership that would accompany an expanded full-purpose regional district, administrators and supervisors would be in position to best support the growth and development of staff, thereby impacting the educational outcomes of students.

15. Assessment Results

State Assessments

Standardized assessments provide a common metric for assessing the academic performance of students across different schools or districts. We will look at several examples of New Jersey Student Learning Assessments (NJSLA) across the districts. NJSLA allows for a standardized evaluation of how well students are mastering key concepts and skills, as outlined in the NJSLs, in subjects like math, reading, science, and college readiness. The tables below indicate the percentage of students meeting or exceeding expectations in each area. Due to the impact of the COVID pandemic on schools throughout the state, statewide assessments were suspended during the spring of 2020 and 2021, hence no data is available.

TABLE 21
Percentage of Students Meeting or Exceeding NJSLA ELA Expectations, Delsea¹⁸

	Delsea 2019	State 2019	Delsea 2022	State 2022	Delsea 2023	State 2023
Grade 7	79%	63%	33%	53%	55%	56%
Grade 8	71%	63%	38%	51%	52%	55%
Grade 9	58%	55%	25%	49%	34%	52%
Grade 10	58%	58%				
Grade 11	5%	30%				

TABLE 22
Percentage of Students Meeting or Exceeding NJSLA Math Expectations, Delsea¹⁹

	Delsea 2019	State 2019	Delsea 2022	State 2022	Delsea 2023	State 2023
Grade 7	47%	42%	24%	34%	24%	34%
Grade 8	29%	29%	7%	15%	8%	18%
Algebra (MS)	84%	43%	79%	35%	46%	35%
Algebra (HS)	23%		8%		10%	
Geometry	18%	31%	32%	44%	44%	51%
Algebra II	22%	35%		53%	n/a	54%

¹⁸ Assessment data comes from the NJDOE School Performance Reports. Beginning in 2022, the NJSLA in English Language Arts was no longer administered to students in grades 10 and 11.

¹⁹ Students were only required to test at the end of their first math course in high school (Algebra I, Geometry, or Algebra II); Students enrolled in Algebra II were not required to test in 2022. n/a = data not shared to protect student privacy.

The impact of the pandemic on standardized test scores can vary depending on numerous factors, including the level of disruption to education, the availability of resources for remote learning, and the effectiveness of mitigation strategies implemented by schools and districts. The tables above indicate that standardized test scores declined in many areas following the pandemic.

Delsea's statewide assessment scores have rebounded in ELA and in some areas in mathematics, although more work must be done. In an effort to further support student learning, changes to the middle and high school programs include: (a) the introduction of the teaming concept and WIN period to provide middle school academic support; (b) the addition of a new Tier 3 support teacher in mathematics; and (c) the introduction of a streamlined Intervention and Referral Services (I&RS) process to quickly address academic concerns at all levels.

TABLE 23
Percentage of Students Meeting or Exceeding NJSLA ELA Expectations
Disaggregated by Race, Gender, Ability, and Income – Delsea

	2019	2022	2023
White	69%	32%	49%
Asian	n/a	n/a	60%
Black	47%	21%	36%
Hispanic	62%	20%	32%
Female	77%	40%	55%
Male	56%	24%	37%
Students with Disabilities	17%	11%	12%
Economic Disadvantage	54%	31%	28%

TABLE 24
Percentage of Students Meeting or Exceeding NJSLA Math Expectations
Disaggregated by Race, Gender, Ability, and Income – Delsea

	2019	2022	2023
White	38%	23%	22%
Asian	n/a	n/a	30%
Black	16%	12%	9%
Hispanic	30%	11%	12%
Female	35%	20%	17%
Male	34%	20%	21%
Students with Disabilities	7%	10%	4%
Economic Disadvantage	21%	10%	13%

Achievement gaps in standardized test scores refer to persistent disparities in academic performance between different groups of students. The gaps between white students and black and brown students are evident above both pre- and post-pandemic. These persistent gaps are also observed along lines of socioeconomic status, gender, and ability.

Addressing achievement gaps requires that schools provide targeted support and resources to underserved students and communities, encourage a focus on culturally responsive teaching practices, and implement policies that foster inclusive and equitable learning environments for all students. A more consistent program in ELA and mathematics, beginning in the younger grades, would yield more common student experiences and would potentially result in more productive professional learning communities, where teachers examine assessment data and the corresponding instructional strategies that generated those results.

As shown in Table 25, much like we have seen with other assessments, the pandemic had multifaceted effects on the number of AP test takers and their results. Many students faced challenges in accessing resources and preparing for exams during the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years, while others were impacted negatively during the years leading up to their scheduled exam, even as school returned to more normal schedules. Delsea Regional High School was no different.

TABLE 25
Advanced Placement Scores, Delsea

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Total AP Students	123	137	79	99	94
Number of AP Exams	235	260	145	192	169
AP Students with Scores of 3+	107	101	50	62	69
% of Total AP Students w/ Scores of 3+	87%	74%	63%	63%	73%

Tables 26 and 27 provide the NJSLA data for Elk and Franklin in grades 3 through 6. This data indicates no consistent differences in rates of students meeting or exceeding expectations on NJSLA ELA or Mathematics assessments during the 2019 (pre-pandemic) or 2022 and 2023 (post-pandemic) assessment administrations. During some years and at some grade levels, the percentage of students meeting or exceeding expectations was within three percentage points of each other. Of note are the NJSLA ELA rates of meeting or exceeding expectations for the Elk students in grade 6. These results consistently bested the state average.

TABLE 26
Percentage of Students Meeting or Exceeding NJSLA ELA Expectations, Elk and Franklin

	2019			2022			2023		
	Elk	Franklin	State	Elk	Franklin	State	Elk	Franklin	State
Grade 3	25%	35%	50%	28%	25%	42%	34%	21%	42%
Grade 4	46%	39%	57%	29%	37%	49%	39%	43%	51%
Grade 5	41%	42%	58%	54%	27%	50%	46%	44%	53%
Grade 6	62%	59%	56%	74%	27%	48%	72%	34%	49%

TABLE 27
Percentage of Students Meeting or Exceeding NJSLA Math Expectations, Elk and Franklin

	2019			2022			2023		
	Elk	Franklin	State	Elk	Franklin	State	Elk	Franklin	State
Grade 3	56%	37%	55%	46%	33%	45%	41%	39%	46%
Grade 4	56%	43%	51%	40%	38%	39%	53%	44%	44%
Grade 5	38%	39%	47%	20%	26%	36%	24%	33%	40%
Grade 6	37%	44%	40%	40%	21%	31%	33%	40%	34%

Further examination of mean scale scores across both districts indicates the same. There is no indication of one district having consistently higher scale scores than the other across multiple years in either subject area. In general, students are performing on par with each other.

TABLE 28
Percentage of Students Meeting or Exceeding NJSLA ELA Expectations
Disaggregated by Race, Gender, Ability, and Income – Elk and Franklin

	2019		2022		2023	
	Elk	Franklin	Elk	Franklin	Elk	Franklin
White	50.8%	48.3%	52.2%	29.7%	51%	37%
Asian	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Black	33.3%	36.2%	23.1%	21.4%	30%	20%
Hispanic	32.0%	21.4%	34.5%	22.9%	47%	33%
Multi-Racial	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	34%
Female	51.5%	53.6%	51.7%	32.5%	55.0%	39%
Male	37.2%	36.5%	39.3%	24.8%	40.0%	32%
Students with Disabilities	21.7%	13.7%	17.2%	n/a	21%	14%
Economic Disadvantage	26.7%	25.3%	34.1%	18.3%	28%	21%

TABLE 29
Percentage of Students Meeting or Exceeding NJSLA Math Expectations
Disaggregated by Race, Gender, Ability, and Income – Elk and Franklin

	2019		2022		2023	
	Elk	Franklin	Elk	Franklin	Elk	Franklin
White	53.3%	45.0%	41.6%	32.2%	39.0%	41%
Asian	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Black	20.0%	29.8%	19.2%	14.3%	23.0%	23%
Hispanic	36.0%	26.2%	20.7%	24.1%	30.0%	33%
Multi-Racial	n/a	n/a	n/a	26.3%	n/a	36%
Female	41.4%	41.4%	31.0%	26.1%	35.0%	34%
Male	50.0%	42.0%	40.5%	34.1%	37.0%	44%
Students with Disabilities	21.7%	12.2%	17.2%	10.1%	6.0%	21%
Economic Disadvantage	26.7%	22.0%	25.0%	19.8%	19.0%	24%

Beyond the existence of achievement gaps between White students and those who identify as Black and Hispanic, there were few additional patterns that emerged in terms of the magnitude of those gaps. Outside of race and ethnicity, female students performed better on the NJSLA across both districts in ELA, while male students performed better in mathematics. The performance of students with disabilities trailed all other subgroups while those students identified as economically disadvantaged also demonstrated lagging assessment scores across both districts.

Student Growth or Value-Added Data

In its simplest form, value-added data are a measure of how much student learning is growing above standard expectations over a given period of time. New Jersey uses a median student growth percentile (mSGP) model to indicate growth on statewide ELA and mathematics assessments. This mSGP is derived from each individual's student growth percentile (SGP) for ELA in grades 4 through 8 and for Mathematics in grades 4 through 7. The SGP measures a student's academic progress from one year to the next compared to other students with similar prior test scores. Members of this similar group are called a student's academic peers.

The calculation of mSGPs relies on one to two consecutive years of prior assessment results to calculate individual student growth percentiles. Due to the cancellation of the NJLSA in both 2019-20 and 2020-21, SGPs were not calculated for 2019-2020, 2020-2021, or 2021-2022. Data from the years leading up to the 2019-2020 school year are shown in Tables 30 and 31.

TABLE 30
Median Student Growth Percentiles in ELA, Elk and Franklin²⁰

	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
Elk	47th	67th	55th
Franklin	42nd	39th	43rd

TABLE 31
Median Student Growth Percentiles in Math, Elk and Franklin

	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
Elk	46th	54th	52nd
Franklin	48th	53rd	59th

The mSGP in each of the years above, with the exception of Franklin’s 2017-18 ELA results, indicate that student growth met or exceeded the NJDOE standard. Districts achieving mSGP scores between 40.0-59.5 are considered as having met the federal accountability standard.

The mSGP percentiles, while somewhat dated due to the disruption caused by the pandemic, indicate varied SGPs. While students from Elk routinely demonstrate higher levels of growth in ELA, Franklin students demonstrate slightly higher growth in mathematics.

A wide range of student growth scores provides an opportunity for district leaders, working within a regional setting, to examine the programs and instructional practices that are yielding the highest levels of student growth demonstrated in ELA and mathematics. By combining district- and building-level supervisory staff and reassigning responsibilities closely aligned to areas of expertise, a regional school district can better serve and provide targeted support to the teachers preparing students to meet or exceed academic standards and leave high school college and career ready.

Graduation

Delsea Regional High School is the only school in this study that awards high school diplomas and reports the post-high school plans of its students. Its graduation data, across 4-year and 5-year cohorts are noted in Table 32. Delsea Regional High School has higher graduation rates than the state average for each of the 4-year and 5-year cohorts from 2019-2022.

²⁰ The expected mSGP is at the 50th percentile, so scores above the 50th are better than expected and below the 50th are lower than expected.

TABLE 32
Graduation Rates, Delsea Regional High School

	2019 cohort	2020 cohort	2021 cohort	2022 cohort
4-yr graduation	n/a	92.8%	92.7%	93.3%
5-yr graduation	94.8%	93.5%	94.5%	n/a

Postsecondary Attendance

Table 33 documents the post-graduation plans for Delsea Regional High School students. Delsea's postsecondary attendance rates, as demonstrated by the percentage of graduates that have enrolled in 2-year and 4-year institutions within 16 months of graduating from high school for each of the last three years, indicates consistency from year-to-year. As the table also demonstrates, Delsea lags behind the state average in its graduates attending any institution of higher education. Of the students enrolled in post-secondary institutions, students from Delsea Regional High School are more likely to attend a 2-year institution and less likely to attend a 4-year institution than graduates statewide.

TABLE 33
Postsecondary Attendance Rates, Delsea Regional High School vs State Average

	Class of 2019	Class of 2020	Class of 2021	State Average Class of 2021
% Enrolled in 2-year Institution	30.1%	30.9%	27.9%	20.5%
% Enrolled in 4-year Institution	32.2%	31.3%	33.8%	52.8%
% Enrolled in Any Postsecondary Institution	62.3%	62.1%	61.7%	73.3%

Chronic Absenteeism

Chronic absenteeism refers to a situation where a student misses a significant number of school days, in this case defined as missing 10% or more of the school year for almost any reason excused or unexcused. This can have a profound impact on education due to missed instructional time and lost opportunities for social interaction and the development of social skills. Students who are frequently absent tend to have lower academic achievement compared to their peers who attend school regularly. Chronic absenteeism has been linked to higher

dropout rates as students who are frequently absent may become disengaged from school, leading them to eventually drop out before completing their education. This can have long-term consequences for their future opportunities and success. The rates of chronic absenteeism for the school districts involved in this study are listed in Table 34.

TABLE 34
Chronic Absentee Rates²¹

	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2021-2022
Delsea Reg HS 9-12	14.5%	14.4%	11.6%	29.7%
Delsea Reg MS 7-8	6.3%	8.0%	10.6%	28.6%
Aura School K-6 (Elk)	10.6%	14.8%	11.1%	16.2%
Janvier School K-2 (Franklin)	8.5%	7.7%	7.9%	25.7%
Main Rd School 3-4 (Franklin)	7.6%	8.3%	10.2%	10.1%
Reutter School 5-6 (Franklin)	7.9%	4.9%	8.3%	18.9%

In the years leading up to the pandemic, data indicates that in grades K-6 the Franklin schools had significantly lower instances of chronic absenteeism than those at the Aura School in Elk. Similarly, among students at the secondary level, the Delsea Regional Middle School maintained lower instances of chronic absenteeism than Delsea Regional High School. While some of this variance may be age related, it would be beneficial for the schools in the region to examine the strategies being employed by those schools with more favorable rates of chronic absenteeism.

Student Discipline

Table 35 indicates the number and percentage of students assigned to out of school suspension from each of the schools examined in the study. Table 36 indicates how many incidents of violence, vandalism, HIB, and substance offenses were reported per 100 students during the 2021-22 school year.

²¹ 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years were not reported due to the COVID pandemic. The NJDOE recommends caution in comparing the 2021-22 chronic absenteeism rates with the rates from 2020-21 and rates prior to 2019-20 as the pandemic has impacted attendance rates significantly.

TABLE 35
Out-of-School Suspensions, 2021-22

	Number of Students²² (% Students)	School Days Missed Due to Out-of-School Suspensions
Delsea Reg HS 9-12	10 (1.0%)	55 days
Delsea Reg MS 7-8	n/a	33 days
Aura School K-6 (Elk)	n/a	n/a
Janvier School K-2 (Franklin)	n/a	27 days
Main Rd School 3-4 (Franklin)	n/a	11 days
Reutter School 5-6 (Franklin)	14 (3.9%)	41 days

TABLE 36
Student Safety Data, 2021-2022

	Violence, Vandalism, HIB, and Substance Offenses (Incidents per 100 students)
Delsea Reg HS 9-12	2.19
Delsea Reg MS 7-8	3.73
Aura School K-6 (Elk)	1.80
Janvier School K-2 (Franklin)	0.37
Main Rd School 3-4 (Franklin)	0.51
Reutter School 5-6 (Franklin)	2.76

Perhaps not surprisingly, the incident rates of violence, vandalism, HIB, and substance offense tend to increase as students move through the grade levels. For comparison purposes, the rate of incidents for every 100 students enrolled across the State was 2.18 for the 2021-22 school year.

16. Special Programs

Special Education

Tables 37 and 38 provide breakdowns of special education classifications and placement for each district, respectively.

²² n/a = data not shared to protect student privacy.

TABLE 37
Special Education Classifications, 2021-2022²³

Classification	Delsea HS 9-12	Delsea MS 7-8	Franklin pK-6	Elk pK-6
Autistic	14	7	21	2
Communication Impairment	24	17	38	2
Emotional Regulation Impairment	5	1	4	2
Multiple Disabilities	31	8	8	9
Orthopedic Impairment	0	0	2	0
Other Health Impairment	30	21	23	1
Specific Learning Disability	73	31	76	29
Speech and Language	0	6	69	15
Moderate Intellectual Disability	0	0	0	1
Mild Intellectual Disability	5	0	0	0
Auditory	1	1	25	2
Preschool with Disabilities	0	0	0	7
TOTAL CLASSIFIED	183	92	266	70
% of Total Enrollment	15.7%	21.1%	18.2%	16.2%

TABLE 38
Special Education Placements, 2021-22²⁴

District	Total Classified	In District	In District %
Delsea	275	223	81.1%
Franklin	266	249	93.6%
Elk	70	63	90.0%

²³ Classification data provided by the districts, which is from a different date than that used for the demographic section. Percentage enrolled data comes from NJDOE School Performance Reports, 2021-22

²⁴ NJDOE User-Friendly Budgets 2021-22.

Delsea

Comprehensive programs are provided to meet the requirements of the special needs population. The district employs six child study team members whose purpose is to ensure that these students receive an educational program appropriate to their needs. Paraprofessionals are outsourced through Educational Staffing Solutions, a private provider.

The district has developed programs for cognitively low functioning children to keep their placements in-district in a least restrictive environment. These programs provide for life skills and transitioning while maintaining strong academic components. When an opening is available in the program, the district promotes the program throughout the region and accepts tuition students from other districts, representing a potential source of additional revenue.

The 2019-20 school year saw the reinstatement of an 18-21 year old multiply disabled (MD) program for special needs students who have graduated but wish to continue attending school. Additionally, the district offers services in both in-class support and resource settings, as well as within the MD program.

Franklin

Special education programs are an integral part of each school in Franklin. The district offers a number of programs including in-class resource (or co-teaching) and pull-out resource, as well as self-contained classrooms. The district also offers related services including counseling, speech therapy, occupational therapy, and physical therapy. Paraprofessionals are employed by the school district.

The Janvier School includes two half-day inclusive preschool classrooms of up to 15 students, which are populated both by students with special needs and their typically developing peers, selected through a lottery. Families of the typically developing students pay tuition to attend the program. The preschool program also includes two self-contained classrooms for students with more severe needs.

Janvier also offers a full day in-class resource program, including both a general education teacher and special education teacher, in kindergarten and grade 1, as well as a full day departmentalized program in grade 2, where the special education teacher follows the students. Pull-out resource services are offered for ELA and mathematics. Finally, Janvier offers a self-contained learning and language disability (LLD) classroom and a self-contained MD classroom for students in kindergarten through grade 2.

The Main Road School offers a full-day in-class resource program for students in grades 3 and 4. A special education teacher accompanies students to ELA and mathematics subjects. The school also offers self-contained MD and LLD programs.

The Reutter School offers an in-class support program in ELA, mathematics, social studies, and science. Tiered supports are offered to support students throughout the curriculum in grades 5 and 6.

Elk

Elk meets the needs of its students with special needs through a combination of in-class support and resource classes. The district does not educate its in-district students in self-contained settings, including preschool. Four of the preschool students who are classified are educated in an inclusive classroom. There exist pull-out resource room settings for students in grades 1-6 in ELA and Mathematics. Students are included in the general education environment for all other subjects. Paraprofessionals are outsourced through Educational Staffing Solutions.

Opportunities to Realize Efficiencies in Educating Students with Special Needs

Based on numbers alone, it appears efficiencies may be realized within the Franklin and Elk special education departments. For example, students with certain special needs who would benefit from an MD program in Elk are often sent to an out-of-district placement when they could be placed more effectively and efficiently in Franklin, a much easier decision if the districts were operating as one. Elk may also benefit from the availability of an in-house LLD program, depending on the number of students appropriate for such a program in any given year.

Franklin acknowledges that a program for students with autism may benefit the children of the township by allowing those students to be educated in-district in a less restrictive environment. These students are often sent out-of-district to receive their educational services.

English Language Learners (ELL)

The percentage of students considered ELL is well under 5% of the student population in all districts.²⁵ Elk is an exception, as the district saw a meaningful increase between the two school years. Overall, the ELL percentage across the region has remained consistently low with no significant difference between districts. Due to the relatively low numbers of students eligible for ELL services, there appear to be opportunities to more efficiently educate these students in grades K-6 throughout the region.

Intervention Programs

Multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) is a framework used in schools to proactively identify and assist students who need help academically, behaviorally, or socially. The three-tiered system ranges from Tier 1 universal supports, which begins with high-quality classroom programming for all students, to Tiers 2 and 3 targeted supports, which can take the form of small group or individual interventions. All identification and interventions are driven by data

²⁵ Data can be found in Table 16, p. 33.

from screenings and progress monitoring to determine which interventions are working and which need adjustment.

Delsea

- The middle school MTSS process begins with a team meeting to discuss the academic or behavioral needs of the student. The student may be supported within the academic team or may be referred to the I&RS committee. Students may be assigned counseling sessions, be placed in an additional lab class for academic support, or be assigned to a co-teaching section of the same course to support the student in the classroom setting.
- The high school MTSS process also involves determining student needs, but most support services take place during the shared period block lunch. This support period takes on the look of office hours for students who require additional academic or behavioral support.
- A student support coordinator, housed at Elk and shared with Delsea, plays a significant role in streamlining the MTSS and I&RS programs.

Franklin

- Teachers have undergone training in the New Jersey Tiered System of Supports, New Jersey's version of MTSS, through a grant with Rutgers University.
- Screeners are administered to students three times per year. These screeners are used to identify students who need additional support. Students participate in 12-week, pull-out intervention cycles with progress monitoring occurring throughout the cycle.
- Because intervention is built into the instructional process informed by screening tools, I&RS is used only for behavior, attendance, or social emotional learning challenges.
- Instructional coaches are used to build Tier 1 intervention plans that are monitored before a student progresses to Tiers 2 and 3. K-3 pull-out instruction is offered for students in tiers 2 and 3 during the regularly assigned classroom time. Intervention rooms are available for students in grades 4, 5, and 6 with instructional coaches assigned to them.

Elk

- The Aura School maintains a basic skills curriculum in reading and math, available for students who are identified as in need of additional support. Grades K-6 also have interventionists who provide push-in instructional support in ELA and mathematics. Pull-out basic skills support occurs 4-5 times per week. Interventionists are available during the WIN period for additional support.
- The Aura School uses DIBELS, the Independent Reading Level Assessment (a formative assessment from the American Reading Company), and the Fountas and Pinnell

Benchmark Assessment, as universal screeners. Results from these screeners are used to assess student reading levels and identify students in need of additional support.

- ELA intervention and support programs include Achieve3000, Read180, System44, and Fountas and Pinnell Leveled Literacy Intervention. The math intervention program is Bridges Math Intervention.
- A student support coordinator, housed at Elk and shared with Delsea, plays a significant role in streamlining the MTSS and I&RS programs.

While intervention systems are present in each of the school districts, the criteria, tools, and processes for identifying and serving students differ from school to school. Unifying around a protocol for identifying students in need of support would benefit every student in need of those services by aligning the staff training on how to accurately identify and serve those students with the program and staffing required to meet their needs.

Gifted and Talented (G&T)

Delsea

- The middle school offers a series of Honors programs for academically advanced learners, and the high school meets the needs of advanced learners through Honors and Advanced Placement programs.
- The high school also offers dual enrollment programs where students can earn college credits while still in high school. Dual enrollment programs are offered in:
 - Horticulture (Delaware Valley University and Rowan College of South Jersey)
 - Computer Aided Design and Computer Aided Engineering (Rowan College of South Jersey)
 - Financial Accounting, Chemistry I, English I Composition, Introduction to Literature, Elementary French I & II, Western Civilization II, U.S. History II, Elementary Italian I & II, Introduction to Statistics, American Federal Government, Physics II, Basic Psychology, and Elementary Spanish I & II (Camden County College)
- The high school also offers a substantial number of CTE programs which, when taken in sequence, can lead to the awarding of credits at Rowan College of South Jersey. These CTE tracks (and corresponding Rowan courses in parentheses) include:
 - Engineering and Technology (Engineering Materials)
 - Accounting Technician (Accounting)
 - Marketing/Marketing Management (Introduction to Business)
 - Radio/TV Production and Broadcasting (Video and Digital Media Production I)
 - Horticulture (Introduction to Agricultural Sciences)
 - Music Technology (Introduction to Audio Production)

- Computer Systems Networking and Telecommunications (Networking Essentials)
- Architectural Drafting and Architecture (RCSJ CADD I/AutoCAD)
- CADD Technician/Drafting and Design (CADD I/AutoCAD)
- Web Page/Digital Multimedia information Systems (Web Development HTML)
- Digital Arts (Foundations of Computer Graphic Arts)
- Computer Programming (Introduction to Programming)
- Building Construction Technology (Introduction to Surveying)

Franklin

- The schools identify students for G&T services using the same universal screeners as those used to identify students for intervention.
- Once identified for giftedness in math and/or language arts, teachers are provided with the information necessary to differentiate in the classroom during small group and independent instructional time.

Elk

- The school identifies students for G&T services using the same universal screeners as those used to identify students for intervention.
- If initial data indicates that a student is exceptionally talented, the district will administer a G&T screener. If students are identified using the G&T screener, they will receive the equivalent of individual education programs.
- Students qualifying for G&T services in grades kindergarten through three take advantage of in-class activities to differentiate and enrich their instruction, as well as STEAM-based activities.
- Students qualifying for G&T services in grades four through six participate in a thematic-based program. In this program, students engage in problem solving and creative thinking activities that enrich them academically.

Each of the districts offers what appear to be robust programs for their students identified as gifted. What appears to be lacking is any coordination of services to ensure that these students receive comparable experiences prior to seventh grade. While the students are still receiving the required services, we can imagine the outcomes that could be associated with aligning the programs across the elementary schools and syncing them with some of those advanced programs at the middle and high school, such as engineering, computer science, and digital arts.

Preschool

High-quality preschool programs offer a wealth of benefits for young children, including stronger cognitive development, particularly in language and math, enhanced social and emotional skills, and preparation for the structure and expectations they will encounter in

kindergarten. The advantages of high-quality preschool can last well into elementary school and beyond. Studies have shown children who attend these programs have better academic achievement, higher graduation rates, and even increased earning potential as adults.

Elk

- Elk has taken advantage of preschool expansion funding offered by the State. The district was the recipient of \$1.1 million in funding during the 2023-24 expansion cycle to operate a high-quality preschool program.
- The district uses Creative Curriculum as the primary learning platform.
- At its Board of Education meeting on August 16, 2023, the neighboring Pitman School District (6 miles apart) approved an agreement with Elk to lease classroom space in one of Pitman's shuttered schools for the purpose of expanding Elk's preschool program. The Aura Early Learning Center now operates out of that space.
- The Aura Early Learning Center currently serves 50% of its designated preschool universe. While the preschool expansion funding cannot be used to educate preschool disabled students, the district does educate that population beginning at age 3.

Franklin

- While Franklin is eligible for preschool expansion funding, space limitations have precluded it from applying.
- The district operates a preschool program for its students with special needs in both preschool disabled (self-contained) and inclusionary settings. Some parents opt to include their nondisabled children in the inclusionary setting on a tuition basis.

By taking advantage of the preschool expansion funding offered by the State, the Franklin and Newfield students could enjoy these benefits as the 3- and 4-year olds from Elk currently do. By working in unison to identify both the members of their preschool universe and appropriate spaces in which to house the increased number of preschool classrooms, the students, parents, and entire Delsea area community could benefit from the many advantages that emerge from a universal high-quality preschool program.

17. Extracurricular Programs

Franklin and Elk schools offer a wide array of extracurricular activities for students, especially for those in grades 5 and 6.

Franklin has four clubs for K-2 students: Garden and Nature, Storyteller, Student Leadership and LEGO Robotics. For students in grades 3 and 4, clubs include Crochet, 3rd grade Kickball, 4th Grade Kickball, 3rd grade Art, 4th Grade Art, Technology, Board Games, Chorus and Band.

Fifth and sixth grade students have many activities to choose from: Student Council, Safety Patrol, Nurse's Helpers, Library Helpers, Counselor Helpers, Service Learning Club, Drama Club, Writing Club, Technology Club, Homework Club, Field Hockey Club, Band, Chorus, Physical Fitness Club, Art Club, and Project CREATE (an art enrichment program). The Physical Fitness and Art Clubs are the two opportunities students mentioned most often and most positively in the middle school survey discussed previously.

Elk offers activities for students in grades 3-6 as follows: Chorus and Band (4th-6th), Drama (4th-6th), Student Congress (5th & 6th), Safety Patrol (6th), Student Voice (3rd-6th). There are no athletic clubs or after school activities offered at the Aura School, potentially putting these students at a disadvantage in terms of skill development as they enter middle school.

Delsea Middle School has an expansive group of clubs, activities, and athletics for its 7th and 8th graders. Clubs include Art Club, Concert Band, Chorus, Drama Guild, Student Council, Homework Clinic, International Club, Junior Athenaeum League, Junior Black Cultural League, Math Club, Student Voice, S.U.R.E. (Students United for Respect and Equality) Club, Environmental Club, Ambassadors Club, English Club, History Club, Renaissance Club, Science Club, Unified Friends of SAVE, and the World Language Club. Athletic teams include Boys Basketball, Girls Basketball, Boys Soccer, Girls Soccer, Spring Track and Field, and Field Hockey.

Aligning clubs and activities across schools has the potential to create common experiences upon which students can draw, particularly in the areas of athletics and the arts, where skill development is essential for success. Well-aligned pK-6 program would benefit the students as they approach the middle and high school years.

18. Other Resources

Technology Access

The three school districts already share a technology department. Delsea implemented a one to one device initiative beginning about ten years ago. All students in grades 7-12 have access to a device every day. Technology in Elk and Franklin is used to support and enhance learning and instruction. Each elementary student has access to a chromebook, as well as to various educational software platforms, and technology is integrated into most aspects of the curriculum.

Length of School Day

TABLE 39
Length of Instructional Day

Schools	Hours and Minutes
Delsea Reg HS 9-12	5:28
Delsea Reg MS 7-8	5:58
Aura School K-6 (Elk)	6:05
Janvier School K-2 (Franklin)	5:25
Main Rd School 3-4 (Franklin)	5:30
Reutter School 5-6 (Franklin)	5:40

The differences in instructional time that currently exist provide an opportunity to provide more similar amounts of time to every student. The difference in daily instructional time between the Aura School in Elk (6 hrs 5 min) and the Janvier School in Franklin (5 hrs 25 min) is 40 minutes per day or 120 hours over the course of a school year. This results in about 20 additional days of school time for the Elk students and is something that can be considered during the collective bargaining process.

19. Staffing

Parents and members of the local community will likely be concerned about the impact of staffing decisions on their children's education. Class sizes, subject and course offerings, and the ability of the instructional staff to meet the needs of individual students will be front of mind in discussions surrounding staffing at each of the schools. While specific enrollment projections are an important metric when it comes to scheduling the actual number of sections of classes and hiring certificated staff to teach those sections, another way to examine instructional staff needs is through student-to-teacher ratios across the districts. The ratio of students-to-teachers, students-to-support personnel, and students-to-administrators across each district, are listed below and are all near the state averages.

Under an all-purpose pK-12 regionalized district, the Board of Education will need to work with district- and building-level administrators to determine staffing needs at each elementary grade level and within each secondary subject area. Staff members may be moved between grade levels or across schools within their areas of certification to best meet the needs of the students they serve. These intra-district transfers and reassignments have the potential over time to lead to increased staffing efficiencies.

Delsea

Delsea currently employs 146 certified staff members who have demonstrated expertise in all core content areas required under the state's curricular standards as well as guidance, health, special education, and administrative personnel. There are 40 subject matter teachers at the middle school and 74 at the high school, broken down as follows:²⁶

Middle School

- 9 teachers of Mathematics
- 11 teachers of English
- 5 teachers of Science
- 4 teacher of Social Studies
- 4 teachers of Health & Physical Education
- 2 teachers of World Languages
- 1 teacher of Music
- 3 teachers of Art
- 1 teacher of Technology
- 4 special education teachers
- 2 guidance counselors
- 1 librarian (shared with HS)
- 2 child study team members
- 1 school nurse
- 1 substance abuse coordinator (shared with HS)
- 2 supervisors of instruction and 1 educational technology coach (shared with HS)
- 2 administrators - 1 principal and 1 assistant principal

The middle school is divided into 4 instructional teams (2 per grade level.) Each team has approximately 120 students among 6 teachers inclusive of each core content area, as well as an additional math and ELA teacher for co-teaching support. Teachers have a dedicated teaming period to coordinate interdisciplinary planning and review data related to student learning for students on their team.

High School

- 12 teachers of Mathematics
- 14 teachers of English
- 11 teachers of Science
- 9 teachers of Social Studies
- 8 teachers of Health & Physical Education
- 6 teachers of World Languages
- 2 teachers of Music
- 3 teachers of Visual Arts
- 1 teacher of Theatre Arts

²⁶ Staffing data was provided by each school's administration.

- 4 teachers of Technology
- 4 teachers of Business
- 1 networking/computer science teacher
- 6 special education teachers
- 2 ROTC teachers
- 5 guidance counselors
- 1 librarian (shared with MS)
- 2 child study team members
- 1 structured learning coordinator
- 2 school nurses
- 1 substance abuse coordinator (shared with MS)
- 2 supervisors of instruction and 1 educational technology coach (shared with MS)
- 3 administrators - 1 principal and 2 assistant principals

TABLE 40
Staff Experience & Retention
Delsea, 2021-22²⁷

	Delsea	State Average
Average teacher years of experience in public schools	15.8	12.5
Average teacher years of experience in district	14.4	11.3
Percentage of teachers with 4+ years in district	81.0%	76.0%
Percentage of teachers teaching out-of-field	0.8%	2.5%
One year retention of teachers	94.5%	90.7%
Average administrator years of experience in public schools	21.6	16.5
Average administrator years of experience in district	13.3	12.6
Percentage of administrators with 4+ years in district	75.0%	78.8%
One year retention of administrators	83.3%	87.4%

²⁷ NJDOE Taxpayers Guide to Education Spending, 2021-22.

TABLE 41
Student to Staff Ratios and Staff Salaries
Delsea, 2021-22²⁸

	Delsea	Peer Rank	State Median
Ratio of Students to Classroom Teachers	12.7	10	11.3
Median Classroom Teacher Salary	\$88,334	31	\$78,200
Ratio of Students to Support Personnel	93.7	7	74.9
Median Support Personnel Salary	\$90,084	30	\$81,633
Ratio of Students to Administrators	132.8	14	135.2
Median Administrator Salary	\$123,828	15	\$128,614
Ratio of Faculty to Administrators	11.9	19	12.3

Tables 40 and 41 exhibit data on Delsea’s staff experience, retention, salaries, and staff to student ratios. It is important to have experience and stability among faculty members to provide students with a sense of continuity and belonging. In every measure, Delsea staff are more experienced and have remained in the district longer than the average school in New Jersey.

Delsea is more than competitive with its peer school districts and the state as a whole in terms of staff salaries. Student-to-administrator and student-to-teacher ratios fall near and slightly above the state averages, respectively. The student-to-support personnel ratio is an area that could be examined as it does significantly exceed the state average, though there may be compelling reasons for this.

Franklin and Elk

Franklin has 138 certificated staff members, the majority of whom hold bachelor’s degrees, with just over one-third having masters’ degrees. Each of the elementary schools is led by an administrative principal. Staffing at the individual schools is as follows:

Janvier (K-2)

- 24 classroom teachers
- 1 music teacher
- 1 art teacher
- 1 physical education teacher

²⁸ NJDOE Taxpayers Guide to Education Spending, 2021-22. Ranks are among the 46 grades 7-12 or 9-12 New Jersey school districts, highest to lowest for ratios and lowest to highest for salaries.

- 1 computer literacy teacher
- 1 reading specialist
- 1 education media specialist
- 3 resource room teachers
- 5 basic skills teachers
- 2 preschool teachers
- 1 LLD teacher
- 1 school nurse
- 1 school counselor
- 1 speech/language therapist
- 1 administrative principal

Main Road (3-4)

- 16 classroom teachers
- 1 music teacher
- 1 art teacher
- 1 physical education teacher
- 1 computer literacy teacher
- 1 Spanish/ESL teacher
- 1 reading specialist
- 5 resource room teachers
- 4 basic skills teachers
- 1 LLD teacher
- 1 MD-MR teacher
- 1 speech/language therapist
- 1 school nurse
- 1 school counselor
- 1 administrative principal

Reutter (5-6)

- 21 classroom teachers
- 1 music teacher
- 1 art teacher
- 1 physical education teacher
- 1 Spanish/ESL teacher
- 1 reading specialist
- 6 resource room teachers
- 2 special education teachers
- 2 basic skills teachers
- 1 MD teacher
- 1 LLD teacher
- 1 speech/language therapist

- 1 school nurse
- 1 school counselor
- 1 administrative principal

Elk has 35 certificated staff members, with over one-third holding masters' degrees and the other nearly two-thirds with a bachelor's degree. School staffing at Aura is as follows:

- 20 classroom teachers
- 1 social studies teacher
- 1 music teacher
- 1 art teacher
- 1 physical education teacher
- 1 instructional coach
- 1 technology teacher
- 1 librarian/BSI teacher
- 3 BSI teachers
- 1 BSI/ELL teacher
- 2 special education teachers
- 1 speech therapist
- 1 school nurse
- 1 school social worker
- 3 child study team members
- 1 school psychologist

Tables 42 and 43 exhibit data on staff experience, retention, salaries and staff to student ratios in Franklin and Elk.

TABLE 42
Staff Experience & Retention
Franklin and Elk, 2021-22²⁹

	Franklin	Elk	State Average
Average teacher years of experience in public schools	10.8	17.8	12.5
Average teacher years of experience in district	8.8	16.0	11.3
Percentage of teachers with 4+ years in district	70.2%	84.4%	76.0%
Percentage of teachers out-of-field	0.8%	0.0%	2.5%
One year retention of teachers	87.5%	90.9%	90.7%
Average administrator years of experience in public schools	19.5	25.2	16.5
Average administrator years of experience in district	9.0	10.0	12.6
Percentage of administrators with 4+ years in district	75.0%	60.0%	78.8%
One year retention of administrators	87.5%	100.0%	87.4%

TABLE 43
Student to Staff Ratios and Staff Salaries
Franklin and Elk, 2021-22³⁰

	Franklin	Peer Rank	Elk	Peer Rank	State Median
Ratio of Students to Classroom Teachers	10.2	25	10.5	18	9.8
Median Classroom Teacher Salary	\$55,405	3	\$74,502	53	\$65,121
Ratio of Students to Support Personnel	69.8	24	97.1	6	64.9
Median Support Personnel Salary	\$55,555	10	\$81,684	51	\$68,957
Ratio of Students to Administrators	157	15	330	1	114
Median Administrator Salary	\$112,878	33	\$112,596	32	\$128,614
Ratio of Faculty to Administrators	18	19	35	1	13

²⁹ NJDOE Taxpayers Guide to Education Spending, 2021-22

³⁰ NJDOE Taxpayers Guide to Education Spending, 2021-22. Ranks are among the 57 K-6 New Jersey school districts, highest to lowest for ratios and lowest to highest for salaries.

Franklin has significantly lower teacher salaries than its peer school districts as well as the state as a whole. This is largely a result of Franklin staff being less experienced and having worked in the district for less time than the average school in N.J. This supports concerns raised by the Franklin central administrative team about staff turnover. Due to the structure of the salary guide and lack of significant increases until much later on the salary guide, Franklin is often a starting place for teachers who gather some experience and then move elsewhere for a significant jump in salary. This constant turnover in staff can impact the quality of teaching and learning in a school as seasoned teachers leave and are replaced by novice teachers who have not had time to fully develop their skill set.

Although administrators have less time in the district, they have more years of administrative experience than the average N.J. district. Franklin is about average on student-to-teacher and student-to-support personnel ratios, while higher on student-to-administrator ratios.

On the other hand, Elk has higher classroom teacher salaries than most of its peer school districts, as reflected in the experience of its staff. The district also has a bit higher student-to-teacher ratios. With only one administrator, Elk is very efficient although the salary is below average.

District-Level Personnel

TABLE 44
District Administrative Staffing
Delsea, Elk, and Franklin, 2021-22

	Delsea & Elk	Franklin
Superintendent	1	1
Assistant Superintendent	1	0
Business Administrator	1	1
Instructional Supervisors	3	2
Child Study Team Supervisor	1	1
Technology Director	1	0
Evaluation & Student Success Coordinators	2	0
Transportation Coordinator/Supervisor	1	1
Facilities Manager/Director	1	1

Table 44 compares the district administrative staffing in each of the three districts. District-level staff are shared between Delsea and Elk with one exception. The instructional supervisors are shared currently, but that arrangement has not been made permanent. In each district, the administrators are supported by a cadre of support staff members including administrative assistants, secretaries, and clerks.

Projected staffing needs

Projecting staff needs for consolidated districts is based on a great deal of context and requires setting some parameters. The objective should be to provide equal or improved educational services to students through optimized staffing and operations wherever possible.

This study considers it as a given that all existing schools will remain open and operate with most school-level positions remaining as they presently do. Each school is expected to retain its administrative and teaching staff as well as other essential support positions such as nurses, counselors, library media specialists, and teaching assistants. It would take largely the same staff to perform the security and custodial functions in each school as well. There are no contingency plans considered here for staff changes based on the enrollment projections presented earlier in this study. However, as years pass following any regionalization, it will be important for central and school level administrators to pay close attention to staffing needs in each school as opportunities for efficiencies may present themselves. These considerations would want to mirror best practices in school staffing and operations.

There is already some staff sharing going on between the middle and high schools. A single physical location makes this somewhat easier than traveling between more distant schools. Child study team members such as psychologists, social workers, and learning disabilities teacher consultants may continue to be assigned at the school level depending on their case management and service loads, or this may be an area for more intra-district sharing in an all-purpose regional district. As child study team members join together as one team, additional options may emerge to better match team members with students who would ultimately benefit from their specific skill sets.

With school-level staff remaining relatively constant, the opportunities for efficiency will be more available by combining district office staffs. A single unified district would need only one superintendent and one business administrator, while assistant superintendent and assistant business administrator positions would need to be considered in the new structure. One could project a reduction here from five current positions to four. Depending on the responsibilities assigned to an assistant superintendent, a similar review could be done of the instructional supervisor roles, reducing those from five to four. Newfield also has a part-time business administrator position, which would become redundant. The other administrative roles serving the child study team, technology, transportation and facilities could be combined into a single leader in each area. Clerical staff in each department could also present opportunities for restructuring in a unified pK-12 district.

20. Educational Impact

The data collection and analysis throughout this section of the study makes it evident that the boards of education, school and district leaders, teachers, and other staff members in all three districts care deeply about the success of the students under their care.

From curriculum development and implementation to staffing and supervision to professional learning and more, we were unable to identify any area where a full, grades pK-12 regionalization of the communities currently served would be detrimental to the students or to their success. In fact, we have come to the conclusion that a consolidation of the districts will only lead to additional opportunities for all students in a more effective and efficient manner.

At the start of this section, we presented three broad questions that would be addressed through data collection and analysis. We firmly believe we have sufficient data to successfully address these questions.

1. Will students in any newly proposed regional district have access to a higher quality, more equitable educational program in grades PK-12?

The team of consultants believes that students in the newly regionalized district will continue to receive the same or better access to quality education than they currently receive. The study of high performing schools is both substantial and complex, with specific findings varied. While each study includes nuances, most include the following common characteristics:³¹

- a. A clear and shared focus
- b. High standards and expectations for all students
- c. Effective school leadership
- d. High levels of collaboration and communication
- e. Curriculum, instruction and assessments aligned with state standards
- f. Frequent monitoring of learning and teaching
- g. Focused professional development
- h. Supportive learning environment
- i. High level of family and community involvement

We believe that all of the characteristics listed above are found at a high level in each of the existing districts. An expanded, full-purpose regional school district serving the students of Franklin, Elk, and Newfield will be able to identify and provide enhanced approaches to meeting each of these characteristics resulting in an even stronger educational program for students.

In the area of academic educational programs, both Elk and Franklin use research-based programs and strategies in teaching English language arts and mathematics. These strategies

³¹ Retrieved from <https://danielsongroup.org/nine-characteristics-of-high-performing-schools/>.

include universal screening, high-quality academic programs complemented by effective teaching and learning strategies, and interventions for both the struggling student and the high achiever. Each district is committed to strengthening its multi-tiered systems of support to meet the needs of individual learners.

When examining co-curricular opportunities, it is obvious that each district understands the importance of providing students with in-school and after-school activities that broaden their experiences and build the social emotional learning competencies outlined in the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) framework.³² CASEL has served as a leader in the global SEL movement and a trusted voice in the rapidly growing SEL field. Both the existing pK-6 elementary schools and regional 7-12 schools offer multiple co-curricular opportunities from clubs to organized athletics and the arts for students to grow both as individuals and as part of a team.

While standardized test results provide valuable insights into school performance, it is important to recognize that they are just one measure of educational quality and should be considered alongside other factors such as graduation rates, student engagement, teacher qualifications, and school climate. Additionally, standardized tests should be used judiciously and in conjunction with other forms of assessment to provide a comprehensive understanding of student learning and school effectiveness.

While the work being done in each individual district supports the characteristics of high-performing schools listed above, we believe that the creation of an expanded regional school district comes with additional benefits, as outlined below.

2. Will the creation of a larger, regional pK-12 district produce additional educational benefits or challenges for students and/or professionals when compared to the status quo?

The team of consultants who analyzed the educational programs believe there are several opportunities for students and staff to benefit from the reorganization of the districts into one all-purpose, grades pK-12, regional school district:

Academic Benefits

The consolidation of programs leading up to the start of grade 7 would ensure that all students have a similar foundation in reading, mathematics, and other content areas. More aligned teaching strategies, instructional content, and time spent on each academic area can help mitigate discrepancies in literacy levels and mathematics abilities among students entering middle and high school, creating a higher platform for academic success.

The opportunity for teachers would be there to build upon the skills and knowledge gained from the aligned programs in a more informed manner, limiting the time spent re-teaching or addressing gaps in understanding. Shared programs can facilitate smoother transitions

³² Retrieved from <https://casel.org/fundamentals-of-sel/what-is-the-casel-framework/>.

between grade levels and schools within a district. Teachers can align their curricula more effectively, knowing that students have been exposed to similar instructional materials and teaching methods in elementary school.

Greater opportunities exist for authentic equity and inclusivity, made possible by reducing the unnecessary replication of work across districts and redirecting resources toward ensuring that all students, regardless of background or prior educational experiences, have access to high-quality materials, instruction, and interventions. These steps help mitigate disparities in educational achievement and empower all students to succeed academically. As the districts prepare for the expiration of the federal funding that was made available during and immediately after the COVID pandemic, the continuation of much needed academic support services will be at risk, punctuating the need to streamline these services. Furthermore, comparative data on standardized test results can be used to inform education policy decisions and resource allocation within an expanded district.

Professional Learning Benefits

Through the adoption of school-based professional learning communities, there would exist expanded opportunities for collaboration between educators to identify best practices and data-driven interventions that lead to sustained improvement. Educators can learn from each other and implement strategies that have been successful in other classrooms to enhance teaching and learning.

Opportunities for improved academic planning and preparation between schools would be enhanced. By comparing the performance of their school to that of other schools within the district, with similar student bodies, educators would be able to identify trends, strengths, and areas for improvement, allowing for targeted interventions to support struggling readers and challenge advanced learners.

Communication and Collaboration Benefits

Improved collaboration and communication across schools within a single district fosters better communication between elementary and high school teachers as a shared vocabulary emerges. High school educators can more accurately gauge students' abilities and instructional needs based on their prior experiences with the shared program.

Sustainable Leadership Practices

While the use of shared services is one means of controlling financial obligations within a school district, these sharing arrangements do not come without cost. The toll on human capital can be dramatic as shared leaders and staff are frequently faced with increased obligations from accountability measures to public meeting requirements to the frequency of school and community responsibilities. These issues and others bring the sustainability of these shared services arrangements into question. Regionalization allows district leadership

and staff to focus more of their time and attention on school improvement and efficiency efforts and less on repetitive compliance-driven tasks.

3. Will any newly proposed regional district provide benefits or challenges in serving students from special populations, including those with special needs, those whose first language is not English, those who benefit from enrichment programming, and those eligible for early childhood education?

Students Identified with Special Needs

Each of the school districts involved in the study has students with special needs placed in out-of-district settings. At the time of this writing, it was reported that Delsea had 54 students placed out of district while Elk and Franklin had 8 and 16 students in out-of-district placements, respectively. Each of these placements is both restrictive and costly in nature and provides opportunities for the school districts to realize efficiencies while educating these students in-house in less restrictive environments. The leadership in Elk acknowledges that their students may benefit from a comprehensive LLD and MD program housed in-district. Leadership from Franklin noted that housing a program to serve students with autism would help the district meet the needs of that subset of its student body closer to home in a more inclusive environment. Building programs beginning at the earliest of ages to meet the needs of these students and others with similar needs has the potential to benefit the students, their classmates, and the communities by enhancing inclusivity throughout the region. Launching and maintaining such programs requires a certain number of students, which would prove more achievable in a larger, all-purpose regional district. An added benefit of initiating these programs in-house is the opportunity to attract tuition students to the district.

Students Identified as English Language Learners

The population of English language learners in each district is relatively small, ranging from less than 1% to just over 4% of the student population. With numbers this low, it can be difficult to establish a comprehensive program to address the needs of these learners. By pooling resources across an all-purpose regional district, programming for this important subset of the student population becomes more impactful and efficient. As our state and nation continue to grow more diverse, well-researched and funded programs also position the district to meet the needs of this population for years to come.

Students Identified as Gifted

Students identified as exceptionally gifted make up a small percentage of the student body in almost all school districts. The coordination of programming for students so identified can help better meet the needs of this talented group of young people by pooling resources, including staffing, to provide exemplary programs that align well on a K-12 continuum. Giftedness comes in many forms and aligning programs across an expanded regional district

offers the opportunity to better target programs to the gifts of the young people included in the program while preparing students for the opportunities that await them in the future.

Preschool Students

Currently, Elk takes advantage of the state's preschool expansion funding by leasing space from the neighboring Pitman School District. Franklin has yet to take advantage of this same funding because of space issues. Working as one all-purpose regional school district, the staff could research available space within the confines of the larger region, as addressed above, and potentially expand its preschool offerings. As per current NJDOE guidelines, school districts taking advantage of state funding must commit to hiring a master teacher, a preschool intervention and referral specialist, and a community and parent involvement specialist. By combining the resources for which each district is currently eligible and hiring one person to serve each of these roles across the expanded program, an all-purpose, regional school district could consolidate resources, freeing up funding to lease and maintain the space necessary to expand preschool to benefit students and families across the region.

FINANCE & OPERATIONS

21. State Aid & Local Tax Levies

This section of the study examines the financial implications of the proposed expansion of the limited purpose Delsea Regional into an all-purpose, grades pK-12, regional school district. As described in the Consolidation Options section in the Introduction, the two scenarios being considered are:

- Consolidating all limited-purpose districts into one all-purpose, grades pK-12, regional school district; and
- Maintaining the status quo with opportunities to better align educational programs and support services while reducing or controlling the costs of educating students in each district through the expansion of shared services.

The primary finance methodology was to analyze all internal and public financial data to draw conclusions on efficiency, determined solely by the aggregate amount of savings for the newly enlarged, all-purpose, regional school district when compared to the status quo. In addition, this narrative will rely heavily on the reader to review and draw conclusions from the financial tables to follow.

Key Assumptions

- Voters of Franklin, Elk, and Newfield would be motivated to approve a question where there exists the possibility for tax savings or only minimal tax increases that are offset by benefits to educational programs.
- Future tax levies would reflect the maximum two percent annual increase and that no banked cap would be utilized to increase levies beyond the two percent.
- Any cost reductions to the budget, including personnel outlined in this study, would be approved by the board of education of the newly enlarged, all-purpose, regional school district.
- The State of New Jersey would continue to provide state aid pursuant to the School Funding Reform Act of 2008 (SFRA), as modified by what is widely known as Senate Bill 2 (S2). Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 is the last year of the scheduled phase-in to full funding of the SFRA formula. It is anticipated that state aid would continue to be fully funded throughout the studied period extending to FY 2029.
- The equalized value of real property in each community would continue in a manner consistent with trends from FY 1999 to FY 2025.
- Existing assets among the districts would become assets of the all-purpose, regional school district.
- Shared services agreements between the constituent members of the participating districts would terminate upon consolidation.
- The operating budget for the newly formed regional school district would be an aggregate of the constituent district budgets less the cost savings outlined later in this study.
- Transportation issues including distance between schools and communities, routes, and projected costs would not be altered since the grade configurations of the constituent districts would remain as they are currently.
- All costs due to the condition of school buildings, including educational adequacy, anticipated expansion or enhancement, and maintenance do not affect the analysis since the newly enlarged all-purpose, regional school district would assume all these costs.
- S3488 (also known as P.L.2021, c.402) would allow existing collective bargaining agreements to expire at which time the board of education of the newly enlarged, all-purpose, pK-12 regional school district would need to negotiate an all-encompassing, collective bargaining agreement. This study did not make any assumptions on the value of this new collective bargaining agreement.

- The provisions of P.L.2021, c.402, which modify how state aid is calculated for a regional school district created or expanded following the completion of a feasibility study funded with an SREP grant, would apply to each participating district and to any newly enlarged regional school district.
- State aid provided pursuant to S3488's slower phase-out schedule will not count towards the state aid for the budget year in which it is applicable. This becomes a critical question in the determination of state aid through FY 2029 under the methodology prescribed in the statute.
- Debt service aid for the newly formed regional school district would be an aggregate of the constituent district debt service aid.
- The tax levies projected in the analysis are for the purposes of studying the differences between the status quo and the regionalization scenario and are not intended to serve as predictions of future tax levies and rates.
- Estimates of participating district enrollment in school years 2026 through 2029 were used in the determination of state aid and in the allocation of both equalized valuations and tax levies. The enrollment predictions rely on the conclusions produced by this study's demographer.
- The status quo scenario continues to allocate tax levy responsibility for the limited-purpose 7-12 Delsea Regional school district using the 100% equalized valuation method.
- The tax deferral utilized in the current limited-purpose 7-12 Delsea Regional school district would expire once the expanded regional is created. For the status quo scenario, the deferral is continued through FY 2029.

State Aid Calculations

Since the School Funding Reform Act (SFRA) was enacted and implemented for the 2008-09 school year, the amounts required by the SFRA funding formula for K-12 education have never been fully funded in the annual state budget. The persistent underfunding eventually led to significant updates known as the S2 legislation enacted in 2018. S2 provided a 6-year phase-in schedule in order to achieve full funding of the SFRA formula by the 2024-25 school year. At the time of writing, state aid figures for the 2024-25 school year have been distributed to school districts. The figures for school year 2024-25 do indeed provide amounts consistent with the full funding of SFRA. While state aid figures have been inherently unpredictable in the past, it is expected that in each year going forward under the current full funding paradigm, a district's state aid will equal the amount calculated by the SFRA funding formula.

Therefore, for the purpose of estimating state aid in both the status quo and regionalization scenarios outlined above, the consultants implemented a model approximating the SFRA funding

formula. State aid estimates for future years are based on the enrollment, demographic, property value, and aggregate income trends in each participating school district and municipality.

Historical trends were analyzed and used to estimate future values of both equalized valuations for each municipality and aggregate income in each participating district. Enrollments used in the model have been estimated by the study's demographer utilizing a cohort-survival methodology, wherever possible. Where required, moving average proportions and rates of change were also utilized in various sub calculations within the model.

The model first determines each participating district's adequacy budget, local fair share, and the resulting equalization aid. Three other aid categories (i.e., special education categorical aid, security categorical aid, and transportation categorical aid) are calculated and added to the equalization aid total to determine a district's total state aid, also called uncapped aid.

As part of the changes enacted under S2, a check is performed each year after the SFRA formula amounts are determined. Current year formula amounts are compared to the amount of state aid received by the district in the prior year. This comparison is called the state aid differential. A positive differential means that the district received more aid in the prior year than the formula would provide in the current year while a negative differential means that a district's prior year state aid was less than is needed for the current year.

Districts with positive state aid differentials have prior year funding reduced to match the current year formula amount and districts with negative state aid differentials have funding increased to match current year formula amounts. State aid differentials are significant to this financial impact analysis because S3488 provides a means for school districts participating in an SREP grant who have a positive state aid differential to preserve state aid that would otherwise be removed each year prior to regionalization.

The model calculates state aid differentials pursuant to the formula defined in S2 to determine eligibility for any state aid benefit a district may qualify for under S3488. This process is performed for each participating district in the status quo scenario and, where applicable, for the consolidated all-purpose regional school district in the regionalization scenario. All estimated S3488 benefits are summarized later in this section.

The figures generated from running the model represent a comprehensive estimate of state aid for fiscal years 2026 through 2029 that reflect the expectations of both the study's financial and demographic experts and that are informed by the most up-to-date data.

Tax Levy Apportionment Calculations

School taxes to be levied in the newly formed all-purpose regional school district must be estimated and a portion of the overall responsibility must be assigned to each individual constituent district. To determine the impact of regionalization on tax levies in each participating district, the amounts owed by each constituent are compared to the amounts that each constituent would pay in the status quo scenario.

A constituent's share of the tax responsibility depends on the apportionment method used by a regional school district. Under current law, regional school districts may use either the equalized property values in each community or the actual count of students attending the regional school district from each community. In either case, a community's share is the proportion of its property values or enrollment relative to the total property value or enrollment in the regional school district. The law also allows for a combination of both apportionment methods to be used where each method is weighted by a multiplier between zero and one hundred percent. For example, equalized valuations could be given a 75% weighting and enrollment 25%. Using whole percentages, this analysis results in one hundred and one apportionment scenarios ranging from equalized valuations weighted at 100% and enrollment weighted at 0% to equalized valuations weighted at 0% and enrollments weighted at 100%.

State Aid History

Tables 45 through 48 present the state aid received by each participating school district for the 2020 through 2025 school years. Data provided for the 2025 school year are official projections for the upcoming 2024-25 school year released in February 2024 by the NJDOE. Each spring following the Governor's budget address, NJDOE provides state aid schedules to each school district for the upcoming school year. In some instances, these initial figures are revised when the budget is signed into law at the end of June. In most cases however, the aid figures sent to school districts in the spring remain as is and represent the final state aid figures to be received by each school district.

TABLE 45
Franklin (K-6) State Aid, FY 2020-25

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Equalization Aid	7,628,286	7,687,826	7,674,505	6,896,111	6,640,254	6,640,254
School Choice Aid	-	-	-	-	-	-
Transportation Aid	836,192	836,192	836,192	836,192	836,192	836,192
Special Education Aid	737,647	737,647	737,647	737,647	737,647	795,294
Security Aid	177,000	177,000	177,000	177,000	177,000	177,000
Adjustment Aid	-	-	-	-	-	-
FY K-12 Aid	9,379,125	9,438,665	9,425,344	8,646,950	8,391,093	8,448,740
Prior FY K-12 Aid	9,274,364	9,379,125	9,438,665	9,425,344	8,646,950	8,391,093
YOY \$ Variance	104,761	59,540	-13,321	-778,394	-255,857	57,647
YOY % Variance	1.13%	0.63%	-0.14%	-8.26%	-2.96%	0.69%

Examining the six year period from 2020 to 2025, Franklin has experienced annual state aid decreases in all years but 2021 and 2025. Equalization aid, the largest category of state aid received by Franklin, has declined 13% over the period. In 2025, special education categorical

aid increased to \$795,000 from \$737,000 and marks the first state aid increase since the slight increase to equalization aid in 2021.

The steady decreasing trend is due to several factors. First, K-6 enrollment has declined by approximately 100 students over the period. Second, since 2020 there have been sharp decreases in the percentage of economically disadvantaged students attending Franklin schools. These students receive extra weighting in the funding formula so when the percentage falls, formula aid declines as well. Third, Franklin's property values and aggregate personal incomes increased over the period. When a school district becomes more wealthy in the eyes of SFRA's local fair share formula, it translates to reductions in state aid.

TABLE 46
Elk (K-6) State Aid, FY 2020-25

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Equalization Aid	1,989,915	1,921,984	1,866,269	1,731,876	1,761,709	1,559,623
School Choice Aid	143,759	152,456	163,970	172,235	199,215	221,027
Transportation Aid	148,655	148,655	148,655	148,655	148,655	148,655
Special Education Aid	195,091	195,091	195,091	195,091	287,900	287,900
Security Aid	66,201	66,201	66,201	66,201	66,201	66,201
Adjustment Aid	-	-	-	-	-	-
FY K-12 Aid	2,543,621	2,484,387	2,440,186	2,314,058	2,463,680	2,283,406
Prior FY K-12 Aid	2,551,049	2,543,621	2,484,387	2,440,186	2,314,058	2,463,680
YOY \$ Variance	-7,428	-59,234	-44,201	-126,128	149,622	-180,274
YOY % Variance	-0.29%	-2.33%	-1.78%	-5.17%	6.47%	-7.32%

Elk's state aid has fluctuated over the six year period. The district experienced declines in aid in five of the six years, and total state aid will be about 10% lower in 2025 than in the 2020 school year. As was the case in Franklin, the reductions in state aid were delivered through equalization aid. Special education categorical aid has increased by nearly 50% from 2020 levels.

Over the six year period, Elk's adequacy budget increased by roughly \$1 million due to enrollment and inflationary impacts on the SFRA formula variables. Despite the increasing adequacy budget, state aid was down due to property values and aggregate personal incomes rising even faster than adequacy.

TABLE 47
Newfield (K-12) State Aid, FY 2020-25

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Equalization Aid	1,277,997	1,369,744	1,734,860	2,208,894	1,996,704	1,269,260
School Choice Aid	-	-	-	-	-	-
Transportation Aid	132,194	132,194	132,194	132,194	132,194	132,194
Special Education Aid	130,013	130,013	130,013	130,013	130,013	130,013
Security Aid	43,725	43,725	43,725	43,725	43,725	43,725
Adjustment Aid	-	-	-	-	-	-
FY K-12 Aid	1,583,929	1,675,676	2,040,792	2,514,826	2,302,636	1,575,192
Prior FY K-12 Aid	1,504,442	1,583,929	1,675,676	2,040,792	2,514,826	2,302,636
YOY \$ Variance	79,487	91,747	365,116	474,034	-212,190	-727,444
YOY % Variance	5.28%	5.79%	21.79%	23.23%	-8.44%	-31.59%

Newfield has seen state aid increase and then decline over the six year period. The increases in state aid from 2021 through 2023 were driven by stable enrollment in those years and inflationary increases to SFRA formula variables. The enrollment trend reversed in 2024 and 2025 as enrollment declined to its lowest point since 2020 leading to a reduced adequacy budget. Over the same period, local fair share increased as property and income wealth factors increased. All aid reductions have come in the form of equalization aid.

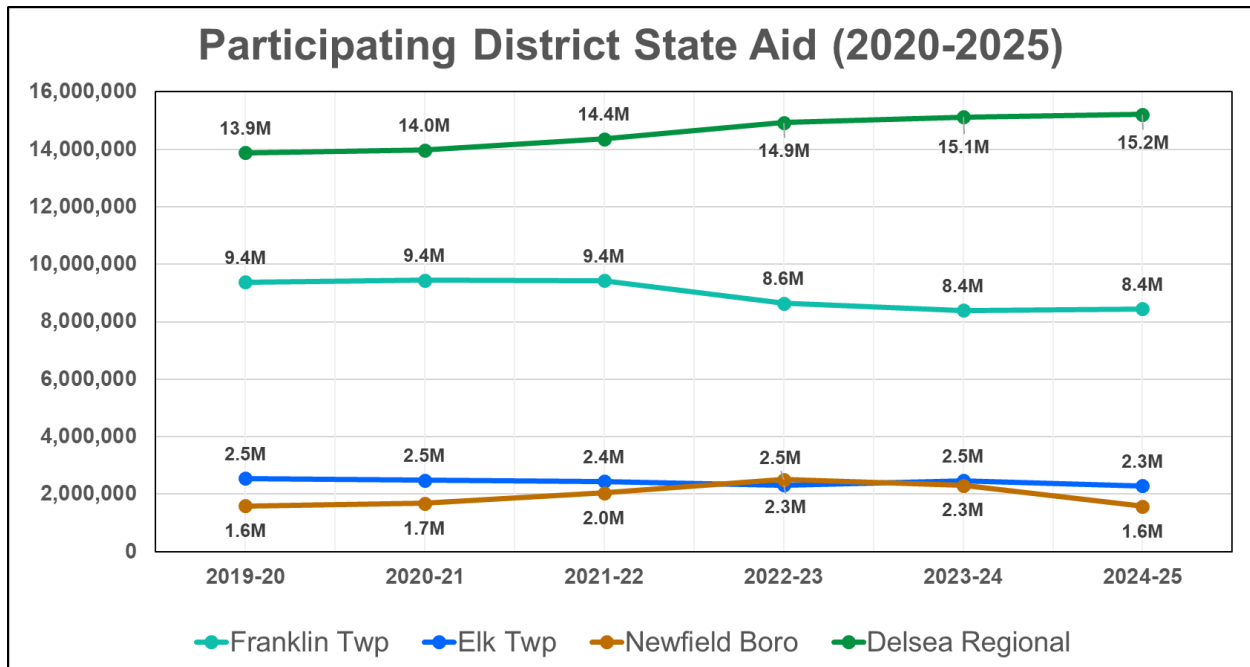
TABLE 48
Delsea (7-12) State Aid, FY 2020-25

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Equalization Aid	12,014,766	12,014,766	12,014,766	12,044,423	12,044,423	12,044,423
School Choice Aid	439,475	478,667	487,397	515,877	520,458	608,109
Transportation Aid	239,518	239,518	239,518	561,312	668,879	668,879
Special Education Aid	956,261	1,005,050	1,382,314	1,540,790	1,624,387	1,625,743
Security Aid	231,243	231,243	231,243	260,074	260,074	260,074
Adjustment Aid	-	-	-	-	-	-
FY K-12 Aid	13,881,263	13,969,244	14,355,238	14,922,476	15,118,221	15,207,228
Prior FY K-12 Aid	14,016,426	13,881,263	13,969,244	14,355,238	14,922,476	15,118,221
YOY \$ Variance	-135,163	87,981	385,994	567,238	195,745	89,007
YOY % Variance	-0.96%	0.63%	2.76%	3.95%	1.31%	0.59%

State aid for Delsea increased each year over the six year period as increasing enrollment combined with inflationary pressures significantly increased Delsea's adequacy budget. Over the

same period, massive investments in K-12 formula aid were included in the annual state budget which allowed for underaided districts to receive increased state aid. These increases in aid to Delsea were phased-in over the full six year period resulting in a 2025 state aid level that is consistent with fully funded SFRA amounts.

CHART 4
Total State Aid, FY 2020-25



State Aid Projections for the Status Quo

This subsection presents the model’s estimated state aid for each participating district from 2026 through 2029. The analysis excludes school choice aid from consideration and instead focuses on the SFRA formula aid categories of equalization aid, special education categorical aid, security categorical aid and transportation categorical aid. Adjustment aid has also been removed as it becomes completely phased out beginning in 2026.

2024-25 will mark the first school year in which the state will fully fund the SFRA formula amounts in the state budget. In this new paradigm, a district’s state aid in each future year will be the amount produced by the SFRA formula. This differs significantly from how state aid was determined from 2020 to 2025. Under the old method, instead of receiving the full amount of aid determined by the SFRA formula, a district would receive or lose a pro-rata share of the difference between the pre-budget year aid and budget year formula aid. The exact pro-rata share followed a phase in schedule outlined in S2.

Now that the phase-in is complete, the SFRA formula will determine how state aid is allocated to each school district. This will create winners and losers each year as enrollment, demographics,

property wealth and personal income change. Tables 49 through 52 summarize the projections for status quo state aid in the same format as the historical tables presented above.

TABLE 49
Franklin (K-6) Projected State Aid, FY 2025-29

	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029
Equalization Aid	6,640,254	5,813,140	5,308,349	5,737,407	5,904,311
Transportation Aid	836,192	841,749	812,988	825,639	822,987
Special Education Aid	795,294	1,378,833	1,381,303	1,439,302	1,460,110
Security Aid	177,000	161,763	156,236	158,667	158,157
K-12 Aid	8,448,740	8,195,484	7,658,876	8,161,014	8,345,565
Prior Year K-12 Aid	8,391,093	8,448,740	8,195,484	7,658,876	8,161,014
K-12 Aid Difference	57,647	-253,256	-536,608	502,139	184,551
Aid Percent Difference	0.69%	-3.00%	-6.55%	6.56%	2.26%

In the status quo scenario where Franklin continues as a K-6 district, state aid is projected to decline in 2026 and 2027, as short-term projected enrollment declines put downward pressure on Franklin's adequacy budget. In 2028, enrollment rises and stabilizes as SFRA formula variables continue to adjust upwards for inflation, leading to increased state aid.

TABLE 50
Elk (K-6) Projected State Aid, FY 2025-29

	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029
Equalization Aid	1,559,623	1,676,458	1,673,450	2,154,246	2,248,548
Transportation Aid	148,655	184,323	183,665	200,355	203,569
Special Education Aid	287,900	390,792	396,839	445,871	462,767
Security Aid	66,201	64,005	63,776	69,572	70,688
K-12 Aid	2,062,379	2,315,578	2,317,730	2,870,044	2,985,572
Prior Year K-12 Aid	2,264,465	2,062,379	2,315,578	2,317,730	2,870,044
K-12 Aid Difference	-202,086	253,199	2,152	552,314	115,528
Aid Percent Difference	-8.92%	12.28%	0.09%	23.83%	4.03%

From 2026-29, Elk is projected to experience increasing state aid driven by projected enrollment increases in the elementary grade levels combined with inflationary increases to key SFRA formula variables. Increases to property values and aggregate personal incomes in the district are also projected, however, the impact of these increases does not keep pace with the concurrent increases to the adequacy budget, resulting in net state aid increases.

TABLE 51
Newfield (K-12) Projected State Aid, FY 2025-29

	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029
Equalization Aid	1,269,260	863,728	931,204	1,387,839	1,392,056
Transportation Aid	132,194	154,085	156,266	172,321	172,129
Special Education Aid	130,013	228,577	236,577	265,958	271,277
Security Aid	43,725	25,882	26,248	28,945	28,913
K-12 Aid	1,575,192	1,272,271	1,350,295	1,855,063	1,864,375
Prior Year K-12 Aid	2,302,636	1,575,192	1,272,271	1,350,295	1,855,063
K-12 Aid Difference	-727,444	-302,921	78,024	504,768	9,312
Aid Percent Difference	-31.59%	-19.23%	6.13%	37.38%	0.50%

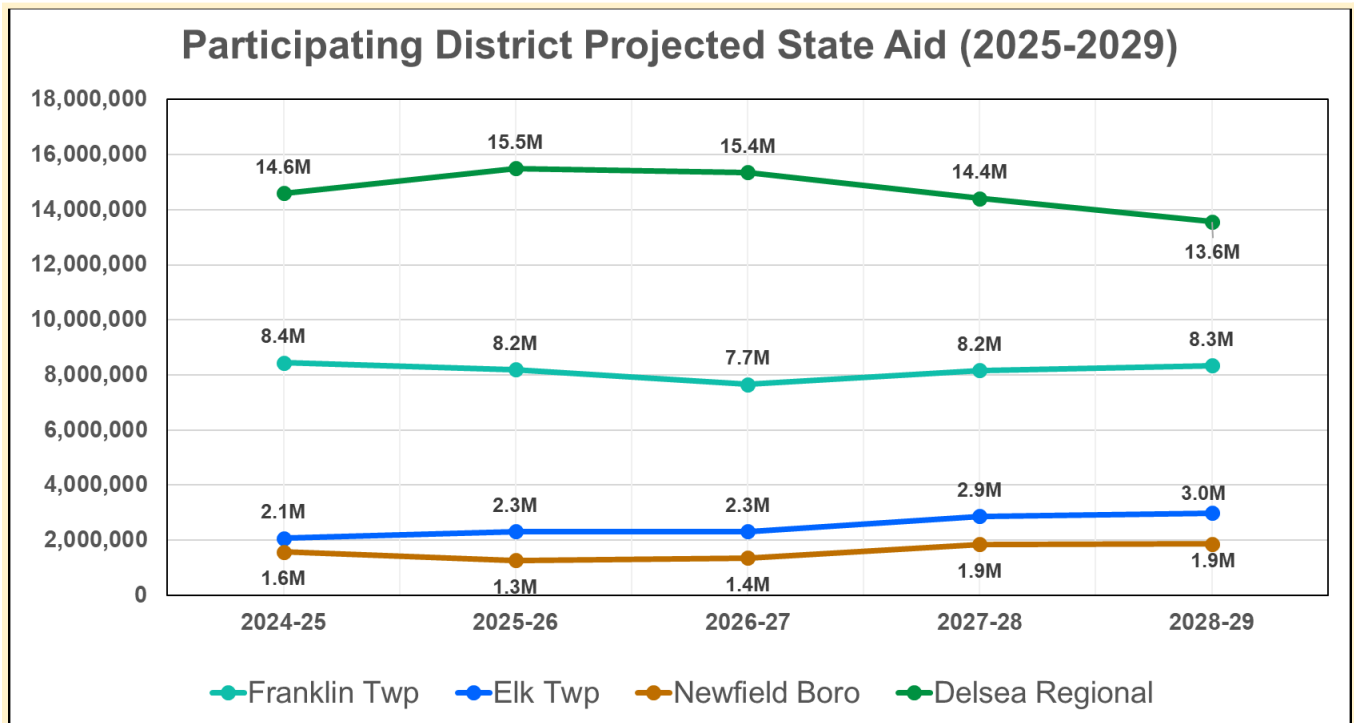
State aid to Newfield will increase over the period driven by projected enrollment increases in the shorter term that begin to impact state aid in earnest in 2028. Over the same period, property values in Newfield are projected to increase, peak, and begin to decline while aggregate personal incomes are projected to increase steadily. The state aid increase shown for fiscal year 2028 is the result of a stable local fair share and an increased adequacy budget.

TABLE 52
Delsea Regional (7-12) Projected State Aid, FY 2025-29

	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029
Equalization Aid	12,044,423	12,217,601	12,047,724	11,202,034	10,427,769
Transportation Aid	668,879	1,195,219	1,178,355	1,130,256	1,093,085
Special Education Aid	1,625,743	1,858,106	1,892,614	1,861,706	1,835,110
Security Aid	260,074	234,963	231,647	222,192	214,884
K-12 Aid	14,599,119	15,505,889	15,350,341	14,416,188	13,570,848
Prior Year K-12 Aid	14,597,763	14,599,119	15,505,889	15,350,341	14,416,188
K-12 Aid Difference	1,356	906,770	-155,548	-934,152	-845,341
Aid Percent Difference	0.01%	6.21%	-1.00%	-6.09%	-5.86%

Delsea is projected to experience declining enrollment which results in a slightly declining state aid from 2026 through 2029. The declining enrollment is projected to be accompanied by increases in the portion of property values and aggregate personal incomes attributed to the regional school district.

CHART 5
Projected State Aid, FY 2025-29



State Aid Projections for an Expanded All-Purpose Regional School District

Regional school districts created following the conclusion of an SREP grant are governed by a new set of rules signed into law in 2022.³³ The rules prescribe that state aid in a regional school district each year through the 2029 school year will be the greater of:

- the amount of state school aid that the newly enlarged regional school district would receive as a regional school district; or
- the sum of the amount of state school aid received by each school district constituting the newly enlarged regional school district prior to the enlargement of such regional school district.

Having already presented estimated state aid for each participating district in the prior section, this section presents the comparable state aid figures for a newly enlarged, all-purpose, regional school district. As a newly enlarged regional, Franklin's and Elk's K-6 student counts, demographics, property values and aggregate personal incomes all shift into the regional under the SFRA funding formula. Additionally, Newfield, which currently pays tuition to Franklin and Delsea pursuant to established send-receive agreements, will become a constituent district of the newly formed regional, and therefore, will also have their enrollment, property values, and

³³ P.L.2021, c.402 (also known as S3488)

incomes counted in the regional district. The existing limited-purpose Delsea Regional state aid factors will all also be included in the expanded all-purpose regional district.

Given that all four districts currently, and will continue to, educate the same students in the expanded regional scenario, state aid in the regional will be roughly equivalent to the sum of the state aid received by each of the four participating districts. There are no major differences with how the regional district's aid would be treated by SFRA versus each individual district.

Table 53 presents the projected state aid for the all-purpose regional. Readers will observe that these amounts are very close to the amounts generated by summing the estimated aid in each category for each participating district. The small difference is due to decimal place precision of several of the percentages applied within the model and the impact those percentages have when using larger totals.

TABLE 53
All-Purpose Regional (K-12) Projected State Aid, FY 2026-29

	2026	2027	2028	2029
Equalization Aid	20,500,096	19,872,718	20,523,858	20,045,839
Transportation Aid	2,375,376	2,331,275	2,328,571	2,291,771
Special Education Aid	3,856,307	3,907,331	4,012,837	4,029,264
Security Aid	486,612	477,908	479,375	472,642
K-12 Aid	27,218,391	26,589,232	27,344,641	26,839,515
Sum of Constituent Districts ³⁴	27,289,221	26,677,241	27,302,309	26,766,360
Difference	-70,831	-88,009	42,332	73,155

Considering the fiscal year 2025 total participating district state aid of \$26,685,430 (not shown in the table), state aid for the all-purpose regional school district is projected to increase by \$533,000 in 2026 relative to 2025, decline slightly in 2027, increase again in 2028, and decline again in 2029. The stepped trend observed in these projections is interesting and is caused by the underlying total enrollment trends and the compound annual growth rate projection methodology utilized within the SFRA formula.

As mentioned earlier in this analysis, language in S3488 creates a check that must be performed once state aid is determined for the regional school district. To recap, state aid in a newly enlarged regional school district will be the greater of the amount of state aid that would be received as a regional school district; or the total amount of state aid received by each participating district constituting the newly created regional school district *prior to the creation of such regional school district*.

³⁴ From Tables 49, 50, 51, and 52

The italicized section is instructive for the check that will be performed. State aid from 2025 must be compared to the state aid amount calculated by the SFRA formula in each year from 2026 through 2029. If the state aid total from 2025 prior to regionalization is higher, then the all-purpose regional district will receive that total. If the aid that would be provided through SFRA is higher, the all-purpose regional district will receive that total. Table 54 shows the pertinent figures for the “greater of” check for the regionalization scenario analyzed in this study.

TABLE 54
Determination of Applicable State Aid in the All-Purpose Regional District, FY 2026-29

	2026	2027	2028	2029
(a) Uncapped Aid as Expanded Regional	27,218,391	26,589,232	27,344,641	26,839,515
(b) Sum of Constituent Uncapped Aid in FY25	26,685,430	26,685,430	26,685,430	26,685,430
Difference between (a) and (b)	532,961	-96,198	659,211	154,085
Applicable Scenario	(a)	(b)	(a)	(a)
Regional District Total State Aid	27,218,391	26,685,430	27,344,641	26,839,515

In 2026, 2028, and 2029, state aid calculated by SFRA for the enlarged regional district is projected to be higher than the sum of constituent district aid in 2025, the year prior to a potential regionalization. This results in state aid being applied according to scenario (a) under S3488: the uncapped aid determined as an expanded regional district. This finding aligns logically with the observed trends in the underlying variables. In 2027, the short term impact of an increased local fair share rising faster than the corresponding increase in adequacy results in a decline in state aid for the expanded regional district. The decline is such that in absolute terms, the expanded regional district may receive less in 2027 than was received in 2025. This would result in the regional district receiving the aid amount from 2025 instead for that year, producing a benefit to regionalization estimated at \$96,000.

Another provision in S3488, meant to incentivize school districts to study the feasibility of regionalizing, allows for a participating district that has a positive state aid differential to elect to have its state aid reduced at a slower rate than it otherwise would be under SFRA.

Under the full funding paradigm where the full amount of aid required by SFRA is provided for in the annual state budget, a school district’s aid will be whatever amount is produced by the formula in a given budget year. For districts that would see funding reduced because prior year aid was higher than formula aid in the current year, S3488 allows a district to slow the reduction by prorating the decrease. For example, in the case of a district whose uncapped aid is determined to be \$800,000 for the current year that had received \$900,000 in the prior year and is, therefore, overaided by \$100,000; the district would see aid reduced by the full \$100,000 to bring state aid in line with the formula. S3488 would allow for the district to slow the reduction by the applicable percentage for the given budget year. The percentages outlined in S3488 are as follows:

- (1) 30 percent in the 2021-2022 school year;
- (2) 37 percent in the 2022-2023 school year;
- (3) 46 percent in the 2023-2024 school year;
- (4) 55 percent in the 2024-2025 school year;
- (5) 65.5 percent in the 2025-2026 school year;
- (6) 76 percent in the 2026-2027 school year;
- (7) 88 percent in the 2027-2028 school year; and
- (8) 100 percent in the 2028-2029 school year.

Returning to the example, if the current budget year was 2023-2024, instead of state aid declining by \$100,000, it would instead decline by \$46,000 ($\$100,000 \times .46$). This would leave the school district in this example with \$54,000 more than it otherwise would have received in state aid.

It must be noted that, to date, no district has yet been eligible for and received the state aid benefit described above. S3488 was enacted in early 2022 and the SREP grant program within DCA has only recently begun awarding grants in 2023. While prescriptive in the law, the benefits presented in this study rely on the interpretation of the financial experts conducting the analysis as the NJ DOE has yet to release guidance on how this provision in S3488 will be applied.

All efforts have been made to determine if any of the participating districts are eligible and to determine the amount of the benefit that would be applied if the district was to make the election to receive the benefit pursuant to the law. To be eligible, a district:

1. must be participating district in an SREP grant;
2. must have a positive state aid differential; and
3. must be within two years of the SREP grant application approval date.

Elk, Franklin, Newfield, and Delsea are all participating districts under the current grant awarded in September of 2023. Therefore, criteria one and three are satisfied. To determine whether or not each district has a positive state aid differential and subsequently, the amount of the resulting benefit, actual state aid figures for the 2024 and 2025 school years were examined. The two school years would be, presumably, the two years the participating districts are eligible prior to an assumed regionalization occurring in 2026.

TABLE 55
Calculated State Aid Differentials, FY 2024 & 2025

		2024	2025
Franklin	Uncapped Aid	8,310,295	8,448,744
	Prebudget Year Aid	8,646,950	8,391,093
	State Aid Differential	336,655	-57,651
	Differential Description	Positive	Negative
Elk	Uncapped Aid	2,303,200	2,062,379
	Prebudget Year Aid	2,141,823	2,264,465
	State Aid Differential	-161,377	202,086
	Differential Description	Negative	Positive
Newfield	Uncapped Aid	2,235,629	1,575,193
	Prebudget Year Aid	2,514,826	2,302,636
	State Aid Differential	279,197	727,443
	Differential Description	Positive	Positive
Delsea	Uncapped Aid	14,658,136	14,599,119
	Prebudget Year Aid	14,406,599	14,597,763
	State Aid Differential	-251,537	-1,356
	Differential Description	Negative	Negative

Table 55 shows the calculated state aid differentials for each of the participating districts. Franklin, Elk, and Newfield all have positive state aid differentials in either 2024, 2025, or both years. Franklin would be eligible for a benefit for the current 2023-24 school year, Elk would be eligible for a benefit for the upcoming 2024-25 school year, and Newfield would be eligible in both school years examined.

To calculate the potential state aid benefit, the amount of the differential is multiplied by the applicable percentage in the schedule outlined in S3488. Table 56 summarizes the calculated potential state benefits.

TABLE 56
Calculated State Aid Benefit Due to S3488, FY 2024 & 2025

		2024	2025
Franklin	Differential	336,655	Not Eligible
	S3488 Phase-out Percentage	46%	
	Revised Reduction in Aid	154,861	
	Actual Reduction in Aid	255,858	
	Net Benefit	+100,996	
Elk	Differential	Not Eligible	202,086
	S3488 Phase-out Percentage		55%
	Revised Reduction in Aid		111,147
	Actual Reduction in Aid		202,086
	Net Benefit		+90,939
Newfield	Differential	279,197	727,443
	S3488 Phase-out Percentage	46%	55%
	Revised Reduction in Aid	128,431	400,094
	Actual Reduction in Aid	212,190	727,443
	Net Benefit	+83,759	+327,350

Franklin would be eligible to recover \$100,996 of state aid that has been removed for the current 2023-24 school year. In 2025, Franklin's state aid differential becomes negative and therefore disqualifies them from a benefit for that year. Elk would be eligible to recover a portion of its projected aid reduction for the upcoming 2024-25 school year in the amount of \$90,939. Newfield is eligible in both years and could recover a total of \$411,109 in state aid.

Because this potential benefit to studying regionalization is new and aid has never been received by any district, there are inherent uncertainties in anticipating how NJDOE will award and distribute the recovered state aid. First, it is being referred to here as "recovered aid" because the benefit represents a reduction of an already existing reduction in aid. Relative to the prior year, the district will still be losing state aid, just less than the amount it was currently told it would lose. Second, the law indicates that the district must proactively elect to receive aid pursuant to this calculation. Third, it is unclear how any state aid provided through this mechanism will be considered in other parts of the SFRA formula and S3488's "greater of" check detailed earlier in this section. For this analysis, it was assumed that any aid received through this mechanism would be considered a special appropriation and would not be considered state aid under any of the existing formulas. If this assumption proves to be incorrect, and the aid received is indeed considered by the other existing formulas, it may impact the way state aid is determined in an enlarged all-purpose regional district, possibly resulting in more state aid than was estimated.

Tax Levy Apportionment

In a regional school district, each constituent municipality is responsible for the financial support of the district. In order to determine each municipality's share of the district's total costs, several methods may be used. Current law provides three apportionment methods. Taxes may be apportioned on the basis of:

1. the portion each municipality's equalized valuation allocated to the regional district;
2. the number of students enrolled in the regional district from each municipality; or
3. any combination of apportionment based on equalized valuations and enrollment.

Constituent districts have long contemplated the fairness of tax apportionment methods used in their regional school districts. Generally speaking, methods that weight equalized valuation heavier favor districts with lower property wealth while apportionment methods that weigh pupil counts heavier favor higher property wealth districts. The idea of using equalized values is to share the costs of the regional school district amongst the constituent municipalities in proportion to each municipality's ability to pay, with ability to pay defined by the municipalities property wealth. The idea behind using enrollment also seems sensible as it seeks to shift more of the regional district's costs towards the constituent districts using the largest share of its services. The debate between which apportionment method to use has been a consistent theme of school district regionalization, evidenced by amendments made to the original school district regionalization law dating back to 1953.

The existing limited-purpose Delsea Regional district currently apportions tax levy based solely on the equalized valuations of the two constituent school districts, Elk and Franklin.³⁵ The actual student counts attending the regional school district are not considered when apportioning taxes.

Since both Franklin and Elk operate K-6 elementary districts, the total equalized valuations of each municipality must be split between the K-6 school district and the regional school district in order to determine state aid for the elementary district separately from the regional district and in order to apportion the regional district's tax levy. For example, Franklin's total equalized property values in October of 2020 were \$1.36 billion. Part of the \$1.36 billion must be attributed to Franklin's K-6 elementary school district and part to the regional school district serving grades 7-12. This requires a second apportionment calculation which is easily confused with the apportionment of tax levies. Apportionment in this context, however, is of the township's total equalized valuation and in this calculation, actual elementary and regional student counts are used pursuant to existing law.

To analyze the potential impacts of creating an enlarged all-purpose regional district on the tax responsibilities of each community, the consultants utilized historical equalized valuation, net valuation taxable, and other property value trends dating back 25 years in order to estimate future equalized valuations in each municipality.

³⁵ Newfield is not a constituent district of the limited-purpose regional district and instead has a send-receive agreement in place.

In the status quo scenario, these projected equalized valuations were then split between the elementary and secondary school districts within each community and then ultimately used to apportion the limited-purpose Delsea Regional district's projected tax levy in each year. In the regionalization scenario, the projected equalized valuations were used to determine the apportionment of the all-purpose regional district's total tax levy.

Tables 57 and 58 contain the historical and projected equalized valuations for each municipality. Data for each year represent the equalized valuations used in state aid and tax apportionment calculations. For example, the equalized valuations listed for 2025 are from the 2023-24 fiscal year.

TABLE 57
Historical Equalized Valuations, FY 2020-25

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Franklin Township	1,320,476,404	1,332,420,861	1,363,159,865	1,453,209,917	1,647,080,898	1,852,696,189
Elk Township	388,167,434	392,054,796	406,782,937	437,406,016	475,493,248	539,086,768
Newfield Borough	130,319,880	133,941,466	136,156,580	147,815,085	166,719,965	187,889,814

TABLE 58
Projected Equalized Valuations, FY 2026-29

	2026	2027	2028	2029
Franklin Township	2,062,162,533	2,155,289,023	2,164,008,448	2,103,175,156
Elk Township	561,010,030	570,746,254	570,501,535	570,550,919
Newfield Borough	194,439,698	201,054,645	195,935,494	194,925,708

Equalized valuations in each constituent municipality have been rising steadily over the last decade. The projections factor in longer-term cyclical trends informed by historical data dating back to 1999. Based on those trends, equalized values were forecast for 2026 through 2029. The predicted equalized valuations are expected to rise in each municipality and peak at points over the next several years. In Franklin, the model predicts valuations will peak and begin declining in 2028. In Elk, valuations peak in 2027 and begin to ease back down. In Newfield, valuations peak in 2027 and then begin to decline for subsequent years.

Generally, the model is anticipating the upwards trend observed over the last decade to come to a conclusion and begin to reverse for some period of time. The model also analyzed broader statewide aggregate equalized valuations and found consistent cyclical trends, lending consistency and validity to the individual predictions for each municipality.

Using these predictions, equalized valuations within each municipality were first apportioned to each school district configuration. Tables 59 and 60 show the breakdown of how equalized valuations have been split in each community and how they are expected to be split in future years under the status quo scenario if the limited-purpose regional district remains unchanged.

As mentioned earlier, equalized valuations are apportioned according to the student counts enrolled in each school district configuration. That is, the percentage of students attending grades K-6 will determine the total amount of the municipality's equalized value attributed to the K-6 district while the percentage of students attending the regional school district from the municipality will determine how much of the total equalized value is attributed to the regional district.

TABLE 59
Equalized Valuations Attributed to Each School District, FY 2020-25³⁶

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Franklin Total	1,320,476,404	1,332,420,861	1,363,159,865	1,453,209,917	1,647,080,898	1,852,696,189
K-6 Portion	689,816,873	693,791,542	691,531,000	711,782,217	819,587,455	910,970,716
7-12 Portion	630,659,531	638,629,319	671,628,865	741,427,700	827,493,443	941,725,473
Elk Total	388,167,434	392,054,796	406,782,937	437,406,016	475,493,248	539,086,768
K-6 Portion	194,238,984	181,756,603	200,543,988	218,309,343	251,298,182	294,557,010
7-12 Portion	193,928,450	210,298,193	206,238,949	219,096,673	224,195,066	244,529,758

TABLE 60
Equalized Valuations Attributed to Each School District, Status Quo, FY 2026-29

	2026	2027	2028	2029
Franklin Total	2,062,162,533	2,155,289,023	2,164,008,448	2,103,175,156
K-6 Portion	1,022,007,751	1,063,850,662	1,090,227,456	1,064,627,264
7-12 Portion	1,040,154,781	1,091,438,361	1,073,780,992	1,038,547,892
Elk Total	561,010,030	570,746,254	570,501,535	570,550,919
K-6 Portion	309,004,324	322,985,305	338,478,561	339,021,356
7-12 Portion	252,005,705	247,760,949	232,022,974	231,529,563

In 2025, 49% of Franklin's total equalized valuation is attributed to its elementary district while the other 51% was designated for the regional district. In Elk, the split is 55% to 45% to the elementary district and regional district, respectively. Newfield is not a current constituent of the regional district and therefore does not require apportionment of its total municipal equalized value.

The figures presented show that in Franklin, under the status quo, the apportionment of equalized valuation between the elementary and secondary district will remain roughly unchanged from their current proportions. In Elk, the proportion attributed to the elementary district is increasing, rising from 55% in 2025 to 59% by 2029.

³⁶ Newfield is not a constituent of the existing limited-purpose Delsea Regional district, and therefore does not require apportionment of its equalized valuation in prior years.

The next step is to calculate the total equalized valuation attributed to Delsea from both municipalities and to examine the share of total equalized valuation contributed by each community. Tables 61 and 62 present these figures historically and estimated through 2029.

TABLE 61
Allocation of Equalized Value to Delsea Regional, FY 2020-25

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Delsea Total	824,587,981	848,927,511	877,867,815	960,524,373	1,051,688,510	1,186,255,231
Franklin Portion	630,659,531	638,629,319	671,628,865	741,427,700	827,493,443	941,725,473
Elk Portion	193,928,450	210,298,193	206,238,949	219,096,673	224,195,066	244,529,758
Franklin %	76.5%	75.2%	76.5%	77.2%	78.7%	79.4%
Elk %	23.5%	24.8%	23.5%	22.8%	21.3%	20.6%

The percentages shown in the previous table reflect that, at present, roughly 80% of Delsea's total equalized valuation comes from Franklin while the remaining 20% comes from Elk. These percentages become the basis of the tax levy apportionment calculation used to determine what tax amounts must be levied in each municipality.

TABLE 62
Allocation of Equalized Value to Delsea Regional, Status Quo, FY 2026-29

	2026	2027	2028	2029
Delsea Total	1,292,160,487	1,339,199,310	1,305,803,966	1,270,077,455
Franklin Portion	1,040,154,781	1,091,438,361	1,073,780,992	1,038,547,892
Elk Portion	252,005,705	247,760,949	232,022,974	231,529,563
Franklin %	80.5%	81.5%	82.2%	81.8%
Elk %	19.5%	18.5%	17.8%	18.2%

Under the status quo, it is projected that Franklin's share of total Delsea equalized valuations will continue to rise, ultimately reaching roughly 82% by 2029. Conversely, Elk's share will decline to 18% by 2029.

Under the regionalization scenario, the equalized valuation picture changes considerably. Since all elementary districts would be consolidated, municipal equalized valuations will no longer be apportioned. Instead, each community's total municipal equalized valuation will be used for tax apportionment in the regional district. Additionally, Newfield will become a constituent district of the newly enlarged regional district and will have its equalized valuation added to the mix. Table 63 presents how equalized valuations will be split between the three municipalities in the regionalization scenario.

TABLE 63
Allocation of Equalized Value to Delsea Regional, All-Purpose Regional, FY 2026-29

	2026	2027	2028	2029
Delsea Total	2,817,612,260	2,927,089,921	2,930,445,477	2,868,651,783
Franklin Portion	2,062,162,533	2,155,289,023	2,164,008,448	2,103,175,156
Elk Portion	561,010,030	570,746,254	570,501,535	570,550,919
Newfield Portion	194,439,698	201,054,645	195,935,494	194,925,708
Franklin %	73.2%	73.6%	73.8%	73.3%
Elk %	19.9%	19.5%	19.5%	19.9%
Newfield %	6.9%	6.9%	6.7%	6.8%

In an enlarged all-purpose regional district, Franklin's share of total equalized valuations, and therefore its eventual share of total taxes levied, are lower than the figures shown in the status quo scenario (≈82% in the status quo versus 73% in the all-purpose regional in 2029). Elk's share remains almost unchanged at roughly 20% under the regional scenario in 2029. Newfield's addition as a constituent district would see it responsible for 7% of the total all-purpose regional tax levy.

The figures above describe the share of the total tax levy each district must raise in local taxes. Table 64 below puts amounts to these percentages and presents the total estimated taxes to be levied by an enlarged all-purpose regional district. It must be noted that the total tax levy estimates are inclusive of cost savings that are described in detail later in this section. Additionally, the figures are presented under the assumption that such cost savings will be applied as tax relief by the future board of the enlarged all-purpose regional district, a decision that must be weighed against the education programming needs of the enlarged regional district.

It should also be reiterated that the figures shown are for the current apportionment method in use in the existing limited-purpose Delsea Regional district, which is based 100% on the percentages of equalized valuation described in the tables above. Later in this section, we present how the figures change if pupil counts are also factored into tax apportionment using one of the blended methods allowed under current law.

TABLE 64
Apportionment of Taxes in an Enlarged All-Purpose Regional, 100% Equalized Values, FY 2026-29

	2026	2027	2028	2029
Delsea Regional Total Tax Levy	36,930,401	37,682,974	38,454,787	39,216,439
Franklin Portion	27,028,733	27,746,910	28,397,213	28,751,848
Elk Portion	7,353,150	7,347,713	7,486,410	7,799,823
Newfield Portion	2,548,518	2,588,351	2,571,165	2,664,768

Comparing the amount from the previous table with the comparable total tax amounts from under the status quo shows the tax impacts on each municipality. The tables that follow will present the comparative impact for a range of apportionment methods ranging from 100% of equalized valuation and 0% based on enrollment through 0% equalized valuation and 100% enrollment.

Table 65 shows the impact relative to the status quo for each tax apportionment method. The values included in the table represent the average impact from 2026 through 2029. Positive numbers represent potential tax savings, while negative numbers represent potential tax increases relative to the status quo. It is important to note that tax levies are expected to increase annually in both scenarios and that any potential tax savings or increases indicated in the table are derived by comparing the regionalization scenario to the status quo scenario in a given year, and therefore, may not represent savings relative to the current tax year.

TABLE 65
Average Tax Impact of an Enlarged All-Purpose Regional District, FY 2026-29³⁷

	Franklin	Elk	Newfield	Total
100% Equalized Value / 0% Enrollment	382,973	-100,783	540,491	822,680
90% Equalized Value / 10% Enrollment	352,585	-67,432	537,527	822,680
80% Equalized Value / 20% Enrollment	322,198	-34,080	534,563	822,681
70% Equalized Value / 30% Enrollment	291,810	-729	531,600	822,681
60% Equalized Value / 40% Enrollment	261,422	32,622	528,637	822,681
50% Equalized Value / 50% Enrollment	231,034	65,974	525,673	822,681
40% Equalized Value / 60% Enrollment	200,646	99,325	522,710	822,681
30% Equalized Value / 70% Enrollment	170,258	132,676	519,746	822,680
20% Equalized Value / 80% Enrollment	139,870	166,028	516,783	822,681
10% Equalized Value / 90% Enrollment	109,482	199,379	513,819	822,681
0% Equalized Value / 100% Enrollment	79,094	232,730	510,856	822,680

The table shows that, at the current apportionment ratio in use at the limited-purpose Delsea Regional (100% equalized valuation and 0% enrollment), Franklin could see an average tax savings of roughly \$383,000 over the four year period from 2026 through 2029. Elk, however, would see an average tax increase of about \$101,000 and Newfield would experience the largest savings at \$540,000 over the same period.

When examining other apportionment ratios, the savings to Franklin and Elk become more balanced at apportionment ratios that weight enrollment higher until an inflection point at the method with weights at 24% equalized valuation and 76% enrollment. At those ratios, Newfield's savings will be more than triple the potential savings amounts for Franklin and Elk

³⁷ Figures show relative change from status quo tax levies which include a one-year tax deferral for Delsea Regional.

(\$518k vs. \$150k). The transition from Newfield’s current send-receive structure to being added as a constituent district could have a positive impact on tax levies in the community of Newfield. In addition, enlarging the current limited purpose regional district also has the potential to produce tax savings for both Franklin and Elk.

The figures in the previous table represent four-year averages from 2026-29. However, the potential tax impact in any one year can differ from the average. Tables 66 through 68 summarize the potential tax impact in each municipality for each year from 2026 through 2029. Examining the trend patterns over each individual year is instructive as it allows for the reader to observe the general trend over time and how the data changes for each apportionment ratio.

TABLE 66
Tax Impact of an Enlarged All-Purpose Regional District, Franklin, FY 2026-29

	2026	2027	2028	2029
100% Equalized Value / 0% Enrollment	279,985	293,235	362,660	596,012
90% Equalized Value / 10% Enrollment	214,251	268,042	356,007	572,042
80% Equalized Value / 20% Enrollment	148,517	242,848	349,353	548,073
70% Equalized Value / 30% Enrollment	82,783	217,654	342,699	524,103
60% Equalized Value / 40% Enrollment	17,049	192,460	336,045	500,133
50% Equalized Value / 50% Enrollment	-48,685	167,266	329,391	476,163
40% Equalized Value / 60% Enrollment	-114,419	142,072	322,737	452,194
30% Equalized Value / 70% Enrollment	-180,153	116,878	316,084	428,224
20% Equalized Value / 80% Enrollment	-245,887	91,684	309,430	404,254
10% Equalized Value / 90% Enrollment	-311,621	66,490	302,776	380,285
0% Equalized Value / 100% Enrollment	-377,355	41,296	296,122	356,315

Each year, the potential tax savings in Franklin increases over the prior year. Additionally, the potential tax savings at the extreme ends of the apportionment ratio scale begin to tighten so that the difference becomes substantially less significant at opposite ends of the apportionment ratio scale. For example, in 2026, the difference between potential savings at the 100% eq. val / 0% enrollment ratio and the 0% eq. val / 100% enrollment ratio differs by \$657,000. In 2028, the variance tightens to just a difference of \$67,000 at opposite ends of the scale.

TABLE 67
Tax Impact of an Enlarged All-Purpose Regional District, Elk, FY 2026-29

	2026	2027	2028	2029
100% Equalized Value / 0% Enrollment	56,701	14,245	-140,079	-334,000
90% Equalized Value / 10% Enrollment	110,758	53,342	-123,665	-310,163
80% Equalized Value / 20% Enrollment	164,816	92,440	-107,251	-286,325
70% Equalized Value / 30% Enrollment	218,873	131,537	-90,837	-262,488
60% Equalized Value / 40% Enrollment	272,930	170,634	-74,423	-238,651
50% Equalized Value / 50% Enrollment	326,987	209,731	-58,009	-214,814
40% Equalized Value / 60% Enrollment	381,044	248,828	-41,595	-190,977
30% Equalized Value / 70% Enrollment	435,101	287,925	-25,181	-167,140
20% Equalized Value / 80% Enrollment	489,159	327,022	-8,767	-143,303
10% Equalized Value / 90% Enrollment	543,216	366,120	7,647	-119,466
0% Equalized Value / 100% Enrollment	597,273	405,217	24,061	-95,629

Elk experiences potential tax savings at all apportionment ratios in both 2026 and 2027. However, by 2028 potential savings would only be possible if an apportionment ratio heavily weighted toward enrollment is chosen. By 2029, there are no apportionment ratios that produce a savings relative to the status quo. The reason for this is due to Elk's increasing share of the three municipalities' total equalized valuations combined with projected enrollment increases.

TABLE 68
Tax Impact of an Enlarged All-Purpose Regional District, Newfield, FY 2026-29

	2026	2027	2028	2029
100% Equalized Value / 0% Enrollment	492,714	513,705	592,932	562,611
90% Equalized Value / 10% Enrollment	504,391	499,802	583,172	562,743
80% Equalized Value / 20% Enrollment	516,067	485,898	573,412	562,876
70% Equalized Value / 30% Enrollment	527,744	471,995	563,652	563,009
60% Equalized Value / 40% Enrollment	539,421	458,092	553,892	563,141
50% Equalized Value / 50% Enrollment	551,098	444,189	544,132	563,274
40% Equalized Value / 60% Enrollment	562,775	430,285	534,372	563,407
30% Equalized Value / 70% Enrollment	574,451	416,382	524,612	563,539
20% Equalized Value / 80% Enrollment	586,128	402,479	514,852	563,672
10% Equalized Value / 90% Enrollment	597,805	388,576	505,091	563,805
0% Equalized Value / 100% Enrollment	609,482	374,672	495,331	563,937

Newfield is projected to experience significant potential tax savings by transitioning from a send-receive district to a constituent of the enlarged all-purpose regional district. All apportionment ratios possess the potential for savings, which is projected to increase each year.

Having presented the projected apportioned tax levies, two important points should be reiterated. First, the tax levies being apportioned in the regional scenario and which are presented in the previous tables are inclusive of significant cost savings described later in this section. The cost savings total \$1,000,000 and include consolidation of duplicated administrative and clerical staff positions as well as some reductions in audit costs and other professional services. Secondly, the savings are potential savings only and the consultants do not mean to imply that the amounts shown in the table will necessarily be reflected in the future tax levies in each municipality. It will be up to the future Board of Education of the enlarged all-purpose regional district to decide how to deal with any cost savings stemming from regionalization. Tax relief is one of many possible uses of such savings.

After examining all tax apportionment data, there does exist the possibility of potential tax savings to each constituent community at various apportionment ratios. Given the projected equalized valuation and enrollment trends in the constituent municipalities, a shift from relying on equalized valuations for apportionment to enrollments, may make sense. The most balanced tax impacts to all three constituents arise in apportionment scenarios where enrollment is weighted between 70% and 90%. The model identifies the greatest balance, with respect to total savings amounts, at the 19% equalized valuation and 81% enrollment method. From the perspective of percentage savings (relative to the status quo) the model estimates the 0% equalized valuation and 100% enrollment method produces the most balance. Despite the specific ratios described, the potential tax savings is relatively balanced in all scenarios where enrollment is weighted at least 60%.

A change to an enrollment-based apportionment method would represent a marked departure from how the limited-purpose Delsea Regional has traditionally apportioned its taxes. It would also be a departure in how the vast majority of regional school districts apportion taxes since apportionment methods have historically been extremely difficult to change in practical terms, and most if not all regional districts were originally formed using property values for apportionment. Only relatively recently has the school regionalization law been updated to provide more flexibility to regional districts to change their apportionment methods. Of the school districts regionalizing in the past two decades, of which there are only a handful, several have chosen a blended apportionment that relies more on enrollment.

Current law also allows for a transitional method of apportionment for up to ten years. This method could provide additional flexibility and would phase-in the potential tax savings or increases over that period. A transitional tax apportionment method could make it easier to gain voter approval in each constituent district, particularly in Elk where tax increases are possible, as the increases or savings would be spread out over a number of years. This approach may not be necessary if sufficient savings are projected in the apportionment method chosen.

22. Operating Expenses

Budgetary Costs Per Student

Tables 69 to 71 highlight the spending priorities of each school district through budgetary per pupil costs broken into five categories by the State: classroom instruction, support services, administration, operations and maintenance, and extracurriculars. Each category then ranks the districts against their peers across the state in terms of grade-level structure.³⁸

TABLE 69
Budgetary Per Pupil Costs, Delsea³⁹

	\$ Amount	Rank ⁴⁰	Percentage of Total	State Median \$	State Median %
Total Budgetary Per Pupil Costs	17,107	7		20,232	
Classroom Instruction	9,310	6	54.4%	11,250	55.6%
Support Services	2,693	13	15.7%	2,892	14.3%
Administration	1,687	5	9.9%	2,003	9.9%
Operations and Maintenance	2,169	9	12.7%	2,616	12.9%
Extracurriculars	739	5	4.3%	995	4.9%

TABLE 70
Budgetary Per Pupil Costs, Franklin

	\$ Amount	Rank ⁴¹	Percentage of Total	State Median \$	State Median %
Total Budgetary Per Pupil Costs	15,598	4		19,420	
Classroom Instruction	9,252	3	59.3%	11,421	58.8%
Support Services	2,361	6	15.1%	3,535	18.2%
Administration	1,606	13	10.3%	1,916	9.9%
Operations and Maintenance	1,974	20	12.7%	2,176	11.2%
Extracurriculars	44	20	0.3%	55	0.3%

³⁸ 7-12/9-12 for Delsea, K-6 for Franklin and Elk

³⁹ Data in Tables 69, 70, and 71 come from Taxpayers' Guide to Education Spending, 2023

⁴⁰ Ranking is from lowest to highest spending among New Jersey's 46 grade 7-12/9-12 school districts (Delsea) and among its 57 grade K-6 school districts (Elk and Franklin).

⁴¹ Ranking is from lowest to highest spending among New Jersey's 46 grade 7-12/9-12 school districts (Delsea) and among its 57 grade K-6 school districts (Elk and Franklin).

TABLE 71
Budgetary Per Pupil Costs, Elk

	\$ Amount	Rank ⁴²	Percentage of Total	State Median \$	State Median %
Total Budgetary Per Pupil Costs	17,600	17		19,420	
Classroom Instruction	10,823	19	61.5%	11,421	58.8%
Support Services	3,184	21	18.1%	3,535	18.2%
Administration	1,613	14	9.2%	1,916	9.9%
Operations and Maintenance	1,930	18	11.0%	2,176	11.2%
Extracurriculars	49	22	0.3%	55	0.3%

Elk, Franklin, and Delsea have overall budgetary costs per pupil that are very efficient compared to their peers. Of specific note, Franklin is 4th lowest spending among the 46 grade K-6 districts in New Jersey, and Delsea is 7th lowest among the state's grade 7-12/9-12 districts. Elk is 17th lowest among 46 grade K-6 districts, which is also below the median.

It is clear that all three districts prioritize classroom instruction, which provides direct student academic experiences, and therefore should receive primary attention and commitment in the district budget. Spending on classroom instruction is above the state median in the two elementary districts, and very close at the secondary level. 60% of total spending on classroom instruction is generally indicative of a strong academic commitment. Elk is above that standard, Franklin is above the state median and just below that target, and Delsea is just below the state median with room for growth toward the 60% goal.

One item worth noting is that Delsea and Elk have median or below spending on administration, likely due to the number of positions shared between the two districts, confirming previous analysis in this study. Commitment in terms of percentages of spending on support services, operations and maintenance, and extracurriculars are generally above the state median or within a point. One exception is that Franklin lags the state median in percentage devoted to support services.

Cost Savings

The consultants, through conversations with participating district personnel, identified a number of cost savings that could be obtained through regionalizing. Table 72 presents the cost savings that could be anticipated in an enlarged all-purpose regional district. Despite the cost savings identified and presented in the table, all existing programs would be maintained.

⁴² Ranking is from lowest to highest spending among New Jersey's 46 grade 7-12/9-12 school districts (Delsea) and among its 57 grade K-6 school districts (Elk and Franklin).

TABLE 72
Cost Savings Opportunities in an Enlarged All-Purpose Regional⁴³

Items	Amount
Total Estimated Cost Savings	1,000,000
Reduction in audit costs	100,000
Reduction in professional services costs	75,000
Reduction of five district administrative staff	550,000
Reduction of three district clerical staff	225,000
Reduction of shared business administrator	50,000
Estimated New Cost - Removal of Tax Deferral	-177,000
Average One-Time Net Cost Savings	823,000

Potential cost savings in an all-purpose regional district total an estimated \$1,000,000, through reductions in audit costs, professional services costs, district administrative and clerical staff, and a shared business administrator, while maintaining all existing programs. The removal of a tax deferral would result in an estimated new cost of \$177,000, leading to an average net cost savings of \$823,000. This could amount to a total savings over a five-year period of some \$4.8 million. More support for the potential cost savings in consolidating staff positions may be found in the Education & Program section in this study. Audit cost savings estimate that three audits will consolidate into a single audit that results in a net savings. Similarly, professional services could be consolidated and are expected to result in a net savings. The actual determination of reductions and subsequent use of any cost savings from regionalization would be decided by the future Board of Education of the enlarged regional district.

The cost increase due to the removal of the existing tax deferral in place in the existing limited-purpose Delsea Regional district is a one-time cost to transition away from the deferred collection of current year tax levies. The deferral could instead be continued and would result in the removal of the indicated cost; however, regionalization provides an opportunity to abrogate the deferral, which can ease the municipal tax collection process.

In addition to the potential cost savings presented above that may arise from regionalization, an estimated \$603,044 in additional benefits to the constituent districts may be realized through state aid savings in the period before regionalization. More information on that is presented in Table 56 entitled “Calculated State Aid Benefits Due to S3488”.

Tables 73 and 74 summarize the projected state aid and tax levy impact over the next five years as detailed in this subsection.

⁴³ Cost savings expressed as positive dollars, new costs expressed as negative dollars.

TABLE 73
Summary of Projected State Aid and Tax Impact, Status Quo, FY 2025-29

		FY25	FY26	FY27	FY28	FY29
Franklin	K-6 Portion of Equalized Valuation	910,970,716	1,022,007,751	1,063,850,662	1,090,227,456	1,064,627,264
	Total Community Equalized Valuation	1,852,696,189	2,062,162,533	2,155,289,023	2,164,008,448	2,103,175,156
	Tax Levy	12,655,021	12,908,121	13,166,284	13,429,610	13,698,202
	State Aid	8,448,740	8,195,484	7,658,876	8,161,014	8,345,565
	K-6 Enrollment	1,201	1,181	1,138	1,161	1,164
	Regional HS Enrollment	1,242	1,202	1,167	1,144	1,136
Elk	K-6 Portion of Equalized Valuation	294,557,010	309,004,324	322,985,305	338,478,561	339,021,356
	Total Community Equalized Valuation	539,086,768	561,010,030	570,746,254	570,501,535	570,550,919
	Tax Levy	3,723,332	3,797,799	3,873,755	3,951,230	4,030,254
	State Aid	2,062,379	2,315,578	2,317,730	2,870,044	2,985,572
	K-6 Enrollment	300	323	324	352	356
	Regional HS Enrollment	249	263	249	241	243
Newfield	K-6 Portion of Equalized Valuation	-	-	-	-	-
	Total Community Equalized Valuation	187,889,814	194,439,698	201,054,645	195,935,494	194,925,708
	Tax Levy	2,981,600	3,041,232	3,102,056	3,164,097	3,227,379
	State Aid	1,575,192	1,272,271	1,350,295	1,855,063	1,864,375
	K-12 Enrollment	205	209	225	216	211
	Regional HS Enrollment	-	-	-	-	-
Delsea	Attributed Equalized Valuation	1,186,255,231	1,292,160,487	1,339,199,310	1,305,803,966	1,270,077,455
	Franklin Portion	941,725,473	1,040,154,781	1,091,438,361	1,073,780,992	1,038,547,892
	Elk Portion	244,529,758	252,005,705	247,760,949	232,022,974	231,529,563
	Franklin Portion of Tax Levy	13,967,660	14,400,597	14,873,861	15,330,263	15,649,658
	Franklin Levy - %	79.0%	79.9%	81.0%	81.9%	82.0%
	Elk Portion of Tax Levy	3,704,472	3,612,052	3,488,203	3,395,101	3,435,569
	Elk Levy - %	21.0%	20.1%	19.0%	18.1%	18.0%
	Total Tax Levy	17,672,132	18,012,649	18,362,064	18,725,365	19,085,227
	State Aid	14,599,119	15,505,889	15,350,341	14,416,188	13,570,848
	Enrollment	1,491	1,465	1,416	1,385	1,379

TABLE 74
Summary of Projected State Aid and Tax Impact, Newly Enlarged Regional, FY 2025-29

	FY25	FY26	FY27	FY28	FY29
Equalized Valuation	2,579,672,771	2,817,612,260	2,927,089,921	2,930,445,477	2,868,651,783
Total Tax Levy	37,032,085	37,759,801	38,504,159	39,270,302	40,041,062
State Aid	26,685,430	27,218,391	26,589,232	27,344,641	26,839,515
Enrollment	3,196	3,179	3,102	3,114	3,111
Potential Cost Savings		1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000
Adjusted Regional Tax Levy		36,930,401	37,682,974	38,454,787	39,216,439
Franklin Tax Levy		27,561,178	27,950,980	28,451,108	28,946,003
Elk Tax Levy		6,915,287	7,031,026	7,353,457	7,606,742
Newfield Tax Levy		2,453,936	2,700,968	2,650,221	2,663,694

23. Debt Allocation & Borrowing Margin

Tables 75 and 76 list the debt service and borrowing margin amounts for each district as they currently exist. The newly enlarged regional district would simply combine the debts into one lump sum moving forward.

TABLE 75
Debt Service as of June 30, 2023

	2024		2025		2026		2027	
District	Debt	FF&E	Debt	FF&E	Debt	FF&E	Debt	FF&E ⁴⁴
Elk	145,000	50,456	-	43,170	-	30,126	-	-
Franklin	170,000	356,439	175,000	243,375	180,000	190,259	185,000	143,671
Newfield	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Delsea	405,000	433,077	420,000	302,255	430,000	194,773	450,000	94,363
New Regional	720,000	839,972	595,000	588,800	610,000	415,158	635,000	238,034
	2027		2028		2029		2030 - 2040	
Elk	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Franklin	185,000	143,671	187,000	143,671	-	143,671	-	1,189,051
Newfield	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Delsea	450,000	94,363	475,000	-	475,000	-	5,226,000	
New Regional	635,000	238,034	662,000	143,671	475,000	143,671	5,226,000	1,189,051

⁴⁴ FFE = furniture, fixtures, and equipment. This typically includes any easily removed objects in a building.

TABLE 76
Borrowing Margin as of June 30, 2023

	Elk	Franklin	Newfield	Delsea
Avg Eq Val Taxable Prop	483,237,373	1,415,064,800	150,230,543	1,853,817,970
Debt Limit	12,080,934	49,527,268	3,755,764	55,614,539
Net Bonded School Debt	145,000	897,000	-	7,881,000
Legal Debt Margin	11,935,934	48,630,268	3,755,764	47,733,539

24. Collective Bargaining Agreements

P.L.2021, c.402 outlines the conditions of regional district formation, among those being provisions for collective bargaining agreements (CBAs). It states, “... the newly formed regional district shall recognize each majority representative of the existing bargaining units in the largest constituent district as the majority representatives of those separate bargaining units of employees.”⁴⁵ It notes further that if there is a classification of employees that does not have a CBA in the largest constituent district, the CBA of the next largest would apply.

*... the salary guide and terms and conditions of employment, whether established through a collective negotiations agreement or past practice, of the largest constituent school district shall apply in full after three years following the formation of the regional district or until a successor agreement is negotiated with the majority representative of the new school district, whichever occurs first. The salary guide and terms and conditions of employment that will apply pursuant to the provisions of this subsection shall be based upon the terms and conditions of employment of the largest constituent district made up of only the identical grade levels. In the event that there is no constituent district made up of only the identical grade levels, the salary guide and terms and conditions of employment that will apply pursuant to the provisions of this subsection shall be based upon the terms and conditions of employment of the largest constituent district containing the identical grade levels;*⁴⁶

This suggests that Delsea’s CBAs would govern all grades 7-12 staff initially. Franklin’s primary CBA would govern non-administrative certified personnel in grades pK-6, and a review of other CBAs covering pK-6 staff would also likely use Franklin’s CBAs as the larger of the two constituent pK-6 districts. As noted, a successor agreement would need to be negotiated between the new board of education and new association representatives.

The following review of the main CBAs for Delsea, Franklin, and Elk is intended to provide useful information to aid the negotiations process should the districts decide to form an all

⁴⁵ N.J.S.A. 18A:13-47.5

⁴⁶ N.J.S.A. 18A:13-47.5

purpose, pK-12 regional, or can be used simply as points for comparison and synthesis in future negotiations.

Dates

The Elk and Franklin contracts are set to expire on June 30, 2026, with Delsea's to end on the same date in 2027. Should an enlargement of the current limited purpose regional occur prior to June 30, 2026, the statute's provisions as noted previously would hold. If an enlargement should occur after this date, the statute goes on to say,

... whenever the salary guide and terms and conditions of employment of one or more school districts seeking to join a newly formed or existing limited purpose or all purpose regional district is set to expire upon the formation of the new regional district, the school district may: (a) elect to adopt the expiring salary guide and terms and conditions of employment for a period not to exceed one year or until a successor agreement is negotiated with the majority representative of the new regional district, whichever occurs first; or (b) elect to adopt the salary guide and terms and conditions of employment of the largest comparable district joining the new regional district.

Recognition Clause

The recognition clause identifies who is, and often who is not, represented by the primary CBA. Delsea's CBA is the most inclusive involving all certified and non-certified staff. Elk includes certified staff and educational support professionals but not administrators, supervisors, teacher assistants, or maintenance personnel. Franklin's CBA only applies to non-administrative certified personnel.

Negotiation Procedure

Delsea and Elk start negotiations approximately 120 days prior to submission of the following year's budget, while Franklin's begins not prior to January 1 of the expiration year.

Grievance Procedure

The most important aspect of the grievance procedure is whether disputes end ultimately in binding or advisory arbitration. Franklin has binding arbitration, Elk has binding arbitration for disciplinary matters only, and Delsea has advisory arbitration.

Association Rights & Privileges

Most agreements, including those for all three of these districts, allow associations the right to have meeting space at specified times of the day and reasonable use of school communications systems (e.g., office mailboxes). Elk's CBA also includes the right to representation other than post observation and evaluation meetings. Delsea's CBA allows for the association president to have an extra duty free period and five paid days leave if elected to state or national office.

Service

There are what appear to be minor but important differences between the agreements with regard to length of school year. Delsea's CBA calls for 187 work days for returning teachers, 189 for new teachers, and 185 for teacher assistants. There are 2 in-service days that can be built into that calendar. Franklin has 186 work days inclusive of 1 in-service day, while Elk also has 186 work days, though 6 days are planned for in-service training.

The length of the school day is similar in that Delsea and Elk have a 7 hour and 10 minute work day, while Franklin's is 7 hours, all inclusive of a duty free lunch period. Teacher preparation time is 225 minutes per 5 day cycle in Franklin, 40 continuous minutes per day in Elk, and 1 period per day in Delsea. Extra service for activities such as overtime, student supervisory duties, faculty meetings, field trip chaperoning, etc. are unique to each contract and would need considerable coordination in a combined agreement.

Salaries

Important employee safeguards were placed into P.L.2021, c.402. It provides that "the tenure and seniority rights of all employees ... except for superintendents ... shall be recognized and preserved"; "... all periods of employment in any of the school districts shall count toward acquisition of tenure and seniority"; and that "... All statutory and contractual rights to accumulated sick leave, leave of absence, and pension of an employee that have been acquired through employment in any of the districts shall be recognized ..."⁴⁷

Table 77 provides a brief comparison of salary guides and shows some divergence that would require attention to bring the guides into alignment.

TABLE 77
Salary Guide Comparison

	Franklin	Elk	Delsea
Horizontal Steps	5	6	7
Vertical Steps	18	18	13
Salary - Step 1 BA	\$51,368	\$53,363	\$53,993
Salary - Step 5 MA	\$57,920	\$56,128	\$60,733
Salary - Step 10 MA+ or PhD	\$62,235 (MA+60)	\$62,688 (MA+30)	\$76,725 (PhD)

⁴⁷ N.J.S.A. 18A:13-47.10

Leaves of Absence

Leaves of absence are generally in line with each other and fairly standard among other school district agreements.

TABLE 78
Leaves of Absence

	Franklin	Elk	Delsea
Employee Illness Days	10, no max	10, plus 10 more with sub cost deducted	10
Family Illness Days	included in personal business	2	n/a
Personal Business Days	3, unused convert to employee illness	3, unused convert to employee illness, up to 5 more with supt approval and sub cost deducted	3
Bereavement Days	3 family, 1 extended	5 family, 3 more with sub cost deducted	3 family, 1 extended
Maternity/Paternity Leave	As per law, 90 days notice, employee illness during period of disability	As per law, return first teacher workday in September, not to exceed remainder of school year contract	As per law, up to one calendar year
Sabbatical Leave	n/a	1 year or 1/2 year unpaid for those with at least 7 consecutive years in district, purpose will be of use to school district	1 year at 1/2 salary for those with at least 7 consecutive years in district, must reimburse if leave within 1 year

Insurance Coverage

Insurance coverages tend to be somewhat more divergent between school districts, and Franklin, Elk, and Delsea are no exception.

TABLE 79
Insurance Coverage

	Franklin	Elk	Delsea
Medical	SHIF AmeriHealth PPO \$25 or Aetna Choice POS II at BOE expense if hired before 7/1/2020, tier 3.5 contribution on medical and Rx, leveling up costs the premium difference, NJEHP or NJGSHP if hired after 7/1/2020, hired at Step 4 or below covers employee only, leveling up costs premium difference; same as others upon tenure	Chapter 78 contribution, leveling up costs premium difference, eligibility at 21 hrs/wk (BOE pays 60%), 29 hrs/wk (80%), 35 hrs/wk (100%), first 3 years cover employee only	Eligibility at 30 hrs/wk, part-time may purchase coverage but pay full premium, Aetna US Patriot V or equal with Patriot X grandfathered
Prescription (Rx)	BOE pays 100%, co-pay \$10 generic / \$20 brand	BOE pays 100%, co-pays \$10 generic / \$15 brand / \$25 non-preferred	BOE pays 100%, co-pays \$10 generic / \$20 brand / \$35 non-preferred, must participate in health plan
Dental	\$50,000 group premium maximum, participating employees pay excess on % basis if exceeded	BOE pays up to \$900 annually, excess deducted from paycheck, preventative coverage at 90%, remaining basic / crowns / prosthodontics at 50%	BOE pays 100% of Delta Preferred, 90% of Delta Premier
Coverage Waiver	Medical and Rx only, single \$750, parent child \$1,625, employee spouse \$1,900, family \$2,100, disbursed on June 30	Medical \$600-\$800, Rx \$230-\$545, dental \$145, no more than 25% of eligibles can waive	\$1,000

Transfers & Assignments

Employees are provided written notice of assignment in Franklin by May 15 (special education by September 1) and in Elk by June 15.

Evaluations

In Delsea, non tenured teachers receive evaluations at least 3 times per year, and tenured teachers

and teacher assistants at least 2 times per year. In Franklin, no evaluations are sent to the central office or put in a teacher's file without a conference.

Separation

Employees retiring from districts are typically compensated for their accumulated individual sick days. In Elk and Delsea that happens after 15 years of service (higher level for those over 20 years), and in Franklin after 20 years. Payout amount and timing differ by district.

Tuition Reimbursement

Tuition reimbursement is offered by many districts as an incentive for employees to further their education. Franklin reimburses up to \$1,800 per year with prior approval after 4 years of employment with the district, and there is a requirement to complete 2 more years with the district or return that reimbursement. Delsea reimburses certified staff up to 12 credit hours per year with prior approval up to the highest cost rate at state universities or colleges, and there is a requirement to complete 1 more year with the district or return that reimbursement. Delsea teacher assistants can be reimbursed up to 12 credits hours per year up to the highest cost per credit at a state community college. Elk reimburses up to 9 credits per year not to exceed \$650 per credit with prior approval, and there is a requirement to complete 2 more years with the district or return that reimbursement.

Miscellaneous

Districts often have other unique features in their contracts that are worth noting. Delsea has a contract provision that allows children of full time certified employees to attend Delsea schools at no cost other than a \$1,500 per year fee for supplies.

25. Shared Services

N.J.S.A. 18A:18A, known as the Public School Contracts Law, governs all purchasing of goods and services for all public school districts in the state of New Jersey. These regulations are very strict and compliance is mandatory. The School Business Administrator frequently also holds a certification as a Qualified Purchasing Agent (QPA); in very large districts, a separate individual and staff may be responsible for purchasing. Compliance is evaluated regularly through a district's annual audit, grant compliance reviews and state/federal program audits; OFAC, the Office of Fiscal Accountability and Compliance within the New Jersey Department of Education has general oversight of regulatory programs.

Shared services are permitted by statute, which states, "The boards of education of two or more districts may provide jointly by agreement for the provision and performance of goods and services for their respective districts, or one or more boards of education may provide for such provision or performance of goods or services by joint agreement with the governing body of

any municipality or county.”⁴⁸ A shared service is defined by code as “any educational or administrative service required to be performed by a district board of education in which the school district, with district board of education approval, is able and willing to share in the costs and benefits of that service with another district board of education, municipality, or other governmental unit, as authorized by the Uniform Shared 12 Services and Consolidation Act at N.J.S.A. 40A:65-1 et seq.”⁴⁹ It should be noted that both a send-receive relationship between districts and school choice programs are addressed in other sections of code and statute and are not considered shared services.

Shared services amongst school districts, local municipalities and other governmental agencies have long been promoted by the state as a cost savings measure. “Sharing services offers numerous benefits for participating communities. It reduces costs, delivers municipal services in a more efficient manner and increases value for each dollar spent while ensuring local units remain responsible stewards of the public trust.”⁵⁰

In reality, sometimes that philosophy is true and sometimes it is not. Purchasing cooperatives save the district hours in pre-purchasing regulation compliance by creating bid documents, soliciting bids, and awarding bids. They also save time and money by eliminating the need for legal review and advertising fees. State purchasing regulations can, however, end up with an inferior product due to a required stipulation of “equal to or better than.” This requires careful attention to exactly what has been bid and awarded. Purchasing cooperatives may sometimes find it necessary to substitute a different item due to shortages in availability of the initially awarded item. The item could be better, not as good as, or simply not what was expected.

Most of the districts in this study participate in many shared services as indicated in the table below. This is consistent throughout the state of New Jersey, as indicated in a 2007 study “Shared Services in School Districts”, commissioned by New Jersey School Boards and done by Rutgers University. While the study may be dated, the concepts it addresses continue to be promoted throughout the state today.

Shared services between school districts, or between districts and municipalities can save money, generate invaluable positive public relations, and foster good relationships among entities. However, what is a good idea conceptually can be difficult to implement, especially if people try to, or need to, assign a financial value, and the end result can be discord among the entities. The process requires flexibility, communication, and usually, a degree of trust.

⁴⁸ N.J.S.A. 18A:18A-11

⁴⁹ N.J.A.C. 6A:23-1.2

⁵⁰ Local Efficiency Achievement Program Guidelines, 2023

TABLE 80
Existing Shared Services⁵¹

	Delsea	Elk	Franklin	Newfield
Equipment	Middlesex, Camden, Ed Data	Ed Data	ESC NJ, Hunterdon Cty	
Health Insurance	SHIF	State Health Benefits	SHIF	
Liability & Property Insurance	GCSSD JIF	GCSSD JIF	NJSIG	NJSIG
Fuel (diesel)			Gloucester County Co-op	
National co-ops	TIPS USA, OMNIA, KEYSTONE	TIPS USA, OMNIA	OMNIA, TIPS USA	
Natural Gas, Electricity, Heating Oil	ACES, County	ACES, County	ACES	
Non-Public Funds and Services	GCSSSD	n/a	GCSSSD	GCSSSD
Custodial Supplies	Ed Data	Ed Data	ESC of NJ	
Educational Supplies	Ed Data	Ed Data	Ed Data	
Technology Supplies	Ed Data	Ed Data	Ed Data	
Staff Development	Elk	Delsea		
Transportation Abstracts, Bids, Quotes & Jointures	Delsea, Newfield, Others		GCSSSD, Delsea, Newfield, Others	Franklin & Delsea
Superintendent	Elk	Delsea		
Asst Superintendent	Elk	Delsea		
Data Analysis & Research	Elk	Delsea		
CST Director	Elk	Delsea		
Facilities Manager	Elk	Delsea		
Business Administrator and Staff	Elk	Delsea		
Technology Staff	Elk, Franklin	Delsea, Franklin	Delsea, Elk	
Transportation Coordinator	Clayton, Elk			
Transportation Maintenance Services	Clayton			
Facilities and Fields	Recreation teams	Recreation teams	Recreation teams	
Miscellaneous		Trash, snow, salt, fuel	Salt purchase, storage, application	
Services			Maintenance labor for PD vehicles	

⁵¹ Data gathered from business administrators and NJDOE User-Friendly Budgets

Newfield is a non-operating district; all students are sent to other schools for education. As such, the level of purchasing is minimal, and does not lend itself to shared services. The business administrator/board secretary could be a shared position, but it is currently a part-time position with no benefits, so is most likely cost efficient to the extent it can be. The difficulty has been that turnover of personnel in the position has been frequent, and that has its own cost.

Franklin has a standard assortment of shared services, but is unique in that it shares transportation mechanical personnel to perform maintenance on the municipality's police department vehicles.

Delsea and Elk have shared many administrative personnel over the years. They currently share a shared superintendent, assistant superintendent, business administrator, director of transportation and director of facilities. While some people might simply assume this makes sense given the size of a district or geographical proximity, there are other factors to consider. Districts with shared administrators are the administrators of two separate districts. This means they contend with two different sets of collective bargaining agreements and budgets, twice as many night meetings, twice as many compliance activities, etc. This indicates a strong commitment on the part of the shared employees, and can be a stressful factor that may contribute to turnover or burnout of employees.

26. Contracted Services

Transportation

Since the proposed regionalization would result in little to no change as far as what schools the students attend, there would likely be no change to any of the current transportation programs for the four districts.

The consultants are sure that the districts already strive to maximize shared services and cooperatives regarding transportation, some of which are identified in the Shared Services section of this document. Districts routinely review current routes as the contract expires. A review of transportation routes for out of district special education placements is especially critical due to the significantly higher cost per child. Minor cost savings may be achieved simply due to economies of scale in maintenance, purchasing of fuel, or route changes for special education students.

TABLE 81
Transportation Data⁵²

	Franklin	Elk	Newfield	Delsea
Public Regular Education Students	971	180	186	1023
Public Integrated Special Education Students	19	1	26	94
Courtesy Elementary	180	114	15	50
Courtesy Secondary	0	0	1	192
Regular Education Average Mileage	5.2	3.7	6.2	6.3
Special Needs Students	12	5	13	101
Special Education Average Mileage	15.5	5.3	8.5	10.2
Non Public Aid In Lieu of Transportation	106	20	4	87
Transportation Efficiency	105.8%	n/a	n/a ⁵³	126.2%

Transportation in New Jersey school districts has many factors. One of the most commonly known is the issue of courtesy busing. Districts are required to transport any grade K-8 child if they live 2 miles or more from the school, or grade 9-12 students if they live 2.5 miles or more from the school.⁵⁴ Eligibility is calculated by measuring the shortest route from the home to the school. One can see from the table above that many students are courtesy bused, meaning that they are not required to be transported under the law. However, even though a district is not required to provide transportation, it is extremely common for non-remote students to be bused for other reasons. Given that the average mileage for the regular education students ranges from 3.7 to 6.3 miles, it is likely that many of the courtesy bused students are on the route as the bus travels to the schools.

The table above also shows students designated as Non Public Aid in Lieu of Transportation. Public school districts that transport their own remote students are required to do the same for parents who choose to send their children to non-public schools. The district must either provide transportation or pay the parents to transport their children, depending on the cost of the routes. For the 2023-24 school year, if the cost to transport a child to the non-public exceeds \$1,165, the parent is paid that amount toward the cost of providing transportation for their children.⁵⁵

All New Jersey public schools are required to complete the District Report of Transported Resident Students. The state sets a standard efficiency level of 120 percent, which is difficult to

⁵² NJDOE Taxpayer Guide to Education Spending, District Report of Transported Resident Students.

⁵³ Transportation is done by Franklin and Delsea.

⁵⁴ N.J.S.A. 18A:39.1

⁵⁵ NJDOE

achieve in rural areas. This standard does not include the transportation of special education students that require special vehicles or transport to out of district locations. Unless the district/municipality has declared the route hazardous, students in grades 4-12 who live less than the remote standard (2.0 and 2.5 miles), are also not included in the calculation, making it even less likely to meet the 120% standard.

Food Service

New Jersey school districts have the option to participate in many state and federal food service programs. Decisions as to which programs a district will select are frequently determined by the percentage of economically disadvantaged students. Districts that have over 5% of students eligible for free and reduced lunch must participate in the National School Lunch Program. The United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Services, made a significant change in the Community Eligibility Program this past year, and many more districts across the nation will be eligible to participate. The program has many benefits for students, families, and districts, but eligible districts need to carefully evaluate the financial implications on the operation of their food service program. Further enhancements to this program may make it more appealing if proposed changes to calculation factors are adopted in the 2024 federal budget. The demographics of the districts in this study will be evaluated to determine if they are eligible for the program. It should be noted that the program requires a school or district to have a 25% identified student percentage. This is different from a 25% free/reduced meal percentage in that the calculation is based upon directly certified students through Medicaid, TANF, and/or SNAP,⁵⁶ not the school lunch income verification application with which most people are familiar.

Districts with a higher number of economically disadvantaged students usually provide at least breakfast and lunch, though sometimes after school snack, dinner, and/or a summer program. Wealthier districts may choose to offer lunch and/or breakfast, but not comply with the myriad regulations of the federal programs. However, state legislation known as the Working Class Families' Anti Hunger Act, requires that every school, regardless of how many students are eligible, must provide a free and reduced breakfast and lunch program.⁵⁷ The Act also expanded the eligibility criteria to up to 224% of the federal poverty level so that more students can benefit from the program. Districts will be reimbursed by the state for the cost difference between students who are not federally eligible for free and reduced meals, but are eligible under the more generous New Jersey standards.

The level of students eligible for free and reduced meals is a major factor in the financial stability of many food service programs, as the reimbursement rates are different depending on whether the student is a private pay or qualifies for the state and/or federal program. For the 2022-23 school year, a district with less than 60% free and reduced meal population would have received the following reimbursements:⁵⁸

⁵⁶ TANF = Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, SNAP = Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

⁵⁷ P.L.2023, c.336.

⁵⁸ Form 163, NJ Department of Agriculture

Free Lunch	\$4.40 (\$4.33 federal and \$0.07 state)
Reduced Lunch	\$4.00 (\$3.93 federal and \$0.07 state)
Paid Lunch	\$0.83 (\$0.77 federal and \$0.06 state)

The COVID pandemic brought with it a major change to food service programs with the advent of free breakfast and lunch for all students in public schools. Although there are many advocates of continuing the universal free meals due to the links between nutrition and learning, the program expired in September 2022.

Accounting for food service operation is similar to a business in private industry and is labeled an enterprise fund. Many years ago, schools hired their own employees to provide lunch. In recent years, most districts turned this operation over to a food service management company (FSMC). Such companies are selected through a process that is strictly regulated by the state's Department of Agriculture. Each company prepares a proposal that includes staffing, sample menus, projected and/or guaranteed financial results, and other items that have been deemed important to the district. It is not unusual for a small district to have their food as a satellite operation from a larger district, where food is prepared at one site and transported in special containers to another site.

TABLE 82
Meal Costs, 2023-24⁵⁹

District	Breakfast Regular/Reduced/Free	Lunch Regular/Reduced/Free
Delsea	\$2.10/\$0.00/\$0.00	\$3.35/\$0.00/\$0.00
Franklin	\$2.00/\$0.00/\$0.00	\$3.50/\$0.00/\$0.00
Elk	\$1.85/\$0.00/\$0.00	\$3.20/\$0.00/\$0.00

Franklin offers a diverse food service program through its FSMC. The flexibility in the breakfast schedule is of particular note. Although breakfast is not offered to the preschool students since it is a half day program, it is delivered to Janvier's kindergarten through second grade classrooms by 9:00 am, and they have an hour to eat before it is collected. At Main Road, 3rd and 4th graders go to the cafeteria to get breakfast and take it to the classroom to eat from 8:12-8:50 am. Students at Reutter have a slightly shorter breakfast time from 7:15-7:45 am. 5th grade students continue the practice of getting food from the cafeteria and taking it back to the classroom, while 6th graders get breakfast from a cart in their grade wing and take it to their classroom. Students at Main Road and Reutter are still able to get breakfast in the cafeteria if they arrive after the bell. The food service fund showed a substantially lower increase in fund balance (\$854) during the 2022-2023 year than the prior year increase of \$240,397. An investment of \$216,934 was made to update program equipment and reduce cash balances during the 2022-23 year.

⁵⁹ Data accessed from district websites

Elk and Delsea not only use the same FSMC but also share a food service director. Both schools have their own kitchens, so food is not provided to a satellite location, allowing for greater flexibility in service at both locations. Both districts provide breakfast and lunch and do not have an after school food service program. Elk has a net financial position of \$208,552 and Delsea has a healthier net position of \$399,614. As is the case with many districts, the fund increases were smaller in 2023 than in 2022, most likely due to pandemic food service changes resulting from free lunch count reimbursements as described above.

A review of the free and reduced meal student population as presented in the demographics section of this study indicates that Franklin has the highest percentage of eligible students at just under 28%. Since this is based upon applications and not directly certified, none of the districts in this study qualify for the Community Eligibility Program. Furthermore, the combined districts would not qualify if regionalized unless eligibility requirements are changed.

Overall, other than an alignment of prices and some potential savings due to economies of scale in purchasing or personnel, it does not appear that meal programs would be significantly impacted, either programmatically or financially, by a pK-12 regionalization, especially since Elk and Delsea are already sharing a food service director.

27. Tuition

As stated earlier in the study, Delsea is a limited-purpose regional school district serving students in grades 7-12 from the constituent municipalities of Elk and Franklin. Newfield is a non-operating district. Newfield severed its relationship with Buena Regional School District in 2012 and established two send-receive tuition agreements: their pk-6 students attend Franklin schools and grades 7-12 attend Delsea. Elk does not participate in any send-receive tuition agreements for regular education students.

Districts that participate in send-receive relationships are often doing so because the sending district is not large enough to provide a thorough and efficient education to a particular age group or classification of students. In some cases, the district may maintain a K-6 or K-8 school but send its 7-12 or 9-12 to another high school. In others, the small district (including non-operating districts like Newfield) may choose to send all of its students to another elementary school and then to a centralized high school. There are many possible configurations. The send-receive structure can also be used for special education students, where a particular need cannot be addressed in their home district. For purposes of this report, the focus is on regular education students.

One thing that is similar in all send-receive relationships is the financial arrangement. Sending districts are to provide the receiving district an estimate of their anticipated enrollment for the next school year by December 15th. The process is simple up to that point, but confusing to both lay people and many school officials from there forward. Following the determination of estimated enrollment from the sending district, most districts receive a certified tuition cost for

two years prior in January and use that to set an anticipated tuition rate so that districts can begin the budget process. The real estimated tuition rate is determined by most districts when the 2nd NJDOE state budget download is received, and it calculates the maximum estimated tuition that can be charged.

There are a few ways in which both sending and receiving districts can address concerns during the budget process. One is to over or underestimate the projected enrollment. Another is through the negotiation of the proposed tuition rate. Districts are provided a tuition rate in the state budget software that cannot be exceeded; however, they may charge the sending district a lower rate. As will be shown, both methods can result in large amounts due to or from the other district later on in the process. However, once the districts have agreed upon the estimated number of students and an estimated tuition, the next part of the calculation begins.

After a district's financial records are audited, districts receive a certified tuition amount from the State for each group of grade levels for the school year that took place before the current school year. They also receive a certified average daily enrollment for the same year. To do an adjusted tuition calculation, the actual enrollment is multiplied by the actual tuition to determine how much should have been paid versus what was paid. This amount is added or subtracted to the future budget in order to adjust tuition.

For example:

By December 15th of the 2021-22 school year, the sending district sends an estimated number of students for the 2022-23 school year.

In January 2022, the receiving district establishes a tentative tuition rate for the 2022-23 school year, so that all districts can work on their budgets for that school year.

Also in January, the receiving district should receive the certified tuition rate for 2020-21 based upon the district's audit and actual enrollment numbers. These actual numbers are compared to the estimated numbers for 2020-21 to come up with the actual tuition that should have been paid. Depending on the proposed versus actual, either district can end up owing money to the other. The projected numbers from January 2020 for 2020-21 are reconciled to actual numbers (post audit) two years later in January 2022 for 2022-23.

When the state budget download occurs, a district can determine from the software what the maximum allowed estimated tuition is. The districts may still choose to use a lower amount.

The receiving district combines the projected numbers for 2022-23 and the actual amount that should have been paid for 2020-21 to come up with a total tuition due for the 2022-23 budget and a tuition contract is developed.

The same process is used for each classification of special education programs.

Send-receive relationships can be very sensitive for a variety of reasons and financial concerns can certainly be a cause of contention. Occasionally, there are situations that call for the districts to cooperatively develop solutions that allow both parties in the send-receive relationship to deal with unusual circumstances. A common example of this is when one district has budgetary problems. The typical resolution is a board approved written agreement between the two entities, generally with the knowledge and/or consent of the NJDOE county office.

TABLE 83
Per Student Tuition Rate History, Delsea

Year	Certified Tuition		\$ Difference		% Change	
	Gr 6-8	Gr 9-12	Gr 6-8	Gr 9-12	Gr 6-8	Gr 9-12
2017-18	\$14,883	\$15,279	-	-	-	-
2018-19	\$16,138	\$14,989	\$1,255	-\$290	8.43%	-1.90%
2019-20	\$14,347	\$15,807	-\$1,791	\$818	-11.10%	5.46%
2020-21	\$14,394	\$15,312	\$47	-\$495	0.33%	-3.13%
2021-22	\$15,173	\$15,431	\$779	\$119	5.41%	0.78%
2022-23	\$15,721	\$15,945	\$548	\$514	3.61%	3.33%

TABLE 84
Per Student Tuition Rate History, Franklin

Year	Certified Tuition			\$ Difference			% Change		
	Gr pK/K	Gr 1-5	Gr 6	Gr pK/K	Gr 1-5	Gr 6	Gr pK/K	Gr 1-5	Gr 6
2017-18	\$11,204	\$11,753	\$11,639	-	-	-	-	-	-
2018-19	\$10,817	\$11,142	\$11,150	-\$387	-\$611	-\$489	-3.45%	-5.20%	-4.20%
2019-20	\$11,889	\$12,802	\$12,801	\$1,072	\$1,660	\$1,651	9.91%	14.90%	14.81%
2020-21	\$12,791	\$13,184	\$13,222	\$902	\$382	\$421	7.59%	2.98%	3.29%
2021-22	\$12,722	\$13,823	\$14,946	-\$69	\$639	\$1,724	-0.54%	4.85%	13.04%
2022-23	\$12,467	\$14,059	\$14,185	-\$255	\$236	-\$761	-2.00%	1.71%	-5.09%

TABLE 85
Per Student Tuition Rate History, Elk

Year	Certified Tuition			\$ Difference			% Change		
	Gr pK/K	Gr 1-5	Gr 6	Gr pK/K	Gr 1-5	Gr 6	Gr pK/K	Gr 1-5	Gr 6
2017-18	\$14,689	\$12,615	\$11,831	-	-	-	-	-	-
2018-19	\$16,088	\$14,290	\$14,313	\$1,399	\$1,675	\$2,482	9.52%	13.28%	20.98%
2019-20	\$18,898	\$16,193	\$17,184	\$2,810	\$1,903	\$2,871	17.47%	13.32%	20.06%
2020-21	\$12,882	\$15,182	\$13,482	-\$6,016	-\$1,011	-\$3,702	-31.83%	-6.24%	-21.54%
2021-22	\$15,855	\$14,859	\$15,461	\$2,973	-\$323	\$1,979	23.08%	-2.13%	14.68%
2022-23	\$18,135	\$15,512	\$15,720	\$2,280	\$653	\$259	14.38%	4.39%	1.68%

TABLE 86
Tuition History, Delsea-Newfield⁶⁰

Year	Certified Tuition		Regular Ed ADE		Total ADE	Total Tuition
	Gr 7-8	Gr 9-12	Gr 7-8	Gr 9-12		
2018-19	\$16,138	\$14,989	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
2019-20	\$14,347	\$15,807	43.63	77.23	120.86	\$1,846,755
2020-21	\$14,394	\$15,312	33.42	79.12	112.54	\$1,692,514
2021-22	\$15,173	\$15,431	26.58	67.98	94.56	\$1,452,298
2022-23	\$15,721	\$15,945	34.22	69.88	104.09	\$1,652,121

TABLE 87
Tuition History, Franklin-Newfield

Year	Certified Tuition			Regular Ed ADE			Total ADE	Total Tuition
	Gr K	Gr 1-5	Gr 6	Gr K	Gr 1-5	Gr 6		
2018-19	\$10,817	\$11,142	\$11,150	16.66	79.56	16.31	112.53	\$1,248,525
2019-20	\$11,889	\$12,802	\$12,801	19.00	88.39	14.00	121.39	\$1,536,674
2020-21	\$12,791	\$13,184	\$13,222	14.91	86.51	19.94	121.36	\$1,594,908
2021-22	\$12,722	\$13,823	\$14,946	17.70	87.76	19.17	124.63	\$1,724,801
2022-23	\$12,467	\$14,059	\$14,185	16.08	89.00	8.63	113.71	\$1,574,137

⁶⁰ ADA = average daily attendance, ADE = average daily enrollment. Delsea calculates tuition with both regular education and special education students on the same roster sheet. The attendance database was sorted to provide ADA for regular education students only. The consultant calculated regular education total tuition by calculating ADE multiplied by the certified tuition rate. The district has not confirmed these calculations.

The Delsea-Newfield and Franklin-Newfield send-receive relationships both operate with annual financial contracts utilizing the form required by the State. The districts do not have an overarching multi-year contract describing terms and conditions. While some districts do find that an overarching agreement provides guidelines for issues when they arise, lack of such an agreement is not unusual. There may have been a more formal multi-year agreement when Newfield first joined Delsea and Franklin. If it did exist, it evidently was not renewed at some point. Evidence that it may have existed is implied in an interdistrict communication stating “the sending-receiving agreements specifically provides that any such dispute must be submitted to the Executive County Superintendent.”⁶¹ The current Newfield business administrator states that both receiving districts have been accommodating when Newfield has worked to create a balanced budget.

Franklin and Newfield follow the traditional send-receive tuition procedures. Franklin uses the prior year certified tuition rate multiplied by 4% (2% for the current year and 2% for the proposed budget year). According to the Franklin business administrator, there have not been any exceptions or accommodations to Newfield as it relates to tuition payments. Newfield says the kindergarten enrollment number has been adjusted occasionally in the past.

It should be noted that Franklin does have a tuition based preschool program that is set up to provide the inclusionary aspects of the preschool disabled program. Parents who send their children to the preschool pay a \$2,000 per year tuition fee, which is not part of the send-receive tuition agreement.

Delsea uses the prior year certified tuition rate multiplied by 2.5% as the estimated tuition rate for future year budgeting. As stated above, some send-receive districts find it necessary to create solutions to accommodate issues of one of the districts. This is the case for Delsea and Newfield. Newfield could not submit a balanced budget for the 2017-18 fiscal year, so the two districts worked out a tuition agreement. The agreement deferred approximately \$729,000 to be paid at the rate of \$121,000 per year over a period of six years, with payments made sooner if Newfield could do so. Newfield made a final payment of \$309,000 on this deferral in 2022-23, ahead of schedule.

However, there is a large discrepancy in outstanding tuition invoices between Delsea and Newfield. The consultant had multiple communications with the business administrators in an effort to fairly and accurately represent both sides. The consultant also reviewed many documents submitted by the districts. Both business administrators have reviewed the topic during the annual mid-year budget review held with the NJDOE county office, and there has been correspondence between the districts about the discrepancy.

According to the Newfield business administrator, “ the Board has taken the position that there is no further money due to Delsea other than the current (2022-23) tuition adjustment. The Board’s

⁶¹ Letter from Newfield superintendent/business administrator to Delsea superintendent, July 23, 2019

understanding is that payment of the \$729,000 brought the balance to \$0, other than any current year tuition adjustment.”

Given the current financial status of Newfield amid 2024-25 state aid cuts, it is unlikely that Newfield would be in a position to pay any significant amount of possible past due tuition. Funds for the 2024-25 year tuition should be available, as the district was able to pay off the deferred tuition and end the 2023 year with a tuition reserve account balance of \$396,488.⁶² The business administrator attributes this significant change to reduced expenses over the last two years and an increase in categorical state aid in the amount of \$669,321.

In conclusion, the tuition dispute creates a potential debt to one district and a potentially uncollectible receivable to the other. This issue would need to be addressed prior to a regionalization vote. Since discussions have been ongoing for more than five years, and are differently represented in the ACFR’s of the two districts, it seems unlikely that the auditors for the districts will reach a conclusion that would be acceptable to both parties. The services of an independent auditor (not currently representing either district) or a forensic audit, the level of which could be determined by the districts, may be needed to resolve the long-standing discrepancy.

The sale of Newfield’s only significant asset, a 1912 school building that is currently rented to a non-public school, could provide temporary funding, but would require legal resolution to the lease terms. Details are provided in the facility section of this study, though the sale of such a unique building is not guaranteed.

Documents from the Franklin administration indicate that 40 Newfield students attend non-public schools. The Newfield business administrator confirmed that and stated that there are an additional 29 preschool students at the Edgerton School to which Newfield rents its building. Since the majority of these students are elementary, using the 2022-23 certified grades 1-5 tuition yields an annual cost of \$562,360 avoided by Newfield. If the non-public school did not exist in the actual municipality and only ten of these 40 students enrolled at Franklin, additional tuition would be approximately \$140,059 per year, a significant additional cost to Newfield.

A detailed financial analysis of special education tuition is not conducted in this report due to the variable nature of special education needs and populations. The tuition calculations do follow the same process as for regular education students. As stated previously in the Education & Program section of this study,

Based on numbers alone, it appears efficiencies may be realized within the Franklin and Elk special education departments. For example, students with certain special needs who would benefit from an MD program in Elk are often sent to an out-of-district placement when they could be placed more efficiently in

⁶² NJDOE Annual Comprehensive Financial Report, 2023

Franklin. Elk may also benefit from an in-house LLD program, depending on the number of students appropriate for such a program in any given year.

Franklin had a 2022-23 certified per pupil cost of \$31,280 for MD and \$20,676 for LLD. The districts would need to work together to evaluate a variety of options to see which is most cost effective if the status quo remains. However, it is not uncommon for a regionalization to allow the creation or enhancement of special education programs across the districts with significant savings of resources (i.e., staffing, space, money).

28. Reserves

The State of New Jersey allows many different reserve accounts, each of which is legally restricted for specific purposes, and in some cases, has a cap for the dollar amount that may be reserved. Although some reserve accounts require deposits be specified during budget preparation, some of the reserves are allowed to be identified at the end of the fiscal year in June, utilizing unspent appropriations or unanticipated revenues. The district audit reviews the reserve accounts to ensure that they do not exceed legal restrictions. The districts in this study use three types of reserve accounts, and only those will be described at this time.

Most districts do have a capital reserve account. N.J.S.A. 7F-41, N.J.S.A. 18A 7G-31, N.J.S. A. 18A:21-2, and N.J.A.C 6A:23A-14.1 provide the restrictions on this account. Deposits and expenses to and from this reserve must be incorporated into the certified budget. The district is capped at the amount of the local share of project costs in the district's Long Range Facility Plan.

Tuition reserve accounts are restricted to districts in a send-receive relationship and regulated by N.J.A.C. 6A:23A-17.1. The purpose is to budget for tuition adjustments based upon tuition rates certified by the state.⁶³ They are capped at up to 10% of the estimated tuition cost. Deposits to this type of account are usually a year-end calculation based upon available funds and anticipated tuition adjustments.

Maintenance reserve accounts are the most common reserve account. Governed by N.J.A.C. 6A:26A, N.J.S.A. 18A:7F-41, the maintenance reserve account balance cannot, at any time, exceed 4% of the replacement cost of the school district's school facilities for the current year.

TABLE 88
Reserve Accounts as of June 30, 2023

	Elk	Franklin	Newfield	Delsea
Capital Reserve	825,120	1,896,062	500,000	929,485
Maintenance Reserve	300,000	839,264	16,971	226,436
Tuition Reserve	0	0	396,488	0

⁶³ An explanation can be found in the Tuition subsection of this study.

29. Facility Utilization

This section of the report models the projected use of available instructional space in each school building across the five-year enrollment projection. It is a high-level evaluation for the purpose of analyzing available instructional space in each of the schools, so it does not examine infrastructure such as roofs, heating systems, electrical needs, etc. The data used for this analysis came from:

- A survey provided to each business administrator for the purpose of obtaining information specific to each school;
- A review of the most recent long-range facility plan, which provides detailed information describing instructional space in each school such as classroom numbers, classroom sizes, and co-curricular and non-instructional space; and
- A review of the actual building floor plans.

Tables with grade level projections are provided for each school building which also list:

- The number of general education and special education (self-contained) classrooms needed for each grade level for each projected year. Full sized classrooms are those with at least 650 square feet of space. While there have been changes over the years in size requirements for new classrooms, this does not apply to older buildings; therefore, the minimum used in this study is 650 square feet.
- The projected average class size for each grade level. While maximum class sizes may be designated by district policy, we used state guidelines for this study. These guidelines are 21 students in grades kindergarten to three, 23 in grades four and five, and 24 in grades six through twelve. A maximum of 12 was used for self-contained (SC) special education.
- For pK students, the state maximum of 15 students was used. Since Elk and Franklin currently run half-day pK programs, they can assign twice the number of students to the same classroom.
- A summary of specialized (Sp) instructional spaces (e.g., art, music, computers, physical education).

TABLE 89
Projected Room Utilization, Aura Elementary School (Elk)

	pK	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	SC	Sp	Rooms Used	Rooms Available	Rooms Net
Students 2023-24	23	41	38	33	52	30	40	44					
Full Sized Rooms	1	3	3	3	3	2	2	2	0	4	23	23	0
Avg Class Size	12	14	13	11	17	15	20	22					
Students 2024-25	30	49	40	37	31	53	31	39					
Full Sized Rooms	1	3	2	2	2	3	2	2	0	4	21	23	2
Avg Class Size	15	16	20	19	16	18	16	20					
Students 2025-26	24	46	46	39	35	31	54	30					
Full Sized Rooms	1	3	3	2	2	2	3	2	0	4	22	23	1
Avg Class Size	12	15	15	20	18	16	18	15					
Students 2026-27	26	65	35	47	38	33	32	55					
Full Sized Rooms	1	3	2	3	2	2	2	3	0	4	22	23	1
Avg Class Size	13	22	18	16	19	17	16	18					
Students 2027-28	26	47	72	46	45	34	32	33					
Full Sized Rooms	1	3	4	3	3	2	2	2	0	4	24	23	-1
Avg Class Size	13	16	18	15	15	17	16	17					
Students 2028-29	26	47	50	86	52	43	34	34					
Full Sized Rooms	1	3	3	4	3	2	2	2	0	4	24	23	-1
Avg Class Size	13	16	17	22	17	22	17	17					

Table 89 shows that Aura Elementary School has 23 full sized classrooms available. There are currently no self-contained special education classes in the school. Four classrooms are listed as “specialized” for art, music, computers, and a small gymnasium, bringing the number of rooms used to 23. The last column shows the remaining classrooms that could be used for other purposes. Three smaller rooms used for programs such as special needs pull-outs and/or small group instruction are not shown in the table above. The tables for the other schools are similarly constructed.

In 2024-25, 2025-26, and 2026-27, Elk has additional classrooms that can be assigned to reduce class sizes in at least one or two grade levels, or be repurposed for another use. In 2027-28 and 2028-29, there are projected to be shortfalls of classrooms, so strategic decisions may need to be made that cause the least impact on class sizes or program offerings.

TABLE 90
Projected Room Utilization, Janvier Elementary School (Franklin)

	pK	K	1	2	SC	Sp	Rooms Used	Rooms Available	Rooms Net
Students 2023-24	37	160	177	167	18				
Full Sized Rooms	1.5	8	9	8	2	2	30.5	34	3.5
Avg Class Size	12	20	20	21	9				
Students 2024-25	30	161	167	185	21				
Full Sized Rooms	1	9	8	9	2	2	31	34	3
Avg Class Size	15	18	21	21	11				
Students 2025-26	34	176	170	175	21				
Full Sized Rooms	1.5	9	9	9	2	2	32.5	34	1.5
Avg Class Size	11	20	19	19	11				
Students 2026-27	35	187	146	174	21				
Full Sized Rooms	1.5	9	8	9	2	2	31.5	34	2.5
Avg Class Size	12	21	18	19	11				
Students 2027-28	35	156	192	142	21				
Full Sized Rooms	1.5	8	10	8	2	2	31.5	34	2.5
Avg Class Size	12	20	19	18	11				
Students 2028-29	35	155	157	181	21				
Full Sized Rooms	1.5	8	8	9	2	2	30.5	34	3.5
Avg Class Size	12	19	20	20	11				

At Janvier, there are four smaller classrooms along with the net rooms available to provide services and programs such as occupational and physical therapy (OT/PT), speech, computer instruction, and small group instruction. Alternatively, the net rooms could be used if Franklin wants to expand its preschool program.

TABLE 91
Projected Room Utilization, Main Road Elementary School (Franklin)

	3	4	SC	Sp	Rooms Used	Rooms Available	Rooms Net
Students 2023-24	171	173	15				
Full Sized Rooms	9	9	2	4	24	24	0
Avg Class Size	19	19	8				
Students 2024-25	169	168	21				
Full Sized Rooms	9	8	2	4	23	24	1
Avg Class Size	19	21	11				
Students 2025-26	185	173	21				
Full Sized Rooms	9	8	2	4	23	24	1
Avg Class Size	21	22	11				
Students 2026-27	179	186	21				
Full Sized Rooms	9	9	2	4	24	24	0

Avg Class Size	20	21	11				
Students 2027-28	180	182	21				
Full Sized Rooms	9	9	2	4	24	24	0
Avg Class Size	20	20	11				
Students 2028-29	145	178	21				
Full Sized Rooms	7	9	2	4	22	24	2
Avg Class Size	21	20	11				

There are seven smaller classrooms used for programs such as speech, resource, or small group instruction. There appear to be enough rooms to house the projected enrollments in a similar fashion as the current configuration. It is worth noting here that the district sold the Lake Drive School in 2023 for \$175,000. The administration investigated renovating the building to house preschool students, but the cost would have exceeded \$16 million.

TABLE 92
Projected Room Utilization, Reutter Elementary School (Franklin)

	5	6	SC	Sp	Rooms Used	Rooms Available	Rooms Net
Students 2023-24	195	192					
Full Sized Rooms	10	9	0	6	25	25	0
Avg Class Size	20	21					
Students 2024-25	170	199					
Full Sized Rooms	9	10	0	6	25	25	0
Avg Class Size	19	20					
Students 2025-26	165	173					
Full Sized Rooms	9	9	0	6	24	25	1
Avg Class Size	18	19					
Students 2026-27	162	163					
Full Sized Rooms	9	9	0	6	24	25	1
Avg Class Size	18	18					
Students 2027-28	162	163					
Full Sized Rooms	9	9	0	6	24	25	1
Avg Class Size	18	18					
Students 2028-29	177	183					
Full Sized Rooms	9	10	0	6	25	25	0
Avg Class Size	20	18					

There are seven smaller classrooms which are used for programs such as speech, OT/PT, and small group instruction. The school appears to be fully utilized and should remain the same over the next five years.

For Delsea Regional Middle and High Schools, the study assumes that each student in each grade carries five academic courses requiring one full sized general education classroom. The nature of secondary school departmentalized classes considers that each student will be, for some part of the day, not in standard general education courses, but in a dedicated classroom for lunch, art,

music, physical education, and other elective courses. This allows all classrooms to be used all day with classrooms shared by more than one teacher and/or subject each day.

TABLE 93
Projected Room Utilization, Delsea Regional Middle School

	7	8	SC	Sp	Rooms Used	Rooms Available	Rooms Net
Students 2023-24	250	228	40				
Full Sized Rooms	11	11	4	3	29	30	1
Avg Class Size	23	21	10				
Students 2024-25	250	251	40				
Full Sized Rooms	11	11	4	3	29	30	1
Avg Class Size	23	23	10				
Students 2025-26	253	251	40				
Full Sized Rooms	11	10	4	3	28	30	2
Avg Class Size	23	25	10				
Students 2026-27	219	254	40				
Full Sized Rooms	11	11	4	3	29	30	1
Avg Class Size	20	23	10				
Students 2027-28	239	219	40				
Full Sized Rooms	10	10	4	3	27	30	3
Avg Class Size	24	22	10				
Students 2028-29	220	240	40				
Full Sized Rooms	10	10	4	3	27	30	3
Avg Class Size	22	24	10				

There are six smaller classrooms which may be used for resource, speech, OT/PT, and other programs and services. The middle school is fully utilized for now, but some additional spaces appear to open up near the end of the five-year projection.

TABLE 94
Projected Room Utilization, Delsea Regional High School

	9	10	11	12	SC	Rooms Used	Rooms Available	Rooms Net
Students 2023-24	285	268	275	276	18			
Full Sized Rooms	13	12	12	12	2	51	52	1
Avg Class Size	22	22	23	23	9			
Students 2024-25	237	269	267	264	18			
Full Sized Rooms	10	12	12	11	2	47	52	5
Avg Class Size	24	22	22	24	9			
Students 2025-26	261	224	268	256	18			
Full Sized Rooms	11	10	12	11	2	46	52	6
Avg Class Size	24	22	22	23	9			
Students 2026-27	261	246	223	257	18			
Full Sized Rooms	11	11	10	11	2	45	52	7

Avg Class Size	24	22	22	23	9			
Students 2027-28	264	246	245	214	18			
Full Sized Rooms	11	11	11	11	2	46	52	6
Avg Class Size	24	22	22	19	9			
Students 2028-29	228	250	245	236	18			
Full Sized Rooms	10	10	11	10	2	43	52	9
Avg Class Size	23	24	22	24	9			

There are seven smaller classrooms which can be used for resource, small group instruction, OT/PT, ESL, Speech and other programs and services. The school also provides space for guidance, physical education, and vocational programs. It does appear that this school is fully utilized and will be able to easily accommodate future enrollment, which is projected to decline moderately over the next five years.

Overall, the instructional spaces of the Delsea, Franklin, and Elk schools can sustain the current and projected utilization. The only future concern may be with any intent or requirement to provide full-day preschool programs, which would have an impact on elementary school space unless other options were explored.

Time and attention should be paid to identifying spaces throughout the Delsea region suitable to operating a high-quality preschool program. Options may include leasing additional space in the Pitman School District building currently housing several Elk preschool classrooms, leasing space in another Pitman School District building, utilizing the building owned by the Newfield Board of Education that currently houses a non-public school, or investigating any other spaces that previously served as public or non-public school buildings. While a comprehensive facilities and transportation study would likely be necessary to determine the viability of such spaces, these options should be considered for the districts to take full advantage of state funding and realize the long-term benefits of a full-day, universal, preschool program.

The school building in Newfield was built in 1912 and contains 29,000 square feet. The district was sending its students to Buena, who rented the building, prior to Newfield dissolving that send-receive and entering into send-receive relationships with Franklin and Delsea in 2012.

The building has been leased to Edgerton Christian Academy since 2012. Approximately 120 K-8 students attend the school, and there are two modular classrooms on the property. Current rental income for the school is \$29,400 annually. The lease allows for five year renewals, the existing one expiring in June 2027, and states that Edgerton has the right to give notice of canceling the extended renewal term with a year's notice. It does not stipulate how the landlord might terminate the lease if it desired to do so. Edgerton had plans to build a permanent school in Buena. However, that is no longer being considered, so the district will likely have a tenant at least through 2027.

Depreciation is less than \$100,000 per year, resulting in a June 2023 valuation of \$1,484,192. As stated in the tuition section above, sale of this building could generate temporary funding, but

careful consideration should be given to other potential uses. The district has not explored selling the facility, so a potential sales price has not been established.

The district spent \$38,000 to repair an old asbestos boiler during the 2022-23 fiscal year. A roof replacement is estimated at \$600,000 and the 45 year old boiler also needs to be replaced. Newfield does have a \$500,000 capital reserve fund. Costs to upgrade the building to be used for a public school again would be in addition to these major replacements.

While the above data might make one question the decision to lease the building, there is another factor to be considered. Approximately 69 of the 120 students at Edgerton are Newfield residents, 40 in grades K-8 and 29 in the preschool program. Using the Franklin 2022-23 certified grades 1-5 tuition yields a \$562,360 annual tuition cost avoided by Newfield because the students attend Edgerton.

30. Financial Impact

The consultants performed a comprehensive review of historical state aid, tax levies, property values, incomes, district budgets, audits, enrollments, and other financial records, in order to project future values and estimate the financial impact of regionalizing for each participating district and municipality.

The study evaluated two scenarios: (1) the status quo, limited 7-12 Delsea Regional (Franklin and Elk with Newfield as a send-receive to both Franklin and Delsea); and (2) an expansion to an all-purpose, pK-12, regionalization with Newfield added as a constituent district. Key assumptions include voter approval, maximum 2% annual tax levy increases, cost reductions approved by the board of education, continued state aid under the School Funding Reform Act (SFRA), consistent trends in equalized property values, termination of shared services agreements upon consolidation, and the applicability of P.L.2021, c.402 provisions.

By virtue of studying the feasibility of regionalizing, the elementary school districts of Franklin and Elk and the non-operating Newfield school district will all be eligible for state aid relief either by way of decreasing the amount state aid that was removed for fiscal year 2024 or shrinking the amount that is scheduled to be removed in fiscal year 2025, or both. The amount of aid eligible to be recovered by all three districts totals more than \$600,000 over the two years.

A model approximating the SFRA funding formula was utilized for the purpose of estimating state aid. State aid estimates for future years (2026-2029) are projected based on historical data (2020-2025), enrollment, demographic, property value, and aggregate income trends in each participating school district and municipality given the assumptions stated above. Regionalizing is expected to produce roughly the same amount of total state aid under the SFRA formula as would have been received as separate school districts. As a regional school district, state aid will be highest when calculated for the budget year as an enlarged regional district unless the state aid reduction benefit described above is also counted as state aid for the pre-budget year. In that

case, state aid in the year prior to regionalization may be higher in some years between 2026 and 2029 than it will be as calculated for the enlarged regional district. In this scenario, the regional would receive the higher amount in those years – an option reserved only for districts regionalizing following an SREP grant approval – and therefore, would be a direct benefit to regionalization.

Similar to how total state aid in the regional district would be roughly equivalent to the total aid received by all participating districts, the total estimated tax levy in the enlarged regional is roughly equivalent to the total of all participating district levies. Tax levies in both the status quo and the regionalization scenario are assumed to increase by the maximum allowable increase of 2%.

Current law provides three apportionment methods based on equalized valuation, student enrollment, or a combination of both. Enrollment, property values, and income trends all differ and combine to produce unique financial impacts to each community with respect to potential tax savings. Many of the apportionment methods could benefit all three communities. Depending on the specific apportionment ratio chosen, a transitional apportionment method may be chosen for up to 10 years to phase-in the impact to each community. Apportionment ratios skewed towards enrollment produce the most balanced potential tax savings to each community. The potential tax savings for Franklin and Elk primarily result from the tax levy being reduced by the estimated cost savings, and for Newfield from reconfiguring the composition of constituent school districts.

The existing limited-purpose Delsea Regional district apportions tax levy based on 100% of the equalized valuations of Elk and Franklin. The analysis shows that in the status quo scenario, Franklin's share of total Delsea Regional equalized valuations is projected to rise to around 82% by 2029, while Elk's share will decline to 18%. In the full regionalization scenario, Franklin's share of total equalized valuations would be lower at around 73%, Elk's share would remain at about 20%, and Newfield would be responsible for 7% of the total tax levy. The most balanced tax impacts for all three districts are scenarios heavily weighted towards enrollment. A change to a complete enrollment-based apportionment method would be a departure from the current practice but could provide more flexibility and balance.

Budgetary costs per student were examined comparing district spending priorities and efficiency to their peers across the state. The analysis shows that all three districts have overall budgetary costs per pupil that are very efficient compared to their peers, with a strong commitment to classroom instruction. Potential cost savings in an all-purpose regional district total identified an estimated \$1,000,000, through reductions in audit costs, professional services costs, district administrative and clerical staff, and a shared business administrator, while maintaining all existing programs. The removal of a tax deferral would result in an estimated new cost of \$177,000, leading to an average net cost savings of \$823,000. This could amount to a total savings over a five-year period of some \$4.8 million. In addition to the potential cost savings presented above that may arise from regionalization, an estimated \$603,044 in additional benefits

to the constituent districts may be realized through state aid savings in the period before regionalization. The actual determination of reductions and subsequent use of any cost savings from regionalization would be decided by the future Board of Education of the enlarged all-purpose regional district.

Each district except Newfield has debt service on its ledgers. A newly enlarged regional district would combine those debts into one lump sum moving forward.

The review of the main collective bargaining agreements in Delsea, Elk, and Franklin provides a comparison of key aspects to help with potential negotiations if the districts decide to regionalize fully. The agreements have similar expiration dates, but vary in terms of recognition clauses, negotiation procedures, grievance procedures, and association rights and privileges. The length of the school year and day, as well as teacher preparation time, are similar across the districts, but extra service requirements for activities vary and would need coordination in a combined agreement.

Salary guides show some divergence that would require alignment, and leaves of absence are generally similar and fairly standard among school district agreements. Insurance coverages tend to be more divergent between the districts, with differences in medical, prescription, dental, and coverage waiver provisions. The districts also have varying practices regarding transfers and assignments, evaluations, separation compensation for accumulated sick days, and tuition reimbursement. Delsea has a unique contract provision allowing children of full-time certified employees to attend its schools at a reduced cost.

Current law allows for the existing contracts to expire and then be renegotiated by the new all purpose regionalized board of education. As is the case in most districts, significant effort will need to be focused on the salary and insurance issues to achieve a collective bargaining agreement for a fully regionalized district.

Shared services are permitted by statute and are promoted by the state as a cost-saving measure, although their effectiveness can vary. The districts in the study participate in many shared services, including purchasing cooperatives, insurance, fuel, non-public funds and services, staff development, and transportation.

Delsea and Elk have shared many administrative personnel over the years, which can lead to increased workload and potential turnover or burnout. The time that the administrators spend duplicating planning and administrative duties (e.g., budgets, audits, board meetings, professional development, compliance activities) could be reduced significantly in a consolidated district. This would free up time that could be used to further benefit student achievement, focus on cost efficiencies, and achieve other district goals that simply cannot be addressed under the current time constraints.

Regarding contracted services, the proposed regionalization is unlikely to significantly impact transportation programs, as the schools that students attend would remain largely unchanged.

The districts already strive to maximize shared services and cooperatives in transportation. The districts use food service management companies and offer varying levels of breakfast and lunch services. Franklin has the highest percentage of students eligible for free and reduced meals, but none of the districts qualify presently for the community eligibility program, nor would they under a full regionalization. The study suggests that, apart from potential savings due to economies of scale in purchasing or personnel, meal programs would not be significantly impacted by a pK-12 regionalization.

Newfield is a non-operating district, sending its pK-6 students to Franklin and its grades 7-12 students to Delsea. The financial arrangements in send-receive relationships involve estimating enrollment, setting tuition rates, and reconciling actual versus estimated costs. The process can be complex and lead to financial concerns and contention between districts. A full regionalization would eliminate these potential issues.

The send-receive relationships operate with annual financial contracts. There is a significant tuition discrepancy between Delsea and Newfield that creates a potential debt for one district and a possible uncollectible receivable for the other; this could be addressed through an independent or forensic audit. The section also briefly discusses special education tuition and suggests that a regionalization could allow for the creation or enhancement of special education programs across the districts, potentially leading to significant resource savings.

The State allows school districts to maintain various reserve accounts, each with specific legal restrictions and purposes. The districts in this study utilize three types of reserve accounts: capital reserve, tuition reserve, and maintenance reserve. Capital reserve accounts are restricted to the local share of project costs in the district's Long Range Facility Plan, while tuition reserve accounts are capped at 10% of the estimated tuition cost and are used by districts in send-receive relationships to budget for tuition adjustments. Maintenance reserve account balances cannot exceed 4% of the current year's replacement cost of the district's school facilities. As of June 30, 2023, the participating districts have varying balances in these reserve accounts, with Franklin having the highest balances in capital and maintenance reserves, and Newfield having a significant tuition reserve balance.

The projected use of available instructional space in each school building across the five-year enrollment projection was reviewed. The analysis considers factors such as the number of general education and special education classrooms needed, projected average class sizes, and specialized instructional spaces. The data suggests that the instructional spaces of the schools can sustain the current and projected utilization, with the only potential future concern being the provision of full-day preschool programs. Newfield's school building, which is currently leased to Edgerton Christian Academy, is noted, along with the potential financial implications of selling the building or continuing to lease it, considering the cost avoidance of tuition for Newfield residents attending Edgerton.

FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

This feasibility study considered perspectives from governance and law, demography, education and program, and finance and operations. After analysis of the data gathered in each of these sections, **we produce the following findings and recommend that the boards of education of the Delsea Regional, Franklin, Elk, and Newfield school districts strongly consider enlarging the current limited purpose regional into one all-purpose, pK-12, regional school district.** Any referendum or vote to regionalize which does not include all four districts would completely change the analysis and findings produced herein.

Governance and Law

1. Overall, a proposed grades pK-12 regionalization of Delsea, Franklin, Elk, and Newfield poses no apparent legal concerns. The statutes cited under the section entitled “Election Process and Board Composition” would be expected to operate as written. (p. 21)
2. The law requires that the proposal be submitted to the voters of *each of the constituent districts* (emphasis added) of the regional district instead of at large to the voters of the regional district, and the proposal shall be considered adopted if a majority of the voters in a majority of the constituent districts that constitute the limited purpose regional district vote to form an all purpose regional district. The board of education of a constituent district of the limited purpose district that does not vote to join the all purpose regional may continue to send students that were enrolled in the limited purpose regional district to schools that were established as part of the limited purpose regional district. (p. 14)
3. If based on current enrollment projections, which we recommend, board membership of the newly-enlarged regional district would be as follows: Franklin - one for a 3-year term, two for 2-year terms, and three for 1-year terms; Elk - one for a 3-year and one for a 2-year; Newfield - one for a 3-year term. Thereafter, all members shall be elected for 3-year terms. (p. 16-17)
4. While each district scored admirably and was deemed high performing during its last NJQSAC review (2014-15 for Delsea and Franklin, 2021-22 for Elk), additional alignment among the districts through a consolidation of the boards of education could aid in strengthening those scores in a more universal manner while reducing the time spent on completing the self evaluation and review. That time may then be redirected toward students, staff, and program development. (p. 17-18)
5. Approval by the various boards of education would be needed to move forward with an application to the state Commissioner of Education for approval to hold a referendum to expand Delsea Regional into a grades pK-12 district. (p. 20)

6. Given that these three communities would be expanding an existing limited purpose district to an all purpose regional district that will continue to include all of their students, N.J.S.A. 18A:13-47.11, which prohibits districts from consolidating, regionalizing or withdrawing from a regional district that will increase or exacerbate the segregation of students by racial, socioeconomic, disability or English language learner status, is not applicable to this enlargement of the limited purpose Delsea Regional to an all purpose grades pK-12 given that there would be no change in the constituent districts. (p. 21-22)

Demography

7. Tracking the number of children born in a municipality is important in demographic studies in order to project kindergarten enrollment over future years by seeing trends over the recent past. The data is also useful in evaluating the relative health of a municipality, as population growth is often the result of a desire by parents and others to move into and stay in a community. Newfield has the highest birth rates relative to population in the region, while Elk and Franklin are demonstrating stability due to near replacement birth rate levels. (p. 25)
8. Research indicates that there are no planned major housing developments in any of the three municipalities that might impact school enrollment at this time. As a percentage of the total units in each community, there are marginal increases in housing with either approval for construction or those for which certificates of occupancy have been issued. (p. 26)
9. Long-range enrollment projections show more stability from 2024-25 on, and indicate that the district is not likely to see a return to the highest enrollment levels from 2018-19 and 2019-20. (p. 29)
10. Increases in the number of Hispanic and Black students/families provide an opportunity to evaluate the equity of access to resources and programs in the schools for these traditionally underserved groups. Changes in cultural background present a moment to ensure that honoring the dignity of each student and developing an even greater sense of belonging in the schools' climate are priorities. Higher household incomes combined with lower percentages of families qualifying for free and reduced meals should reduce the needs for certain kinds of at-risk programming designed to address the effects of lower income. (p. 33-34)
11. The addition of Newfield as a member of the regional will not create any changes in enrollment, demographics, and/or socioeconomic status projected for the district. In summary, the data indicates that creating a grade pK-12 regional for the municipalities of Franklin, Elk, and Newfield will not create any demographic or enrollment changes in the school district. (p. 34)

Education & Program

12. Students entering Delsea from Elk and Franklin have different educational experiences. Having all students entering Delsea with shared experiences in terms of educational programs and philosophy, time spent studying each of those content areas, and the professional learning that accompanies these programs can offer several benefits. (p. 47)
 - a. Teachers of upper grades should see greater consistency in student skills, which translates into lessons that meet the needs of more students.
 - b. 7th and 9th grade staff members will have a much greater awareness of the skills students have likely mastered and those skills on which they will likely have to further develop. Teachers of the upper grades can more easily share with the teachers of the lower grades the data and information they need to help them plan and adjust their instruction. The alignment of assessment tools allows both sending and receiving teachers to speak a common language when they have access to consistent data about student strengths and areas where additional support may be needed.
 - c. Consistency in the time allotted to literacy instruction can produce more consistent results among students.
13. One central Delsea Regional curriculum office serving students in grades pK-12 can play a vital role in providing direction, support, and coordination for curriculum and instructional practices within the district, ultimately leading to improved student achievement and success. With the expiration of ARP-ESSER funding in September 2024, a centralized curriculum office can increase the efficiency with which it uses resources by eliminating duplicative efforts and services. These efficiencies could ultimately preserve some of the instructional support systems, such as interventionists and coaches, originally made possible by federal funding in a more sustainable manner. (p. 48)
14. The similarity of professional learning plans between Delsea and Elk is no accident as they share leadership. With the common administrative leadership that would accompany an expanded full-purpose regional district, administrators and supervisors would be in position to best support the growth and development of staff, thereby impacting the educational outcomes of students. (p. 50)
15. Addressing achievement gaps requires that a school provides targeted support and resources to underserved students and communities, encourages a focus on culturally responsive teaching practices, and implements policies that foster inclusive and equitable learning environments for all students. A more consistent program in ELA and mathematics, beginning in the younger grades, would yield more common student experiences and would potentially result in more productive professional learning

- communities, where teachers examine assessment data and the corresponding instructional strategies that generated those results. (p. 53)
16. A wide range of student growth scores provides an opportunity for district leaders, working within a regional setting, to examine the programs and instructional practices that are yielding the highest levels of student growth demonstrated in ELA and mathematics. By combining district- and building-level supervisory staff and reassigning responsibilities closely aligned to areas of expertise, a regional school district can better serve and provide targeted support to the teachers preparing students to meet or exceed academic standards and leave high school college and career ready. (p. 57)
 17. While some variance between the schools may be age related, it would be beneficial for the region to examine the strategies being employed by those schools with more favorable rates of chronic absenteeism. (p. 59)
 18. Based on numbers alone, it appears efficiencies may be realized within the Franklin and Elk special education departments. For example, students with certain special needs who would benefit from an MD program in Elk are often sent to an out-of-district placement when they could be placed more effectively and efficiently in Franklin. Elk may also benefit from an in-house LLD program, depending on the number of students appropriate for such a program in any given year. Franklin acknowledges that a program for students with autism may benefit the children of the township by allowing those students to be educated in-district in a less restrictive environment. These students are often sent out-of-district to receive their educational services. (p. 63)
 19. Due to the relatively low numbers of students eligible for ELL services, there appear to be opportunities to more efficiently educate these students in grades K-6 throughout the region. (p. 63)
 20. While intervention systems are present in each of the school districts, the criteria, tools, and processes for identifying and serving students differ from school to school. Unifying around a protocol for identifying students in need of support would benefit every student in need of those services by aligning the staff training on how to accurately identify and serve those students with the program and staffing required to meet their needs. (p. 65)
 21. Each of the districts offers what appear to be robust programs for their students identified as gifted. What appears to be lacking is any coordination of services to ensure that these students receive comparable experiences prior to seventh grade. While the students are still receiving the required services, we can imagine the outcomes that could be associated with aligning the programs across the elementary schools and syncing them with some of those advanced programs at the middle and high school, such as engineering, computer science, and digital arts. (p. 66)

22. By taking advantage of the preschool expansion funding offered by the State, the Franklin and Newfield students could enjoy these benefits as the 3- and 4-year olds from Elk currently do. By working in unison to identify both the members of their preschool universe and appropriate spaces in which to house the increased number of preschool classrooms, the students, parents, and entire Delsea area community could benefit from the many advantages that emerge from a universal high-quality preschool program. (p. 67)
23. Aligning clubs and activities across schools has the potential to create common experiences upon which students can draw, particularly in the areas of athletics and the arts, where skill development is essential for success. (p. 68)
24. The differences in instructional time provide an opportunity to provide more similar amounts of time to every student. This is something that can be considered during the collective bargaining process. (p. 69)
25. Under an all-purpose pK-12 regionalized district, the Board of Education will need to work with district- and building-level administrators to determine staffing needs at each elementary grade level and within each secondary subject area. Staff members may be moved between grade levels or across schools within their areas of certification to best meet the needs of the students they serve. These intra-district transfers and reassignments have the potential over time to lead to increased staffing efficiencies. (p. 69)
26. Delsea is more than competitive with its peer school districts and the state as a whole in terms of staff salaries. Student-to-administrator and student-to-teacher ratios fall near and slightly above the state averages, respectively. The student-to-support personnel ratio is an area that could be examined as it does significantly exceed the state average, though there may be compelling reasons for this. (p. 72)
27. Franklin has significantly lower teacher salaries than its peer school districts as well as the state as a whole. This is largely a result of Franklin staff being less experienced and having worked in the district for less time than the average school in N.J. This supports concerns raised by the Franklin central administrative team about staff turnover. Elk has higher classroom teacher salaries than most of its peer school districts, as reflected in the experience of its staff. (p. 76)
28. This study considers it as a given that all existing schools will remain open and operate with most school-level positions remaining as they presently do. Each school is expected to retain its administrative and teaching staff as well as other essential support positions such as nurses, counselors, library media specialists, and teaching assistants. It would take largely the same staff to perform the security and custodial functions in each school as well. There are no contingency plans considered here for staff changes based on the enrollment projections presented earlier in this study. However, as years pass following any regionalization, it will be important for central and school level administrators to pay

- close attention to staffing needs in each school as opportunities for efficiencies may present themselves. These considerations would want to mirror best practices in school staffing and operations. (p. 77)
29. There is already some staff sharing going on between the middle and high schools. A single physical location makes this somewhat easier than traveling between more distant schools. Child study team members such as psychologists, social workers, and learning disabilities teacher consultants may continue to be assigned at the school level depending on their case management and service loads, or may be an area for more intra-district sharing in an all-purpose regional district. As child study team members join together as one team, additional options may emerge to better match team members with students who would ultimately benefit from their specific skill sets. (p. 77)
30. With school-level staff remaining relatively constant, the opportunities for efficiency will be more available by combining district office staffs. A single unified district would need only one superintendent and one business administrator, while assistant superintendent and assistant business administrator positions would need to be considered in the new structure. One could project a reduction here from five current positions to four. Depending on the responsibilities assigned to an assistant superintendent, a similar review could be done of the instructional supervisor roles, reducing those from five to four. Newfield also has a part-time business administrator position, which would become redundant. The other administrative roles serving the child study team, technology, transportation and facilities could be combined into a single leader in each area. Clerical staff in each department could also present opportunities for restructuring in a unified pK-12 district. (p. 77)

Finance & Operations

31. In 2026, 2028, and 2029, state aid calculated by SFRA for the enlarged regional district is projected to be higher than the sum of constituent district aid in 2025, the year prior to a potential regionalization. This results in state aid being applied according to scenario (a) under S3488: the uncapped aid determined as an expanded regional district. In 2027, the short term impact of an increased local fair share rising faster than the corresponding increase in adequacy results in a decline in state aid for the expanded regional district. The decline is such that in absolute terms, the expanded regional district may receive less in 2027 than was received in 2025. This would result in the regional district receiving the aid amount from 2025 instead for that year, producing a benefit to regionalization estimated at \$96,000. (p. 94)
32. For districts that would see funding reduced because prior year aid was higher than formula aid in the current year, S3488 allows a district to slow the reduction by prorating the decrease. Franklin would be eligible to recover \$100,996 of state aid that has been removed for the current 2023-24 school year. In 2025, Franklin's state aid differential

- becomes negative and therefore disqualifies them from a benefit for that year. Elk would be eligible to recover a portion of its projected aid reduction for the upcoming 2024-25 school year in the amount of \$90,939. Newfield is eligible in both years and could recover a total of \$411,109 in state aid. (p. 97)
33. The existing limited-purpose Delsea Regional district currently apportions tax levy based solely on the equalized valuations of the two constituent school districts, Elk and Franklin. The actual student counts attending the regional school district are not considered when apportioning taxes. (p. 98)
34. Under the status quo, it is projected that Franklin's share of total Delsea equalized valuations will continue to rise, ultimately reaching roughly 82% by 2029. Conversely, Elk's share will decline to 18% by 2029. (p. 101)
35. Under the regionalization scenario, the equalized valuation picture changes considerably. In an enlarged all-purpose regional district, Franklin's share of total equalized valuations, and therefore its eventual share of total taxes levied, are lower than the figures shown in the status quo scenario (73% in the all-purpose regional in 2029). Elk's share remains almost unchanged at roughly 20% under the regional scenario in 2029. Newfield's addition as a constituent district would see it responsible for 7% of the total all-purpose regional tax levy. (p. 102)
36. At the current apportionment ratio in use at the limited-purpose Delsea Regional (100% equalized valuation and 0% enrollment), Franklin could see an average tax savings of roughly \$383,000 over the four year period from 2026 through 2029. Elk, however, would see an average tax increase of about \$101,000 and Newfield would experience the largest savings at \$540,000 over the same period. (p. 103)
37. When examining other apportionment ratios, the savings to Franklin and Elk become more balanced at apportionment ratios that weight enrollment higher until an inflection point at the method with weights 24% equalized valuation and 76% enrollment. At those ratios, Newfield's savings will be more than triple the potential savings amounts for Franklin and Elk (\$518k vs. \$150k). The transition from Newfield's current send-receive structure to being added as a constituent district could have a positive impact on tax levies in the community of Newfield. In addition, enlarging the current limited purpose regional district also has the potential to produce tax savings for both Franklin and Elk. (p. 103-104)
38. After examining all tax apportionment data, there does exist the possibility of potential tax savings to each constituent community at various apportionment ratios. Given the projected equalized valuation and enrollment trends in the constituent municipalities, a shift from relying on equalized valuations for apportionment to enrollments, may make sense. The most balanced tax impacts to all three constituents arise in apportionment scenarios where enrollment is weighted between 70% and 90%. The model identifies the

most balance, with respect to total savings amounts, at the 19% equalized valuation and 81% enrollment method. From the perspective of percentage savings (relative to the status quo) the model estimates the 0% equalized valuation and 100% enrollment method produces the most balance. Despite the specific ratios described, the potential tax savings is relatively balanced in all scenarios where enrollment is weighted at least 60%. Current law also allows for a transitional method of apportionment for up to ten years. It will be up to the future Board of Education of the enlarged all-purpose regional district to decide how to deal with any cost savings stemming from regionalization. Tax relief is one of many possible uses of such savings. (p. 106)

39. Elk, Franklin, and Delsea have overall budgetary costs per pupil that are very efficient compared to their peers. It is clear that all three districts prioritize classroom instruction, which provides direct student academic experiences, and therefore should receive primary attention and commitment in the district budget. (p. 108)
40. Potential cost savings in an all-purpose regional district total identified an estimated \$1,000,000, through reductions in audit costs, professional services costs, district administrative and clerical staff, and a shared business administrator, while maintaining all existing programs. The removal of a tax deferral would result in an estimated new cost of \$177,000, leading to an average net cost savings of \$823,000. This could amount to a total savings over a five-year period of some \$4.8 million. In addition to the potential cost savings presented above that may arise from regionalization, an estimated \$603,044 in additional benefits to the constituent districts may be realized through state aid savings in the period before regionalization. The actual determination of reductions and subsequent use of any cost savings from regionalization would be decided by the future Board of Education of the enlarged regional district. (p. 109)
41. The review of the main collective bargaining agreements in Delsea, Elk, and Franklin provides a comparison of key aspects to help with potential negotiations if the districts decide to regionalize fully. The agreements have similar expiration dates, but salary guides and insurance coverages show some divergence that would require alignment. (p.138)
42. Shared services between school districts, or between districts and municipalities can save money, generate invaluable positive public relations, and foster good relationships among entities. Franklin has a standard assortment of shared services, but is unique in that it shares transportation mechanical personnel to perform maintenance on the municipality's police department vehicles. Delsea and Elk have shared many administrative personnel over the years. (pp. 117, 119)
43. Since the proposed regionalization would result in little to no change as far as what schools the students attend, there would likely be no change to any of the current transportation programs for the four districts. (p. 119)

44. Other than an alignment of prices and some potential savings due to economies of scale in purchasing or personnel, it does not appear that meal programs would be significantly impacted, either programmatically or financially, by a pK-12 regionalization, especially since Elk and Delsea are already sharing a food service director. (p. 123)
45. The Delsea-Newfield and Franklin-Newfield send-receive relationships both operate with annual financial contracts. There is a large discrepancy in outstanding tuition invoices between Delsea and Newfield. The tuition dispute creates a potential debt to one district and a potentially uncollectible receivable to the other. This issue would need to be addressed prior to a regionalization vote. (p. 127)
46. A detailed financial analysis of special education tuition is not conducted in this report due to the variable nature of special education needs and populations. The districts would need to work together to evaluate a variety of options to see which is most cost effective if the status quo remains. However, it is not uncommon for a regionalization to allow the creation or enhancement of special education programs across the districts with significant savings of resources (i.e., staffing, space, money). (p. 128)
47. Overall, the instructional spaces of the Delsea, Franklin, and Elk schools can sustain the current and projected utilization. The only future concern may be with any intent or requirement to provide full-day preschool programs, which would have an impact on elementary school space unless other options were explored. (p. 135)



July 10, 2024

Memo to the Delsea Regionalization Steering Committee

As previously discussed, the Rowan School Regionalization Institute prepared a separate financial analysis of a recommended 10-year cost apportionment agreement for the creation of a PreK-12 Delsea Regional School District that would include Franklin Township and Elk Township as members, with Newfield Borough continuing in a send-receive relationship with the newly expanded district.

This analysis is needed because the current regionalization statute requires a vote to expand the current 7-12 Delsea Regional School District into a PreK-12 district to be approved initially by a majority of voters in each of the member districts, Franklin and Elk, prior to or simultaneous with any vote by Newfield to join the newly created district.

Consequently, if Franklin and Elk choose to move forward on PreK-12 regionalization, as recommended in our School Regionalization Efficiency Program study, the ballot initiative to be submitted to voters would also have to include a cost apportionment agreement for the new district that would cover only Franklin and Elk; we previously provided a cost apportionment agreement recommendation for a Franklin-Elk-Newfield tri-member district.

Mirroring the fixed-percentage share recommendation we provided for the tri-member district, we are recommending a 79.4% transitional cost share for Franklin and a 20.6% cost share for Elk for the first seven years of the regionalization, which would be the FY2026 through FY2032 fiscal years. This provides a predictable tax levy impact for both communities.

The formula would then transition over the final three years to the standard 100% community equalized valuation formula that is currently in use for the 7-12 Delsea district. Based on current projections, this would result in a 78.8%/21.2% cost share in FY2033, 78.0%/22.0% in FY2034 and 77.0%/23.0% in FY2035. Under this scenario, Newfield would continue to pay tuition.

Our fiscal team also did an analysis of how the projected cost savings due to regionalization in the SREP study would be affected by the expansion to a PreK-12 Delsea Regional School District with Franklin and Elk as member districts and Newfield continuing in a send-receive relationship.

We concluded that the two-member district would achieve \$723,000 of the originally projected \$823,000 in first-year cost savings without Newfield joining as a member, and \$900,000 of the \$1 million out-year cost avoidance. The first-year savings projection is reduced by the \$177,000 removal of the 7-12 regional district's tax deferral.

We believe the referendum language to be submitted to the Commissioner of Education can be worded to allow Franklin and Elk to simultaneously vote to merge into a PreK-12 Delsea Regional School District with the above formula and to accept Newfield as a member with the previously discussed tri-member formula if Newfield's voters agree to join.

Franklin and Elk could also seek approval from the Commissioner of Education to vote first to expand to a PreK-12 Delsea district with the above formula and defer the addition of Newfield to a second vote if outstanding financial issues are not resolved.

In that case, the initial composition of the transitional board – and the elected board, if Newfield does not join – would include seven members from Franklin and two from Elk. The Delsea Board would appoint three of its current members, two from Franklin and one from Elk, to serve on the transition board if the referendum passes. The Franklin Board would appoint five members, and the Elk Board would appoint one.

If Newfield joined the district as a member, its board would appoint one representative to the transition board, and Franklin would appoint four members. The Delsea and Elk board appointments to the transition board would remain the same. The elected board would be made up of six members from Franklin, two from Elk and one from Newfield.

Our fiscal team's addendum report is attached. As always, we remain available for consultation and discussion.

Thank you very much,

Mark Magyar and Scott Oswald

ROWAN SCHOOL REGIONALIZATION INSTITUTE

Fiscal Addendum to SREP Feasibility Study for Creation of PreK-12 Delsea Regional School District

This section serves as an addendum to the feasibility study delivered to the Steering Committee in May 2024 and contains an examination of the financial impact of enlarging the limited-purpose Delsea Regional School District to an all-purpose PK-12 regional school district with Franklin Township and Elk Township as the only constituent members. This configuration differs from the configuration in the original study in that it excludes Newfield as a constituent member of the enlarged regional school district. In this case, it is assumed that Newfield would form a send-receive relationship with the enlarged regional district and make tuition payments on a per-pupil basis.

The exclusion of Newfield impacts the financial analysis in several ways. First, it reduces the estimated potential cost savings by \$100,000, from \$1 million to \$900,000, as the part time Business Administrator position would no longer be consolidated, and the savings attributed to audit costs and professional services are each reduced slightly. Table 99 compares the potential cost savings in both configurations.

TABLE 99
Comparison of Potential Cost Savings

	With Newfield	Excluding Newfield	Difference
Potential Budgetary Cost Savings	1,000,000	900,000	-100,000
Reduction in audit costs	100,000	75,000	-25,000
Reduction in professional services costs	75,000	50,000	-25,000
Reduction of five administrative staff (5 @ \$90k + \$20k ben)	550,000	550,000	0
Reduction of three clerical staff (3 @ \$55k + \$20k ben)	225,000	225,000	0
Shared Business Administrator	50,000	0	-50,000
Added Cost - Removal of Tax Deferral	-177,000	-177,000	0
Net Potential Cost Savings	823,000	723,000	-100,000

Secondly, the exclusion of Newfield as a constituent district in the enlarged regional district will alter:

- the total community equalized valuation attributable to the enlarged regional district,
- the total PK-12 enrollments at the enlarged regional district used for purposes of determining tax apportionment, and
- the percentage share of each of those totals attributable to Franklin and Elk.

These differences in the percentage share of equalized valuation and enrollment directly impact the calculation of tax levy apportionment for the various apportionment methods.

Third, in the configuration excluding Newfield, the total school taxes to be levied by the enlarged regional district, and paid by both Franklin and Elk, will be reduced compared to the original studied scenario due to the assumed continuation of Newfield's send-receive relationship with enlarged regional. The tuition payments received by the enlarged regional district will offset the need to levy additional taxes to provide educational programming to Newfield's students.

Equalized Valuations

Since both Franklin and Elk already constitute the limited-purpose 7-12 Delsea Regional School District, the studied scenario would see the equalized valuation attributed to each township's PK-6 elementary schools added to the portion already carved out for the limited-purpose regional district. Currently, only a proportional share of each community's equalized valuation is assigned to the limited-purpose regional based on the distribution of each community's enrollment in grades K-6 relative to grades 7-12. Table 100 below illustrates the amount of each community's total equalized valuation that will be designated to each of its school districts in fiscal year 2025.

TABLE 100
Equalized Valuations, Fiscal Year 2025

	Amount	Percent
Franklin Total	\$1,852,696,189	
K-6 District Equalized Valuation	910,970,716	49.2%
7-12 District Equalized Valuation	941,725,473	50.8%
Elk Total	\$539,086,768	
K-6 District Equalized Valuation	294,557,010	54.6%
7-12 District Equalized Valuation	244,529,758	45.4%
Total All Communities	\$2,391,782,957	

In fiscal year 2025, both communities will split their total community equalized valuations nearly 50/50 between each's elementary school district and the limited-purpose regional district with 50.8% of Franklin's total designated to Delsea Regional and 45.4% of Elk's total designated to Delsea Regional. Additionally, when analyzing the totals from each community, it is evident that Franklin's total equalized valuation is roughly 3.4 times that of Elk's at \$1.85 billion compared to \$539 million. Of the two-community total of \$2.4 billion, Franklin makes up 77.5% while Elk comprises the remaining 22.5%

Table 101 presents the projected equalized valuations for Franklin and Elk from 2026 through 2029. The two communities will have a combined equalized valuation of \$2.6 billion in fiscal year 2026. This figure is projected to increase to a peak of \$2.73 billion by 2028 and then begin to decline over the following years. In 2026, Franklin's share of the total equalized value is 78.6% while Elk's share is 21.4%. Over time, Franklin's share is generally expected to increase

slightly over the four year period from 2026-2029 while Elk's share over the same period is expected to decline slightly. By 2029, the shares will be 78.7% (+.1) and 21.3% (-.1) for Franklin and Elk, respectively.

TABLE 101

Equalized Valuations in Each Constituent Community, Enlarged All-purpose PK-12 Regional

	2026	2027	2028	2029
Franklin				
Equalized Valuation	2,062,162,533	2,155,289,023	2,164,008,448	2,103,175,156
Percent of Total	78.6%	79.1%	79.1%	78.7%
Elk				
Equalized Valuation	561,010,030	570,746,254	570,501,535	570,550,919
Percent of Total	21.4%	20.9%	20.9%	21.3%
Total	2,623,172,562	2,726,035,276	2,734,509,982	2,673,726,075

The share of total community equalized valuation in the above tables differs somewhat from the shares currently in use for the limited-purpose 7-12 Delsea Regional School District. As mentioned previously, in the current limited-purpose regional district, only a portion of each community's total equalized valuation is exposed to the regional district as each community's total equalized valuation is split between their PK-6 school district and the regional school district. For the sake of comparison, Table 102 below illustrates the equalized valuations currently in use at the limited-purpose 7-12 regional district and the percentage of the total attributable to each.

TABLE 102

Equalized Valuations in Each Constituent Community, Limited-purpose 7-12 Delsea Regional

	2026	2027	2028	2029
Franklin				
Equalized Valuation	1,040,154,781	1,091,438,361	1,073,780,992	1,038,547,892
Percent of Total	80.4973%	81.4993%	82.2314%	81.7704%
Elk				
Equalized Valuation	252,005,705	247,760,949	232,022,974	231,529,563
Percent of Total	19.5027%	18.5007%	17.7686%	18.2296%
Total	1,292,160,487	1,339,199,310	1,305,803,966	1,270,077,455

Comparing the figures from Tables 101 and 102, Franklin's share of the current limited-purpose regional district averages roughly 2.5 percentage points higher than its share of total community equalized valuation (81.1% vs 78.6%). Conversely, Elk's share averages about 2.5 percentage points lower in the limited-purpose regional district (21.4% vs. 18.9%).

Further, the share of total constituent district equalized valuations presented in Table 101 differ somewhat significantly from those presented in the original study which included Newfield (Table 63 in the study, pg. 102). When Newfield is included, the percentage shares for Franklin and Elk are each lower, with each community's percentage benefiting from the addition of

Newfield's nearly \$200 million of additional equalized value. Franklin's share averages 73.5% from 2026 to 2029 in the original configuration, while Elk's share averages 19.7%.

Enrollments

Table 103 shows the projected K-12 enrollments for each constituent community in the enlarged regional district. From 2026 to 2029, Franklin will average 79.8% of total enrollment in the regional district while Elk will average 20.2%.

TABLE 103

K-12 Enrollment in Each Constituent Community, Enlarged All-purpose PK-12 Regional

	2026	2027	2028	2029
Franklin				
K-12 Enrollment	2,383	2,305	2,305	2,300
Percent of Total	80.3%	80.1%	79.5%	79.3%
Elk				
K-12 Enrollment	586	573	593	600
Percent of Total	19.7%	19.9%	20.5%	20.7%
K-12 Enrollment Total	2,969.2	2,877.9	2,898.1	2,899.5

As was the case with equalized valuations, the percentage shares of total enrollment shown in Table 103 at the enlarged regional differ significantly from the enrollment shares at the current limited-purpose Delsea Regional School District and from the shares included in the original study.

Table 104 summarizes the percentage shares of total enrollment for both Franklin and Elk currently in use at the limited-purpose regional district. Comparing the percentage shares in Tables 103 and 104, it is evident that when the K-6 enrollments for each community are brought in, Franklin's share of total enrollment declines slightly while Elk's share increases. It should be reiterated here that the trends observed from 2026-2029 in the preceding and following enrollment tables rely on the assumptions made by the study's demographer using a cohort survival projection method.

TABLE 104

Projected 7-12 Enrollment in Each Constituent Community, Limited-purpose 7-12 Regional

	2026	2027	2028	2029
Franklin				
7-12 Enrollment	1,202.0	1,167.3	1,143.8	1,135.7
Percent of Total	82.0%	82.4%	82.6%	82.4%
Elk				
7-12 Enrollment	263.4	248.6	241.2	243.4
Percent of Total	18.0%	17.6%	17.4%	17.6%
7-12 Enrollment Total	1,465	1,416	1,385	1,379

Table 105 presents the share of total K-12 enrollment at the enlarged regional from the original study, inclusive of Newfield. Comparing the percentage shares for Franklin and Elk only, we find that the percentages in table 103 are higher for both communities than the percentage shares found in Table 105 when Newfield was included. This is consistent with expectations as the total enrollment is being split between two communities rather than by three. The differences in percentage share of enrollment are more pronounced for Franklin than Elk. For example, in 2026, Franklin's percentage of total enrollment in the two-district enlarged regional being studied in this paper is 80.3% (Table 103) compared to 75% in the original study's enlarged regional including Newfield (Table 105). Elk's share is similarly higher in the two-district enlarged regional configuration, however the difference totals roughly 1.5 percentage points in Elk versus a difference of roughly five (5) percentage points in Franklin.

TABLE 105

Projected K-12 Enrollment in Each Constituent Community, All-purpose PK-12 Regional, Inclusive of Newfield, Original Study

	2026	2027	2028	2029
Franklin				
K-12 Enrollment	2,383	2,305	2,305	2,300
Percent of Total	75.0%	74.3%	74.0%	73.9%
Elk				
K-12 Enrollment	586	573	593	600
Percent of Total	18.4%	18.5%	19.0%	19.3%
Newfield				
K-12 Enrollment	209	225	216	211
Percent of Total	6.6%	7.2%	6.9%	6.8%
Total K-12 Enrollment	3,178.5	3,102.5	3,114.2	3,110.8

Regional Tax Levy and Levy Apportionment

As mentioned earlier in this section, it is *assumed* that the exclusion of Newfield as a constituent district in the enlarged regional district would see the continuation of Newfield's send-receive relationship with the regional district rather than the migration of Newfield's tax levy into the regional. This change has the impact of lowering the total taxes to be levied on residents of both Franklin and Elk. In the original study, the taxes levied by Newfield on Newfield residents were added to the total tax levy for each of the K-6 districts and the limited-purpose regional district, yielding a higher total school tax to be levied in the three-community configuration.

Additionally, the slightly reduced potential cost savings due to regionalization alter the total amount to be levied. As described in the original study, the cost savings identified can be given as tax relief by way of a reduced total tax, or re-purposed for educational programming or other expenditures. This is why the savings are referred to as "potential" savings and it will be the

decision of the enlarged regional Board of Education to determine how the potential cost savings will be applied.

The tables below show the total tax levy inclusive (Table 106) and exclusive (Table 107) of the \$900,000 in potential cost savings. For the sake of comparison, each table also shows the comparable figure from the original study.

TABLE 106

Comparison of Taxes to be Levied in the Enlarged Regional, Savings Given as Tax Relief

	2026	2027	2028	2029
Enlarged PK-12 Regional				
Inclusive of Newfield (original study)	36,930,401	37,682,974	38,454,787	39,216,439
Exclusive of Newfield	33,989,169	34,680,917	35,390,689	36,089,059

TABLE 107

Comparison of Taxes to be Levied in the Enlarged Regional, Savings Budgeted for Programs

	2026	2027	2028	2029
Enlarged PK-12 Regional				
Inclusive of Newfield (original study)	37,930,401	38,682,974	39,454,787	40,216,439
Exclusive of Newfield	34,889,169	35,580,917	36,290,689	36,989,059

When the potential cost savings are given as tax relief, less taxes need to be levied. For example, in 2026, Tables 106 and 107 show that the total tax levy of the enlarged regional will be \$33,989,169 if savings are given as tax relief instead of \$34,889,169 if it is not.

Further, we see that the total tax levy is indeed significantly smaller when compared to the original studied scenario due to the exclusion of Newfield's tax levy in the regional district. This reduction will be balanced by tuition payments from Newfield. Franklin and Elk residents will pay less in taxes because Newfield will handle its own taxes to cover tuition payments to the regional district. As a result, the overall budget for the enlarged regional district will stay about the same in both the two-district and three-district configurations.

As was done in the original study, all tax apportionment methods ranging from 100% equalized valuation, 0% enrollment to 0% equalized valuation, 100% enrollment were examined. Table 108 presents the tax impact for each apportionment method in increments of ten. The amounts shown in Table 108 are inclusive of the potential cost savings; that is, the savings are being given as tax relief via a lower total tax to be levied.

TABLE 108

Average Tax Savings of an Enlarged All-Purpose Regional District, FY 2026-29¹

	Franklin	Elk
100% Equalized Value / 0% Enrollment	730,423	-7,742
90% Equalized Value / 10% Enrollment	698,072	24,608
80% Equalized Value / 20% Enrollment	665,722	56,959
70% Equalized Value / 30% Enrollment	633,371	89,310
60% Equalized Value / 40% Enrollment	601,020	121,661
50% Equalized Value / 50% Enrollment	568,670	154,011
40% Equalized Value / 60% Enrollment	536,319	186,362
30% Equalized Value / 70% Enrollment	503,969	218,712
20% Equalized Value / 80% Enrollment	471,618	251,063
10% Equalized Value / 90% Enrollment	439,268	283,413
0% Equalized Value / 100% Enrollment	406,917	315,764

Table 108 shows that, at the current apportionment ratio in use at the limited-purpose Delsea Regional — 100% equalized valuation and 0% enrollment — Franklin could see an average annual tax savings of roughly \$730,000 over the four year period from 2026 through 2029. Elk, however, would see an average annual total tax increase of about \$7,700.

When examining other apportionment ratios, the savings to Franklin and Elk become more balanced in terms of total dollars saved at apportionment ratios that weight enrollment higher with the most balance at the 0% equalized valuation, 100% enrollment ratio where Franklin would save an average of \$406,917 and Elk would have average savings of \$315,764.

If, instead of attempting to balance total dollars saved, savings to each community is sought to be commensurate with either each community's percentage share of equalized valuation or enrollment, apportionment ratios near 50% equalized valuation and 50% enrollment could be considered. For example, the 50% equalized valuation and 50% enrollment ratio would see \$568,670 in savings go to Franklin taxpayers and \$154,011 to Elk taxpayers, a roughly 79%/21% split of the total savings which closely resembles the split of both equalized valuations and K-12 enrollments in each of the communities.

The figures in Table 108 assume the potential cost savings identified due to regionalization are passed on to taxpayers in the form of a lower tax levy. If the savings are instead used for educational programs or some other purpose, the total amount to be levied increases and the tax impact for each community looks significantly different. Table 109 presents the tax impact in that scenario.

¹ Figures show relative change from status quo tax levies which include a one-year tax deferral for Delsea Regional. Savings are shown as positive numbers, tax increases are shown as negative numbers.

TABLE 109

Average Tax Savings of an Enlarged All-Purpose Regional District, FY 2026-29

	Franklin	Elk
100% Equalized Value / 0% Enrollment	20,606	-197,925
90% Equalized Value / 10% Enrollment	-12,584	-164,736
80% Equalized Value / 20% Enrollment	-45,774	-131,546
70% Equalized Value / 30% Enrollment	-78,963	-98,356
60% Equalized Value / 40% Enrollment	-112,153	-65,166
50% Equalized Value / 50% Enrollment	-145,342	-31,977
40% Equalized Value / 60% Enrollment	-178,532	1,213
30% Equalized Value / 70% Enrollment	-211,722	34,403
20% Equalized Value / 80% Enrollment	-244,912	67,592
10% Equalized Value / 90% Enrollment	-278,101	100,782
0% Equalized Value / 100% Enrollment	-311,291	133,972

Table 109 shows that, if cost savings are not provided as tax relief, enlarging the limited-purpose regional with only two constituents does not possess the ability to financially benefit both communities at any apportionment ratio. Ratios near 100% equalized valuation would produce a slight tax savings to Franklin while producing approximately \$198,000 of tax increases to Elk. Ratios that favor enrollment more heavily favor Elk with the 100% enrollment method producing \$134,000 of tax savings to Elk and a \$311,000 tax increase in Franklin. Balancing the total dollar impact is possible at the 67% equalized valuation, 33% enrollment ratio where both districts would experience a roughly \$88,000 tax increase.

Again, when analyzing the various apportionment ratios, if the reader seeks to identify a ratio that would distribute the tax impact commensurate with each community's percentage share of equalized valuation or enrollment, ratios near the 50%/50% could be considered. For example, the 52% equalized valuation, 48% enrollment ratio would see Franklin with a \$139,000 tax increase and Elk with a \$39,000 tax increase. This distributes the total average tax impact (in this case, increases) of nearly \$178,000 about 78% to Franklin and 22% to Elk, a percentage share consistent with each community's share of equalized valuation (Franklin: 79%; Elk: 21%) and enrollment (Franklin: 80%; Elk: 20%).

Transitional Methods of Tax Levy Apportionment

As described above, the most balanced tax impacts would require a shift from the 100% equalized valuation, 0% enrollment method currently in use at the limited-purpose 7-12 Delsea Regional School District to something more heavily weighted towards enrollment.

If such an apportionment ratio shift is not desired for any reason or if it is desirable to delay such a shift to provide stability in the term after regionalization occurs, a transitional apportionment methodology could be considered.

P.L.2021, c.402. permits a Board to establish a transitional methodology, not to exceed 10 years, of the apportionment method adopted by the voters provided that the methodology is agreed to by all participating districts.

The transitional apportionment method explored would establish fixed percentage shares of the regional tax levy for both Franklin and Elk for the first seven years of regionalization. Beginning in year eight, the percentages would gradually adjust toward the apportionment formula that weights equalized valuation and enrollment at some ratio. In year eight, the percentage share would adjust by one-third of the difference calculated. In year nine, it would adjust by two-thirds of the difference, and by year ten, it would be equivalent to the output of the apportionment ratio formula that is ultimately selected.

Example Calculation:

Years 1-7: Fixed Percentage Shares of Regional Tax Levy

Franklin: 80%

Elk: 20%

Year 8: Begin Adjustment

Run the apportionment formula for the 100% eq. val. 0% enrollment ratio

Franklin: 75%

Elk: 25%

Calculate the difference:

Franklin: $80\% - 75\% = 5\%$

Elk: $20\% - 25\% = -5\%$

Adjust by one-third of the difference:

Franklin: $80\% - 1.67\% = 78.33\%$

Elk: $20\% + 1.67\% = 21.67\%$

Year 9: Continue Adjustment

Adjust by two-thirds of the difference:

Franklin: $80\% - 3.33\% = 76.67\%$

Elk: $20\% + 3.33\% = 23.33\%$

Year 10: Final Adjustment

Franklin: 75%

Elk: 25%

It should be noted that any apportionment ratio could be chosen as the year ten target ratio instead of the 100% equalized valuation, 0% enrollment method used in the above example.

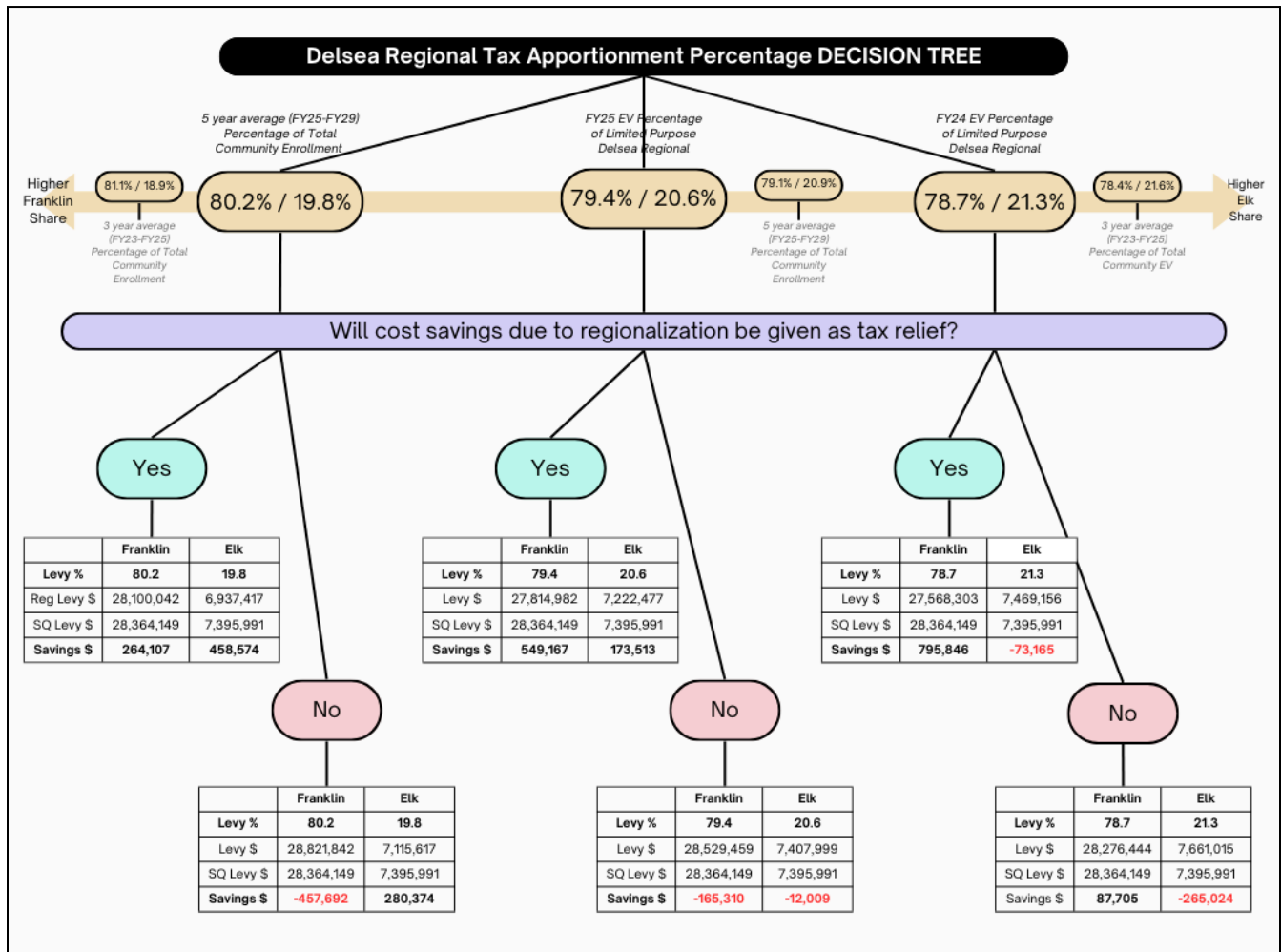
In this transitional apportionment scheme, a specific fixed percentage must be chosen. The consultants considered several fixed percentages which all represent various derivatives of each community's share of equalized valuation or enrollment either currently, historically, or in the future. Table 110 presents the various fixed percentages considered and how the percentages were derived. Each was chosen to present options that are representative of the size and wealth of each community and that will be perceived as credible and fair by the taxpayers of each community.

TABLE 110
Fixed Percentages Considered for Transitional Methodology

	Franklin	Elk
3 year average (FY23-FY25) Percentage of Total Community Equalized Valuation	78.4%	21.6%
FY24 Equalized Valuation Percentage in use at the Limited-Purpose Delsea Regional	78.7%	21.3%
5 year average (FY25-FY29) Percentage of Total Community Enrollment	79.1%	20.9%
FY25 Equalized Valuation Percentage in use at the Limited-Purpose Delsea Regional	79.4%	20.6%
5 year average (FY25-FY29) Percentage of Total Community Enrollment	80.2%	19.8%
3 year average (FY23-FY25) Percentage of Total Community Enrollment	81.1%	18.9%

Figure A below provides a summary of the various fixed percentages and how tax levies would be apportioned on a transitional basis at each percentage over the four years from 2026-2029. The amounts in the tables are four-year averages over the period.

FIGURE A
Tax Apportionments at Various Fixed-Percentage Transitional Apportionment Methods



The most balanced fixed-percentage transitional apportionment method appears to be 79.4% and 20.6% to Franklin and Elk, respectively. This fixed percentage split is equal to the split present for fiscal year 2025 at the limited-purpose Delsea Regional School District. It is the most balanced whether cost savings are applied as tax relief or not. The real-world example below explains how tax apportionment might look when applying this percentage for the next seven years and then transitioning to a method based 100% on each community's equalized valuation. Again, any apportionment ratio could be chosen as the target for year ten. Table 111 uses 100% equalized valuation, 0% enrollment simply for purposes of the example.

It should also be noted that Table 111 contains projections extending to 2035, which involve long-term estimates of enrollments, property values, and school district budgets. As such, the accuracy of these figures may be limited, and readers are advised to interpret them with caution.

TABLE 111

Real-world Example of Transitional Apportionment Method Using 79.4% / 20.6% Fixed Percentage

	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034	2035
Franklin	79.4%	79.4%	79.4%	79.4%	79.4%	79.4%	79.4%	78.8%	78.0%	77.0%
Elk	20.6%	20.6%	20.6%	20.6%	20.6%	20.6%	20.6%	21.2%	22.0%	23.0%

The percentages shown in Table 111 represent the percentage of the enlarged regional district's total tax levy that would be paid by each community. For this example, the consultants estimate that equalized valuations in Franklin will decline slightly relative to Franklin by 2035. As a result, Franklin's percentage begins to decline starting in year eight of the enlarged regional district and continues downward in year nine until it ultimately becomes equivalent to the percentage of total community equalized valuation from Franklin. Elk's percentage moves inversely and begins to rise in year eight and continues to rise in years nine and ten.

The transitional apportionment method outlined in Table 111 is just one such method that could be chosen. Because the percentage share mirrors the one currently in use at the limited-purpose regional district currently, the consultants believe the 79.4% / 20.6% split between Franklin and Elk, respectively, represents a familiar and fair way to apportion the enlarged regional district's levy, regardless of how potential cost savings are applied by the future Board of Education.

Conclusion

This addendum explores the financial implications of transitioning the limited-purpose Delsea Regional School District into an all-purpose PK-12 district excluding Newfield. The exclusion of Newfield results in nuanced shifts in cost savings, tax apportionment, and equalized valuations that impact Franklin and Elk differently.

Firstly, without Newfield, the potential cost savings are reduced from \$1 million to \$900,000 due to the lack of consolidation in administrative roles and reduced professional service savings. Despite this reduction, Franklin and Elk benefit from a lower overall tax burden since Newfield will continue its send-receive relationship and contribute through tuition payments rather than direct taxes.

The redistribution of equalized valuations and enrollments between Franklin and Elk also significantly impacts the analysis. However, Franklin's equalized valuation and share of total enrollment remain dominant at the regional district, further emphasizing its larger financial responsibility within the district.

The analysis of different tax apportionment methods reveals varied impacts on both communities. While Franklin sees substantial tax savings under the current 100% equalized valuation method, Elk experiences a minor tax increase. Balancing these impacts necessitates exploring alternative apportionment ratios that weigh enrollment more heavily. A 50% equalized valuation and 50% enrollment ratio offers a more balanced distribution of tax savings, aligning closely with each community's share of equalized valuation and enrollment.

The analysis also considers the implementation of a transitional apportionment methodology, per P.L.2021, c.402, allowing a gradual shift towards the final apportionment ratio over a ten-year period. This method, exemplified by a 79.4% (Franklin) and 20.6% (Elk) split for the initial seven years, offers a fair and familiar approach, mirroring current practices at the limited-purpose regional district.

Ultimately, the proposed enlargement without Newfield is financially viable under several apportionment ratios and methods and the Board must strive to achieve an equitable balance to ensure that both Franklin and Elk have fair representation in tax responsibility while maintaining financial stability for the enlarged regional district.