

A Feasibility Study on Regionalization and Shared  
Services in the Wallkill Valley Regional, Franklin,  
Hamburg, Hardyston, and Ogdensburg School Districts

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Rowan School Regionalization Institute  
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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study outlines the potential consolidation or expansion of shared services among five New Jersey (NJ) school districts under the School Regionalization Efficiency Program (SREP), which supports public school districts and governing bodies across the state who wish to study the feasibility of school district regionalization and/or consolidation to improve efficiency and reduce costs.

The intent of this study is to examine relevant data in order to provide recommendations on the feasibility of consolidating operations to enlarge the current limited purpose, grades 9-12, Wallkill Valley Regional School District (Wallkill Valley) into one all purpose, grades pre-kindergarten (pK) to 12, regional school district. Concurrently, the study will investigate opportunities to share services more effectively and efficiently among Wallkill Valley and its four constituents: the grades pK-8 Franklin Borough School District (Franklin); the grades pK-8 Hamburg School District (Hamburg); the grades pK-8 Hardyston Township School District (Hardyston); and the grades pK-8 Ogdensburg Borough School District (Ogdensburg).

The scenarios being studied include:

1. Full Regional pK-12: The expansion of the limited purpose, grades 9-12 Wallkill Valley Regional School District into an all purpose, grades pK-12 school district including the municipalities of Franklin, Hamburg, Hardyston, and Ogdensburg.
2. Status Quo: 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 regionalization as outlined above. Any referendum or vote to regionalize that does not include the options as designed for this study would completely change the analysis and findings produced herein.

The Sweeney Center for Public Policy and Rowan University's College of Education formed the Rowan School Regionalization Institute to assess the new school regionalization law, make policy recommendations, and conduct regionalization studies for interested school districts. The Sweeney Center is led by Mark Magyar, who developed the new school regionalization law and has advised over three dozen districts. The Institute retained a team of expert consultants with deep experience in school administration, governance, law, finance, operations, and demographics to conduct this feasibility study. This includes: former superintendents G. Kennedy Greene and Scott A. Oswald; attorney and former Commissioner of Education Lucille Davy; school business analysts Brian Diamante and Donna Snyder-DeVita; demographic analyst George Sundell; and transportation analyst Ray Kuehner. The study was commissioned by the Wallkill Valley Regional Board of

Education with the support and partnership of the other districts to examine the feasibility of regionalization or expanded shared services across the districts.

### Governance and Law

The five school districts in this study are all public entities located in Sussex County, NJ. Wallkill Valley is a grades 9-12 regional school district located in Hardyston Township with constituent municipalities including Franklin Borough, Hamburg Borough, Hardyston Township, and Ogdensburg Borough. The four constituent municipalities are each home to their own school districts, which operate schools for students in grades pK-8.

To guide this study process, Wallkill Valley, Franklin, Hamburg, Hardyston, and Ogdensburg established a steering committee that included the superintendents and business administrators from each of the districts. Board members representing each of the school districts were also invited to join the committee.

Selected board of education members and administrators from Wallkill Valley, Franklin, Hamburg, Hardyston, and Ogdensburg were invited to participate on a steering committee to help provide direction and seek clarification on issues impacting each community. The steering committee membership was coordinated by the superintendents.

Stakeholder input was a key feature of this study. The districts created a steering committee of superintendents, business administrators, and school board representatives to guide the outline of what was to be studied and to review and comment on an initial draft report. Surveys regarding school climate and academic preparedness were ways to capture input from students, parents, and staff about how each group felt about its schools. Some selected staff interviews were also held to gather insights that documentary evidence would not be able to provide.

The steering committee met twice in October 2024 to learn more about the process, review a scope of work including delivery timelines, go step by step through an outline of the study, and identify specific lines of inquiry that would reflect local concerns. Committee members were asked to go back and share information with their respective boards of education and collect any questions and feedback to share with the study team. Study team representatives met with the superintendents twice in January 2025 to revise the study timeline and discuss changes to finalize the outline, and again in May 2025 to provide a progress update. The committee was presented a draft of the study in September 2025 to review for input on the final product.

If the Wallkill Valley Regional Board of Education and the state education commissioner or his/her representative determine after consultation, study and investigation that it is advisable to expand the purposes of the regional district, then such proposal shall be submitted to the voters in each of the Wallkill Valley constituent districts.

The 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* of the regional district (emphasis added), instead of to the voters of the regional district at large. If a majority of the voters in a majority of the constituent districts that constitute the limited purpose regional vote to expand the limited purpose district to an all purpose regional, then the proposal is considered adopted. In this case, a proposal would be submitted to the voters of Franklin, Hamburg, Hardyston, and Ogdensburg to expand Wallkill Valley. If voters in three of the four communities agree, Wallkill Valley would be enlarged into a grades pK-12 regional.

Should the vote in one municipality be in the negative, “Notwithstanding any law, rule, or regulation to the contrary, a board of education of a constituent district of a limited purpose regional district that does not vote to join an all purpose regional district pursuant to the provisions of this subsection may continue to send such students as were enrolled in the limited purpose regional district to the schools that were established as part of the limited purpose regional district.”

If regionalization is approved, the initial interim board of education for the enlarged all purpose district would have one-third, or three, of its members selected from among the members of the existing Wallkill Valley Regional Board of Education. The remaining two-thirds, or six members, would be selected from among the members of the boards of education that agreed to join the enlarged regional.

The law requires that board membership be apportioned based upon the proportional number of pupils enrolled from each constituent district that was part of the limited purpose regional. However, limited purpose constituent districts are permitted to apportion board members, as nearly as may be, according to the number of each of their inhabitants. Each scenario is outlined in detail.

State law requires that the initial terms of the first elected board be staggered, and in this case, there would be three members elected for three years, three for two years, and three for one year.

The school regionalization law limits regionalization referendums to the April school election, the November statewide general election, or one of the four special election dates authorized in N.J.S.A. 19:60-2 – the fourth Tuesday in January; the second Tuesday in March; the last Tuesday in September; or the second Tuesday in December. The law is silent on the number of times or how frequently a regionalization referendum can be submitted to voters.

If a proposal to expand Wallkill Valley from a limited purpose regional to an all purpose regional does not move forward, a discussion among district leaders and boards of education to maximize opportunities for shared services among the districts would be encouraged. Thereafter, the development and approval of specific contracts would be necessary to design and adopt shared services agreements between the schools and districts.

The NJ Quality Single Accountability Continuum (NJQSAC) is the NJ Department of Education’s (NJDOE) monitoring and self-evaluation system for public school districts. It includes the

evaluation of five key components: Instruction and Program, Fiscal Management, Governance, Operations, and Personnel. Districts that score 80% or higher in all components are designated as "high-performing".

Each district scored admirably in its most recently completed cycles (2021-22 for Hardyston, Ogdensburg, and Wallkill Valley; 2022-23 for Franklin and Hamburg). Hardyston was recognized as a high performing district, and the other four districts were deemed high performing in all areas but one. 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.

There are a few potential political issues identified by some of the districts that are worth keeping in mind if and when discussions begin regarding the advantages or drawbacks of regionalization and enhanced shared services.

### Education and Program

Since students in the region already attend Wallkill Valley Regional HS from grades 9 through 12, this study was conducted with a focus on the curricular programs offered by the elementary and middle schools in Franklin, Hamburg, Hardyston, and Ogdensburg with a lesser emphasis on the programs offered at the high school level. However, the benefits of program coordination between the elementary schools and the regional high school will be included.

Significant instructional variations exist in the core subjects of English language arts (ELA), Math, Science, and Social Studies. For example in ELA, the four elementary districts' use of varying literacy programs and assessment tools creates inconsistent student experiences, preparation levels, and outcomes as students advance through grade levels and transition to high school. Implementing standardized programs, supplemental materials, and universal screening and assessment instruments would benefit both students and teachers by ensuring students enter high school with comparable experiences and generating assessment data that allows for meaningful comparisons.

Differences in class sizes, instructional time, length of school day, and technology support services provide additional opportunities for increased collaboration and synthesis into common approaches.

Whether regionalization occurs or not, a centralized regional curriculum office overseeing grades pK-12 education could provide unified leadership, support, and coordination for curriculum and instruction across the schools, ultimately enhancing student achievement and success. Such leadership could also facilitate coordination of shared educational services both within and beyond district boundaries. Even implementing coordinated curriculum solely for grades pK-8 would ensure students arrive at 9th grade better equipped for high school demands, enabling high school teachers to focus less on establishing common foundational knowledge and expectations with incoming students.

An all-purpose regional made up of the five districts would have a projected student enrollment of 2,273 students in 2025-26. This consolidation could allow for at least one administrative staff member (e.g., an assistant superintendent or a director of curriculum and instruction) to be devoted largely to the leadership of curriculum coordination, instructional supervision, and professional development. Another option would be to consider an elementary coordinator for grades pK-8 (or pK-6) and a secondary coordinator for grades 9-12 (or 7-12) who could work closely together to ensure consistency and continuity. Either option can also be considered as a shared service where one district employs the individual and others pay a portion of costs to the employing district.

The study also examines standardized assessment results across the districts, focusing on the NJ Student Learning Assessments (NJSLA) for ELA and Math. The five districts met the federal ELA and Math proficiency standards in nine of ten measures, which is a strong indicator of academic success. Growth is perhaps of even greater importance, as it is more under the locus of school control. Hamburg exceeded its growth targets, Hardyston and Franklin met them, and Ogdensburg fell just short for this school year. Looking at disaggregated results, every district in this study has more student groups for whom the proficiency/progress targets are met or exceeded than for those not met. This speaks well of the successful work on the part of these schools and their staff members to reduce achievement gaps.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on standardized test scores has been deep and varied depending on multiple 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. An overview of the past three years of data shows that 51 of the 75 ELA, 44 of the 83 Math, and 5 of the 9 Science results met or exceeded state averages. That said, there remain significant disparities among the four elementary district assessment scores at various grade levels. This adds further evidence to the recommendations in the previous section on the desirability of better curriculum coordination, common philosophies and instructional materials, and similar resources devoted to academic work.

Wallkill Valley Regional HS scores consistently above state averages in college and career readiness measures such as SAT Reading and Writing, enrollment and performance in advanced coursework, and graduation and postsecondary enrollment rates. Notably, the school is doing quite well in preparing its students with disabilities to meet their graduation requirements and earn their diplomas.

While Franklin, Hamburg, Hardyston, and Ogdensburg have all been awarded state grants that allowed them to establish free, universal, preschool programs for interested families, the districts remain interested in increasing access for all eligible families. The four elementary schools are currently serving 240 preschool students, 74% of the total estimated three- and four-year old population, in 18 classrooms. Serving the full realistic universe of 90%, while considering the need for some self-contained rooms, would require at least an additional 2-3 classrooms.

Special education is an area that is often identified as an area for increased collaboration. This can be difficult given the individualized nature of the identification and planning processes. However, the superintendents and program leaders were in consensus about the potential for greater effectiveness and efficiency. In-district placement percentages are high (from 92% to 99%), but many of those programs are duplicated in three or four of the schools. Depending on the number of students in any given year, efficiencies may be found in consolidating one or more of these programs into one or even two of the elementary schools. Program leaders felt that more frequent meetings to explore these possibilities are warranted. Superintendents also identified aligning special education leadership as worthy of further consideration. Child study team caseloads were an area requested for deeper insight by the steering committee. That inquiry found that caseloads vary from 16 in one district up to 50 in another. This is an area for conversation about job responsibilities and whether there are ways to find more optimal solutions.

One option to consider would be to consolidate the five districts' child study teams into a regionalized special education service through a shared services contract to take advantage of specialized staff skills in various districts and to ensure coordination of services as students move from grades pK-8 schools to the high school.

Similar to specialized services for students with disabilities, students receiving academic intervention can gain additional benefits when staff invest in standardized screening tools and support systems. The key advantage of regional partnerships or shared services lies in accessing district-wide expertise and resources while maintaining the personalized attention possible in smaller school settings—all before students require formal special education classification.

The multilingual student population in this region is projected to grow significantly, rising from 2.0% in 2024-25 to 4.2% by 2029-30. Regional districts can offer multilingual learners a more comprehensive program that extends beyond standalone language classes to include content-area teachers trained in sheltered instruction methodologies.

Gifted education programming varies significantly across the elementary districts, with each school offering different services and minimal alignment between programs. Enhanced collaboration through regional partnerships or joint offerings could standardize programming to ensure all gifted students receive comparable, equitable support before transitioning to high school advanced coursework.

While smaller middle schools certainly offer some benefits, their size can often limit the number of extracurricular activities in which students may participate. Expanding the number of students available to take part in specialized activities, such as clubs, instrumental music, and theatre, or athletic teams can enhance the quality of those programs and better prepare middle school students for high school athletic and academic competitions.

School and district staffing is an important topic to address potential concerns about sufficient staff levels to address the multiple needs students present. The staffing analyses begin by comparing

actual school-level and district-level positions to enrollment-scaled school models. This can be tricky, as the models are general in nature but they do provide some basis for evaluation. Wallkill Valley school staffing levels appear to be very efficient, while the elementary schools are mostly above the scale models due to high rates of special education classification requiring additional staff and programs. Ogdensburg is the exception here, as the district has a classification rate three percentage points below the state average.

There are also comparisons made of staff experience and retention to state averages and student to staff ratios and staff salaries to other peer school districts across the state. It should not be surprising that districts with more experienced staff such as Hamburg tend to have higher median salaries, while the opposite is true for a less experienced staff like Ogdensburg.

If there is an enlargement of the current limited purpose regional, this study assumes that all existing schools will remain open and operate with most school-level positions remaining as they presently are. With school-level staff remaining relatively constant, the opportunities for efficiency will be more available by combining some positions on district office staffs. Compared to the individual district scaled models, all of the districts in this study have higher personnel levels due to their small size and inability to gain economies of scale. A district staff analysis modeled what a regional district office structure might look like based on the projected 2025-26 enrollment of 2,259 students compared to current staffing in the five districts today. The result is a personnel level that still exceeds the model, but is more streamlined and efficient than is possible in the status quo district configuration.

### Demography and Facilities

This domain opens with a series of tables depicting demographic data in each municipality in the Wallkill Valley region regarding population and housing levels and median ages and incomes along with disaggregations by race and ethnicity from 2018 to 2023. Populations grew modestly over the period from 2.7% in Franklin Borough up to 4.5% in Hamburg and Hardyston with Ogdensburg as the exception seeing its population decrease by 8.0%. Six year averages for live births showed similar trends though Ogdensburg's percentage of births to population was the highest of the four communities and Hamburg's was decreasing.

In terms of housing, Hardyston Township averaged 15 occupancies per year for the last 6 years, Franklin Borough averaged 2.3 per year, and Hamburg Borough and Ogdensburg Borough were both under one per year. In the period from 2019-2024, 303 building permits were issued in the four municipalities and only 110 (36.3%) were followed by occupancy permits. It appears there are no planned major housing developments above the recent averages in any of the four municipalities that might impact school enrollment significantly at this time. Affordable housing mandates for Round 4 have recently been issued for present and prospective need obligations. They are at a combined level of 2,168 units for the four municipalities with Hardyston's by far the largest at 1,622. If, when,

and how the mandates will be met is unknown at this time. Compliance with the obligations needs to be monitored on a municipal and project basis.

Enrollment projections for the entire region from 2024-25 to 2029-30 show a 3.0% cumulative increase from 2,297 students in 2024-25 to 2,367 in 2029-30. This is about .06% per year and a material averaged change of approximately 4 students per grade over 14 grade levels. This is a continuation, though a flattening, of the recent five-year trend of steady enrollment growth.

Given that the scenario contemplated would not change the composition of districts in this region, there is expected to be no impact on racial and other demographic groups from a full pK-12 regionalization. However, increases in the number of students of Hispanic (from 20.6% to 35.2% of the total enrollment) and Multiracial (from 2.8% to 4.1%) backgrounds provide an opportunity to evaluate the equity of access to resources and programs in the schools for these traditionally underserved groups. There is projected to be a near doubling of the numbers of both low income and multilingual students across the region over the next five years as well.

In spite of the 19.1% decline in student enrollment over the past two decades, an analysis of the utilization of school facilities does not find a corresponding increase in the number of available classroom spaces. It is understood that schools operate differently than they did twenty years ago, with greater emphasis on using spaces to meet the needs of students with specialized needs as well as a broadening of the curriculum for all students. At most, the projected enrollments show the availability by 2029-30 of only 3 classrooms at Hardyston ES and 3 at Wallkill Valley Regional HS. Hamburg is projected to have sufficient rooms for its population, while there is a projected need for 2 classrooms at Franklin ES and 3 at Ogdensburg ES. Hardyston MS is the only school that is projected to have a useful additional capacity of 6 classrooms.

### Finance and Operations

This domain opens with a comparison of the districts' collective bargaining agreements. Negotiations on a new agreement are expected to begin shortly after public approval of a regionalization. The law allows a period of three years for that negotiation to be successfully concluded before imposing the contract of the largest constituent district made up of only the identical grade levels. This suggests that the Wallkill Valley contract would govern staff in grades 9-12, and the Hardyston CBA for grades pK-8 after the initial three year period if a successor agreement is not reached in that time.

As expected, there are some important differences among the various aspects of the contract that would have to be coordinated through that negotiation. Of particular importance are the recognition clauses, grievance procedures, salaries, and benefits. The recognition clauses diverge beyond the typical inclusion of certified personnel as some include clerical staff, custodial and maintenance staff, and/or some non-certified staff. For the grievance procedures, an important difference is that two districts (Hardyston and Wallkill Valley) have binding arbitration as the end point of the process, while the other three call for non-binding arbitration.

In terms of salaries, there are some important differences in the horizontal and vertical steps for each of the districts. The study also evaluates the cost of transitioning all eligible staff members to the applicable default salary guide and terms of employment, based on current staffing data and guide structures. In the event that no successor collective bargaining agreement is negotiated within three years of regionalization, the estimated costs of transitioning pK-8 staff to the Hardyston guide are: \$35,296 for Franklin; \$97,508 for Hamburg; and \$97,045 for Ogdensburg. This yields a total cost of about \$230,000.

Even in the best of circumstances, insurance coverages are nuanced. What appears similar on paper can often be perceived as less than once employees consider the in-network provider list and other specific details of the plan. It is recommended that any new regional board of education enlist the help of a benefits specialist to assist with the analysis and future negotiations of these plans.

Budgetary costs per student were examined comparing district spending priorities and efficiency to their peers across the state. It is clear that all five districts prioritize direct spending on students in terms of the percentage of dollars allocated to classroom instruction. This is a strong positive indicator as it provides direct student academic experiences, and therefore should receive primary attention and commitment in the district budget. Another interesting note is that lower spending on administration is often identified by the public as an area to realize potential efficiencies in education. Even though economies of scale tend to favor larger entities, the smaller districts of Franklin at 7.2%, Hamburg at 8.8%, and Ogdensburg at 9.7% are all below the state median percentage of administrative spending of 10.3%.

The study estimates cost savings that could be realized from a regionalization. The primary areas targeted for cost reduction include audit processes, professional services, and administrative and support staffing. Despite the cost savings identified and presented in the table, all existing programs are anticipated to be maintained. The estimated cost savings of \$1.3 million would come primarily from consolidating administrative functions and reducing duplication across the districts.<sup>1</sup>

It is important to note that these cost savings do not include the potential financial efficiencies and educational benefits that could occur from consolidating and coordinating operations such as curriculum and textbook purchases, in-district special education programs, student transportation, technology infrastructure, central office functions, unified contract negotiations, and the potential for self-insured health benefit plans that would be viable in an enlarged regional. Each of these would require further exploration and consideration by a regional board of education and administration or joint actions by the districts as currently structured.

To estimate state aid, the consultants implemented a model approximating the formula in the School Funding Reform Act. The model reflects the demographic, enrollment, property valuation, and aggregate income trends of each participating district. Beginning in FY 2026, several methodology changes were introduced by the State, including caps on annual aid increases and decreases (6% and

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<sup>1</sup> Identified items are one-time savings, which would no longer be needed in future budgets.

3%, respectively). These caps, while enacted through temporary budget language, are assumed by the consultants to continue through the study period due to their stabilizing effect on the State's overall budget and K-12 formula aid obligations.

While assuming a continuation of the caps, an analysis of aid was done under both capped and uncapped scenarios. In both scenarios, state aid in an enlarged regional is expected to be lower than the sum of total state aid if the districts remain separate. However, projected aid is estimated to be substantially higher in the capped aid scenario (\$11.2 million vs. \$4.8 million).

In the uncapped aid scenario where full SFRA formula funding is provided throughout the study period, state aid in the enlarged regional is projected to decrease by \$5.7 million. The large decrease is triggered as a result of combining the constituent districts' property wealth and aggregate incomes, both of which are used by the SFRA formula in setting levels of state aid. When the figures are combined, individual district dynamics give way to the aggregate dynamics over all constituents and the single consolidated district receives disadvantaged treatment under SFRA.

Changes to state law provide important protections against the type of aid reductions described above that may result from regionalization. But, the existing protections are not enough on their own to bring the enlarged regional's aid up to levels that match state aid allocations to the separate districts. Additionally, the statutory language currently only provides protection through FY 2029, at which point the full weight of the effect would be felt by the enlarged regional. Revised legislation is being developed to ensure that school districts pursuing the benefits of regionalization would be held harmless in future state aid calculations.

From a local tax perspective, two primary methods for apportionment of a regional district's costs are permitted under state law — allocation based on equalized property valuation (EPV), which distributes costs according to each municipality's property wealth, and allocation based on student enrollment (ENR), which assigns costs in proportion to each community's utilization of the district's services, or some combination of both. Generally, the model anticipates the upward trend in EPV observed over the last decade to continue through at least 2031. Aligned with growth rates determined by this study's demographer, total enrollment in the region is projected to initially continue its decline before rising by FY 2031 to exceed current levels.

The model's optimal ratio, which attempts to balance tax impacts between all constituent communities and minimize extreme impacts, would select an apportionment method that weights each community's EPV at 75% and ENR at 25%. At this ratio, Franklin, Hardyston, and Ogdensburg would all experience an increase in total tax liability relative to what they would otherwise pay in the status quo. Hamburg would see a decrease in its tax liability relative to the status quo. While the model attempts to identify a combination that could provide benefits to all communities, no such outcome appears possible under current conditions.

An alternate approach to tax apportionment is provided through P.L.2021, c.402, which permits a board of education to establish a transitional methodology, not to exceed ten years, of the

apportionment method adopted by the voters provided that the methodology is agreed to by all participating districts. A possible transitional methodology has been developed that would keep tax impacts positive for all districts for the first five years of the regional's operation and then provide a gradual phase-in towards formulaic apportionment under the optimal weights of 75% EPV and 25% ENR.

The amount of bonded debt in this region varies among the districts. Franklin and Ogdensburg do not have bonded debt, while Hamburg and Hardyston have outstanding amounts of \$3.87 million and \$5.535 million, respectively. As permitted by law and unless there are negotiated changes, any existing debt would become the debt of the new regional district. Wallkill Valley has debt of \$6.085 million, which is already shared by the municipalities in the region. The five districts use only four types of reserve accounts – maintenance, capital, unemployment, and legal – that have a total balance of \$5.8 million.

The proposed regionalization does not result in students changing schools, so transportation would largely remain as it is. There would be no impact on student seat time or distance traveled from a regionalization, as there has been no discussion of any intent to change the schools that students are attending. As requested, a student transportation seat time and distance travel evaluation was conducted based on the existing regional, which serves students in all four communities. The findings were that student ride times and distances traveled are within what is reasonable for an area of this size.

If the districts were to move to a centralized transportation coordinator, there may be opportunities for greater efficiencies in both cost and route design. In addition, the opportunity exists for a larger district to buy buses and hire drivers, which can be beneficial for special education, small group instruction, and after school activities among other things.

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 Wallkill Valley region participate in the standard purchasing cooperatives, insurance, non-public funds administration services, and some transportation. The districts all use the same food service management company, and may want to explore sharing a manager.

Although current operations are being handled productively, it appears that all of the districts could be better served from a cost effectiveness and efficiency standpoint with a well-staffed, regional business office with some school level staffing. A regional business office could not only handle required functions, but also allow time to explore grants, alternative funding, purchasing co-operatives, joint insurance, and other money saving options. Beyond a joint business office, other possible areas identified for exploration included counseling, curriculum and instruction, facilities, food services, special education, special subject teachers, staff development, and transportation.

# INTRODUCTION

## Study Purpose

The School Regionalization Efficiency Program (SREP) supports public school districts and governing bodies across New Jersey (NJ) who wish to study the feasibility of school district regionalization and/or consolidation. NJ Public Law 2021, Chapter 402 (P.L.2021, c.402), the legislative act that created the SREP, was signed into law by Governor Murphy on January 18, 2022, after passing both houses of the State Legislature. It created 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, ability, 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.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> P.L.2021, c.402

The intent of this study was to examine relevant data in order to provide recommendations on the feasibility of consolidating operations to enlarge the current limited purpose, grades 9-12, Wallkill Valley Regional School District (Wallkill Valley) into one all purpose, grades pre-kindergarten (pK) to 12, regional school district. Concurrently, the study will investigate opportunities to share services more effectively and efficiently among Wallkill Valley and its four constituents: the grades pK-8 Franklin Borough School District (Franklin); the grades pK-8 Hamburg School District (Hamburg); the grades pK-8 Hardyston Township School District (Hardyston); and the grades pK-8 Ogdensburg Borough School District (Ogdensburg).

The study examined district operations in the following areas, which make up the four major domains of this project: governance and law; education and program; demography and facilities; and finance and operations. Each of these considerations must be studied to understand the overall impact of the potential formation of an all purpose, regional school district. The Governance and Law domain focuses on school district profiles; statutory review and transition features; election process and board composition; state monitoring status; stakeholder input; and potential political issues. The Education and Program domain examines the curriculum and instructional factors, performance measures, preschool education, special education, support programs, extracurricular programs, and school and district staffing. The Demography and Facilities domain looks at municipal profiles; housing starts; enrollment history; enrollment projections; disaggregated enrollments; and school facility capacities. The Finance and Operations domain explores collective bargaining agreements; operating expenses and cost savings; school aid; local tax levies; borrowing margin, debt allocation, and reserves; contracted services and tuition; and shared services.

The study began in September 2024. District-delivered information reflects the status in the 2024-25 school year. Much of the public data is from the 2023-24 school year, where available; if not, the nearest relevant year became the starting point for data collection and analysis.

## Consolidation Options

The boards of education of Wallkill Valley, Franklin, Hamburg, Hardyston, and Ogdensburg have expressed an interest in examining the feasibility of reorganizing their school districts or seeking ways in which to expand shared services across their schools and districts. The scenarios being studied include:

1. Full Regional pK-12: The expansion of the limited purpose, grades 9-12 Wallkill Valley Regional School District into an all purpose, grades pK-12 school district including the municipalities of Franklin, Hamburg, Hardyston, and Ogdensburg.
2. Status Quo: 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 regionalization as outlined above. Any referendum or vote to regionalize that does not include the options as designed for this study would completely change the analysis and findings produced herein.

## Consultant Backgrounds

The Sweeney Center for Public Policy and the Rowan University College of Education formed the Rowan School Regionalization Institute to assess the impact of the school regionalization law (P.L.2021, c.402), make recommendations on policies to advance regionalization, and conduct feasibility studies for interested districts. As the lead agency, the Wallkill Valley Regional Board of Education retained the Institute to prepare this study to address the requirements of its SREP grant.

The Rowan University School Regionalization Institute is led by Director Mark Magyar, MLIR, who developed the new regionalization law as policy director for the NJ Senate Majority Office. He has met with superintendents and board members from dozens of school districts to advise them on regionalization issues. The Institute retained the following experts to collaborate on this study:

G. Kennedy Greene, Ed.D., adjunct associate professor in the Department of Education Policy and Social Analysis at Teachers College, Columbia University. He is a former superintendent of schools in Newton (Sussex County) and a past president of the NJ Association of School Administrators. Dr. Greene served as the lead investigator, editing and contributing to all domains of the study with a primary focus on the Education & Program domain.

Scott A. Oswald, Ed.D., adjunct professor in the Colleges of Education at Stockton and Rowan Universities. He is a former shared superintendent of schools in Collingswood and Oaklyn (Camden County), past executive committee member of the NJ Association of School Administrators, and past president of the Camden County Association of School Administrators. Dr. Oswald served as the co-project manager as well as doing overall study editing.

Donna Snyder-DeVita, M.A., consultant with The Diamante Group LLC. She was the Sussex County representative to the NJ Association of School Business Officials board, chaired its education committee, and served on many other statewide committees. She served as a NJ school business official for many years with demonstrated expertise in all areas of school business management. Ms. Snyder-DeVita served as the co-project manager and focused on the Finance & Operations domain.

Lucille Davy, Esq., attorney, certified K-12 mathematics teacher, and former NJ 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 focused on the Governance & Law and Education & Program domains.

Brian Diamante, president and chief executive officer of The Diamante Group LLC, a school data services provider. He is the senior director of data and research at NJPCSA and has over a

decade of education finance experience. Mr. Diamante focused on the Finance & Operations domain.

Ray Kuehner, school transportation consultant. He is a former school transportation supervisor and a past president of the NJ School Transportation Supervisors Association. Mr. Kuehner focused on the Finance & Operations domain.

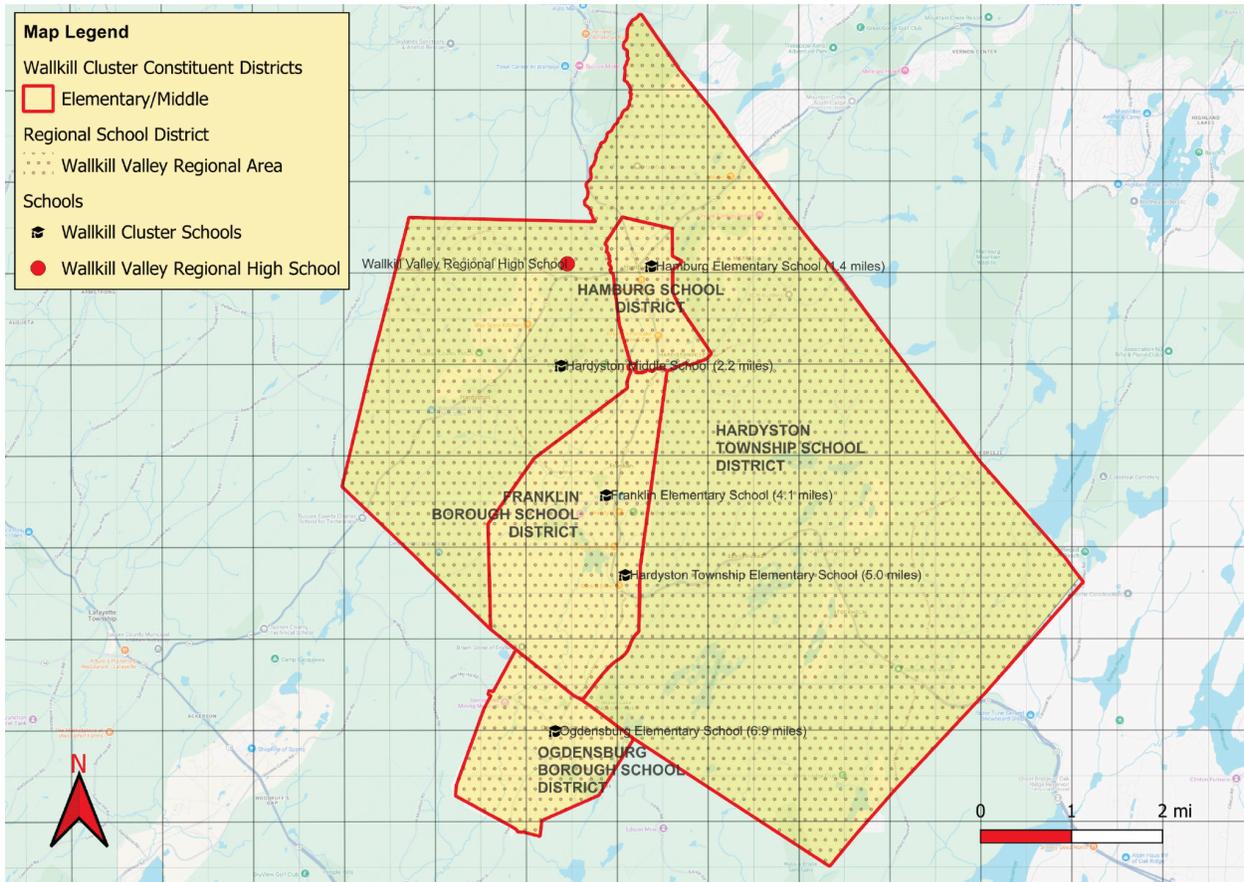
George Sundell, chief executive officer of Sundance Associates. The firm provides services including facilities planning, demographic analysis, redistricting, community relations and participation programs, and grant writing to public school systems throughout NJ. Mr. Sundell focused on the Demography domain.

Arisahi Mora Lázaro, Rowan University assistant, served as a data researcher.

# GOVERNANCE and LAW

## 1. School District Profiles

FIGURE 1  
Map of the Walkkill Valley Region



The five school districts in this study are all public entities located in Sussex County, NJ. Walkkill Valley is a grades 9-12 regional school district located in Hardyston Township with constituent municipalities including Franklin Borough, Hamburg Borough, Hardyston Township, and Ogdensburg Borough. The four constituent municipalities are each home to their own school districts, which operate schools for students in grades pK-8.

The school districts are all situated in the eastern portion of the county. The three boroughs are small historic villages that border one another on a southwest to northeast axis where Ogdensburg Borough sits southwesterly, Hamburg Borough northeasterly, and Franklin Borough between the two. Franklin Borough and Hamburg Borough are surrounded more or less by the larger Hardyston Township, and Ogdensburg Borough is surrounded on three sides by Sparta Township. The region is

bordered to the south by Sparta Township, to the west by Lafayette Township, to the northwest by Wantage Township, to the northeast by Vernon Township, and to the east by Morris County.

Wallkill Valley, Hardyston, and Ogdensburg participate in the state's interdistrict school choice program. Sussex County has ten other school districts that offer school choice options for families at varying grade levels. The county has one charter school, the Sussex County Charter School for Technology, serving students in grades 6-8. Families in the southern part of the county are within reasonable proximity to Ridge and Valley Charter School in Frelinghuysen Township in Warren County for students in grades K-8. Sussex County Technical School in Sparta Township is a public vocational school option for students in grades 9-12.

There are several private schools in the county that offer tuition-based choices for families: Catholic Academy of Sussex County (grades pK-12) in Sparta Township; Hilltop Country Day School (pK-8) also in Sparta; Northwest Christian School (pK-8) in Hampton Township, and Sussex Christian School (pK-8) in Sussex Borough.

### Wallkill Valley

Wallkill Valley is a grades 9-12 regional district with one school: Wallkill Valley Regional High School. The school educates students from Franklin Borough, Hamburg Borough, Hardyston Township, and Ogdensburg Borough.

The district mission statement reads, "In partnership with the community, the Wallkill Valley Regional High School District is committed to educational excellence and guarantees challenging learning opportunities for all students to become lifelong learners and productive and responsible members of society."<sup>3</sup>

The board of education has its own mission statement that reads as follows:

The Wallkill Valley Regional Board of Education accepts the responsibility for coordinating the available resources of home, school and community in a mutual effort to guide every student's growth towards becoming a self-respecting individual who can effectively function politically, economically and socially in a democratic society.

The board is dedicated to ensuring that all students in the district are provided with the necessary skills and competencies for achievement of the Core Curriculum Content Standards.

The high school graduation rate shall be at least 90 percent.

The district shall provide least restrictive alternate programs for students who cannot succeed in the regular high school environment, including those students with disabilities.

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<sup>3</sup> Mission statements and other information in this section were retrieved from district websites.

The district shall provide dropout prevention programs for students at risk.

Students shall leave grades eleven and twelve having demonstrated the competency in challenging subject matter including language arts/literacy, mathematics, science, social studies, health and physical education, visual and performing arts, and world languages.

The district shall implement the state-approved Core Curriculum Standards and appropriate assessments to enable students to succeed and to evaluate their performance.

The district shall provide staff development opportunities to ensure that teachers are adequately equipped to teach challenging and up-to-date subject matter and to implement effective teaching techniques. It shall monitor teaching staff member's progress toward achievement of the required 100 clock hours of continuing education to ensure that they are obtaining and maintaining the skills to help all students achieve the Core Curriculum Standards.

Students shall learn to use their minds well, so that they may be prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment in our modern society.

The district shall provide students with experiences in higher-level thinking, information processing, the responsibilities of citizenship, and employability skills.

All students shall demonstrate competency in the skills identified in the cross-content workplace readiness standards.

All students shall demonstrate respect for racial, cultural, ethnic and religious diversity.

All students shall increase their achievement levels in science and mathematics to contribute to our country's ability to compete academically with other countries of the world.

The district shall revise its curriculum offerings in science and mathematics according to the state standards.

The district shall provide staff training in the teaching of mathematics and science at grades 9-12 to increase teachers' understanding of and ability to teach these subjects.

Wallkill Valley Regional High School shall be free of drugs and violence and offer a safe, disciplined environment conducive to learning.

The district shall develop partnerships with parents to establish the responsibilities of each to create and maintain a safe and healthy educational environment for all students.

The district shall provide programs and staffing to deal with students at risk.

The school and community shall expand their cooperative efforts to create drug and violence-free environments.

All students shall develop a positive view of self and learn to use effective interpersonal skills.

The district also has a school-parent-student compact that reads as follows:

The Wallkill Valley Regional High School-Parent-Student Compact is a plan that outlines how parents, the entire school staff and students will share the responsibility for improved student academic achievement and the means by which the school and parents will build and develop a partnership to help students achieve state standards.

The School District will:

Provide high-quality curriculum and instruction in a supportive and effective learning environment that enables students to meet the State's student academic achievement standards.

To the extent practicable, provide full opportunities for the participation of parents with limited English proficiency, parents with disabilities, and parents of migratory children.

Provide information and school reports in a format and, to the extent practicable, in a language parents understand.

Jointly develop and agree on a parent involvement policy with the parents of participating students. This compact will be distributed to parents of participating students.

Provide coordination, technical assistance, and other support necessary to assist participating schools in planning and implementing parental involvement activities to improve student academic achievement and school performance.

Parents/Guardians of Participating Students will:

Assure their child's prompt and regular school attendance and compliance with school rules and procedures.

Talk with their child daily about school activities and show an active interest in their assignments.

Provide a regular time and place for homework assignments.

Communicate any needs and concerns to appropriate school representatives.

Respond to school communications promptly, attend parent conferences and programs, and encourage their child's social and intellectual development.

Participating Students will:

Put forth their best effort at all times when in school.

Follow school rules and procedures.

Complete and return homework and other assignments in a timely manner

In an interview, the superintendent noted the pride felt in being the regional high school and being welcoming to all students from the constituent districts. The blending of students from the elementary and middle schools happens quickly. Teachers confirmed that this blending begins in the elementary grades as the smaller rural communities slowly build into feeling as one by the time they get to the high school. Some of that is through community service by high school students that go into the younger schools and transition visits to the high school from middle schoolers.

### Franklin

Franklin is a grades pK-8 district with one school: Franklin Borough School. It is a constituent district of Wallkill Valley, where its high school age students attend. The district philosophy and mission statement read as follows:

We believe that the Franklin Borough School staff must know each child, plan an appropriate program for each child, provide a wide variety of experiences to meet his/her needs, reveal and develop his/her gifts, and strengthen his/her self-confidence, and nurture in each child his/her zest for learning. It is the expectation of this school district that all pupils achieve the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards at all grade levels.

Therefore, it is the mission of this school community to assist each child to the limit of his/her abilities:

To think.

To use communication skills effectively.

To become adept in the skills necessary to solve problems.

To make intelligent choices, based on a growing set of moral values.

To create and appreciate beauty in music, art, literature, and nature.

To be healthy in body and mind, with wholesome feelings towards self and others.

To contribute as a citizen, with a sense of loyalty, understanding and interest in his/her own land and the world at large.

The board of education has its own goals:

To have members of the Franklin School Board attend both school and community events.

Increased board attendance at county meetings and sharing important information with relevant stakeholders.

To support capital improvements that will increase the efficiency and long term viability of the school building.

The district also has a 2024-2029 strategic plan with three goal statements and accompanying objectives:

Goal Statement: Maintain a well-rounded program of studies that meets the needs and interest of all learners so each student can reach their full potential.

Objective 1: Provide a rigorous and meaningful academic program that is aligned to the NJSLs and the needs of students.

Objective 2: Provide opportunities for students that promote academic, social and emotional growth.

Objective 3: Collaborate with community partners to provide opportunities to expose students to life skills that promote future success.

Goal Statement: Further develop a school-wide culture of wellness that supports the education of the Whole Child and prepares students for a successful future.

Objective 1: Offer a variety of opportunities and programming to develop age-appropriate social skills across all grade levels.

Objective 2: Provide high-quality professional development for staff to support best practices in sustaining a culture of wellness for students.

Objective 3: Provide opportunities for parents to be active partners with the school in promoting a culture of wellness for students both in school and at home.

Goal Statement: Ensure facilities continue to be safe, upgraded, and equipped with current technology to promote a conducive environment for learning and advancement.

Objective 1: Continually update campus security and safety.

Objective 2: Continually maintain innovative technology.

### Objective 3: Proactively anticipate facility needs

In an interview, the superintendent pointed to the community's pride in the history of being a mining town. He acknowledged that people who have lived in the borough for a long time share this history with new families who move in. There is also a pride in having one of the first high schools in the county. It was conveyed that there is strong support offered to lower income families with an emphasis on taking care of each other and a generosity in times of trouble regardless of income. Teachers provided an example of this generosity with their popular fundraising event called Ram Jam featuring a runathon with pledge monies all going back to the students.

#### Hamburg

Hamburg is a grades pK-8 district with one school: Hamburg School. It is a constituent district of Wallkill Valley, where its high school age students attend. The district mission statement reads as follows:

The mission of the Hamburg Public School District is to provide an education, which will enable students to acquire the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to become contributing members of society.

The educational program will enable each student to develop emotionally, socially, psychologically, and cognitively within his or her abilities and interests.

The mission of the Hamburg Public School District, therefore, is to develop an educational program that is under constant evaluation, allows all students to achieve New Jersey Student Learning Standards at all grade levels, and is dedicated to providing experiences relative to the demands of modern society in an effort to best prepare our students for success and grand achievements in the 21st century.

#### Belief Statements

We believe in the worth and dignity of each person.

We believe that all students are entitled to the opportunity to maximize their talents and abilities.

We believe that students thrive in a learning environment that facilitates self-discovery, exploration, and intellectual risk-taking.

We believe that a quality education is a life-long process that fosters academic and cultural understanding.

We believe that an effective education is a shared responsibility by all students, parents, educators, and organizations within our community.

We believe that we have the obligation to nurture a culture of respect that honors the uniqueness of the individual and fosters responsibility toward the community and the environment.

We believe that an effective educational system anticipates, plans, and acts in response to a changing world.

The district has the same school-parent-student compact as Wallkill Valley.

In an interview, the superintendent spoke of how proud the school was of supporting families in need and participating in community events. The school is seen as the center of the community noting that the holiday pageant was attended by over 250 adults. Teachers also pointed to community service activities such as biannual street clean ups.

### Hardyston

Hardyston is a grades pK-8 district with two schools: Hardyston Elementary School with grades pK-4 and Hardyston Middle School with grades 5-8. It is a constituent district of Wallkill Valley, where its high school age students attend. The district mission statement reads as follows:

The Hardyston School District together with our parents, families and community is dedicated to preparing our students for the 21st Century by providing each student with a quality education, in a safe and caring environment, which allows all students to achieve the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards and Common Core State Standards at all grade levels and includes the knowledge, confidence, and self-esteem to be successful life-long learners in a culturally diverse democracy.

The district goals are:

Hardyston will continue to focus on math and language arts instruction and assessments in order to advance student achievement.

Hardyston will improve student attendance and reduce chronic absenteeism by partnering with parents, and elevating student interest and participation in their education.

Hardyston will improve staff collaboration, camaraderie, and cooperation to optimize our school district culture and climate, and to aid in staff retention and encourage professional advancement.

The board of education also has two goals:

Hardyston Board members will complete mandatory training as early as possible, and will endeavor to complete additional, non-mandatory professional development to advance their governance skills.

Hardyston Board members will endeavor to attend school-sponsored events and community events, acting always in accordance with Board bylaws and the School Ethics Act.

In an interview, the superintendent discussed his district's uniqueness in this region of having two schools and the relationship between them. He cited a specific example being the clap-out when students move up from 4th grade to go to middle school in the next year. Teachers gave examples of the Veterans Day program and Battle of the Hornet class competitions as points of pride.

### Ogdensburg

Ogdensburg is a grades pK-8 district with one school: Ogdensburg Borough School. It is a constituent district of Wallkill Valley, where its high school age students attend. The district mission statement reads as follows:

The Ogdensburg Borough Public School District, in partnership with the community, is committed to providing twenty-first century opportunities for the development of the academic, social, and emotional growth of all of our students.

The Ogdensburg Borough Board of Education, district administration, and staff are committed to creating and maintaining a challenging educational program that addresses the individual needs of all students in a positive and safe learning environment. We are striving for dynamic curriculum development, upgrades in technology, and a variety of activities that will provide for differences in student interests and abilities across a comprehensive school program.

Our goal at Ogdensburg School is to be on the move toward higher student achievement, active learning, greater student participation, and a better and safer facility. We are excited about the future of our school and the success of our students. We look forward to this year and to the future.

In an interview, the superintendent discussed the pride the residents of the borough feel in its history as a mining community and the shared culture that goes along with it.

## 2. Statutory Review and Transition Features

This study examines the expansion of Wallkill Valley, a limited purpose regional school district serving students in grades 9-12, into an all purpose regional that would serve students in grades pK-12 from the four municipalities whose high school students attend Wallkill Valley Regional High School (Wallkill Valley Regional HS) as constituent members: Franklin Borough, Hamburg Borough, Hardyston Township, and Ogdensburg Borough.

### Statutory Review

If the Wallkill Valley Regional Board of Education and NJ Commissioner of Education (Commissioner) or his/her representative determine, after consultation and study, that it is advisable

to expand the purposes of the regional district, then such proposal shall be submitted to the voters in each of the Wallkill Valley constituent districts.<sup>4</sup> 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. Although it is not mentioned explicitly in the law, it would appear that two or more of the constituent districts could petition the Commissioner to study and investigate the expansion of the limited purpose regional into an all purpose regional if the Wallkill Valley board did not seek to move forward with a consolidation proposal.

The 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* of the regional district (emphasis added), instead of to the voters of the regional district at large. If a majority of the voters in a majority of the constituent districts that constitute the limited purpose regional vote to expand it into an all purpose regional, then the proposal is considered adopted.<sup>5</sup> In this case, a proposal would be submitted to the voters of Franklin, Hamburg, Hardyston, and Ogdensburg to expand Wallkill Valley. If voters in three of the four communities agree, Wallkill Valley would be enlarged into a grades pK-12 regional.

Should the vote in one municipality be in the negative, “Notwithstanding any law, rule, or regulation to the contrary, a board of education of a constituent district of a limited purpose regional district that does not vote to join an all purpose regional district pursuant to the provisions of this subsection may continue to send such students as were enrolled in the limited purpose regional district to the schools that were established as part of the limited purpose regional district.”<sup>6</sup> After approval by the voters as outlined above, the board of education of the regional and the board(s) of education of one or more local districts determined to enlarge the regional shall proceed with the regionalization plan.<sup>7</sup>

### Transition Features

To guide this study process, Wallkill Valley, Franklin, Hamburg, Hardyston, and Ogdensburg established a steering committee that included the superintendents and business administrators from each of the districts. Board members representing each of the school districts were also invited to join the committee.

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.

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<sup>4</sup> N.J.S.A. 18A:13-33

<sup>5</sup> N.J.S.A. 18A:13-33.2.a

<sup>6</sup> N.J.S.A. 18A:13-33.2.a

<sup>7</sup> N.J.S.A. 18A:13-44.1.a

Members of the Wallkill Valley-Franklin-Hamburg-Hardyston-Ogdensburg steering committee met with the study team to provide oversight and guidance, coordinate interviews and data collection, and ensure that information was shared with the leadership of all districts. The committee intended to serve as a forum for district representatives to discuss critical interim planning decisions affecting the districts leading up to any potential regionalization vote or any decision to explore additional shared services.

Upon receipt and review of this study, members of the steering committee will take a role in presenting the findings at a combined public meeting and potentially at other smaller gatherings. There will be multiple opportunities for the boards to receive feedback and input from all members of the participating communities. The committee can then discuss the study findings and public responses in order to consider a joint recommendation to their boards on next steps to pursue regionalization or specific shared services.

#### *Grades pK-12 All Purpose Regional Option*

Approval by the Commissioner would need to be received at least sixty days prior to a proposed regionalization 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. Under existing state statutes, the creation of an all purpose regional would require the approval of a majority of voters in each of the constituent municipalities that participate in the referendum for their individual school districts to merge into the new regionalized district. It is not known whether the Commissioner would approve a referendum that did not include each school district in an existing region. The State would pay the full cost of any special election for school regionalization.

If regionalization is approved, an interim board would be formed with two-thirds of its members from among the members of the boards of education or governing bodies of the constituent districts constituting the limited purpose regional, and one-third from among the members of the board of education of the limited purpose regional, with such members selected according to the number of each constituent districts' inhabitants.

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. As an example, Henry Hudson Regional voters passed their regionalization referendum in late September 2023, and the fully regionalized district began operation on July 1, 2024. This provided nine months for implementation planning. The appointed interim board continued to serve through January 1, 2025, when a new board elected by voters in November 2024 was sworn into office.

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

### *Status Quo with Shared Services*

If a proposal to expand Wallkill Valley from a limited purpose regional to an all purpose regional does not move forward, a discussion among district leaders and boards of education to maximize opportunities for shared services among the districts would be encouraged. Thereafter, the development and approval of specific contracts would be necessary to design and adopt shared services agreements between the schools and districts.

### *Implementation Grants*

The Division of Local Government Services, which provided the grant that funded this study, 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 received a \$400,000 LEAP grant to cover its implementation costs. The program has been funded annually, was included in the approved state budget, and is anticipated to be available if a regionalization moves forward here.

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

## 3. Election Process and Board Composition

If the voters of the participating municipalities decide to enlarge the regional, all members are chosen at the next annual school election.<sup>8</sup> The constituent districts constituting the limited purpose regional shall calculate and apportion the membership of the board of education of the enlarged all purpose regional upon the basis of a proportional number of pupils enrolled from each constituent district that constitutes the limited purpose regional, with each district having at least one member. In the alternative by resolution, the constituent districts may propose to calculate and apportion membership of the board of education of the enlarged all purpose regional among the constituent districts as nearly as may be according to the number of their inhabitants, except each shall have at least one member.<sup>9</sup>

The board of education of a regional district shall consist of nine members unless it consists of more than nine constituent districts.<sup>10</sup> If a proposal to add additional purposes to a limited purpose regional is adopted, the constituent districts constituting the limited purpose regional shall calculate and apportion the membership of the board of education. The new members of the board of education of the enlarged all purpose regional, who shall serve until the election of the first elected members of that regional, shall be selected as follows: <sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> N.J.S.A. 18A:13-33.2.b

<sup>9</sup> N.J.S.A. 18A:13-33.3.a

<sup>10</sup> N.J.S.A. 18A:13-8

<sup>11</sup> N.J.S.A. 18A:13-33.3.a

(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; and

(2) one-third shall be selected from among the members of the board of education of the limited purpose regional proposing to add additional purposes.

TABLE 1  
Current Membership, Wallkill Valley Regional Board of Education

<b>Municipality</b>	<b>Number of Board Members</b>
Franklin	2
Hamburg	2
Hardyston	4
Ogdensburg	1

Interim Board of Education

The initial interim board of education for the enlarged all purpose district would have one-third, or three, of its members selected from among the members of the existing Wallkill Valley Regional Board of Education. The remaining two-thirds, or six members, would be selected from among the members of the boards of education that agreed to join the enlarged regional.

NJ law specifies how the composition of the interim regional grades pK-12 board of education is to be determined.<sup>12</sup> As noted above, the law requires that board membership be apportioned based upon the proportional number of pupils enrolled from each constituent district that was part of the limited purpose regional. However, limited purpose constituent districts are permitted to apportion board members, as nearly as may be, according to the number of each of their inhabitants.<sup>13</sup>

Table 2 shows membership of the interim board if it were based upon the number of pupils enrolled from each constituent district that constitutes the limited purpose regional. In this scenario, each district would have at least one member: 1 from the Franklin board, 1 from the Hamburg board, 3 from the Hardyston board, 1 from the Ogdensburg board, and 3 from the Wallkill Valley board (1 from Hardyston, 1 from Ogdensburg, and 1 from Franklin).

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<sup>12</sup> N.J.S.A. 18A:13-33.2.b

<sup>13</sup> N.J.S.A. 18A:13-33.3

TABLE 2  
Interim Apportionment, Wallkill Valley Regional Board of Education  
Grades pK-12 based on Student Enrollment

	<b>Enrollment 2023-24</b>	<b>Percentage 2023-24</b>	<b>Number of Interim BOE Members</b>
Wallkill Valley	n/a	n/a	3 (1 Hardyston, 1 Franklin, 1 Ogdensburg)
Franklin	527	30.7%	1
Hamburg	273	15.9%	1
Hardyston	619	36.0%	3
Ogdensburg	300	17.5%	1

Alternatively by resolution, as noted above, the districts could apportion the board in accordance with the number of inhabitants in each community. Table 3 includes the data for that apportionment.

TABLE 3  
Interim Apportionment, Wallkill Valley Regional Board of Education  
Grades pK-12 based on Resident Population

	<b>Number of Inhabitants</b>	<b>Percentage of Inhabitants</b>	<b>Number of Interim BOE Members</b>
Wallkill Valley	n/a	n/a	3 (1 Hardyston, 1 Franklin, 1 Hamburg)
Franklin	4,938	26.4%	1
Hamburg	3,293	17.6%	1
Hardyston	8,239	44.1%	3
Ogdensburg	2,231	11.9%	1

The interim board would reflect the same composition as the final board that would be elected in the following school election as referenced in Table 4 if based on student enrollment, and Table 5 if based on the resident population.

TABLE 4  
 Post-Interim Apportionment, Wallkill Valley Regional Board of Education  
 Grades pK-12 based on Student Enrollment

Municipality	Number of Elected BOE Members
Franklin	2
Hamburg	1
Hardyston	4
Ogdensburg	2

TABLE 5  
 Post-Interim Apportionment, Wallkill Valley Regional Board of Education  
 Grades pK-12 based on Resident Population

Municipality	Number of Elected BOE Members
Franklin	2
Hamburg	2
Hardyston	4
Ogdensburg	1

The first elected members of the enlarged regional 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.<sup>14</sup> State law also requires that the initial terms of the first elected board be staggered, and in this case, there would be three members elected for three years, three for two years, and three for one year.<sup>15</sup>

With regard to the order in which seats are filled, state statute requires that in regional districts with nine members, three members shall be elected for three years, three for two years and three for one year, which shall be allocated to the constituent districts to the extent of apportioned membership on the regional board of education, starting with the allocation of the terms of three years, by allocating one of such terms to each of the constituent districts in the alphabetical order of the names of such

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<sup>14</sup> N.J.S.A. 18A:33-33.3b

<sup>15</sup> N.J.S.A. 18A:13-46.1

districts, and continuing in such order with allocations of the two year terms and then allocation of the one year terms.<sup>16</sup>

If based on current enrollment projections, board membership of the enlarged regional would be as follows: Franklin - one for a 3-year term, and one for a 2-year term; Hamburg - one for a 3-year term; Hardyston - one for a 3-year term, one for a 2-year term, and two for a 1-year term; and Ogdensburg - one for a 2-year term and one for a 1-year term. Thereafter, all members shall be elected for 3-year terms.

If based on the number of inhabitants, board membership of the enlarged regional would be as follows: Franklin - one for a 3-year term, and one for a 2-year term; Hamburg - one for a 3-year term and one for a 2-year term; Hardyston - one for a 3-year term and three for a 1-year term; and Ogdensburg - one for a 2-year term. Thereafter, all members shall be elected for 3-year terms.

The school regionalization law is silent on the number of times or how frequently a regionalization referendum can be held. The State's education law does not generally address referendum timing or frequency other than to say they must be held during the April school election, the November statewide general election, or on special election dates authorized in N.J.S.A. 19:60-2 – the fourth Tuesday in January; the second Tuesday in March; the last Tuesday in September; or the second Tuesday in December. The consultants have made a request to the Office of Legislative Services to address whether there is another possible interpretation.

Finally, districts are prohibited from consolidating, regionalizing, or withdrawing from a regional district if it will increase or exacerbate the segregation of students by racial, socioeconomic, disability or English language learner status.<sup>17</sup> In this case, the statute is not applicable since all students in the communities currently attending the limited purpose regional would remain in attendance with their peers in the all purpose regional.

#### 4. State Monitoring Status

The Quality Single Accountability Continuum (NJQSAC) is NJDOE's monitoring and district self-evaluation system for public school districts. It is a single comprehensive 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".

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<sup>16</sup> N.J.S.A. 18A:13-38.1

<sup>17</sup> N.J.S.A. 18A:13-47.11

Wallkill Valley completed its most recent NJQSAC review during the 2021-22 school year.<sup>18</sup> During that cycle, four of the five areas met or exceeded the standard for a high performing school district: Fiscal Management 100%; Governance 100%; Operations 89%; and Personnel 97%. The district was deemed by NJDOE to need a district improvement plan in Instruction and Program given a score of 75%, five points shy of the high performing standard.

Franklin underwent its most recent NJQSAC review during the 2022-23 school year. During that cycle, four of the five areas met or exceeded the standard for a high performing school district: Fiscal Management 100%; Governance 100%; Operations 100%; and Personnel 100%. The district was deemed by NJDOE to need a district improvement plan in Instruction and Program given a score of 75%, five points shy of the high performing standard. It should be noted that this component is highly dependent upon state assessment results.

Hamburg also underwent its most recent NJQSAC review during the 2022-23 school year. During that cycle, four of the five areas met or exceeded the standard for a high performing school district: Fiscal Management 96%; Governance 95%; Operations 94%; and Personnel 97%. The district was deemed by NJDOE to need a district improvement plan in Instruction and Program given a score of 75%.

Hardyston completed its most recent 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 82%; Fiscal Management 96%; Governance 100%; Operations 97%; and Personnel 98%.

Ogdensburg also completed its most recent NJQSAC review during the 2021-22 school year. During that cycle, four of the five areas met or exceeded the standard for a high performing school district: Fiscal Management 96%; Governance 97%; Operations 83%; and Personnel 96%. The district was deemed by NJDOE to need a district improvement plan in Instruction and Program given a score of 76%, four points shy of the high performing standard.

Each district scored admirably in its most recently completed cycles (2021-22 for Hardyston, Ogdensburg, and Wallkill Valley; 2022-23 for Franklin and Hamburg). Hardyston was recognized as a high performing district, and the other four districts were deemed high performing in all areas but one. 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.

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<sup>18</sup> Results of the 2024-25 reviews for Wallkill Valley, Hardyston, and Ogdensburg had not been received by the end of this study.

## 5. Stakeholder Input

### Steering Committee

Selected board of education members and administrators from Wallkill Valley, Franklin, Hamburg, Hardyston, and Ogdensburg were invited to participate on a steering committee to help provide direction and seek clarification on issues impacting each community. The steering committee membership was coordinated by the superintendents.

The committee met twice in October 2024 to learn more about the process, review a scope of work including delivery timelines, go step by step through an outline of the study, and identify specific lines of inquiry that would reflect local concerns. Committee members were asked to go back and share information with their respective boards of education and collect any questions and feedback to share with the study team. Study team representatives met with the superintendents twice in January 2025 to revise the study timeline and discuss changes to finalize the outline, and again in May 2025 to provide a progress update. The committee was presented a draft of the study in September 2025 to review for input on the final product.

### Student Staff, and Parent Surveys<sup>19</sup>

#### *Wallkill Valley*

A voluntary survey was given to 9th and 10th grade students at Wallkill Valley Regional HS in June 2025. It asked them to recall their academic experiences related to, among other things, how prepared they felt in different subject areas. 214 students responded to the survey, and a summary of results is provided in Table 6. Students indicated the school attended in Grade 8: 39% attended Hardyston Middle School (MS); 19% Ogdensburg Elementary School (ES); 17% Franklin ES; 13% Hamburg ES; and the remainder went to elementary schools outside the region. All responses were on a scale of 1 to 5 with the data in this table representing the average response. For questions 1 and 2 – 1 was “not much at all” and 5 was “a lot”. For questions 3, 4, 5, and 7 – 1 was “not prepared at all” and 5 was “very well prepared. For question 8 – 1 was “never or hardly ever” and 5 was “all the time”.

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<sup>19</sup> Survey data was provided by district administrators.

TABLE 6  
Survey on Academic Preparedness, Wallkill Valley Students, Grades 9-10

	<b>Franklin</b>	<b>Hamburg</b>	<b>Hardyston</b>	<b>Ogdensburg</b>
1. How much reading were you asked to do in 7th and 8th grades (in any subject area, not just ELA)?	3.7	4.0	3.9	3.9
2. Did you think that the reading skills you developed in elementary/middle school prepared you for the reading you were expected to do in 9th grade?	3.8	4.2	4.1	4.1
3. How much writing were you asked to do in 7th and 8th grades (in any subject area, not just ELA)?	3.5	4.6	4.0	4.0
4. Did you think that the writing skills you developed in elementary/middle school prepared you for the writing you were expected to do in 9th grade?	3.4	4.3	4.0	4.0
5. How prepared were you for your 9th grade math class?	3.4	4.0	3.9	3.9
6. Did you feel that you were better prepared, less prepared, or as prepared as other students in your 9th grade math class?	17% better 64% equal 19% less	37% better 59% equal 4% less	29% better 56% equal 15% less	27% better 66% equal 7% less
7. Did you think that the science you learned in elementary/middle school prepared you for the science you were expected to do in 9th grade?	3.2	3.4	3.8	3.8
8. How often did you do any hands-on science experiments prior to your 9th grade science class?	3.2	3.6	3.4	3.4

Additional survey results:

21% of the students who responded took Geometry in 9<sup>th</sup> grade and 63% took Algebra I.

29% of the students took College Prep Biology in 9th grade, 29% took a course not listed in the survey; 24% took Honors Biology, and 17% took some level of physical science.

How often per week did you have physical education class in 8th grade? 73% responded that they had it every day.

Did you learn to play a musical instrument before you came to high school? 40% said, “No, my school offered lessons, but I never played an instrument.” 38% said, “Yes, I started playing an instrument but stopped before 9th grade.” 17% said, “Yes , and I continue playing an instrument today.”

Did you have technology / computer classes before 9th grade? 72% responded yes.

Did you feel you were adequately prepared to use technology as a tool for learning in your 9th grade classes? 92% responded yes.

Did your school offer 1:1 devices to students (Chromebooks, iPads, laptops, etc.) prior to ninth grade? 97% responded yes.

The results of the student survey show students general confidence in their preparation for the academic rigors of high school. While some differences can be noted, the diversity of preparation did not lead to all students feeling equally ready in all subject areas. Greater instructional coordination in a regionalized district should provide all students with a more common experience.

*Franklin*

TABLE 7  
NJ School Climate Improvement Survey Results, Franklin Students, Grades 3-5

Domain	Mean <sup>20</sup>	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Responses
Academic Culture & Classroom Practices	2.81	9%	31%	30%	30%	84
Behavioral Expectations	3.03	8%	13%	47%	32%	81
Negative Student Personal Behaviors	2.50	30%	19%	21%	30%	80
Prosocial Student Personal Behaviors	3.03	6%	12%	55%	27%	80
Sense of Physical Safety	3.38	1%	8%	41%	50%	81
Student Sense of Belonging	3.34	4%	7%	40%	49%	80
Student Voice & Involvement	2.97	11%	15%	40%	34%	79
Supportive Staff-Student Relationships	3.22	6%	8%	45%	41%	81
Supports for Student Social & Emotional Learning	3.24	4%	8%	48%	40%	80

<sup>20</sup> On a four point scale

Franklin shared results of NJ School Climate Improvement Surveys of its students, staff, and parents/caregivers conducted in May 2024. Tables 7 through 10 exhibit the results. Students in grades 3-5 reported their highest agreement with their sense of physical safety (mean = 3.38) and sense of belonging (3.34). Other high marks were given for supports for social and emotional learning or SEL (3.24) and supportive staff-student relationships (3.22). The lowest score by far was given for negative personal behaviors (2.50), speaking to the awareness of unacceptable actions by their peers. Students in grades 6-8 also reported high marks in the same categories: physical safety (3.33); staff-student relationships (3.22); SEL supports (3.14); and belonging (3.08). Again, the lowest response was in negative behaviors (2.68) with 58% agreeing or strongly agreeing that this was an issue.

**TABLE 8**  
NJ School Climate Improvement Survey Results, Franklin Students, Grades 6-8

<b>Domain</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Responses</b>
Academic Culture & Classroom Practices	2.80	6%	34%	33%	26%	134
Behavioral Expectations	2.96	5%	17%	54%	24%	134
Negative Student Personal Behaviors	2.68	22%	21%	25%	33%	134
Prosocial Student Personal Behaviors	2.82	4%	25%	56%	15%	134
Sense of Physical Safety	3.33	1%	5%	56%	39%	133
Student Sense of Belonging	3.08	3%	15%	52%	30%	134
Student Voice & Involvement	2.93	4%	21%	52%	22%	133
Supportive Staff-Student Relationships	3.22	3%	9%	52%	36%	134
Supports for Student Social & Emotional Learning	3.14	1%	9%	64%	26%	133

TABLE 9  
NJ School Climate Improvement Survey Results, Franklin Staff

Domain	Mean	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Responses
Academic Culture & Classroom Practices	2.76	0%	40%	45%	16%	37
Behavioral Expectations	3.01	2%	15%	63%	20%	40
Collegial Support	3.04	2%	10%	68%	20%	33
Family Support and Engagement	3.05	0%	12%	70%	17%	33
Leadership Support	2.88	2%	20%	66%	12%	34
Negative Student Personal Behaviors	2.20	18%	46%	35%	2%	32
Organizational Resources & Supports	2.64	7%	33%	49%	11%	37
Prosocial Student Personal Behaviors	2.83	0%	23%	69%	7%	32
Sense of Physical Safety	3.55	0%	2%	41%	57%	37
Student Voice & Involvement	3.18	0%	6%	71%	23%	32
Supportive Staff-Student Relationships	3.26	1%	1%	70%	28%	37
Supports for Student Social & Emotional Learning	3.05	0%	10%	76%	14%	34

Both adult groups agreed with students on the high degree of sense of physical safety in the school (staff 3.55, parents/caregivers 3.33) and supportive staff-student relationships (staff 3.26, parents/caregivers 3.22). They also agreed with students on the problem of negative student behaviors (staff 2.20, parents/caregivers 2.66), although at differing levels. Parents and caregivers gave high marks for academic culture (3.19), while staff did so for student voice (3.18). Staff shared concerns regarding organizational resources and supports (2.64).

TABLE 10  
NJ School Climate Improvement Survey Results, Franklin Parents and Caregivers

Domain	Mean	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Responses
Academic Culture & Classroom Practices	3.19	1%	6%	68%	25%	31
Behavioral Expectations	3.04	3%	13%	60%	24%	33
Family Support & Engagement	3.10	3%	14%	53%	30%	33
Negative Student Personal Behaviors	2.66	13%	32%	32%	24%	29
Prosocial Student Personal Behaviors	2.98	2%	12%	71%	15%	29
Sense of Physical Safety	3.33	0%	7%	53%	40%	31
Supportive Staff-Student Relationships	3.22	1%	12%	52%	35%	31
Supports for Student Social & Emotional Learning	3.09	2%	19%	36%	42%	30

### *Hamburg*

Hamburg conducted a staff climate and culture survey in the 2024-25 school year to be used by the school committee to develop a plan for the following year. Twenty staff members responded by assessing each of sixteen elements of climate and/or culture: mission; teaching and learning; professional expectations; social environment for the students; shared leadership; social emotional learning; climate plan; programs, initiatives, and approaches; physical environment; time; norms; expectations for student behavior; data collection and analysis; collegial environment; rules and norms for students; and teams, focus, and goals. They rated each element with one of the following descriptors: (1) not addressed; (2) emerging; (3) developing; or (4) sustaining.

The five highest rated elements were: physical environment (3.5); teaching and learning (3.3); shared leadership (3.25); professional behavior (3.25); and data collection and analysis (3.2). These are situated between developing and sustaining with the difference based on one or two factors – usually consistency, cohesiveness or reflection. The element with the lowest overall score was time (2.55) and norms (2.45), placing them about midway between emerging and developing. The difference here was based generally around having a set standard versus regular implementation in practice. The intent moving forward is to: present results to the climate-culture committee; expand

data collection to students, other staff members, and perhaps community; identify easily implementable action steps and critical targets; and strategize and plan.

*Ogdensburg*

TABLE 11  
Ogdensburg Family Climate Survey, Spring 2024 (21 respondents) <sup>21</sup>

<b>Initiative</b>	<b>Score</b>	<b>Initiative</b>	<b>Score</b>
Bullying 2.0 for 6th Graders	4.0	Social Media / Tech Assembly (grades 5-8)	4.4
Footprints for 2nd Graders	5.0	Spirit Weeks	4.8
Positive Climate Summit for 7th Grade	4.0	Diary of Anne Frank Assembly	4.6
Student Character Ed Committee	4.8	Haunted Mine	4.8
Pillars of Character	4.7	Hallway TV for Pictures and Updates	4.9
Green Tickets for Students	4.8	Lunch Bunch Groups	4.5
Week of Respect / Red Ribbon Week	4.6	Pass-It-Along	5.0
Kindness Challenge	4.2	Veterans Day Assembly	4.7
Birthdays on Announcements	4.8	Character Awards Assemblies	4.7
Preschool Literacy Night	4.9	School Facebook Page	4.7
Alumni Basketball / Staff v Students Soccer	4.8	3rd Grade Night	4.5
Live Morning Announcements	4.8	Green Apple Day	4.7
No Tech Tuesdays	4.6	Girls on the Run	4.8
Love of Reading Week	4.6	Book Fair	4.7
Torch Run	4.8	Family Literacy Night	4.8
Celebration for pK Student Finishing Cancer Treatment	4.8	How do you feel the climate of the school is currently?	4.3

Ogdensburg shared data on several recent surveys of its stakeholders. Tables 11 and 12 show the results of surveys on climate initiatives started in the school. While there were 21 respondents to the family survey and 27 to the staff survey, several of the activities were grade-based and received fewer than 10 responses. The final question on the current feeling about the school’s climate was

<sup>21</sup> Survey results are from 1 (had a negative effect on school climate) to 5 (had a positive effect on school climate), except for the final question which is rated from 1 (needs improvement) to 5 (great).

scored at 4.3 out of 5.0 by both staff and families. That result was a collective expression that adult stakeholders are pleased with the activities focused on school climate and believe the climate is quite positive.

TABLE 12  
Ogdensburg Staff Climate Survey, Spring 2024 (21 respondents)

<b>Initiative</b>	<b>Score</b>	<b>Initiative</b>	<b>Score</b>
Bullying 2.0 for 6th Graders	3.8	Social Media / Tech Assembly (grades 5-8)	4.3
Footprints for 2nd Graders	3.8	Spirit Weeks	4.8
Positive Climate Summit for 7th Grade	3.8	Diary of Anne Frank Assembly	3.9
Student Character Ed Committee	4.5	Haunted Mine	4.3
Pillars of Character	4.6	Hallway TV for Pictures and Updates	4.9
Green Tickets for Students	4.7	Lunch Bunch Groups	4.3
Week of Respect / Red Ribbon Week	4.7	Pass-It-Along	4.5
Kindness Challenge	4.4	Veterans Day Assembly	4.9
Birthdays on Announcements	4.9	Character Awards Assemblies	4.5
Preschool Literacy Night	4.6	School Facebook Page	4.7
Alumni Basketball / Staff v Students Soccer	4.7	3rd Grade Night	4.2
Live Morning Announcements	4.9	Green Apple Day	4.4
No Tech Tuesdays	3.9	Girls on the Run	4.7
Love of Reading Week	4.8	Book Fair	4.8
Torch Run	4.9	Family Literacy Night	4.7
White Tickets for Staff	4.6	Staff Lunches/Parties	4.9
Early Leave on Holidays/Early Dismissals	5.0	Wellness Wednesdays	4.9
Coffee Club	4.4	Teacher Appreciation Week	4.7
Celebration for pK Student Finishing Cancer Treatment	5.0	How do you feel the climate of the school is currently?	4.3

TABLE 13  
Ogdensburg Preschool Parent Survey, Summer 2024 (29 respondents)

Question	Yes	No
Did you feel you had enough information about the program when your child started?	83%	17%
Were you satisfied with the way naptime was handled?	100%	0%
Were you satisfied with the way lunchtime was handled?	100%	0%
Did you participate in the parent/family events at night?	76%	24%
Are you familiar with resources in the community (Project Self Sufficiency, Center for Prevention and Counseling, etc.)?	74%	26%
Would you recommend the preschool program to others?	100%	0%

Table 13 shows the results from a survey of preschool parents. The impressions of the program are uniformly positive, and each respondent would recommend the preschool to others. The survey also posed some questions that asked for more than just a simple response. Some of the comments were:

- If our teacher wasn't as accessible, I feel like we wouldn't really know much about what goes on especially since the children are too young to explain certain things.
- I wish there was something that told you about their schedule, what they can eat during lunch (ex: can they have peanut butter or not), even what to do if you need to pick up early or late.
- Would like more details regarding hours, nap times, play times, curriculum
- Alternate option for kids who do not nap (gym time? outdoor time?)
- I was confused about buying lunch from the cafeteria, so I just opted to make her lunch everyday. I wouldn't mind her buying a few times a month though.
- Some (of the family activities) were held right after school, and I was not able to attend due to work. Some midday events we had other family members attend and support our child.
- Many PTO activities/incentives are not available to preschool, love the program and teachers.
- The pre-k program is wonderful! My child is encouraged to learn new skills and content, but they are also encouraged to play as a form of learning. I am very satisfied with this preschool program and the teachers facilitating the learning are the best. The compassion and care they give the children is unmatched, and they're the reason the program is successful!

- I think this program is awesome! I feel so fortunate that it's provided for as young as 3 year olds, and for free!! It's been so helpful and she has been learning SO MUCH it's crazy, and is so much more comfortable around other kids.

TABLE 14  
Ogdensburg Parent Survey on School Environment and Attendance  
Fall 2024/Winter 2025 (78 respondents)

Prompt	Yes	No	N/A or Not Sure
Children who arrive late are welcomed and kindly reminded about the importance of being on time	50%	8%	42%
Students are respectful to one another in the hallways, classrooms, lunch and recess	55%	14%	31%
Principals, teachers, and support staff are visible and engage positively with students	87%	3%	10%
The school visibly acknowledges and celebrates the diversity of the student population through displays, art, signage, etc	77%	3%	21%
The school clearly communicates expectations and consequences for student attendance in languages spoken by parents and guardians	79%	4%	17%
If students arrive at school not meeting the dress code, they are treated with consideration and are offered an alternative so they can stay at school	26%	3%	72%
The main office is easy to find and the staff greets students. There is a clear sign-in and sign out system for students who arrive late or leave early	94%	0%	6%
Local police officers are visible and engage all students in a considerate and friendly way	65%	12%	23%
Posters, pictures, bulletin boards, banners, etc. posted around the school make it clear that attendance is valued.	58%	5%	37%
Recognition for good and improved student attendance is acknowledged	49%	6%	45%
The physical environment is welcoming and supports learning for all students (example: well lit, clean painted walls, working HVAC, student/parent gathering areas)	79%	18%	3%
Recess areas are in good condition and offers a space for students to be physically active and interact with their peers	79%	12%	9%
The nurse office is easily accessible, staffed by a medical professional and in use by students	85%	9%	6%
Common area spaces (including Zen Den and cafeteria) are clean, orderly, and offer	73%	1%	26%

students an opportunity to socialize			
Students' academic work and artwork is evident throughout the school	96%	0%	4%
Classrooms foster active learning, and have space for working on projects, books, and supplies	95%	0%	5%
Classrooms are well organized and clean	96%	3%	1%
Self-contained classrooms support student learning and are included within the school community	74%	0%	26%

Over 90% of parents agreed that the school's: classrooms are well organized and clean; classrooms foster active learning with sufficient space; halls display student work; and the main office is easy to find, organized, and friendly. Over 70% also felt that the school: visibly acknowledges and celebrates student diversity; clearly communicates expectations for student attendance; physical environment is welcoming and supports learning; recess areas are in good condition and of sufficient space; nurse's office is easily accessible and professionally staffed; common areas are clean, orderly, and appealing to students; and self-contained classrooms support student learning and are included within the broader school. While two of the prompts scored 50 or below (i.e., students not meeting the dress code are treated with consideration; children arriving late are welcomed), it is also true that both prompts had high numbers of "not applicable or not sure" responses.

TABLE 15  
Ogdensburg Staff Survey on Instructional Resource Use, May 2024 (17 respondents)

Prompt	Yes	No	Other
Do you use Discovery Education to teach Science/Social Studies?	7	10	0
Do you feel Discovery Ed has enough information to teach the Science and Social Studies curriculum? (other = did not respond)	3	11	3
Are you interested in exploring something new for Science/Social Studies? (other = did not respond)	11	3	3
If you have been given access to the TCI samples, do you feel the online access would be beneficial for our staff? (other = didn't receive access)	2	1	14
Do you feel SimpleK12 is beneficial to your professional development? (other = sometimes)	2	7	8
Do you use Socrative PRO?	0	16	1
Do you use Gizmo?	1	16	0
Do you use Otus other than for SGOs?	1	14	2

## Staff Interviews

Members of the study team met with groups of staff members from all five districts on June 2, 2025, at Wallkill Valley Regional HS to obtain information that would be difficult or impossible to obtain in documentary form. Separate meetings were held with superintendents, curriculum coordinators, special education directors and child study team members, 8th grade teachers, and 9th grade teachers. Responses are shared in various parts of the study, primarily in the Education and Program domain.

## 6. Potential Political Issues

Hardyston mentioned two concerns that should be acknowledged. One is that the current board of education is split 5-4 ideologically along national political lines. The majority has been looking to roll back cultural policies such as ones dealing with transgender students and diversity initiatives among other things. Second, there have been several ethics charges filed against school board members, in some cases by one board member against another. This divisiveness may prove to be a challenge to finding consensus on either regionalization or broader sharing of services.

Franklin referenced four issues that warrant mention. One is the borough's consideration of designating parts of the municipality as a historic district. The school building and property are in the area being discussed, and the board of education is gathering information to understand how this designation may affect future projects. A second is that the borough council and school board are in discussions to sell a piece of land along Route 23 that was acquired from the borough when a Walmart was built under the agreement that it would only be used for school use. A third issue arose in 2023 when the borough council expressed concerns with the school budget and staffing and attempted to change the board election from November to April. This did not occur and there have been no concerns regarding the budget since. The final issue noted was the borough committee being concerned about an influx of townhouses being planned, as well as the potential for low income housing. These things said, the borough and school district work well together to support each other in a collaborative manner.

Ogdensburg also shared concerns about the potential for significant housing growth and its impact on the school. Otherwise, the district saw political issues generally as minor turf fights and exhibitions of local pride.

## 7. Governance and Legal Impact

Wallkill Valley and its constituent districts commissioned this study to assist in determining whether the limited purpose, grades 9-12, regional school district should be expanded into an all purpose, grades pK-12, regional school district for all constituents or whether the districts should continue with the status quo while attempting to better control the costs of education by expanding shared services.

If a majority of voters in a majority of the constituent districts decide to move forward, the existing limited purpose regional would be expanded into an all purpose regional. Therefore, if a majority of voters in any three of the four constituent districts vote to expand the limited purpose, grades 9-12, Wallkill Valley Regional, it would become an all purpose, grades pK-12, regional district. If a proposal to expand the regional is defeated by two or more constituent districts, Wallkill Valley would remain as a limited purpose regional, and the four constituent districts would continue to operate as they currently do.

Each district scored admirably in its most recently completed NJQSAC cycles (2021-22 for Hardyston and Wallkill, 2022-23 for Franklin and Hamburg, and 2024-25 for Ogdensburg). Hardyston was recognized as a high performing district, and the other four districts were deemed high performing in all areas but one. 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.

Stakeholder input was a key feature of this study. The districts created a steering committee of superintendents, business administrators, and school board representatives to guide the outline of what was to be studied and to review and comment on an initial draft report. Surveys regarding school climate were a way to capture input from students, parents, and staff about how each group felt about its schools. Some selected staff interviews were also held to gather insights that documentary evidence would not be able to provide.

There are a few potential political issues in some of the districts worth keeping in mind if and when discussions begin regarding the advantages or drawbacks of regionalization and enhanced shared services.

# EDUCATION and PROGRAM

## 8. Curriculum and Instruction

Since students in the region already attend Wallkill Valley Regional HS from grades 9 through 12, this study was conducted with a focus on the curricular programs offered by the elementary and middle schools in Franklin, Hamburg, Hardyston, and Ogdensburg with a lesser emphasis on the programs offered at the high school level. However, the benefits of program coordination between the elementary schools and the regional high school will be included.

The NJ 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 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 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 curricula. 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.

### Curricular Philosophies, Content Focus, and Instructional Resources<sup>22</sup>

Because each elementary and middle school involved in this study has adopted a curriculum aligned with the most recent version of the NJSLs for each specific content area, the implemented curricula of each district would include differences in instructional practices, resources, and internal academic assessments. Actual instructional practices often vary as much between classrooms within a school as they do between schools or between districts. Therefore, these would require much more intensive investigation than expected in this kind of study.

### *ELA*

Like many high schools, Wallkill Valley uses a novel-based approach with no single textbook foundational series, and teachers have choices at each grade level. The curricular offerings include three levels of English for all grades and electives in journalism, creative writing, and college composition. The school does use Language Live for the resource center, and all English classes have a standard 42 minutes per day.

Some common approaches present elements of coordination in ELA and other subjects though differences remain, which are apparent as students enter high school. Specifically, Franklin and Hardyston have completely aligned their ELA curricula. Both schools use Schoolwide Inc.'s Readers and Writers Workshop as a base resource in grades K-8. For literacy interventions in grades K-5, they use 95% Group Literacy Intervention System, and for diagnostics they employ iReady, DIBELS 8, and Ready Coach supplemented with Reading A-Z and iReady Lesson Library. ELA instructional time in the two districts is 120 minutes per day in grades K-4 and 83 minutes per day in grades 5-8.

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<sup>22</sup> Interviews at Wallkill Valley Regional HS, 6-2-2025

Ogdensburg uses Wonders as a base resource in grades K-5 with UFLI Foundations for phonics development, while grades 6-8 ELA instruction is novel based. Diagnostics and RTI are done with a combination of DIBELS and iXL with OTUS as the data platform. ELA instructional time is 120 minutes per day in grades K-4 and 80 minutes per day in grades 5-8.

Hamburg uses HMH Into Reading as a base resource for grades K-4, while grades 5-8 ELA instruction is done through SAVVAS and novels. Diagnostics are done using NWEA with Language Live for the middle school LLD program with LinkIT as the data platform. ELA instructional time is 120 minutes per day in grades K-4 and 84 minutes per day in grades 5-8.

9th grade English teachers notice that the different curricular approaches in the elementaries lead to differing experiences. They see the jump from middle school to high school as a large gap for students to navigate. They would prefer at least a common middle school curriculum with a more seamless way for students to hit instructional milestones (note: 8th grade teachers agree with this). It was noted that reading lists were coordinated several years ago, but that hasn't been updated recently.

The four elementary districts' use of varying literacy programs and assessment tools creates inconsistent student experiences, preparation levels, and outcomes as students advance through grade levels and transition to high school. Implementing standardized programs, supplemental materials, and universal screening and assessment instruments would benefit both students and teachers by ensuring students enter high school with comparable experiences and generating assessment data that allows for meaningful comparisons.

### *Math*

Similar dynamics are at play in Math in that Franklin and Hardyston's curricula are fully aligned. They both use HMH Into Math as a base resource in grades K-8 with diagnostics through iReady and HMH Education. They supplement with iReady Math Toolbox, and instructional time for Math is 83 minutes per day in grades K-8.

Hamburg uses SAVVAS as a base resource for grades K-8 with instructional time for Math at 84 minutes per day in grades K-8. Ogdensburg uses a combination of SAVVAS and Envisions as a base resource. Instructional time for Math is 80 minutes per day in grades K-4 and 280 minutes per week (double periods twice per week) in grades 5-8.

Math teachers at the high school use a variety of base resources for their classes, although a common one, Delta Math, for diagnostics. The curricular offerings include the standard ones to be expected: Algebra 1, Geometry, Algebra 2, PreCalculus, Calculus, Statistics, and College Math. The common schedule has 42 minute periods per day.

Similarly to the case with ELA, Math curricular materials utilized by the four districts are quite varied, and that, combined with the variable amount of instructional time, means students have very different experiences in Math. 8th grade teachers note they have a higher level and lower level Math

class when they can have multiple sections. In some cases it was difficult to challenge the higher level students as there were important differences in learning background among students in the same classroom. 9th grade teachers saw this as well saying that, “highs are high and lows are low” and they can tell who went to which school, suggesting a need for better coordination. 9th grade saw it as important to administer the common Math placement assessment, but 8th grade teachers thought it should happen sooner so as to have a more productive impact on high school scheduling for 8th graders.

### *Science and Social Studies*

For these subjects, there is a similar cooperative dynamic but involving different districts. Hamburg and Hardyston both use TCI for Science and Social Studies in grades K-8. For instructional time in both subjects, Hardyston allots 42 minutes three times per week for grades K-3, while grades 4-8 get 42 minutes per day. Hamburg allocates 41 minutes twice per week in grades K-4, and 41 minutes per day in grades 5-8 with an additional 41 minute lab period once per week.

Ogdensburg uses Discovery Ed & Mystery Science for grades K-2, TCI for grades 3-4, and a variety of labs and Mystery Science for grades 5-8. Grades K-4 get 3 periods per week of 40 minutes each for Science and 2 periods per week for Social Studies, with 40 minutes per day for each subject in grades 5-8. Like Ogdensburg, Franklin uses Discovery Ed & Mystery Science for grades K-2. They use Discovery Science for grades 3-8. For Social Studies they use TCI History Alive in grades K-8. Instructional time for both subjects is 42 minutes every other day in grades K-4, and 42 minutes every day for grades 5-8.

Wallkill Valley offers Science (standard courses include Physical Science, Biology, Chemistry, Environmental Science, Physics) and Social Studies classes (World History, US History 1 & 2, and upper level electives) in 42 minute periods for 5 days per week with the exception of Honors and AP Science at 6 periods per week. Science resources are varied, but Social Studies does use the common HMH Americans text for US History and an online resource from HMH for World History.

The 9th grade Science teacher noted that incoming students take one of four courses – one of two levels of Physical Science or one of two 2 levels of Biology. The elementary school curricula in Science spiral around different topics for each one. The state standards encourage this as they are written for grades 6-8 together rather than for individual grades like ELA and Math.

Elementary educators recognize that Social Studies and Science instruction frequently takes a backseat to Math and ELA. However, both subjects have established state standards, and students face several science assessments throughout their schooling. Early exposure to these disciplines cultivates interest and curiosity that may influence students' high school course selections and eventual career paths. The diverse approaches used across elementary districts may result in uneven levels of student preparation in these subject areas.

*Specials (i.e., art, music, physical education, world language, technology/STEM, library/media)*

Franklin employs 2.5 full time equivalent (FTE) Health and Physical Education teachers with .5 Health pulled during Physical Education and .5 for adaptive Physical Education. Grades K-4 have one period three days per week. Grades 5-8 have one period per day on a trimester rotation. Preschool students have no formal physical education class, but do gross motor skill development in class. Music, Art, Spanish, and Technology/STEM each have 1 FTE teacher. Grades K-4 get one period per week, and grades 5-8 cycle through by trimester (i.e., choice of two cycles, then split a cycle for the other two). Grades K-4 also have a Library/Media period once a week, while grades 5-8 have their one period per week integrated with their ELA teacher.

Hamburg has 1 FTE teacher for Health and Physical Education with grades pK-3 scheduled two days per week and three days per week for grades 4-8 with health taught separately to the upper grades. Students in grades K-8 have Music, Art, and Spanish one period per week. Technology/STEM is integrated into homeroom, and Library/Media is scheduled once per week for grades pK-5 and by sign-in for grades 6-8.

Hardyston offers Art (1 FTE), Music (1 FTE), Spanish, and STEM for its specials in grades 5-8 on a marking period basis. Spanish is taught through a private program facilitated by a native speaker who is on a substitute certificate. The STEM teacher is also the technology coordinator, who receives a stipend to teach.

Ogdensburg has 2 FTE teachers for Health and Physical Education with pK scheduled once per week, K-4 scheduled 2 periods per week plus health, and grades 5-8 three periods per week plus health. Music (1 FTE) and Art (0.8 FTE) are offered 1 period per week for K-8 (note: Music also includes instrumental band) and both teachers provide academic support. The Spanish teacher is 1 FTE with grades K-8 having one period per week and the teacher also serves as the media specialist (once per week for grades K-8). Technology/STEM is embedded in the curriculum.

### Potential Improvements in Instructional Program

Currently, there is no single staff member in the region to coordinate curriculum for the five districts. Each district has someone assigned to oversee its curriculum: Wallkill Valley has a director of curriculum, instruction, and student activities; Franklin has a supervisor of instruction; and Hamburg, Hardyston, and Ogdensburg have a principal or assistant principal who also takes on curricular responsibilities.

Despite having individuals assigned to curriculum, the teachers who were interviewed and the superintendents shared the common concern that there is a lack of curriculum articulation going on among the districts. Years ago, there was a process and active effort in this regard, but it has been gone for some time now. There are individual bright spots noted in the previous section where pairs of districts have certain subjects aligned or are using the same resources. For the most part, the districts are devoting similar amounts of instructional time. These good practices can be acknowledged and built upon now, while a full regionalization effort is being considered.

A centralized regional curriculum office overseeing grades pK-12 education could provide unified leadership, support, and coordination for curriculum and instruction across the schools, ultimately enhancing student achievement and success. Such leadership could also facilitate coordination of shared educational services both within and beyond district boundaries. Even implementing coordinated curriculum solely for grades pK-8 would ensure students arrive at 9th grade better equipped for high school demands, enabling high school teachers to focus less on establishing common foundational knowledge and expectations with incoming students.

An all-purpose regional made up of the five districts would have a projected student enrollment of 2,259 students in 2025-26. This consolidation could allow for at least one administrative staff member (e.g., an assistant superintendent or a director of curriculum and instruction) to be devoted largely to the leadership of curriculum coordination, instructional supervision, and professional development. Another option would be to consider an elementary coordinator for grades pK-8 (or pK-6) and a secondary coordinator for grades 9-12 (or 7-12) who could work closely together to ensure consistency and continuity. Either option can also be considered as a shared service where one district employs the individual and others pay a portion of costs to the employing district.

This analysis reveals that students entering Wallkill Valley from elementary schools in Franklin, Hamburg, Hardyston, and Ogdensburg arrive with significantly varied educational experiences. Ensuring all incoming high school students share common experiences in educational programs and philosophy, consistent time allocation for content areas, and aligned professional development opportunities can provide numerous advantages. Standardizing programs, assessment instruments, and instructional time for each subject area would create this cohesive foundation such that:

- Teachers of upper grades should see greater consistency in student experiences, which translates into lessons that meet the needs of more students;
- 9th grade staff members will have a much greater awareness of the common skills students have likely mastered and those skills in which they will likely have to develop further. Teachers of the upper grades can more easily share with the teachers of the lower grades the information they need to help them plan and adjust their instruction;
- The alignment of assessment tools and data warehouses 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. For instance, it was observed that four of the districts share a student information system, and this could be an easy point of full collaboration in terms of student data platforms; and
- Consistency in the time allotted, especially in literacy and math instruction, can produce more coherent results among students and better prepare them for success in high school.

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

of programs in all grades pK-12 would result from regionalization or more coordinated efforts. This would allow staff to further investigate programs and their results prior to making a decision about investments in them. Reducing the replication of program review, curriculum writing, and professional learning comes not only with stronger academic programs throughout the region, but should also result in financial benefits.

Class Sizes

TABLE 16  
Average Class Sizes, 2024-25 <sup>23</sup>

	Wallkill Valley	Franklin	Hamburg	Hardyston	Ogdensburg
Kindergarten		21	13	14	13
Grade 1		18	12	22	16
Grade 2		24	12	14	22
Grade 3		26	16	21	14
Grade 4		18	22	16	16
Grade 5		12	25	22	15
Grade 6		23	23	22	25
Grade 7		25	19	19	27
Grade 8		24	19	25	23
ELA 9	20				
ELA 10	17				
ELA 11	18				
ELA 12	17				
Overall Average	18.0	21.2	17.9	19.4	19.0

The State has identified suggested maximum class sizes of 20 for grades K-5, 22 for grades 6-8, and 24 for grades 9-12.<sup>24</sup> The data below reveals the differentiation not only between districts but even within them. This is a challenge especially for districts with one school and for those with low enrollments, who often have just one or two classrooms per grade level. It makes it hard to attain efficiencies in personnel allocation and student to teacher ratios. The data shows that all districts in the study are generally below or at least close to those suggested maximums. Regionalization of the districts may allow for decisions on more efficient placement or sharing of teaching staff.

<sup>23</sup> Grades K-8 class sizes are based on homerooms, grades 9-12 are based on English classes

<sup>24</sup> Maximum class sizes are from NJDOE’s room capacity guidelines in the long range facilities plan for district practice.

With Wallkill Valley operating at a larger scale than the other districts, it is not surprising to see them have more consistent class sizes. The elementary districts have broader ranges from 12-13 up to 25-27, the latter of which is above the state recommended class size maximums. It is very difficult to balance these between effectiveness and efficiency when a school has to choose between one large section of perhaps 25-30 versus two small sections of 12-15. By working together regionally, districts could make strategic decisions about teacher placement and sharing that help stabilize class sizes at certain schools.

Length of School Day, Instructional Time, and School Calendar

TABLE 17  
Length of School Day, Instructional Time, and School Calendar, 2023-24 <sup>25</sup>

School	Grade Level	Start/End Time of School Day	Length of School Day	Instructional Time	First/Last Day of School Year
Wallkill Valley HS	9-12	7:30 AM / 2:15 PM	6:45	5:28	9-4-24 / 6-12-25
Franklin ES	pK-8	7:55 AM / 2:30 PM	6:35	5:54	9-5-24 / 6-26-25
Hamburg ES	pK-8	8:05 AM / 3:00 PM	6:55	6:25	9-5-24 / 6-13-25
Hardyston ES	pK-4	8:50 AM / 3:25 PM	6:35	5:45	9-4-24 / 6-17-25
Hardyston MS	5-8	7:55 AM / 2:50 PM	6:55	5:53	9-4-24 / 6-17-25
Ogdensburg ES	pK-8	8:10 AM / 2:55 PM	6:45	6:03	9-5-24 / 6-26-25

Different starting and ending times are to be expected due to tiered busing routes. Elementary/middle school instructional times vary from a low of 5 hours 45 minutes to a high of 6 hours 25 minutes. Further alignment of the length of school day and instructional time across the districts, or in an all purpose regional district, would provide a more even playing field for all students in these schools. Syncing school calendars more closely would assist with transportation efficiencies, common planning, and collaborative professional development activities.

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<sup>25</sup> School websites and district provided information

## Technology Access and Resources

All of the districts have made significant investments in technology resources with at least a 1.0 to 1 student to device ratio mostly through Chromebooks in grades 3-8 and carts in grades K-2. STEM teams are organized in the middle school grades, and there is a move to pivot from smartboards to television monitors as a more cost effective use. Hardyston has a dedicated line between schools for internet access, security, and handheld communications.

Technology is another area where shared services or regional consolidation can have performance benefits. One model using the status quo governance structure is to have the people responsible for supervising or coordinating technology in each district begin to develop expertise in specific areas of technology such as instructional design, systems integration, professional development, accessibility, technical support, hardware and asset management, software updates, and/or data management and security. In this way these specialists could be called upon to address issues related to their expertise in any of the five districts. This is a model that could also be followed in an all purpose regional with one director, perhaps an assistant director with a targeted portfolio, and several specialized technicians.

## Professional Development

A review of the district professional development plans revealed the focus each puts on this essential contributor to student success. Goals are summarized below.

Wallkill Valley – familiarize staff with the RTI process; begin implementing the RTI process into classroom instruction; develop vertical articulation with the elementary districts

Franklin – build capacity to use data in instruction; enhance strategies to support struggling students

Hamburg – map and analyze the curriculum; introduce RealTime SIS; articulate ELA and writing NJSLA components; enhance preschool tiered system of supports

Hardyston – improve math and language arts instruction and assessments; increase student attendance and reduce chronic absenteeism by partnering with parents and elevating student interest and participation in their education; improve staff collaboration, camaraderie, and cooperation to optimize school district culture and climate, and aid in staff retention

Ogdensburg – focus on improved instruction, virtual education, innovative practices, and data driven instruction to ensure adherence to state approved standards with SGO and PDP alignment<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> NJQSAC district improvement plan

One interesting resource in Hamburg’s contract is that two of the five days allotted for professional development may become “flex days” to be used at the staff member’s discretion for learning opportunities outside the typically planned activities.

In larger districts and regionals, professional development is often an important aspect of the role of an assistant superintendent or director of curriculum and instruction. This arrangement helps to coordinate the adult learning opportunities with specific aspects of curriculum development or instructional improvement objectives.

The superintendents in this region are also concerned with the challenges of staff recruitment and hiring. They are considering professional development and school culture as means to help solve this dilemma. Growing enrollments help, but competitive pay scales compared to other districts is a shared concern. Math and Science continue to be difficult content areas for finding teachers. Wallkill Valley is offering only Spanish as a world language (note: offered three languages previously) and having a difficult time staffing those roles, as online programs tend to be expensive. Franklin suggested discussions around sharing staff to balance class sizes. Hamburg has occasionally extended mentorship for a half or full year as an additional support for new teachers. Hardyston has a district goal to increase staff retention and strives for a family atmosphere to improve in that area, as does Ogdensburg.

## 9. Performance Measures

### Federal Accountability Status

TABLE 18  
Overall Federal Accountability Status, 2023-24 <sup>27</sup>

	<b>ELA Proficiency</b>	<b>Math Proficiency</b>	<b>ELA Growth</b>	<b>Math Growth</b>	<b>4-Year Grad Rate</b>	<b>5-Year Grad Rate</b>	<b>English Progress</b>	<b>Chronic Absenteeism</b>
Wallkill Valley	Y	Y	–	–	N	–	*	N
Franklin	Y	N	Y	Y	–	–	*	N
Hamburg	Y	Y	E	E	–	–	*	N
Hardyston	Y	Y	Y	Y	–	–	*	Y
Ogdensburg	Y	Y	N	N	–	–	–	Y

The federal government’s Every Student Succeeds Act mandates that states create accountability frameworks to pinpoint schools requiring additional support and enhancement. These frameworks must evaluate student performance using a comprehensive approach that extends beyond

<sup>27</sup> The table shows whether the district met annual federal accountability targets for each indicator. E = exceeds standard; Y = meets target/standard; N = does not meet target/standard; dash = not applicable. An asterisk (\*) indicates that due to accountability calculations, data was not made public for groups of less than 20 students.

standardized test results alone, including academic achievement levels, student growth measurements, high school graduation rates, and advancement tracking for multilingual learners. States are also required to break down educational data by various student demographic groups and guarantee that assessment practices reach every student within their systems. Table 18 identifies those metrics and their status for the 2023-24 school year.

The five districts met the ELA and Math proficiency standards in nine of ten measures, which is a strong indicator of academic success. Growth is perhaps of even greater importance, as it is more under the locus of school control. Hamburg exceeded its growth targets, Hardyston and Franklin met them, and Ogdensburg fell just short for this school year.<sup>28</sup> Progress toward English proficiency for multilingual learners is not reported here due to the few students in that category. Chronic absenteeism is the non-academic measure, and the mixed results here provide a reason to continue working to improve post-pandemic student attendance.

Tables 19 to 23 provide the disaggregated results by student group. Every district in this study has more student groups for whom the proficiency/progress targets are met or exceeded than for those not met. This speaks well of the successful work on the part of these schools and their staff members to reduce achievement gaps.

**TABLE 19**  
Federal Accountability Status Disaggregated by Race, Ethnicity,  
Ability, Income, and Language, Wallkill Valley, 2023-24 <sup>29</sup>

	<b>ELA Proficiency</b>	<b>Math Proficiency</b>	<b>ELA Growth</b>	<b>Math Growth</b>	<b>4-Year Grad Rate</b>	<b>5-Year Grad Rate</b>	<b>English Progress</b>	<b>Chronic Absenteeism</b>
White	Y	N	*	*	N	--		N
Hispanic	Y	Y	*	*	Y	--		N
Black	*	*	*	*	*	*		N
Asian/HI/PI	*	*	*	*	*	*		*
NA/AK	*	*	*	*	*	*		*
Multiracial	*	*	*	*	*	*		*
Students with Disabilities	Y	Y	*	*	Y	--		N
Economically Disadvantaged	Y	Y	*	*	N	--		N
Multilingual Learners	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*

<sup>28</sup> High schools do not have growth targets

<sup>29</sup> Asian/HI/PI = Asian, Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander

TABLE 20  
Federal Accountability Status Disaggregated by Race, Ethnicity,  
Ability, Income, and Language, Franklin, 2023-24

	ELA Proficiency	Math Proficiency	ELA Growth	Math Growth	4-Year Grad Rate	5-Year Grad Rate	English Progress	Chronic Absenteeism
White	Y	N	Y	Y	--	--		N
Hispanic	Y	Y	Y	E	--	--		Y
Black	*	*	*		--	--		*
Asian/HI/PI	*	*	*	*	--	--		*
NA/AK	*	*	*	*	--	--		*
Multiracial	*	*	*	*	--	--		*
Students with Disabilities	Y	Y	N	Y	--	--		N
Economically Disadvantaged	Y	N	Y	Y	--	--		N
Multilingual Learners	*	*	*	*	--	--	*	

TABLE 21  
Federal Accountability Status Disaggregated by Race, Ethnicity,  
Ability, Income, and Language, Hamburg, 2023-24

	ELA Proficiency	Math Proficiency	ELA Growth	Math Growth	4-Year Grad Rate	5-Year Grad Rate	English Progress	Chronic Absenteeism
White	Y	Y	E	E	--	--		N
Hispanic	Y	Y	E	*	--	--		Y
Black	*	*	*	*	--	--		*
Asian/HI/PI	*	*	*	*	--	--		*
NA/AK	*	*	*	*	--	--		*
Multiracial	*	*	*	*	--	--		*
Students with Disabilities	Y	Y	Y	E	--	--		N
Economically Disadvantaged	Y	Y	E	*	--	--		N
Multilingual Learners	*	*	*	*	--	--	*	*

**TABLE 22**  
**Federal Accountability Status Disaggregated by Race, Ethnicity,**  
**Ability, Income, and Language, Hardyston, 2023-24**

	<b>ELA Proficiency</b>	<b>Math Proficiency</b>	<b>ELA Growth</b>	<b>Math Growth</b>	<b>4-Year Grad Rate</b>	<b>5-Year Grad Rate</b>	<b>English Progress</b>	<b>Chronic Absenteeism</b>
White	Y	Y	Y	Y	--	--		Y
Hispanic	Y	Y	N	Y	--	--		N
Black	--	--	*	*	--	--		Y
Asian/HI/PI	*	*	*	*	--	--		*
NA/AK	*	*	*	*	--	--		*
Multiracial	*	*	*	*	--	--		*
Students with Disabilities	Y	Y	Y	Y	--	--		Y
Economically Disadvantaged	Y	Y	N	*	--	--		N
Multilingual Learners	*	*	*	*	--	--	*	*

**TABLE 23**  
**Federal Accountability Status Disaggregated by Race, Ethnicity,**  
**Ability, Income, and Language, Ogdensburg, 2023-24**

	<b>ELA Proficiency</b>	<b>Math Proficiency</b>	<b>ELA Growth</b>	<b>Math Growth</b>	<b>4-Year Grad Rate</b>	<b>5-Year Grad Rate</b>	<b>English Progress</b>	<b>Chronic Absenteeism</b>
White	Y	Y	N	Y	--	--		Y
Hispanic	Y	Y	*	*	--	--		N
Black	*	*	*	*	--	--		*
Asian/HI/PI	*	*	*	*	--	--		*
NA/AK	*	*	*	*	--	--		*
Multiracial	*	*	*	*	--	--		*
Students with Disabilities	Y	Y	E	N	--	--		Y
Economically Disadvantaged	Y	Y	Y	N	--	--		Y
Multilingual Learners	*	*	*	*	--	--	--	*

State Assessment Scores (aggregated) <sup>30</sup>

Standardized state assessments provide a common metric for assessing the academic performance of students across different schools or districts across the State. The State has adopted several different assessment regimes over the past two decades and is using the NJ Student Learning Assessments (NJSLA) presently. NJSLA allows for a standardized evaluation of how well students are mastering key concepts and skills as outlined in the NJSLS in the subjects of ELA, Math, and Science. Tables 24 through 32 indicate the percentage of total students meeting or exceeding expectations by grade level and/or subject area in the 2021-22, 2022-23, and 2023-24 school years.

TABLE 24  
Percentage of Students Meeting or Exceeding NJSLA ELA Expectations, 2021-22

	Wallkill Valley	Franklin	Hamburg	Hardyston	Ogdensburg	State Average
Grade 3		25%	20%	47%	56%	42%
Grade 4		57%	50%	69%	46%	49%
Grade 5		55%	39%	56%	67%	50%
Grade 6		38%	47%	55%	53%	48%
Grade 7		56%	64%	44%	61%	53%
Grade 8		62%	83%	75%	61%	51%
Grade 9	48%					49%

TABLE 25  
Percentage of Students Meeting or Exceeding NJSLA ELA Expectations, 2022-23

	Wallkill Valley	Franklin	Hamburg	Hardyston	Ogdensburg	State Average
Grade 3		28%	46%	40%	59%	42%
Grade 4		36%	32%	72%	65%	51%
Grade 5		62%	76%	75%	50%	53%
Grade 6		40%	60%	61%	73%	49%
Grade 7		45%	59%	59%	57%	56%
Grade 8		55%	70%	73%	65%	55%
Grade 9	50%					52%

<sup>30</sup> Data in the remainder of this section retrieved from NJ School Performance Reports

**TABLE 26**  
**Percentage of Students Meeting or Exceeding NJSLA ELA Expectations, 2023-24**

	<b>Wallkill Valley</b>	<b>Franklin</b>	<b>Hamburg</b>	<b>Hardyston</b>	<b>Ogdensburg</b>	<b>State Average</b>
Grade 3		47%	33%	58%	52%	44%
Grade 4		45%	68%	76%	48%	51%
Grade 5		42%	60%	55%	64%	52%
Grade 6		45%	72%	64%	62%	53%
Grade 7		53%	56%	54%	81%	54%
Grade 8		48%	61%	69%	50%	53%
Grade 9	62%					58%

**TABLE 27**  
**Percentage of Students Meeting or Exceeding NJSLA Math Expectations, 2021-22**

	<b>Wallkill Valley</b>	<b>Franklin</b>	<b>Hamburg</b>	<b>Hardyston</b>	<b>Ogdensburg</b>	<b>State Average</b>
Grade 3		40%	30%	50%	48%	45%
Grade 4		41%	36%	50%	42%	39%
Grade 5		32%	22%	18%	48%	36%
Grade 6		13%	35%	32%	10%	31%
Grade 7		17%	55%	29%	29%	34%
Grade 8		13%	55%	49%	*	15%
Algebra MS		47%	64%	96%	56%	35%
Algebra HS	18%					35%
Geometry	*					50%
Algebra II	*					68%

TABLE 28  
Percentage of Students Meeting or Exceeding NJSLA Math Expectations, 2022-23

	Wallkill Valley	Franklin	Hamburg	Hardyston	Ogdensburg	State Average
Grade 3		66%	50%	38%	48%	46%
Grade 4		30%	23%	42%	50%	44%
Grade 5		49%	59%	41%	50%	40%
Grade 6		25%	13%	45%	50%	34%
Grade 7		26%	41%	32%	29%	34%
Grade 8		13%	40%	19%	10%	18%
Algebra MS		42%	*	65%	27%	35%
Algebra HS	27%					35%
Geometry	*					55%
Algebra II	*					66%

TABLE 29  
Percentage of Students Meeting or Exceeding NJSLA Math Expectations, 2023-24

	Wallkill Valley	Franklin	Hamburg	Hardyston	Ogdensburg	State Average
Grade 3		39%	43%	60%	68%	48%
Grade 4		50%	64%	47%	42%	45%
Grade 5		38%	44%	33%	48%	40%
Grade 6		27%	61%	45%	42%	36%
Grade 7		26%	35%	41%	57%	38%
Grade 8		*	*	25%	17%	20%
Algebra MS		41%	*	91%	*	40%
Algebra HS	20%					40%
Geometry	35%					53%
Algebra II	64%					73%

TABLE 30  
Percentage of Students Meeting or Exceeding NJSLA Science Expectations, 2021-22

	Wallkill Valley	Franklin	Hamburg	Hardyston	Ogdensburg	State Average
Grade 5		19%	11%	25%	33%	26%
Grade 8		9%	10%	14%	9%	16%
Grade 11	30%					29%

TABLE 31  
Percentage of Students Meeting or Exceeding NJSLA Science Expectations, 2022-23

	Wallkill Valley	Franklin	Hamburg	Hardyston	Ogdensburg	State Average
Grade 5		24%	36%	14%	16%	27%
Grade 8		8%	22%	22%	24%	19%
Grade 11	36%					30%

TABLE 32  
Percentage of Students Meeting or Exceeding NJSLA Science Expectations, 2023-24

	Wallkill Valley	Franklin	Hamburg	Hardyston	Ogdensburg	State Average
Grade 5		21%	24%	27%	28%	27%
Grade 8		4%	17%	21%	15%	19%
Grade 11	29%					28%

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on standardized test scores has been deep and varied depending on multiple 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. To a great extent, statewide assessment scores have rebounded to pre-pandemic levels, although more work is needed.

An overview of the past three years of data shows that 51 of the 75 ELA, 44 of the 83 Math, and 11 of the 27 Science results met or exceeded state averages. That said, there remain significant disparities among the four elementary district assessment scores at various grade levels. This adds further evidence to the recommendations in the previous section on the desirability of better curriculum coordination, common philosophies and instructional materials, and similar resources devoted to academic work.

The NJ Graduation Proficiency Assessment (NJGPA) debuted in 2023 as a Grade 11 assessment required by the State for graduating high school. Performance is measured in ELA and Math with the percentages of those students deemed “graduation ready” displayed in Table 33. With only two years of data, Wallkill Valley Regional HS students performed near the state average in three of the four metrics.

TABLE 33  
Percentage of Grade 11 Students Meeting or Exceeding NJGPA Expectations

	Wallkill Valley ELA	State Average ELA	Wallkill Valley Math	State Average Math
2023	80%	81%	46%	55%
2024	83%	83%	57%	56%

State Assessment Scores (disaggregated)

Achievement gaps in standardized test scores refer to persistent disparities in academic performance between different groups of students. For example, the score differences between racial/ethnic majority and minority students or between wealthier students and their less economically advantaged peers are evident in both pre- and post-pandemic results. These persistent gaps are also observed along the lines of gender, ability, and language.

TABLE 34  
Percentage of Students Meeting or Exceeding NJSLA ELA Expectations  
Disaggregated by Race, Ethnicity, Gender, Ability, Income, and Language, 2023-24

	Wallkill Valley	Franklin	Hamburg	Hardyston	Ogdensburg
White	67%	46%	52%	64%	61%
Hispanic	48%	51%	75%	50%	58%
Black	*	*	50%	50%	*
Asian/HI/PI	*	*	*	*	*
NA/AK	*	*	*	*	*
Multiracial	*	*	*	73%	*
Female	67%	52%	73%	74%	68%
Male	60%	40%	45%	51%	48%
Students with Disabilities	28%	11%	26%	36%	26%
Economically Disadvantaged	36%	33%	60%	49%	47%
Multilingual Learners	*	*	*	*	*

**TABLE 35**  
**Percentage of Students Meeting or Exceeding NJSLA Math Expectations**  
**Disaggregated by Race, Ethnicity, Gender, Ability, Income, and Language, 2023-24**

	<b>Wallkill Valley</b>	<b>Franklin</b>	<b>Hamburg</b>	<b>Hardyston</b>	<b>Ogdensburg</b>
White	27%	29%	49%	50%	54%
Hispanic	29%	38%	54%	29%	21%
Black	*	*	44%	29%	*
Asian/HI/PI	*	*	*	*	*
NA/AK	*	*	*	*	*
Multiracial	*	*	*	46%	*
Female	14%	32%	50%	47%	49%
Male	40%	33%	55%	44%	44%
Students with Disabilities	19%	<10%	26%	26%	22%
Economically Disadvantaged	17%	21%	44%	41%	34%
Multilingual Learners	*	*	*	*	*

**TABLE 36**  
**Percentage of Grade 5 Students Meeting or Exceeding NJSLA Science Expectations**  
**Disaggregated by Race, Ethnicity, Gender, Ability, Income, and Language, 2023-24**

	<b>Franklin</b>	<b>Hamburg</b>	<b>Hardyston</b>	<b>Ogdensburg</b>
White	20%	14%	28%	32%
Hispanic	25%	*	*	*
Black	*	*	*	*
Asian/HI/PI	*	*	*	*
NA/AK	*	*	*	*
Multiracial	*	*	*	*
Female	16%	27%	26%	25%
Male	26%	21%	28%	*
Students with Disabilities	*	*	20%	*
Economically Disadvantaged	0%	*	*	*
Multilingual Learners	*	*	*	*

TABLE 37

Percentage of Grade 8 Students Meeting or Exceeding NJSLA Science Expectations Disaggregated by Race, Ethnicity, Gender, Ability, Income, and Language, 2023-24

	<b>Franklin</b>	<b>Hamburg</b>	<b>Hardyston</b>	<b>Ogdensburg</b>
White	7%	0%	28%	12%
Hispanic	0%	*	*	*
Black	*	*	*	*
Asian/HI/PI	*	*	*	*
NA/AK	*	*	*	*
Multiracial	*	*	*	*
Female	0%	*	13%	17%
Male	8%	8%	29%	*
Students with Disabilities	*	*	0%	*
Economically Disadvantaged	*	*	0%	*
Multilingual Learners	*	*	*	*

TABLE 38

Percentage of Grade 11 Students Meeting or Exceeding NJSLA Science Expectations Disaggregated by Race, Ethnicity, Gender, Ability, Income, and Language, 2023-24

	<b>Wallkill Valley</b>
White	33%
Hispanic	12%
Black	*
Asian/HI/PI	*
NA/AK	*
Multiracial	*
Female	29%
Male	30%
Students with Disabilities	4%
Economically Disadvantaged	12%
Multilingual Learners	*

TABLE 39  
 Percentage of Grade 11 Students Meeting or Exceeding NJGPA Expectations  
 Disaggregated by Race, Ethnicity, Gender, Ability, Income, and Language, 2023-24

	Wallkill Valley ELA	State Average ELA	Wallkill Valley Math	State Average Math
White	85%	90%	62%	69%
Hispanic	73%	72%	27%	38%
Black	*	73%	*	33%
Asian/HI/PI	*	>90%	*	88%
NA/AK	*	76%	*	44
Multiracial	*	88%	*	62%
Female	90%	87%	58%	57%
Male	80%	78%	57%	55%
Students with Disabilities	33%	54%	<10%	18%
Economically Disadvantaged	60%	72%	27%	36%
Multilingual Learners	*	24%	*	13%

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. Beginning in the younger grades, a more consistent program in ELA, Math, and Science would yield more common student experiences and could result in more productive professional learning communities, where teachers examine assessment data and the corresponding instructional strategies that foster those results.

### Student Growth Scores

In their simplest form, student growth scores are a measure of how much student learning is increasing above standard expectations over a given period of time. NJ uses a median student growth percentile (mSGP) model to indicate growth on statewide ELA and Math assessments. This mSGP is derived from each individual's student growth percentile (SGP) for ELA in grades 4-8 and for Math in grades 4-7. The SGP measures each 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, and the mSGP is the median score among those peers.

The mSGP falls between 1 and 99 and is separated into three levels. According to the State, an mSGP below 35 indicates low growth, an mSGP between 35 and 65 indicates typical growth, and an mSGP greater than 65 indicates high growth. The calculation of mSGPs relies on two consecutive

years of assessment results that calculate individual SGPs. Due to the cancellation of the NJSLA in both 2019-20 and 2020-21, SGPs were not calculated for those years or in 2021-22. mSGPs for each elementary district from two years before and two years after the pandemic are shown in Tables 40 and 41.

TABLE 40  
Median Student Growth Percentiles for ELA, 2017-18 to 2023-24

	<b>2017-18</b>	<b>2018-19</b>	<b>2022-23</b>	<b>2023-24</b>
Franklin	52.5	60.5	40	46
Hamburg	57	58	57.5	74
Hardyston	57	60	60	42.5
Ogdensburg	39	50	53	39

TABLE 41  
Median Student Growth Percentiles for Math, 2017-18 to 2023-24

	<b>2017-18</b>	<b>2018-19</b>	<b>2022-23</b>	<b>2023-24</b>
Franklin	62	48	52	53
Hamburg	37	64	56	71.5
Hardyston	47	41	44	50
Ogdensburg	43	42	44	39.5

Districts achieving mSGP scores between 40.0-59.5 are considered as having met the federal accountability standard. The 32 mSGP scores in this dataset indicate that student growth met or exceeded that standard with only three exceptions that were each close to the standard. In short, the Franklin, Hamburg, Hardyston, and Ogdensburg schools are consistently assisting their students' academic growth to a successful level.

Over the four years of data, there are a range of results with no discernable patterns. This range 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 in ELA and Math. 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 as they enter high school.

## College and Career Readiness Indicators

Tables 42 and 43 show the results of the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) administered at Wallkill Valley Regional HS. Many students faced challenges in accessing resources and preparing for exams during the 2019-20 and 2020-21 school years, while others were impacted during the years leading up to their scheduled exam, even as school returned to more normal schedules. In SAT Reading and Writing over five years, Wallkill Valley Regional HS scored consistently above and had a percentage of students well above the college readiness benchmarks as compared to the state average. Math is more of a mixed result.

TABLE 42  
SAT Reading and Writing Scores, Wallkill Valley, 2019-20 to 2023-24

	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Average Score	548	571	554	537	545
State Average	536	557	538	533	530
% at or above CRB <sup>31</sup>	83%	88%	83%	72%	80%
State Average	69%	76%	68%	67%	65%

TABLE 43  
SAT Math Scores, Wallkill Valley, 2019-20 to 2023-24

	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Average Score	531	574	525	520	542
State Average	536	560	532	525	519
% at or above CRB <sup>32</sup>	51%	70%	51%	46%	51%
State Average	52%	60%	49%	48%	46%

The steering committee asked for a breakdown of SAT scores by district of residence, and Tables 44 and 45 display that data.

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<sup>31</sup> Reading & Writing college readiness benchmark (CRB) is 480

<sup>32</sup> Math CRB is 530

TABLE 44  
SAT Reading and Writing Scores by District of Residence, 2022-23 to 2024-25

	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Franklin	518	561	526
Hamburg	546	560	580
Hardyston	567	565	558
Ogdensburg	547	560	554

TABLE 45  
SAT Math Scores by District of Residence, 2022-23 to 2024-25

	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Franklin	556	577	532
Hamburg	515	531	556
Hardyston	556	558	540
Ogdensburg	543	560	568

Participation in advanced courses such as Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and Dual Enrollment are other indicators of college readiness. Wallkill Valley Regional HS students have increased their enrollment and performance in advanced coursework steadily, and in some cases significantly, over the five year period. The disaggregated data reveal that both Wallkill Valley and the State overall have enrollment challenges that should be a priority.

TABLE 46  
Advanced Course Enrollment and Scores, Wallkill Valley, 2019-20 to 2023-24

	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Students Enrolled in an AP/IB Course <sup>33</sup>	20%	22%	27%	26%	24%
State Average	36%	36%	35%	35%	36%
Students Taking One or More AP/IB Tests	12%	13%	15%	17%	19%
State Average	29%	27%	28%	30%	31%
Students with AP Scores of 3+ (IB 4+)	*	*	10%	13%	16%
State Average	23%	18%	20%	21%	23%
Students Participating in Dual Enrollment	16%	12%	6%	17%	36%
State Average	20%	22%	24%	24%	27%

<sup>33</sup> AP = Advanced Placement; IB = International Baccalaureate; shows the percentage of 11th and 12th graders who enrolled in one or more AP or IB courses; Wallkill Valley offers only AP courses

TABLE 47  
Advanced Course Enrollment, Disaggregated by Race, Ethnicity, Gender,  
Ability, Income, and Language, Wallkill Valley, 2023-24

	Wallkill Valley AP/IB Enrollment	State Average AP/IB Enrollment	Wallkill Valley Dual Enrollment	State Average Dual Enrollment
White	27.4%	41.8%	35.6%	33.0%
Hispanic	8.6%	23.2%	34.5%	20.9%
Black	25.0%	20.3%	37.5%	17.4%
Asian/HI/PI	40.0%	70.5%	20.0%	32.5%
NA/AK	*	30.4%	*	28.6%
Multiracial	*	41.0%	*	29.0%
Female	30.7%	41.4%	40.7%	30.2%
Male	18.5%	30.6%	31.2%	23.7%
Economically Disadvantaged	8.5%	22.8%	23.7%	20.2%
Students with Disabilities	3.4%	4.8%	17.2%	10.9%
Multilingual Learners	*	9.8%	*	8.8%

Graduation and Postsecondary Enrollment

TABLE 48  
Graduation Rates, Wallkill Valley, 2021-2024

	2021 cohort		2022 cohort		2023 cohort		2024 cohort	
	School	State	School	State	School	State	School	State
Four-Year Graduation	89.6%	90.6%	92.1%	90.0%	91.0%	91.1%	91.7%	91.3%
Five-Year Graduation	89.7%	92.5%	93.3%	92.7%	93.6%	92.6%	93.6%	92.6%

Wallkill Valley Regional HS 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 75. The school had equal to or better graduation rates than the state average for the 4-year and 5-year cohorts for each of the past three years.

An examination of graduation rates by student subgroups in Table 49 is also important to get a fuller picture of the performance of the school in meeting the needs of all of its students. Given the enrollment profile at Wallkill Valley Regional HS, it is not surprising that several subgroups do not have enough students to meet the threshold for revealing data publicly. For those subgroups with sufficient enrollment, Wallkill Valley Regional HS is graduating students near the state average in most cases. Notably, the school is doing quite well in preparing its students with disabilities to meet their graduation requirements and earn their diplomas.

TABLE 49  
Four-Year Graduation Rates, Disaggregated by Race, Ethnicity, Gender, Ability,  
Income, and Language, Wallkill Valley, 2024 Cohort <sup>34</sup>

	<b>Wallkill Valley</b>	<b>State Average</b>
White	93.8%	95.0%
Hispanic	82.1%	86.9%
Black	*	86.5%
Asian/HI/PI	*	96.7%
NA/AK	n/a	91.7%
Multiracial	*	92.3%
Female	92.5%	93.1%
Male	90.8%	89.5%
Students with Disabilities	93.9%	80.7%
Economically Disadvantaged	80.0%	87.1%
Multilingual Learners	*	78.9%

Tables 50 and 51 document postsecondary enrollment rates by the percentage of graduates that were enrolled in any institution by the fall of the following year, 16 months after graduating from high school. As the tables demonstrate, Wallkill Valley Regional HS was above the state average in two of the three years shown.

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<sup>34</sup> n/a = no data available

TABLE 50  
 Postsecondary Enrollment Rates In Any Institution, Wallkill Valley, 2020-22 <sup>35</sup>

	<b>Wallkill Valley</b>	<b>State Average</b>
Class of 2020	75.4%	73.7%
Class of 2021	71.0%	73.3%
Class of 2022	77.1 - 79.5%	75.1 - 77.4%

TABLE 51  
 Postsecondary Enrollment Rates In Any Institution, Disaggregated by Race, Ethnicity, Gender, Ability, Income, and Language, Wallkill Valley, Class of 2022 <sup>36</sup>

	<b>Wallkill Valley</b>
White	76.5 - 78.8%
Hispanic	72.7 - 75.0%
Black	*
Asian/HI/PI	*
NA/AK	*
Multiracial	*
Female	78.1 - 80.5%
Male	75.9 - 78.3%
Students with Disabilities	40.7 - 42.0%
Economically Disadvantaged	70.6 - 72.8%
Multilingual Learners	*

There are many reasons students do and do not enroll in post-secondary education right after high school, including affordability, the need to work, or being the first in their family to have the opportunity to enroll in a post-secondary option. What the table above demonstrates is that Hispanic students and white students enroll in post-secondary options at nearly the same rates, as do male and female students and students who are economically disadvantaged. The only group that does lag

<sup>35</sup> NJDOE reported a range for overall postsecondary enrollment for the Class of 2022; the lower bound of the range is the percentage of students who were matched by the National Student Clearinghouse; the upper bound of the range represents an estimate of the percentage of students that may have enrolled, given the potential reasons that students may not be matched. Postsecondary enrollment data for the Class of 2023 was not yet posted by NJDOE at the time of this report.

<sup>36</sup> State averages were not available for this disaggregated data.

behind is the group of students with disabilities. Without state averages to serve as comparisons, it is difficult to tell if subgroups of Woodstown High School students are on par with like groups from across the state.

### School Climate

The State’s primary school climate measures are chronic absenteeism and student discipline. Chronic absenteeism refers to a situation where a student misses 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 interpersonal 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 disenroll 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 presented in Tables XX and XX. NJDOE recommends caution in comparing the 2022-23 chronic absenteeism rates with rates from prior years as the pandemic impacted attendance rates in a significant way. Depending on the years examined, the data shows little consistency, though the 2023-24 data are trending generally in a positive direction. It could be beneficial for the districts in the region to examine the strategies being employed by each one to see where improvements may be made.

TABLE 52  
Chronic Absentee Rates, 2021-22 to 2023-24 <sup>37</sup>

	<b>2021-22</b>	<b>2022-23</b>	<b>2023-24</b>
Wallkill Valley HS	40.7%	29.1%	31.5%
Franklin ES	28.8%	20.9%	14.5%
Hamburg ES	25.1%	30.7%	19.5%
Hardyston ES	18.5%	14.5%	14.4%
Hardyston MS	17.5%	21.0%	9.4%
Ogdensburg ES	27.5%	n/a	3.4%

<sup>37</sup> Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, NJDOE received a federal waiver which removed the requirement to report on chronic absenteeism and related accountability measures for the 2019-20 and 2020-21 school years.

**TABLE 53**  
**Chronic Absentee Rates, Disaggregated by Race, Ethnicity,**  
**Gender, Ability, Income, and Language, 2023-24**

	<b>Wallkill Valley HS</b>	<b>Franklin ES</b>	<b>Hamburg ES</b>	<b>Hardyston ES</b>	<b>Hardyston MS</b>	<b>Ogdensburg ES</b>
White	32.3%	16.9%	25.5%	10.7%	9.5%	0.5%
Hispanic	33.3%	11.4%	9.3%	30.0%	11.8%	18.4%
Black	20.0%	0.0%	5.3%	0.0%	0.0%	*
Asian/HI/PI	11.8%	*	9.1%	33.3%	*	*
NA/AK	*	*	*	*	*	*
Multiracial	41.7%	25.0%	*	*	10.0%	*
Female	35.4%	11.4%	17.0%	15.9%	9.0%	2.3%
Male	27.6%	17.5%	22.1%	13.1%	9.7%	4.8%
Economically Disadvantaged	46.0%	22.6%	32.2%	30.0%	8.3%	8.8%
Students with Disabilities	43.2%	27.0%	23.2%	15.7%	8.0%	8.2%
Multilingual Learners	*	14.3%	*	30.8%	*	*

Table 54 displays behavioral incident numbers and rates, while Table 55 shows disaggregated data for student suspensions.

**TABLE 54**  
**Student Discipline Data, 2023-24**

	<b>Wallkill Valley HS</b>	<b>Franklin ES</b>	<b>Hamburg ES</b>	<b>Hardyston ES</b>	<b>Hardyston MS</b>	<b>Ogdensburg ES</b>
Violence Incidents	4	4	0	0	2	0
Weapons Incidents	0	0	0	0	0	0
Vandalism Incidents	0	0	0	0	0	0
Substance Incidents	7	0	2	0	0	0
HIB Incidents	0	1	8	0	3	3
<b>TOTAL</b>	11	5	10	0	5	3
Incidents per 100 students	1.81	0.97	4.05	0.00	1.95	1.05

TABLE 55  
Students with any Suspension, Disaggregated by Race, Ethnicity,  
Gender, Ability, Income, and Language, 2023-24

	Wallkill Valley HS	Franklin ES	Hamburg ES	Hardyston ES	Hardyston MS	Ogdensburg ES
White	2%	5%	1%	0%	3%	< 5%
Hispanic	1%	4%	4%	0%	0%	< 5%
Black	0%	8%	13%	0%	6%	< 5%
Asian	0%	0%	0%	0%	*	*
HI/PI	*	*	*	*	*	*
NA/AK	*	*	*	*	*	*
Multiracial	8%	9%	*	0%	0%	*
Female	2%	1%	4%	0%	1%	< 5%
Male	2%	9%	2%	0%	4%	< 5%
Economically Disadvantaged	3%	6%	4%	0%	2%	< 5%
Students with Disabilities	2%	8%	4%	0%	3%	< 5%

### Potential Improvements in Performance Measures

The assessment results and other performance measures presented in this section may be linked to curricular programs, teaching methods and strategies, and school climate and culture, each of which is also linked inextricably to the others. There are many types of data presented here, most of it available publicly via NJDOE’s School Performance Reports.

The five districts met the federal ELA and Math proficiency standards in nine of ten measures, which is a strong indicator of academic success. Hamburg exceeded its growth targets, Hardyston and Franklin met them, and Ogdensburg fell short for this school year. On state assessments, an overview of the three years of data shows that 51 of the 75 ELA, 44 of the 83 Math, and 5 of the 9 Science results met or exceeded state averages. That said, there remain significant disparities among the four elementary district assessment scores at various grade levels. In terms of student growth, the 32 mSGP scores for state assessments studied here met or exceeded the state standard with only three exceptions that were each close to the standard. In short, the Franklin, Hamburg, Hardyston, and Ogdensburg schools are consistently assisting their students’ academic growth to a successful level.

The new high school graduation proficiency assessment results showed that Wallkill Valley Regional HS students performed near the state average in three of the four metrics. On college and career readiness assessments, graduation rates, and postsecondary attendance rates, Wallkill Valley

Regional HS students regularly perform at, above, or at least near state averages. Advanced course and test taking rates lag behind state averages.

Regionalization or strategically designed shared services can substantially enhance educational effectiveness by coordinating essential elements such as curriculum, student assessment, and professional development. This coordination directly influences student achievement, as evidenced in assessment outcomes and accountability metrics, since these components are fundamentally interconnected. Enhanced curriculum consistency and student preparation through shared academic programs can provide uniform instruction and common resources and strategies. This alignment better prepares students for state assessments, particularly as they advance to departmentalized secondary schools, with centralized supervision ensuring this consistency.

A unified system also creates a more efficient approach to equity by making it easier to address achievement gaps, graduation rate disparities, and discipline inequities through dedicated resources and concentrated efforts to improve outcomes for all students. Consolidated support for school climate initiatives can be a useful approach. Given that school climate significantly affects attendance and discipline, regionalization can allow for focused attention and resources on climate and culture programs that smaller districts might find challenging to implement independently, ultimately benefiting all students in the partnership.

## 10. Preschool Education

Children who attend high-quality preschool tend to be more prepared for kindergarten, which leads to higher academic achievement in other grades. When children don't attend early schooling, they can miss out on developing valuable social and emotional skills as well. Franklin, Hamburg, Hardyston, and Ogdensburg have all been awarded preschool expansion funding that allowed them to establish free, universal, preschool programs for interested families. They also have made a commitment to classrooms that include both general and special education students as much as possible with only a few self-contained classrooms.

As per current guidelines, school districts taking advantage of state funding must commit to hiring a preschool instructional coach (25 hours per week minimum), a preschool intervention and referral specialist, and a community and parent involvement specialist. Ogdensburg and Franklin each have a staff member whose position has been revised to include the master teacher role, while Hardyston and Hamburg contract with university consultants at a combined cost of just over \$50,000. Hardyston also contracts with a university consultant for the intervention and referral specialist at \$24,000, while others have staff assuming combined roles for that position and the community and parent involvement specialist involving staff such as a guidance counselor, secretary, social worker, instructional coach, and instructional supervisor depending on the district.

## Potential Improvements in Preschool Education

The districts have expressed a desire to consider adding preschool classes as additional families show interest. The State uses ninety percent of twice the number of students in Grade 1 to estimate a “realistic” universe of preschool 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 1 in the Wallkill Valley region during the 2024-25 school year is 162, which indicates a realistic preschool universe of approximately 292 children (i.e., 90% of double the Grade 1 enrollment). It is worth noting that the region is doing an exemplary job with preschool education at present. The four schools are currently serving 240 preschool students, 74% of the total estimated three- and four-year old population, in 18 classrooms. Serving the full realistic universe of 90%, while considering the need for some self-contained rooms, would require at least an additional 2-3 classrooms.

Given a future need for elementary classrooms due to projected enrollment increases, an option to consider for preschool expansion could be leasing space to create a joint preschool center in another facility. Lease costs are an approved use of preschool expansion aid, and a combined setting would allow for some economies of scale. This would have the added benefit of freeing up elementary classrooms to address the anticipated need for additional space in Franklin, Hamburg, and Ogdensburg.

By combining the resources for which each district is currently eligible, an all purpose regional could consolidate the roles of preschool instructional coach, preschool intervention and referral specialist, and community and parent involvement specialist into fewer persons to serve across the expanded program, freeing up other staff from combined positions to focus on their core purposes. It would also save on expenses such as consultant fees, which could be shifted toward leasing and maintaining the space necessary to expand preschool to benefit students and families across the region.

Operating a preschool program under a shared services agreement, while possible, comes with complications. Preschool funding is allocated by district with only students domiciled in that district eligible to attend. While sharing staff like a master teacher and interventionist is technically possible, it is difficult to make happen in practice. Selecting a common curriculum is relatively easy, though identifying and sharing space within the schools could prove more challenging.

## 11. Special Education

Tables 56 and 57 provide breakdowns of special education placements and classifications for each school district. The high rates of in-district placements speak well of each district’s efforts to be effective and efficient while educating students in their home schools with their non-disabled peers.

TABLE 56  
Special Education Classification and Placement Data, 2023-24 <sup>38</sup>

	Wallkill Valley	Franklin	Hamburg	Hardyston	Ogdensburg
Students Classified In-District	120	115	65	133	46
Students Classified Out-of-District	11	7	1	1	1
% Placed In-District	92%	94%	98%	99%	98%

TABLE 57  
Percentage of In-District Students by Classification Category, 2024-25 <sup>39</sup>

	Wallkill Valley	Franklin	Hamburg	Hardyston	Ogdensburg
Auditory Impairment					
Autistic	1.0%	0.9%	2.6%	2.4%	1.4%
Communication Impairment	1.5%	0.9%	0.5%	1.6%	
Emotional Regulation Impairment	1.4%	5.1%	2.6%	3.7%	0.4%
Mild Intellectual Disability	0.3%	0.4%	0.3%		0.4%
Moderate Intellectual Disability	0.2%				
Multiple Disabilities	0.9%	0.2%	0.6%		
Orthopedic Impairment	0.2%				
Other Health Impairment	7.4%	6.1%	3.2%	5.3%	2.5%
Preschool with Disabilities		2.3%	1.6%	1.6%	2.1%
Specific Learning Disability	6.9%	4.2%	4.4%	4.9%	8.2%
Speech and Language Impairment	0.5%	1.7%	5.5%	6.5%	1.4%
Traumatic Brain Injury	0.2%				
Visual Impairment	0.2%		0.2%	0.4%	
% Classified <sup>40</sup>	20.7%	21.8%	21.5%	26.4%	16.4%

<sup>38</sup> NJSMART Special Education Placement Profile; out-of-district placement numbers from school district student information systems

<sup>39</sup> Data in this table and the following one include only students placed in-district

<sup>40</sup> Represents the percentage of the total school enrollment that is classified and being educated in-district

Ogdenburg’s classification rate of 16.4% is significantly lower than the other elementary schools and the state average of 19.3%. While it may be true that student needs are quite different at each school, it is also possible that the unique practices and philosophies of the districts may lead to variance in eligibility criteria for classification and individual education plan (IEP) development. It is recommended that the districts look to align their criteria to decrease the transition issues that the high school is likely facing.

Looking more deeply into the categories for insight on Ogdenburg’s low classification rate, there are a small percentage of students classified with emotional regulation impairment (ERI), which tends to be a category with among the highest rates of classification. ERI refers to persistent difficulties in managing, controlling, or modulating emotional responses in age-appropriate ways.

Schools can reduce ERI and other classifications through implementing multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS), starting with universal strategies like teaching all students about emotions and coping skills through social-emotional learning curricula. Effective MTSS often result in fewer students needing to be classified, because learning needs can be addressed in the general education setting with less intensive use of human resources. With regard to ERI specifically, schools can also train staff to recognize early warning signs of emotional dysregulation and create “calm down” spaces or sensory breaks where students can regulate themselves. The next section will address district MTSS approaches in more detail.

The districts each offer the following in-district special education programs: preschool integrated with special and general education students, a combination of pull-out resource replacement and/or in-class resource support, and self-contained programs as student needs warrant. The districts have a mix of part-time and full-time child study team (CST) members and use mostly contracted providers for related services such as occupational therapy, physical therapy, and behavior analysis. Speech and language therapy is generally handled by employees, either full- or part-time.

Wallkill Valley uses mostly pull-out resource center replacement (RCR) for core subjects. This year they have moved to in-class support (ICS) in 10th grade English. Teachers have wanted a more inclusive model like this, and so the approach will grow in 2025-26 to include 9th grade English. The district runs self-contained programs for learning and language disabilities (LLD) with 8 students (anticipating 12 in 2025-26) and an ERI class with 6. A challenge in these two programs is that NJDOE routinely denies age waivers, making it harder to maintain them with smaller numbers. As a high school, Wallkill Valley also runs a transition program for students ages 18-21.

Franklin uses a mix of ICS and RCR for its special education instructional approach. The school has a LLD program for grades K-8 and an ERI class for grades 6-8. Hamburg also uses a mix of ICS and RCR classes. It has a self-contained multiply disabled (MD) program for grades 2-3 students and a self-contained LLD program for grades 5-8, while pushing for least restrictive as age increases. The district has one out-of-district student who attends Ogdensburg using their transportation. Hardyston uses RCR for grades K-8 in ELA and Math and ICS for grades K-8 in Social Studies and Science. For self-contained programs, the district hosts LLD, ERI, and MD

classes at both schools. Ogdensburg runs RCR programs in grades K-8, and there is a self-contained LLD program for grades 7-8. The district started a new autism program for grades pK-K.

### Potential Improvements in Special Education

Lack of alignment among the districts has led to different programs by grade level that create difficulties with IEP alignment and transition. In particular, Wallkill Valley has had over \$1 million in mediation settlements over the past several years, especially due to “stay put” litigation. One family even sued the high school district for services not received at the elementary level. It was noted that it is very hard to transfer students from an elementary out-of-district placement into the high school, even if a program that meets the needs is offered. One suggestion from the districts was to consider more interdistrict placements before looking outside the region (e.g., Hamburg sends one student to Ogdensburg). Depending on the number of students in any given year, efficiencies may be found in consolidating one or more of these programs into one or even two of the elementary schools.

Special education leaders discussed how to make it more feasible to operate in-house (for out of district placements) or target more specific needs (for in-district students) if the schools in the region operated more cohesively. It was noted that there are often short turnaround times for decisions, planning time is hard to find, and there are challenges with staffing in the short term. It was suggested that a way to start would be to hold more frequent meetings to discuss flexibility and joint operation.

All superintendents felt there would be value in aligning special education leadership. Hardyston employs a director and Ogdensburg has a supervisor. Wallkill Valley, Franklin, and Hamburg have a person coordinating the work who has other responsibilities. One option to improve coordination and address some of the issues of the elementary to high school IEP transition concerns in the status quo arrangement would be to consider a single regional elementary director responsible for grades pK-8 (or pK-6) and a regional secondary director responsible for grades 9-12 (or 7-12). In an all purpose regional environment, a single director would be able to implement a more seamless approach to address these issues.

While these discussions took place in the context of regionalization, the five districts should consider the option of consolidating their child study teams and special education programs into a regionalized special education service under a single director through a shared services contract to maximize the efficiency of the programs they offer.

All districts felt it would be relatively easy to coordinate the summer extended school year programs at one or two facilities. Hamburg already does this with Hardyston, and the effort could be expanded. They also believe transportation is an area for greater cooperation, which will be examined more specifically in the Facilities and Operations domain. Beyond the existing use of cooperatives, incorporating the use of some district-owned busing across the region could be a way

to offer greater flexibility and a useful alternative to the often scarce and expensive contracted transportation options.

Contracted related service providers (e.g., therapists for occupational, physical, and behavioral needs) present a challenge due to lack of continuity, supervisory issues, and chain of command. This could be ameliorated by having several districts hire service providers as employees and share them and their costs with those who do not have in-house staff. There was also an expressed need for more and better training of paraprofessionals to become more effective in the classroom. Again, this is something that could be resolved with shared professional development opportunities hosted by any one district at a time for the region.

A specific request was to look into CST structures and caseloads to see what could be optimized. All districts have struggled with staffing, so their structures are unique to their personnel. Wallkill Valley has mostly full-time staff and has added positions over time, but its coordinator is a psychologist with a small caseload. Franklin has had to be creative in how they use people, which can be a problem when one leaves. Hamburg has had mostly part-time staff for a while (e.g., the learning disabilities teacher consultant or LDTC is .4 FTE), though they now employ a full-time social worker. Ogdensburg's LDTC is also their reading specialist and other team members are hands-on in multiple places.

Franklin appears to have the largest caseloads at about 40 students per CST member with Wallkill Valley in the same range at between 38 and 45. Hardyston comes in at 35 per with the social worker, who is also implementing the Tier 1 Second Step social-emotional learning (SEL) program, having as many as 50. Ogdensburg (18) and Hamburg (16) have the smallest caseloads but acknowledge that most of their CST staff do multiple jobs including schoolwide Tier 1 SEL. This is an area for conversation about job responsibilities and whether there are ways to find more optimal solutions.

## 12. Support Programs

### Multitiered Systems of Support

Often tied to education laws and regulations that require schools to provide support for struggling students, MTSS is a framework used by schools to proactively identify and assist students who need help academically, behaviorally, and/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 that usually take the form of small group and individual interventions, respectively. All identification and support is driven by data from screenings and progress monitoring to determine which interventions are working and which need adjustment.

Intervention and referral services (I&RS) are the MTSS vehicles used by NJ's elementary and secondary schools to support students who are experiencing academic, behavioral, or health difficulties that may be impacting their educational performance. The purpose of I&RS, known in

some schools as a response to intervention (RTI) committee, is to identify and assist students who are struggling before their issues escalate to the point of requiring more intensive interventions or special education classification. The process typically involves the identification of students at risk, followed by an assessment of the needs of those students. Once needs are determined, the team develops an action plan that outlines the implementation of services its members believe will support the student's success and then monitors and evaluates the effectiveness of those interventions, adjusting the plan as necessary.

The multidisciplinary I&RS team typically includes teachers, counselors, administrators, and other support staff. As an example, Franklin has its principal and RTI coordinator leading a team that includes a math interventionist, reading interventionist, reading specialist, nurse, general education teacher, special education teacher and school counselors. As a Tier 1 intervention, the districts are using data warehouse and management tools to collate and analyze student academic, behavioral, and health data. Most are also using a schoolwide Tier 1 approach to social-emotional learning, particularly given the needs that emanated from the COVID-19 pandemic. Some are also building in time for interventions and/or enrichment depending on which is needed.

### Multilingual Education

Each of the districts must adhere to NJ administrative code for bilingual education when crafting programming and schedules for students.<sup>41</sup> The low numbers of multilingual learners (MLs) in these schools do not require a full bilingual program (i.e., subjects being taught in both languages), but eligible students must receive either English language services (ELS) or an English as a second language (ESL) program. The difference here is that ELS encompasses a wide range of services including translation, interpretation, and various other forms of language support, while ESL programs are specifically structured to develop English language proficiency through systematic instruction.

The programs in these districts are typical of the operations in other NJ districts. MLs enrolling in the district are given the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment, or WIDA, screener to determine their levels of English language acquisition. Those results provide information as to what ELS to offer, which generally include the following for these districts:

- Scheduling one period, 3-5 days per week, where students work with a full- or part-time ESL staff member on English language acquisition through their assigned classwork;
- Engaging in regular communication between the school counselor, teachers, parents, and the student;
- Extending time on school work and tests;
- Using a translation application;

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<sup>41</sup> N.J.A.C. 6A:15

- Allowing students to write answers in the native language or English during the transition to all English;
- Repeating and clarifying directions; and
- Providing extended school year tutoring classes, if the family’s schedule allows.

### Gifted Education

Just like students with learning disabilities and multilingual learners, the learning needs of gifted students are addressed in state administrative code.<sup>42</sup> The law codifying school district responsibilities states that they must establish a process to identify students as gifted and talented using multiple measures, and that these students require modification to their educational program if they are to achieve in accordance with their capabilities.<sup>43</sup>

Typical of most high schools, Wallkill Valley offers advanced classes such as Honors, AP, and Dual Credit to provide enhanced opportunities for gifted students. Franklin pulls students one period per week for enrichment, while Ogdensburg has the music teacher do a rotation to push into classes in grades K-4. Hamburg has an informal enrichment program for pupils in grades 1-3 in their homerooms and a creative approach for gifted children in grades 4-8 called Honors Seminar. Students in the Honors Seminar partake in at least some of the following activities during the year as a pull-out enrichment at least once per week: Academic Bowl; Battle of the Books; Computer-Based Experiences; Creative Writing; Field Trips; Independent Reading; Newzbrain; Presentations; Research Assignments; School Projects such as dioramas, art work, or bulletin boards; Solar Sprint; STEAM Projects; and Student Drama Production.

### Potential Improvements in Support Programs

Similar to specialized services for students with disabilities, students receiving MTSS support can gain additional benefits when staff invest in standardized screening tools and support systems. This enables focused conversations about student needs and systematic progress monitoring. The key advantage of regional partnerships or shared services lies in accessing district-wide expertise and resources while maintaining the personalized attention possible in smaller school settings—all before students require formal special education classification.

The multilingual student population in this region is projected to grow significantly, rising from 2.0% in 2024-25 to 4.2% by 2029-30. While individual districts have established frameworks to serve these students, their services are typically constrained to a single class period or designated time block each day. Regional districts can offer multilingual learners a more comprehensive program that extends beyond standalone language classes to include content-area teachers trained in sheltered instruction methodologies. A larger staff of certified educators enables continuous support

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<sup>42</sup> N.J.A.C. 6A:8

<sup>43</sup> P.L.2020, c.338; NJ Student Learning Standards

throughout the academic day and provides families with assistance navigating both educational systems and community resources.

Gifted education programming varies significantly across the elementary districts, with each school offering different services and minimal alignment between programs. This inconsistency means that students identified as gifted enter middle and high school with vastly different educational experiences. Enhanced collaboration through regional partnerships or joint offerings could standardize programming to ensure all gifted students receive comparable, equitable support before transitioning to high school advanced coursework.

### 13. Extracurricular Programs

A healthy extracurricular program provides balance to an academic education by offering activities that engage student interest. Wallkill Valley Regional HS offers a broad program of 19 interscholastic athletic programs and 31 student clubs/activities. The athletic offerings include: Baseball, Basketball (girls and boys), Cheering (fall and winter), Cross Country (girls and boys), Field Hockey, Football, Golf (girls and boys), Ice Hockey, Soccer (girls and boys), Softball, Tennis (girls and boys), Track (unified), and Wrestling. The club/activity offerings include: Academic Bowl, Art Club, Band, Chorus, BASIC, Drama, Ecology Club, Esports, FBLA, Gender and Sexuality Alliance, Honor Societies (Art, English, French, Science, Spanish), Health Science Society, Honors Choir, Literary Magazine, Math League, Mock Trial, National Honor Society, Newspaper, Pass It Along, Peer Counseling, Photography Club, SADD, Science League, Science Olympiad, Student Council, WALC, and Yearbook.

Franklin sponsors the following extracurriculars: Academic Bowl, Art Club, Basketball (girls and boys), Band (beginner and concert), Big Brothers Big Sisters, Cheerleading, Chorus (junior and senior), Dance, Drama Club, Fiber Arts (knitting), Field Hockey, Girls on the Run, Let Me Run, National Junior Honor Society, RISE (life skills), Ski Club, Soccer, Student Council, Track, TREP\$, Wind Ensemble, WingMan, and Yearbook.

Hamburg sponsors the following extracurriculars: Academic Club, Archery, Art Club, Band, Basketball (girls and boys), Chorus, Cross Country, Drama Club, Eighth Grade, Environmental Club, Field Hockey, Homework Club, National Junior Honor Society, Robotics/STEAM, Safety Patrol, School Newspaper, Soccer, Track, TREP\$, Volleyball, and Yearbook

Hardyston sponsors the following extracurriculars: Academic Bowl, Adventure Theatre, Basketball (boys and girls), Cheerleading, Cross Country, Field Hockey, Soccer, Student Council, Track and Field. The district also noted they offer many elementary and middle school clubs, varying according to student and staff interest.

Ogdensburg sponsors the following extracurriculars: Basketball, Cheering, Field Hockey, Green Team (grades 5-8), Homework Club (grades 4-8), Safety Patrol (grades 6-8), School Musical, School Store, Soccer, Student Council, Track, and Yearbook.

The elementary schools also rely on community recreation programs for athletics, and there is a great deal of interaction among students of different schools when they participate on joint teams.

#### Potential Improvements in Extracurricular Programs

A healthy extracurricular program provides balance to an academic education by offering activities that engage student interest. While smaller middle schools certainly offer some benefits, their size can often limit the number of activities in which students may participate. In many schools, the same students participate in clubs, activities, and athletics, which due to competing time requirements, can further limit the number of students participating in a given activity even further.

Expanding the number of students available to take part in specialized activities, such as clubs, instrumental music, and theatre, or athletic teams can enhance the quality of those programs and better prepare middle school students for high school athletic and academic competitions.

## 14. School and District 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 top 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 looking at student-to-teacher ratios across the districts.

In a regionalized district, the board of education would work with district and building-level administrators to determine staffing needs at each grade level (elementary level - kindergarten to grade 5) and within each subject area (secondary level - grades 6 through 12). 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. The superintendents provided their thoughts on regional sharing already underway and expressed interest in further collaborations. There have been some sharing of elementary specials teachers.

#### School and District Staff Analyses

The tables in this subsection provide four analyses of the staffing at the school and district levels. The first table compares the actual elementary school staff levels by position, and the second table does the same for district staff including Wallkill Valley. The third and fourth tables for each district

compare staff experience and retention to state averages and student to staff ratios and staff salaries to other peer districts across the state.

TABLE 58  
School Staff Analysis, Elementary Districts, 2024-25 <sup>44</sup>

	Franklin ES	Hamburg ES	Hardyston ES	Hardyston MS	Ogdensburg ES
Grade Level Teachers	20.0	14.0	18.0	12.0	12.0
Specials Teachers	7.0	4.0	3.2	3.8	5.0
Resource Teachers	7.0	5.0	4.0	4.0	2.0
Self Contained Teachers	6.0	2.0	4.0	3.0	2.0
Intervention Teachers	4.0	2.0	3.3	1.3	1.0
G&T Teachers	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Library Media Specialists	1.0	1.0	1.0	0.0	0.2
Counselors	0.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	0.0
Nurses	1.4	1.0	1.3	1.3	1.0
Speech Therapists	2.0	1.0	1.5	0.5	1.0
Occupational Therapists	0.0	0.0	0.5	0.5	0.0
Principals	1.0	0.5	1.0	1.0	0.5
Assistant Principals	0.0	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.5
Clerical Staff	3.0	2.0	3.0	3.0	1.0
K-8 Staff	53.9	34.0	41.8	31.4	26.2
K-8 Enrollment	451	211	286	264	257
Student to Staff Ratio	8.4	6.2	6.8	8.4	9.8

The overall comparison shows Hamburg ES with the least efficient student to staff ratio, which should not be surprising given it also has the fewest number of enrolled students (i.e., the smaller the school, the fewer are the opportunities for economies of scale). The differences between Hardyston’s schools are mostly due to the larger number of grade level teachers at the elementary level, which is also unsurprising as many districts will prioritize lower class size numbers and more individualized attention in the primary grades. There may have been similar results were we to break the K-8 schools down by elementary and middle grade levels.

Special education classification rates also play a role in differentiated staff levels. Franklin (21.8%), Hamburg (21.5%), and Hardyston (26.4%) have classification rates above the state average of 19.3%, thus requiring more teachers with this certification. It also may reflect success in retaining self-contained students in-district in a least restrictive environment. Ogdensburg’s rate of 16.4% is

<sup>44</sup> Preschool teachers are not included in this analysis, as their levels are directly impacted by student enrollments and state funding levels. Paraprofessionals are not included, as their levels are highly dependent upon IEP needs, and security staff are also not included.

nearly three points lower than the state average, and the fewer number of resource class and self-contained teachers (total of 4.0) reflects that reality.

Digging into the data, Table 59 presents the number of “specials” teachers by subject area. Specials is a term schools use for content areas outside the core of English, Math, Science, and Social Studies, which are offered more regularly per week. Specials courses typically include subjects such as Art, Music, Technology/STEM, World Languages, and Physical Education. Sharing this information may provide some insight into the emphasis each district places on these areas of the curriculum.

**TABLE 59**  
Specials Teachers by Subject Area Elementary Districts, 2024-25

	<b>Franklin ES</b>	<b>Hamburg ES</b>	<b>Hardyston ES</b>	<b>Hardyston MS</b>	<b>Ogdensburg ES</b>
Music <sup>45</sup>	2.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Art	1.0	1.0	0.5	0.5	0.8
Technology/STEM	1.0	0.0	0.2	0.2	0.2
Spanish	1.0	1.0	0.0	0.6	1.0
Physical Education	2.5	1.0	1.5	1.5	2.0
K-8 School Staff	7.5	4.0	3.2	3.8	5.0
K-8 Student Enrollment	458	220	286	264	251
Student to Staff Ratio	61.1	55.0	89.4	69.5	50.2

**TABLE 60**  
District Staff Analysis, 2024-25

	<b>Wallkill Valley</b>	<b>Franklin</b>	<b>Hamburg</b>	<b>Hardyston</b>	<b>Ogdensburg</b>
Superintendents/CSAs	0.5	1.0	0.5	1.0	0.5
Directors/Supervisors/Coordinators	2.0	2.0	0.5	2.0	1.0
Child Study Team Staff	3.0	3.0	2.0	3.6	2.5
Business Administrators	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Clerical Staff	3.0	3.0	1.0	3.0	1.0
Custodial/Maintenance Staff	9.0	7.0	4.0	6.0	6.0
District Staff Total	18.5	17.0	9.0	16.6	12.0
Student Enrollment	581	527	273	619	300
Student to Staff Ratio	31.4	31.0	30.3	37.3	25.0

Table 59 shows a similar analysis for the district level staff. Hardyston has the largest student enrollment, and the highest student to staff ratio. Again, scale matters; it is difficult for smaller

<sup>45</sup> Includes general music courses as well as instrumental band and vocal music performance groups.

districts such as these to get economies of scale. Consolidation of district staffs may provide some benefit in improving efficiency over smaller offices.

*Wallkill Valley*

With regard to staff experience and retention, Wallkill Valley is doing a strong job in maintaining its staff as compared to the state average. Student to staff ratios are efficient and staff salaries are well above state averages for teachers and support staff. Administrative salaries are well below the state average for grades 9-12 districts though the ratio of 8.0 faculty members to administrators suggests more than adequate leadership support.

TABLE 61  
Staff Experience and Retention, Wallkill Valley, 2022-23 <sup>46</sup>

	Wallkill Valley	State Average
Average teacher years of experience in public schools	17.2	12.5
Average teacher years of experience in district	13.9	11.3
Percentage of teachers with 4+ years in district	84.3%	74.8%
One year retention of teachers	94.1%	88.4%
Percentage of teachers out-of-field	5.9%	2.4%
Average administrator years of experience in public schools	18.7	16.1
Average administrator years of experience in district	12.4	12.5
Percentage of administrators with 4+ years in district	85.7%	77.9%
One year retention of administrators	100%	86.6%

TABLE 62  
Student to Staff Ratios and Staff Salaries, Wallkill Valley, 2023-24 <sup>47</sup>

	Wallkill Valley	Peer Rank	State Median
Ratio of Students to Classroom Teachers	12.7	11/46	11.3
Median Classroom Teacher Salary	\$102,920	42/46	\$92,892
Ratio of Students to Support Personnel	77.0	12/46	60.8
Median Support Personnel Salary	\$101,933	40/46	\$91,476
Ratio of Students to Administrators	87.5	33/46	93.1
Median Administrator Salary	\$129,643	14/46	\$144,212
Ratio of Faculty to Administrators	8.0	41/46	10.5

<sup>46</sup> NJDOE School Performance Reports

<sup>47</sup> NJDOE Taxpayers Guide to Education Spending; ranks are among the State's 46 school districts educating students in grades 9-12, highest to lowest for ratios and lowest to highest for salaries.

*Franklin*

Like Wallkill Valley, Franklin has been able to retain a relatively experienced staff. Student to staff ratios are in line with state medians, but salaries are lower, especially for support personnel. This may make recruitment and hiring more difficult in a competitive market.

TABLE 63  
Staff Experience and Retention, Franklin, 2022-23

	<b>Franklin</b>	<b>State Average</b>
Average teacher years of experience in public schools	13.9	12.5
Average teacher years of experience in district	11.4	11.3
Percentage of teachers with 4+ years in district	75.5%	74.8%
One year retention of teachers	90%	88.4%
Percentage of teachers out-of-field	0%	2.4%
Average administrator years of experience in public schools	17.3	16.1
Average administrator years of experience in district	7.3	12.5
Percentage of administrators with 4+ years in district	100%	77.9%
One year retention of administrators	100%	86.6%

TABLE 64  
Student to Staff Ratios and Staff Salaries, Franklin, 2023-24<sup>48</sup>

	<b>Franklin</b>	<b>Peer Rank</b>	<b>State Median</b>
Ratio of Students to Classroom Teachers	10.1	28/64	9.8
Median Classroom Teacher Salary	\$73,743	39/64	\$74,275
Ratio of Students to Support Personnel	62.9	31/64	61.8
Median Support Personnel Salary	\$67,714	19/64	\$76,878
Ratio of Students to Administrators	125.8	24/64	117.4
Median Administrator Salary	\$131,398	43/64	\$131,992
Ratio of Faculty to Administrators	14.5	29/64	14.2

*Hamburg*

Like Wallkill Valley and Franklin, Hamburg has an experienced staff compared to the state average. Teacher and support personnel salaries are above the median, but administrator salaries are well below it. Ratios of students to staff show that there are more than adequate personnel levels to meet student needs.

<sup>48</sup> NJDOE Taxpayers Guide to Education Spending; ranks are among the State’s 64 K-8 school districts with 401-750 students, highest to lowest for ratios and lowest to highest for salaries.

TABLE 65  
Staff Experience and Retention, Hamburg, 2022-23

	<b>Hamburg</b>	<b>State Average</b>
Average teacher years of experience in public schools	16.8	12.5
Average teacher years of experience in district	12.6	11.3
Percentage of teachers with 4+ years in district	67.6%	74.8%
One year retention of teachers	96.9%	88.4%
Percentage of teachers out-of-field	2.9%	2.4%
Average administrator years of experience in public schools	24.0	16.1
Average administrator years of experience in district	6.7	12.5
Percentage of administrators with 4+ years in district	100%	77.9%
One year retention of administrators	75%	86.6%

TABLE 66  
Student to Staff Ratios and Staff Salaries, Hamburg, 2023-24 <sup>49</sup>

	<b>Hamburg</b>	<b>Peer Rank</b>	<b>State Median</b>
Ratio of Students to Classroom Teachers	7.2	61/76	9.8
Median Classroom Teacher Salary	\$78,546	63/76	\$74,275
Ratio of Students to Support Personnel	51.1	51/76	61.8
Median Support Personnel Salary	\$78,001	55/76	\$76,878
Ratio of Students to Administrators	97.9	34/76	117.4
Median Administrator Salary	\$102,985	25/76	\$131,992
Ratio of Faculty to Administrators	15.5	25/76	14.2

*Hardyston*

TABLE 67  
Staff Experience and Retention, Hardyston, 2022-23

	<b>Hardyston</b>	<b>State Average</b>
Average teacher years of experience in public schools	11.2	12.5
Average teacher years of experience in district	10.4	11.3
Percentage of teachers with 4+ years in district	68.4%	74.8%
One year retention of teachers	85%	88.4%
Percentage of teachers out-of-field	0%	2.4%
Average administrator years of experience in public schools	16.0	16.1
Average administrator years of experience in district	3.4	12.5
Percentage of administrators with 4+ years in district	40%	77.9%
One year retention of administrators	75%	86.6%

<sup>49</sup> NJDOE Taxpayers Guide to Education Spending; ranks are among the State's 76 K-8 school districts with 0-400 students, highest to lowest for ratios and lowest to highest for salaries.

TABLE 68  
Student to Staff Ratios and Staff Salaries, Hardyston, 2023-24<sup>50</sup>

	<b>Hardyston</b>	<b>Peer Rank</b>	<b>State Median</b>
Ratio of Students to Classroom Teachers	10.2	24/64	9.8
Median Classroom Teacher Salary	\$68,123	17/64	\$74,275
Ratio of Students to Support Personnel	52.5	51/64	61.8
Median Support Personnel Salary	\$83,851	53/64	\$76,878
Ratio of Students to Administrators	125.4	25/64	117.4
Median Administrator Salary	\$110,000	20/64	\$131,992
Ratio of Faculty to Administrators	14.7	28/64	14.2

In Hardyston, teacher experience and, consequently, salaries are below the state average. Support personnel salaries are well above the state average, suggesting that the more experienced staff are likely found in this category.

*Ogdensburg*

The staff overall is less experienced than the state average, and median salaries are indicative of that across the board.

TABLE 69  
Staff Experience and Retention, Ogdensburg, 2022-23

	<b>Ogdensburg</b>	<b>State Average</b>
Average teacher years of experience in public schools	8.3	12.5
Average teacher years of experience in district	6.6	11.3
Percentage of teachers with 4+ years in district	46.4%	74.8%
One year retention of teachers	92.6%	88.4%
Percentage of teachers out-of-field	3.6%	2.4%
Average administrator years of experience in public schools	6.0	16.1
Average administrator years of experience in district	4.5	12.5
Percentage of administrators with 4+ years in district	75%	77.9%
One year retention of administrators	100%	86.6%

<sup>50</sup> NJDOE Taxpayers Guide to Education Spending; ranks are among the State's 64 K-8 school districts with 401-750 students, highest to lowest for ratios and lowest to highest for salaries.

TABLE 70  
Student to Staff Ratios and Staff Salaries, Ogdensburg, 2023-24<sup>51</sup>

	<b>Ogdensburg</b>	<b>Peer Rank</b>	<b>State Median</b>
Ratio of Students to Classroom Teachers	9.7	21/76	9.8
Median Classroom Teacher Salary	\$54,273	1/76	\$74,275
Ratio of Students to Support Personnel	83.8	19/76	61.8
Median Support Personnel Salary	\$50,915	4/76	\$76,878
Ratio of Students to Administrators	67.0	58/76	117.4
Median Administrator Salary	\$88,175	10/76	\$131,992
Ratio of Faculty to Administrators	7.7	67/76	14.2

### Projected Staffing Needs

Forecasting staffing requirements for consolidated districts involves complex considerations based on numerous contextual factors. Discussions about school staff assignments will inevitably address class sizes, available subjects and courses, and teachers' capacity to address individual student needs. Although precise enrollments are crucial for determining the actual number of class sections and hiring of certified teaching staff, examining student-to-teacher ratios across consolidated districts provides an alternative perspective for assessing instructional staffing requirements.

If there is an enlargement of the current limited purpose regional, this study assumes that all existing schools will remain open and operate with most school-level positions remaining as they presently are. 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. At the school level, it would take largely the same staff to perform the other support functions as well.

There is minimal personnel sharing in place currently among the districts. A second nurse is being shared between Franklin and Hardyston. Recently, Hardyston and Ogdensburg shared a business administrator, and Hamburg and Hardyston shared a music teacher. Varied responsibilities are not reflected frequently in employees' official job titles, as staff members in districts of these sizes commonly fulfill multiple roles. The goal should be delivering equivalent or enhanced educational services through optimized staffing and operational practices whenever feasible.

In a grades pK-12 regional, the board of education would collaborate with district and building administrators to establish staffing requirements for each elementary grade level from kindergarten through grade 5, and for each subject area at the secondary level spanning grades 6 through 12. Within a consolidated system, staff members could be reassigned between grade levels or transferred across schools within their certification areas to optimize student services throughout the district. Over time, these internal transfers and reassignments could generate improved staffing efficiencies and more strategic teacher placements.

<sup>51</sup> NJDOE Taxpayers Guide to Education Spending; ranks are among the State's 76 K-8 school districts with 0-400 students, highest to lowest for ratios and lowest to highest for salaries.

With school-level staff remaining relatively constant, the opportunities for efficiency will be more available by combining some positions on 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 a new structure. In addition to the highest level administrative positions within the districts, there also exist several supervisory position responsibilities and costs that could be shared across a regional district. The programmatic benefits of considering such consolidation in the areas of curriculum and instruction, professional development, technology, special education, and preschool education were addressed earlier in this domain. Central office staff could be consolidated as well and aligned for the development of more specialized expertise.

TABLE 71  
District Staff Model Comparison, Status Quo to Proposed Grades pK-12 Regional

	<b>Current</b>	<b>Proposed</b>
Superintendents <sup>52</sup>	3.5	1.0
Assistant Superintendents	0.0	1.0
Directors/Supervisors/Coordinators	7.5	4.0
Child Study Team Staff	14.1	12.0
Business Administrators	5.0	1.0
Assistant Business Administrators	3.0	1.0
Clerical Staff	11.0	9.0
Custodial/Maintenance Staff	32.0	29.0
Total Staff	76.1	58.0

Table 71 uses the previous approach to district staff analysis to model what a regional district office structure might look like based on the projected 2025-26 enrollment of 2,259 students compared to current staffing in the five districts today. The result is a personnel level that is more streamlined, and potentially more efficient, than is possible in the status quo district configuration.

Administrative tasks currently duplicated across five school districts could be folded into single processes. From state monitoring systems to district audits to routine report submissions and numerous other responsibilities, these duties are performed five times whenever deadlines for reports or data uploads occur. This duplication consumes both time and money while diverting resources from more productive applications. Eliminating redundancy would likely generate staffing efficiencies and enable cost savings or funding redirected toward educational programming.

As years pass following any regionalization, there will likely be opportunities to realize efficiencies through routine attrition and changing student needs. As such, it will be important for district- and

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<sup>52</sup> Includes current CSA's as 0.5 superintendents

school-level administrators to pay close attention to staffing needs in each school as these opportunities present themselves.

## 15. Educational and Programmatic Impact

Our comprehensive data collection and analysis clearly demonstrates that the boards of education, administrators, teachers, and staff in Wallkill Valley, Franklin, Hamburg, Hardyston, and Ogdensburg are deeply committed to student success. After examining many aspects of the educational programs—from curriculum and instruction to staffing, supervision, and professional development—we found no evidence that a full grades pK-12 regional consolidation would harm students or impede their academic achievement. On the contrary, our findings indicate that district consolidation and/or greater collaboration among the existing entities would create enhanced opportunities for all students while improving effectiveness and efficiency in educational delivery.

The team of consultants believes that students in the newly regionalized district will continue to receive at least 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:<sup>53</sup>

- A clear and shared focus
- High standards and expectations for all students
- Effective school leadership
- High levels of collaboration and communication
- Curriculum, instruction and assessments aligned with state standards
- Frequent monitoring of learning and teaching
- Focused professional development
- Supportive learning environment
- High level of family and community involvement

We believe all of the characteristics listed above are found in some way in each of the existing districts. However, given the differences in programming leading into the high school, an enlarged regional should be able to identify and provide better-aligned approaches to meeting each characteristic, ultimately resulting in even stronger educational programs for students. 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 enlarged regional comes with additional benefits as outlined below.

### *Academics*

Each district employs various educational strategies across subject areas: universal assessments to identify student needs; strong curriculum paired with proven teaching methods; and specialized

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<sup>53</sup> The Nine Characteristics of High Performing Schools, The Danielson Group

interventions for learners at all levels. Creating uniform pre-high school programs ensures every student receives the same foundational education in essential subjects. When districts align their teaching approaches, content, and instructional time, they can narrow achievement gaps in literacy and mathematics, better preparing all students for success in higher grades. This alignment offers multiple advantages: teachers can advance instruction more efficiently without constantly addressing knowledge gaps; students experience seamless transitions between schools and grade levels; and educators can coordinate curricula confidently, knowing students have consistent preparation. The improved structure also strengthens supervision and support systems, benefiting both new teachers learning the profession and experienced educators implementing fresh programs or strategies.

By reducing duplicated services across districts, resources can be refocused on providing equitable access to high-quality education for all students, regardless of their starting point. This targeted approach addresses achievement disparities and supports universal academic success. The loss of federal pandemic funding makes efficient service delivery even more critical. A unified district would also generate more comprehensive data to inform strategic decisions about policies and resource allocation.

Given the proximity of the districts involved in this study, the shared goal of advancing achievement for all students, and the common high school that serves the Wallkill Valley region, there is much to be gained from better coordinating the student experiences at the pK-8 levels, whether through regionalization of the districts or the expansion of shared services. While these differing structures have the potential to produce similar benefits, it is important to understand that shared services come with additional challenges. Working with and between multiple boards and central offices, those staff members participating in shared services are often stretched thin and are more inclined to look elsewhere for opportunities to serve just one board and one superintendent.

### *Extracurriculars*

Each district values extracurricular activities as vital for student growth and social-emotional development. The schools offer diverse opportunities in athletics, arts, and clubs to build both individual skills and teamwork abilities. The main barriers to expanding these programs are small student numbers and budget limitations. Collaborative approaches may result in more options, particularly for the region's middle school students.

### *Preschool Students*

Children who attend a high-quality preschool tend to be more prepared for kindergarten, which leads to higher academic achievement in other grades. When children do not attend early schooling, they can miss out on developing valuable social and emotional skills as well. Currently, all of the eligible districts in this region take advantage of the state's preschool expansion funding, a significant source of monies being used by school districts throughout the state. However, these districts have insufficient space to accommodate much preschool expansion.

Working as one all purpose regional, the staff could research available space within the confines of the larger region and potentially expand preschool offerings. As per current NJDOE guidelines, school districts taking advantage of state funding must commit to hiring a preschool instructional coach, 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 could consolidate resources, freeing up funding to expand preschool to benefit students and families across the region.

Operating a preschool program under a shared services agreement, while possible, comes with complications. Preschool funding is allocated by district with only students domiciled in that district eligible to attend. While selecting a common curriculum is relatively easy, sharing staff like a master teacher and interventionist is difficult, and identifying and sharing space within the communities or the greater region could prove challenging. A fully regionalized school district could address these concerns.

### *Students Identified with Special Needs*

Twenty-one students with special needs currently attend out-of-district programs at significant cost and potentially in more restrictive settings than necessary. The elementary districts are building capacity to serve some of these students locally, which should reduce future high school placements. Once a student is placed out-of-district initially, that placement becomes his or her school, and it can be difficult to convince families that the student can be educated locally, even when appropriate programming exists. The challenge lies in making early intervention at the elementary level critical for long-term success in maintaining students within the district.

Special education leaders discussed how to make it more feasible to operate in-house (for out of district placements) or target more specific needs (for in-district students) if the schools in the region operated more cohesively. All felt it would be relatively easy to coordinate the summer extended school year programs at one or two facilities. Superintendents felt there would be value in aligning special education leadership. One option to improve coordination and address some of the issues of the elementary to high school IEP transition concerns in the status quo arrangement would be to consider a single regional elementary director responsible for grades pK-8 (or pK-6) and a regional secondary director responsible for grades 9-12 (or 7-12). In an all purpose regional environment, a single director would be able to implement a more seamless approach to address these issues.

Building inclusive programs from the ground up serves multiple populations while strengthening community values. Regional coordination solves the enrollment challenge that often prevents smaller districts from launching specialized programs, and successful initiatives can even become revenue generators by serving students from outside the region.

### *Students Identified with Support Needs*

The population of multilingual learners in the region is relatively small with 54 students (2.0% of enrollment) in 2024-25, but is expected to grow to 4.2% of enrollment (98 students) by 2029-30. Resource pooling, whether through regional consolidation or shared services, enables more strategic and cost-effective planning for these student populations. With increasing state and national diversity, robust programs developed today will be well-positioned to serve growing numbers of multilingual learners tomorrow.

With gifted students forming small groups within individual districts, regional collaboration becomes key to providing enhanced programming. Shared staffing and resources support comprehensive services across all grade levels, while broader regional enrollment allows for more personalized programs that recognize varied talents and academic trajectories.

### *Staffing, Professional Learning, and Collaboration*

While each school is expected to retain its administrative and teaching staff as well as other essential support positions, the opportunities for efficiency will be more available by combining some positions on 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 a new structure. In addition to the highest level administrative positions within the districts, there also exist several supervisory positions that could be shared across a regional district in areas such as curriculum and instruction, professional development, technology, special education, and preschool education. Central office staff could be consolidated as well and aligned for the development of more specialized expertise.

Centralized curriculum leadership would support three key improvements: enhanced teacher collaboration through professional learning communities focused on best practices and data analysis; better academic planning through performance comparisons that identify successful interventions; and stronger elementary-to-high school transitions through improved communication and shared educational approaches. A single curriculum office would strengthen professional collaboration, enabling teachers to share effective practices and use comparative data to improve instruction for all learners. Educators would develop common language and understanding about student preparation. Both regionalization and expanded shared services could achieve some level of these collaborative benefits.

# DEMOGRAPHY and FACILITIES

## 16. Municipal Profiles

The following section provides information regarding selected demographic characteristics for each of the four municipalities in the Wallkill Valley region of Sussex County, NJ.<sup>54</sup> They include Hardyston Township and the Boroughs of Franklin, Hamburg and Ogdensburg. Franklin, Hamburg and Ogdensburg each have a grades pK-8 elementary school, while Hardyston has a grades pK-4 elementary school and a grades 5-8 middle school. All are constituent members of the grades 9-12 Wallkill Valley Regional School District.

### Franklin Borough

TABLE 72  
Selected Demographic Characteristics, Franklin Borough

	2018		2023		Change	% Change
Population	4,807		4,938		131	2.7%
Housing Units	2,210		2,359		149	6.7%
Median Age	40.7		51.6		10.9	26.8%
Median Income	\$63,036		\$90,152		\$27,116	43.0%
Mean Income	\$81,068		\$91,075		\$10,007	12.3%
Race	2018	% of Population	2023	% of Population	Change	% Change
Hispanic/Latino	299	6.2%	948	19.2%	649	217.1%
White	4,319	89.8%	3,742	75.8%	-577	-13.4%
Black	150	3.1%	40	0.8%	-110	-73.3%
Asian	33	0.7%	9	0.2%	-24	-72.7%
NA/AK	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	
HI/PI	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	
Two or More Races	6	0.1%	152	3.1%	146	2433.3%
Other Alone	0	0.0%	47	1.0%	47	

Franklin has been called the fluorescent mineral capital of the world, as it is located over a rich ore body containing more than 150 minerals, many of them fluorescent, and 25 of which are found nowhere else on earth. The borough spans a total area of 4.43 square miles (11.47 km<sup>2</sup>). In terms of population, Franklin is the second largest of the region at 4,938 residents, which represents a slight increase of about 2.7% (131 persons) since 2018. It has also seen important shifts in its racial

<sup>54</sup> Selected demographic characteristics retrieved from the American Community Survey, United States Department of the Census, 2023; HI/PI = Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, NA/AK = Native American or Alaskan

demographics, with decreases among Whites (-13.4%, 577 persons), Asians (-72.7%, 24 persons) and Blacks (-73.3%, -110 persons), and increases among the Hispanic (217.1%, 649 persons) and Multiracial (2433.3%, 146 persons) populations. The median age has increased 10.9 years to 41.6, while median household incomes have increased 43.0% to \$90,152.

Hamburg Borough

TABLE 73  
Selected Demographic Characteristics, Hamburg Borough

	2018		2023		Change	% Change
Population	3,152		3,293		141	4.5%
Housing Units	1,456		1,575		119	8.2%
Median Age	43.6		41.6		-2	-4.6%
Median Income	\$76,349		\$90,655		\$14,306	18.7%
Mean Income	\$94,916		\$109,517		\$14,601	15.4%
Race	2018	% of Population	2023	% of Population	Change	% Change
Hispanic/Latino	145	3.0%	839	17.0%	694	478.6%
White	2,877	59.9%	2,105	42.6%	-772	-26.8%
Black	82	1.7%	149	3.0%	67	81.7%
Asian	48	1.0%	131	2.7%	83	172.9%
NA/AK	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	
HI/PI	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	
Two or More Races	0	0.0%	69	1.4%	69	
Other Alone	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	

Hamburg has a total area of 1.17 square miles (3.03 km<sup>2</sup>) and the third largest population in the region with 3,293 residents. It has experienced a 4.5% increase in its population since 2018. Like Franklin, Hamburg has seen shifts in its racial demographics, with increases in Hispanic (478.6%, from 145 to 839 persons), Multiracial (from 0 to 69 persons), Black (81.7%, from 82 to 149 persons) and Asian (172.9% from 48 to 83 persons) populations with decreases in the White (-26.8%, from 2,877 to 2,105 persons) population. The median age has decreased 2.0 years, while median household income has risen over 15.4% to \$109,517.

Hardyston Township

TABLE 74  
Selected Demographic Characteristics, Hardyston Township

	2018		2023		Change	% Change
Population	7,886		8,239		353	4.5%
Housing Units	3,756		3,946		190	5.1%
Median Age	44.9		47.7		2.8	6.2%
Median Income	\$102,572		\$119,103		\$16,531	16.1%
Mean Income	\$114,981		\$139,896		\$24,915	21.7%
Race	2018	% of Population	2023	% of Population	Change	% Change
Hispanic/Latino	415	8.6%	821	16.6%	406	97.8%
White	7,047	146.6%	6,387	129.3%	-660	-9.4%
Black	218	4.5%	476	9.6%	258	118.3%
Asian	143	3.0%	127	2.6%	-16	-11.2%
NA/AK	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	
HI/PI	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	
Two or More Races	63	1.3%	412	8.3%	349	554.0%
Other Alone	0	0.0%	16	0.3%	16	

Hardyston Township has a total area of 32.65 square miles (84.56 km<sup>2</sup>). A large eastern portion of the township, the Pequannock River Watershed, is owned by the City of Newark in Essex County as its water source. Hardyston has the largest and most diverse population of the four municipalities, with a total of 8,259 as of 2023. The overall population has been relatively stable between 2018 and 2023 with a negligible gain of 353 persons (4.5%). There have been changes in the racial makeup, with increases in the Hispanic (97.8%, from 415 to 821 persons), Multiracial (554.0%, from 63 to 412 persons) and Black (118.3%, from 218 to 476 persons) populations, and decreases in the White (-9.4%, from 7,047 to 6,387 persons) and Asian (-11.2%, from 143 to 127 persons) populations. The median age has increased by 2.8 years to 47.7, and median household income has increased nearly 16.1% since 2018 to \$119,103.

Ogdensburg Borough

TABLE 75  
Selected Demographic Characteristics, Ogdensburg Borough

	2018		2023		Change	% Change
Population	2,424		2,231		-193	-8.0%
Housing Units	926		984		58	6.3%
Median Age	43.1		38.7		-4.4	-10.2%
Median Income	\$86,842		\$104,946		\$18,104	20.8%
Mean Income	\$104,279		\$123,644		\$19,365	18.6%
Race	2018	% of Population	2023	% of Population	Change	% Change
Hispanic/Latino	173	3.6%	370	7.5%	197	113.9%
White	2,186	45.5%	1,761	35.7%	-425	-19.4%
Black	0	0.0%	4	0.1%	4	
Asian	51	1.1%	29	0.6%	-22	-43.1%
NA/AK	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	
HI/PI	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	
Two or More Races	14	0.3%	67	1.4%	53	378.6%
Other Alone	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	

Ogdensburg Borough spans a total area of 2.25 square miles (5.82 km<sup>2</sup>) and is the smallest of the four communities in terms of population with 2,231 residents, representing a decrease of -8.0% (193 persons) since 2018. This has been accompanied by increased racial and ethnic diversity, with decreases in White (-19.4, from 2,186 to 1,761 persons) and Asian (-43.1%, from 51 to 29 persons) residents and increases in Black (from 0 to 4 persons), Hispanic (113.9%, from 173 to 370 persons) and Multiracial (378.6% from 14 to 67 persons) residents. The median age has decreased 4.4 years, and median household income has risen 18.6% to \$123,644.

Birth Data

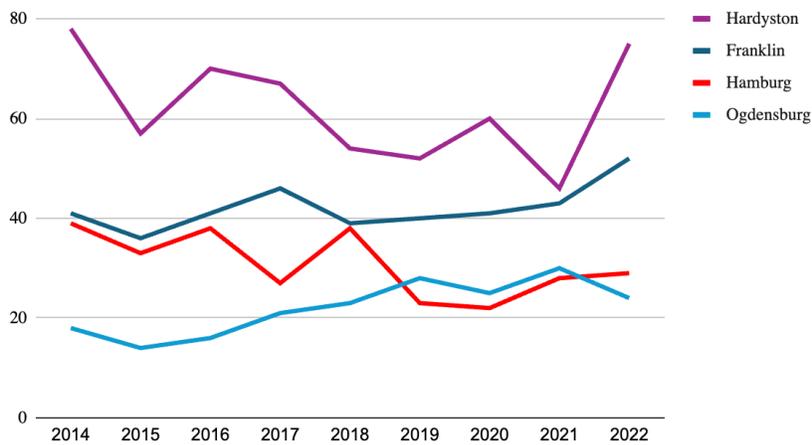
Tracking the number of children born in a municipality is important in demographic studies in order to project kindergarten enrollment over future years by seeing trends over the recent past. The data is also useful in evaluating the relative health of a municipality, as population growth is often the result of a desire by parents and others to move into and stay in a community of choice. Births in the region have been averaging 156 per year and trending 2+ births each year over the last 6 years.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>55</sup> NJ Department of Health

TABLE 76  
Live Births by Municipality, 2014-22

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023 6 yr Avg	2024 Roll Avg
Franklin	41	36	41	46	39	40	41	43	52	44	43
Hamburg	39	33	38	27	38	23	22	28	29	28	28
Hardyston	78	57	70	67	54	52	60	46	75	59	58
Ogdensburg	18	14	16	21	23	28	25	30	24	25	26
TOTAL	176	140	165	161	154	143	148	147	180	156	155

CHART 1  
Live Births by Municipality, 2014-22



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 77 presents that perspective, showing Franklin, Hardyston and Ogdensburg having the largest increases in births relative to population in the region, while births in Hamburg have decreased relative to population.

TABLE 77  
Comparing Live Births to Total Population

	Births 2018	Population 2018	% Births to Population 2018	Births est. 2023	Population 2023	% Births to Population 2023
Franklin	39	4,807	0.81%	44	4,938	0.88%
Hamburg	38	3,152	1.21%	28	3,293	0.85%
Hardyston	54	7,886	0.68%	59	8,239	0.72%
Ogdensburg	23	2,424	0.95%	25	2,231	1.13%
TOTAL	154	18,269	0.84%	156	18,701	0.83%

## 17. Housing Starts

Another factor that impacts enrollment is new housing construction which may be coming into a community. Tables 78 and 79 look at recent certificates of occupancy and building permits.<sup>56</sup>

TABLE 78  
Certificates of Occupancy Issued, 2019-24

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	TOTAL
Franklin	0	2	0	0	1	11	14
Hamburg	1	1	0	1	2	0	5
Hardyston	5	30	10	17	25	4	91
Ogdensburg	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	6	33	10	18	28	15	110

TABLE 79  
Building Permits Issued, 2019-24

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	TOTAL
Franklin	0	5	12	2	1	2	22
Hamburg	2	9	9	2	3	0	25
Hardyston	13	61	70	42	39	31	256
Ogdensburg	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	15	75	91	46	43	33	303

Research indicates that there are no planned major housing developments above the recent averages in any of the four municipalities that might impact school enrollment significantly 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. Only Hardyston Township experienced significant housing development. While Hardyston Township averaged 15 occupancies per year for the last 6 years, Franklin Borough averaged 2.3 per year, and Hamburg Borough and Ogdensburg Borough were both under one per year. In the period from 2019-2024, 303 building permits were issued in the four municipalities and only 110 (36.3%) were followed by occupancy permits.

In 2025, NJ municipalities are entering the fourth round of affordable housing obligations, which involves reassessing their obligations to provide housing for low and moderate-income individuals through July 2035. This round follows the abolishment of the Council on Affordable Housing (COAH) and the establishment of a new municipal compliance program. Municipalities must

<sup>56</sup> NJ Department of Community Affairs

provide a realistic opportunity for the construction of their fair share of affordable housing by adopting a binding resolution by June 30, 2025. Challenges may follow with an adoption of an implementing ordinance by March 15, 2026.

TABLE 80  
Affordable Housing Obligations, Fourth Round, 2025

	<b>Present Need</b>	<b>Prospective Need</b>
Franklin	25	381
Hamburg	0	125
Hardyston	22	1,622
Ogdensburg	4	40
TOTAL	51	2,168

Affordable housing mandates for Round 4 have recently been issued for present and prospective need obligations as shown in Table 24. They are at a combined level of 2,168 units for the four municipalities with Hardyston’s by far the largest at 1,622. If, when, and how the mandates will be met is unknown at this time. Compliance with the obligations needs to be monitored on a municipal and project basis.

## 18. Enrollment History

Table 81 shows the combined enrollment history for each of the school districts in this region over the past six years. The enrollment history in the Wallkill Valley region from 2019-20 to 2024-25 shows overall increases of 5.0% from 2,191 to 2,300 students. This data is used to calculate combined average survival ratios to project the total enrollment for a potential grades pK-12 regional school district. The average migration ratios across grades K-12 indicate that the number of students transitioning from one grade level to the next is 1.00, a consistent flow of students through the school system.

TABLE 81  
Student Enrollment History, 2019-20 to 2024-25 <sup>57</sup>

2019-20	Births	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	K-5	6-8	9-12	SC	PK	Total
Wallkill Valley											137	148	140	131	0		556	10	0	566
Franklin	41	32	38	46	41	41	42	43	29	46					240	118		38	58	454
Hamburg	39	26	21	25	24	26	41	26	18	28					163	72		0	18	253
Hardyston	78	67	68	52	70	64	64	72	73	91					385	236		9	32	662
Ogdensburg	18	24	23	22	22	23	30	23	27	17					144	67		5	40	256
TOTAL	176	149	150	145	157	154	177	164	147	182	137	148	140	131	932	493	556	62	148	2191
2020-21	Births	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	K-5	6-8	9-12	SC	PK	Total
Wallkill Valley											150	146	154	136	0		586	4	0	590
Franklin	36	51	29	44	52	43	37	44	49	37					256	130		27	55	468
Hamburg	33	19	25	23	21	22	23	20	23	19					133	62		0	15	210
Hardyston	57	47	59	61	52	67	67	60	68	72					353	200		11	28	592
Ogdensburg	14	26	24	24	21	25	20	29	24	31					140	84		5	25	254
TOTAL	140	143	137	152	146	157	147	153	164	159	150	146	154	136	882	476	586	47	123	2114
2021-22	Births	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	K-5	6-8	9-12	SC	PK	Total
Wallkill Valley											149	153	145	159	0		606	10	0	616
Franklin	41	41	50	27	47	54	47	37	50	40					266	127		23	61	477
Hamburg	38	37	25	23	20	22	20	18	19	31					147	68		0	31	246
Hardyston	70	68	47	59	55	52	71	61	61	71					352	193		17	33	595
Ogdensburg	16	24	25	25	27	25	23	21	30	24					149	75		7	34	265
TOTAL	165	170	147	134	149	153	161	137	160	166	149	153	145	159	914	463	606	57	159	2199
2022-23	Births	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	K-5	6-8	9-12	SC	PK	Total
Wallkill Valley											143	158	150	152	0		603	12	0	615
Franklin	46	39	42	45	26	45	55	47	39	48					252	134		24	64	474
Hamburg	27	30	30	28	22	23	20	14	16	22					153	52		1	41	247
Hardyston	67	59	65	48	61	63	56	73	62	66					352	201		15	27	595
Ogdensburg	21	21	26	26	30	26	26	22	21	33					155	76		5	45	281
TOTAL	161	149	163	147	139	157	157	156	138	169	143	158	150	152	912	463	603	57	177	2212
2023-24	Births	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	K-5	6-8	9-12	SC	PK	Total
Wallkill Valley											149	158	148	150	0		605	9	0	614
Franklin	39	36	44	45	47	33	44	51	54	43					249	148		33	72	502
Hamburg	38	22	24	33	22	23	24	18	15	14					148	47		5	35	235
Hardyston	54	58	54	60	48	60	66	57	69	60					346	186		19	26	577
Ogdensburg	23	32	21	24	28	30	25	27	21	20					160	68		4	36	268
TOTAL	154	148	143	162	145	146	159	153	159	137	149	158	148	150	903	449	605	70	169	2196
2024-25	Births	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	K-5	6-8	9-12	SC	PK	Total
Wallkill Valley											120	156	148	148	0		572	9	0	581
Franklin	40	48	41	46	48	39	39	45	50	52					261	147		50	69	527
Hamburg	23	27	21	22	29	22	23	22	18	19					144	59		8	53	264
Hardyston	52	53	59	53	63	49	63	65	55	72					340	192		18	69	619
Ogdensburg	28	40	32	23	26	31	32	24	26	23					184	73		0	49	306
TOTAL	143	168	153	144	166	141	157	156	149	166	120	156	148	148	929	471	572	85	240	2297
Average S/R	1.235	1.106	1.044	1.032	1.028	1.022	1.020	1.013	1.016	0.966	0.961	0.996	1.003							

The steering committee asked for a further look back to be able to consider longer term trends. Table 82 displays the district enrollments in five-year increments over a twenty-year period. The average enrollment decline from 2005 to 2025 of 19.1% was not felt equally by all districts. Franklin experienced a 3.7% drop while Wallkill Valley's was 29.7%, and the others were

<sup>57</sup> NJDOE's Standards Measurement and Resource for Teaching (NJSMART); SC = self-contained special education students; PK = prekindergarten students

somewhere in between. It is worth noting that the region’s average enrollment decline over the fifteen years from 2005 to 2020 was higher at 23.0%, while the past five years have shown an enrollment increase across the region of 5.0%. The superintendents attributed the recent increases to post-pandemic migrations of families from more populated areas in New Jersey and New York to their more rural municipalities.

TABLE 82  
Student Enrollment History, 2003-04 to 2023-24 <sup>58</sup>

	2004-05	2009-10	2014-15	2019-20	2024-25	20 Year % Change
Wallkill Valley	826	785	655	566	581	- 29.7%
Franklin	547	516	458	454	527	- 3.7%
Hamburg	331	288	270	253	273	- 17.5%
Hardyston	764	743	743	662	619	- 19.0%
Ogdensburg	376	312	264	256	300	- 20.2%
Total Region	2844	2644	2390	2191	2300	- 19.1%

Table 83 identifies the number of student seats available in Hardyston, Ogdensburg, and Wallkill Valley via the state’s Interdistrict School Choice Program. Franklin and Hamburg do not participate in the program.

TABLE 83  
Available Seats, Interdistrict School Choice Program

District	Available Seats
Wallkill Valley	2
Hardyston	1
Ogdensburg	12

While the State does not provide numbers of students enrolled as school choice students by district, Ogdensburg’s program has been particularly successful financially. It expects to receive \$468,198 in state school choice aid for the 2025-26 school year. Hardyston expects to receive \$122,451 and Wallkill Valley anticipates \$111,264.<sup>59</sup>

The State also does not publish the enrollments of charter school students by student resident district. However, the financial impact on each district can be considered based on the payments identified

<sup>58</sup> NJDOE Fall Enrollment Reports

<sup>59</sup> NJDOE State Aid Summaries

for charter school students.<sup>60</sup> For the 2023-24 school year, the region’s districts allotted the following amounts for their resident students to attend charter schools: Hamburg \$387,870; Hardyston \$153,270; Franklin \$92,496; and Ogdensburg \$26,000. Wallkill Valley did not identify any transfers to charter schools for the 2023-24 school year.

## 19. Enrollment Projections

This study used a standard cohort survival model for the projections. A cohort model tracks students as they move year to year 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 in the next year when these students become second graders the number increases to 104, that would be a growth rate of 4% or a cohort survival ratio of 1.04. This growth/decline ratio between years and grades is calculated for six years of enrollment providing five growth/decline ratios for each grade to grade and year to year change. The average of the five ratios between each grade then serves as the multiplier for future growth between each grade. 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 would be 120 students. This averaged, grade-to-grade survival ratio is applied to all grade levels for the next five years to complete the five-year projection.

The kindergarten ratio is generally projected by calculating the difference between live births attributable to a community and student enrollment in kindergarten five years later. A six-year average of live births was used for the live births to kindergarten ratio in the fifth year of the projection (2029-30) when those births five years earlier (2024) were not yet available in the data.

TABLE 84  
Enrollment Projections for Combined School Districts, 2025-26 to 2029-30

Year	Births	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	K-5	6-8	9-12	SC	pK	Total
2025-26	148	152	167	154	145	172	143	150	158	156	145	127	152	150	933	463	575	64	237	2273
2026-27	147	154	151	168	156	151	175	137	151	165	136	154	124	154	954	453	569	65	274	2314
2027-28	180	182	153	152	170	162	154	166	138	158	144	144	151	126	973	462	565	66	244	2310
2028-29	156	159	181	154	155	177	164	147	168	145	138	153	141	152	991	460	585	68	252	2356
2029-30	156	159	158	181	157	161	179	158	150	176	127	147	150	143	996	484	566	69	252	2367
2030-31	156	159	158	159	184	164	164	172	161	156	154	134	143	151	988	489	583	61	243	2364
2031-32	156	159	158	159	161	191	166	158	176	167	137	163	131	145	994	501	576	62	243	2376
2032-33	156	159	158	159	161	168	194	159	161	183	147	145	159	133	999	504	584	63	243	2393
2033-34	156	159	158	159	161	168	170	187	163	168	161	155	142	161	975	517	619	62	243	2417
2034-35	156	159	158	159	161	168	170	164	191	170	147	170	152	143	975	524	612	63	243	2418

<sup>60</sup> NJDOE User-Friendly Budgets

Table 84 projects future enrollments of the combined districts from 2025-26 to 2034-35. The first five years of the projection are included in our standard model and are typically more accurate and useful for immediate budgeting and resource allocation. The steering committee requested a ten-year timeframe to give more insight into long-range planning.

The overall growth in enrollment in the Wallkill Valley region over the next five years is projected to be 70 students from the 2024-25 actual enrollment of 2,297 students, an aggregate increase of 3.0% or about .06% per year and a material averaged change of approximately 4 students per grade over 14 grade levels. This is a continuation, though a flattening, of the recent five-year trend of steady enrollment growth.

CHART 2  
Enrollment History and Trend, 2019-20 to 2034-35

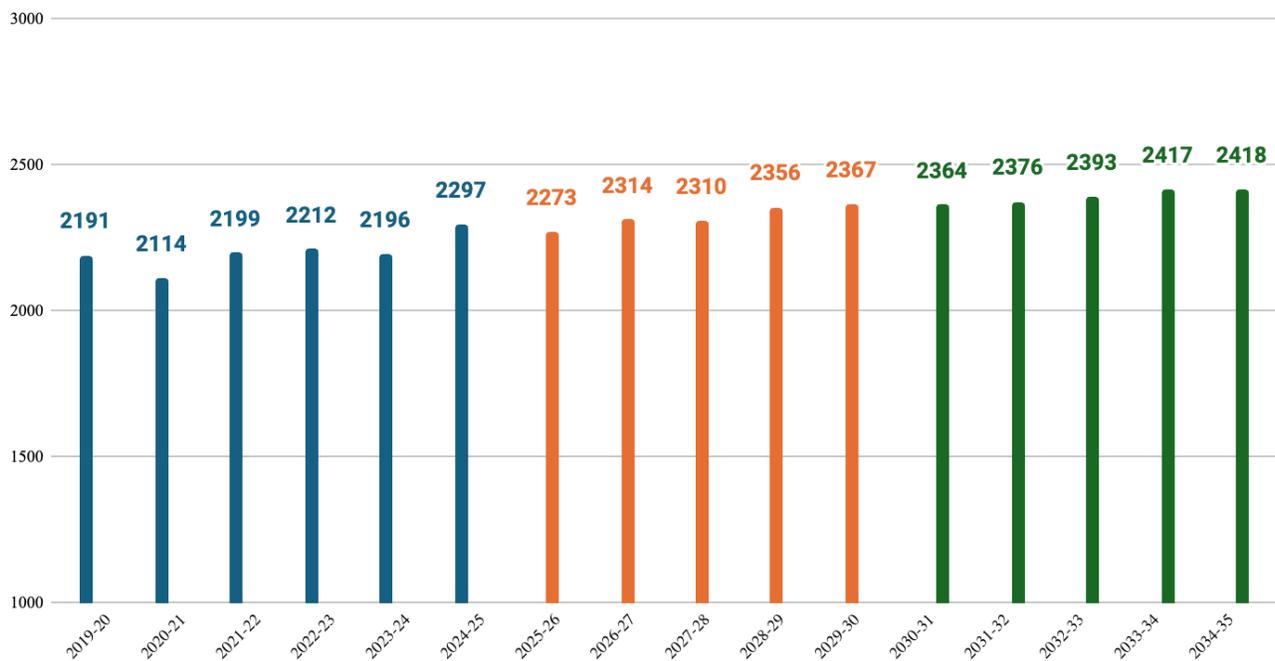


Chart 2 combines the historical and ten-year projection data to show a steadily growing trend. An enlargement of the current limited purpose, regional district into an all-purpose, regional district would not alter the overall enrollment projections in any way.

**TABLE 85**  
**Elementary Enrollment Projections, 2025-26 to 2029-30**

<b>2025-26</b>	<b>K</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>K-5</b>	<b>6-8</b>	<b>SC</b>	<b>PK</b>	<b>Total</b>
Franklin	42	50	42	49	49	40	39	49	51	272	139	34	72	518
Hamburg	19	26	22	19	30	21	17	21	21	137	59	2	53	252
Hardyston	56	51	57	53	64	52	61	64	56	333	181	14	53	581
Ogdensburg	35	40	33	25	28	30	32	24	28	192	83	5	59	339
TOTAL	152	167	154	145	172	143	150	158	156	933	463	56	237	1689
<b>2026-27</b>	<b>K</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>K-5</b>	<b>6-8</b>	<b>SC</b>	<b>PK</b>	<b>Total</b>
Franklin	44	44	51	44	50	51	40	43	50	284	133	35	88	539
Hamburg	24	18	27	19	20	28	16	17	24	136	57	2	53	248
Hardyston	43	54	49	57	54	68	51	60	65	324	176	14	86	600
Ogdensburg	42	36	41	36	27	27	30	32	25	209	87	6	47	349
TOTAL	154	151	168	156	151	175	137	151	165	954	453	56	274	1736
<b>2027-28</b>	<b>K</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>K-5</b>	<b>6-8</b>	<b>SC</b>	<b>PK</b>	<b>Total</b>
Franklin	53	46	45	54	45	52	51	44	44	294	139	36	73	542
Hamburg	25	23	19	23	20	19	22	15	19	128	56	2	53	239
Hardyston	70	41	52	49	58	57	66	49	62	327	177	14	68	586
Ogdensburg	34	43	37	45	39	26	27	30	34	223	91	6	49	369
TOTAL	182	153	152	170	162	154	166	138	158	973	462	58	244	1736
<b>2028-29</b>	<b>K</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>K-5</b>	<b>6-8</b>	<b>SC</b>	<b>PK</b>	<b>Total</b>
Franklin	45	55	47	47	55	47	52	56	45	296	152	38	79	565
Hamburg	24	24	24	16	24	19	14	21	17	130	52	2	56	240
Hardyston	55	67	40	52	50	61	56	65	51	325	171	13	68	577
Ogdensburg	36	34	44	40	48	38	26	27	32	240	85	6	49	380
TOTAL	159	181	154	155	177	164	147	168	145	991	460	59	252	1763
<b>2029-30</b>	<b>K</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>K-5</b>	<b>6-8</b>	<b>SC</b>	<b>PK</b>	<b>Total</b>
Franklin	45	46	57	49	48	57	47	56	57	302	160	39	79	580
Hamburg	24	23	25	21	17	23	14	14	24	131	51	2	56	241
Hardyston	55	53	65	40	53	52	60	54	66	318	181	13	68	580
Ogdensburg	36	36	35	48	43	47	37	26	29	245	92	6	49	392
TOTAL	159	158	181	157	161	179	158	150	176	996	484	61	252	1793

Tables 85 and 86 and Chart 3 break down the near-term projections by elementary school district. Elementary enrollment peaks in 2029-30 at 1,809 students, demonstrating a growth of 90 students over five years, using the 2024-25 school year as the base year. Enrollment peaks again at the end of the extended projection period at 1,822 students.

TABLE 86  
Elementary Enrollment Projections, 2030-31 to 2034-35

<b>2030-31</b>	<b>K</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>K-5</b>	<b>6-8</b>	<b>SC</b>	<b>PK</b>	<b>Total</b>
Franklin	45	46	47	60	51	50	57	51	58	299	166	39	73	577
Hamburg	24	23	24	21	21	16	17	14	15	128	46	2	53	230
Hardyston	55	53	51	65	40	56	51	58	56	320	165	13	68	566
Ogdensburg	36	36	37	38	52	42	47	37	28	241	112	7	49	408
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>184</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>988</b>	<b>489</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>243</b>	<b>1781</b>
<b>2031-32</b>	<b>K</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>K-5</b>	<b>6-8</b>	<b>SC</b>	<b>PK</b>	<b>Total</b>
Franklin	45	46	47	50	61	52	50	62	52	302	165	39	73	579
Hamburg	24	23	24	20	22	20	12	17	15	133	44	2	53	232
Hardyston	55	53	51	51	66	43	54	50	60	318	164	13	68	564
Ogdensburg	36	36	37	40	41	50	42	47	40	241	128	7	49	425
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>191</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>176</b>	<b>167</b>	<b>994</b>	<b>501</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>243</b>	<b>1799</b>
<b>2032-33</b>	<b>K</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>K-5</b>	<b>6-8</b>	<b>SC</b>	<b>PK</b>	<b>Total</b>
Franklin	45	46	47	50	51	63	52	55	64	303	171	40	73	587
Hamburg	24	23	24	20	21	21	15	11	19	132	46	2	53	233
Hardyston	55	53	51	51	52	70	42	53	51	331	146	13	68	558
Ogdensburg	36	36	37	40	43	40	50	42	49	233	141	8	49	430
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>168</b>	<b>194</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>999</b>	<b>504</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>243</b>	<b>1809</b>
<b>2033-34</b>	<b>K</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>K-5</b>	<b>6-8</b>	<b>SC</b>	<b>PK</b>	<b>Total</b>
Franklin	45	46	47	50	51	53	63	57	56	293	177	40	73	582
Hamburg	24	23	24	20	21	20	16	15	13	132	44	2	53	230
Hardyston	55	53	51	51	52	55	68	41	54	316	163	13	68	561
Ogdensburg	36	36	37	40	43	42	40	50	44	235	134	8	49	425
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>168</b>	<b>170</b>	<b>187</b>	<b>163</b>	<b>168</b>	<b>975</b>	<b>517</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>243</b>	<b>1798</b>
<b>2034-35</b>	<b>K</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>K-5</b>	<b>6-8</b>	<b>SC</b>	<b>PK</b>	<b>Total</b>
Franklin	45	46	47	50	51	53	53	69	59	293	181	40	73	587
Hamburg	24	23	24	20	21	20	15	15	17	132	47	2	53	234
Hardyston	55	53	51	51	52	55	53	66	42	316	162	13	68	559
Ogdensburg	36	36	37	40	43	42	42	40	53	235	135	8	49	426
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>168</b>	<b>170</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>191</b>	<b>170</b>	<b>975</b>	<b>524</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>243</b>	<b>1805</b>

**CHART 3**  
**Elementary Enrollment Projections, Grades pK-8, 2025-26 to 2034-35**

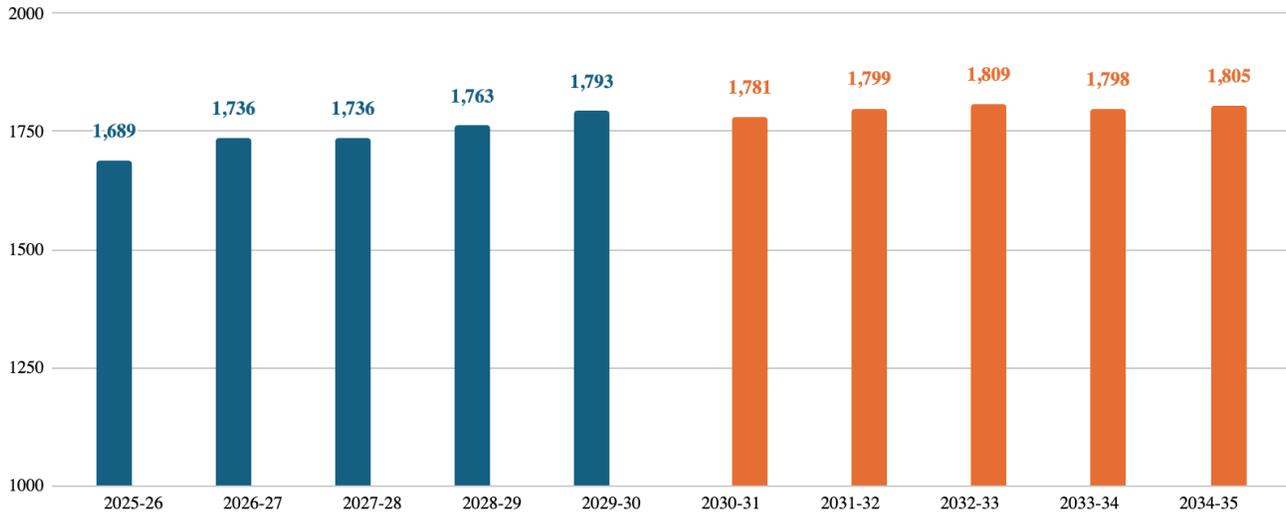
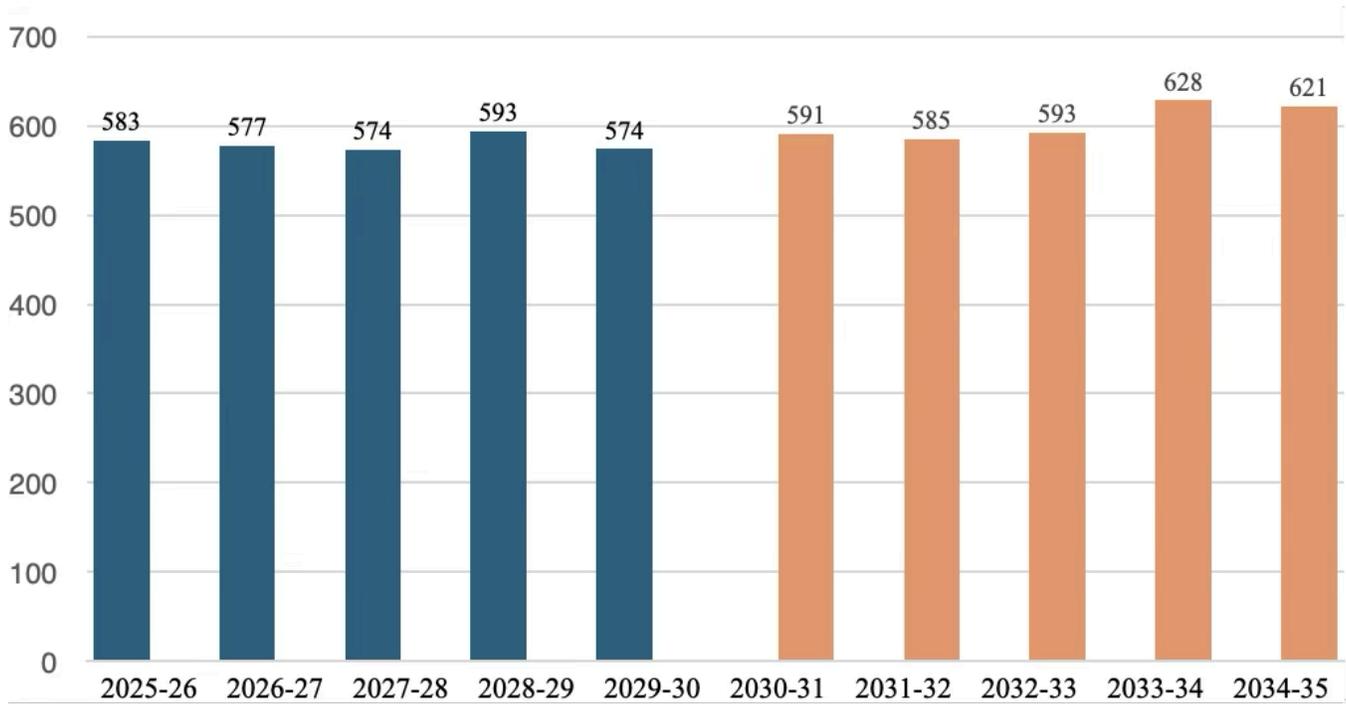


Table 87 and Chart 4 provide the same grade level and yearly enrollment projection breakdown for the high school district. The secondary school enrollment is projected to peak at 562 students in 2028-29, the fourth year of the five-year projection, and then again at 596 in 2033-34 near the end of the extended period.

**TABLE 87**  
**Secondary Enrollment Projections, 2025-26 to 2034-35**

Year	9	10	11	12	9-12	SC	Total
2025-26	145	127	152	150	575	9	583
2026-27	136	154	124	154	569	8	577
2027-28	144	144	151	126	565	8	574
2028-29	138	153	141	152	585	9	593
2029-30	127	147	150	143	566	8	574
2030-31	154	134	143	151	583	9	591
2031-32	137	163	131	145	576	9	585
2032-33	147	145	159	133	584	9	593
2033-34	161	155	142	161	619	9	628
2034-35	147	170	152	143	612	9	621

CHART 4  
 Secondary Enrollment Projections, Grades 9-12, 2025-26 to 2034-35



When examining the enrollment projections by elementary and secondary school levels, there are important changes going on in the region. The elementary school enrollment is projected to increase by 90 students over the next five years, while the secondary school enrollment is expected to decline by 37 students. This will be worth monitoring, given the enrollment decline over the past two decades of 29.7% at Wallkill Valley Regional HS. If the projected gains in the elementary population are realized and impact the secondary enrollment positively through 2029-30 and beyond, the future enrollment of Wallkill Valley Regional HS may be more promising than the previous twenty-year trendline.

## 20. Disaggregated Enrollments

Tables 88 through 91 provide disaggregated data from the perspectives of race, ethnicity, income, and language for the students in the Wallkill Valley region over the past six years with projections for the next five years. As expected, changes in group compositions largely mirror the trends in each municipality. An exception is the growth in median family incomes compared to the projected growth in the number of low income students.

TABLE 88  
Enrollment History, Disaggregated by Race and Ethnicity, 2019-20 to 2024-25 <sup>61</sup>

2019-20	Enr	White	%	Black	%	Hispan	%	Asian	%	NA/AK	%	HI/PI	%	MR	%
Wallkill Valley	566	442	78.1%	27	4.8%	74	13.1%	12	2.1%	1	0.2%	0	0.0%	10	1.8%
Franklin	454	185	40.7%	28	6.2%	28	6.2%	11	2.4%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	0.2%
Hamburg	253	185	73.1%	28	11.1%	28	11.1%	11	4.3%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	0.4%
Hardyston	662	553	83.5%	29	4.4%	51	7.7%	14	2.1%	2	0.3%	0	0.0%	13	2.0%
Ogdensburg	256	226	88.3%	5	2.0%	24	9.4%	1	0.4%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
TOTAL	2191	1591	72.6%	117	5.3%	205	9.4%	49	2.2%	3	0.1%	0	0.0%	25	1.1%
2020-21	Enr	White	%	Black	%	Hispan	%	Asian	%	NA/AK	%	HI/PI	%	MR	%
Wallkill Valley	590	459	77.8%	27	4.6%	79	13.4%	14	2.4%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	11	1.9%
Franklin	468	153	32.7%	23	4.9%	25	5.3%	8	1.7%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	0.2%
Hamburg	210	153	72.9%	23	11.0%	25	11.9%	8	3.8%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	0.5%
Hardyston	592	496	83.8%	23	3.9%	47	7.9%	11	1.9%	2	0.3%	0	0.0%	13	2.2%
Ogdensburg	254	219	86.2%	6	2.4%	27	10.6%	2	0.8%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
TOTAL	2114	1480	70.0%	102	4.8%	203	9.6%	43	2.0%	2	0.1%	0	0.0%	26	1.2%
2021-22	Enr	White	%	Black	%	Hispan	%	Asian	%	NA/AK	%	HI/PI	%	MR	%
Wallkill Valley	616	457	74.2%	31	5.0%	96	15.6%	17	2.8%	1	0.2%	0	0.0%	14	2.3%
Franklin	477	314	65.8%	14	2.9%	123	25.8%	9	1.9%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	17	3.6%
Hamburg	246	175	71.1%	23	9.3%	39	15.9%	9	3.7%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Hardyston	595	477	80.2%	21	3.5%	67	11.3%	12	2.0%	1	0.2%	0	0.0%	17	2.9%
Ogdensburg	265	223	84.2%	6	2.3%	35	13.2%	1	0.4%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
TOTAL	2199	1646	74.9%	95	4.3%	360	16.4%	48	2.2%	2	0.1%	0	0.0%	48	2.2%
2022-23	Enr	White	%	Black	%	Hispan	%	Asian	%	NA/AK	%	HI/PI	%	MR	%
Wallkill Valley	615	443	72.0%	32	5.2%	111	18.0%	15	2.4%	1	0.2%	0	0.0%	13	2.1%
Franklin	474	294	62.0%	19	4.0%	138	29.1%	8	1.7%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	15	3.2%
Hamburg	247	169	68.4%	17	6.9%	46	18.6%	13	5.3%	2	0.8%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Hardyston	595	465	78.2%	23	3.9%	77	12.9%	12	2.0%	1	0.2%	0	0.0%	17	2.9%
Ogdensburg	281	226	80.4%	6	2.1%	44	15.7%	2	0.7%	0	0.0%	3	1.1%	0	0.0%
TOTAL	2212	1597	72.2%	97	4.4%	416	18.8%	50	2.3%	4	0.2%	3	0.1%	45	2.0%
2023-24	Enr	White	%	Black	%	Hispan	%	Asian	%	NA/AK	%	HI/PI	%	MR	%
Wallkill Valley	614	441	71.8%	31	5.0%	114	18.6%	16	2.6%	1	0.2%	1	0.2%	10	1.6%
Franklin	502	299	59.6%	20	4.0%	156	31.1%	10	2.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	17	3.4%
Hamburg	235	154	65.5%	21	8.9%	48	20.4%	12	5.1%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Hardyston	577	431	74.7%	27	4.7%	85	14.7%	15	2.6%	2	0.3%	0	0.0%	17	2.9%
Ogdensburg	268	213	79.5%	9	3.4%	43	16.0%	1	0.4%	0	0.0%	2	0.7%	0	0.0%
TOTAL	2196	1538	70.0%	108	4.9%	446	20.3%	54	2.5%	3	0.1%	3	0.1%	44	2.0%
2024-25	Enr	White	%	Black	%	Hispan	%	Asian	%	NA/AK	%	HI/PI	%	MR	%
Wallkill Valley	581	409	70.4%	35	6.0%	104	17.9%	18	3.1%	1	0.2%	1	0.2%	13	2.2%
Franklin	527	305	57.9%	31	5.9%	155	29.4%	11	2.1%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	25	4.7%
Hamburg	264	186	70.2%	25	9.4%	41	15.6%	12	4.4%	0	0.2%	0	0.0%	0	0.2%
Hardyston	619	451	72.9%	22	3.6%	103	16.6%	17	2.7%	3	0.5%	0	0.0%	23	3.7%
Ogdensburg	306	256	83.7%	7	2.4%	40	13.0%	2	0.5%	0	0.0%	1	0.4%	0	0.0%
TOTAL	2297	1607	69.9%	120	5.2%	443	19.3%	59	2.6%	4	0.2%	2	0.1%	61	2.7%

<sup>61</sup> Enr = Enrollment, NA/AK = Native American or Alaskan, HI/PI = Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, MR = Multiracial

**TABLE 89**  
**Regional Enrollment History and Trend**  
**Disaggregated by Race and Ethnicity, 2019-20 to 2029-30**

	Enr	White	%	Black	%	Hispan	%	Asian	%	NA/AK	%	HI/PI	%	MR	%
2019-20	2191	1591	72.6%	117	5.3%	205	9.4%	49	2.2%	3	0.1%	0	0.0%	25	1.1%
2020-21	2114	1480	70.0%	102	4.8%	203	9.6%	43	2.0%	2	0.1%	0	0.0%	26	1.2%
2021-22	2199	1646	74.9%	95	4.3%	360	16.4%	48	2.2%	2	0.1%	0	0.0%	48	2.2%
2022-23	2212	1597	72.2%	97	4.4%	416	18.8%	50	2.3%	4	0.2%	3	0.1%	45	2.0%
2023-24	2196	1538	70.0%	108	4.9%	446	20.3%	54	2.5%	3	0.1%	3	0.1%	44	2.0%
2024-25	2297	1607	69.9%	120	5.2%	443	19.3%	59	2.6%	4	0.2%	2	0.1%	61	2.7%
2025-26	2273	1591	70.0%	110	4.8%	546	24.0%	59	2.6%	4	0.2%	4	0.2%	65	2.9%
2026-27	2314	1609	69.6%	111	4.8%	612	26.4%	62	2.7%	5	0.2%	4	0.2%	73	3.1%
2027-28	2310	1596	69.1%	111	4.8%	666	28.8%	64	2.8%	5	0.2%	5	0.2%	79	3.4%
2028-29	2356	1617	68.6%	113	4.8%	736	31.3%	68	2.9%	5	0.2%	6	0.2%	87	3.7%
2029-30	2367	1614	68.2%	114	4.8%	797	33.7%	70	3.0%	6	0.2%	7	0.3%	94	4.0%

**CHART 5**  
**Regional Enrollment History & Trend**  
**Disaggregated by Race and Ethnicity, 2019-20 to 2029-30**

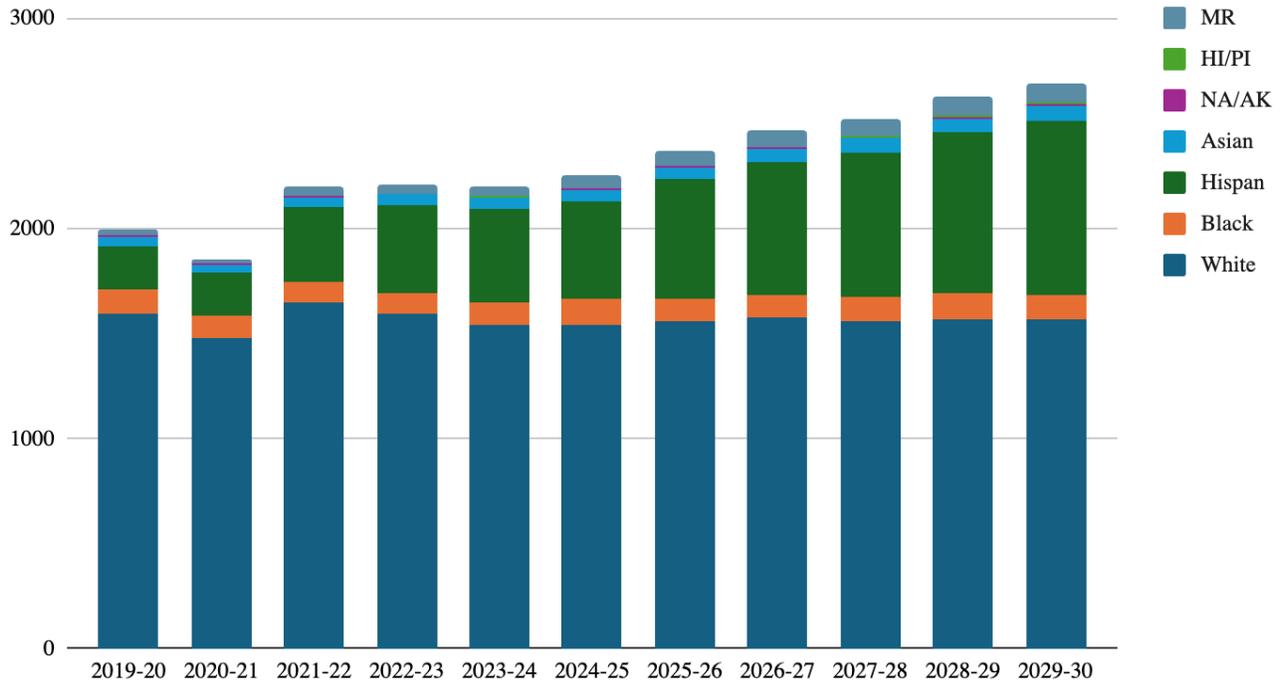


TABLE 90  
Enrollment History, Disaggregated by Income and Language, 2019-20 to 2024-25 <sup>62</sup>

<b>2019-20</b>	<b>Enr</b>	<b>ED</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>ML</b>	<b>%</b>
Wallkill Valley	566	74	13.1%	0	0.0%
Franklin	454	203	44.7%	0	0.0%
Hamburg	253	53	20.9%	1	0.4%
Hardyston	662	66	0.5%	4	0.6%
Ogdensburg	256	69	27.0%	0	0.0%
TOTAL	2191	465	21.2%	5	0.2%
<b>2020-21</b>	<b>Enr</b>	<b>ED</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>ML</b>	<b>%</b>
Wallkill Valley	590	96	16.3%	0	0.0%
Franklin	468	220	31.9%	7	1.5%
Hamburg	210	42	7.0%	1	1.4%
Hardyston	592	50	0.7%	2	0.3%
Ogdensburg	254	69	66.6%	0	0.0%
TOTAL	2114	477	22.6%	10	0.5%
<b>2021-22</b>	<b>Enr</b>	<b>ED</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>ML</b>	<b>%</b>
Wallkill Valley	616	96	33.7%	0	0.0%
Franklin	477	161	31.1%	9	1.9%
Hamburg	246	35	5.2%	1	1.1%
Hardyston	595	31	0.0%	3	1.1%
Ogdensburg	265	42	68.1%	0	0.0%
TOTAL	2199	365	16.6%	13	0.6%
<b>2022-23</b>	<b>Enr</b>	<b>ED</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>ML</b>	<b>%</b>
Wallkill Valley	615	88	14.3%	3	0.5%
Franklin	474	178	37.6%	10	2.1%
Hamburg	247	42	17.0%	0	0.0%
Hardyston	595	68	0.0%	2	0.3%
Ogdensburg	281	57	20.3%	0	0.0%
TOTAL	2212	433	19.6%	15	0.7%
<b>2023-24</b>	<b>Enr</b>	<b>ED</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>ML</b>	<b>%</b>
Wallkill Valley	614	114	18.6%	8	1.3%
Franklin	502	235	46.8%	14	2.8%
Hamburg	235	54	23.0%	1	0.4%
Hardyston	577	87	15.1%	5	0.9%
Ogdensburg	268	60	22.4%	0	0.0%
TOTAL	2196	550	25.0%	28	1.3%
<b>2024-25</b>	<b>Enr</b>	<b>ED</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>ML</b>	<b>%</b>
Wallkill Valley	581	165	28.4%	12	2.1%
Franklin	527	259	49.1%	14	2.7%
Hamburg	264	79	29.9%	4	0.6%
Hardyston	619	73	11.8%	24	3.6%
Ogdensburg	306	71	23.2%	0	0.0%
TOTAL	2297	647	28.2%	54	1.9%

<sup>62</sup> ED = economically disadvantaged students as measured by families qualifying for free or reduced price meals, ML = students identified as multilingual learners

**TABLE 91**  
**Regional Enrollment History and Trend**  
 Disaggregated by Income and Language, 2019-20 to 2029-30

	<b>Enr</b>	<b>ED</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>ML</b>	<b>%</b>
2019-20	2191	465	21.2%	5	0.2%
2020-21	2114	477	22.6%	10	0.5%
2021-22	2199	365	16.6%	13	0.6%
2022-23	2212	433	19.6%	15	0.7%
2023-24	2196	550	25.0%	28	1.3%
2024-25	2297	647	28.2%	54	1.9%
2025-26	2273	736	32.4%	52	2.3%
2026-27	2314	842	36.4%	63	2.7%
2027-28	2310	934	40.4%	74	3.2%
2028-29	2356	1047	44.4%	86	3.7%
2029-30	2367	1147	48.5%	98	4.1%

**CHART 6**  
**Regional Enrollment History and Trend**  
 Disaggregated by Income, 2019-20 to 2029-30

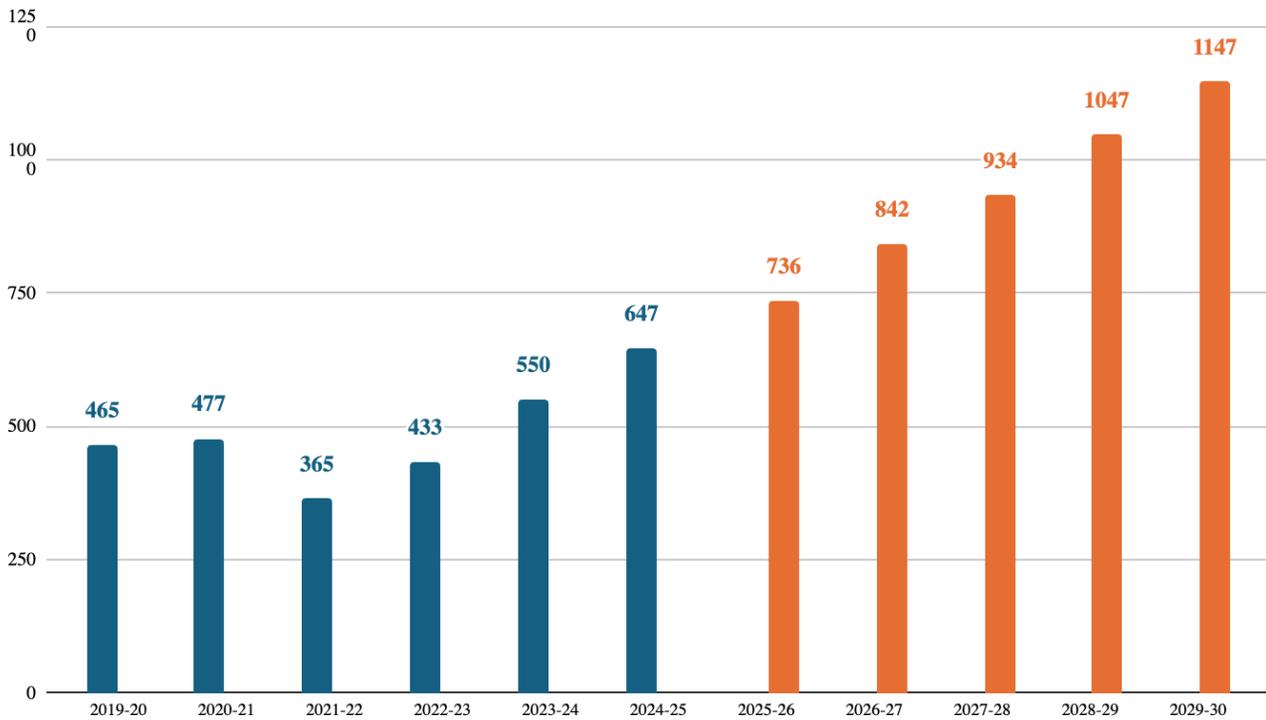
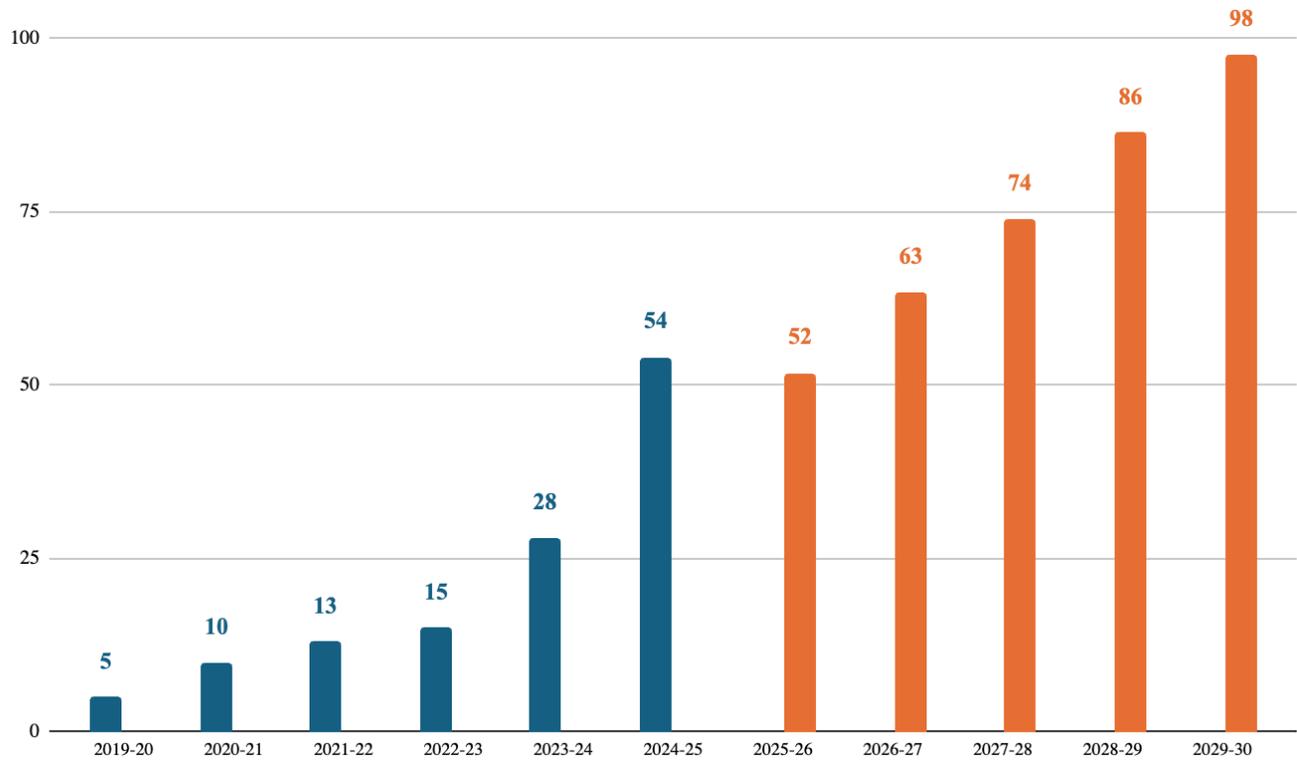


CHART 7  
 Regional Enrollment History and Trend  
 Disaggregated by Language, 2019-20 to 2029-30



Given that the scenario contemplated would not change the composition of districts in this region, there is expected to be no impact on racial and other demographic groups from a full pK-12 regionalization. However, increases in the number of students of Hispanic (from 20.6% to 35.2% of the total enrollment) and Multiracial (from 2.8% to 4.1%) backgrounds provide an opportunity to evaluate the equity of access to resources and programs in the schools for these traditionally underserved groups. There is projected to be a near doubling of the numbers of both low income and multilingual students across the region over the next five years as well. Changes in cultural background present opportunities to ensure that honoring the dignity of each student and developing an even greater sense of belonging in the schools' climate are emphasized as priorities.

## 21. 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 review of the most recent long-range facility plans, which provide detailed information describing capacity generating instructional space in each school such as classroom numbers, classroom sizes, classroom use, and extracurricular and non-instructional spaces. Enrollment projections in this analysis are based on the demographic data presented earlier rather than the average daily enrollments used for state aid projections and tuitions in the Finance and Operations domain.

Tables 92 through 97 provide grade level projections for each school building:<sup>63</sup>

- 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 20 students in grades K-3, 22 in grades 4-5, and 24 in grades 6-12. Guidelines for self-contained classrooms for special education range from 6 for grades K-6 students in autism classrooms to 12 for 6-12 graders in multiply disabled and resource classrooms;
- For pK students, the state maximum of 15 students was used and all schools in this study have full day programs; and
- A summary of specialized instructional spaces labeled “Sp” for art, music, computers, physical education, etc.

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<sup>63</sup> NJDOE Long Range Facility Plans

TABLE 92  
Projected Room Utilization, Wallkill Valley Regional HS

	9	10	11	12	SC	Sp	Rooms Used	Rooms Available	Rooms Net
<b>Students 2025-26</b>	145	127	152	119	8				
Full Sized Rooms	7	6	7	5	2	24	51	52	1
Avg Class Size	21	22	22	24	4				
<b>Students 2026-27</b>	136	154	124	123	8				
Full Sized Rooms	6	7	5	5	2	24	49	52	3
Avg Class Size	23	22	25	25	4				
<b>Students 2027-28</b>	144	144	151	100	8				
Full Sized Rooms	7	6	7	4	2	24	50	52	2
Avg Class Size	21	24	22	25	4				
<b>Students 2028-29</b>	138	153	141	121	8				
Full Sized Rooms	6	7	6	5	2	24	50	52	2
Avg Class Size	23	22	24	25	4				
<b>Students 2029-30</b>	127	147	150	114	8				
Full Sized Rooms	6	6	6	5	2	24	49	52	3
Avg Class Size	22	25	25	23	4				

TABLE 93  
Projected Room Utilization, Franklin ES

	pK	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	SC	Sp	Rooms Used	Rooms Available	Rooms Net
<b>Students 2025-26</b>	72	42	50	42	49	49	40	39	49	51	34				
Full Sized Rooms	5	3	3	2	3	3	2	2	2	3	5	9	42	44	2
Avg Class Size	15	15	17	21	17	17	20	20	25	17	7				
<b>Students 2026-27</b>	88	44	44	51	44	50	51	40	43	50	35				
Full Sized Rooms	6	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	2	3	5	9	45	44	-1
Avg Class Size	15	15	15	17	15	17	17	20	22	17	7				
<b>Students 2027-28</b>	73	53	46	45	54	45	52	51	44	44	36				
Full Sized Rooms	5	4	3	3	3	2	3	3	2	2	5	9	44	44	0
Avg Class Size	15	14	16	15	18	23	18	17	22	22	8				
<b>Students 2028-29</b>	79	45	55	47	47	55	47	52	56	45	38				
Full Sized Rooms	6	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	5	9	46	44	-2
Avg Class Size	14	15	19	16	16	19	16	18	19	23	8				
<b>Students 2029-30</b>	79	45	46	57	49	48	57	47	56	57	39				
Full Sized Rooms	6	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	5	9	46	44	-2
Avg Class Size	14	15	16	19	17	16	19	24	19	19	8				

TABLE 94  
Projected Room Utilization, Hamburg ES

	pK	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	SC	Sp	Rooms Used	Rooms Available	Rooms Net
<b>Students 2025-26</b>	50	19	28	31	19	30	21	17	21	21	2				
Full Sized Rooms	4	1	2	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	4	21	23	2
Avg Class Size	13	19	14	16	19	15	21	17	21	21	2				
<b>Students 2026-27</b>	50	24	20	29	27	20	28	16	17	24	2				
Full Sized Rooms	4	2	1	2	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	4	22	23	1
Avg Class Size	13	12	20	15	14	20	14	16	17	24	2				
<b>Students 2027-28</b>	50	25	25	20	25	28	19	22	15	19	4				
Full Sized Rooms	4	2	2	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	4	22	23	1
Avg Class Size	13	13	13	20	13	14	19	22	15	19	4				
<b>Students 2028-29</b>	50	24	26	26	17	26	26	14	21	17	2				
Full Sized Rooms	4	2	2	2	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	4	23	23	0
Avg Class Size	13	12	13	13	17	13	13	14	21	17	2				
<b>Students 2029-30</b>	50	24	25	27	22	18	25	20	14	24	2				
Full Sized Rooms	4	2	2	2	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	4	23	23	0
Avg Class Size	13	12	13	14	11	18	13	20	14	24	2				

TABLE 95  
Projected Room Utilization, Hardyston ES

	pK	K	1	2	3	4	SC	Sp	Rooms Used	Rooms Available	Rooms Net
<b>Students 2025-26</b>	53	56	51	57	53	64	8				
Full Sized Rooms	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	26	30	4
Avg Class Size	14	19	17	19	18	22	3				
<b>Students 2026-27</b>	86	43	54	49	57	54	14				
Full Sized Rooms	6	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	28	30	2
Avg Class Size	15	15	18	17	19	18	5				
<b>Students 2027-28</b>	68	70	41	52	49	58	14				
Full Sized Rooms	5	4	2	3	3	3	3	4	27	30	3
Avg Class Size	14	18	21	18	17	20	5				
<b>Students 2028-29</b>	68	55	67	40	52	50	13				
Full Sized Rooms	5	3	4	2	3	3	3	4	27	30	3
Avg Class Size	14	19	17	20	18	17	5				
<b>Students 2029-30</b>	68	55	53	65	40	53	13				
Full Sized Rooms	5	3	3	4	2	3	3	4	27	30	3
Avg Class Size	14	19	18	17	20	18	5				

TABLE 96  
Projected Room Utilization, Hardyston MS

	5	6	7	8	SC	Sp	Rooms Used	Rooms Available	Rooms Net
<b>Students 2025-26</b>	52	61	64	56	4				
Full Sized Rooms	3	3	3	3	2	7	21	27	6
Avg Class Size	18	21	22	19	2				
<b>Students 2026-27</b>	68	51	60	65	2				
Full Sized Rooms	3	3	3	3	1	7	20	27	7
Avg Class Size	23	17	20	22	2				
<b>Students 2027-28</b>	57	66	49	62	4				
Full Sized Rooms	5	3	3	3	2	7	23	27	4
Avg Class Size	12	23	17	21	2				
<b>Students 2028-29</b>	61	56	65	51	4				
Full Sized Rooms	3	3	3	3	2	7	21	27	6
Avg Class Size	21	19	22	17	2				
<b>Students 2029-30</b>	52	60	54	66	4				
Full Sized Rooms	3	3	3	3	2	7	21	27	6
Avg Class Size	18	20	18	22	2				

TABLE 97  
Projected Room Utilization, Ogdensburg ES

	pK	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	SC	Sp	Rooms Used	Rooms Available	Rooms Net
<b>Students 2025-26</b>	59	35	34	33	25	28	30	32	24	28	5				
Full Sized Rooms	4	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	1	3	25	25	0
Avg Class Size	15	18	17	17	13	14	15	16	24	14	5				
<b>Students 2026-27</b>	47	41	35	35	36	27	27	30	32	25	6				
Full Sized Rooms	4	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	3	26	25	-1
Avg Class Size	12	21	18	18	18	14	14	15	16	13	6				
<b>Students 2027-28</b>	49	33	42	36	38	39	26	27	30	34	2				
Full Sized Rooms	4	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	3	26	25	-1
Avg Class Size	13	17	21	18	19	20	13	14	15	17	2				
<b>Students 2028-29</b>	55	35	33	43	39	41	38	26	27	32	6				
Full Sized Rooms	4	2	2	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	3	27	25	-2
Avg Class Size	14	18	17	15	20	21	19	14	14	16	6				
<b>Students 2029-30</b>	55	35	35	34	47	42	40	37	26	29	6				
Full Sized Rooms	4	2	2	2	3	3	2	2	2	2	1	3	28	25	-3
Avg Class Size	14	18	18	17	16	15	20	19	13	15	6				

In spite of the 19.1% decline in student enrollment over the past two decades, this analysis of the utilization of school facilities does not find a corresponding increase in the number of available classroom spaces. It is understood that schools operate differently than they did twenty years ago, with greater emphasis on using spaces to meet the needs of students with specialized needs as well as a broadening of the curriculum for all students. At most, the projected enrollments show the availability by 2029-30 of only 3 classrooms at Hardyston ES and 3 at Wallkill Valley Regional HS. Hamburg is projected to have sufficient rooms for its population, while there is a projected need for 2 classrooms at Franklin ES and 3 at Ogdensburg ES. Hardyston MS is the only school that is projected to have a useful additional capacity of 6 classrooms.

This analysis shows that expanding the educational program in the current school facilities in the region will be challenging, especially given a desire to consider expanding preschool programs to more families.<sup>64</sup> One consideration could be combining the region’s 8th grade students to attend Hardyston MS given its excess room capacity. Table 98 examines that option using the state guideline of 24 students maximum class size for 8th grade.

**TABLE 98**  
Projecting the Use of Facility Capacity at Hardyston MS for a Unified 8th Grade, 2029-30

	<b>Franklin</b>	<b>Hamburg</b>	<b>Hardyston</b>	<b>Ogdensburg</b>	<b>Unified 8th Grade</b>
Projected Students	57	24	66	29	176
Projected Sections	3	1	3	2	8
Projected Class Size	19	24	22	15	22

This possibility would create a minor economy of scale by reducing the need for homerooms from nine to eight, but Hardyston MS is only projected to have six available classrooms. This option would also be less than ideal even if there were enough available classrooms because Franklin, Hamburg, and Ogdensburg students would need to transition from their elementary schools for one year of 8th grade and then again the next year to high school. Research has examined how school transitions affect student achievement, with studies consistently finding that moves from elementary to middle school and middle to high school often lead to temporary drops in academic performance. In other words, the fewer the number of school transitions, the less likely there will be for negative student impacts. Transportation would also need to be provided by each district to Hardyston.

A more realistic option to consider for preschool expansion would be leasing space in another facility to create a joint preschool center. Lease costs are an approved use of preschool expansion aid, and a combined setting would create some economies of scale. This would have the added benefit of freeing up elementary classrooms to address the anticipated need for additional spaces in Franklin, Hamburg, and Ogdensburg.

<sup>64</sup> See earlier section on Preschool Education

## 22. Demographic and Facilities Impact

Over the period from 2018 to 2023, the populations of Franklin Borough, Hamburg Borough, and Hardyston Township grew anywhere from 2.7% to 4.5%, while Ogdensburg's declined by 8.0%. Births in the region have been averaging 156 per year and trending 2+ births each year over the last 6 years. This modest growth has been mirrored in the schools as the 2024-25 enrollment of 2,300 students is an increase of 106 students (4.8%) over five years ago at an average of just over 21 students per year. This is in contrast to an average enrollment decline of 23.0% across the region over the fifteen years from 2005 to 2020.

Research indicates that there are no planned major housing developments above the recent averages in any of the four municipalities that might impact school enrollment at this time. Affordable housing mandates are at a combined level of 2,219 units for the four municipalities broken down as follows: Franklin has a need for 406 units; Hamburg 125; Hardyston 1,644; and Ogdensburg 44. If, when, and how the mandates will be met is unknown at this time.

A comparison of the 2024-25 actual enrollment of 2,297 students with the 2029-30 projection of 2,367 shows an increase of 70 students and a material averaged change of approximately 5 students per grade over 14 grade levels. Elementary enrollment peaks in 2029-30 at 1,793 students with a growth of 104 students over five years, and again at the end of the extended projection period at 1,805 students. The secondary school enrollment is projected to peak at 593 students in 2028-29, the fourth year of the projection, and then again at 628 in 2033-34. An enlargement of the current limited purpose regional into an all-purpose regional would not alter the overall enrollment projections in any way.

Given that the scenario contemplated would not change the composition of districts in this region, there is expected to be no impact on racial and other demographic groups from a full pK-12 regionalization. However, increases in the number of students of Hispanic (from 20.6% to 35.2% of the total enrollment) and Multiracial (from 2.8% to 4.1%) backgrounds provide an opportunity to evaluate the equity of access to resources and programs in the schools for these traditionally underserved groups. There is projected to be a near doubling of the numbers of both low income and multilingual students across the region over the next five years.

In spite of the sizable decline in student enrollment over the past two decades, this analysis of the utilization of school facilities does not find a corresponding increase in the number of available classroom spaces. It is understood that schools operate differently than they did twenty years ago, with greater emphasis on using spaces to meet the needs of students with specialized needs as well as a broadening of the curriculum for all students. At most, the projected enrollments show the availability by 2029-30 of only 3 classrooms at Hardyston ES and 3 at Wallkill Valley Regional HS. There is projected to be a net need for 1 classroom at Hamburg ES, 2 at Franklin ES, and 3 at Ogdensburg ES. Hardyston MS is the only school that is projected to have a useful additional capacity of 6 classrooms.

# FINANCE and OPERATIONS

## Key Assumptions

### *General Assumptions*

- It is the view of the consultants that voters in the municipalities of Franklin Borough, Hamburg Borough, Hardyston Township, and Ogdensburg Borough would be motivated to approve a question where there exists the possibility for tax savings or only minimal tax increases relative to the status quo that are offset by important benefits to educational programs.
- The tax levies and rates projected in the analysis are for the purposes of studying the differences between the status quo and the regionalization scenarios and are not intended to serve as predictions of future tax levies and rates.
- Estimates of participating district enrollment in school years 2026 through 2031 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 and on other projection methods where demographer projections were unavailable.
- Where a starting date is required for analysis, it is assumed the enlarged regional would begin operation on July 1, 2026.

### *Financial Assumptions*

- Future tax levies would reflect the maximum two percent annual increase, and no banked cap would be utilized to increase levies beyond the two percent.
- NJ 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) and methodology changes introduced in the fiscal year (FY) 2026 appropriations act. It is the consultants' belief that these policies are more likely to be continued than not, as they greatly reduce and stabilize the amount of additional state aid required in subsequent budget years.
- The provisions of P.L.2021, c.402, which modify how state aid is calculated for a regional 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 enlarged regional.
- Debt service aid for the enlarged regional would be an aggregate of the five districts' debt service aid.

- The equalized value of real property in each community would continue in a manner consistent with secular trends present between FY 1985 to FY 2026. The trend patterns reflect cyclical increasing, peaking, and declining equalized valuation trends over 15-18 year cycles.
- Any state aid benefits provided pursuant to P.L.2021, c.402's slower phase-out schedule would not count towards the state aid for the budget year in which it is applicable and are considered by the consultants to be a bonus appropriation due to how recently the law was changed and the lack of official guidance on the new rules.

#### *Operational Assumptions*

- Existing shared services agreements between the participating districts would terminate upon consolidation.
- Transportation would not be altered in the regional configuration being analyzed, and therefore, there will be no impact on student seat time, distance traveled, or cost when compared to the status quo as there has been no discussion of any intent to change the schools that students are attending.
- The operating budget for the enlarged regional would be an aggregate of the district budgets less the cost savings outlined earlier in this domain.
- Any cost reductions to the budget, including personnel outlined in this study, would be approved by the board of education of the enlarged regional.

#### *Asset/Liability Assumptions*

- Existing assets and debt among the districts would become the shared assets and debt of the enlarged regional.
- Costs related to school building conditions, including educational adequacy, planned expansions, and maintenance would be assumed by the enlarged regional, and therefore, do not impact this analysis.

#### *Legal Assumptions*

- P.L.2021, c.402 provides a specific transition mechanism when a regional district is formed that allows for existing employee contracts to continue until their expiration, or, for up to three years following regionalization, or until a successor agreement is negotiated, whichever occurs first. If no successor agreement is negotiated after three years, the salary guide and terms and conditions of the largest constituent district serving like grade levels would apply. An estimate of costs stemming from aligning the existing district salary guides was calculated and is included in the cost savings used in the model.

- P.L.2021, c.402 states that newly created or enlarged regional school districts shall, “... receive State school aid in an amount that is the greater of: (a) the amount of State school aid that the newly created regional school district would receive as a regional school district; or (b) the sum of the amount of State school aid received by each school district constituting the newly created regional school district prior to the creation of such regional school district.” State aid analysis in this study follows the consultants' interpretation that this statutory language establishes the pre-regionalization sum of state aid as a fixed baseline for comparison. This means using the actual aid amounts received by the constituent districts immediately prior to regionalization, rather than calculating hypothetically what these districts might have received in future years had they remained separate entities.
- According to multiple state government sources, the legislative intent of the language cited above was that state aid should be calculated not just prior to the creation of the regional, but in each subsequent year, such that the new regional district would continue to receive the greater of the regional combined amount or the sum of the separate district amounts if calculated in the year in question. Consultants have engaged with leaders of the State Legislature to propose amendments to the current language to clarify and confirm that intent, and extend that method of calculation through the 2033-34 school year. In that case, the aid calculations in this study would represent a conservative estimate of the potential state aid impacts of regionalization.

## 23. Collective Bargaining Agreements

P.L.2021, c.402 outlines the conditions of regional district formation, among those being provisions for the main collective bargaining agreement (CBA). 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.”<sup>65</sup> 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*

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<sup>65</sup> N.J.S.A. 18A:13-47.5

*upon the terms and conditions of employment of the largest constituent district containing the identical grade levels;*<sup>66</sup>

This suggests that the Wallkill Valley contract would govern staff in grades 9-12, and the Hardyston CBA for grades pK-8 after the initial three year period if a successor agreement is not reached in that time. As noted, a successor agreement would need to be negotiated between the new board and new association representatives.

The following review of the primary CBAs for Wallkill Valley, Franklin, Hamburg, Hardyston and Ogdensburg intends to provide useful information to aid the negotiations process should the districts decide to form an all purpose regional district, or can be used simply as points for comparison and synthesis in future negotiations.<sup>67</sup> Common labor practices and contractual language could simplify the ability to share staff when desirable. The contracts being reviewed are the ones with the largest number of members, typically including the teaching staff. Personnel excluded in these main contracts may be represented in other CBAs.

### Expiration Dates

It is important to note that this analysis is based upon the CBAs in effect for the 2024-25 school year. As such, this analysis represents a snapshot in time for comparison purposes only.

TABLE 99  
Expiration of Current Collective Bargaining Agreements

District	Expiration of Primary CBA
Wallkill Valley	2028
Franklin	2028
Hamburg	2027
Hardyston	2026
Ogdensburg	2027

Should an enlarged all purpose regional be created prior to the expiration of an existing CBA, the statute's provisions as noted previously would hold. If it 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*

<sup>66</sup> N.J.S.A. 18A:13-47.5

<sup>67</sup> CBAs provided by each district's administration

*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 Clauses

The recognition clause identifies who is, and often who is not, represented by the primary CBA. All agreements include teachers, nurses, counselors, librarians, and child study team members, but there is variance on the inclusion of non-certificated or supervisory staff. The differences are:

- Franklin and Hardyston include classroom aides/paraprofessionals, school secretaries/administrative assistants (except confidential personnel), and custodians and maintenance staff;
- Ogdensburg includes classroom aides/paraprofessionals and custodians and maintenance staff; and
- Wallkill Valley includes the athletic trainer.

As indicated, recognition clauses vary somewhat from district-to-district. The districts are split in terms of recognizing some non-certificated staff such as secretaries, administrative assistants, and paraprofessionals in the CBA. In some cases, those groups of employees are represented in other bargaining units. These discrepancies would need to be addressed should the districts regionalize.

### Grievance Procedures

School contracts often carefully outline grievance procedures to provide a clear and structured process for resolving disputes between employees and the school administration. These procedures are a cornerstone of labor-management relations in the educational sector, serving as a formal mechanism to ensure fairness, protect employee rights, and maintain a stable and positive working environment.

At its core, a grievance is a formal complaint alleging a violation, misinterpretation, or misapplication of the terms of the employment contract. By establishing a predefined pathway for addressing these complaints, grievance procedures offer several key benefits.

- Protection of employee rights: The primary purpose of a grievance procedure is to safeguard the contractual rights of teachers and other school staff. This includes rights related to salary, benefits, working hours, class size, preparation periods, and leave policies. Without a formal process, employees would have little recourse if they felt their contractual rights were being infringed upon.

- **Conflict resolution:** Grievance procedures provide a systematic and escalating process for resolving conflicts. This typically begins with an informal discussion and can progress to more formal steps, including mediation or arbitration. This structured approach prevents minor disagreements from escalating into major disputes and promotes resolution at the lowest possible level.
- **Ensuring due process:** A fundamental aspect of the grievance process is the assurance of due process for employees. This means that individuals have the right to be heard, to present evidence, and to be represented by their union or another advocate. This is particularly crucial in situations involving disciplinary action, where an employee's career and livelihood may be at stake.
- **Maintaining a stable work environment:** By providing a recognized and respected channel for raising concerns, grievance procedures contribute to a more stable and predictable work environment. Employees are more likely to feel valued and respected when they know there is a fair process for addressing their concerns. This can lead to higher morale, lower turnover, and a greater focus on the educational mission of the school.
- **Contractual clarity and enforcement:** The existence of a grievance procedure incentivizes both the administration and employees to have a clear understanding of the collective bargaining agreement. It also serves as the primary mechanism for enforcing the terms of that contract. When a grievance is filed, it often leads to a closer examination of the contractual language, which can help to clarify ambiguities and prevent future disputes.

In the realm of alternative dispute resolution, arbitration offers a path to settling conflicts outside of a traditional courtroom. However, the weight of the arbitrator's decision hinges on a crucial distinction: whether the process is binding or non-binding. The key difference lies in the finality and enforceability of the outcome.

Binding arbitration is a formal process where the disputing parties agree to be legally bound by the decision of the arbitrator or arbitration panel. This decision, known as an award, is final and has the same force as a court judgment. By choosing binding arbitration, parties effectively waive their right to a trial and agree to a conclusive resolution.

Non-binding arbitration, on the other hand, serves as a more advisory process. While the parties still present their cases to a neutral arbitrator who renders a decision, this decision is not legally enforceable. Instead, it provides a well-reasoned, third-party perspective on the likely outcome if the case were to proceed to court. Either party has the right to reject the arbitrator's award and can choose to pursue the dispute through litigation.

The grievance procedures in these districts are similar in that they start generally at the level closest to the perceived issue and end with arbitration through an arbiter provided through the Public Employees Relation Commission or a professional from the American Arbitration Association. The

difference is that Hardyston and Wallkill Valley are the only districts that end with binding arbitration. This would need to be negotiated to a common process in a fully regionalized district.

### School Calendars and Working Conditions

School calendars and staff work years and working conditions often differ from district to district and include both instructional and non-instructional (professional learning) days, the length of the workday, designated duty-free lunch breaks, preparation time, and other miscellaneous provisions.

Table 100 summarizes many of these negotiated provisions. The staff work year varies from 182 to 185 days based upon the language in the CBA in effect during the 2024-25 school year. Typically, the remaining days when the number of student days are deducted from staff days – in this case varying from 2 to 5 days – are used for classroom preparation at the start of the school year and professional learning throughout the year. The student school years are consistent at 180 days.

While the length of the 10 month staff member workday is 7 hours and 15 minutes for all districts except Franklin where the work day is 7 hours, the amount of student contact time demonstrates greater variability with 27 minutes daily separating the greatest and least number of contractual minutes. Staff have a guaranteed daily, duty-free lunch in all contracts. The amount of time ranges from 30 minutes to 42 minutes. Preparation time provides time to prepare lessons, meet with colleagues or parents, or grade student work among other professional tasks. There is some variability here, and it is common to see some divergence between elementary and secondary staff due to the nature of the school day schedule.

TABLE 100  
School Calendars and Working Conditions

	<b>Staff School Days <sup>68</sup></b>	<b>Student School Days</b>	<b>Staff Learning Days</b>	<b>Staff Workday</b>	<b>Student Contact Minutes</b>	<b>Duty-Free Lunch</b>	<b>Preparation Time <sup>69</sup></b>
Wallkill Valley	182	180	2	7:15	351	42 mins	42 mins
Franklin	184	180	4	7:00	338	41 mins	41 mins
Hamburg	185	180	5	7:15	384	30 mins	40 mins
Hardyston	185	180	5	7:15	365	30 mins	40 mins
Ogdensburg	184	180	3	7:15	353	41 mins	41 mins

<sup>68</sup> 10 month staff only

<sup>69</sup> Average minutes per day, even though a staff member may not experience that number of minutes in a given day.

TABLE 101  
Extra Services and Duties

	<b>Faculty Meetings</b>	<b>Additional Time</b>
Wallkill Valley	Department meetings 2x/wk, number not specified	Back to School Night, Graduation
Franklin	20 after school meetings/yr; 5 more for specific district needs	Back to School Night, Graduation, Night Conferences, Teacher's Choice
Hamburg	16 faculty meetings max, 5 student early dismissal days provide time for staff learning	Back to School Night, 2 Parent Conferences
Hardyston	2x/mo	Back to School Night, Parent Conference, plus social functions
Ogdensburg	2x/mo plus up to 8 add'l/yr	Up to 4 (conferences, back to school)

Collective bargaining agreements sometimes include provisions requiring staff to attend activities outside of traditional school hours. These activities can include back-to-school nights, open houses, parent-teacher conferences, graduation ceremonies, or select activities throughout the school year. These school districts are no different, but there seem to be few requirements that would be considered out of the ordinary. Faculty meeting time is addressed in each contract and appears to be very consistent and should not interfere with the development of a CBA for any enlargement of the regional.

Salaries

TABLE 102  
Salary Guide Comparison, 2024-25

	<b>Wallkill Valley</b>	<b>Franklin</b>	<b>Hamburg</b>	<b>Hardyston</b>	<b>Ogdensburg</b>
Horizontal Steps	5	5	2	9	4
Vertical Steps	13	15	16	17	18
Salary - Step 1 BA	\$64,290	\$60,637	\$65,609	\$59,151	\$54,435
Salary - Step 10 MA	\$92,775	\$75,105	\$81,019	\$74,706	\$71,875
Salary - Top of Guide MA+30 <sup>70</sup>	\$105,665	\$96,150	\$90,194	\$93,686	\$92,025

<sup>70</sup> Or next closest lane; Hamburg only has MA

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 ... 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 ...”<sup>71</sup>

Starting salaries (BA Step 1) in the region vary significantly. At the elementary level they range from a low of \$54,435 at Ogdensburg to a high of \$65,609 at Hamburg, a difference of about \$11,000. As staff members move on the guides both horizontally and vertically, salaries continue to vary, although the amounts change depending on step and guide placement. At the top of the elementary guides, salaries range from a low of \$90,194 in Hamburg to a high of \$96,150 in Franklin. Many factors and goals can contribute to the variances. Not surprisingly as a high school district, Wallkill Valley pays more at the top of the guide than the others. Wallkill Valley staff that earn a doctorate receive a one time stipend payment of \$2,750.

Hardyston appears to have done some major work on its guide in 2017, eliminating two columns but allowing staff who were already there to remain on those columns.<sup>72</sup> Staff who had not achieved the MA+10 or MA+20 goals had to achieve the MA+15 or MA+30 to move across the guide. While Hardyston has nine columns and is working towards seven, Hamburg is at the other end of the spectrum with a very simple salary guide of two columns of BA and MA. These salary guides would require significant work to merge into a regional agreement.

Longevity payments in education are a form of supplementary compensation awarded to teachers, administrators, and other school staff based on their accumulated years of service. This practice is designed to recognize and reward loyalty, reduce employee turnover, and acknowledge the value of experienced professionals within a school system. Typically, longevity pay is structured as a service increment, or an additional payment beyond the salary guide for employees who remain in the school district for a set number of years. In this region, longevity begins at 15 years in four of the five districts, with amounts running from several hundred dollars to several thousand. Hardyston stopped the practice for employees hired after July 1, 1996. This disparity would need to be addressed during collective bargaining should a regional district be formed.

### *Aligning Salary Guides*

The next step in this analysis was to estimate the financial implications of aligning salary guides across districts in accordance with the statutory requirements set forth in P.L.2021, c.402, in the

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<sup>71</sup> N.J.S.A. 18A:13-47.10

<sup>72</sup> Effective July 1, 2017, the MA+10 and MA+20 columns shall be eliminated. Teachers placed on the MA+10 or MA+20 column as of June 30, 2017 are permitted to remain on those columns. Teachers on MA+10 will move to the MA+15 column upon achievement of those credits and shall then progress to MA+30 and MA+45. Teachers on the MA+20 column will move to the MA+30 column upon achievement of those credits. Employees not placed on the MA+10 and/or the MA+20 columns as of June 30, 2017 are ineligible for placement on either column.

event that no successor collective bargaining agreement is negotiated within three years of regionalization. Specifically, it evaluates the cost of transitioning all eligible staff members to the applicable default salary guide and terms of employment, based on current staffing data and guide structures.

The purpose of this work is twofold: first, to anticipate and quantify costs associated with salary guide harmonization; and second, to highlight the assumptions and decision rules necessary for making fair and consistent staff placements across districts.

Several methodological questions emerged during the analysis, including:

- Should eligible staff placement on the new guide be based on current step, salary, or a hybrid of both?
- How should disparities in lane structures and education levels be addressed?
- How should placement be handled when the new guide lacks an equivalent step?

To address these issues, the consultants applied the following rules:

- For grades 9-12 eligible staff, the Wallkill Valley guide would remain in use;
- For grades pK-8 eligible staff, the Hardyston guide would serve as the default guide due to its status as the largest grades pK-8 district by staff count;
- Eligible staff from Franklin, Hamburg, and Ogdensburg were placed on the closest higher step of the Hardyston guide relative to their current salary;
- No eligible staff member would experience a salary reduction, and many would see increases as there was not always a perfect landing spot on the new guide; and
- Eligible staff members earning above the highest step in the new guide would have their salary frozen until a successor agreement is reached.

Applying these rules to the current staffing data provided by the constituent school districts, the estimated costs of transitioning staff to the Hardyston guide are: \$35,296 for Franklin; \$97,508 for Hamburg; and \$97,045 for Ogdensburg. This yields a total cost of about \$230,000. These estimated costs were included in the broader calculations described in the Cost Savings section.

### Leaves of Absence

Leaves of absence are generally in line with each other and often fairly standard district-to-district, as demonstrated in Table 103. All districts offer similar numbers of illness days ranging from 10-12 per year, and personal days ranging from 3-4 per year. All districts limit the ability of staff to take personal days to extend a pre-existing holiday. Hamburg does have a unique clause, “If a tenured bargaining member has exhausted their accumulated sick leave and personal days, they shall be

granted, if requested, the ability to use in advance up to twelve (12) sick days from the following year’s provision to cover extended illness. If the bargaining member uses the next year’s days and leaves for other than retirement reasons, they shall reimburse the Board the expenditure granted. The bargaining member shall sign a promissory note at the time payment is made.”<sup>73</sup>

Bereavement leave is available in all districts for immediate members of the family, though the definition of immediate family can vary from district-to-district. Each district offers maternity and paternity above what is required by law, oftentimes allowing the teacher to take extended unpaid leave until either the end of the school year in which the child is born or adopted or until the end of the following school year. These provisions are relatively standard in school district CBAs.

TABLE 103  
Temporary Leaves of Absence

	Wallkill Valley	Franklin	Hamburg	Hardyston	Ogdensburg
Employee Illness Days (10-month)	12, incl 2 emergency	12, cumulative no max; up to 2 for family ill	12, cumulative no max	10	11, 1 can be used for personal
Personal Business Days	4	3 with pay, plus 2 additional less sub cost	4	4	4, 1 sick day may also be used as personal
Personal Day Limit <sup>74</sup>	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Personal Days convert to Illness	Yes, up to 3	Yes, up to 3	Yes, up to 2	Yes	Yes
Bereavement Days Immediate Family	5	5	5	5	5
Bereavement Days Others	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Maternity/ Paternity Leave beyond law	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sabbatical Leave Provision	No	Yes, after 7 years	No	Yes, after 7 years	Yes, after 6 years

<sup>73</sup> Hamburg Collective Bargaining Agreement

<sup>74</sup> Before or after holidays

## Tuition Reimbursements

Table 104 outlines general provisions around tuition reimbursement. The language in this section of many CBAs can get very detailed and, at times, confusing. As such, the table represents the maximum number of credits for which a tenured employee may apply, the maximum rate at which an employee may be reimbursed, any district maximum that has been established, and whether the employee taking advantage of the tuition reimbursement provisions must commit to remaining in the district for an established length of time.

It is not uncommon for a school district CBA to align tuition reimbursement to the per-credit tuition charged at the nearest state university. Other district CBAs simply set forth a dollar amount, a maximum number of credits per year, or both. Finally, it is not uncommon for a board of education to limit its exposure to tuition reimbursement claims by capping the total district reimbursement amount at a set number, as each of these five districts do. In such cases, reimbursement is paid on either a percentage or first-come, first-served basis. This provision varies by agreement. It has also become more common for districts to include a repayment clause in the event a staff member leaves the district within a short time after receiving a tuition reimbursement.

TABLE 104  
Tuition Reimbursements

	Wallkill Valley	Franklin	Hamburg	Hardyston	Ogdensburg
Eligibility	Available immediately	Available immediately unless hired mid-year	Available immediately	Available after two years, phased in of allowable credits	Available after short wait
Maximum Credits/Dollars per Year	9	Empl prior to 7/1/96, 15 cr/yr; 3 at 100%, 12 at NJ state college rate; after 7/1/96 6 at 100% & 9 at 75%	6 credits per semester or 18 per fiscal yr	12 credits	9 credits
Rate per Credit	\$675	Rutgers	Rutgers	Cost incl fees, not to exceed \$600	William Patterson
District Maximum	\$47,925	\$35,000	\$12,000	\$25,000	\$18,000
Commitment after Completion	3 years graduated reimbursement	3 years graduated reimbursement	3 years 100% reimbursement n/a if non-tenured and non-renewed or tenured RIF	2 years graduated reimbursement, n/a if non-renewed or RIF	2 years graduated reimbursement

## Insurance Coverages

TABLE 105  
Insurance Coverages

	Wallkill Valley	Franklin	Hamburg	Hardyston	Ogdensburg
Medical Plan	Private	State	State	Private	State
Min hrs/wk to Receive Benefits	29	25	25 when in SEHBP, otherwise 20	25	25
Coverage	Greater coverage provided (after 2 yrs)	Greater coverage provided (year 5+)	Greater coverage provided	Employee only for first three years; purchase option exists <sup>75</sup>	Greater coverage provided (after first yr)
In-Network Co-Pay primary/specialist	\$15/\$25	\$10/\$15	\$10/\$15	\$5 POS/\$10 PPO	\$10/\$15
Contribution Provisions	Ch 78	Ch 78 or Ch 44	25% of premium if Dir 10/15; all others are Ch 44	Ch 78	Ch 78
Payment for Waiver of Coverage	40% if hired prior to 6/20; 30% if after; 20% if after 6/21; if after 6/22 lesser of 25% of BOE saving or max \$5k	Lesser of 25% or \$4,000 of premium cost	n/a	Emp can waive but payment was eliminated 7/15	n/a
Prescription Generic/ Brand	\$5/\$20	\$10/\$15	\$10/\$15	\$5/\$10 retail, \$10/\$20 mail, if generic available member pays difference	\$15/\$10
Dental Plan	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes, emp pays 50%
Vision Plan	Coverage provided	Coverage not offered	Coverage not offered	Coverage not offered	Coverage not offered

<sup>75</sup> Hardyston's CBA reads, "Effective July 1, 2006, all new hires otherwise eligible for insurance under A1 or 2 shall receive POS single coverage only for the first three (3) years of employment. The employee has the option to purchase dependent coverage, and the Board will pay 50% and the employee will pay 50% of the cost of the premium for the dependent coverage. At the conclusion of three (3) years of employment, such employee will be eligible for POS family coverage."

NJ mandated that newly hired teachers and other school employees be enrolled in the School Employees' Health Benefits Program (SEHBP) by choosing either the NJ Educators' Health Plan (NJEHP) or the Garden State Health Plan (GSHP), or their private equivalents, as of January 1, 2021, if they commenced employment on or after July 1, 2020. For teachers and other school district employees hired before July 1, 2020, there are wider options from which to choose. Here is a breakdown of the key points related to this requirement:

- **Effective Date:** The requirement to enroll new hires in the NJEHP, GSHP, or private equivalents took effect on January 1, 2021;
- **Target Group:** This mandatory enrollment applied to employees who commenced employment on or after July 1, 2020, and before January 1, 2028, and did not waive health coverage. For the plan year starting January 1, 2028, employees could choose any plan offered by their school district during open enrollment; and
- **Plan Options:** These newly hired employees were offered either the NJEHP, the GSHP, or private equivalents.

For public school teachers in NJ, health insurance is a required component of their employment benefits package. Participation in the SEHBP, or its equivalent, is a condition of employment for all full-time public school employees. While local school districts determine the exact definition of full-time, it cannot be less than 25 hours per week. The cost of health insurance is a shared responsibility between the teacher, their school district, and, sometimes, the state. A teacher's contribution is mandatory and deducted directly from their paycheck. The amount a teacher pays is determined by state law (most notably, Chapter 44, P.L. 2020) and is generally calculated as a percentage of their annual salary, tied to the level of coverage they select (e.g., single, parent/child, employee/spouse, or family). For some plans, the contribution may instead be a percentage of the total premium cost.

While NJ teachers are required to have health insurance, the system provides them with a number of choices in coverage dependent on start date, and a structured, albeit mandatory, cost-sharing framework. The system also offers options in how these benefits are offered. The districts can choose to belong to a health insurance fund where multiple districts are able to spread out risk and lower premiums by increasing the number of employees in a pool. A district with small enrollment or poor claim experience may have difficulty obtaining reasonable quotes. It is not possible for consultants to project health insurance costs for an enlarged regional due to the required confidential claims data that would be needed to do so. An insurance broker could do so, if the districts have the same broker or are able to share data. It should be noted that since many districts are in a joint purchasing program for benefits, they are already obtaining optimum pricing for the programs they are offering based upon that district's claims experience.

Some districts mandate a specific plan while others establish a base plan and then allow employees to buy up or down depending on needs and desire to alter contributions. Another important

distinction is whether the school district provides single-only, spousal, parent-child, or full family coverage and when the opportunity for that expanded coverage is available. These differences range from immediate full family eligibility to eligibility after the first year, second year, or the attainment of tenure after four years. Differences in plans, co-pays, and eligibility for coverage would need to be negotiated into a new contract, if the all purpose regional model is to be adopted.

Employee reimbursement for waiving coverage, should they maintain coverage elsewhere, is generally similar in the region. However, Hamburg’s contract does not address it, and Hardyston eliminated a payment for waiving insurance in 2015.<sup>76</sup> Wallkill Valley’s has been steadily reduced through a phased-in plan based upon an employee’s hiring date. Even in the best of circumstances, insurance coverages are nuanced. What appears similar on paper can often be perceived as less than once employees consider the in-network provider list and other specific details of the plan. It is recommended that any new regional board of education enlist the help of a benefits specialist to assist with the analysis and future negotiations of these plans.

## 24. Operating Expenses and Potential Cost Savings

### Budgetary Costs per Student

Tables 106 through 110 highlight the spending priorities of each district through budgetary per student costs broken into five categories by the State: classroom instruction, support services, administration, operations and maintenance, and extracurriculars.<sup>77</sup> Each category then ranks the districts against their peers across the state in terms of grade-level structure.<sup>78</sup>

TABLE 106  
Budgetary Per Student Costs, Wallkill Valley, 2023-24

	\$ Per Pupil	Peer Rank	% of Total	State Median \$	State Median %
Total Budgetary Per Student Costs	19,827	13/46		22,702	
Classroom Instruction	10,211	13/46	51.5%	12,358	54.4%
Support Services	3,449	25/46	17.4%	3,751	16.5%
Administration	2,180	20/46	11.0%	2,273	10.0%
Operations and Maintenance	2,502	13/46	12.6%	2,935	12.9%
Extracurriculars	1,486	34/46	7.5%	1,333	5.9%

<sup>76</sup> Despite no reference in the CBA, Hamburg does provide a \$5,000 reimbursement to staff who waive health benefits.

<sup>77</sup> NJDOE Taxpayers’ Guide to Education Spending; K-8 state medians are for all K-8s regardless of enrollment, and 9-12 state medians are for all 9-12s regardless of enrollment.

<sup>78</sup> Ranking is from lowest to highest spending among NJ’s 76 K-8 school districts with less than 400 students (Ogdensburg and Hamburg), the 64 K-8 school districts with 401-750 students (Franklin and Hardyston), and the 46 7-12/9-12 high schools (Wallkill Valley).

TABLE 107  
Budgetary Per Student Costs, Franklin, 2023-24

	<b>\$ Per Pupil</b>	<b>Peer Rank</b>	<b>% of Total</b>	<b>State Median \$</b>	<b>State Median %</b>
Total Budgetary Per Student Costs	25,837	58/64		20,554	
Classroom Instruction	15,049	57/64	58.2%	12,212	59.4%
Support Services	5,536	60/64	21.4%	3,804	18.5%
Administration	1,857	14/64	7.2%	2,114	10.3%
Operations and Maintenance	2,961	53/64	11.5%	2,389	11.6%
Extracurriculars	339	53/63	1.3%	178	0.9%

TABLE 108  
Budgetary Per Student Costs, Hamburg, 2023-24

	<b>\$ Per Pupil</b>	<b>Peer Rank</b>	<b>% of Total</b>	<b>State Median \$</b>	<b>State Median %</b>
Total Budgetary Per Student Costs	28,728	64/76		20,554	
Classroom Instruction	17,425	66/76	60.7%	12,212	59.4%
Support Services	4,873	57/76	17.0%	3,804	18.5%
Administration	2,516	69/76	8.8%	2,114	10.3%
Operations and Maintenance	3,503	59/76	12.2%	2,389	11.6%
Extracurriculars	316	50/74	1.1%	178	0.9%

TABLE 109  
Budgetary Per Student Costs, Hardyston, 2023-24

	<b>\$ Per Pupil</b>	<b>Peer Rank</b>	<b>% of Total</b>	<b>State Median \$</b>	<b>State Median %</b>
Total Budgetary Per Student Costs	19,655	26/64		20,554	
Classroom Instruction	11,030	21/64	56.1%	12,212	59.4%
Support Services	3,564	31/64	18.1%	3,804	18.5%
Administration	2,277	43/64	11.6%	2,114	10.3%
Operations and Maintenance	2,592	44/64	13.2%	2,389	11.6%
Extracurriculars	192	33/63	1.0%	178	0.9%

TABLE 110  
Budgetary Per Students Costs, Ogdensburg, 2023-24

	<b>\$ Per Pupil</b>	<b>Peer Rank</b>	<b>% of Total</b>	<b>State Median \$</b>	<b>State Median %</b>
Total Budgetary Per Student Costs	20,264	24/76		20,554	
Classroom Instruction	11,871	25/76	58.6%	12,212	59.4%
Support Services	3,707	22/76	18.3%	3,804	18.5%
Administration	1,971	25/76	9.7%	2,114	10.3%
Operations and Maintenance	2,386	29/76	11.8%	2,389	11.6%
Extracurriculars	311	48/74	1.5%	178	0.9%

Budgetary costs per student are comparable among districts in a way that total costs are not. Total costs include items such as expenditures funded by restricted grants, pension contributions, tuition payments to other districts and private schools for students with disabilities, debt service expenditures, and principal and interest payments for the lease purchase of land and buildings.

Per the state definition, the elementary districts are in two separate peer groups: Hamburg and Ogdensburg are small K-8's, and Franklin and Hardyston are medium K-8s. In terms of total budgetary costs per student, it must be noted that the state median of \$20,554 is for all K-8s – small, medium, and large. Hardyston at \$19,655 is less than \$1,000 below the state median, and Ogdensburg at \$20,264 is just under it. Franklin at \$25,837 and Hamburg at \$28,728 are well above the state median. Whether small or medium, low student enrollments make it difficult to be efficient financially. Wallkill Valley at \$19,827 is almost \$3,000 under the state median of \$22,702 for total budgetary costs per student.

It is clear that all five districts prioritize direct spending on students in terms of the percentage of dollars allocated to classroom instruction. Hamburg at 60.7% is above the state median of 59.4% for elementary school districts, while Franklin, Hardyston, and Ogdensburg all spend more than 55% of the total budgetary cost on classroom instruction. Wallkill Valley at 51.5% is very close to the state median of 54.4% for the high school peer group. This is a strong positive indicator as it provides direct student academic experiences, and therefore should receive primary attention and commitment in the district budget.

Another interesting note is that lower spending on administration is often identified by the public as an area to realize potential efficiencies in education. Even though economies of scale tend to favor larger entities, the smaller districts of Franklin at 7.2%, Hamburg at 8.8%, and Ogdensburg at 9.7% are all below the state median percentage of administrative spending of 10.3%.

## Cost Savings

Table 111 presents specific cost savings that could be anticipated in an enlarged, all purpose, regional school district. Despite the cost savings identified and presented in the table, all existing programs are anticipated to be maintained.

The primary areas targeted for cost reduction include audit processes, professional services, and administrative and support staffing. The Projected Staffing Needs under the Education and Program domain and the Shared Services section in this domain provide additional support for these projections, particularly with regard to staff consolidation.

The estimated cost savings of \$1.3 million would come primarily from consolidating administrative functions and reducing duplication across the districts. However, these savings are partially offset by necessary investments in both existing positions that assume more responsibility, and new positions to serve the enlarged regional created by restructuring.

TABLE 111  
Anticipated Cost Savings, Enlarged Regional <sup>79</sup>

<b>Items</b>	<b>Net Savings Amount</b>
Consolidation of Administrative Personnel	
Superintendents (2 to 1)	\$159,208
Chief School Administrators (all continue as principals)	\$0
Assistant Superintendents (0 to 1)	(-\$160,000)
Business Administrators (5 to 1)	\$433,512
Assistant Business Administrators (3 to 1)	\$65,572
Special Education Directors (5 to 1)	\$351,399
Technology Directors (3 to 1)	\$172,095
Facilities Managers (4 to 1 & 1 asst)	\$124,428
Curriculum & Instruction Directors/Supervisors (3 to 1)	\$157,697
Treasurers of School Monies (5 to 1)	\$29,648
Reduction in Audit Costs	\$126,950
Reduction in Legal Costs	\$71,464
Reduction in Dues & Fees	\$22,036
Cost of Default Salary Guide Alignment	(-\$229,849)
Total Estimated Cost Savings	\$1,324,160

<sup>79</sup> Identified items are one-time savings, which would no longer be needed in future budgets.

Examining administrative and support staffing, there would be a reduction from two superintendent positions to one (\$159,000 in savings), the addition of an assistant superintendent (\$160,000 additional cost), reduction of business administrators from five to one (\$434,000), assistant business administrators from three to one (\$66,000), special education directors from five to one (\$351,000), technology directors from three to one (\$172,000), facilities directors from four to one plus an assistant (\$124,000), curriculum & instruction directors from three to one (\$158,000) and treasurer of school monies from five to one (\$30,000).

Regarding audit processes and professional services, audit cost estimates were derived by comparing current expenditures across constituent districts with the projected cost of a single audit for the enlarged regional. Similarly, legal services costs were estimated based on current average expenses, with the expectation that these services could also be consolidated.

Aligning the salary guides for teaching staff creates an offset to the savings as noted in the table. P.L.2021, c.402 outlines the conditions of regional district formation, among those being provisions for the main collective bargaining agreements. If the enlarged regional does not reach a successor agreement within three years, interpretation of the law suggests that grades pK-8 would be governed by the Hardyston agreement and Wallkill Valley would stand as the grades 9-12 prevailing agreement. The approximate additional costs would be \$230,000. The individual collective bargaining agreements are analyzed in more detail earlier in this domain.

It is important to note that these cost savings do not include the potential financial efficiencies and educational benefits that could occur from consolidating and coordinating operations such as curriculum and textbook purchases, in-district special education programs, student transportation, technology infrastructure, central office functions, unified contract negotiations, and the potential for self-insured health benefit plans that would be viable in an enlarged regional. Each of these would require further exploration and consideration by a regional board of education and administration or joint actions by the districts as currently structured.

## 25. State Aid

### State Aid Calculations and Methodology

From its enactment and implementation in the 2008-09 school year through the 2017-18 school year, the SFRA school funding formula for K-12 education had never been fully funded in any annual state budget. The persistent underfunding led to significant legislative updates known as the S2 legislation enacted in 2018. S2 provided a six-year phase-in schedule for the state to achieve full funding of the SFRA formula by the 2024-25 school year. Having stuck mostly to its statutory obligation, the state did indeed achieve full funding of SFRA in 2024-25 for the first time.

However, state aid figures for the upcoming FY 2026 school year have been distributed to school districts and reflect several methodology changes that deviate from the full-funding paradigm finally

achieved in FY 2025. First, three year average equalized values and aggregate district income values were used in the formula's determination of "local fair share", the amount each district is expected to raise locally through school taxes. Secondly, a change was made to how special education funding is provided. Rather than providing state aid based on the previous static classification rate applied to each district's total enrollment, the state based aid on actual district counts of special education and speech-only students. Third, the state restricted the amount each district's state aid could increase or decrease relative to the prior year with increases capped at 6% and decreases capped at 3%.

All of the factors discussed above were implemented through budgetary language provisions and therefore apply only to FY 2026. They are not permanent changes. Despite not being permanent, it is the consultants' belief that these policies are more likely to be continued than not as they greatly reduce and stabilize the amount of additional state aid required in subsequent budget years. In an effort to provide clarity, state aid has been analyzed both where the described changes are continued into the future for all years in the study period and also where the changes are only applied to FY 2026 with subsequent years reverting back to the default mechanisms in the statutory SFRA funding formula.

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, other projection methods 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 for special education, security, and transportation are calculated and added to the equalization aid to determine a district's total uncapped state aid. Additionally, school choice aid is included in the total where relevant.

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.

Through FY 2025, districts with positive state aid differentials had prior year funding reduced to match the current year formula amount and districts with negative state aid differentials had funding

increased to match current year formula amounts. Despite the S2 period coming to an end in FY 2025, state aid differentials remain significant to this financial impact analysis because P.L.2021, c.402 provides a means for school districts participating in an SREP grant who have a positive state aid differential to preserve state aid that might otherwise be removed each year prior to regionalization.<sup>80</sup>

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 P.L.2021, c.402. 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 that scenario. All estimated P.L.2021, c.402 benefits are summarized later in this subsection.

The figures generated from running the model represent a comprehensive estimate of state aid for FY 2027 through FY 2031 that reflect the expectations of both the study's financial and demographic experts and that are informed by the most up-to-date data.

### State Aid History in the Region

Historically, all of the districts in the region have received equalization aid except Hardyston, and all receive funding in the State's three categorical aid items that are provided to all districts regardless of wealth and income.

NJ provides equalization aid to school districts based on a comparison between local funding capacity and need. Under the SFRA formula, the state calculates each district's adequacy budget (the amount required to provide a thorough and efficient education) and compares it to the district's local fair share (the amount a district can reasonably raise through local property taxes based on its equalized valuation (i.e., market-rate property values) and aggregate personal income.

When a district's local fair share falls short of its adequacy budget, the state concludes that district cannot generate sufficient local revenue to meet its educational funding needs. In these cases, the state provides equalization aid to bridge the funding gap. Conversely, when a district's local fair share exceeds its adequacy budget, the formula determines that local tax capacity is sufficient to fund the district's needs and no equalization aid is provided.

NJ also provides categorical aid on a per-student basis for three purposes: transportation, security, and special education. Categorical aid is provided to all school districts based on student enrollment regardless of property wealth and income.

There are also several items funded separately through dedicated formulas. Districts participating in the Interdistrict School Choice Program receive school choice aid to supplement base state aid for students attending the school from sending districts. Districts who have locally funded eligible capital projects through bond referendums may receive debt service to offset a portion of their

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<sup>80</sup> This is described in detail in a later section.

principal and interest payments. Districts with eligible preschool programs may receive preschool education aid. Through the 2024-25 school year, districts may have received a grandfathered allocation of adjustment aid which was originally intended to ensure stability through the initial implementation of the SFRA formula in 2008-09 but has since become disconnected and will be phased out completely beginning in the 2025-26 school year.

Wallkill Valley, Hardyston, and Ogdensburg all participate in the Interdistrict School Choice Program, and therefore, receive school choice aid. Additionally, all of the elementary districts receive an allocation of preschool aid. Both Wallkill Valley and Hamburg receive debt service aid.

Tables 112 through 116 present the state aid received by each participating school district for FY 2021 through FY 2026.<sup>81</sup> Debt service aid and preschool aid are considered separate forms of aid and are therefore omitted from the tables below.

TABLE 112  
Actual State Aid, Wallkill Valley, FY 2021-26

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Equalization Aid	2,825,328	2,379,126	2,201,582	2,096,099	2,096,099	1,339,587
Transportation Aid	508,608	508,608	508,608	508,608	508,608	542,115
Special Education Aid	525,097	525,097	525,097	525,097	571,584	1,115,926
Security Aid	67,325	67,325	67,325	67,325	67,325	148,680
Adjustment Aid	0	0	0	0	0	0
School Choice Aid	32,283	47,000	36,938	80,400	87,648	111,264
Total State Aid	3,958,641	3,527,156	3,339,550	3,277,529	3,331,264	3,257,572
Prior Year State Aid	4,350,189	3,958,641	3,527,156	3,339,550	3,277,529	3,331,264
YoY Difference (\$)	-391,548	-431,485	-187,606	-62,021	53,735	-73,692
YoY Difference (%)	-9.00%	-10.90%	-5.32%	-1.86%	1.64%	-2.21%

State aid for Wallkill Valley saw its largest decreases in FY 2021 and FY 2022 with the regional’s funding declining due to the state’s broader efforts to align state funding levels with the SFRA formula. Funding since FY 2023 has been mostly stable as inflationary increases to underlying SFRA formula variables and an increasing adequacy budget were neutralized by simultaneous increases in local property wealth. FY 2026 total funding remained relatively stable while funding shifts occurred between aid categories due to the transition from funding according to S2 based on prior year amounts to formula funding under SFRA as modified by FY 2026 budgetary language.

<sup>81</sup> State School Aid Summaries, NJDOE Office of School Finance

TABLE 113  
Actual State Aid, Franklin, FY 2021-26

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Equalization Aid	2,680,420	2,786,062	2,808,501	2,830,931	3,727,526	3,812,869
Transportation Aid	49,243	49,243	49,243	49,243	49,243	76,649
Special Education Aid	303,322	303,322	305,842	367,363	481,245	699,909
Security Aid	95,302	95,302	95,302	95,302	95,302	131,225
Adjustment Aid	100,129	100,129	100,129	100,129	100,129	0
School Choice Aid	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total State Aid	3,228,416	3,334,058	3,359,017	3,442,968	4,453,445	4,720,652
Prior Year State Aid	3,276,002	3,228,416	3,334,058	3,359,017	3,442,968	4,453,445
YoY Difference (\$)	-47,586	105,642	24,959	83,951	1,010,477	267,207
YoY Difference (%)	-1.45%	3.27%	0.75%	2.50%	29.35%	6.00%

Franklin experienced annual state aid increases in all years of the S2 period. The steady increasing trend in aid is due to four primary factors. First, average daily enrollment in grades K-8 increased steadily by approximately 50 students over the period. Second, inflationary increases in underlying SFRA formula variables put upward pressure on district adequacy budgets. Third, the sharp annual increases in statewide formula funding since FY 2020, driven by S2, enabled annual funding increases to districts to align state aid with the SFRA formula. Additionally, the property wealth and aggregate personal income factors used in local fair share determination, while increasing over the period, were outpaced by increases in Franklin’s adequacy budget.

TABLE 114  
Actual State Aid, Hamburg, FY 2021-26

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Equalization Aid	750,879	750,879	807,239	857,681	857,681	750,521
Transportation Aid	44,903	44,903	44,903	44,903	44,903	24,967
Special Education Aid	197,985	197,985	197,985	197,985	197,985	404,173
Security Aid	30,047	30,047	30,047	30,047	30,047	56,944
Adjustment Aid	369,333	217,227	217,227	217,227	45,593	0
School Choice Aid	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total State Aid	1,393,147	1,241,041	1,297,401	1,347,843	1,176,209	1,236,605
Prior Year State Aid	1,471,190	1,393,147	1,241,041	1,297,401	1,347,843	1,176,209
YoY Difference (\$)	-78,043	-152,106	56,360	50,442	-171,634	60,396
YoY Difference (%)	-5.30%	-10.92%	4.54%	3.89%	-12.73%	5.13%

Hamburg experienced mixed, but relatively stable state aid throughout the S2 period. Average daily enrollment declines in grades K-8 combined with increases in equalized valuation and personal

income in the district worked to soften increases to Hamburg’s adequacy budget while simultaneously increasing its local fair share. State aid rose in FY 2026 by 5% over the prior year despite continued projected enrollment declines as underlying inflationary increases to SFRA formula variables put substantial upward pressure on district adequacy budgets. Hamburg’s adequacy budget increases were sufficient to completely offset similar increases in local fair share.

Hardyston saw stable state aid over the six year period. The SFRA funding formula consistently determined that the district possesses the capacity to fund its public education programs through local school taxes, and therefore, it does not provide any equalization aid. The categorical aid received by Hardyston is based on pupil enrollment, with changes in funding primarily driven by underlying changes in enrollment in addition to annual inflationary adjustments to underlying SFRA variables. Despite a 6% cap on FY 2026 funding increases, Hardyston experienced 7.6% increase as the state excludes school choice aid from the cap determination.

TABLE 115  
Actual State Aid, Hardyston, FY 2021-26

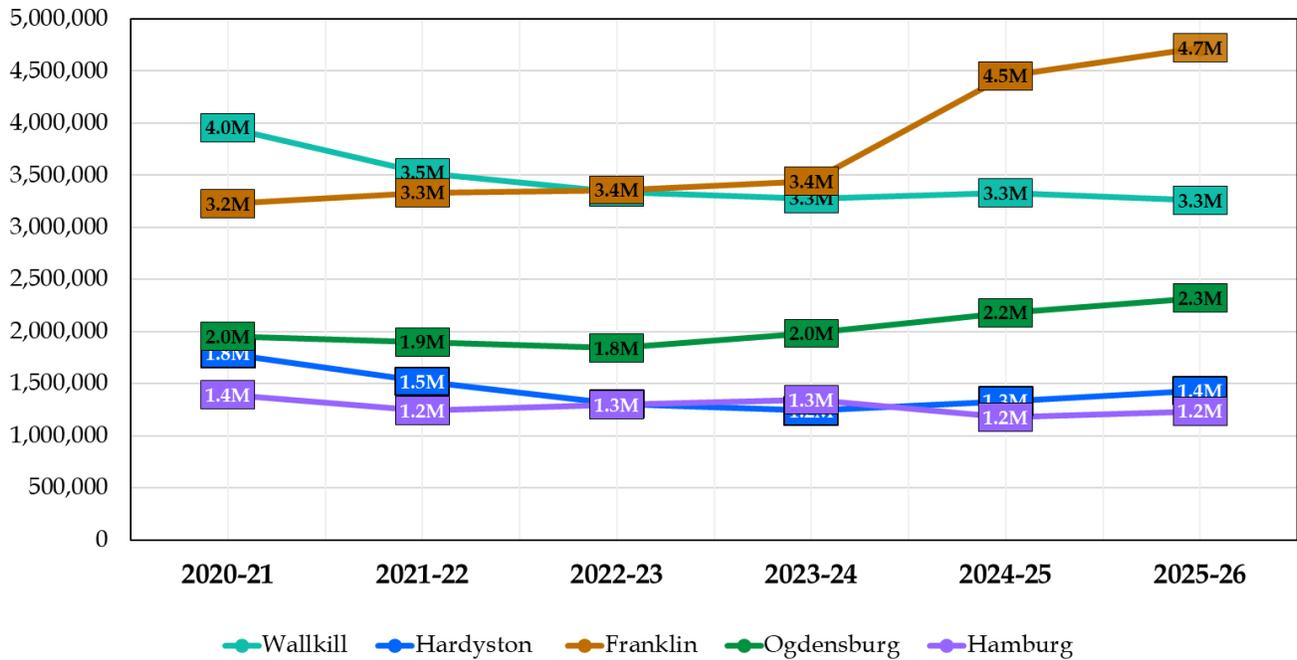
	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Equalization Aid	0	0	0	0	0	0
Transportation Aid	452,207	452,207	452,207	452,207	452,207	534,888
Special Education Aid	461,016	461,016	461,016	461,016	575,155	688,271
Security Aid	61,773	61,773	61,773	61,773	61,773	88,190
Adjustment Aid	709,546	441,179	223,812	147,988	147,988	0
School Choice Aid	104,808	106,104	107,272	115,760	95,122	122,451
Total State Aid	1,789,350	1,522,279	1,306,080	1,238,744	1,332,245	1,433,800
Prior Year State Aid	1,973,894	1,789,350	1,522,279	1,306,080	1,238,744	1,332,245
YoY Difference (\$)	-184,544	-267,071	-216,199	-67,336	93,501	101,555
YoY Difference (%)	-9.35%	-14.93%	-14.20%	-5.16%	7.55%	7.62%

Ogdensburg experienced an increasing state aid trend over the period. Equalization aid has been relatively stable and has followed similar underlying changes in average daily enrollment. Local fair share and the district’s adequacy budget have both increased at similar rates creating a stable amount of equalization aid. The largest increase over the period has come through increases in school choice aid, which has grown by 56% since 2021 with the state’s increased funding of school choice aid in the state budget.

TABLE 116  
Actual State Aid, Ogdensburg, FY 2021-26

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Equalization Aid	1,369,767	1,364,108	1,300,950	1,331,104	1,434,178	1,445,309
Transportation Aid	17,372	17,372	17,372	17,372	20,559	10,737
Special Education Aid	162,828	162,828	162,828	236,702	280,674	343,166
Security Aid	27,247	27,247	27,247	27,247	44,180	55,332
Adjustment Aid	74,635	0	0	0	0	0
School Choice Aid	300,292	328,671	332,186	370,148	401,931	468,198
Total State Aid	1,952,141	1,900,226	1,840,583	1,982,573	2,181,522	2,322,742
Prior Year State Aid	2,121,831	1,952,141	1,900,226	1,840,583	1,982,573	2,181,522
YoY Difference (\$)	-169,690	-51,915	-59,643	141,990	198,949	141,220
YoY Difference (%)	-8.00%	-2.66%	-3.14%	7.71%	10.03%	6.47%

CHART 8  
Actual State Aid in the Participating School Districts, FY 2021-26



Projected State Aid in the Status Quo Scenario

This section presents the model’s estimated state aid for each participating district from FY 2027 through FY 2031. The analysis focuses on the SFRA formula aid categories of equalization aid, special education categorical aid, security categorical aid, transportation categorical aid, and school choice aid. Adjustment aid has been removed as it phased out completely with the conclusion of the S2 phase-in.

FY 2025 marked the first year in which the state fully funded the SFRA formula amounts in the annual state budget. In this paradigm, a district's state aid in each future year would be the amount determined by the SFRA funding formula. While seemingly straightforward, this differs significantly from how state aid was determined for nearly two decades prior to FY 2025. Under the old method, instead of receiving the full amount of aid determined by the 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.

With the S2 phase-in complete, the SFRA formula should have dictated how state aid would be allocated to each school district moving forward. However, as discussed earlier, NJDOE introduced a series of methodology adjustments that altered SFRA parameters and imposed caps on state aid increases (6%) and decreases (3%). These caps, by tying funding to prior year allocations rather than full funding, effectively shifted K-12 education funding in NJ back to an off-formula model.

To provide clarity, state aid was analyzed in two ways in this study. First, where the described methodology changes were applied consistently across all years in the study period. Second, where the changes were applied exclusively to FY 2026, with subsequent years reverting back to the default SFRA mechanisms. Comparing the two methods, the analysis found that the state's caps on aid reductions will work to dampen the region's projected future state aid losses by about \$2 million annually in aggregate. The largest impact is to Wallkill Valley with a projected FY 2027 formula aid amount of \$1.44 million and capped aid amount at \$3.05 million. The large projected state aid decrease is due to continued increases in projected equalized values and incomes in the district combined with modestly declining enrollment. The 3% cap on aid reductions, if continued, would cap the maximum annual aid reduction to less than \$100,000 and delays the loss of \$1.6 million that would have otherwise been removed by the SFRA formula.

The impact of caps on Hardyston, Franklin, and Ogdensburg are all minimal with the difference in state aid under each method less than \$50,000. Like Wallkill Valley, Hamburg will also benefit from the capped aid methodology. State aid to Hamburg is expected to decline in future years due to declining enrollment and continued increases to the district's equalized valuation and personal incomes. In FY 2027, Hamburg will see roughly \$640,000 more in state aid than the SFRA formula would have provided if the caps were not continued.

Tables 117 through 121 summarize the projections for status quo state aid with the capped methodology applied for fiscal year 2027 through 2031. An uncapped aid row has been added to highlight differences between the two scenarios. Actual FY 2026 state aid figures are also presented for convenience.

In the status quo where Wallkill Valley continues as a limited purpose regional, uncapped state aid is projected to decline in the near term through FY 2027 and then stabilize around \$1.5 million annually. However, as previously mentioned, continuing the state's capped aid methodology would instead have the district receive annual 3% reductions in aid through at least 2031 as aid moves

directionally towards the lower uncapped aid amount. As of this writing, it remains the consultants’ belief that aid caps will be continued for the foreseeable future due to their stabilizing nature.

TABLE 117  
Projected State Aid, Wallkill Valley, FY 2027-31

	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031
Equalization Aid	1,339,587	0	0	0	0	0
Transportation Aid	542,115	912,866	865,933	826,888	804,048	764,978
Special Education Aid	1,115,926	1,888,692	1,856,939	1,817,882	1,760,839	1,727,062
Security Aid	148,680	250,361	237,490	226,781	220,517	209,802
Total State Aid	3,146,308	3,051,919	2,960,361	2,871,550	2,785,404	2,701,842
Prior Year State Aid	3,243,616	3,146,308	3,051,919	2,960,361	2,871,550	2,785,404
YoY Difference (\$)	-97,308	-94,389	-91,558	-88,811	-86,147	-83,562
YoY Difference (%)	-3.00%	-3.00%	-3.00%	-3.00%	-3.00%	-3.00%
Uncapped Aid	2,687,615	1,441,192	1,431,613	1,459,905	1,517,851	1,517,702

The table above also highlights a marked shift in which aid categories state aid will be received and the amounts that will be received. Despite the aid caps used in FY 2026, the state’s implementation pegs each aid category’s value to the SFRA formula amount. Therefore, equalization aid is allowed to reach zero if called for under the formula, and the remaining aid categories will be adjusted upwards by the necessary amount to ensure a maximum total loss of 3%. This dynamic is evident in the Table 120 as equalization aid drops to zero while the categorical aid amounts all increase relative to their FY 2026 levels.

TABLE 118  
Projected State Aid, Franklin, FY 2027-31

	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031
Equalization Aid	3,812,868	4,016,009	3,852,911	3,886,110	4,083,248	4,231,436
Transportation Aid	76,649	95,112	99,023	100,089	103,752	107,450
Special Education Aid	699,909	729,936	732,312	750,926	799,613	798,434
Security Aid	131,225	162,834	169,529	171,354	177,625	183,957
Total State Aid	4,720,652	5,003,891	4,853,774	4,908,478	5,164,237	5,321,277
Prior Year State Aid	4,453,445	4,720,652	5,003,891	4,853,774	4,908,478	5,164,237
YoY Difference (\$)	267,207	283,239	-150,117	54,704	255,759	157,040
YoY Difference (%)	6.00%	6.00%	-3.00%	1.13%	5.21%	3.04%
Uncapped Aid	6,017,797	5,031,967	4,772,313	4,908,478	5,164,237	5,321,277

In the status quo scenario, Franklin continues operating its grades pK-8 district while students in grades 9-12 attend the regional high school. State aid is projected to increase throughout the studied period, driven largely by projected increases in enrollment and annual inflationary adjustments to the

underlying variables in the SFRA formula. For FY 2026, total state aid received with caps in place will run far below the district’s uncapped aid amount. However, by FY 2027, capped and uncapped aid becomes mostly aligned and by FY 2028, the district will receive the same amount of aid regardless of the caps as annual changes will remain under the positive six percent and negative three percent thresholds.

TABLE 119  
Projected State Aid, Hamburg, FY 2027-31

	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031
Equalization Aid	750,521	272,780	0	0	0	0
Transportation Aid	24,967	50,480	62,375	57,964	53,734	52,387
Special Education Aid	404,173	761,113	958,882	938,449	918,468	890,045
Security Aid	56,944	115,134	142,264	132,203	122,555	119,483
Total State Aid	1,236,605	1,199,507	1,163,522	1,128,616	1,094,758	1,061,915
Prior Year State Aid	1,176,209	1,236,605	1,199,507	1,163,522	1,128,616	1,094,758
YoY Difference (\$)	60,396	-37,098	-35,985	-34,906	-33,858	-32,843
YoY Difference (%)	5.13%	-3.00%	-3.00%	-3.00%	-3.00%	-3.00%
Uncapped Aid	1,236,605	559,755	431,934	436,660	461,496	460,942

Uncapped state aid to Hamburg is projected to decline steadily through FY 2028 and then stabilize between 400,000 and 500,000 annually. Like Wallkill Valley, Hamburg will benefit from the capped aid methodology as the maximum three percent annual reduction will stave off larger formula aid declines called for under SFRA. The aid caps will provide between \$600,000 and \$740,000 in additional funding for Hamburg through at least FY 2031.

Hamburg will also see a shift in the amounts received through each aid category. Equalization aid is projected to drop to zero as the district’s property wealth and income factors continue to rise. When this happens, the remaining categorical aid amounts will be adjusted upwards to ensure a total maximum annual aid loss of 3%.

TABLE 120  
Projected State Aid, Hardyston, FY 2027-31

	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031
Equalization Aid	0	0	0	0	0	0
Transportation Aid	534,889	560,612	545,824	549,393	543,626	552,555
Special Education Aid	688,271	736,986	752,383	775,682	799,613	807,020
Security Aid	88,190	92,432	89,993	90,582	89,631	91,103
Total State Aid	1,311,350	1,390,030	1,388,199	1,415,657	1,432,869	1,450,678
Prior Year State Aid	1,237,123	1,311,349	1,390,030	1,388,199	1,415,657	1,432,869
YoY Difference (\$)	74,227	78,681	-1,831	27,458	17,212	17,809
YoY Difference (%)	6.00%	6.00%	-0.13%	1.98%	1.22%	1.24%
Uncapped Aid	1,438,420	1,399,344	1,388,199	1,415,657	1,432,869	1,450,678

From FY 2027-31, Hardyston is projected to experience stable-to-increasing state aid. The relative stability in comparison to other districts in the region is due to the fact that Hardyston’s local fair share has historically exceeded its adequacy budget under the SFRA formula. As a result, the district does not receive equalization aid with its state aid, instead it is primarily composed of categorical aid, adjusting proportionally each year with changes in pupil enrollments.

The aid caps in FY 2026 impacted Hardyston negatively as the district would have received \$127,000 in additional aid in their absence. However, from FY 2027 through FY 2031, the difference between capped and uncapped is negligible with aid being equal under either scheme by FY 2028.

TABLE 121  
Projected State Aid, Ogdensburg, FY 2027-31

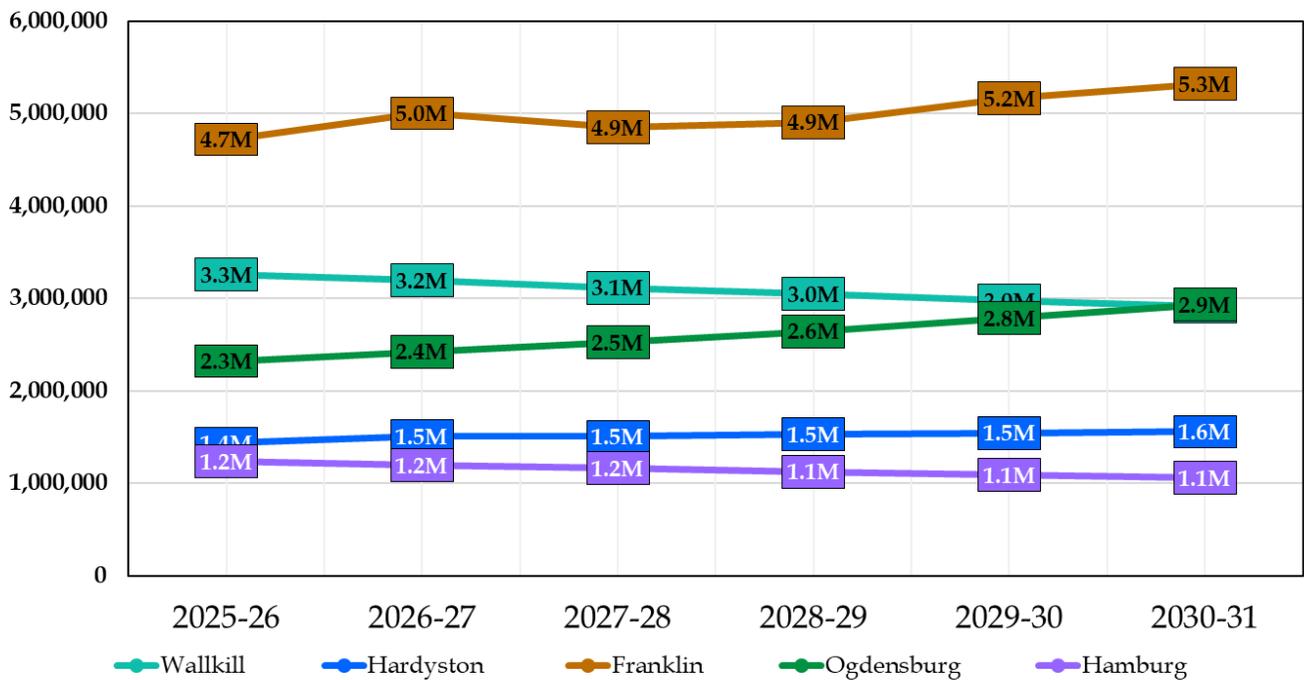
	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031
Equalization Aid	1,445,309	1,571,137	1,714,986	1,843,862	1,960,183	2,084,133
Transportation Aid	10,737	11,480	11,579	11,717	12,377	13,025
Special Education Aid	343,166	324,035	297,532	292,829	304,975	317,514
Security Aid	55,332	59,163	59,670	60,383	63,784	67,125
Total State Aid	1,854,544	1,965,817	2,083,766	2,208,792	2,341,319	2,481,798
Prior Year State Aid	1,779,591	1,854,544	1,965,817	2,083,766	2,208,792	2,341,319
YoY Difference (\$)	74,953	111,273	117,949	125,026	132,527	140,479
YoY Difference (%)	4.21%	6.00%	6.00%	6.00%	6.00%	6.00%
Uncapped Aid	1,854,544	2,011,091	2,323,033	2,614,240	2,713,951	2,818,438

State aid to Ogdensburg is expected to increase over the period, from \$1.97 million in FY 2027 to \$2.5 million in FY 2031, driven by an increasing projected enrollment trend and annual inflationary

adjustments to the underlying variables in the SFRA formula. Wealth factors in the district, while rising, are outpaced by increases in the district’s adequacy budget, leading to additional formula aid.

With the increasing aid trend described above, unsurprisingly, total state aid received with caps in place runs below uncapped aid amounts for all years in the studied period, as the six percent cap on aid increases mutes the broader increases called for under the SFRA formula. The average annual gap is \$280,000 over the five year period.

CHART 9  
Status Quo Projected State Aid in the Participating School Districts, FY 2027-31



Projected State Aid for an Expanded Regional School District

Having already presented estimated state aid under the status quo scenario for each participating district in the prior subsection, this one presents the comparable state aid figures for an enlarged, all purpose, regional consisting of all of the districts.

TABLE 122  
 Projected Capped State Aid without S3488 Protection, Expanded Regional, FY 2027-31 <sup>82</sup>

	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031
Equalization Aid	0	0	0	0	0
Transportation Aid	2,910,353	2,812,801	2,704,283	2,590,591	2,519,057
Special Education Aid	7,753,057	7,535,063	7,343,411	7,169,523	6,945,624
Security Aid	1,237,964	1,196,469	1,150,309	1,101,948	1,071,520
Total State Aid	11,901,374	11,544,333	11,198,003	10,862,063	10,536,201
Prior Year State Aid	12,269,458	11,901,374	11,544,333	11,198,003	10,862,063
YoY Difference (\$)	-368,084	-357,041	-346,330	-335,940	-325,862
YoY Difference (%)	-3.00%	-3.00%	-3.00%	-3.00%	-3.00%
Uncapped Aid	4,688,855	4,697,608	4,819,448	4,998,780	5,053,132

Table 122 summarizes the projected state aid with aid caps applied for FY 2027 through 2031. An uncapped aid row has been added to highlight differences between the two methods.

The enlarged regional is projected to see declining state aid through FY 2031 driven by underlying SFRA formula mechanics. The district would receive the maximum allowable annual reduction of three percent in each year but will benefit greatly from the capped state aid methodology. With no caps in place, the district would receive an average of \$6.4 million less in aid annually. The substantial difference in capped and uncapped aid warrants further investigation and is explained in detail below.

*The Discrepancy between Capped and Uncapped Aid*

As an enlarged regional district, the elementary and middle school student counts, demographics, property values, and aggregate personal incomes formerly attributed to the grades pK-8 districts all shift into the regional for purposes of calculating state aid pursuant to the SFRA funding formula. The shifting of individual community property values, in particular, into the regional district impacts the proposed regional district’s state aid in significant and interesting ways.

The status quo figures presented in the last subsection show that Franklin and Ogdensburg are both projected to receive substantial allocations of equalization aid through FY 2031. Equalization aid is only provided to districts deemed unable to raise adequate local funds by the SFRA formula. To make this determination, a local fair share (LFS) amount is calculated which represents the amount anticipated by the formula that a district is able to raise locally through school taxes based on its actual property wealth and income factors.

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<sup>82</sup> The first year of operation of the enlarged regional is assumed to be the 2026-27 school year. S3488 (P.L.2021, c. 402) protection, referenced in the title, is explained in detail later in this subsection.

If the LFS is higher than a district’s adequacy budget (i.e., the total dollar amount needed to provide a thorough and efficient education), no equalization aid is provided. Likewise, if the LFS is lower than the district’s adequacy amount, equalization aid is provided in an amount sufficient to bring the district up to adequacy.

The reader may question how accurately the state’s LFS formula captures each district’s actual ability to levy taxes. This question has been the subject of much debate in recent years as property wealth, measured by aggregate equalized valuation within each community, has increased substantially and unpredictably in many districts leading to LFS amounts far higher than current taxes. When this occurs, districts receive less state aid but may not be able to offset losses with sufficient levy increases, either by choice or by defeated referendums.

The attention being paid to LFS in this analysis is justified as it greatly impacts the state aid calculation under a regionalization scenario. The table below presents an example of how the property wealth in each district impacts the amount of equalization aid to be allocated. The table examines projected FY 2027 data and compares the adequacy budget, local fair share, and resulting state equalization aid for each district in the status quo and for an enlarged regional.

TABLE 123  
Projected Uncapped K-12 Equalization Aid, Wallkill Region, FY 2027

	Status Quo					Expanded Regional
	Wallkill	Franklin	Hamburg	Hardyston	Ogdensburg	
Adequacy Budget	12,861,430	11,002,646	4,486,225	10,483,906	5,319,739	44,153,947
Local Fair Share	13,131,519	6,964,104	4,358,931	17,545,632	3,712,417	45,712,603
Equalization Aid	0	4,038,542	127,294	0	1,607,322	0

In an enlarged regional, individual district dynamics give way to the aggregate dynamics over all constituents. To illustrate, consider Franklin and Hardyston separately for FY 2027. Franklin’s local fair share is \$6.96M against a \$11M adequacy budget, qualifying for \$4M in equalization aid. Hardyston’s \$17.5M local fair share exceeds its \$10.5M adequacy budget, receiving no equalization aid. When combined, their \$24.5M total local fair share would exceed their \$21.5M combined adequacy budget, eliminating equalization aid entirely despite Franklin’s individual need.

When all district data is included, the same wealth aggregation effect is present and produces less total state aid than as separate districts. Table 124 provides a clear summary of the effect over all aid categories and all districts. When separately constituted in the status quo, the five districts in the region would receive \$10.4 million in aggregate uncapped state aid. When consolidated into a single enlarged regional district, no equalization aid is provided and aggregate state aid totals \$4.7 million. Under the current statutory framework, the single consolidated district receives disadvantaged treatment under SFRA.

TABLE 124  
Comparison of Projected Uncapped K-12 State Aid, Wallkill Region, FY 2027

	<b>All Constituents</b>	<b>Expanded Regional</b>	<b>Difference</b>
Equalization Aid	5,773,158	0	-5,773,158
Transportation Aid	1,126,394	1,146,609	+20,215
Special Education Aid	3,054,518	3,054,518	0
Security Aid	489,279	487,728	-1,551
Total State Aid	10,443,349	4,688,855	-5,754,494

*Changes to State Aid for Regional School Districts*

P.L.2021, c.402 updated several aspects of the law governing school district regionalization as it pertains to state aid. First, it created an alternative method of determining state aid for regional school districts participating in a feasibility study under a SREP grant. The alternative method holds the enlarged or newly created regional harmless to the prior year such that the new regional’s funding cannot fall below the total sum of all constituent district state aid in the year prior to regionalization. This is referred to as the “locked aid” benefit in this subsection.

Second, it created an incentive for school districts participating in feasibility studies under an SREP grant by slowing down any state aid reductions that may occur through FY 2029. In practical terms, the incentive allowed districts to retain a modest amount of state aid that otherwise would have been removed. This is referred to as the “slower phase-out” benefit in this subsection that follows.

These changes to state law provide important protections against the type of aid reductions described above that may result from regionalization. But as we will see, the existing protections are not enough on their own to bring the enlarged regional’s aid up to levels that match state aid allocations to the separate districts. Additionally, the statutory language currently only provides protection through FY 2029, at which point the full weight of the effect would be felt by the enlarged regional.

The locked aid provision introduced by S3488 secures the sum of state aid from all constituent districts in the year prior to regionalization if it is higher than the aid that would otherwise have been provided to the regional district; a scenario present in this region. That is, the total aid from all districts in the year prior to regionalization becomes the minimum amount that can be received by the enlarged regional annually through FY 2029.

Complicating the matter are the previously discussed caps on aid increases and reductions. Table 125 presented the uncapped aid figures which represent what would happen under SFRA with no aid caps in place. The picture changes considerably when we shift our lens to what would happen if the state continues applying aid caps. Again, the table below examines FY 2027 data.

TABLE 125  
Comparison of Projected Capped K-12 State Aid, Wallkill Region, FY 2027

	All Constituents	Expanded Regional	Difference
Equalization Aid	5,859,927	0	-5,859,927
Transportation Aid	1,630,550	2,910,353	1,279,803
Special Education Aid	4,440,763	7,753,057	3,312,294
Security Aid	679,924	1,237,964	558,041
Total State Aid	12,611,163	11,901,374	-709,789

Under these conditions, an enlarged regional would receive roughly \$710,000 less in state aid than the aggregate total state aid over all constituent districts in the status quo. While still less than the status quo, the capped aid methodology shrinks the gap from -\$5.7 million to -\$710,000, a mere fraction of the gap present under uncapped aid conditions.

Further, when the locked aid protection is layered on top of capped aid scenarios, state aid in the enlarged regional would be higher still. Since total state aid in the region in FY 2026 will be \$12.3 million, this total becomes the minimum amount that may be received in the regional annually through FY 2029. Each year, a check is performed and if the resulting aid would be less, the minimum amount would be provided instead. The next table presents projected capped state aid with the locked aid protection.

TABLE 126  
Projected Capped State Aid with Locked Aid Protection, Expanded Regional, FY 2027-31<sup>83</sup>

	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031
Equalization Aid	7,348,285	7,348,285	7,348,285	0	0
Transportation Aid	1,189,356	1,189,356	1,189,356	2,910,353	2,812,801
Special Education Aid	3,251,445	3,251,445	3,251,445	7,753,057	7,535,063
Security Aid	480,371	480,371	480,371	1,237,964	1,196,469
Total State Aid	12,269,458	12,269,458	12,269,458	11,901,374	11,544,333
Prior Year State Aid	-	12,269,458	12,269,458	12,269,458	11,901,374
YoY Difference (\$)	-	0	0	-368,084	-357,041
YoY Difference (%)	-	0	0	-3.00%	-3.00%

Examining the figures for fiscal years 2027 through 2029, we can see that the locked aid provision was indeed triggered and the minimum locked state aid amount of \$12.3 million is provided. Following the protection's expiration, aid in FY 2030 and 2031 begins to decline by the maximum allowable amount of three percent. Under these circumstances, the largest sum of state aid would be

<sup>83</sup> The first year of operation of the enlarged regional is assumed to be the 2026-27 school year.

received by the separate districts in the status quo, followed by locked state aid in the enlarged regional, and finally the state aid with no locked aid protection.

CHART 10  
Effect of Capped Locked Aid in the Enlarged Regional, FY 2027-31

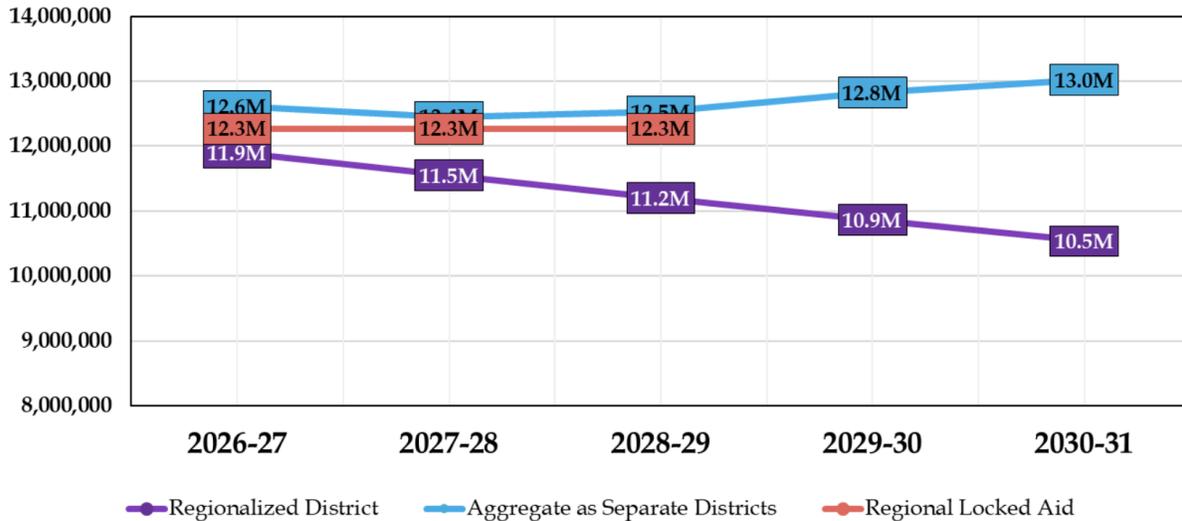
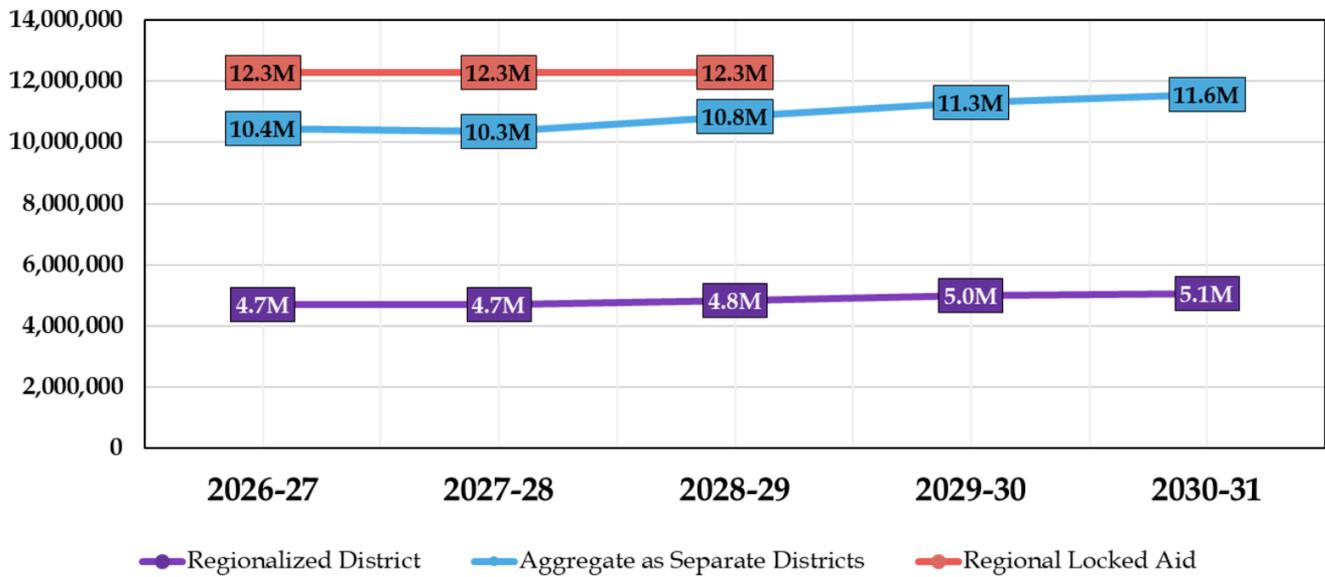


Chart 10 helps visualize the concept. It demonstrates the wide gap between separate district aid (blue) and regional aid (purple) through 2029. While the locked aid provision (red) provides some protection, it cannot fully offset the aid reduction ultimately caused by the region’s combined property wealth calculations and declining enrollment.

Having previously presented uncapped aid figures, Chart 11 rounds out the analysis and shows how the locked aid protection would impact aid if the caps on aid increases and reductions are not applied in the future. The difference between the two scenarios is stark. Since aid levels are allowed to return to their SFRA-determined amounts beginning in FY 2027, the locked aid benefit keeps the regional district’s state higher than the total aid received by the separate districts in the status quo. The benefit would provide roughly \$2 million in additional aid in 2027 and 2028 and another \$1.5 million in 2029. Beginning in 2030 however, the protection expires and the regional district’s aid reverts back to the uncapped aid provided to it under SFRA, which, as we discussed earlier in this subsection, is substantially lower due to being disadvantaged as a result of combining the region’s property wealth.

CHART 11  
Effect of Uncapped Locked Aid in the Enlarged Regional, FY 2027-31



*The “Slower Phase-out” Benefit*

In addition to locked aid protection, another provision of P.L.2021, c.402 offered districts who participate in regionalization studies an important protection against state aid losses by prorating the amount of state aid to be removed in the event a district would see less aid relative to the prior school year. The exact proportion used depends on the year and was defined in the legislation. To be eligible, a district must: (1) be a participating district in an SREP grant; (2) have a positive state aid differential; and (3) be within two years of the SREP grant application approval date. Of the participating districts, only Wallkill Valley satisfies all three conditions.

However, the caps on state aid increases and decreases put into place in FY 2026 described earlier in this subsection nullify the effect of this protection by eliminating any scenario where an eligible district would be better off, and would therefore, voluntarily elect to receive state aid pursuant to the provision. For this reason, it is the consultant’s belief that no “slower-phase-out” benefit is available to any of the districts participating in this SREP grant.

Additionally, it should be noted that, to date, no district has yet been both eligible for and received the state aid benefit described above. P.L.2021, c.402 was enacted in early 2022, and the Department of Community Affairs only began awarding SREP grants in 2023. Even if the aid caps were not in effect, it remains unclear how NJDOE would implement this provision of the law.

## *Summary*

Having described in detail the various factors and dynamics that impact the regional district's state aid, a summary of the conclusions drawn from the above presentation of state aid is warranted.

1. Wallkill Valley will see stable 3% declines in capped state aid through FY 2031 and a shift in aid from equalization aid into the remaining categorical aid categories.
2. Franklin will see mostly steady capped state aid increases through FY 2031, rising from \$4.7M in FY 2026 to \$5.3M in FY 2031 with state aid declining only in FY 2028.
3. Hamburg will see stable 3% declines in capped state aid through 2031 and a shift in aid from equalization into the three categorical aid amounts, primarily special education.
4. Hardyston will receive stable-to-increasing capped state aid as its categorical aid adjusts annually with changes in pupil enrollments.
5. Ogdensburg will see increasing capped state aid through FY 2031 as projected enrollment increases. Aid increases will hit the cap of 6% in all years.
6. Without the state's new capped aid methodology, state aid in an enlarged regional will decline sharply as the effect of combining the region's property wealth creates less favorable treatment under the SFRA formula. With caps in place, projected declines in state aid for the enlarged regional would be one-twelfth the size of the decline under uncapped aid.
7. Despite the aid caps, combined state aid in the regional configuration would remain below the total aggregate state aid of the constituent districts if they remain separate.
8. State aid in the regional district configuration benefits from recent changes to school regionalization law. The locked aid provision enacted by S3488 would bolster the regional school district's state aid in the regional scenario through 2029.
9. With aid caps in place, the locked aid benefit averages roughly \$720,000 annually through FY 2029. Without aid caps, the benefit becomes much more significant, averaging roughly \$7.5M annually through FY 2029.
10. With aid caps in place, the benefits provided by S3488 aren't enough to bring the regional district's aid above the total state aid that would be received if the participating school districts remain separately constituted. With no aid caps, the benefit provided by S3488 would have the enlarged regional receive more state aid than as separate districts through FY 2029 when the benefit expires, at which point the regional district's aid would drop substantially to levels below what the separate districts would receive in the status quo.

11. A state administrative interpretation and revised legislation are being sought to ensure that school districts pursuing the benefits of regionalization would be held harmless in future state aid calculations.
12. No participating district in the region will benefit from the slower phase-out benefit introduced in S3488.

## 26. Local Tax Levies

### Tax Levy Apportionment

Understanding tax distribution among participating communities represents one of the most critical aspects of every regionalization study as the fundamental question underlying all apportionment calculations is how tax burden will be shared among individual families in each community.

The purpose of this analysis is to: (1) evaluate the tax impact of regionalization on each municipality; (2) identify tax apportionment methods that minimize aggregate costs while distributing burden fairly among participating communities; (3) assess the feasibility of achieving universal tax benefits across constituent districts; and (4) identify potential barriers to regionalization and possible mitigation strategies. This analysis is conducted in accordance with SREP guidelines, which require careful consideration of the tax impact on constituent municipalities as part of any regionalization effort.

### *Understanding Tax Apportionment Methods*

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, an apportionment method must be chosen. Current law provides that taxes may be apportioned on the basis of the portion of each municipality's equalized property valuation (EPV) allocated to the regional; the number of students enrolled (ENR) in the regional from each municipality; or any combination of apportionment based on EPV and ENR. The current limited-purpose Wallkill Valley apportions taxes based solely on EPV.

These two primary methods reflect fundamentally different approaches to sharing costs. EPV apportionment distributes expenses based on each community's capacity to pay, operating on the principle that wealthier communities should contribute proportionally more to support education.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Equalized property valuations (EPVs) are assessments of property values used to ensure fair distribution of tax burdens and state aid across municipalities. The "equalization" process standardizes assessed property values by compensating for differences in local assessment practices and market conditions across the state. The process generally involves comparing the assessed values of recently sold properties with their sale price and using that data to broadly adjust the community's aggregate assessed values. Using EPVs rather than local assessed values, the state can more accurately compare the relative wealth of different communities. For example, if two identical houses are assessed at different values in different municipalities due to varying assessment practices, the equalization process adjusts these values to reflect their true market value and ensures fair comparisons across district lines.

By contrast, ENR apportionment allocates costs according to each community's usage of the regional district, following a service-usage philosophy where communities contribute based on how many students they send to the district. State law also permits any combination of these two methods, allowing communities to negotiate apportionment formulas that balance ability to pay with service utilization. This flexibility creates a spectrum of possible tax distributions, each producing different impacts on participating communities.

The fairness of tax apportionment methods in regional school districts has long been debated in NJ. At its core, the debate pits EPV methods, which benefit districts with lower property wealth, against ENR-based approaches, which tend to favor wealthier areas. This tension between apportionment strategies has been a recurring theme in school district regionalization since the original regionalization law was adopted in 1931 and reflects competing philosophies about fairness and community responsibility that extend far beyond technical formula considerations.

### *Analytical Methodology*

The flexibility in combining apportionment methods creates extensive analytical possibilities. Since each method can be weighted anywhere from zero to one hundred percent, this analysis examined one hundred and one different apportionment scenarios in whole number increments. These scenarios range from pure property value apportionment on one end to pure enrollment apportionment on the other, and every possible combination in between. For example, one scenario might weight EPVs at 60% and ENR at 40%, while another might reverse these weightings. Each combination produces a unique distribution of tax responsibilities across the participating communities that reflect different balances of ability-to-pay and service-usage principles.

The detailed analysis that follows provides a foundation for informed decision-making about the most appropriate approach for the proposed regional district and allows stakeholders to understand the full range of possible outcomes under regionalization rather than being limited to a single apportionment assumption. The analysis identifies which apportionment scenarios would provide the greatest aggregate financial benefit to the participating municipalities, while also revealing how different scenarios might affect individual communities differently.

### *Historical and Projected Property Wealth*

To evaluate the financial impact of regionalization, this analysis must project both EPVs and ENRs into the future using consistent assumptions about growth and change over time. The consultants analyzed up to forty years of historical data on enrollments, equalized property valuations, and assessed property values to establish reliable projection methods for each participating community. These historical patterns provide the foundation for estimating future property values and enrollment changes that will affect each community's tax responsibility.

Under the status quo scenario, the projection methodology reflects typical growth patterns for school districts by assuming that each district's tax levy will increase by the maximum allowable two

percent annually. This captures how costs would likely evolve if each community maintains its existing operating structure while accounting for normal inflation and program expansion.

For the regionalization scenario, the same projection methods to estimate total costs for the combined regional district are applied. The methodology then incorporates identified cost savings stemming from regionalization efficiencies before using projected EPV and ENR figures to determine how net costs would be distributed among the communities through the process.

This approach ensures that both scenarios use identical assumptions about underlying economic and demographic trends and allows the analysis to isolate the specific impacts of regionalization from other variables that affect costs over time. Tables 127 and 128 contain the historical and projected EPVs for each municipality. Data for each year represent the EPVs used in state aid and tax apportionment calculations. For example, the EPVs listed for 2026 are from October or January of the 2024-25 fiscal year.

TABLE 127  
Historical EPVs, FY 2021-26

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Franklin	422,442,694	437,123,001	488,423,832	539,170,684	566,945,074	663,565,483
Hamburg	271,266,796	276,306,809	303,309,637	332,920,058	370,948,815	445,803,102
Hardyston	1,147,553,722	1,160,627,950	1,188,640,243	1,320,151,563	1,518,441,308	1,819,866,064
Ogdensburg	198,610,105	202,485,577	207,820,790	240,029,147	265,560,498	299,573,602
Total	2,039,873,317	2,076,543,337	2,188,194,502	2,432,271,452	2,721,895,695	3,228,808,251

TABLE 128  
Projected EPVs, FY 2027-31

	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031
Franklin	722,169,871	779,943,461	826,740,069	868,077,072	911,480,926
Hamburg	490,383,412	529,614,085	561,390,930	589,460,477	618,933,501
Hardyston	1,899,262,393	2,051,203,385	2,174,275,588	2,282,989,367	2,397,138,836
Ogdensburg	318,212,132	343,669,103	364,289,249	382,503,711	401,628,897
Total	3,430,027,809	3,704,430,034	3,926,695,836	4,123,030,627	4,329,182,159

After reaching highs in around 2009, EPVs in each municipality mostly declined or trended sideways through 2019 and have begun to rise through the present. The future projections factor in longer-term secular trends informed by historical data dating back to 1985. Based on those trends, equalized values were forecast for 2027 through 2031. Generally, the model anticipates the upward trend observed over the last decade to continue through at least 2031.

Under the current system, each municipality's total EPV is split between its elementary district and the regional high school district based on student enrollment patterns. The percentage of a municipality's students enrolled in grades K-8 determines the share of total community equalized value attributed to the elementary district, while the percentage of students in high school determines the portion allocated to the regional district.

TABLE 129  
EPVs Attributed to Each School District, FY 2022-26

	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Franklin Total	437,123,001	488,423,832	539,170,684	566,945,074	663,565,483
K-8 Portion	306,423,224	345,217,964	394,025,936	420,956,717	499,731,165
9-12 Portion	130,699,777	143,205,868	145,144,748	145,988,357	163,834,318
Hamburg Total	276,306,809	303,309,637	332,920,058	370,948,815	445,803,102
K-8 Portion	189,049,119	203,551,097	213,701,385	224,164,369	276,843,726
9-12 Portion	87,257,690	99,758,540	119,218,673	146,784,446	168,959,376
Hardyston Total	1,160,627,950	1,188,640,243	1,320,151,563	1,518,441,308	1,819,866,064
K-8 Portion	825,786,786	830,027,482	918,825,488	1,063,212,604	1,313,761,312
9-12 Portion	334,841,164	358,612,761	401,326,075	455,228,704	506,104,752
Ogdensburg Total	202,485,577	207,820,790	240,029,147	265,560,498	299,573,602
K-8 Portion	146,862,789	150,088,175	173,301,044	193,567,047	214,734,358
9-12 Portion	55,622,788	57,732,615	66,728,103	71,993,451	84,839,244

TABLE 130  
Percentage of EPV Attributed to Each School District, FY 2022-26

	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Franklin K-8 Portion	70.1%	70.7%	73.1%	74.3%	75.3%
Franklin 9-12 Portion	29.9%	29.3%	26.9%	25.8%	24.7%
Hamburg K-8 Portion	68.4%	67.1%	64.2%	60.4%	62.1%
Hamburg 9-12 Portion	31.6%	32.9%	35.8%	39.6%	37.9%
Hardyston K-8 Portion	71.2%	69.8%	69.6%	70.0%	72.2%
Hardyston 9-12 Portion	28.9%	30.2%	30.4%	30.0%	27.8%
Ogdensburg K-8 Portion	72.5%	72.2%	72.2%	72.9%	71.7%
Ogdensburg 9-12 Portion	27.5%	27.8%	27.8%	27.1%	28.3%

The historical data highlight the trends in EPV allocation patterns over the past five years. While the four communities maintain similar allocation ratios, Franklin and Hamburg have experienced significant changes in the share of EPV attributed to the regional high school. Franklin's regional

allocation had decreased from 29.9% in FY 2022 to 24.7% in FY 2026 (-5.2), with its K-8 allocation inversely increasing from 70.1% to 75.3% (+5.2). Hamburg shows the opposite pattern, with its regional allocation increasing from 31.6% in FY 2022 to 37.9% in FY 2026 (+6.3) and its K-8 portion decreasing from 68.4% to 62.1% (-6.3). Hardyston and Ogdensburg have had relatively stable allocations throughout the previous five years with Hardyston’s regional allocation decreasing by one percentage point and Ogdensburg’s increasing by about one percentage point. Of the four communities in FY 2026, Hamburg’s share stands out with a significantly larger share of its enrollment, and thus EPV, dedicated to the regional high school.

**TABLE 131**  
**EPVs Attributed to Each School District, Status Quo, FY 2027-31**

	<b>2027</b>	<b>2028</b>	<b>2029</b>	<b>2030</b>	<b>2031</b>
Franklin Total	722,169,871	779,943,461	826,740,069	868,077,072	911,480,926
K-8 Portion	553,037,687	600,556,465	639,979,487	674,843,116	718,246,969
9-12 Portion	169,132,184	179,386,996	186,760,582	193,233,956	193,233,956
Hamburg Total	490,383,412	529,614,085	561,390,930	589,460,477	618,933,501
K-8 Portion	306,048,288	328,572,578	344,076,501	357,802,509	380,334,636
9-12 Portion	184,335,125	201,041,507	217,314,429	231,657,967	238,598,864
Hardyston Total	1,899,262,393	2,051,203,385	2,174,275,588	2,282,989,367	2,397,138,836
K-8 Portion	1,349,425,930	1,459,636,329	1,554,607,045	1,605,854,721	1,708,920,276
9-12 Portion	549,836,463	591,567,056	619,668,543	677,134,646	688,218,560
Ogdensburg Total	318,212,132	343,669,103	364,289,249	382,503,711	401,628,897
K-8 Portion	242,159,433	267,133,994	285,602,771	301,374,674	321,102,303
9-12 Portion	76,052,700	76,535,109	78,686,478	81,129,037	80,526,594

**TABLE 132**  
**Projected EPV Percentages Attributed to Each School District, Status Quo, FY 2027-31**

	<b>2027</b>	<b>2028</b>	<b>2029</b>	<b>2030</b>	<b>2031</b>
Franklin K-8 Portion	76.6%	77.0%	77.4%	77.7%	78.8%
Franklin 9-12 Portion	23.4%	23.0%	22.6%	22.3%	21.2%
Hamburg K-8 Portion	62.4%	62.0%	61.3%	60.7%	61.5%
Hamburg 9-12 Portion	37.6%	38.0%	38.7%	39.3%	38.5%
Hardyston K-8 Portion	71.1%	71.2%	71.5%	70.3%	71.3%
Hardyston 9-12 Portion	29.0%	28.8%	28.5%	29.7%	28.7%
Ogdensburg K-8 Portion	76.1%	77.7%	78.4%	78.8%	80.0%
Ogdensburg 9-12 Portion	23.9%	22.3%	21.6%	21.2%	20.0%

The projection model indicates that K-8 allocation percentages will increase in both Franklin and Ogdensburg over the analysis period while Hamburg declines slightly and Hardyston remains stable. Franklin’s K-8 allocation is expected to rise from 76.6% to 78.8% by FY 2031, while Ogdensburg’s allocation increases from 76.1% to 80.0%. Hardyston shows the smallest change with K-8 allocation rising from 71.1% to 71.3%. Hamburg’s allocation declines from 62.4% to 61.5% by FY 2031.

Comparing the projections to the trends over the most recent five years, Franklin’s rising K-8 share is expected to continue while Hamburg’s declining K-8 share is projected to slow and stabilize by 2031. Hardyston will see similar allocation for both K-8 and 9-12 from FY 2022 to FY 2031. Ogdensburg has the largest shift in historical to projected allocations. While remaining relatively stable from FY 2022 to FY 2026, K-8 enrollments, and by extension K-8 allocation of EPV, are projected to increase to 80% in FY 2031 from 76.1% in FY 2026. This rise in K-8 allocation and the corresponding decline in 9-12 allocation is projected to lead to a two-to-three percentage point decrease in the district’s share of costs in the regional high school in the status quo.

Next, the percentages assigned to grades 9-12 are applied to the total community equalized valuations to calculate the equalized valuation attributed to Wallkill Valley from all constituent municipalities. This allows us to examine the share of total regional district equalized valuation contributed by each community. Tables 133 and 134 present these figures historically and estimated through FY 2031.

TABLE 133  
Allocation of EPV to Wallkill Valley, FY 2022-26

	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Wallkill Valley Total	608,421,419	659,309,784	732,417,599	819,994,958	923,737,690
Franklin Portion	130,699,777	143,205,868	145,144,748	145,988,357	163,834,318
Hamburg Portion	87,257,690	99,758,540	119,218,673	146,784,446	168,959,376
Hardyston Portion	334,841,164	358,612,761	401,326,075	455,228,704	506,104,752
Ogdensburg Portion	55,622,788	57,732,615	66,728,103	71,993,451	84,839,244
Franklin Share	21.5%	21.7%	19.8%	17.8%	17.7%
Hamburg Share	14.3%	15.1%	16.3%	17.9%	18.3%
Hardyston Share	55.0%	54.4%	54.8%	55.5%	54.8%
Ogdensburg Share	9.1%	8.8%	9.1%	8.8%	9.2%

The percentages shown above reflect that, at present, roughly 55% of Wallkill Valley’s total EPV comes from Hardyston, 18% from Franklin and Hamburg, and the remaining 9% from Ogdensburg. These percentages become the basis of the tax levy apportionment calculation used to determine what tax amounts must be levied in each municipality.

TABLE 134  
Allocation of EPV to Wallkill Valley, Status Quo, FY 2027-31

	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031
Wallkill Valley Total	979,356,471	1,048,530,668	1,102,430,031	1,183,155,607	1,200,577,974
Franklin Portion	169,132,184	179,386,996	186,760,582	193,233,956	193,233,956
Hamburg Portion	184,335,125	201,041,507	217,314,429	231,657,967	238,598,864
Hardyston Portion	549,836,463	591,567,056	619,668,543	677,134,646	688,218,560
Ogdensburg Portion	76,052,700	76,535,109	78,686,478	81,129,037	80,526,594
Franklin Share	17.3%	17.1%	16.9%	16.3%	16.1%
Hamburg Share	18.8%	19.2%	19.7%	19.6%	19.9%
Hardyston Share	56.1%	56.4%	56.2%	57.2%	57.3%
Ogdensburg Share	7.8%	7.3%	7.1%	6.9%	6.7%

Under the status quo scenario, the projection model indicates modest shifts in contribution patterns through FY 2031. Hamburg and Hardyston’s share of Wallkill Valley’s total EPV will increase by 1.1 and 1.2 points, respectively. Conversely, Franklin’s and Ogdensburg’s share will decrease by 1.2 and 1.1 points over the same period.

Shifting away from the status quo into the regionalization scenario being studied, the EPV picture changes considerably. Since all of the pK-8 districts would be consolidated, municipal EPVs will no longer be split according to the process outlined above. Instead, each community’s total municipal EPV will be used for tax apportionment purposes in the all-purpose regional district. This will significantly expand the EPV base as the K-8 property wealth, which currently represents an average of 70% of each municipality's total, becomes incorporated into the regional’s apportionment calculation.

TABLE 135  
Allocation of EPV, Enlarged Regional, FY 2027-31

	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031
Regional Total EPV	3,430,027,809	3,704,430,034	3,926,695,836	4,123,030,627	4,329,182,159
Franklin	722,169,871	779,943,461	826,740,069	868,077,072	911,480,926
Hamburg	490,383,412	529,614,085	561,390,930	589,460,477	618,933,501
Hardyston	1,899,262,393	2,051,203,385	2,174,275,588	2,282,989,367	2,397,138,836
Ogdensburg	318,212,132	343,669,103	364,289,249	382,503,711	401,628,897
Franklin Share	21.1%	21.1%	21.1%	21.1%	21.1%
Hamburg Share	14.3%	14.3%	14.3%	14.3%	14.3%
Hardyston Share	55.4%	55.4%	55.4%	55.4%	55.4%
Ogdensburg Share	9.3%	9.3%	9.3%	9.3%	9.3%

Table 135 shows how EPVs are projected to be allocated among the four municipalities under the enlarged regional scenario. The allocation percentages remain constant over the five-year projection because the model applied uniform growth caps across all communities. Historical EPV data for each municipality show steep, accelerating increases that are inherently difficult to project with confidence. To avoid overstating potential future growth, the model applies growth caps that take into account economic factors like mortgage rates, housing availability, and population growth patterns. For FY 2027–2031, these caps were set at 10%, 8%, 6%, 5%, and 5% respectively.

Since all four municipalities hit these growth caps, their property values increased at the same rate, which means their relative shares remained unchanged. It must be noted that this result reflects a modeling safeguard rather than the consultant’s expectation that future growth will be perfectly uniform across communities.

Under pure EPV-based apportionment, the method currently in use by Wallkill Valley, the percentage distributions above would be each community's share of the regional district’s costs. In an enlarged all-purpose regional district, the total equalized valuation base climbs to a high of \$4.3 billion by FY 2031 from a starting point of \$3.4 billion in FY 2027. Hardyston will still represent the largest EPV share at 55.4% in FY 2027, one percentage point lower than the average share it comprises in the regional high school in the status quo scenario (56.7%). Similarly, Hamburg’s share is also reduced when compared to its share in the status quo (14.3% vs. 19.4%). Shares in both Franklin and Ogdensburg are higher relative to their shares in the status quo (21.1% vs. 16.7% and 9.3% vs. 7.2%, respectively).

As previously mentioned, while EPV represents one method for apportioning costs among constituent communities, state law also permits cost apportionment based on student enrollment. The following subsection examines the ENR patterns across the district for the same time period and provides a comparison of how these two different apportionment methods would impact each municipality's share of the tax levy.

#### *Historical and Projected Enrollment*

State law requires regional districts to use average daily enrollment (ADE) for cost apportionment rather than point-in-time student counts. ADE represents the average number of students enrolled over the course of a school year, calculated by dividing the total number of days all students are enrolled by the number of days school is in session. The timing of cost apportionment calculations also requires using prebudget year enrollments for planning purposes. For example, FY 2027 calculations will be based on actual attendance patterns from the 2025-26 school year to ensure that apportionment reflects demonstrated enrollment patterns rather than projections. Additionally, students enrolled through the Interdistrict School Choice Program are required to be excluded from the counts.

TABLE 136  
Historical Prebudget Year ADE by Municipality, FY 2022-26

	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Franklin	612.0	614.0	587.0	602.0	640.0
Hamburg	342.0	374.0	377.0	369.0	357.5
Hardyston	832.0	832.0	842.0	814.0	766.0
Ogdensburg	273.0	270.0	277.0	278.5	286.0
Total ENR	2,059.0	2,090.0	2,083.0	2,063.5	2,049.5
Franklin Share	29.7%	29.4%	28.2%	29.2%	31.2%
Hamburg Share	16.6%	17.9%	18.1%	17.9%	17.4%
Hardyston Share	40.4%	39.8%	40.4%	39.4%	37.4%
Ogdensburg Share	13.3%	12.9%	13.3%	13.5%	14.0%

Total ADE across the four municipalities has fluctuated over the past five years, showing an overall slightly declining trend from 2,059 students in FY 2022 to 2,049.5 in FY 2026. Examining each municipality, Hardyston consistently accounts for the largest share, but has seen its enrollment decline from 832 in FY 2022 to 766 students (-7.9%) in FY 2026. Franklin’s enrollment rose to 614 through FY 2023 before pulling back in FY 2024 to 587 and climbing to 640 students, up 5% over the period. Hamburg also shows some variability, with enrollment initially rising to 377 students through FY 2024 before declining to 357.5 in FY 2026, ending the period with an increase of 4.5%. Ogdensburg has experienced the most consistent growth pattern, with enrollment steadily increasing from 273 to 286 students (+4.8%) through FY 2026.

TABLE 137  
Projected ADE in an Enlarged Regional, FY 2027-31

	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031
Franklin	611.5	617.7	637.6	657.9	669.1
Hamburg	337.9	335.1	327.6	330.8	326.8
Hardyston	747.2	726.4	729.1	728.6	723.6
Ogdensburg	297.3	318.3	335.2	344.6	354.1
Total ENR	1,994.0	1,997.5	2,029.6	2,062.0	2,073.5
Franklin Share	30.7%	30.9%	31.4%	31.9%	32.3%
Hamburg Share	16.9%	16.8%	16.1%	16.0%	15.8%
Hardyston Share	37.5%	36.4%	35.9%	35.3%	34.9%
Ogdensburg Share	14.9%	15.9%	16.5%	16.7%	17.1%

Aligned with growth rates determined by this study’s demographer, total enrollment in the region is projected to initially continue its decline, dropping to 1,994 students in FY 2027 before rising to

2073.5 by FY 2031 exceeding current levels. Franklin’s ENR share is expected to increase modestly by 1.6 percentage points to 32.3%. Similarly, Ogdensburg’s share will increase by 2.2 points from 14.9% to 17.1%. Conversely, shares in Hamburg and Hardyston will both decline 1.1 and 2.6 percentage points, respectively. These ENR share changes have direct implications for cost apportionment under ENR-based scenarios. Communities with increasing ENR shares would bear proportionally larger shares of regional costs, while communities with declining shares would see their cost responsibilities decrease accordingly.

The patterns in ENR and EPV across municipalities warrant a direct comparison to fully understand their implications for tax apportionment. The following table and chart present average shares over the five-year period (FY 2027-31) using both methods and highlights the key differences between property values and student enrollment in the communities in the region.

**TABLE 138**  
**Summary Comparison, Enlarged Regional, FY 2027-31**

	<b>Avg. EPV Share</b>	<b>Avg. ENR Share</b>	<b>Difference</b>
Franklin	21.1%	31.4%	10.4%
Hamburg	14.3%	16.3%	2.0%
Hardyston	55.4%	36.0%	-19.4%
Ogdensburg	9.3%	16.2%	7.0%

The comparison reveals significant disparities in how costs would be allocated under each apportionment method. Hardyston would contribute 55.4% of costs under EPV but only 36% under ENR-based apportionment, a 19 percentage point difference in its financial responsibility as it has property wealth that exceeds its proportional ENR in the regional district. Franklin, Ogdensburg and Hamburg show the inverse pattern. Franklin would contribute 21.1% of costs compared to 31.4% under ENR, a difference of 10 percentage points. Ogdensburg would contribute 9.3% under EPV but 16.2% under ENR, meaning it would pay 7 percentage points more under the ENR method. Hamburg would contribute 14.3% under EPV apportionment but 16.3% under ENR, a difference of 2 percentage points.

These percentage differences translate directly into varying tax burden distributions depending on the apportionment method chosen. Hardyston would benefit financially from ENR-based apportionment, as its property wealth exceeds its student ENR proportions. Franklin, Ogdensburg, and Hamburg would prefer EPV apportionment, as their student ENR exceeds their property wealth contributions.

*Tax Impact Analysis*

Given these disparities between EPV and ENR shares, it is important to examine how different combinations of the two methods would affect each municipality's tax contribution. The following

tables present apportionment scenarios in ten-percentage-point increments, from 100% EPV to 100% ENR-based allocation.

It is important to note that the model assumes tax levies to increase annually in both the status quo and regionalization scenarios and that any potential tax savings or increases indicated in the tables that follow represent the difference between regionalization and maintaining separate districts in each given year, not changes from current tax levels. In other words, a projected tax savings may actually mean a smaller increase compared to the status quo, not necessarily a reduction from today's levels of taxation.

It should also be noted that the total tax levy estimates in the tables below are inclusive of cost savings that are described in detail elsewhere in this study. Additionally, the figures are presented under the assumption that such cost savings will be applied as tax relief by the future board of education of the enlarged regional district, a decision that must be made by that board of education and weighed against the educational programming needs of the students.

The table that follows will present the comparative impact for a range of apportionment methods going from 100% based on EPV and 0% based on ENR through 0% EPV and 100% ENR. The values included in the table are averages over the period from FY 2027 through FY 2031. Positive numbers represent potential tax liability increases, while negative numbers represent potential reductions in tax liability relative to the status quo. Again, the current limited-purpose regional utilizes a 100% EPV / 0% ENR ratio.

TABLE 139  
Average Tax Impact, Enlarged Regional, FY 2027-31 <sup>85</sup>

	Franklin	Hamburg	Hardyston	Ogdensburg
100% EPV / 0% ENR	-765,920	-2,782,958	2,405,722	-48,589
90% EPV / 10% ENR	-359,379	-2,696,524	1,643,484	220,674
80% EPV / 20% ENR	47,162	-2,610,090	881,247	489,937
<b>75% EPV / 25% ENR</b>	<b>250,433</b>	<b>-2,566,873</b>	<b>500,128</b>	<b>624,568</b>
70% EPV / 30% ENR	453,703	-2,523,656	119,009	759,200
60% EPV / 40% ENR	860,244	-2,437,222	-643,229	1,028,463
50% EPV / 50% ENR	1,266,785	-2,350,788	-1,405,467	1,297,725
40% EPV / 60% ENR	1,673,327	-2,264,355	-2,167,704	1,566,989
30% EPV / 70% ENR	2,079,867	-2,177,921	-2,929,942	1,836,251
20% EPV / 80% ENR	2,486,409	-2,091,487	-3,692,180	2,105,514
10% EPV / 90% ENR	2,892,950	-2,005,053	-4,454,417	2,374,777
0% EPV / 100% ENR	3,299,491	-1,918,619	-5,216,655	2,644,040

<sup>85</sup> The bold faced row is the model's optimal ratio.

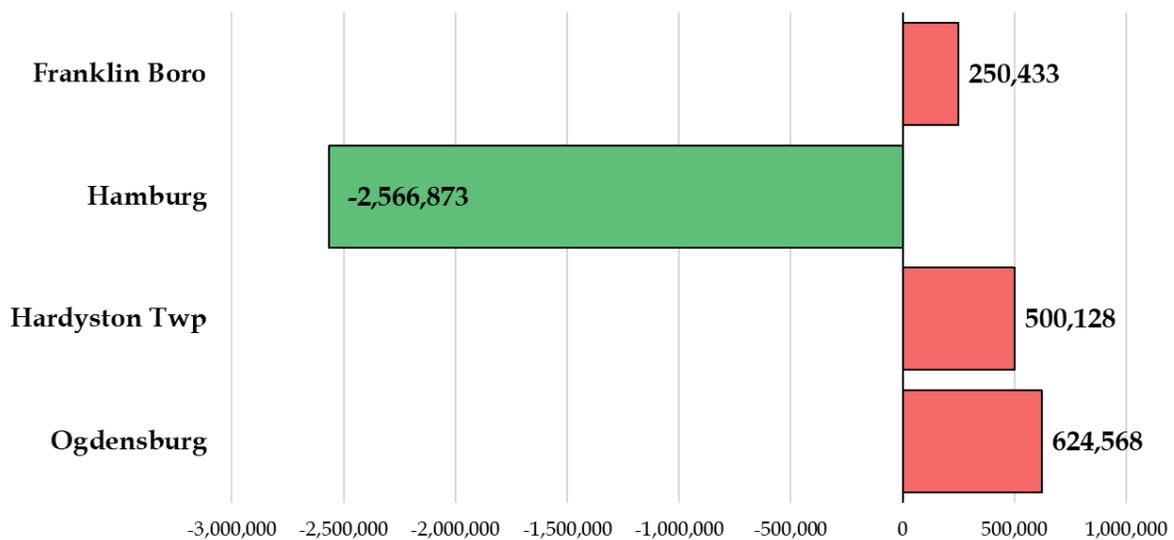
Table 139 illustrates the significant impact different apportionment ratios would have on each municipality. In the regionalization scenario, Hamburg experiences its greatest tax benefit under EPV-heavy apportionment methods with potential savings reaching \$2.7 million annually under 100% EPV-based allocation. As the weighting shifts toward ENR, Hamburg’s benefit decreases but still represents a tax savings of \$1.9 million under 100% ENR apportionment. This pattern shows that Hamburg would benefit under any apportionment method, but the magnitude varies significantly based on what ratio is selected.

Ogdensburg would face tax increases under nearly all apportionment scenarios shown, with tax obligations ranging from \$2.6 million more under 100% ENR to \$49 thousand less under 100% EPV. Ogdensburg would only experience tax decreases relative to the status quo with EPV-heavy methods that weight EPV at 96% or more.

Franklin shows similar results to Ogdensburg in that under roughly 80% of apportionment ratios, it would experience tax increases relative to the status quo. It also benefits more from EPV-heavy ratios with savings of \$766 thousand at 100% EPV and tax increases of \$3.3 million at 100% ENR.

Hardyston shows mixed results depending on the apportionment method. Hardyston would face tax increases under EPV-heavy scenarios, reaching \$2.4 million under 100% EPV-based apportionment. However, it would experience tax savings under ENR-heavy scenarios, with benefits reaching \$5.2 million under 100% ENR. The inflection point occurs around the 70% EPV / 30% ENR combination.

**CHART 12**  
Average Tax Impact, Enlarged Regional, FY 2027-31  
Optimal 75% EPV & 25% ENR Ratio



The model's optimal ratio, which attempts to balance tax impacts between all constituent communities and minimize extreme impacts, would select an apportionment method that weights each community's EPV at 75% and ENR at 25%. At this ratio, Franklin, Hardyston, and Ogdensburg would all experience an increase in total tax liability relative to what they would otherwise pay in the status quo. Hamburg would see a decrease in its tax liability relative to the status quo. While the model attempts to identify a combination that could provide benefits to all communities, no such outcome appears possible under current conditions. There is no combination of EPV and ENR parameters that produces tax savings for all municipalities.

It is important to understand these outcomes in their proper context. The varying impacts across different apportionment ratios demonstrate the complex interplay between property wealth and student population in determining tax responsibility. Each district's outcome is shaped by both its relative property wealth and its proportion of students, with the selected apportionment ratio determining which factor carries more weight.

While operational efficiencies from regionalization can help reduce the total tax levy to split, the underlying mathematics of redistributing costs means that finding a ratio that benefits all communities remains challenging. Districts with significantly different proportions of property wealth versus student population will often see opposing effects under any given ratio. Therefore, decisions about regionalization in this region should consider the full spectrum of potential benefits – educational, operational, and programmatic – rather than focusing solely on tax impacts.

Additionally, although no permanent apportionment ratio can deliver tax savings for all communities, state law provides some flexibility through temporary transitional apportionment methods. These methods allow regional school districts to phase in their cost allocations over a period of up to ten years. For this study, a transitional plan has been developed designed to ensure all municipalities realize tax benefits during the first five years of regionalization, before gradually moving toward the permanent EPV/ENR ratio. This helps ease the financial adjustment period and provides stability to communities during the transition to an enlarged regional district. The plan is presented later in this section.

### *Tax Rate Implications*

This subsection transforms the average tax impacts presented earlier from total dollars into tax rates, something more relevant to individual taxpayers, and provides a format consistent with other presentations of tax impacts during the annual school budget process. A community's school tax rate is its total amount of school tax to be levied divided by its total assessed property values (net valuation taxable) multiplied by 100. The tax rate analysis provides additional context to the financial impacts of regionalization. Currently, there is significant variation in total school tax rates across the municipalities, ranging from Hardyston's low of \$1.101 per \$100 of assessed value to Hamburg's high of \$3.162.

TABLE 140  
School Tax Rate per \$100 of Assessed Value, FY 2026 <sup>86</sup>

	<b>FY 2026 Rate</b>
Franklin	1.381
Hamburg	3.162
Hardyston	1.101
Ogdensburg	1.987

TABLE 141  
School Tax Rate per \$100 of Assessed Value, Enlarged Regional  
Model Optimal Ratio of 75% EPV & 25% ENR, FY 2027-31<sup>87</sup>

	<b>Status Quo</b>			<b>Enlarged Reg</b>	<b>Difference</b>
	<b>Tax Rate pK-8</b>	<b>Tax Rate Reg 9-12</b>	<b>Total School Tax Rate</b>	<b>Projected Tax Rate</b>	
Franklin	1.133	0.372	1.505	1.543	0.039
Hamburg	2.482	1.077	3.558	2.555	-1.003
Hardyston	0.740	0.471	1.211	1.241	0.029
Ogdensburg	1.512	0.541	2.053	2.373	0.320

Table 141 examines the impact on school tax rates in the future in both the status quo and regionalization scenarios over the period from FY 2027 through 2031 at the model’s optimal apportionment ratio of 75% EPV / 25% ENR. Hamburg would see the largest rate reduction (-\$1.003), moving from \$3.558 per \$100 assessed to a more moderate regional rate of \$2.555. Hamburg would retain the highest school tax rate amongst the constituent municipalities, but would see the gap between itself and its neighbors substantially reduced. Both Franklin and Hardyston would see modest movement in tax rates relative to the status quo, with increases of \$0.039 and \$0.029, respectively. Ogdensburg will see tax rates climb by \$0.32 per \$100 of assessed value. The statewide average school tax rate currently sits at \$1.376 per \$100 of assessed value.<sup>88</sup>

Under regionalization using traditional apportionment methods, Hamburg is the only community where the total school tax rate decreases, even though its rate remains the highest overall. This occurs because, under both the status quo and regionalization scenarios at the model’s optimal ratio, costs are distributed primarily on the basis of EPV. Hamburg’s relatively high share of students in the regional high school (38% vs. 22%-29% for the other three communities) has historically

<sup>86</sup> School tax rates were calculated using available tax levies prior to any revisions due to tax appeals and the latest available October 2024 net valuation taxable from the Department of Community Affairs.

<sup>87</sup> The average tax rate calculation uses the October 2024 net valuation taxable for each community for all years over the period. This table is for comparison purposes only and is not intended to be predictions of future tax rates, which will use current annual assessed values.

<sup>88</sup> Department of Community Affairs, 2024 Property Tax Information

concentrated a larger portion of its total equalized valuation into the regional allocation. When the districts are consolidated into a single all purpose regional, the inclusion of the other communities’ K-8 equalized valuations dilutes Hamburg’s share of the regional base.

While projected rates under a regional configuration are generally compared to current rates by those who will ultimately make the decision to regionalize, Table 142 compares these rates to those in other Sussex County communities participating in regional school districts.

TABLE 142  
School Tax Rate per \$100 of Assessed Value  
Selected Sussex County Municipalities, January 2025 <sup>89</sup>

County	Municipality	Total School Tax Rate
Morris	Netcong Borough	2.174
Sussex	Andover Borough	2.072
Sussex	Andover Township	2.400
Sussex	Branchville Borough	1.703
Sussex	Byram Township	2.170
Sussex	Frankford Township	1.918
Sussex	Fredon Township	2.044
Sussex	Hampton Township	2.103
Sussex	Lafayette Township	1.955
Sussex	Sandyston Township	2.181
Sussex	Stanhope Borough	2.489
Sussex	Stillwater Township	2.383
Sussex	Sussex Borough	2.015
Sussex	Walpack Township <sup>90</sup>	0.000
Sussex	Wantage Township	2.019
Sussex	County Average	1.764

*Transitional Method of Apportionment*

An alternate approach to tax apportionment is provided through P.L.2021, c.402, which permits a board of education to establish a transitional methodology, not to exceed ten years, of the apportionment method adopted by the voters provided that the methodology is agreed to by all participating districts. The language is designed to address situations where standard apportionment methods may not benefit all communities during the consolidation process. The transitional method was envisioned as a tool to facilitate school district regionalization in cases where immediate

<sup>89</sup> Non-equalized rates

<sup>90</sup> Walpack User Friendly Budget, 2021. Walpack Township has only 38 taxable land parcels and does not levy school taxes. Instead, it pays any regional school tax obligations through its municipal budget.

implementation of a new apportionment method might create financial hardships or disparities among the participating districts. It provides a mechanism to smooth out potential tax impacts over time, making the regionalization process more palatable to all stakeholders.

As described in the prior subsection, the standard apportionment methods do not allow for universal tax benefits to all constituents. However, a possible transitional methodology has been developed that would keep tax impacts positive for all districts for the first five years of the regional's operation and then provide a gradual phase-in towards formulaic apportionment under the optimal weights of 75% EPV and 25% ENR.

The transitional shares for years one through five presented below were set so that all districts benefit compared to the status quo, based on tax modeling over ten years. Beginning in year six and continuing through year eight, each district's share will adjust in relatively equal annual steps toward the permanent formula based 75% on equalized property values and 25% based on each district's share of total enrollment. By year nine, each district's share of the regional's total costs will be determined by the new permanent apportionment formula.

TABLE 143  
Transitional Shares of Total Regional Tax Levy

	Years 1-5: Fixed Shares					Years 6-8: Phase-in			Permanent 75% EPV / 25% ENR Apportionment
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9
Franklin	22.7%	22.7%	22.7%	22.7%	22.7%	23.0%	23.4%	23.7%	24.1%
Hamburg	20.5%	20.5%	20.5%	20.5%	20.5%	19.0%	17.5%	15.9%	14.3%
Hardyston	48.2%	48.2%	48.2%	48.2%	48.2%	48.7%	49.1%	49.4%	49.6%
Ogdensburg	8.6%	8.6%	8.6%	8.6%	8.6%	9.3%	10.0%	10.9%	12.0%

This transitional strategy maximizes the likelihood of tax savings for all districts in the first five years and avoids a scenario where some municipalities experience tax increases right away. Additionally, the fixed shares provide predictability and stability throughout the initial transition. In line with state law, the transitional shares will fully align with the permanent formula by year nine under this proposal, however, the phase-in could be extended through year ten, if desired. This gradual approach gives each community ample time to plan for the long-term distribution of tax responsibility while immediately realizing the educational and programmatic benefits of regionalization in the short-term.

*Tax Apportionment Insights*

Having described in detail the projected tax impacts of regionalization, a summary of the conclusions drawn from the above presentation is warranted.

1. Considering the full range of apportionment ratios from 100% EPV / 0% ENR to 0% EPV / 100% ENR:
  - a. Franklin would experience tax increases relative to the status quo under roughly 80% of apportionment ratios. It benefits more from EPV-heavy ratios with savings of \$766K at 100% EPV and tax increases of \$3.3 million at 100% ENR.
  - b. Hamburg experiences its greatest tax benefit under EPV-heavy apportionment methods with potential savings reaching \$2.7 million annually under 100% EPV-based allocation. As the weighting shifts toward ENR, Hamburg's benefit decreases but still represents a tax savings of \$1.8 million under 100% ENR apportionment. Hamburg would benefit under any apportionment method, but the magnitude varies significantly based on what ratio is selected.
  - c. Hardyston shows mixed results depending on the apportionment method. Hardyston would face tax increases under EPV-heavy scenarios, reaching \$2.4 million under 100% EPV-based apportionment. However, it would experience tax savings under ENR-heavy scenarios, with benefits reaching \$5.2 million under 100% ENR. The inflection point occurs around the 70% EPV / 30% ENR combination.
  - d. Ogdensburg would face tax increases under nearly all apportionment scenarios shown, with tax obligations ranging from \$2.6 million more under 100% ENR to \$49K less under 100% EPV. Ogdensburg would only experience tax decreases relative to the status quo with EPV-heavy methods that weight EPV at 96% or more.
2. When tasked with finding the optimal ratio by attempting to balance tax impacts between all constituent communities and minimize extreme impacts, the model would choose the 75% EPV - 25% ENR combination as the optimal ratio.
3. At the optimal ratio, Franklin, Hardyston, and Ogdensburg would all still experience an increase in total tax liability relative to what they would otherwise pay in the status quo. Hamburg would see a decrease in its tax liability relative to the status quo.
4. While the model attempts to identify a combination that could provide benefits to all communities, no such outcome appears possible under current conditions. There is no combination of EPV and ENR parameters that produces tax savings for all municipalities.
5. Under regionalization using traditional apportionment methods, Hamburg is the only community where the total school tax rate decreases, even though its rate remains the highest overall. The primary cause stems from Hamburg's relatively high share of students in the regional high school (38% vs. 22%-29% for the other three communities) that has historically concentrated a larger portion of its total equalized valuation into the regional allocation.

When the districts are consolidated into a single all-purpose regional, the inclusion of the other communities' K-8 equalized valuations dilutes Hamburg's share of the regional base. This shift reduces Hamburg's relative tax burden, leading to large relative tax savings and an outsized reduction in its tax rate.

6. The tax levies being apportioned in the regionalization scenario are inclusive of cost savings described in a previous subsection. The cost savings total \$1.3 million and primarily include consolidation of duplicated administrative staff positions as well as some reductions in audit costs and other professional services.
7. 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 a future board of education of a grades pK-12 regional district to decide how to allocate any cost savings stemming from regionalization. Tax relief is one of many possible uses of such savings.
8. While the standard apportionment methods do not allow for universal tax benefits to all constituents, an alternate transitional methodology was presented that would keep tax impacts positive for all districts for the first five years of the regional's operation and then provide a gradual phase-in towards formulaic apportionment under the optimal weights of 75% EPV and 25% ENR.
9. This transitional strategy maximizes the likelihood of tax savings for all districts in the first five years and avoids a scenario where some municipalities experience increases right away. Additionally, the fixed shares provide predictability and stability throughout the initial transition and the gradual transition to the permanent ratio gives each community ample time to plan for the long-term distribution of tax responsibility while immediately realizing the educational and programmatic benefits of regionalization in the short-term.

Finally, Table 144 summarizes the tax data at the model's optimal ratio in the regional scenario.

TABLE 144  
Summary of Tax Apportionment Outputs at 75% EPV & 25% ENR Ratio  
Enlarged Regional, FY 2027-31

	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	5-year avg
Regional District Total Tax Levy	40,617,755	41,396,882	42,236,224	43,094,330	43,965,876	41,836,298
Franklin Tax Levy	9,668,413	9,724,567	9,960,818	10,216,112	10,469,633	10,007,909
Hamburg Tax Levy	7,416,845	6,183,942	6,266,285	6,354,547	6,461,936	6,536,711
Hardyston Levy	19,892,035	21,012,583	21,356,347	21,734,608	22,117,675	21,222,650
Ogdensburg Tax Levy	4,297,550	4,477,010	4,652,363	4,788,684	4,916,285	4,626,378
Franklin Impact	204,497	122,979	190,887	307,838	425,964	250,433
Hamburg Impact	-1,240,272	-2,700,264	-2,854,842	-2,975,229	-3,063,757	-2,566,873
Hardyston Impact	73,179	717,804	663,275	577,535	468,846	500,128
Ogdensburg Impact	300,517	535,320	676,521	765,697	844,787	624,568
Franklin Tax Rate Impact	0.0315	0.0190	0.0294	0.0475	0.0657	0.039
Hamburg Tax Rate Impact	-0.4848	-1.0554	-1.1158	-1.1629	-1.1975	-1.003
Hardyston Tax Rate Impact	0.0043	0.0420	0.0388	0.0338	0.0274	0.029
Ogdensburg Tax Rate Impact	0.1541	0.2746	0.3470	0.3927	0.4333	0.320
Franklin % of Tax Responsibility	23.8%	23.5%	23.6%	23.7%	23.8%	50.2%
Hamburg % of Tax Responsibility	18.3%	14.9%	14.8%	14.7%	14.7%	23.7%
Hardyston % of Tax Responsibility	49.0%	50.8%	50.6%	50.4%	50.3%	10.9%
Ogdensburg % of Tax Responsibility	10.6%	10.8%	11.0%	11.1%	11.2%	15.5%
Potential Net Taxpayer Savings <sup>91</sup>	662,080	1,324,162	1,324,159	1,324,159	1,324,160	1,191,744
Cumulative Benefit	662,080	1,986,242	3,310,400	4,634,560	5,958,720	-

## 27. Borrowing Margin, Debt Allocation, and Reserves

### Borrowing Margin and Debt Allocation

When school districts merge into a regional district, state law requires that all issued and outstanding bonds, notes, or other financial obligations of the individual districts become the shared responsibility of the new regional. The debt consolidation process is a standard and mandatory component of regionalization, designed to ensure equitable treatment of all member communities

<sup>91</sup> The net tax savings in the first year of regionalization will be half of its actual value due to the continuation of tax deferrals consistent with split-year tax collections.

within the new configuration. Flexibility introduced by P.L.2021, c.402 provides a new process for districts to address disparate debt levels or debt-related concerns that might otherwise be barriers to regionalization through the use of a transitional method of apportionment for up to ten years, provided that the transitional method is approved by the Commissioner of Education and is agreed to by all participating districts.

Some districts may enter regionalization carrying significant debt from recent building projects or renovations, while others may have minimal or no outstanding obligations. In the proposed regionalization scenario each community would share the responsibility of paying both principal and interest on all existing debt, regardless of which former district originally incurred it. The consultants emphasize that a holistic view of facilities conditions and future needs should inform these discussions. Districts that have recently invested in facility improvements are contributing updated, modern spaces that will benefit all students in the regional district. Conversely, districts entering with minimal debt may have deferred necessary facility improvements, potentially creating future capital expenditures that the regional district will need to address. Rather than viewing existing debt in isolation, communities should consider both the immediate and shared benefits of recently improved facilities and the long-term capital needs across all buildings.

While a district may have many financial obligations, there are two types of debt, the obligation for which extends for more than one year. There is a distinct difference in both the methods of incurring and the accounting of the debt. Long term debt (bonds) is authorized by voters and expensed through the debt service fund. Short term debt is a multi-year obligation authorized by the school district, but budgeted for in the annual budget process. The latter are considerably smaller amounts than most referendums and range from three to five years. They can be anything from equipment leases (e.g., copiers, computers, buses) to subscription-based information technology arrangements (SBITAs). SBITA's are an area to be explored for sharing services and a merger may lead to savings due to economies of scale. These types of debt were not itemized in this region due to lack of use or miniscule amounts due to expire in the next school year.

The issuance of debt, and all topics related to it, are strictly guided by statute.<sup>92</sup> Once a board of education has been authorized to issue bonds, they may authorize the issuance of temporary notes or loan bonds to fund the initial costs of the approved project as money is needed. Three of the five districts in this study have bonded debt. Wallkill Valley bonded \$3.3M for a solar panel project in 2011. In addition to reducing the costs of their own electricity, they have been selling solar renewable energy credits, generating about \$71,000 in FY 2024 and \$100,000 in FY 2025 revenue for their current expense budget. Unfortunately, that opportunity will cease in two years unless regulations change. Hardyston and Wallkill Valley have copier leases included in their audits, and Wallkill Valley identified some bus leases. The figures for these are not included in this report as the costs are short term and relatively small, included in current expenses budgets, and assets would be retained by all in the event districts merged.

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<sup>92</sup> N.J.S.A. 18A:24

The legal debt limit determines how much bonded debt a district is allowed to incur. This is calculated by multiplying the average of the last three years of equalized valuations by the appropriate percentage for the district’s grade level.<sup>93</sup> The amount of existing debt is then subtracted from the maximum allowable debt to determine the legal debt margin, also known as remaining available debt capacity. For bonded debt purposes, each district is treated as an independent taxing authority with access to the full taxable base of the municipality it serves. As a result, there is overlap in the equalized valuations used for existing grades K–8 districts and the regional high school. Therefore, the equalized valuations presented in the table below are not summable.

Tables 145 and 146 identify the borrowing margin and debt service amounts for each district as they currently exist. The consultants have confirmed with the school business administrators that no other debt was issued or incurred subsequent to the June 30, 2024 ACFR.

TABLE 145  
Borrowing Margin as of June 30, 2024 <sup>94</sup>

	<b>Avg Equalized Valuation Taxable Property</b>	<b>Debt Limit</b>	<b>Net Bonded School Debt</b>	<b>Legal Debt Margin</b>
Wallkill Valley	2,447,451,716	73,423,551	6,085,000	67,338,551
Franklin	531,511,029	15,945,331	0	15,945,331
Hamburg	335,726,170	10,071,785	3,870,000	6,201,785
Hardyston	1,342,411,038	40,272,331	5,535,000	34,737,331
Ogdensburg	237,803,478	7,134,104	0	7,134,104
pK-12 Regional	2,447,451,715	97,898,069	15,490,000	82,408,069

TABLE 146  
Debt Service as of June 30, 2024

	<b>2025</b>	<b>2026</b>	<b>2027</b>	<b>2028</b>	<b>2029</b>
Wallkill Valley	335,000	350,000	365,000	380,000	395,000
Franklin	0	0	0	0	0
Hamburg	175,000	180,000	185,000	185,000	190,000
Hardyston	595,000	625,000	655,000	680,000	705,000
Ogdensburg	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	1,105,000	1,155,000	1,205,000	1,245,000	1,290,000

<sup>93</sup> N.J.S.A. 18A:24-19. A grades K-8 district uses three percent, while a grades K-12 district is calculated at four percent.

<sup>94</sup> Tables 145 and 146 retrieved from the Annual Comprehensive Financial Reviews

	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034-
Wallkill Valley	410,000	425,000	425,000	285,000	2,715,000
Franklin	0	0	0	0	0
Hamburg	195,000	200,000	205,000	210,000	2,145,000
Hardyston	735,000	755,000	785,000	0	0
Ogdensburg	0	0	0	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,340,000</b>	<b>1,380,000</b>	<b>1,415,000</b>	<b>495,000</b>	<b>4,860,000</b>

The steering committee tasked the study team with considering long range facility needs as they pertain to debt capacity. Table 146 looks at the total estimated costs of the long range facilities projects identified by each district’s plan. The combined cost estimate for long range facility projects of \$59,612,700 is well within the legal debt margin of the enlarged regional at \$82,408,069 as noted in Table 145. In spite of having sufficient debt capacity, the administration and board of education of an enlarged regional would likely want to pull the long range facility plans together, prioritize emergent projects, and schedule the others over an extended period of time.

TABLE 147  
Long Range Facility Projects and Estimated Costs <sup>95</sup>

	<b>List of Projects</b>	<b>Cost Estimate</b>
Wallkill Valley HS	New generator plant; replacement of roof, PA system, HVAC units; upgraded kitchen infrastructure; exterior repaving	25,701,000
Franklin ES	Replacement of boiler, lighting, windows	5,162,000
Hamburg ES	Replacement of windows, roof, univents, boiler, lighting, flooring; upgraded controls system, restrooms, ceilings, and stormwater management; tile abatement; schoolwide AC	12,520,000
Hardyston ES	Replacement of windows, roofs, soffits, ceilings, doors; upgraded HVAC, restrooms, and lighting; exterior repaving; flooring abatement	10,831,200
Hardyston MS	Upgraded finishes	1,651,800
Ogdensburg ES	Univent replacements in new building; window replacements in old building	3,746,700
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>59,612,700</b>

<sup>95</sup> Detailed System Action Reports in each district’s approved Long Range Facility Plan. Only projects with estimated costs greater than \$500,000 are included in the list.

This analysis does not include Hamburg’s recent issues with its 1900 era school building that came to light while this study was in progress. A May 2024 microburst storm broke many of the old glass windows, which were then covered with plywood. A window replacement project due to the age of the windows and damage from the storm began in Spring 2025. It was discovered during this project that the lintel system was failing, causing the building to become structurally compromised. This has caused numerous change orders to the initial project.

Fortunately, there have been no student impacts as a result of this problem. The fallout has included moving several central administrative offices to temporary quarters and relocating some business office staff to Hardyston in August 2025 as a shared service. The district’s architect presented options to the board ranging in price from \$750,000 for various repairs to \$15 million to take down the building and rebuild a new space for administrative offices. The initial project cost was \$202,400, and there have been \$63,295 in change orders. Not including the change orders, payments have been made of \$122,660 to the contractors and \$34,300 of \$40,300 to the architect. The district does not have the operating budget to address other options at this time.

Reserves

The State allows many different types of 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 to be specified during budget preparation, other 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. Only the four types of reserve accounts used by the districts in this region will be described here – maintenance, capital, unemployment, and legal.

TABLE 148  
Reserve Accounts, as of June 30, 2024<sup>96</sup>

	Wallkill Valley	Franklin	Hardyston	Hamburg	Ogdensburg	TOTAL
Capital	-	751,280	1,154,189	612,176	552,441	3,070,086
Legal	-	1,000,000	-	-	-	1,000,000
Maintenance	608,455	442,933	195,832	-	240,055	1,487,275
Unemployment	8,297	-	152,764	-	88,500	249,561
TOTAL	616,752	2,194,213	1,502,785	612,176	880,996	5,806,922

Most districts have a capital reserve account, and state statute and code provide the restrictions on it.<sup>97</sup> Deposits are generally transferred by board resolution at year end, but may also be appropriated in the budget planning process. Expenses must be incorporated into the certified budget or approved

<sup>96</sup> Annual Comprehensive Financial Reports

<sup>97</sup> N.J.S.A. 7F-41, N.J.S.A. 18A 7G-31, N.J.S.A. 18A:21-2, N.J.A.C. 6A:23A-14.1

by voters as a separate proposal. The amount in the reserve is capped at the local share of project costs in the district's approved long range facility plan.

Maintenance reserve is the most common reserve account used across the state. Its balance cannot, at any time, exceed four percent of the replacement cost of the school district's school facilities for the current year.<sup>98</sup> To receive funding under the Education Facilities and Financing Act, districts are required to demonstrate a net investment in required maintenance of at least two percent of the replacement cost of the related school facility.<sup>99</sup>

Unemployment reserves cover benefit costs. Districts may choose to fund their unemployment obligation in one of two ways. When using the benefit reimbursement method versus state contributions, standard practice is to establish an unemployment reserve account.

Legal reserves are unusual due to the restrictions associated with it. However, it is an option if a district needs to reserve funds for legal purposes or a governmental obligation that usually will be expensed the following year.

As many districts face the challenges of reduced or, at best, stable state aid and have more restricted budgets, the establishment of an emergency reserve to address future unanticipated general fund expenses is becoming more common.<sup>100</sup> This account may not exceed \$250,000 or one percent of the district's general fund budget up to a maximum of \$1,000,000, whichever is greater. While the districts in this region do experience state aid issues, they do not use an emergency reserve fund. This is most likely because they utilize other budgetary tools to address unanticipated general fund expenses and do not have the funds available to appropriate towards another reserve account.

## 28. Contracted Services and Tuition

### Transportation Services

Transportation in NJ school districts has many facets to it. The primary function of a transportation department is to provide safe, efficient, and professional student transportation for the district's students. To achieve these objectives, districts should employ a supervisor who is trained, certified, and knowledgeable in all aspects of student transportation. That supervisor develops a routing of buses for general education students. The most cost-effective routing is a triple-tiered route package, which maximizes the utilization of each school vehicle and driver. District bell schedules play a crucial role in facilitating the implementation of such a system.

Additionally, the department must provide specialized transportation for the district's special needs students. The supervisor needs the child study team to supply detailed information on each student's

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<sup>98</sup> N.J.A.C. 6A:26A, N.J.S.A. 18A:7F-41

<sup>99</sup> To support the demonstration of this requirement, districts must include a schedule of required maintenance expenditures in the ACFR for each year by school facility as defined under N.J.A.C. 6A:26-1.2.

<sup>100</sup> N.J.S.A. 18A:7F-41, PL 2007, c62 (A1)

specific needs when arranging this type of transportation. Some students may require special accommodations, such as a vehicle capable of carrying a wheelchair. Furthermore, some students may need an aide on the vehicle, and that aide may need to be medically certified.

Another topic that is commonly discussed is the issue of courtesy busing. Districts are required to transport any child in grades K-8 if they live two miles or more from the school, or grades 9-12 students if they live two and a half miles or more from the school.<sup>101</sup> Eligibility is calculated by measuring the shortest route from the home to the school. Even though a district is not required to provide transportation for students living within these limits, it is typical for students to be bused for other reasons such as hazardous walking routes, out-of-district placements, and special education students with transportation needs.

A primary difference between send-serve districts and regional districts is that the regional is responsible for transporting students attending all of the region's schools, while sending districts are responsible for transporting their students to the receiving district. The proposed regionalization would result in little to no change as far as what schools the students attend, so there would likely be no change to any of the current transportation programs unless the district chooses to seek a higher level of efficiency or revised routes.

#### *Current Status*

The Wallkill Valley transportation department is managed by a non-certified coordinator who also serves as the school's athletic director. The district ensures transportation is provided to the high school serving each of the constituent districts. Currently, Wallkill Valley does not utilize a formal bus routing system, as most routes have been contracted for over 25 years. Route adjustments are made collaboratively between the coordinator and the bus contractors as needed.

Hardyston provides transportation to students in both its elementary and middle schools. The district does not have a dedicated transportation supervisor; transportation is managed by the middle school principal and the secretary to the principal. Hardyston does not have a bus routing system, as the current bus routes have been in place for between 18 and 27 years. Route adjustments are made collaboratively between the principal and the bus contractors, as needed.

Franklin, Hamburg, and Ogdensburg do not have designated transportation supervisors because the districts are classified as walking districts. Transportation needs are managed and arranged by the business administrators.

#### *Regular Education Transportation*

Table 149 provides the number of stops for each of the district's 14 bus routes. There would be no impact on student seat time or distance traveled from a regionalization, as there has been no discussion of any intent to change the grade levels of schools that students are attending. As

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<sup>101</sup> N.J.S.A. 18A: 39.1

requested, a student transportation seat time and distance travel evaluation was conducted based on the existing regional, which serves students in all four communities.

The earliest pick-up time is 6:35 am for a 7:30 am school start. The average stop to school ride time is 21 minutes, and the average stop to school distance traveled is 4.7 miles. These student ride times and distances traveled are within what is reasonable for an area of this size and geographic distribution of students.

**TABLE 149**  
**Transportation Stops per Route, Wallkill Valley, 2024-25**

<b>Number of Stops</b>	<b>Number of Routes</b>
5	5
6	1
7	1
9	1
10	1
11	2
12	1
14	1
25	1

Bell schedules are a critical component of running a school, and the importance cannot be understated. They affect every aspect of operation, from instruction to contractual obligations to transportation. In fact, the schedule is the initial focus of how a district derives bid specifications, as the student’s arrival times must be coordinated with the bell schedule. It is essential to evaluate various options to ensure that the bell schedule facilitates the most efficient and cost-effective transportation solutions.

TABLE 150  
School Bell Schedules, 2024-25

Schools	Grade Levels	Start / End Times
Wallkill Valley HS	9-12	7:30a - 2:15p
Franklin ES	pK-8	7:55a - 2:30p
Hamburg ES	pK-8	8:00a - 3:00p
Hardyston ES	pK-4	8:40a - 3:36p
Hardyston MS	5-8	7:55a - 2:49p
Ogdensburg ES	pK-8	8:10a - 2:55p

Tables 151 and 152 display the annual and average per route costs for regular education students in Wallkill Valley and Hardyston. A random survey of other districts in the state shows average per package costs to be between \$85,000 and \$95,000, so the costs for Wallkill Valley and Hardyston can be considered reasonable and efficient.

TABLE 151  
Annual and Average per Route Costs, Regular Education, Wallkill Valley, 2024-25

	In-District	Vocational & Charter <sup>102</sup>	Non-Public <sup>103</sup>
Route Packages	14	6	3
Annual Cost	\$595,701	\$165,936	\$68,194
Average Cost	\$42,551	\$27,656	\$22,732
Per Student Cost		\$1,239	\$1,137

<sup>102</sup> The per student rate exceeds the state-established Aid in Lieu (AIL) rate of \$1,177 for charter school students. According to the state-required and submitted District Report of Transported Resident Students, no students are listed as attending a charter school. Therefore, the AIL rate does not apply.

<sup>103</sup> The per student rate is below the AIL rate of \$1,177 as it pertains to non-public school students.

TABLE 152  
Annual and Average per Route Costs, Regular Education, Hardyston, 2024-25

	<b>In-District</b>	<b>Vocational &amp; Charter <sup>104</sup></b>	<b>Non-Public <sup>105</sup></b>
Route Packages	10	5	2
Annual Cost	\$735,384	\$13,268	\$33,169
Average Cost	\$73,539	\$2,653	\$16,585
Per Student Cost		\$1,105	\$1,106

*Tiering Efficiency and Route Packaging*

Tiering efficiency involves organizing each school's bell schedule and structuring the routes for each bus in levels or layers based on route times. Each route on a bus must be scheduled to ensure that the vehicle arrives at each school in accordance with the designated bell time for arrival. The greater the number of tiers assigned to a bus, the more efficient the bus becomes. For the purpose of bidding and contracting, each bus that has been tiered is considered one packaged bus. The total number of packaged buses constitutes a district's route packaging.

Wallkill Valley has 14 single routes provided to the high school. There are 6 routes that supply transportation for 134 students to the county charter and vocational schools and another 3 to transport 60 students to several local non-public schools. The charter, vocational, and non-public routes are provided under a jointure agreement with High Point Regional who serves as the host district.

Hardyston has 10 route packages to the district's schools. 4 of them are single tier packages with 3 to the elementary school and 1 to the middle school. The other 6 are double tiered such that each bus runs a route for both the middle and elementary schools.

Wallkill Valley and Hardyston use the same local bus contractors. Wallkill Valley's contracts have been renewed between 26 and 35 times, and Hardyston's have been renewed between 18 and 21 times.

*Special Needs Transportation*

All of the special education routes for Wallkill Valley, Franklin, and Hardyston shown in Table 153 are contracted through the Sussex County Educational Services Commission (SCESC). By contracting the routes in this way, the districts benefit from shared cost savings as SCESC

<sup>104</sup> These routes transport both vocational and charter school students. The per student rate is below the state set AIL rate of \$1,177.00 as it would pertain to the charter school students.

<sup>105</sup> The per student rate is below the AIL rate of \$1,177 as it pertains to non-public school students.

consolidates students from multiple districts who attend the same school onto common routes. However, it may be advantageous for the districts to consider leasing or purchasing some more of their own school vehicles and employing district drivers and aides for some student transportation. This strategy has the potential to reduce costs while offering increased flexibility to address evolving transportation requirements.

TABLE 153  
Transportation Costs for Special Education Students, 2024-25

	Wallkill Valley <sup>106</sup>	Franklin	Hamburg <sup>107</sup>	Hardyston	Ogdensburg
Out of District Routes	10	4	0	7	0
Out of District Students	11	7	0	7	0
Annual Cost	\$429,801	\$250,825		\$380,581	
Average Cost	\$42,981	\$62,707		\$54,369	
Per Student Cost	\$39,073	\$35,833		\$54,369	
In-District Routes	1	0	1	3	0
In-District Students	6	0	1	15	0
Annual Cost	n/a		\$772	\$307,545	
Average Cost	n/a		\$772	\$102,515	
Per Student Cost	n/a		\$772	\$20,503	

*Potential Improvements in Transportation*

Among the benefits of an enlarged regional would be the employment of a single transportation coordinator. This role would provide for a regular evaluation of bus stops, routes, and tiering to enhance and improve busing efficiency. While transportation services are managed effectively at present, having a supervisor with certification through the state-required program offered at Rutgers University is recommended to further enhance management capabilities. If an enlarged regional does not occur, it is still recommended that the districts consider employing one certified transportation coordinator to increase efficiency in the region’s overall operations. Alternatively, Wallkill Valley and Hardyston could consider having their existing coordinators become certified through the state program.

Any of the aforementioned structures would allow for better and more efficient combinations as noted. The supervisor would be aware of the needs of all schools thus allowing for identifying combining students with a route or routes together. This would improve the overall cost

<sup>106</sup> The in-district route is operated by a district employed driver using a district owned vehicle.

<sup>107</sup> The in-district route is under parent contract.

effectiveness of all districts. Additionally, implementing regular reviews and updates of route efficiency data could further refine the system. By utilizing advanced software for route optimization and ensuring regular communication among districts, the transportation framework could adapt dynamically to changing needs. This proactive approach would not only enhance operational efficiency but also improve service quality for students requiring specialized transportation.

An enlarged regional may also want to consider leasing or purchasing some of its own vehicles and hiring at least some of its own drivers to mitigate having all transportation in the hands of external contractors.

It is recommended that Wallkill Valley and Hardyston evaluate the potential for adjusting Hardyston's school bell times. As is common among districts, challenges frequently arise related to funding mandated and curricular programs. Adjusting the bell schedule presents an opportunity to reduce expenses and potentially allocate additional resources toward essential curriculum initiatives.

Specifically, it is recommended that Hardyston move the start times for both its schools forward by approximately 10 to 12 minutes. Hardyston currently operates a two-tier system for these routes; modifying the bell times would enable the implementation of a triple-tier busing system between Wallkill Valley and Hardyston. Transitioning to a triple-tier busing structure would offer multiple advantages, including improved transportation efficiency and potential reductions in overall transportation costs for both districts. Furthermore, adjusting bell times may facilitate the inclusion of non-public, vocational, and charter school transportation routes, reducing reliance on contracted services from SCESC.

### Food Services

NJ 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's Food and Nutrition Services had 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 federal budget. 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 lunch percentage in that the calculation is based upon directly certified students (i.e., those receiving Medicaid, TANF, SNAP), not the school lunch income verification application with which most are familiar.

Districts with a higher number of economically disadvantaged students usually provide at least breakfast and lunch, and sometimes after school snack, dinner and/or a summer food program. Wealthier districts may choose to offer lunch and/or breakfast on their own, so as not to have to comply with the myriad regulations of the federal programs. Interestingly, federal guidelines require breakfast to be served when a district exceeds 20% at risk population. However, NJ legislation requires that every school with more than 10% low-income students must provide a breakfast program.<sup>108</sup> Those that provide “breakfast after the bell” are eligible for 10 cent per breakfast additional state payment.<sup>109</sup> The act also expanded the eligibility criteria so that more students are eligible. A more recent law expanded the eligibility criteria to up to 224% of the federal poverty level as of September 2024.<sup>110</sup> Districts will be reimbursed by the state for the cost difference between students who are not federally eligible for free/reduced price meals, but are eligible under the more generous state standards.

The level of students eligible for free or 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 payer or qualifies for the state or federal program. For instance, NJ Department of Agriculture Form 163 shows that for the 2024-25 school year, a district with less than 60% free and reduced population will receive the following reimbursements:

Free Lunch	4.50 (4.43 federal and .07 state)
Reduced Lunch	4.10 (4.03 federal and .07 state)
Paid Lunch	0.48 (0.42 federal and .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. These companies are selected through a process that is strictly regulated by the NJ 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 the food is prepared at one site and transported in special containers to another site.

Food service was not identified by the district as an area to be studied in depth. Overall, the region has a relatively high free and reduced lunch rate, ranging from 11.8% in Hardyston to 49.1% in Franklin. Due to the high rate, Franklin was eligible for the community eligible program described

<sup>108</sup> Working Class Families’ Anti Hunger Act, A2368

<sup>109</sup> School Nutrition Association, State School Meal Mandates & Reimbursement Report, 2023-24

<sup>110</sup> A5684/S4055

above; research and calculations by school officials determined it would be too costly to run the program in that manner. All five districts have contracts with the same company to provide management services. It may be advantageous for the districts to issue a combined request for proposal, or to at least investigate sharing a food service director.

### Tuition

None of the districts in this region participate in a send-receive agreement with another district for regular education students. The students are educated in their elementary district through eighth grade and then move up to either Wallkill Valley Regional HS or another high school. Districts that participate in send-receive relationships often do 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 grades pK-6 or pK-8 school but send its grades 7-12 or 9-12 students to another high school. In others, the small district (including non-operating districts) 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 the student's home district. A detailed financial analysis of special education tuition is not conducted in this study due to the variable nature of special education needs and populations. The tuition calculations do follow the same process as for regular education students, except that the contracts are typically for only one student. As stated previously in the Education & Program domain of this study, there are opportunities for shared services of personnel for the provision of special education programs.

In the event that all districts in the study go forward with a grades pK-12 regionalization, one of the issues to be resolved would be the two years of special education tuition reconciliations. Unlike a send-receive district, the amounts to be reconciled for individual special education contracts are relatively small. The reconciliation process converts estimated tuition and enrollment to actual numbers two fiscal years later. Although there may be other options, the consultants see two possibilities: (a) the new regional absorbs the reconciliation; or (b) the tax levy is adjusted for the first two years as a final reconciliation for the municipalities that are involved. A grades pK-12 regionalization would share all costs across all constituent districts, such that tuition would not be an issue among the regionalized municipalities.

## 29. Shared Services

TABLE 154  
Popular Shared Services Opportunities <sup>111</sup>

Service Shared	Number of Districts Participating	Percentage of Districts Participating
Transportation	56	88%
Insurance	49	77%
Supplies	38	59%
Special Education Classes	36	56%
Related Services (OT, PT, Speech)	34	53%
Professional Development	31	48%
Other	25	39%
Child Study Team Services	20	31%
Food Services	17	27%
Facility Maintenance	16	25%
Custodial Services	9	14%
School Business Services	8	13%
Other Administration	7	11%
Other Instruction	5	8%
Textbooks	4	6%
Health Services	3	5%
Security	3	5%

Sharing services between school districts, local municipalities, and other governmental agencies have long been promoted by NJ as an efficiency measure. A 2007 study identified nineteen state governmental reports and nearly as many non-governmental reports over the previous thirty some years dealing with shared/joint/consolidated services and cost savings for public entities.<sup>112</sup> It noted, “While there is no definitive count of all the shared-services arrangements in which New Jersey school districts are currently engaged, they certainly number in the hundreds, if not thousands.” A survey of 66 school districts in Bergen, Burlington, Essex, and Somerset counties found that 64 of them participated in some form of shared services. Table 154 shows the survey results.

The Division of Local Government Services has continued to promote such arrangements, stating in 2023 that, “Sharing services offers numerous benefits for participating communities. It reduces

<sup>111</sup> Institute on Education Law and Policy. (2007). The structures of the 66 districts responding to this survey – 30 elementary, 27 all purpose, 7 secondary, 2 non-operating

<sup>112</sup> Institute on Education Law and Policy. (2007). Shared services in school districts: Policies, practices, and recommendations. Rutgers University-Newark.

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.”<sup>113</sup>

There are literally dozens of NJ statutes and code regulations pertaining to this topic for school districts. The overarching statute 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.”<sup>114</sup> 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.”<sup>115</sup>

Public school contract law governs all purchasing of goods and services for public school districts in NJ.<sup>116</sup> These regulations are very strict and compliance is mandatory. The school business administrator frequently holds a certification as a qualified purchasing agent to address these matters. 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. NJDOE’s Office of Fiscal Accountability and Compliance has general oversight of regulatory programs.

Purchasing cooperatives save districts 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.

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<sup>113</sup> Local Efficiency Achievement Program Guidelines

<sup>114</sup> N.J.S.A. 18A:18A-11

<sup>115</sup> N.J.A.C. 6A:23-1.2

<sup>116</sup> N.J.S.A. 18A:18A

TABLE 155  
Existing Shared Services, Wallkill Valley Region <sup>117</sup>

	Wallkill Valley	Franklin	Hamburg	Hardyston	Ogdensburg
Business Administration					PY BA shared w/ Hamburg & Hardyston as needed
Spanish Teacher			Shares w/ Lafayette		
Nursing Sub Services	Hardyston & Franklin	Hardyston	Hardyston	Provide to others	Hardyston & Franklin
Health Insurance	SHIF	NJ SEHBP	NJ SEHBP	SHIF	SHIF
Liability & Property Insurance	SAIF	SAIF	NJSIG	SAIF	SAIF
Electricity	ACES	ACES	ACES	ACES	
Fuel (propane)		Morris County Pricing Council	ACES	ACES	
Transportation Abstracts, Bids, Quotes & Jointures	Own bids & some buses for athletics & sped; jointure w/ High Point	SCESC, reg co-op	SCESC, reg co-op	Sussex Cty Transport Co-op	Sussex Cty Transport Co-op
Food Service	Maschio	Maschio	Maschio	Maschio	Maschio
Facilities & Fields	Storage space shared w/ Franklin & Hamburg			Share cost w/twp	
Fuel for Vehicles	Hardyston Twp	Hardyston Twp	Hardyston Twp	Twp	
Staff Development					Receive within region
Purchasing Co-Ops	MRESC, HCESC, Ed Data, Sourcewell, Omnia	MRESC, HCESC, ACT	ESC of NJ		
Repairs			Camden Cty ESC		
Snow, Salt & Trash Services	Hardyston Twp salts parking lots	Borough	Borough does salt, snow, misc repairs	Twp does recycling, waste	Twp does waste, snow
Solar	3rd party sells SRECs, expires in 2 years			Sussex Cty, no transmission cost	
Ed Equipment & Supplies	Ed-Data	Ed-Data	HCESC, MCESC	ESC of NJ	HCESC

<sup>117</sup> Data gathered from business administrators and NJDOE User-Friendly Budgets

Shared services between school districts, or between districts and municipalities can save money, generate positive public relations, and foster good relationships. 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 trust.

All of the districts in this study participate in some shared services as indicated in Table 155. It is obvious that the districts in the Wallkill Valley region have worked hard to establish money saving and efficiency enhancing shared services.

### Potential Improvements in Shared Services

As stated, there are some shared services occurring in the region, but the group expressed a desire to explore the development of more agreements. Before embarking on a shared or joint service, it is recommended that some thought be given to the feasibility of the jointure before embarking on it. Useful steps include: <sup>118</sup>

- Establishing a clear goal – describe the service to be provided, clarify expectations, ensure all potential participants are on board;
- Describing the level of service currently being provided and how that would change in a joint operation – does it meet current needs? what are the future needs?;
- Determining the costs of providing the service currently and jointly; and
- Determining how the service will be provided – assign responsibility, identify potential problem areas

These districts have had stable administration at the superintendent level, but have seen significant turnover in the business administrator positions in recent years. As of August 2025, only the regional high school will have had the same business administrator for more than two years. Turnover of administrative personnel, especially in small districts, where one or two people are performing many different roles, creates multiple opportunities for errors and missed deadlines. Simply put, a one- or two-person office restricts the development of systems of checks and balances or internal controls, through no fault of those in the office. The lack of continuity of personnel in certain positions in the district can create a situation where the staff are always catching up and would rarely allow time for exploring greater effectiveness and money saving opportunities.

Although current operations are being handled productively, it appears that all of the districts could be better served from a cost effectiveness and efficiency standpoint with a well-staffed, regional business office with some school level staffing. The following operations would happen for a single district instead of five separate entities: audit; payroll; human resources; transportation;

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<sup>118</sup> Division of Local Government Services. (2010). Shared services working together: A guide to joint service feasibility studies and shared service agreements. NJ Department of Community Affairs.

purchasing/accounts payable; entitlement funds, competitive grant writing, and grant administration; software licenses and support; food service management companies/directors and software; facilities management; compliance reporting; budget preparation; and school treasury services.

A regional business office could not only handle these required functions, but also allow time to explore grants, alternative funding, purchasing co-operatives, joint insurance, and other money saving options. In small districts, one or two people are expected to be an expert in all areas. While this may occur sometimes, it is very difficult to meet all state deadlines and handle day-to-day problems as well. The expertise of individuals in a particular area could be strengthened and should eventually save the districts time and money.

Similarly, the centralized administrative and educational reports are done by many different individuals, where a single office could have individuals who become more experienced in, and familiar with, processing the reports. Some examples are:

- Quality Single Accountability Continuum (NJQSAC)
- School Safety Data System (SSDS)
- Standards Measurement and Resource for Teaching (NJSMART)
- Application for State School Aid (ASSA)
- Annual Comprehensive Financial Report (ACFR)
- Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Accountability Report
- Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC)
- Open Public Records Act (OPRA) Requests
- Fall Enrollment Report
- Certified and Non-Certified Staff Reports
- School Performance Reports
- State Budget Submission

Beyond a joint business office, other possible areas for exploration include: <sup>119</sup>

- Counseling – The availability of counselors is more important now than ever. Smaller schools often struggle to employ full-time staff in this area. Acting as a region, some counseling positions may be shared across schools, reducing the financial burden on one district while offering continuity of services within the region. Although many districts share resources during a crisis, a core group of counselors may be able to provide specialization in specific areas of concern.
- Curriculum and Instruction – It has been stated previously in this study, for many reasons, that this is an area ripe for cooperative effort. An elementary coordinator for grades pK-8 (or pK-6) and a secondary coordinator for grades 9-12 (or 7-12) could work closely together to ensure consistency and continuity. This could be considered as a shared service where one

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<sup>119</sup> There is more detail on the education related areas in that domain of this study.

district employs the individual and others pay a portion of costs to the employing district. These leaders could also share oversight for student assessment and staff development.

- Facilities – A single facilities director could be another useful shared employee, planning projects and identifying facilities that could be done jointly, as well as establishing economies of scale for purchasing and personnel distribution.
- Food Services – Facility capacity for food services could be investigated to see if it would be more efficient to consolidate that activity in one district under a single food service management company with the other districts becoming satellite locations.
- Special Education – A shared special services director could provide opportunities to reduce the transition issues specifically mentioned during interviews with district personnel. Each of the districts offer multiple in-district programs. Depending on the number of students in any given year, efficiencies may be found in consolidating one or more of these programs into one or two of the elementary schools. There is other potential for joint operation among child study teams and related service providers.
- Special Subject Teachers – Art, music, and world language teachers are becoming increasingly difficult to find and hire into part-time positions. Sharing the services of full-time teachers may increase the likelihood that these teachers are attracted to and stay in the districts as well as providing continuity within the program.
- Staff Development – It is difficult for small districts to afford the cost of either sending out staff or bringing in meaningful professional development programs. Selecting a common goal and sharing that cost would assist all districts. Another frequent technique is sending a staff member for training and then asking that person to cross train other staff – a win-win as it reinforces the staff member’s training at the same time.
- Transportation – A regional transportation coordinator can find efficiencies in an area where costs are growing dramatically. This individual would be aware of the needs of all schools thus allowing for combining students more productively in a route or routes together, improving the overall cost effectiveness of all districts. By utilizing advanced software for route optimization and ensuring regular communication among districts, the transportation framework could adapt dynamically to changing needs. This proactive approach would not only enhance operational efficiency but also improve service quality for students requiring specialized transportation.

While opportunities exist to share personnel, not all positions lend themselves to it. For example, unlike a regionalized district with one board of education, the superintendent and business administrator in a shared personnel relationship are the administrators of two separate school districts. However, they contend with two different sets of employee agreements and budgets, twice as many evening meetings, and twice as many compliance activities. The districts may also have

different workplace cultures, norms, and work rules, which can impact the success of the shared service arrangements. This requires a strong commitment on the part of the shared employees, and can be a stressful factor that may contribute to frequent turnover or burnout.

While services can be shared among separate districts, fully regionalized districts can realize all of the benefits mentioned above while simultaneously reducing duplication of efforts in many areas of operation and providing staff with time for program development, research, innovation, and cost savings.

It is also worth noting that a couple of the districts are utilizing the Sussex County Educational Services Commission (SCESC) for transportation. Educational services commissions have been established mostly at the county level to provide cost-effective shared services that individual districts might not be able to afford on their own, offer professional development and training for educators, deliver specialized educational programs and services, and provide administrative and operational support to member districts. SCESC focuses predominantly on special education services, including its Northern Hills Academy for students with more severe needs with “instruction based on a hybrid of the principles of ABA, including the use of positive reinforcement systems, and clearly defined intervention strategies to promote learning and a multi-sensory approach.”<sup>120</sup> SCESC also provides administrative and support services including itinerant roles for child study teams, related services, and home instruction. There may be an opportunity to explore these or other services that could be considered by SCESC to be provided to the entire region.

### 30. Financial and Operational Impact

The consultants performed a comprehensive review and analysis of historical state aid, tax levies, property values, incomes, audits, enrollments, and other financial records, in order to analyze district operations, project future values, and estimate the financial impact of regionalizing for each participating district and municipality. The projections and analyses presented here are based on current data, trends, and assumptions. Actual outcomes may vary based on future economic conditions, policy decisions, and other factors that could impact school funding and operations. As such, this report should serve as a guide for informed decision-making, with the understanding that ongoing monitoring and potential adjustments may be necessary if the regionalization process moves forward.

A review of the main collective bargaining agreements provides a comparison of key aspects to help with potential negotiations if the districts decide to regionalize fully. A successor agreement would need to be negotiated between the new board and new association representatives. If a successor agreement were not reached within three years, the Wallkill Valley contract would govern staff in grades 9-12, and the Hardyston CBA for grades pK-8.

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<sup>120</sup> SCESC website

This review may also be used simply as points for comparison and synthesis in future negotiations on the separate agreements. Recognition clauses are diverse and range from Franklin's and Hardyston's inclusive agreement to Ogdensburg's that does not include secretaries/administrative assistants to Hamburg's and Wallkill Valley's that only include certified staff. Another major difference is in the area of arbitration, where Hardyston and Wallkill Valley have binding arbitration and Franklin, Hamburg, and Ogdensburg have advisory/non-binding arbitration.

There are slight differences in negotiations, grievance procedures, and association rights and privileges. The length of the staff school year ranges from 182 days to 185 days. The length of day is very similar, varying from 7 hours to 7 hours and 15 minutes. There is a large variance in starting salaries, and other topics would need coordination in a combined agreement. 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.

Budgetary costs per student were examined comparing district spending priorities and efficiency to their peers across the state. There are times when state comparisons are easy to interpret, and others when they are not. Low student enrollments make it difficult to be efficient financially. It is worth noting that even though economies of scale tend to favor larger entities, the smaller districts of Franklin (7.2%), Hamburg (8.8%) and Ogdensburg (9.7%) report administrative spending below the state median percentage of 10.3%. It is clear that all five districts prioritize direct spending on students in terms of the percentage of dollars allocated to classroom instruction. This is a strong positive indicator as it provides direct student academic experiences, and therefore should receive primary attention and commitment in the district budget.

Modest cost savings have been projected for an enlarged regional district of \$1.3 million annually. These savings would primarily come from consolidating administrative functions and reducing duplicative services across the current constituent districts. They include the projected cost of moving staff to the appropriate default salary guides as identified by statute. There are other opportunities for savings that are not included in the calculations such as curriculum and textbook purchases, in-district special education programs, student transportation, technology infrastructure, central office functions, unified contract negotiations, and the potential for self-insured health benefit plans that would be viable in an enlarged regional.

Despite these cost savings, the consultants intend for all existing programs to be maintained. The actual implementation and allocation of any cost reductions would ultimately be determined by the board of education of the regional district, ensuring that decisions about resource allocation will be made with consideration of the region's specific needs and priorities in mind. The cost savings detailed in the study represent potential tax savings, as the actual impact on future tax levies in each municipality will depend on decisions made by the future board of education of the regional school district.

State aid projections for both the status quo and regionalization scenarios are based on SFRA, as modified by both S2 (enacted in 2018) and new FY 2026 methodology updates. The updates placed

caps on annual increases and decreases of 6% and 3%, respectively, and necessitated an analysis of aid under both scenarios. In both scenarios, state aid in an enlarged regional is expected to be lower than the sum of total state aid if the districts remain separate. However, projected aid is estimated to be substantially higher in the capped aid scenario (\$11.2 million vs. \$4.8 million).

In the uncapped aid scenario where full SFRA formula funding is provided throughout the study period, state aid in the enlarged regional is projected to decrease by \$5.7 million. The large decrease is triggered as a result of combining the constituent districts' property wealth and aggregate incomes, both of which are used by the SFRA formula in setting levels of state aid. When the figures are combined, individual district dynamics give way to the aggregate dynamics over all constituents and the single consolidated district receives disadvantaged treatment under SFRA.

P.L.2021, c.402 provides newly enlarged regional school districts a form of protection from state aid reductions. The law holds the enlarged or newly created regional harmless to the prior year such that the new regional's funding cannot fall below the total sum of all constituent district state aid in the year prior to regionalization. The protection is afforded through FY 2029.

Examining the figures for fiscal years 2027 through 2029, the locked aid protection will be triggered and the prior-year locked state aid amount of \$12.3 million will be provided as it is higher than the regional district's aid if calculated on its own under SFRA (\$11.9 million). Following the protection's expiration, aid in FY 2030 and 2031 will decline by the maximum allowable amount of 3% under the capped aid scenario, falling to \$11.5 million by FY 2031. With no aid caps, aid in FY 2030 and 2031 collapses down to the district's SFRA formula aid amount of roughly \$5 million.

Given these circumstances, if the state continues capping state aid increases and decreases at 6% and 3%, the largest sum of state aid would be received in the status quo scenario followed by state aid in an enlarged regional with the locked aid protection, and finally the state aid with no locked aid protection. With no aid caps in place, the largest sum of state aid would be received by an enlarged regional with the locked aid protection through FY 2029 followed by the status quo separate districts, and finally, the state aid with no locked aid protection. For FY 2030 and 2031, with no more locked aid, state aid would be higher if the districts remain separate.

Two primary methods for apportionment of a regional district's costs are permitted under state law — allocation based on equalized property valuation (EPV), which distributes costs according to each municipality's property wealth, and allocation based on student enrollment (ENR), which assigns costs in proportion to each community's utilization of the district's services. Opposing patterns of benefit are present where some districts in the region benefit more from apportionment ratios that weight EPVs heavier and other districts benefiting more from apportionment ratios that weight ENR heavier.

For the regionalization scenario, the model identified an optimal apportionment ratio of 75% EPV to 25% ENR. However, while optimal in that each ratio allocates the tax levy as equitably as possible

to all communities, there is no combination of standard apportionment parameters that produces universal tax benefits to all communities in an enlarged regional configuration. Franklin, Hardyston, and Ogdensburg stand to see increases in tax liability in an enlarged regional relative to the status quo while Hamburg would see substantial tax reductions.

An alternate approach to tax apportionment is provided through P.L.2021, c.402, which permits a board of education to establish a transitional methodology, not to exceed ten years, of the apportionment method adopted by the voters provided that it is agreed to by all participating districts. A possible transitional methodology has been developed that would keep tax impacts positive for all districts for the first five years of the regional's operation and then provide a gradual phase-in towards formulaic apportionment under the optimal weights of 75% EPV and 25% ENR.

The amount of bonded debt in this region varies among the districts. Franklin and Ogdensburg do not have bonded debt, while Hamburg and Hardyston have outstanding amounts of \$3.87 million and \$5.535 million, respectively. As permitted by law and unless there are negotiated changes, any existing debt would become the debt of the new regional district. Wallkill Valley has debt of \$6.085 million, which is already shared by the municipalities in the region. As of June 30, 2024, the participating districts have varying balances in their reserve accounts, with Hardyston having the highest balance in capital reserve. Hamburg, Ogdensburg and Wallkill all have reserves of less than one million dollars, while Franklin has a one million dollar legal reserve.

The proposed regionalization does not result in students changing schools, so transportation would largely remain as it is. As requested, a student transportation seat time and distance travel evaluation was conducted based on the existing regional, which serves students in all four communities. The student ride times and distances traveled are within what is reasonable for an area of this size. It is recommended that Hardyston move the start times for both its schools forward by approximately 10 to 12 minutes. Hardyston currently operates a two-tier system for these routes; modifying the bell times would enable the implementation of a more efficient triple-tier busing system between Wallkill Valley and Hardyston. If the districts were to move to a centralized transportation coordinator, there may be opportunities for greater efficiencies in both cost and route design. In addition, the opportunity exists for a larger district to buy buses and hire drivers, which can be beneficial for special education, small group instruction, and after school activities among other things.

The districts in the Wallkill Valley region participate in the standard purchasing cooperatives, insurance, non-public funds administration services, and some transportation. The districts all use the same food service management company, and may want to explore sharing a manager. Consultants were not able to identify significant shared personnel or services within the region. There were instances of a recently retired business administrator assisting other districts while they were in the hiring process, and the high school provides some storage space to Hamburg and Franklin. Hamburg shares a Spanish teacher with a district outside the region. Hardyston Township provides fuel for most of the vehicles in the region. The districts do use co-ops and jointures for transportation.

# FINDINGS and RECOMMENDATIONS

This feasibility study considered perspectives from governance and law, education and program, demography and facilities, and finance and operations. After analysis of the data gathered in each of these domains, the consultants have produced a series of findings and urge the boards of education of the Wallkill Valley, Franklin, Hamburg, Hardyston, and Ogdensburg School Districts to consider the recommendations offered below. Note: Any referendum or vote to regionalize that does not include the options as designed for this study would completely change the analysis and findings produced herein.

**A key conclusion of this study is that an enlarged regional school district would provide multiple opportunities for a more effective and efficient educational program.** From curricular and instructional coordination to performance measures to special education to staffing and more, the research team identified many reasons why a grades pK-12 regionalization would have potential benefits for the success and support of all students. Absent an enlarged regional, there are also varied identified ways through which services and personnel could be shared more productively.

**The financial analysis identified challenges for regionalization.** First, state aid scenarios using either the SFRA uncapped formula or capped aid based on FY 2026 methodology updates show that state aid in an enlarged regional is expected to be lower than the sum of total state aid if the districts remain separate. Revised legislation is being developed to ensure that school districts pursuing the benefits of regionalization would be held harmless in future state aid calculations. Second, there is no combination of standard apportionment parameters that produces universal tax benefits to all communities in an enlarged regional configuration. **An alternate transitional methodology was presented that would keep tax impacts positive for all districts for the first five years of the enlarged regional's operation and then provide a gradual phase-in towards formulaic apportionment.**

The key findings and recommendations that follow pertain to each domain of the study and can be referenced in context at the page numbers as noted.

## Governance and Law

1. The 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* of the regional district (emphasis added), instead of to the voters of the regional district at large. If a majority of the voters in a majority of the constituent districts that constitute the limited purpose regional vote to expand the limited purpose district to an all purpose regional, then the proposal is considered adopted. In this case, a proposal would be submitted to the voters of Franklin, Hamburg, Hardyston, and Ogdensburg to expand Wallkill Valley. If voters in three of the four communities agree, Wallkill Valley would be enlarged into a grades pK-12 regional. (p. 27)

2. If a proposal to expand Wallkill Valley from a limited purpose regional to an all purpose regional does not move forward, a discussion among district leaders and boards of education to maximize opportunities for shared services among the districts would be encouraged. Thereafter, the development and approval of specific contracts would be necessary to design and adopt shared services agreements between the schools and districts. (p. 29)
3. The initial interim board of education for the newly enlarged all-purpose district would have one-third, or three, of its members selected from among the members of the existing Wallkill Valley Regional Board of Education. The remaining two-thirds, or six members, would be selected from among the members of the boards of education that agreed to join the enlarged regional. The law requires that board membership be apportioned based upon the proportional number of pupils enrolled from each constituent district that was part of the limited purpose regional. However, limited purpose constituent districts are permitted to apportion board members, as nearly as may be, according to the number of each of their inhabitants. (p. 30)
4. State law requires that the initial terms of the first elected board be staggered, and in this case, there would be three members elected for three years, three for two years, and three for one year. (p. 32)
5. The State's education law limits regionalization referendums to the April school election, the November statewide general election, or one of four special election dates authorized in N.J.S.A. 19:60-2 – the fourth Tuesday in January; the second Tuesday in March; the last Tuesday in September; or the second Tuesday in December. The school regionalization law is silent on the number of times or how frequently a regionalization referendum can be held.. (p. 33)
6. Districts are prohibited from consolidating, regionalizing, or withdrawing from a regional district if it will increase or exacerbate the segregation of students by racial, socioeconomic, disability or English language learner status. In this case, the statute is not applicable since all students in the communities currently attending the limited purpose regional would remain in attendance with their peers in the all purpose regional. (p. 33)
7. Each district scored admirably in its most recently completed NJQSAC monitoring cycles (2021-22 for Hardyston, Ogdensburg, and Wallkill Valley; 2022-23 for Franklin and Hamburg). Hardyston was recognized as a high performing district, and the other four districts were deemed high performing in all areas but one. 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. 34)
8. There are a few potential political issues identified by some of the districts that are worth keeping in mind if and when discussions begin regarding the advantages or drawbacks of regionalization and enhanced shared services. (p. 46)

9. Stakeholder input was a key feature of this study. The districts created a steering committee of superintendents, business administrators, and school board representatives to guide the outline of what was to be studied and to review and comment on an initial draft report. Surveys regarding school climate and academic preparedness were ways to capture input from students, parents, and staff about how each group felt about its schools. Some selected staff interviews were also held to gather insights that documentary evidence would not be able to provide. (p. 47)

### Education and Program

10. This analysis reveals that students entering Wallkill Valley from elementary schools in Franklin, Hamburg, Hardyston, and Ogdensburg arrive with fragmented educational backgrounds. Ensuring all incoming high school students share common experiences in educational programs and philosophy, consistent time allocation for content areas, and aligned professional development opportunities can provide numerous advantages. (p. 53)
11. A centralized regional curriculum office overseeing grades pK-12 education could provide unified leadership, support, and coordination for curriculum and instruction across the schools, ultimately enhancing student achievement and success. Such leadership could also facilitate coordination of shared educational services both within and beyond district boundaries. Even implementing coordinated curriculum solely for grades pK-8 would ensure students arrive at 9th grade better equipped for high school demands, enabling high school teachers to focus less on establishing common foundational knowledge and expectations with incoming students. (p. 53)
12. An all-purpose regional made up of the five districts would have a projected student enrollment of 2,259 students in 2025-26. This consolidation could allow for at least one administrative staff member (e.g., an assistant superintendent or a director of curriculum and instruction) to be devoted largely to the leadership of curriculum coordination, instructional supervision, and professional development. Another option would be to consider an elementary coordinator for grades pK-8 (or pK-6) and a secondary coordinator for grades 9-12 (or 7-12) who could work closely together to ensure consistency and continuity. Either option can also be considered as a shared service where one district employs the individual and others pay a portion of costs to the employing district. (p. 53)
13. The State has identified suggested maximum class sizes of 20 for grades K-5, 22 for grades 6-8, and 24 for grades 9-12. The data in this report show that all districts in the study are generally below or at least close to those suggested maximums. Regionalization of the districts may allow for decisions on more efficient placement or sharing of teaching staff. (p. 54)
14. Elementary/middle school instructional times vary from a low of 5 hours 45 minutes to a high of 6 hours 25 minutes. Further alignment of the length of school day and instructional time across the districts, or in an all purpose regional district, would provide a more even playing field for all students in these schools. Syncing school calendars more closely would assist with

transportation efficiencies, common planning, and collaborative professional development activities. (p. 55)

15. All of the districts have made significant investments in technology resources with at least a 1.0 to 1 student to device ratio mostly through Chromebooks in grades 3-8 and carts in grades K-2. STEM teams are organized in the middle school grades, and there is a move to pivot from smartboards to television monitors as a more cost effective use. Technology support services is an area where shared services or regional consolidation can have performance benefits. One model using the status quo governance structure is to have the people responsible for supervising or coordinating technology in each district begin to develop expertise in specific areas of technology such as instructional design, systems integration, professional development, accessibility, technical support, hardware and asset management, software updates, and/or data management and security. In this way these specialists could be called upon to address issues related to their expertise in any of the five districts. This is a model that could also be followed in an all purpose regional with one director, perhaps an assistant director with a targeted portfolio, and several specialized technicians. (p. 55-56)
16. The five districts met the federal ELA and Math proficiency standards in nine of ten measures, which is a strong indicator of academic success. Looking at disaggregated results, every district in this study has more student groups for whom the proficiency/progress targets are met or exceeded than for those not met. This speaks well of the successful work on the part of these schools and their staff members to reduce achievement gaps. (p. 58)
17. An overview of the three years of NJSLA data shows that 51 of the 75 ELA, 44 of the 83 Math, and 5 of the 9 Science results met or exceeded state averages. That said, there remain significant disparities among the four elementary district assessment scores at various grade levels. This adds further evidence to the recommendations on the desirability of better curriculum coordination, common philosophies and instructional materials, and similar resources devoted to academic work. (p. 64)
18. Districts achieving mSGP scores between 40.0-59.5 are considered as having met the federal accountability standard. The 32 mSGP scores in this dataset indicate that student growth met or exceeded that standard with only three exceptions that were each close to the standard. In short, the Franklin, Hamburg, Hardyston, and Ogdensburg schools are consistently assisting their students' academic growth to a successful level. (p. 69)
19. In SAT Reading and Writing over five years, Wallkill Valley Regional HS scored consistently above and had a percentage of students well above the college readiness benchmarks as compared to the state average. Math is more of a mixed result. (p. 70)
20. Wallkill Valley Regional HS students have increased their enrollment and performance in advanced coursework steadily, and in some cases significantly, over the five year period. The

disaggregated data reveal that both Wallkill Valley and the State overall have enrollment challenges that should be a priority. (p. 71)

21. Wallkill Valley Regional HS had equal to or better graduation rates than the state average for the 4-year and 5-year cohorts for each of the past three years. For those subgroups with sufficient enrollment, the school is graduating students near the state average in most cases. Notably, the school is doing quite well in preparing its students with disabilities to meet their graduation requirements and earn their diplomas. (p. 73)
22. The four elementary schools are currently serving 240 preschool students, 74% of the total estimated three- and four-year old population, in 18 classrooms. Serving the full realistic universe of 90%, while considering the need for some self-contained rooms, would require at least an additional 2-3 classrooms. Given a future need for elementary classrooms due to projected enrollment increases, an option to consider for preschool expansion could be leasing space to create a joint preschool center in another facility. (p. 79)
23. Lack of alignment among the districts has led to different special education programs by grade level that create difficulties with IEP alignment and transition. One suggestion from the districts was to consider more interdistrict placements before looking outside the region. Depending on the number of students in any given year, efficiencies may be found in consolidating one or more of these programs into one or even two of the elementary schools. (p. 82)
24. Special education leaders discussed how to make it more feasible to operate in-house (for out of district placements) or target more specific needs (for in-district students) if the schools in the region operated more cohesively. It was noted that there are often short turnaround times for decisions, planning time is hard to find, and there are challenges with staffing in the short term. It was suggested that a way to start would be to hold more frequent meetings to discuss flexibility and joint operation. (p. 82)
25. All superintendents felt there would be value in aligning special education leadership. One option to improve coordination and address some of the issues of the elementary to high school IEP transition concerns in the status quo arrangement would be to consider a single regional elementary director responsible for grades pK-8 (or pK-6) and a regional secondary director responsible for grades 9-12 (or 7-12). In an all purpose regional environment, a single director would be able to implement a more seamless approach to address these issues. (p. 82)
26. A specific request was to look into CST structures and caseloads to see what could be optimized. All districts have struggled with staffing, so their structures are unique to their personnel. Franklin appears to have the largest caseloads at about 40 students per CST member with Wallkill Valley in the same range at between 38 and 45. Hardyston comes in at 35 per with the social worker, who is also implementing the Tier 1 Second Step social-emotional learning (SEL) program, having as many as 50. Ogdensburg (18) and Hamburg (16) have the smallest caseloads but acknowledge that most of their CST staff do multiple jobs including schoolwide Tier 1 SEL.

This is an area for conversation about job responsibilities and whether there are ways to find more optimal solutions. (p. 83)

27. Similar to specialized services for students with disabilities, students receiving MTSS support can gain additional benefits when staff invest in standardized screening tools and support systems. The key advantage of regional partnerships or shared services lies in accessing district-wide expertise and resources while maintaining the personalized attention possible in smaller school settings—all before students require formal special education classification. (p. 85)
28. The multilingual student population in this region is projected to grow significantly, rising from 2.0% in 2024-25 to 4.2% by 2029-30. Regional districts can offer multilingual learners a more comprehensive program that extends beyond standalone language classes to include content-area teachers trained in sheltered instruction methodologies. (p. 85)
29. Gifted education programming varies significantly across the elementary districts, with each school offering different services and minimal alignment between programs. Enhanced collaboration through regional partnerships or joint offerings could standardize programming to ensure all gifted students receive comparable, equitable support before transitioning to high school advanced coursework. (p. 85-86)
30. There is minimal personnel sharing in place currently among the districts. A second nurse is being shared between Franklin and Hardyston. Recently, Hardyston and Ogdensburg shared a business administrator, and Hamburg and Hardyston shared a music teacher. Varied responsibilities are not reflected frequently in employees' official job titles, as staff members in districts of these sizes commonly fulfill multiple roles. The goal should be delivering equivalent or enhanced educational services through optimized staffing and operational practices whenever feasible. (p. 94)
31. In a grades pK-12 regional, the board of education would collaborate with district and building administrators to establish staffing requirements for each elementary grade level from kindergarten through grade 5, and for each subject area at the secondary level spanning grades 6 through 12. Within a consolidated system, staff members could be reassigned between grade levels or transferred across schools within their certification areas to optimize student services throughout the district. Over time, these internal transfers and reassignments could generate improved staffing efficiencies and more strategic teacher placements. (p. 94)
32. If there is an enlargement of the current limited purpose regional, this study assumes that all existing schools will remain open and operate with most school-level positions remaining as they presently are. With school-level staff remaining relatively constant, the opportunities for efficiency will be more available by combining some positions on district office staffs. A district staff analysis modeled what a regional district office structure might look like based on the projected 2025-26 enrollment of 2,259 students compared to current staffing in the five districts

today. The result is a personnel level that is more streamlined, and potentially more efficient, than is possible in the status quo district configuration. (p. 94-95)

### Demography and Facilities

33. Births in the region have been averaging 156 per year and trending 2+ births each year over the last 6 years. Franklin, Hardyston and Ogdensburg have the largest increases in births relative to population in the region, while births in Hamburg have decreased relative to population. (p. 103-104)
34. Research indicates that there are no planned major housing developments above the recent averages in any of the four municipalities that might impact school enrollment significantly at this time. The data 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. Only Hardyston Township experienced significant housing development. While Hardyston Township averaged 15 occupancies per year for the last 6 years, Franklin Township averaged 2.3 per year, and Hamburg and Ogdensburg are both under one per year. In the period from 2019-2024, 303 building permits were issued in the four municipalities and only 110 (36.3%) were followed by occupancy permits. (p. 105)
35. Affordable housing mandates for Round 4 have recently been issued for present and prospective need obligations. They are at a combined level of 2,168 units for the four municipalities with Hardyston's by far the largest at 1,622. If, when, and how the mandates will be met is unknown at this time. Compliance with the obligations needs to be monitored on a municipal and project basis. (p. 106)
36. The enrollment history in the Wallkill Valley region from 2019-20 to 2024-25 shows overall increases of 5.0% from 2,191 to 2,300 students. This data is used to calculate combined average survival ratios to project the total enrollment for a potential grades pK-12 regional school district. The average migration ratios across grades K-12 indicate that the number of students transitioning from one grade level to the next is 1.00, a consistent flow of students through the school system. (p. 106)
37. While the State does not provide numbers of students enrolled as school choice students by district, Ogdensburg's program has been particularly successful financially. It expects to receive \$468,198 in state school choice aid for the 2025-26 school year. Hardyston expects to receive \$122,451 and Wallkill Valley anticipates \$111,264. The State also does not publish the enrollments of charter school students by student resident district. However, the financial impact on each district can be considered based on the payments identified for charter school students. For the 2023-24 school year, the region's districts allotted the following amounts for their resident students to attend charter schools: Hamburg \$387,870; Hardyston \$153,270; Franklin

\$92,496; and Ogdensburg \$26,000. Wallkill Valley did not identify any transfers to charter schools for the 2023-24 school year. (p. 108-109)

38. The overall growth in enrollment in the Wallkill Valley region over the next five years is projected to be 53 students from the 2024-25 actual enrollment of 2,300 students, an aggregate increase of 2.3% or about .05% per year and a material averaged change of approximately 3 to 4 students per grade over 14 grade levels. This is a continuation, though a flattening, of the recent five-year trend of steady enrollment growth. (p. 110)
39. Elementary enrollment peaks in 2029-30 at 1,809 students, demonstrating a growth of 90 students over five years, using the 2024-25 school year as the base year. The secondary school enrollment is projected to peak at 562 students in 2028-29, the fourth year of the five-year projection. When examining the enrollment projections by elementary and secondary school levels, there are important changes going on in the region. The elementary school enrollment is projected to increase by 90 students over the next five years, while the secondary school enrollment is expected to decline by 37 students. This will be worth monitoring, given the enrollment decline over the past two decades of 29.7% at Wallkill Valley Regional HS. If the projected gains in the elementary population are realized and impact the secondary enrollment positively through 2029-30 and beyond, the future enrollment of Wallkill Valley Regional HS may be more promising than the previous twenty-year trendline. (p. 110-114)
40. Disaggregated data from the perspectives of race, ethnicity, income, and language for the students in the Wallkill Valley region over the past six years with projections for the next five years show that changes in group compositions largely mirror the trends in each municipality. An exception is the growth in median family incomes compared to the projected growth in the number of low income students. (p. 114)
41. Given that the scenario contemplated would not change the composition of districts in this region, there is expected to be no impact on racial and other demographic groups from a full pK-12 regionalization. However, increases in the number of students of Hispanic (from 20.6% to 35.2% of the total enrollment) and Multiracial (from 2.8% to 4.1%) backgrounds provide an opportunity to evaluate the equity of access to resources and programs in the schools for these traditionally underserved groups. There is projected to be a near doubling of the numbers of both low income and multilingual students across the region over the next five years as well. (p. 119)
42. In spite of the 19.1% decline in student enrollment over the past two decades, this analysis of the utilization of school facilities does not find a corresponding increase in the number of available classroom spaces. It is understood that schools operate differently than they did twenty years ago, with greater emphasis on using spaces to meet the needs of students with specialized needs as well as a broadening of the curriculum for all students. This analysis shows that expanding the educational program in the current school facilities in the region will be challenging, especially given a desire to consider expanding preschool programs to more families. (p. 124)

## Finance and Operations

43. According to state law, the salary guide and terms and conditions of employment 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. This suggests that the Wallkill Valley contract would govern staff in grades 9-12, and the Hardyston CBA for grades pK-8 after the initial three year period if a successor agreement is not reached in that time. (p. 128-129)
44. The review of the primary CBAs for Wallkill Valley, Franklin, Hamburg, Hardyston and Ogdensburg intends to provide useful information to aid the negotiations process should the districts decide to form an all purpose regional district, or can be used simply as points for comparison and synthesis in future negotiations. Common labor practices and contractual language could simplify the ability to share staff when desirable. There are notable differences among the agreements throughout this comparative analysis, with particular attention needed in the areas of recognition clauses, initial salary steps, longevity payments, and health benefit coverages. (p. 129)
45. The study evaluates the cost of transitioning all eligible staff members to the applicable default salary guide and terms of employment, based on current staffing data and guide structures. In the event that no successor collective bargaining agreement is negotiated within three years of regionalization, the estimated costs of transitioning staff to the Hardyston guide are: \$35,296 for Franklin; \$97,508 for Hamburg; and \$97,045 for Ogdensburg. This yields a total cost of about \$230,000. These estimated costs were included in the broader calculations described in the Cost Savings section. (p. 135)
46. It is clear that all five districts prioritize direct spending on students in terms of the percentage of dollars allocated to classroom instruction. This is a strong positive indicator as it provides direct student academic experiences, and therefore should receive primary attention and commitment in the district budget. Another interesting note is that lower spending on administration is often identified by the public as an area to realize potential efficiencies in education. Even though economies of scale tend to favor larger entities, the smaller districts of Franklin at 7.2%, Hamburg at 8.8%, and Ogdensburg at 9.7% are all below the state median percentage of administrative spending of 10.3%. (p. 142)
47. The primary areas targeted for cost reduction include audit processes, professional services, and administrative and support staffing. Despite the cost savings identified and presented in the table, all existing programs are anticipated to be maintained. The estimated cost savings of \$1.3 million would come primarily from consolidating administrative functions and reducing duplication across the districts. However, these savings are partially offset by necessary

investments in both existing positions that assume more responsibility, and new positions to serve the enlarged regional created by restructuring. (p. 143)

48. It is important to note that these cost savings do not include the potential financial efficiencies and educational benefits that could occur from consolidating and coordinating operations such as curriculum and textbook purchases, in-district special education programs, student transportation, technology infrastructure, central office functions, unified contract negotiations, and the potential for self-insured health benefit plans that would be viable in an enlarged regional. Each of these would require further exploration and consideration by a regional board of education and administration or joint actions by the districts as currently structured. (p. 144)
49. To provide clarity, state aid was analyzed in two ways in this study. First, where the described methodology changes were applied consistently across all years in the study period. Second, where the changes were applied exclusively to FY 2026, with subsequent years reverting back to the default SFRA mechanisms. Comparing the two methods, the analysis found that the state's caps on aid reductions will work to dampen the region's projected future state aid losses by about \$2 million annually in aggregate. (p. 151)
50. In the status quo where Wallkill Valley continues as a limited purpose regional, uncapped state aid is projected to decline in the near term through FY 2027 and then stabilize around \$1.5 million annually. However, as previously mentioned, continuing the state's capped aid methodology would instead have the district receive annual 3% reductions in aid through at least 2031 as aid moves directionally towards the lower uncapped aid amount. As of this writing, it remains the consultants' belief that aid caps will be continued for the foreseeable future due to their stabilizing nature. (p. 151-152)
51. The enlarged regional is projected to see declining state aid through FY 2031 driven by underlying SFRA formula mechanics. The district would receive the maximum allowable annual reduction of three percent in each year but will benefit greatly from the capped state aid methodology. With no caps in place, the district would receive an average of \$6.4 million less in aid annually. (p. 156)
52. Changes to state law provide important protections against the type of aid reductions described above that may result from regionalization. But, the existing protections are not enough on their own to bring the enlarged regionals' aid up to levels that match state aid allocations to the separate districts. Additionally, the statutory language currently only provides protection through FY 2029, at which point the full weight of the effect would be felt by the enlarged regional. Revised legislation is being developed to ensure that school districts pursuing the benefits of regionalization would be held harmless in future state aid calculations. (p. 158-161)
53. After reaching highs in around 2009, EPVs in each municipality mostly declined or trended sideways through 2019 and have begun to rise through the present. The future projections factor in longer-term secular trends informed by historical data dating back to 1985. Based on those

trends, equalized values were forecast for 2027 through 2031. Generally, the model anticipates the upward trend observed over the last decade to continue through at least 2031. (p. 165)

54. Aligned with growth rates determined by this study's demographer, total enrollment in the region is projected to initially continue its decline before rising by FY 2031 to exceed current levels. Communities with increasing ENR shares would bear proportionally larger shares of regional costs, while communities with declining shares would see their cost responsibilities decrease accordingly. (p. 171-172)
55. Hardyston would benefit financially from ENR-based apportionment, as its property wealth exceeds its student ENR proportions. Franklin, Ogdensburg, and Hamburg would prefer EPV apportionment, as their student ENR exceeds their property wealth contributions. (p. 172)
56. The model's optimal ratio, which attempts to balance tax impacts between all constituent communities and minimize extreme impacts, would select an apportionment method that weights each community's EPV at 75% and ENR at 25%. At this ratio, Franklin, Hardyston, and Ogdensburg would all experience an increase in total tax liability relative to what they would otherwise pay in the status quo. Hamburg would see a decrease in its tax liability relative to the status quo. While the model attempts to identify a combination that could provide benefits to all communities, no such outcome appears possible under current conditions. (p. 175)
57. An alternate approach to tax apportionment is provided through P.L.2021, c.402, which permits a board of education to establish a transitional methodology, not to exceed ten years, of the apportionment method adopted by the voters provided that the methodology is agreed to by all participating districts. A possible transitional methodology has been developed that would keep tax impacts positive for all districts for the first five years of the regional's operation and then provide a gradual phase-in towards formulaic apportionment under the optimal weights of 75% EPV and 25% ENR. (p. 177-178)
58. Three of the five districts in this study have bonded debt: Wallkill Valley at \$6.1 million; Hardyston at \$5.5 million; and Hamburg at \$3.9 million. The steering committee tasked the study team with considering long range facility needs as they pertain to debt capacity. The combined cost estimate for long range facility projects of \$59,612,700 is well within the legal debt margin of the enlarged regional at \$82,408,069. This analysis does not include Hamburg's recent issues with its 1900 era school building that came to light while this study was in progress. In spite of having sufficient debt capacity, the administration and board of education of an enlarged regional would likely want to pull the long range facility plans together, prioritize emergent projects, and schedule the others over an extended period of time. (p. 182-185)
59. The five districts use only four types of reserve accounts – maintenance, capital, unemployment, and legal – that have a total balance of \$5.8 million. (p. 185)

60. The proposed regionalization does not result in students changing schools, so transportation would largely remain as it is. There would be no impact on student seat time or distance traveled from a regionalization, as there has been no discussion of any intent to change the schools that students are attending. As requested, a student transportation seat time and distance travel evaluation was conducted based on the existing regional, which serves students in all four communities. The findings were that student ride times and distances traveled are within what is reasonable for an area of this size. (p. 188)
61. If the districts were to move to a centralized transportation coordinator, there may be opportunities for greater efficiencies in both cost and route design. In addition, the opportunity exists for a larger district to buy buses and hire drivers, which can be beneficial for special education, small group instruction, and after school activities among other things. (p. 191-192)
62. It is recommended that Hardyston move the start times for both its schools forward by approximately 10 to 12 minutes. Hardyston currently operates a two-tier system for these routes; modifying the bell times would enable the implementation of a more efficient triple-tier busing system between Wallkill Valley and Hardyston. (p. 192)
63. All of the districts in this study participate in some shared services. It is obvious that the districts in the Wallkill Valley region have worked hard to establish money saving and efficiency enhancing shared services. A survey of 66 school districts in Bergen, Burlington, Essex, and Somerset counties found that 64 of them participated in some form of shared services. The more popular types of shared services among those districts (above 50% involved) included transportation, insurance, supplies, special education classes, and related services (i.e, occupational, physical, and speech therapies). (p. 195-198)
64. Although current operations are being handled productively, it appears that all of the districts could be better served from a cost effectiveness and efficiency standpoint with a well-staffed, regional business office with some school level staffing. A regional business office could not only handle required functions, but also allow time to explore grants, alternative funding, purchasing co-operatives, joint insurance, and other money saving options. (p. 198-199)
65. Beyond a joint business office, other possible areas identified for exploration included counseling, curriculum and instruction, facilities, food services, special education, special subject teachers, staff development, and transportation. (p. 199-200)