

ICYMI: DCA Awards Grants for School Regionalization Studies

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School Regionalization Efficiency Program Aims to Help School Districts Conduct Feasibility Studies to Explore Merging with Neighboring Communities

TRENTON, NJ – The New Jersey Department of Community Affairs (DCA) Division of Local Government Services (DLGS) has announced the awarding of School Regionalization Efficiency Program (SREP) grants to five school districts. These grants are intended to offset the costs associated with conducting feasibility studies that explore the potential advantages of school district regionalization or consolidation. By merging school districts or implementing shared services agreements, there is potential for cost savings and other efficiencies that could benefit both students and taxpayers. The grant program was established by P.L.2021, c.402, which was signed into law by Governor Phil Murphy in January 2022.

"This funding for these studies allows our nation leading public school districts to examine ways in which to reduce costs while maintaining the same level of academic excellence of our students," **said Acting Governor Tahesha Way**. "Our Administration will continue to prioritize New Jersey school systems to ensure students excel in the classroom and achieve their academic goals."

"We are excited that school districts are utilizing this grant funding to explore potential regionalization opportunities," **said Commissioner Jacquelyn A. Suárez, who also serves as Director of the Division of Local Government Services**. "New Jersey public schools are ranked among the best in the nation due to their consistent and innovative delivery of high-quality academic resources and services to students. Regionalization can pave the way for new and expanded courses, extracurricular programs, and enhanced facilities, all while making efficient use of taxpayer dollars. It's a concept worth investigating, and we look forward to collaborating with the school districts as they undertake their studies."

"The School Regionalization Efficiency Program (SREP) is an outside-the-box approach to providing new educational opportunities in our schools as well as developing innovative ways to achieve cost savings and efficiencies, ultimately benefiting both students and taxpayers," **said Acting Commissioner of Education Kevin Dehmer**. "Through these grants, this double win is a significant step towards enhancing our educational system and provides practical experience for other districts that may be considering regionalization."

Once again, we see the amazing benefits that result from schools and local communities when they take the initiative to work together. These same school leaders are taking the time to study the possibility of regionalization to see if it is applicable to their district," **said former Mayors Jordan Glatt and Nicolas Platt, who were appointed by Governor Murphy in a bipartisan effort in 2018 to be the state's first Shared Services Czars**. "We are proud of the professional staff at the Department of Community Affairs (DCA) who stand ready to support the districts as they conduct their feasibility studies."

The feasibility studies will evaluate factors such as enrollment, facility utilization, existing send/receive relationships, administrative staffing, class size, diversity enhancement, debt and contractual obligations, faculty needs and attrition, among others.

The following school districts received SREP Grants:

School District	Award Amount
Logan Township Board of Education	\$75,000
Watchung Hills Regional High School	\$135,000
Central Regional Board of Education	\$130,000



School District	Award Amount
Holland Township School	\$118,000
Wallkill Regional Board of Education	\$123,900

Priority was given to school districts that applied for grant funding to study opportunities for K- 12 regionalization and countywide school district consolidation. The funding can cover:

- Preliminary approval for school district regionalization to form an all-purpose regional district by expanding an existing limited-purpose regional district through consolidation with some or all the constituent or sending school districts, or to form a countywide school district.
- Newly proposed feasibility studies for school district regionalization and those studies in the process of being conducted.
- Previously conducted feasibility studies for school district regionalization that were completed within two (2) years prior to the enactment of P.L. 2021 c. 133 on June 29, 2021.
- All feasibility studies must seek to advance an enhanced learning environment for participating school districts; coordinate curriculum across schools and grades throughout the proposed consolidation/regionalization; reflect the potential for improved efficiency and cost savings; consolidate school districts that are in close geographic proximity of each other; and make good faith efforts to implement study recommendations, among other criteria.
- Feasibility studies must demonstrate that the proposed regionalization does not, and is not foreseeably likely to, increase or exacerbate the segregation of students by racial, socioeconomic, disability, or English language proficiency.

The school districts are required to provide DLGS with semi-annual project progress reports on the activities and progress of the feasibility study project. The grant funding is provided on a reimbursement basis.

At the conclusion of their project, the school districts must submit a final feasibility study report, recommendations, and the regionalization implementation plan. Once a study has been completed, the school districts are encouraged to follow through with service sharing agreements but not obligated to do so.

DLGS serves as an advocate for local government interests and provides technical and financial assistance in budgeting, financial reporting, joint services, purchasing, and management issues. It is responsible for the financial integrity of all local government units and reviews and approves all municipal, county, and fire district budgets. It also reviews many local government financial actions and governs and guides the conduct of local government officials.

For more information on the School Regionalization Efficiency Program, visit https://www.nj.gov/dca/dlgs/programs/srep_grants.shtml (https://www.nj.gov/dca/dlgs/programs/srep_grants.shtml).

DCA offers a wide range of programs and services, including local government management and finance, affordable housing production, fire safety, building safety, community planning and development, disaster recovery and mitigation, historic preservation, and information privacy.

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Office of Governor PO Box 001
Trenton, NJ 08625
609-292-6000

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