

OCTOBER 31st, 2008 DEREGIONALIZATION UPDATE

RE: INVESTIGATION FINDINGS IN THE QUESTION OF THE FEASIBILITY OF LIBERTY TOWNSHIP WITHDRAWING FROM THE GREAT MEADOWS TO FORM A K-5

Dear Parents/Guardians-

On October 24th, 2008 County Superintendent Dr. Kevin Brennan returned a decision in regards to Liberty Town Council's current request to withdraw from GMRSD and become its own K-5 district. Dr. Brennan states, "I do not support the request of Liberty Township to withdraw from the Great Meadows Regional School District and to establish a single K-5 school district."

The following reasons were given:

EDUCATIONAL IMPACT:

- a. The educational programs provided through the GMRSD continue to function in a highly effective manner. This conclusion is supported by Liberty Township Council's own Feasibility Study. There is a concern that the K-5 change would have a negative impact on the newly formed smaller elementary district and the GMRSD. The original decision to establish the school district was, in part, to provide a more comprehensive and complete school system for students.
- b. The success of students at each of the schools operated by the GMRSD is a product of a coordinated system of education; it is fair to assume that dissolving this system would result in a reduction in the effectiveness of the curriculum and overall educational program.
- c. The Feasibility Study suggests that the newly formed Liberty Township School District may or may not choose to continue the sending-receiving relationship with Hackettstown. The possibility of Liberty dissolving that relationship would represent a potentially negative impact on the high school.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

- a. Each township has been affected both positively and negatively by the tax apportionment formula. At an earlier time, Independence Township was paying higher taxes than Liberty Township in support of the regional school district. The possibility of amending the tax apportionment formula, while rejected in a recent referendum, continues to be open to the townships as a solution to their financial concerns. In the meantime, the regional school district continues to operate in an efficient manner with one of the lowest per pupil cost in the State as compared with comparable K-8 school districts and a budget that is at or below all State CAPS.
- b. A number of areas present probable increases in cost for a newly formed K-5 Liberty district: the anticipated need to replace the sewage treatment plant at the Liberty School, the realignment of personnel who are currently shared throughout the regional school district, general administration-including chief school administrator and secretary salaries/benefits, central services including school business administrator and other business office staff salaries/benefits, and the veteran status of the Liberty Township

faculty would have a disproportionately higher cost allocated to the newly formed K-5 district.

c. There is no guarantee that the State will provide the current 2% per year minimum increase in educational funding. In fact, with the current financial crisis, increases in state aid may not be likely.

d. With the dissolution of the regional school district, Liberty Twp. would be responsible for a proportionate share of existing debt for the middle school. Furthermore, under the current administrative regulations Independence Twp. would be able to include the interest portion of the debt service not covered by state aid in their grades 6-8 tuition calculation if it were to accept students from Liberty Twp. on a receiving basis.

e. It is suggested that the townships, either jointly or individually, consider moving into a larger K-12 regional school structure. Such a move would provide the opportunity to adjust the apportionment formula. It would also avoid the financial difficulties experienced by other smaller districts in the State. The current code (N.J.A.C.6A:23A) identifies the State's move toward consolidating smaller school districts in order to heighten the fiscal efficiency within school districts.

The above is an excerpt from the recent decision of the County Superintendent. As we have noted in previous correspondence, currently Liberty Township Council has spent an estimated \$200,000 in this deregionalization matter. The Great Meadows Regional School District also continues to expend fiscal resources, now estimated to be close to \$75,000. It is also estimated that Independence Twp has spent \$30,000. In total, around \$300,000 of taxpayer money has been expended over the past 2+ years.

In addition to money, hours upon hours of time has been spent by the Superintendent and Board of Education in regards to the deregionalization issue. In my opinion, it is a waste of time and money--both of which should be directed towards our children. My primary job as Superintendent of Schools is to be an advocate for our children; as I have stated previously, I believe both Liberty Twp. and Independence Twp. children attending the Great Meadows Regional School District is in their best interest!

TEAM: TOGETHER EVERYONE ACHIEVES MORE

Sincerely-

Bing

Jason Bing, M.A., M.Ed.

Superintendent of Schools