

# Greater Egg Harbor Regional High School District Board of Education Referendum Fact Sheet

## **Introduction**

The Greater Egg Harbor Regional High School District Board of Education is preparing for a bond referendum scheduled to go before voters in the constituent communities of Egg Harbor City, Galloway Township, Hamilton Township, and Mullica Township on **September 25, 2007**. To provide facts about the proposed referendum, the district has developed this FAQ fact sheet. As the need arises, the fact sheet will be updated to ensure that residents' concerns are addressed in a timely and comprehensive manner.

The Greater Egg Harbor Regional High School District Board of Education welcomes your questions and/or comments via email, phone, or in person.

Web site: [www.gehrhsd.net](http://www.gehrhsd.net)

E-mail: [newgehrhsreferendum@geh.nj.k12us.com](mailto:newgehrhsreferendum@geh.nj.k12us.com)

District telephone information line: **609-625-0657, ext. 2732**

## **Overview**

Currently, the Greater Egg Harbor Regional High School District consists of two schools serving students in grades 9-12 at Absegami High School and Oakcrest High School.

Students from Hamilton Township, Mullica Township, the City of Port Republic and Washington Township attend the Oakcrest High School located in Hamilton Township; students from Galloway Township and Egg Harbor City attend the Absegami High School located in Galloway Township.

Students residing in the City of Port Republic and Washington Township (Burlington County) attend Greater Egg Harbor Regional High Schools through a sending-receiving relationship.

## **Facility Planning Overview**

For a number of years, the district has been closely monitoring demographic projections, current enrollment, and existing facility conditions in the two schools. Through a long range facility planning process required by the New Jersey State Department of Education, the district identified a shortage of classrooms and core facilities not adequate to accommodate existing and projected enrollment.

In light of this required analysis and legislation providing funding assistance to school districts enacted in July 2000, and to qualify for State funding assistance for which we are eligible, the Greater Egg Harbor Regional High School Board of Education approved a referendum plan to be voted on by residents in September 2007.

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The long range planning process has been focused and deliberate. Many meetings over a period of years and discussions with a variety of individuals, including a community task force, has culminated into the proposed new high school project.

**About the Referendum**

**Q1. What is the purpose of a bond referendum?**

A bond referendum is an opportunity for voters to decide if the school district will be authorized to raise funds through the sale of bonds to finance their share of specific facility construction, additions, repairs, and/or renovations.

**Q2. When will the Greater Egg Harbor Regional High School referendum take place?**

Voters will be asked to cast ballots on Tuesday, September 25, 2007.

Polls will be open from 2:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

**Q3. Why is the referendum being held in September?**

There are several reasons why the Board of Education has chosen to move forward at this time. The reasons are as follows:

- the need for additional classroom space and core facilities to provide appropriate instructional areas to accommodate current and projected student population;
- to meet the Core Curriculum Content Standards as required by the State;
- the need for the district to continue to provide a quality education for all students in the constituent communities in a fiscally responsible manner;
- to fund the project with interest rates still near historic lows and;
- September 25, 2007 is one of the legal dates approved by the State to hold a referendum.

**Q4. Is the district eligible for State funds for the proposed building project?**

The Greater Egg Harbor Regional High School District is eligible to receive a total of 66.46% of costs from State funds. If the referendum passes on September 25, 2007, the New Jersey Schools Development Authority (formerly the School Construction Corporation) will fund 64.87% of the project. A \$1.3 million grant from the New Jersey Property Tax Assistance & Community Development Grant Program comprises the additional 1.59% of state funding. **Total funding from State sources is 66.46%.**

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**Q5. Assuming the referendum passes on September 25, 2007, when will construction work begin, and when will it be completed?**

If the proposed referendum passes in September 2007, construction work is expected to begin in the fall of 2008 and be completed during the summer of 2010.

**Q6. What happens if there is a cost overrun for this referendum plan?**

Construction and design contingencies are already included in the total referendum amount. By law, the board cannot spend more money than the voters approve. More importantly, because the proposed new high school project is substantially funded through the NJ Schools Development Authority, cost overruns are the responsibility of the state.

**Q7. What is in this referendum for me?**

The proposed new high school brings specific benefits to each constituent community, and general benefits to the entire district.

Under the new A4 legislation, a third high school would allow both Galloway and Hamilton Townships to each form a K-12 comprehensive district. Egg Harbor City, Mullica, Port Republic, and possibly Washington Township would be able to form a regional K-12 district.

For residents with students attending the K-8 schools in the constituent districts, a new high school situated in Egg Harbor City is a direct benefit to residents of Egg Harbor City and Mullica Township, as students living in these communities will attend the new high school. Therefore, students from Egg Harbor City, and Hamilton, Galloway, and Mullica Townships will experience a return to the town school concept experienced in the primary and elementary grades. Furthermore, the rigorous and challenging educational, sports, and extracurricular programs offered in the district will be available to more students.

Students from Galloway and Hamilton Townships also will benefit from significant relief from the overcrowding that exists today at Oakcrest and Absegami. A third high school would open 500 seats at Oakcrest High School and up to 500 seats at Absegami High School which includes the magnet school, for a total student population of 1,000 students.

From another perspective, a new high school facility could facilitate community recreation and educational programs. In most communities, there are limited facilities that can accommodate large groups of residents. The new school could be available for instruction (adult school or other), recreation, cultural and civic organizations, and events.

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**About the Proposed New High School**

**Q8. What specific projects are included in the referendum?**

The proposed new high school plan includes the following academic and core curriculum spaces:

- 24 general classrooms
- 6 science labs
- 3 business classrooms
- 2 health classrooms
- 3 special education rooms
- 6 resource rooms
- 1 media center/library
- 1 family/consumer science room
- 2 music rooms
- 2 art rooms
- Dance room
- Drama room
- Technology room
- Gymnasium
- Auxiliary Gym
- Auditorium

**Q9. What other alternatives did the Board of Education explore before deciding on the proposed plan?**

The board explored several alternatives including adding onto the existing high schools and other sites for a possible new high school before deciding on the proposed new high school plan. All discussions were meant to develop a plan that focused on the educational needs of the students and the community's needs. The overall objective was to provide a plan that would address the district's needs for the foreseeable future and to take advantage of funding assistance from the State.

**Q10. Is a new high school really necessary? Can't we build a smaller high school?**

The board of education believes the new high school, as proposed, is necessary to continue to deliver a high-quality learning environment for the students of the constituent communities. The program and spaces proposed in the new high school are consistent with the district's other two high schools and reflect the existing and projected enrollment.

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- Q11. I have heard a rumor that the new high school will be filled to capacity when it opens. How long before additional facilities are required, or will this plan provide all the space necessary for the foreseeable future?**

Based on current and projected student enrollment, it is quite possible the school will be at or near capacity when it opens in 2010. All school districts must comply with Department of Education regulations pertaining to facilities planning and are only allowed to complete enrollment projections for a period of five years. Funding assistance from the State is based upon those projections and a “demonstrated need” for the facilities. Projections that go beyond five years are too speculative since they are not based on live births; therefore, the state will not provide approvals for funding for projects that plan beyond a five-year period.

The board, working closely with the architect, has carefully selected a building plan that can be expanded cost effectively if additional classroom spaces are needed in the future. The district will continue working closely with municipal officials to monitor residential development, home resale and the potential impact of additional students in the coming years. In a few years, as required, the district will request that a professional demographer conduct a revised demographic study. If, as expected, the report reveals another increase in enrollment, the board will take the appropriate steps to submit another project application for a building addition to the Department of Education for review and funding.

- Q12. What type of security measures are included in the proposed plan?**

The security portion of the new high school plan is being designed to meet the recently developed “Homeland Security Standards for Educational Facilities.” The systems are similar to those in the two existing high schools with various enhancements required by all school districts seeking funding assistance for new schools constructed in New Jersey.

The systems are comprehensive and include items such as fencing, lighting, entrance and access door controls, video surveillance, communication systems, and alarms and emergency power supplies for building systems.

- Q13. What is the plan for athletic fields?**

The new high school plan includes dedicated fields for baseball, softball, football, soccer and field hockey.

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**Q14. Will the site have adequate parking during school hours and for evening/weekend events for the community?**

Yes. The site will have adequate parking for all staff, visitors, and administrators during regular school hours with additional event parking, both paved and grass overflow areas.

**Q15. Please explain the school-within-a school and the magnet program model.**

A “school-within-a-school” model is divided into ninth and tenth grades for one “school,” and eleventh and twelfth grades for the other “school,” all housed in one building. The benefits of this model are to give the students continuity and support by offering a smaller learning community within a larger student population.

A magnet school is a program where the curriculum focuses on a specific area of academic interest. Proposed disciplines being considered for a magnet school in the Greater Egg Harbor Regional High School District are:

- environmental science
- engineering
- communication technologies
- computer technology
- visual and performing arts

Any student in the district can elect to study at the magnet school. The magnet school concept is quite successful across the country and has proven to be very popular in districts with large student populations.

**Q16. Do the costs of the project include furniture and equipment?**

Yes, fixed and loose furniture and equipment are included in the total referendum cost.

**Q17. Will the district incur additional costs if this referendum plan is not approved?**

Because of the uncertainty surrounding construction costs, we have been advised any significant delays in construction or waiting for approval of another referendum could significantly impact the cost of the project to construct in the future. Projected construction escalation estimates completed by the project management firm indicate a potential increase in costs of 8-10% annually.

Another less desirable and temporary alternative to consider might be to install temporary classroom trailers to accommodate students especially if enrollment continues to rise as expected. This is only a short-term solution as the Department of Education will only grant approvals for temporary classrooms if there is a more permanent plan in place.

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Although not a monetary cost, the district may also have to look at a reduction in certain program offerings because there would not be enough spaces to accommodate such offerings.

**The New Law (A4) and Its Impact on the GEHRHSD**

**Q18. How will the new law (A4) regarding shared services and consolidation affect the district building a new high school?**

As we understand it, the law contains a provision regarding the role of the executive county superintendent as follows: *No later than three years following the effective date of sections 42 to 58 of P.L. 2007, c.63 (C.18A:7-11 et al.), recommend to the commissioner a school district consolidation plan to eliminate all districts, other than county-based districts and other than preschool or kindergarten through grade 12 districts in the county, through the establishment or enlargement of regional school districts. After the approval of the plan by the commissioner, the executive county superintendent shall require each board of education covered by a proposal in the plan to conduct a special school election, at a time to be determined by the executive county superintendent, and submit the question whether or not the executive county superintendent's proposal for the regionalization of the school district shall be adopted. The question shall be deemed adopted if it receives a vote in accordance with the provisions of N.J.S.18A:13-5. If the question is adopted by the voters, then the regional district shall be established or enlarged in accordance with chapter 13 of Title 18A of the New Jersey Statutes.*

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**Q19. What does this law mean for the Greater Egg Harbor Regional High School District?**

As we see it, this presents three possible options for our district.

1. Option 1: Create one regional K-12 district encompassing all sending districts.
2. Option 2: Two K-12 districts
  - a. Egg Harbor City and Galloway students in grades nine through 12 would attend Absegami High School.
  - b. Hamilton, Mullica, Port Republic, and Washington Township students in grades nine through 12 would attend Oakcrest High School.
3. Option 3: Three K-12 school districts
  - a. Hamilton
  - b. Galloway
  - c. Egg Harbor City, Port Republic, Mullica, and Washington Townships would attend proposed new high school.

With these scenarios, the need for an additional high school still presents itself.

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**Tax Programs for Senior Citizens**

**Q20. Are there programs available for Senior Citizens to offset the tax increases of a proposed referendum?**

Under the Property Tax Reimbursement Program, eligible senior citizens and disabled persons are reimbursed by the State for the difference between the amount of local property taxes paid in the “base year” (the year they became eligible and first filed for the program) and the amount of property taxes paid for the reimbursement year.

Residents applying for the 2006 reimbursement must have total income for 2005 that is less than \$41,972 for single applicants and \$51,466 (combined income) for married couples, and total income for 2006 that is less than \$43,693 for single applicants and \$53,576 (combined income) for married couples.

**Eligibility Requirements (first time filers)**

For 2005 and 2006, you have been age 65 or older or receiving Federal Social Security disability benefits as of December 31. If receiving Federal Social Security disability, you must have received such benefits for yourself (you do NOT qualify if you are receiving Social Security disability benefits on behalf of someone else); and

- Have lived in New Jersey continuously since before January 1, 1996, as either a homeowner or a renter; and
- Have owned and lived in the home for which the reimbursement is being claimed since before January 1, 2003; and
- Have total income for 2005 that is less than \$41,972 for single applicants and \$51,466 (combined income) for married couples, and total income for 2006 that is less than \$43,693 for single applicants and \$53,576 (combined income) for married couples; and
- For both 2005 and 2006, have paid the full amount of the property taxes (or mobile home park site fees) due on the home by December 31.

For more information on the filing of the Property Tax Reimbursement, or to obtain an application, contact the New Jersey Property Tax Reimbursement Hotline at 1-800-882-6597. Information about the Program is also available on the Division of Taxation’s Web site at <http://www.state.nj.us/treasury/taxation/>.

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**Tax Impact Information**

**Q21. How will property revaluations affect my taxes?**

Essentially, revaluation ensures that all property owners are paying a proportional share of the taxes to fund on-going municipal services. The law requires a revaluation program to fairly distribute the tax burden among all property owners based upon the true value of their property.

Once the revaluation is completed, the tax rate will most likely go down to reflect the increased value of the community's base of ratables. Typically, one-third of the taxes increase, one-third decrease, and the remaining one-third remain the same.

**Q22. What is the total dollar amount we will vote on, and how will my property taxes be affected if the referendum passes?**

The total estimated cost for the proposed new high school is **\$81,710,636**. The NJ Schools Development Authority will fund 64.87% of this amount, or \$53,001,187 and a State grant will fund \$1,300,000 for a total State share of the project of 66.46%.

The district has prepared estimates based on a commitment letter received from the State as follows:

<b>Community</b>		<b>Average Tax Rate Increase per \$100,000 Assessed Home Value</b>	<b>Average ANNUAL Tax Impact on Assessed Home of \$100,000</b>	<b>Average MONTHLY Tax Impact on Assessed Home of \$100,000</b>
<b>Egg Harbor City</b>	<b>\$100,000</b>	<b>\$0.0302</b>	<b>\$30.20</b>	<b>\$2.52</b>
<b>Galloway</b>	<b>\$100,000</b>	<b>\$0.0490</b>	<b>\$49.00</b>	<b>\$4.08</b>
<b>Hamilton</b>	<b>\$100,000</b>	<b>\$0.0506</b>	<b>\$50.60</b>	<b>\$4.22</b>
<b>Mullica</b>	<b>\$100,000</b>	<b>\$0.0522</b>	<b>\$52.20</b>	<b>\$4.35</b>

*Note: The estimates indicated above are based on the following assumptions: a 25-year bond and an interest rate of 4.6 %. Interest rates are subject to the market conditions at the time of the sale of bonds.*

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**How Will the Proposal Read on the Ballot**

**Q23. How will the proposal question be worded on the ballot?**

**PROPOSAL FOR NEW HIGH SCHOOL**

The Board of Education of the Greater Egg Harbor Regional High School District in the County of Atlantic, New Jersey is authorized to (a) to acquire by purchase, gift, lease, or condemnation the following parcels of land in City of Egg Harbor in the County of Atlantic, New Jersey for the purpose of constructing a new high school thereon:

Block Nos.	Lot Numbers
16	1, 5.02, 8, 11.02, 16, 25.02, & 26.02
17	1, 16, 25.02, & 27.02
18	1, 9.02, 16, 17.02, & 18.02
19	1, 11, 13.02, 16, 22.02, 28.02 & 29.02
84	1, 7.02, 8.02, 16, 21.02, 22.02, 23.02, 27, 28.01, 28.02, 29.02, & 30
85	1 & 16
86	1, 16, 25, & 26
87	1 & 16
118	1, 16, & 29.02
119	1, 9, 10, 16, 18.02, 19, 20.02 & 21.02
120	1, 16, 18.01, & 18.02
121	1, 16, 26, & 27.02

(b) to undertake the construction of a new high school on the block and lot numbers identified in this Proposal; (c) to make the necessary onsite and offsite improvements and purchase the necessary equipment, fixtures, and furnishings; (d) to appropriate \$81,710,636, funded in part by the State of New Jersey pursuant to the requirements of the *Educational Facilities Construction and Financing Act* in the amount of \$53,001,187, and a grant from State of New Jersey's *Property Tax Assistance and Community Development Grant Program* in the amount of \$1,300,000 for land costs; and (e) to issue bonds of the School District in the principal amount of \$27,409,449;

The final eligible cost for the new high school approved by the Commissioner of Education is \$79,478,905. This project includes \$2,231,731 of school facility construction elements in addition to the facilities efficiency standards developed by the Commissioner of Education or not otherwise eligible for State support pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:7G-5(g).

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**INTERPRETIVE STATEMENT**

If the Proposal is approved, the new high school will be financed in three parts: (i) the New Jersey Schools Development Authority will contribute \$53,001,187 toward the school as well as design and construct the school; (ii) a grant from the New Jersey's *Property Tax Assistance and Community Development Grant Program* in the amount of \$1,300,000 will finance a portion of the land costs; and (iii) the School District will issue bonds in the amount of \$27,409,449 to finance the new high school's remaining costs.

**The total cost of the project, \$81,710,636, will be funded largely by the  
NJ Schools Development Authority.**

**What if...?**

**Q24. What if the referendum fails?**

If voters in the Greater Egg Harbor Regional constituent communities reject the referendum on September 25 and the proposed new high school is not authorized:

- State funding of 66.46% will be in jeopardy.
  - The significant funding commitment from the state (\$53,001,187) will be in jeopardy
  - A \$1.3 million grant also will be threatened
- Class sizes will continue to increase, affecting the quality of instruction
- The board will have to consider other alternatives including the elimination of programs
- The proposed high school site may no longer be available to the board for purchase
- The district would be required to refile all permits and applications with various governmental agencies including the Pinelands Commission

If the referendum is defeated, the board of education would have to resubmit its project application again to the Department of Education seeking funding assistance. There would be increases in construction and materials costs thus negatively offsetting any funding assistance the State might still agree to provide. Lastly, any delay will surely negatively impact curriculum and instruction.

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**When and Where to Vote**

**Q25. When and where will I vote?**

The regular polling places in each constituent community will be open Tuesday, September 25, 2007 from 2:00 p.m.- 9:00 p.m.

<b>CITY/TOWNSHIP</b>	<b>WARD AND DISTRICT</b>	<b>POLLING PLACE</b>
<b>Egg Harbor City</b>	<b>1-1,1-2,1-3</b>	<b>Charles L. Spragg School</b>
	<b>2-1,2-2,2-3</b>	<b>Fanny D. Rittenberg School</b>
<b>Galloway Township</b>	<b>D-1,D-8,D-9,D-14</b>	<b>Smithville E.S.-37 Old Port Republic Rd.</b>
	<b>D-2,D-4, D-13</b>	<b>Germania Fire House-Cologne Ave.</b>
	<b>D-3, D-6</b>	<b>Arthur Rann School-8<sup>th</sup> Ave. Absecon Highlands</b>
	<b>D-5, D-7</b>	<b>Pomona E.S.-400 S. Genoa Ave.</b>
	<b>D-10, D-11, D-12</b>	<b>Roland Rogers E.S.-101 S. Reeds Ave.</b>
<b>Hamilton Township</b>	<b>D-1, D-5</b>	<b>Mays Landing Fire House-Mill St. &amp; Reliance Ave.</b>
	<b>D-2</b>	<b>Laureldale Social Hall-Rte 50 &amp; Orange St.</b>
	<b>D-3</b>	<b>Mizpah Fire House-DeHirsch &amp; Sewell Mizpah</b>
	<b>D-4</b>	<b>Woodlands Club House-Woodlands Dr.</b>
	<b>D-6</b>	<b>New Weymouth Fire House-BHP, Weymouth</b>
	<b>D-7</b>	<b>Hess School Auditorium-Babcock Rd.</b>
	<b>D-8</b>	<b>Presbyterian Church- Main St. &amp; Rte. 50</b>
	<b>D-9</b>	<b>Cologne Fire House-Cologne Ave.</b>
	<b>D-10</b>	<b>Victoria Crossing Club House-Victoria Dr.</b>
	<b>D-11</b>	<b>Oakcrest High School-1824 Dr. Dennis Foreman Dr.</b>
	<b>D-12</b>	<b>Mays Landing Rescue Squad-1404 Rte. 50</b>
	<b>Mullica Township</b>	<b>D-1, D-2, D-3</b>

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**Sources for Additional Information**

**Q26. Where can I get additional information about the referendum plan?**

- ❑ Look for information sent through the **mail**, including special referendum edition Regional Reporter newsletters.
- ❑ Attend **Board of Education** meetings and/or presentations throughout the community. *Board meetings are conducted at 7:00 p.m., unless otherwise noted, on the first and second Monday of the month.*
- ❑ Attend **Open Houses** to see the plans and meet the administrators, architect, financial adviser and others with information about the proposed plan. Dates and times to be determined.
- ❑ Call the Referendum Information **Hotline** at 609-625-0657, ext 2732.
- ❑ Request a **presentation and/or tour** for your group or organization by calling the hotline at 609-625-0657, ext 2732.
- ❑ Visit the district's **Web site** at [www.gehrhsd.net](http://www.gehrhsd.net)
- ❑ Watch for periodic updates or coverage in the *Press of Atlantic City, The Current, The Record Journal* and other media.
- ❑ Speak to members of the Board of Education about the plan details.