



WATCHUNG HILLS REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL

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SUPERINTENDENT

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September 18, 2019

Dear Watchung Hills Regional High School Community,

On September 24, 2019, you will be asked to vote on a referendum to fund necessary electrical upgrades as well as a 21st Century Media Center. **I would like to take this opportunity to provide you with information on the upcoming referendum, which will have no impact financially on taxpayers.**

The selection of these projects from our long range facilities plan to include in the referendum is not arbitrary. The Board and administration participated in a thoughtful process to prioritize our list of projects in terms of safety, educational impact, and affordability. The electrical panel upgrades are necessary to replace outdated operational systems with upgraded systems for increased safety. The redesign and renovation of our Media Center is an outgrowth of our 5 Year Strategic Plan through which we have established a district goal to “Integrate creative, innovative, and interdisciplinary learning throughout the district to empower and inspire students to succeed in a changing global community.”

The ways in which our students use our Media Center have evolved not only due to the increased access to and integration of technology in learning, but also due to the expanded opportunities for collaboration with their peers to pursue innovative learning opportunities beyond the classroom, including such endeavors as TEDx, LaunchX, and virtual learning. The upgrade to the Media Center will expand and redesign the existing space, incorporating areas for collaboration, independent study, large group instruction, experiential learning, and enhanced use of technology, including video production and virtual reality.

By passing the referendum for these projects, the State of New Jersey will reimburse the Watchung Hills Regional High School District up to 40% of the cost of the project. The savings will go back into capital reserve for future projects without burdening taxpayers in the future.

Watchung Hills has been underfunded by the State since the state aid formula was introduced during the 2008-2009 school year. State debt service aid is one way our community is able to recoup some of our tax dollars. A successful referendum results in our district getting a minimum of \$1.3 million in State debt service aid toward the cost of the projects.

I would like to reiterate that this bond referendum has no impact financially on taxpayers. An affirmative vote will save the district up to 40% of the total cost of the projects. The Board expects to fund the remaining local share (approximately 60%) of the project using our own capital reserve funds. Should the referendum not pass, we will look to scale back the Media Center project to what we are able to fund with our allotted capital reserve without the State of New Jersey's reimbursement via debt service aid. However, as the electrical panel project is essential to maintain a safe environment, we will have to fund 100% of the cost of that project out of our capital reserve.

For additional information, please visit our [district web site](#). If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact our School Business Administrator, Timothy Stys, at 908-647-4800, ext. 4850, or my office at 908-647-4800, ext. 4890.

Thank you for your attention to this significant financial issue impacting the Watchung Hills Regional High School District.

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Elizabeth C. Jewett".

Elizabeth C. Jewett, Ph.D.
Superintendent