



STEVE SWEENEY CENTER  
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**Sweeney, Rowan School Regionalization Institute tout first successful regionalization vote under bipartisan S3488 law enacted in 2022**

***Atlantic Highlands, Highlands vote decisively to merge three districts into one; Henry Hudson Regional merger is first in state since 2014***

**GLASSBORO** – Former Senate President Steve Sweeney, prime sponsor of the new 2022 school regionalization law, and leaders of the Rowan School Regionalization Institute hailed yesterday’s overwhelming voter passage of the three-district Henry Hudson Regional merger as an important precedent for New Jersey.

“Atlantic Highlands and Highlands voters yesterday emphatically said yes to a better education for their children and long-term savings for their taxpayers,” said Sweeney. “S3488, the new regionalization barrier, was designed to encourage regionalization, and it did. Teachers knew their jobs were secure, the three school boards knew they had full control over implementation, and parents knew their children would be staying in their community schools with the same teachers.”

The referendum was approved 976 to 539, passing handily in all eight election districts in Atlantic Highlands and Highlands. Under S3488, the state provided grants that fully paid for the cost of regionalization feasibility studies, covered the full cost of the special election, and will provide increased funding to over the next four years to the new district by stretching out scheduled state aid cuts under the S2 school funding formula.

“The Henry Hudson Regional, Atlantic Highlands and Highlands school districts were already sharing so many services successfully that they were operating as a Tri-District with a single superintendent,” said Mark Magyar, director of Rowan’s Sweeney Center. “Superintendent Tara Beams and the 25 members of the three boards deserve tremendous credit for rallying community support to overcome the home rule concerns, voter mistrust and misguided opposition that so often undermines regionalization initiatives.”

Magyar, who also serves as co-director of the Rowan School Regionalization Institute (RSRI), advised Beams and the three boards on regionalization issues. Brian Falkowski, who heads SBO Management, LLC, and also serves on the RSRI team, provided the fiscal analysis for the state-funded Kean University study that laid out the advantages of Henry Hudson Regional, Atlantic Highlands and Highlands merging immediately into a pre-K-12 district, regardless of whether the state Education Commissioner eventually approves Sea Bright's withdrawal from Shore Regional and Oceanport to join the new Henry Hudson Regional.

"The Sweeney Center and the Rowan University College of Education teamed up last fall to form the Rowan School Regionalization Institute because we saw that districts wanted independent, education-focused analysis of regionalization options," said David Lindenmuth, director of Rowan University's Institute for Educational Leadership and as RSRI's co-director. "As a former school superintendent in four school districts in four counties, I know how challenging the regionalization issue is. Our new institute will issue policy studies and is undertaking individual regionalization studies for Delsea Regional, Sterling Regional and other districts."

In addition to Magyar, Lindenmuth and Falkowski, the Rowan School Regionalization Institute includes former Education Commissioner Lucille Davy; Ken Greene, retired Newton superintendent and former president of the New Jersey Association of School Administrators; Scott Oswald, a former Collingswood superintendent who teaches at both Rowan and Stockton State University; and Donna DeVita, former Newton school business administrator.

"The Henry Hudson merger is a great first step to transforming New Jersey's disparate array of school districts into a system of Pre-K to 12 districts that can better serve the state's students.," said Davy. "It is clear to see that voters recognized the advantages of a fully integrated school district and the opportunity to provide better educational experiences that meet the needs of students. "

"This vote in Monmouth County is a beacon for New Jersey municipalities," said Greene. "I believe it will prove to be the first of more to come, as regionalization gains traction as a way forward toward more educationally effective and fiscally efficient local school systems."

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