



bh communitywatch <bhcommunitywatch1@gmail.com>

Elementary and Middle School Summative Rankings -Possible Factors to Look At in the Decline

1 message

bh communitywatch <bhcommunitywatch1@gmail.com>

Fri, May 12, 2023 at 8:00 PM

To: Angela Penna <apenna@bhpsnj.org>, jyoung@bhpsnj.org, tforegger@bhpsnj.org, dkhanna@bhpsnj.org, gbradford@bhpsnj.org, jhyman@bhpsnj.org, rcianciulli@bhpsnj.org, pstanley@bhpsnj.org, "Dr. Melissa" <mvarley@bhpsnj.org>

The information Dr. Foregger and Ms. Khanna were referencing comes from the Dept of Education - the rankings and ratings are the first publications since 2020 due to covid. The rankings and ratings connect to a multitude of factors. I have been looking at and writing about this information for weeks. Being that many of you have no awareness of this information I will try to help you. This first email will deal with elementary and middle schools. This may help the Superintendent and all of you understand why our ratings and rankings are lower and target interventions to improve them.

Elementary School Notes:

Hughes - Math declines as kids transition from grades 3 (84%) through 5 (69%)

Mountain Park-Math declines as kids transition from grades 3 (88%) through 5 (74%)

Mountain ELA declines as kids transition from grades 3 (80%) through 5 (73%)

This is important as student growth is part of the measure used to determine summative scoring: "Student growth is a measure of how much students are learning each year. New Jersey's ESSA state plan outlines that academic progress will be measured with school's median student growth percentile (mSGP) on statewide ELA and mathematics assessments. Each individual student receives a Student Growth Percentile (SGP) for English Language Arts (ELA) in grades 4 through 8 and for Mathematics in grades 4 through 7. The SGP measures their academic progress from one year to the next compared to other students with similar prior test scores (academic peers)." <https://rc.doe.state.nj.us/2021-2022/school/detail/39/0310/040/growth?lang=EN>

Science is likely a big culprit in harming our summative scores:

51% of students met or exceeded on science for Hughes

66% at Mountain Park

Middle School Notes:

Our Science Performance is Abysmal (31% proficient)

Our Math Proficiency on Algebra I is on 64%

Our Overall Match Proficiency is 66%

Im not clear on how this translates into our doing well in Middle School

Link to graphs: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/TbAhEfGMbBHxs5um8>

Source:

<https://rc.doe.state.nj.us/>

I will provide you my perspective on GL in a later email.

John Migueis

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Berkeley Heights Community Watch



bh communitywatch <bhcommunitywatch1@gmail.com>

Governor Livingston Summative Rankings-Possible Factors to Look At in the Decline

1 message

bh communitywatch <bhcommunitywatch1@gmail.com>

Sat, May 13, 2023 at 2:06 PM

To: Angela Penna <apenna@bhpsnj.org>, jyoung@bhpsnj.org, tforegger@bhpsnj.org, dkhanna@bhpsnj.org, jhyman@bhpsnj.org, gbradford@bhpsnj.org, rcianciulli@bhpsnj.org, pstanley@bhpsnj.org, [REDACTED]

Here is my perspective on the GL report that I indicated I would provide to help you understand what the community has been discussing the past few weeks and what Dr. Foregger and Ms. Khanna were both discussing.

Clarification on last email:

On the grade transitions in elementary schools- this is one snap shot - it does not appear to be a direct indicator OF the overall measure but rather an indirect variable that can act as a face indicator - since proficiencies appear to be dropping across grades in this report it is a point of exploration for the measure on student growth. I do plan to look at prior years in the week ahead in coming to a firmer understanding. If you have access to the actual data on this I would appreciate your providing it to me or sending me a link to it.

Going to GL and what the District can look at and what the Superintendent can cover when discussing this with the Public.

48% of GL met or exceed expectation on English Language Arts

32.9% On Math Assessment

37.1% on Geometry

Algebra II was a bright spot at 82% but that measure only includes 22 students

Science Remains problematic at 47% meeting or exceeding

Explanations that center around Middle School and Algebra I appear just bizarre given this information in that there are many other areas to consider and especially when you consider that even on that measure we dont appear to be performing well.

Explanations that center on the fact that AP Students giving up or that the District experienced a Pandemic are insulting as every District would have these variables in play.

SAT scores going up is not a product of our schools achievement - SAT are proximate to IQ tests and do not measure proficiency (a better measure of how a school is doing). SAT scores are certainly helped by schools but they are more a measure of a students innate ability on how well the school taught the student. <https://gwern.net/doc/iq/high/smpy/2004-frey.pdf>

I would like the BOE and the Superintendent to take the reports seriously and to provide the public with a coherent presentation on this issue at the next meeting.

I reached out to the Superintendent last year requesting that she provide the community a coherent analysis on the 2020 edition of this report which also involved a large public discussion. If the District would like my help in this regard I would be more than happy to work with District Staff.

snapshots: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/xFN1h78hNDm9cGDUA>

source: <https://rc.doe.state.nj.us/2021-2022/school/detail/39/0310/005/academic?lang=EN>

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Berkeley Heights Community Watch



bh communitywatch <bhcommunitywatch1@gmail.com>

Comparisons Across Subjects between 2018-2019 and 2021-2022

4 messages

bh communitywatch <bhcommunitywatch1@gmail.com>

Sat, May 13, 2023 at 11:50 PM

To: Angela Penna <apenna@bhpsnj.org>, jyoung@bhpsnj.org, tforegger@bhpsnj.org, dkhanna@bhpsnj.org, gbradford@bhpsnj.org, jhyman@bhpsnj.org, rcianciulli@bhpsnj.org, pstanley@bhpsnj.org, "Dr. Melissa" <mvarley@bhpsnj.org>



Note on last email. The reason I could not find the SG Data was because it wasn't tracked so I would recommend some type of internal tracking mechanism.

I did comparisons on all top level subject areas across all schools between 2018-2019 and 2021- 2022. The latter was the last time comparable data was kept.

IN EVERY SINGLE SUBJECT AREA ACROSS EVERY SINGLE SCHOOL WE DROPPED with the exception of Science in GL (5 point Increase). Every subject area in every school with the exception of a small increase in Science at GL.

The average **overall drop in Math** across all schools was **10 percentage points**.

The average **overall drop in ELA** across all schools was **13.7 percentage points**

The average **overall drop in Science** across all schools was **10.75 percentage points**

Data Source again: <https://rc.doe.state.nj.us/>

Here are the links to the graphs: <https://photos.google.com/u/1/album/AF1QipPQK3PAhJ0KgFjupbAKXkU8eqgesgugdQy1QBT>

This is the data behind the decline. Please ask Dr. Varley to discuss this at the next BOE Meeting.

Again if I can be of any assistance in helping you understand this please feel free to reach out- hopefully you are in a better place with this as a result of these explanations.

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Berkeley Heights Community Watch



bh communitywatch <bhcommunitywatch1@gmail.com>

Sun, May 14, 2023 at 12:02 PM

To: Angela Penna <apenna@bhpsnj.org>, jyoung@bhpsnj.org, tforegger@bhpsnj.org, dkhanna@bhpsnj.org, gbradford@bhpsnj.org, jhyman@bhpsnj.org, rcianciulli@bhpsnj.org, pstanley@bhpsnj.org, "Dr. Melissa" <mvarley@bhpsnj.org>



Photos

The link was not set to share in my last email and it should work now: <https://photos.google.com/u/1/album/AF1QipPQK3PAhJ0KgFjupbAKXkU8eqgesugdDqy1QBT>

I also attached them to this email

[Quoted text hidden]

3 attachments

Science Proficiency			
School	2018-2019 % of Students Meeting/Exceeding	2021-2022 % of Students Meeting/Exceeding	Difference
Hughes	63	51	-12
Mountain Park	15	15	0
CMS	36	33	-3
CL	40	47	7

science (1).png
16K

MATH PROFICIENCY			
School	2018-2019 % of Students Meeting/Exceeding	2021-2022 % of Students Meeting/Exceeding	Difference
Hughes	80.3	70.1	-10.2
Mountain Park	87.5	76.1	-11.4
CMS	83.0	88.3	5.3
CL	47.6	32.9	-14.7

math (1).png
16K

ELA PROFICIENCY			
School	2018-2019 % of Students Meeting/Exceeding	2021-2022 % of Students Meeting/Exceeding	Difference
Hughes	81.1	63	-18.1
Mountain Park	89.0	73.4	-15.6
CMS	82.3	79.0	-3.3
CL	73.4	47.0	-26.4

ELA (1).png
17K

Khanna, Dipti <dkhanna@bhpsnj.org>

Sun, May 14, 2023 at 6:04 PM

To: bh communitywatch <bhcommunitywatch1@gmail.com>

Cc: Angela Penna <apenna@bhpsnj.org>, jyoung@bhpsnj.org, "Dr. Melissa" <mvarley@bhpsnj.org>, Sai Bhargavi Akiri

John - Thank you for the information, and I appreciate you taking the time to do a detailed analysis and sharing it with the board. The data appears to point to a trend in the scores of our school districts and it would behoove us to do a root cause analysis and identify where our district could make improvements.

As always, these are my individual thoughts and opinions and do not represent the opinions of the Berkeley Heights Board of Education. Although I am a member of the Berkeley Heights Board of Education, I am not authorized to speak on behalf of the Board.

Best Regards,

Dipti

[Quoted text hidden]

bh communitywatch <bhcommunitywatch1@gmail.com>

Sun, May 14, 2023 at 10:46 PM

To: "Khanna, Dipti" <dkhanna@bhpsnj.org>

Cc: Angela Penna <apenna@bhpsnj.org>, jyoung@bhpsnj.org, "Dr. Melissa" <mvarley@bhpsnj.org>, Sai Bhargavi Akiri <saibhargaviakiri@gmail.com>, John Leo Jr <jvleo jr@gmail.com>, Laura Kapuscinski <llkap@me.com>, tnajarian1@gmail.com, swilliamsny@yahoo.com, Virginie Delwart <virginie.delwart@gmail.com>, Natasha Joly <Natasha4boe@gmail.com>

My pleasure. I think two more snapshots might be helpful here. During the last BOE Meeting, the Superintendent informed the Public that CMS was doing well on Algebra 1 and implied that it was a hinge point as to why the data was incorrect (again when you look at all the data that really does not appear to make sense). In any case here is our Algebra 1 snapshot (attached and also uploaded)

Algebra I			
School	2018-2019 % of Students Meeting/Exceeding	2021-2022 % of Students Meeting/Exceeding	Difference
CMS	79	64	-15

Lastly here is a snap shot of BH in comparison to six other schools along the summative ratings and rankings the proficiencies I emailed you on have been feeding into along with our cost per pupil. I also included Westfield as Ms. Stanley felt that was a good comparison.

Rank on this list	District (K-12 unless otherwise noted)	County	Number of schools included	Summative score 2021-22	Summative ranking 2021-22	2020-21 Actual Per Pupil Amount-Taxpayers Guide to Education Spending	2021-22 Budgeted Per Pupil Amount
3	Millburn	Essex	8	82 (B-)	89 (B+)	17,613	18,336
4	Westfield	Union	9	79 (C+)	88 (B+)	16,622	16,226
6	New Providence	Union	4	80 (B-)	86 (B)	15,605	17,054
7	Chatham	Morris	6	80 (B-)	85 (B)	15,976	17,248
7	Madison	Morris	5	80 (B-)	85 (B)	16,648	17,567
9	Summit	Union	7	73 (C)	81 (B-)	16,679	17,925
20	Berkeley Heights	Union	4	62 (D-)	67 (D+)	18,840	19,925

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bh communitywatch <bhcommunitywatch1@gmail.com>

Comparisons To Other Districts

3 messages

bh communitywatch <bhcommunitywatch1@gmail.com>

Mon, May 15, 2023 at 12:24 PM

To: Angela Penna <apenna@bhpsnj.org>, jyoung@bhpsnj.org, tforegger@bhpsnj.org, "Khanna, Dipti" <dkhanna@bhpsnj.org>, gbradford@bhpsnj.org, jhyman@bhpsnj.org, rcianciulli@bhpsnj.org, pstanley@bhpsnj.org
 Cc: "Dr. Melissa" <mvarley@bhpsnj.org>, [REDACTED]

Based on Dr. Varley's assertion that Covid is one of the primary factors driving our declines, I decided to look at other Districts.

I compared movement on proficiencies across the Districts that I have been running comparisons over the past month on Budget and proficiencies. These are top-level, district-wide comparisons. The Science number in the screen captures below was the average of three District-captures (5, 8, and 11th grades) for each District.

Of the seven Districts, Berkeley Heights had the largest decline of all Districts in this comparison in English Language Arts and Science. In Math, Berkeley Heights had the fourth-largest decline.

English Language Arts			
District	2018-2019 % of Students Meeting/Exceed ing	2021-2022 % of Students Meeting/Exceed ing	Difference
Millburn	87.9	82.9	-5
Westfield	79.4	72.4	-7
New Providence	83.7	80.9	-2.8
Chatham	82.7	78	-4.7
Madison	76.3	73.6	-2.7
Summit	84.8	81.4	-3.4
Berkeley Heights	79.5	68.5	-11

Math			
District	2018-2019 % of Students Meeting/Exeed ing	2021-2022 % of Students Meeting/Exeed ing	Difference
Summit	76.7	69	-7.7
Chatham	74.8	68.2	-6.6
New Providence	77.7	72.7	-5
Berkeley Heights	68.8	64.1	-4.7
Millburn	83.8	79.9	-3.9
Madison	70.6	67.8	-2.8
Westfield	73.1	70.3	-2.8

Science (Average of 3 Points)			
District	2018-2019 % of Students Meeting/Exeed ing	2021-2022 % of Students Meeting/Exeed ing	Difference
Millburn	67	67	0
Westfield	51.6	51.3	-0.3
New Providence	54	56	2
Chatham	60.3	53	-7.3
Madison	51	36	-15
Summit	56.3	51	-5.3
Berkeley Heights	54.3	45	-9.3

Based on my analysis across the two testing periods:

Out of the 7 Schools:

Berkeley Heights dropped from 5th to 7th in ELA.

Berkeley Heights Dropped from 4th to 6th in Science.

Berkeley Heights remained last in Math across the two points (7th).

I attached the screen captures to this email and they are also uploaded in the album I sent you earlier: https://photos.google.com/u/1/share/AF1QipOeqF7vLBBirduhEbGJsfeNOpJVYy6e_axWXVoNYmo0YADtE48OZ67sRfhUBV89iA?key=S0c3TUc3bFBBdHhLVWhYUjltRFpOUEltUmhsR2h3

I hope you all reconsider having Dr. Varley discuss this with the public at the last meeting now that you at least have a starting point and awareness of the information the community has been discussing.

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Berkeley Heights Community Watch



bh communitywatch <bhcommunitywatch1@gmail.com>

Mon, May 15, 2023 at 12:57 PM

To: Angela Penna <apenna@bhpsnj.org>, jyoung@bhpsnj.org, tforegger@bhpsnj.org, "Khanna, Dipti" <dkhanna@bhpsnj.org>, gbradford@bhpsnj.org, jhyman@bhpsnj.org, rcianciulli@bhpsnj.org, pstanley@bhpsnj.org
 Cc: "Dr. Melissa" <mvarley@bhpsnj.org>, [Redacted], <Natasha4boe@gmail.com>, John Leo J [Redacted]

correction - Berkeley Heights had the second largest drop in Science.
 Largest Decline in ELA
 Second Largest Decline is Science
 Fourth Largest Decline in Math

The placements remain the same:

Berkeley Heights dropped from 5th to 7th in ELA.

Berkeley Heights Dropped from 4th to 6th in Science.

Berkeley Heights remained last in Math across the two points (7th)

John Migueis.
 [Quoted text hidden]

bh communitywatch <bhcommunitywatch1@gmail.com>

Mon, May 15, 2023 at 4:51 PM

To: Angela Penna <apenna@bhpsnj.org>, jyoung@bhpsnj.org, tforegger@bhpsnj.org, "Khanna, Dipti" <dkhanna@bhpsnj.org>, gbradford@bhpsnj.org, jhyman@bhpsnj.org, rcianciulli@bhpsnj.org, pstanley@bhpsnj.org
 Cc: "Dr. Melissa" <mvarley@bhpsnj.org>, [Redacted]

I decided to drill down a tiny bit more. The table below demonstrates the overall 7 District Average between the **several** testing periods and where Berkeley Heights stood and stands.

In ELA Berkeley Height was nearly 6 points greater in its decline than the average and went from 5th to 7th in the rankings.

In Math Berkeley Heights was 1 point less in its decline than the average but remained 7th on the rankings

In Science Berkeley Heights was 4 points greater in its decline than the average and went from 4th to 6th in the rankings

Berkeley Heights was of course included in the average, however if the BH Average were removed and then compared to the "other" group average the differences would be even more notable.

Rankings are important because they help us compare how we fared to other schools.

During the last meeting Ms. Bradford indicated "rankings fluctuate" - what you will notice however was that prior to this testing period Berkeley Heights was rather stable on both measures. Incremental increases on ELA and virtually no movement on Math (unfortunately). The rankings and ratings often poo-pooed by the District matter quite a lot in situations like these as they allow us to compare how we do with events like COVID - which affected every school.

	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2021-2022	7-District Average Decline in 2021-2022	Berkeley Heights Decline in 2021-2022	BH +/- Diff. from Avg.	BH Rank of 7 Districts 2018-2019	BH Rank of 7 Districts 2021-2022
ELA	72	74	79.5	68.5	-5.22	-11	-5.78	5th	7th
Math	67	68.8	68.8	64.1	-4.78	-4.7	0.08	7th	7th
Science*	NA	NA	54.33	45	-5.03	-9.3	-4	4th	6th
7 District Comparison Includes Millburn, New Providence, Chatham, Westfield, Summit, Madison and Berkeley Heights									

If you have any questions please feel free to ask. I will end this email like I have done the others- with a request that the BOE ask Dr. Varley to present on this at the next BOE meeting and take questions from the public.

[Quoted text hidden]



bh communitywatch <bhcommunitywatch1@gmail.com>

Mountainside Information

3 messages

bh communitywatch <bhcommunitywatch1@gmail.com>

Tue, May 16, 2023 at 9:56 AM

To: Angela Penna <apenna@bhpsnj.org>, jyoung@bhpsnj.org, tforegger@bhpsnj.org, "Khanna, Dipti" <dkhanna@bhpsnj.org>, gbradford@bhpsnj.org, jhyman@bhpsnj.org, rcianciulli@bhpsnj.org, pstanley@bhpsnj.org
 Cc: "Dr. Melissa" <mvarley@bhpsnj.org>, [REDACTED]

This morning I decided to look at Mountainside as their residents have a vested interest in a Superintendent's report concerning Governor Livingston. Given the different k-8 configurations between BH and Mountainside, in the interest of time, I decided to average out the BH numbers except for Science and Algebra I (CMS/8th Grade test points were used) - this is just an exploration point - I am sure the Data Analyst on the Superintendent's team can take a deeper look into this.

Mountainside did relatively well compared to Berkeley Heights in both Math and ELA. Mountainside families may be interested in the District exploring how impactful the decline in GL scores were in connection to Mountainside Students.

MATH PROFICIENCY				
School	2018-2019 % of Students Meeting/Exceeding	2021-2022 % of Students Meeting/Exceeding	Difference	
Deerfield	72.9	72.2	-0.7	
BH K-8 Avg	81.16	72.5	-8.66	
GL	47.6	32.9	-14.7	

ELA PROFICIENCY				
School	2018-2019 % of Students Meeting/Exceeding	2021-2022 % of Students Meeting/Exceeding	Difference	
Deerfield	81.2	81.7	0.5	
BH K-8 Avg	81.3	71.6	-9.7	
GL	73.4	47.6	-25.8	

On Algebra I, Mountainside scores were comparable to CMS; however, I could not find 2018/2019 scores for Mountainside.

Algebra I			
	2018-2019 % of Students Meeting/Exceeding	2021-2022 % of Students Meeting/Exceeding	
School			Difference
CMS	79	64	-15
Deerfield	*	63	NA
	* Not Available		

Mountainside improved on Science.

SCIENCE PROFICIENCY			
	2018-2019 % of Students Meeting/Exceeding	2021-2022 % of Students Meeting/Exceeding	
School			Difference
Deerfield*	29	36	7
CMS	55	32	-23
GL	42	47	5
*Grade 8 Test Point			

Again - the source for this data is the NJ DOE. (<https://rc.doe.state.nj.us/>)

I again request that the BOE ask the Superintendent to present on these reports and the Declines at the next Board of Education Meeting.

John Migueis

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[Berkeley Heights Community Watch](#)



Foregger, Thomas <tforegger@bhpsnj.org>
To: bh communitywatch <bhcommunitywatch1@gmail.com>

Tue, May 16, 2023 at 11:48 PM

John Paul,
I appreciate all the work you have done on this problem and thank you for sending it to me.
tom foregger

[Quoted text hidden]

bh communitywatch <bhcommunitywatch1@gmail.com>
To: "Foregger, Thomas" <tforegger@bhpsnj.org>

Wed, May 17, 2023 at 7:12 PM



bh communitywatch <bhcommunitywatch1@gmail.com>

Tying up the Rating, Rankings And Budget

1 message

bh communitywatch <bhcommunitywatch1@gmail.com>

Wed, May 17, 2023 at 8:30 AM

To: Angela Penna <apenna@bhpsnj.org>, jyoung@bhpsnj.org, tforegger@bhpsnj.org, "Khanna, Dipti" <dkhanna@bhpsnj.org>, qbradford@bhpsnj.org, rcianciulli@bhpsnj.org, pstanley@bhpsnj.org, ihyman@bhpsnj.org

I would like to share with you the ratings and rankings themselves along with the Budget. **I've written about this before** and I'm pretty certain you've read what I've written, however, it didn't seem like you had any recollection of it last Thursday. The sources to the tables in this email are the NJ Taxpayers Guide, ACFR and the NJ School Performance Reports - the latter I spent the last few days giving you background on.

The ratings and rankings consider proficiencies in the overall measures. Again, over the last few days I've provided you with my analysis on these proficiencies so that you would have a better understanding on how those factors play out in the ratings below. In addition to proficiencies the ratings and rankings consider 4-year and 5 year graduation rates, student growth, english language proficiency and chronic absenteeism. While many districts who do not perform well try to spin the measure as invalid, it is actually a very basic and common sense measure and a useful tool for families and districts to evaluate how well they are doing, especially when you consider that you can pull samples out of the set and look at comparable districts.

I tied budget information into this email as the budget manifests a District priorities. When you look at our ranking and look at our Budget it's one peice of the puzzle that makes sense. There are other factors that connect to the changes of the past 3 years that we will be writing about (and that I hope you take the opportunity to read). For the purposes of this email, I want to focus on the ratings/rankings and budget.

Let's start with rankings and price per pupil - the following is a list of 7 schools (including our own) with price per pupil and ratings/rankings:

Rank on this list	District (K-12 unless otherwise noted)	County	Number of schools included	Summative score 2021-22	Summative ranking 2021-22	2020-21 Actual Per Pupil Amount-Taxpayers Guide to Education Spending	2021-22 Budgeted Per Pupil Amount
3	Millburn	Essex	8	82 (B-)	89 (B+)	17,613	18,336
4	Westfield	Union	9	79 (C+)	88 (B+)	16,622	16,226
6	New Providence	Union	4	80 (B-)	86 (B)	15,605	17,054
7	Chatham	Morris	6	80 (B-)	85 (B)	15,976	17,248
7	Madison	Morris	5	80 (B-)	85 (B)	16,648	17,567
9	Summit	Union	7	73 (C)	81 (B-)	16,679	17,925
20	Berkeley Heights	Union	4	62 (D-)	67 (D+)	18,840	19,925

GL went down 52 points in the rankings and ratings:

District	High school	State rank 2021-22	Rank change from 2017-18	Summative rating 2021-22	Summative score 2021-22
Chatham	Chatham	25	Up 61	93 (A)	89 (B+)
New Providence	New Providence	30	Up 1	92 (A-)	86 (B)
Millburn	Millburn	48	Up 21	87 (B+)	81 (B-)
Westfield	Westfield	60	Down 24	83 (B)	77 (C)
Madison	Madison	70	Down 37	81 (B-)	74 (C)
Summit	Summit	101	Down 52	72 (C-)	66 (D)
Berkeley Heights	Governor Livingston	137	Down 52	62 (D-)	59 (F)

And the Youngest learners in this set are not doing much better:

Rank on this list	District	County	Number of elementary schools counted	Summative score 2021-22 (Elementary Schools)	Summative ranking 2021-22 (Elementary Schools)
3	Millburn	Essex	6	83 (B)	91 (A-)
4	Westfield	Union	6	83 (B)	92 (A-)
6	New Providence	Union	2	86 (B)	95 (A)
7	Madison	Morris	3	91 (A-)	97 (A)
7	Chatham	Morris	4	85 (B)	91 (A-)
9	Summit	Union	5	75 (C)	84 (B)
20	Berkeley Heights	Union	2	61 (D-)	66 (D)

You will notice that Berkeley Heights has the highest per pupil cost and the lowest summative score and ranking. This cost is not due to median salaries of teachers where we ranked lowest prior to the 3.2% increase and when applied, only moves us to the middle of the pack (assuming all of the other Districts salaries remain the same). This is an important point because the new teachers contract was mentioned as a reason for a high per pupil cost but that does not appear to be the case.

Rank on this list	District	County	Number of schools included	Summative score 2021-22	Summative ranking 2021-22	2020-21 Actual Per Pupil Amount-Taxpayers Guide to Education Spending	2021-22 Budgeted Per Pupil Amount Taxpayers Guide to Education Spending	2021-22 Student to Teacher Ratio	2021-22 Median Teacher Salary	2021-22 Median Teacher Salary with Berkeley Heights Salaries Adjusted to Current Contract 3.2% while all other Salaries Remain the SAME
3	Millburn	Essex	8	82 (B-)	89 (B+)	17,613	18,336	11.5	93,305	93,305
7	Madison	Morris	5	80 (B-)	85 (B)	16,648	17,567	11.1	80,866	80,866
6	New Providence	Union	4	80 (B-)	86 (B)	15,605	17,054	12.1	76,566	76,566
7	Chatham	Morris	6	80 (B-)	85 (B)	15,976	17,248	11.1	76,490	76,490
4	Westfield	Union	9	79 (C+)	88 (B+)	16,622	16,226	11.6	86,814	86,814
9	Summit	Union	7	73 (C)	81 (B-)	16,679	17,925	10.7	70,950	70,950
20	Berkeley Heights	Union	4	62 (D-)	67 (D+)	18,840	19,925	10.6	76,271	78,712

The high per-pupil cost probably has nothing to do with Special Needs. I couldn't find a perfect indicator for this, so I looked at support services and state aid as guideposts. This is also important because many members of our community were under this impression.

Millburn spends about \$100 less per student on Support Services (3227pp v. 3327pp) and Madison a little less (3161 pp) [NJ Taxpayers Guide To Ed Spending]. These are good examples since not only are the dollar amounts close but Madison and Millburn both have a higher percentage of Budgetary Cost PP for Support Services (18% and 17.6%, respectively) than Berkeley Heights (16.7%). Madison receives a similar amount to Berkeley Heights in State Aid (2.2M and 2.1 M, respectively), while Millburn receives 4.3 Million [NJ State Aid Summaries].

Considering these facts, consider the total per pupil cost for each District.

Millburn ~ 18k per pupil 3rd on the list in connection to ratings and ranking

Madison ~ 17k per pupil 7th on the list in connection to ratings and ranking

Berkeley Heights ~19k per pupil 20th on the list in connection to ratings and ranking

Of course, I could be using incomplete indicators concerning Special Needs, but these are the best I can find.

Rank on this list	District	County	Number of schools included	Summative score 2021-22	Summative ranking 2021-22	2020-21 Actual Per Pupil Amount-Taxpayers Guide to Education Spending	2021-22 Budgeted Per Pupil Amount (Support Services)	2020-21 % of Budgetary Cost Per Pupil (Support Services)	FY23 Special Education Aid (Source NJ State Aid Summaries)
3	Millburn	Essex	8	82 (B-)	89 (B+)	17,613	3227	17.6	4324483
7	Madison	Morris	5	80 (B-)	85 (B)	16,648	3161	18	2193412
20	Berkeley Heights	Union	4	62 (D-)	67 (D+)	18,840	3327	16.7	2102100

It also doesn't appear to be our buildings.

Rank on this list	District	County	Number of schools included	Summative score 2021-22	Summative ranking 2021-22	2020-21 Actual Per Pupil Amount-Taxpayers Guide to Education Spending	2021-22 Budgeted Per Pupil Amount Taxpayers Guide to Education Spending	2021-22 Budgeted Per Pupil Amount Total Operations and Maintenance of Plant	2021-22 % of Budgetary Cost Per Pupil Total Operations and Maintenance of Plant
3	Millburn	Essex	8	82 (B-)	89 (B+)	17,613	18,336	1826	10
4	Westfield	Union	9	79 (C+)	88 (B+)	16,622	16,226	1283	7.9
6	New Providence	Union	4	80 (B-)	86 (B)	15,605	17,054	1416	8.3
7	Madison	Morris	5	80 (B-)	85 (B)	16,648	17,567	1895	10.8
7	Chatham	Morris	6	80 (B-)	85 (B)	15,976	17,248	1914	11.1
9	Summit	Union	7	73 (C)	81 (B-)	16,679	17,925	1699	9.5
20	Berkeley Heights	Union	4	62 (D-)	67 (D+)	18,840	19,925	1773	8.9

One factor to the decline (and there are many we will be writing about that I'm not going to cover here) may be the continued lack of textbooks parents often talk about - this concern appears to be validated on our per pupil spend compared to other Districts:

Rank on this list	District	County	Number of schools included	Summative score 2021-22	Summative ranking 2021-22	2020-21 Actual Per Pupil Amount-Taxpayers Guide to Education Spending	2021-22 Budgeted Per Pupil Amount Taxpayers Guide to Education Spending	2021-22 Budgeted per Pupil Amount Classroom Supplies and Textbooks	2021-22 % of Budgetary Cost/Pupil
3	Millburn	Essex	8	82 (B-)	89 (B+)	17,613	18,336	215.00	1.20%
4	Westfield	Union	9	79 (C+)	88 (B+)	16,622	16,226	195.00	1.2
6	New Providence	Union	4	80 (B-)	86 (B)	15,605	17,054	424.00	2.50%
7	Madison	Morris	5	80 (B-)	85 (B)	16,648	17,567	313.00	1.80%
7	Chatham	Morris	6	80 (B-)	85 (B)	15,976	17,248	379.00	2.20%
9	Summit	Union	7	73 (C)	81 (B-)	16,679	17,925	378.00	1.20%
20	Berkeley Heights	Union	4	62 (D-)	67 (D+)	18,840	19,925	174.00	0.90%

Moving to Administrative Costs...

Berkeley Heights has

More Administrators per Faculty

More Administrators per Student

The Highest Administrative cost per pupil

Than any of the Districts in the ratings/rankings table.

.The 2021-2022 original budget was 1629 per pupil

The 2021-2022 revised budget was 1751 (+122 per pupil)

The 2022-2023 original budget is 1723 per pupil (+94 per pupil from 2021-2022 original budget)

Berkeley H

Advertised Per Pupil Cost Calculations

Per Pupil Cost Calculations		2019-20 Actual Costs	2020-21 Actual Costs	2021-22 Original Budget	2021-22 Revised Budget	2022-23 Proposed Budget
Total Budgetary Comparative Per Pupil Cost		\$17,962	\$18,840	\$19,925	\$20,483	\$20,729
Total Classroom Instruction		\$10,786	\$11,298	\$11,971	\$12,266	\$12,442
Classroom-Salaries and Benefits		\$10,450	\$10,836	\$11,526	\$11,667	\$12,052
Classroom-General Supplies and Textbooks		\$126	\$196	\$174	\$235	\$144
Classroom-Purchased Services		\$210	\$266	\$271	\$363	\$246
Total Support Services		\$3,016	\$3,124	\$3,327	\$3,332	\$3,450
Support Services-Salaries and Benefits		\$2,943	\$3,024	\$3,222	\$3,225	\$3,316
Total Administrative Costs		\$1,907	\$2,081	\$2,088	\$2,249	\$2,195
Administration Salaries and Benefits		\$1,514	\$1,640	\$1,629	\$1,751	\$1,723
Total Operations and Maintenance of Plant		\$1,583	\$1,685	\$1,773	\$1,850	\$1,854
Operations and Maintenance-Salaries and Benefits		\$1,023	\$1,094	\$1,145	\$1,165	\$1,208
Board Contribution to Food Services		\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total Extracurricular Costs		\$636	\$618	\$722	\$739	\$756
Total Equipment Costs		\$39	\$31	\$47	\$88	\$42
Legal Costs		\$40	\$33	\$36	\$36	\$41
Employee Benefits as a percentage of salaries*		25.00%	25.26%	27.66%	28.10%	28.81%

Rank on this list	District	County	Number of schools included	Summative score 2021-22	Summative ranking 2021-22	2021-22 Budgeted Per Pupil Amount Taxpayers Guide to Education Spending	2021-2022 Ratio of Faculty to Administrative Personnel	2021-22 Student/Admin Ratio	Administration Salary & Benefits 2021-22 Budgeted Per Pupil Amount
3	Millburn	Essex	8	82 (B-)	89 (B+)	18,336	14.9	148	1435
6	New Providence	Union	4	80 (B-)	86 (B)	17,054	16.7	172	1597
7	Madison	Morris	5	80 (B-)	85 (B)	17,567	17.5	166	1490
7	Chatham	Morris	6	80 (B-)	85 (B)	17,248	13.5	128.7	1582
4	Westfield	Union	9	79 (C+)	88 (B+)	16,226	20.5	204.2	1332
9	Summit	Union	7	73 (C)	81 (B-)	17,925	14.1	128.8	1572
20	Berkeley Heights	Union	4	62 (D-)	67 (D+)	19,925	12.8	110.8	1629*

*Proposed increase to 1,723 (2022-2023 Adv Budget -NJ)

Lastly, onto legal spend.

This area was a rather confusing one to figure out. Let's start with the Berkeley Heights 2021-2022 Annual Comprehensive Financial Report (ACFR). According to this source, our District spent ~157,000 on legal services. Dividing that total amount by the number of students for that year (~2600 students according to this year's advertised budget). This would bring our per-pupil cost to about **\$60** per student.

The \$60 per pupil cost is **nearly double** what is indicated for that specific year on the 2023 advertised budget (\$36 per pupil) and, if the real number, would put Berkeley Heights at the very top of the list on the table of schools we've posted with a lot of room between ourselves and the other Districts.

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Advertised Per Pupil Cost Calculations

Per Pupil Cost Calculations		2019-20 Actual Costs	2020-21 Actual Costs	2021-22 Original Budget	2021-22 Revised Budget	2022-23 Proposed Budget
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Total Operations and Maintenance of Plant		\$1,583	\$1,685	\$1,773	\$1,850	\$1,854
Operations and Maintenance-Salaries and Benefits		\$1,023	\$1,094	\$1,145	\$1,165	\$1,208
Board Contribution to Food Services		\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total Extracurricular Costs		\$636	\$618	\$722	\$739	\$756
Total Equipment Costs		\$39	\$31	\$47	\$88	\$42
Legal Costs		\$40	\$33	\$36	\$36	\$41
Employee Benefits as a percentage of salaries*		25.00%	25.26%	27.66%	28.10%	28.81%

*Does not include pension and social security paid by the State on-behalf of the district.

EXHIBIT "C-1"
SHEET #5

TOWNSHIP OF BERKELEY HEIGHTS SCHOOL DISTRICT
GENERAL FUND
COMPARATIVE STATEMENTS OF REVENUES, EXPENDITURES AND CHANGES
IN FUND BALANCE - BUDGET AND ACTUAL
FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDED JUNE 30, 2022

	ORIGINAL BUDGET	BUDGET TRANSFERS AND AMENDMENTS	FINAL BUDGET	ACTUAL	VARIANCE FAVORABLE (UNFAVORABLE)
Support Services General Administration					
Salaries	\$ 566,658.00	\$ 100,123.08	\$ 666,782.08	\$ 684,301.31	2,480.77
Vacation Payout		27,800.73	27,800.73	27,800.73	
Legal Services	80,000.00	74,900.69	154,900.69	156,735.40	8,125.29

As I've said this was a summary of what I have already shared publicly.

I am again requesting that the BOE instruct the Superintendent to present on the DOE Data Dr. Foregger and Ms. Khanna discussed during the last BOE Meeting at the next BOE Meeting.



bh communitywatch <bhcommunitywatch1@gmail.com>

Possible Reasons for the Decline (the first of several emails): Resignations and Reassignments

1 message

bh communitywatch <bhcommunitywatch1@gmail.com>

Sat, May 20, 2023 at 8:32 AM

To: Angela Penna <apenna@bhpsnj.org>, jyoung@bhpsnj.org, "Khanna, Dipti" <dkhanna@bhpsnj.org>, "Foregger, Thomas" <tforegger@bhpsnj.org>, gbradford@bhpsnj.org, jhyman@bhpsnj.org, pstanley@bhpsnj.org, rcianciulli@bhpsnj.org
Cc: "Dr. Melissa" <mvarley@bhpsnj.org>

Last week I wrote a series of emails to the Berkeley Heights Board of Education and published articles outlining the drop in proficiencies, their relation to our significant drop in the rankings, and the role that the District's budget priorities may have in playing a role- higher Administrative and Legal cost with less investment in teachers salaries and textbooks compared to other Districts in our area.

The Budget is a deliberate process - the Superintendent and BOE Majority own what the Budget prioritizes and the process for community input.

Dr. Varley, during the most recent BOE Meeting, stated that the reason for our declines had to do with COVID and AP Students giving up on the tests. In the public, other reasons residents conveyed included that some of our students go to magnet schools. When you consider that **every single school** experienced COVID, has AP students and students that decide to go to magnet schools, these reasons don't appear to explain why Berkeley Heights had the largest declines out of the seven schools on our dashboard.

This article looks at two other factors (in addition to budget priority) likely connected to the decline that started with the reconfiguration and continues to this day: teacher reassignment and resignations.

In 2021, now BOE Member Gale Bradford wrote a rather compelling op-ed expressing her concerns about the reconfiguration in which she stated:

"The result of the redistricting implementation is the restructuring of over fifty teachers and the moving of over 50+ classrooms by September 1, 2021, with only 20 teacher-contracted work days left this year.

Even the most experienced teachers need time to adjust to a new grade level. It takes several years to become comfortable and effectively implement the best practices in education. The District has invested professional days and money to train teachers in grade-level specific programs that they may not use next year. Yes, the broad strands of the programs across the grade levels are similar, but you want your child's teacher to know the specific materials and that takes time. Let's take the time to do it right.

Teaching is a collaborative profession. We work together, and we share together, and we invest in each other for the benefit of our students. Education is not a business. Your children are special and unique individuals, not products. They don't deserve a teacher who quickly packed materials over a few days and hurriedly set up a new classroom and is working as hard as they can to learn and then teach new grade-level curriculum within weeks. Let's take the time to do it right." (source)

At that time, Ms. Bradford was speaking of Dr. Varley's decision (supported by the the BOE Majority) to pick up and throw 50 teachers into new assignments.

During that time, the District also experienced a mass exodus of teachers leaving the District entirely (~35 overnight) as Dr. Varley's leadership style and management philosophy became apparent. All of this prompted the President of the BHEA, during that time, to make the following statements (05/13/2021 BOE Meeting):

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tLudvHbPmt0&list=PLNUrW_EluE-5f0DjN9H7Sto1vTY45ov2t&index=48&t=26s

What does the research say about teacher exits and grade reassignments?

We use panel data from New York City to compare four ways in which teachers are new to assignment: new to teaching, new to District, new to school, or new to subject/grade. **We find negative effects of having a churning teacher of**

about one third the magnitude of the effect of a new teacher. ([source](#))

This study documents that teacher turnover is strongly related to the pattern of grades that a teacher is asked to teach. Elementary teachers in North Carolina that teach the same grade in their first two years are approximately **20% more likely to stay than teachers who teach two different grades in their first two years of teaching.** More generally, within total experience categories, teachers with the fewest years of grade-specific experience have the highest probability of turnover. **We argue that this pattern is driven both by the disruption caused by grade reassignment and by the fact that teachers with stable grade assignments have effectively smaller workloads since they can reuse lesson plans and, more generally, apply grade-specific skills.** ([source](#))

Teachers who switch grades leave schools at higher rates than their colleagues and exhibit lower impacts on their students' achievement. For teachers who switch to a nonadjacent grade, **these negative effects can wipe out any gains due to increased experience and can persist in the year after the switch occurs.** ([source](#))

The results indicate that students in grade levels with higher turnover score **lower in both English language arts (ELA) and math and that these effects are particularly strong in schools with more low-performing and Black students. Moreover, the results suggest that there is a disruptive effect of turnover beyond changing the distribution in teacher quality.** ([source](#))

So grade reassignments harm academic performance and create resignations which also harm academic performance - a bit of a death spiral when you consider the numbers we are talking about for a District of our size. Experienced teachers leaving the District and being replaced with newer, less experienced teachers either to the school or grade. As Laura wrote in her article yesterday (I hope you all read it), this shell game with teachers has not stopped and neither has the bleeding of experienced teachers leaving our District.

Looking at the whole picture-budget priorities, the atomic nature of the decision to reconfigure our schools made by Dr. Varley and supported by the BOE Majority **just as students were returning to school**, along with the research on these topics, we can better understand our significant declines.

It is still shocking (but in a "not really" sort of way) that the collective (I'm speaking to you Ms. Penna, Ms. Young, Mr. Cianculli, Ms. Stanley and Ms. Bradford) prevented Dr. Varley from taking the month to prepare to discuss this with the public and threw this in a committee that the public has no access to. This is one month in addition to a whole other month of what had been a community wide discussion.

My Suggestions in connection to this specific issue:

Get rid of Dr. Varley and Ms. Kot's assistants, stop using lawyers for political hit jobs, personal vendettas, and a defense of claims already admitted to, and **put that money into increasing after-school and in-school support for all students on Math, Science, and English Language Arts to help them catch up. Incentivize teachers to stay and stop moving them around - this isn't a corporation that makes widgets, it's a school system that serves children and young adults.**

But it's not only the Budget, Grade Reassignments, or Resignations that are likely harming our student achievement-there are other factors at play that I will cover in the days ahead - and they all connect to the very top of our District. **In fact, the most likely, problematic and impactful harm unleashed by the Administration and BOE Majority has not yet been explored in the past weeks.**

Lastly, Ms. Bradford, an earnest plea to get back to your roots and turn your loyalties away from the sharks and toward reason and evidence - become the voice many of the people who voted for you (not me) thought you would be.

To the Board as a whole: Please make Dr. Varley face the public and present her plan to repair the damage she and her echo chamber have created and answer the reasonable questions we have. It is not too late to turn this around - we can probably fix this in a year or two if you simply accept the evidence and make common sense choices. The research suggests that if you stop the movement of teachers right now we may be able to catch up on the damage caused by this specific issue in a year. The suggestions in this email are, I believe, a good starting point for discussion and there will be more coming.

John Migueis

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[Berkeley Heights Community Watch](#)



bh communitywatch <bhcommunitywatch1@gmail.com>

Reasons Connected to the Decline: Reconfiguration and Increased Transitions for Some of Our Youngest Learners

2 messages

bh communitywatch <bhcommunitywatch1@gmail.com>

Sun, May 21, 2023 at 10:14 AM

To: Angela Penna <apenna@bhpsnj.org>, jyoung@bhpsnj.org, "Foregger, Thomas" <tforegger@bhpsnj.org>, "Khanna, Dipti" <dkhanna@bhpsni.org>, gbradford@bhpsni.org, ihvman@bhpsni.org, rcianciulli@bhpsni.org, pstanlev@bhpsni.org

What should have been a thoughtful and considered process on the reconfiguration of our schools turned into an obsessive, rushed campaign that sought to get FDK approved at all costs with no consideration for the future. There was already a predetermined path with no room for discussion.

The research generally supports broader grade configurations. It also demonstrates that the more transitions a child goes through, the more significant the detriment to their academic achievement.

Despite this, Dr. Varley persistently and stubbornly misinformed the public in advocating for and succeeding in keeping our configurations narrow while adding more school transitions to some of our youngest learners.

Dr. Varley would not even acknowledge the overwhelming research that contradicted her positions.

During the reconfiguration debate, when pressed for evidence, Dr. Varley produced one study (which wasn't a study) from a remote Alaskan District to support her grade configuration. If I remember correctly, some children from that District took boats to school. Yet, for some odd reason, Dr. Varley never referenced the volumes of research against such a configuration conducted in school districts throughout the country - many of them completed by school districts who took the time to do it right and commissioned studies before making the decision. Some examples of research the public was able to find and share with the Superintendent including:

..... **most studies in this report showed that when students transition to another school, they experience a significant drop in academic related outcomes. Overall, the literature appears to favor a K-8 model over a middle school or a junior high school model.** ([source](#))

Gordon, Molly, Kristin Peterson, Julie Gdula, and Dave Klingbeil. "Review of Literature on Grade Configuration and School Transitions," 2011.

The authors estimate the impact of grade span paths on eighth-grade performance, controlling for school and student characteristics and correcting for attrition bias and quality of original school. They find that students moving from K-4 to 5-8 schools or in K-8 schools outperform students on other paths. ([source](#))

Schwartz, Amy Ellen, Leanna Stiefel, Ross Rubenstein, and Jeffrey Zabel. "The Path Not Taken: How Does School Organization Affect Eighth-Grade Achievement?" *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 33, no. 3 (September 1, 2011): 293–317. doi:10.3102/0162373711407062.

There are far more studies that look at configurations supporting the same conclusions from different angles (primarily middle school) - but essentially the majority of evidence points to exactly the opposite of what Dr. Varley claimed as best practice or supported by experts.

Dr. Foregger worked on such a study during his career and advised the Board of Education of his findings when he advocated for students and families in urging the BOE to pause the process and reconsider their options. Of course, he was ignored, as was the rest of the community.

The research is clear - more school transitions lead to lower student achievement and more problematic behavior. The former appears evidenced by the most recent school performance reports from the DOE, and the latter became immediately apparent in our elementary schools.

The other fact is a survey conducted not too long before the reconfiguration demonstrated FDK was not a priority for the town's residents. Parents did not appear to be bothered by having to pay private entities for the service or helping children with their educations at home. While I disagree with this position firmly, as full-day kindergarten is highly evidenced to benefit academics and pro-social behaviors (if implemented correctly) and is an incredible benefit to working-class and

middle-class families -it would have been better to educate the public on the benefits of FDK while at the same time developing and presenting a low-impact phase in leading to a successful referendum - getting buy-in using an evidence-based approach that respected the community and did not treat their children like cattle.

New Providence and Cranford both took very different approaches to this issue than Berkeley Heights, they viewed residents and parents as partners not adversaries. The Cranford approach, which offered 10 options to the public, was provided to Dr. Varley by several resident but was again, ignored. Apparently she used their "re-imagining" brand but not the substance of their approach:

As you know, we started the conversation with the community approximately seven months ago and it has been a collaborative process, shaped largely by the community [Cranford], as it should be. We have held several meetings, provided many presentations, and engaged in dialogue about what we as a community may want to do to enhance the school district. This initial conversation culminated in a survey which ended last week. I am glad this is the pathway we took.... ([source](#))

So it was more than just a missed opportunity to rethink the number of transitions our students went through and their impact on student achievement (even at that time struggling). The decision to reconfigure added even more changes to several grades of children and the disenfranchisement of parents.

After children were thrown into different schools, instead of taking a studied approach to family concerns in closely monitoring and supporting those students impacted by the reconfiguration, Dr. Varley decided to conduct what many considered an opportunistic and self-serving survey **excluding the families affected by the reconfiguration negatively** as a means of trying to market the reconfiguration as a huge success based on a sampling of those who most benefitted from it. The only value to that survey was to sell what was an obvious train wreck to everyone as a huge success. When I wrote an article attempting to point this out, Ms. Stanley tried to take the article down.

Of course this can't all fall on Dr. Varley. Those of you on the BOE during that time all sat silently as Dr. Varley and the former President put on a horse and pony show for the town. Ms. Young and Mr. Cianculli voted no (to their credit). Still, their arguments against it were anemic and divorced from the community concerns - and they went on to support other aspects of the process instead of using the opportunities available to stop it. Instead of guiding and helping her, you all enabled her. That's what makes this so difficult to repair- the majority of you were in some way complicit and cannot admit to the damage you caused.

In writing this email, I tried to think very hard about how I could make what I am conveying palatable to those of you who voted for this, but there isn't any other way to describe what happened but in the harshest terms because it was a callous decision disingenuously wrapped in and conflated with false virtue. **It reeked of bureaucratic sociopathy.** While I support FDK, the reality is that the reconfiguration of schools was unnecessary and harmful to the very children the District said they were trying to help - but the messaging was necessary so that those in power appeared virtuous while those with concerns were spun as uncaring.

My suggestion in connection to this factor would be for the District to pay closer attention **to the students impacted by the reconfiguration** and assess where they are now in Math and ELA compared to where they were before the reconfiguration. Based on **individual assessments**, provide additional after-school and in-school support in Math, ELA, and Science where needed. I can't go into more detail than that as the District does not appear to have made any effort to look at this comparison specifically or at least share it with the public - without actual data, more specific interventions are hard to come by.

This brings me to my next suggestion - the BOE should begin to take its oversight role seriously. Much time is spent securing photo ops with the Superintendent - perhaps some of that time could be used in having an actual conversation about the job she is doing.

My last suggestion (for now) can start with asking the Superintendent to provide the District with an explanation and plan surrounding our declining proficiencies at the next BOE meeting and to take questions from the public. Her reasons during the meeting were COVID and that our students do not take the tests seriously. These are reasons any school can use and they do not explain why we had the largest decline, lowest ratings and highest per pupil cost when compared to other schools in the area. **I would ask you to consider that the reasons I've provided thus far along with others I will write to you about have a far more evidenced basis.**

I believe two more factors connect to our decline, which I'll share later this week.

John Migueis

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[Berkeley Heights Community Watch](#)



www.bhcv.io

bh communitywatch <bhcommunitywatch1@gmail.com>

Sun, May 21, 2023 at 2:55 PM

To: Angela Penna <apenna@bhpsnj.org>, jyoung@bhpsnj.org, "Foregger, Thomas" <tforegger@bhpsnj.org>, "Khanna, Dipti" <dkhanna@bhpsnj.org>, gbradford@bhpsnj.org, jhyman@bhpsnj.org, rcianciulli@bhpsnj.org, pstanley@bhpsnj.org

I meant to attach this document, a letter from Dr. Foregger about his concerns connected to the reconfiguration. While he is not as good looking, eloquent or humble as I am - he does an okay job in going step by step on the plan. Though not completely connected to the arguments I make in my email to you earlier today, it demonstrates, or rather, exposes the complete lack of research and diligence connected to the reconfiguration - I won't get too into why this is important right now as it will be part of a larger possible explanation for our decline in my next email. (<https://bhcommunitywatch.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Letter-to-the-Board-April-28-2021.pdf>)

As an aside and If possible, I would also appreciate any emails or documents Dr. Varley provided to you with data and her support of our declines being connected to COVID and AP students not caring. As I am making an effort in working with you and in assisting the BOE with this, some help in understanding her reasoning in coming to these conclusions would be greatly appreciated and reasonable. It might help me better understand her perspective.

Thank You

John Migueis

[Quoted text hidden]



bh communitywatch <bhcommunitywatch1@gmail.com>

Possible Factors Connected to the Decline: Family Engagement

1 message

bh communitywatch <bhcommunitywatch1@gmail.com>

Mon, May 22, 2023 at 9:42 PM

To: Angela Penna <apenna@bhpsnj.org>, jyoung@bhpsnj.org, "Foregger, Thomas" <tforegger@bhpsnj.org>, "Khanna, Dipti" <dkhanna@bhpsnj.org>, gbradford@bhpsnj.org, jhyman@bhpsnj.org, rcianciulli@bhpsnj.org, pstanley@bhpsnj.org

Many studies have pointed to family engagement as leading to higher academic achievement, pro-social behaviors, and interpersonal effectiveness.

In its review of 51 Studies on this topic, the SEDL (now under the umbrella of American Institutes for Research) came to the following conclusions relevant to this factor:

"Summing up

"When schools build partnerships with families that respond to their concerns and honor their contributions, they are successful in sustaining connections that are aimed at improving student achievement. And when families and communities organize to hold poorly performing schools accountable, studies suggest that school districts make positive changes in policy, practice, and resources."

"Action Steps based on Synthesis:

- Build families' social and political connections.
- Focus efforts to engage families and community members on developing trusting and respectful relationships.
- Embrace a philosophy of partnership and be willing to share power with families. Make sure that parents, school staff, and community members understand that the responsibility for children's educational development is a collaborative enterprise."

Source (<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED474521>)

Instead of entertaining a plurality of perspectives in arriving at compromises, the Administration and Board respond by making it more difficult to hear feedback that differs from its position. The very thing could improve its decisions. "I don't like them," or "They disagree with me too much," or "They called me out for breaking the law" is not a valid reason to systematically weaken our schools by limiting the avenues families and students can provide feedback on the District's practices.

Here is the record of evidence to support my position:

During the reconfiguration, Dr. Varley responded that families should not have been involved in the decisions surrounding the most significant changes to our school, which led to an ethics investigation that was later determined by the SEC to be unsubstantiated due to - in large part, I imagine- my question and the Superintendent's response to my question being mysteriously inaudible. But the tape is less important than what the entire reconfiguration process evidenced, which I already described in my last email.

The reconfiguration, however, was far from the only example of our District's challenges to the issue of family engagement.

In July 2021, the BOE decided to stop allowing Zoom access after such access led to an explosion of family involvement in meetings. The District also threw this issue into a committee and spent thousands of dollars in the promise that families would be able to **participate** (which means speaking) at meetings via Zoom when meetings moved to Governor Livingston. This has yet to happen.

In April of 2022, residents discovered that the District was looking to remove French, which led to an effective community education campaign by community members using the District's social media pages. Community members contradicted the Superintendent's announcements that contained incorrect information directly underneath the District posts. Soon after, the District locked all comments on their pages, and the Superintendent claimed the reasons connected to "spam". "Spam" likely means thoughtful articles exposing the bad information used to justify the decision. In this one example, we see the failure of engagement (yet again) in coming to a significant decision and then cutting off the opportunities for engagement as a consequence of families engaging.

In May of 2022, the BOE voted through a policy that prevented BOE members from communicating with the public using social media after two BOE members informed the public of how the Budget process was deviating from past practices involving the community and BHCW finally went over the District's head in obtaining the entire budget from the State of NJ and provided it to the public.

In discussing the feedback the Superintendent received about the District's DEI initiatives, she broad-brushed those who wrote the District with concerns about the lack of clarity and goals by implying that they were similar to segregationists. I challenge the Superintendent or any BOE member to take anything I or anyone cc'd on this email has written to the District on DEI in supporting that conclusion.

But it wasn't about being accurate - it was more about the message it sent: "If you make our lives difficult by asking for a process accountable to research and evidence, we will smear you."

Late last year BHCW conducted a survey on Building Thinking Classroom...a real one that asked relevant questions and provided helpful information. The results were ignored by at least one member of the BOE who indicated that she did not even look at it and implied that the results were falsely manufactured.

The BOE as a body, late last year, arbitrarily ended the practice of allowing members of the public to come up multiple times if they still needed to finish their points. Nowhere in the policy is the BOE empowered to do this. Members of the public are given blank stares by BOE Members and "Ill answer you in the end" responses when community members attempt to engage with them in a discussion or debate only to have their questions spun to mean something different or unanswered. Improper cautions of not speaking directly to BOE Members or bringing up criticisms of the Superintendent are given to members of the public during meetings- not only does this impact engagement, but it increases the Districts' vulnerability to a lawsuit. The BOE President should not be directing the public's speech unless there is a compelling reason - every time she attempts to enforce these manufactured rules she is creating a pattern that brings the District closer to even more legal issues than it already has.

It has now come to a point where even Board Correspondence is no longer listed on the agenda or available for the public to read during meetings.

The following consequences can be expected:

- (1) It demoralizes the public and makes them feel as if they have no say or that the opportunities to have a say are pointless
- (2) It causes the public to go to third parties outside of the District to hold the BOE and Administration accountable
- (3) It causes the public to create a website, establish a quasi shadow BOE and fill in the gaps for the community

This attack on engagement is closing off a feedback loop that is extraordinarily vital to the success of the District - and it is harming our District in irreparable ways. Let's be clear - what has happened to our proficiency scores and rankings, along with the circus created by the BOE's politicized use of attorneys, have harmed the reputation of the District more than anything families will post on the Districts Facebook page. In fact, the Administration has done more harm to the reputation of our District with the content they've posted on their Facebook page than any member of the public. The behavior of the Administration and Board Majority during public meetings moreso.

When a public body makes terrible decisions that impact children and families, the best solution is to try to repair the damage caused instead of frantically running around trying to stop everyone from talking about it.

My suggestions to repair this factor include

- Allowing members of the public to speak at BOE meetings multiple times
- Increasing the time limit for speakers to 5 minutes
- Getting rid of that ridiculous clock
- Opening up comments on the District's Social media page
- Having town halls and referendums on significant decisions
- Respond to questions and concerns empirically and directly instead of trying to make everyone who disagrees appear as if they are attempting to "tear this District apart".
- Answer questions when the speaker at a meeting asks them (like normal people) instead of the strange little circus we have going on right now.
- Eliminate subcommittees and do the work in full view of the public - like our Town Council.

- Bring the Budget back to a public vote - this will help solve the issues discussed in the first factor (Budget priorities) while also giving the public power over decisions made in the District

A good first step is to have Dr. Varley provide her evidence that:

- * Covid is the reason why our rankings fell and are behind comparable schools in our area despite having the highest per pupil cost
- * AP students in our schools care less than AP students in other schools as the reason why our rankings fell and are behind comparable schools in our areas despite having the highest per pupil cost
- * CMS being lower in it's proficiency than it was in the prior testing period is evidence that we are doing well in Algebra I

John Migueis



bh communitywatch <bhcommunitywatch1@gmail.com>

Possible Reasons that can Explain the Decline: Issues connected to Culture, Data and Measurement

1 message

bh communitywatch <bhcommunitywatch1@gmail.com>

Tue, May 23, 2023 at 11:31 AM

To: Angela Penna <apenna@bhpsnj.org>, jyoung@bhpsnj.org, "Foregger, Thomas" <tforegger@bhpsnj.org>, "Khanna, Dipti" <dkhanna@bhpsnj.org>, qbradford@bhpsnj.org, jhyman@bhpsnj.org, rcianciulli@bhpsnj.org, pstanley@bhpsnj.org

A disquieting aspect of the last BOE meeting was how unaware the BOE majority and Superintendent were of the declines in our proficiency. And then, more disturbing, was an attempt to make Dr. Foregger and Ms. Khanna look foolish or silly for even bringing it up. The BOE majority expected Dr. Foregger to be prepared with all the details **yet never even considered how alarming it was that they had no such expectation of the Superintendent, who should have reported on this first thing in the meeting.** Or how shocking it might seem to those of us watching the meeting **when Five BOE members admitted to not having any idea what Dr. Forreger was referencing.** And even more shocking **when the BOE accepted Dr. Varley's explanations for the decline - explanations that would take 2 minutes to understand made no sense- and hid the conversation in a committee the public has no access to.**

Our school culture is divorced from any real or meaningful measurement and does not authentically celebrate Math, Science, or anything academic.

Presentations on data and information appear to occur in a silo, and to that end, the former Assistant Superintendent in a BOE Meeting (I believe two years ago) informed the public that the District was considering moving away from using state data (that provides the public an objective comparison point to other schools) and seeks to focus on internal data.

The District does not measure to understand - it creates instruments that create information it can bend any way it wants.

Last year I asked Dr. Varley about our proficiencies and provided you with that email exchange. Do any of you believe that the responses I received to that email came from someone with any command of our proficiency results? Seven months later, the most recent developments are even more disturbing, and she is **still** unprepared to discuss this? Is a BOE Member asking the Superintendent about measures discussed in the community for over seven months and, more recently, with the declines, a "gotcha question?" If the answer to the question is "yes,"; then it confirms every suspicion the public has about how the BOE and this administration prioritize education.

Why aren't these results with goals connected to each school not posted on the District's social media page? Does the Superintendent have **measurable targets** related to proficiencies with comparative data as benchmarks for her performance evaluation?

What has the Superintendent done to cultivate a culture of pride in our math, science, and ela proficiencies?

Do we have academic pep rallies? Does that sound silly to you, and if it does, why?

Have you ever heard the Superintendent say that a School Sports team lost a game because "they don't care" or "They are elite athletes, so they just gave up-? What do you want me to do about it?"

How in the world is this acceptable to you?

How is this okay?

And it's not just Academics.

When asked repeatedly about DEI, as an example, the Superintendent claimed that it could not be measured. How convenient - the one area she prides herself as being an expert and innovator on cannot be evaluated with hard data. Yet the state of NJ can measure DEI in its climate survey so can Universities - hell, even Biology Departments have

participated in surveys that seek to measure critical aspects of DEI -https://www.lifescied.org/doi/10.1187/cbe.19-09-0166?fbclid=IwAR32vsadjTGF66fdMD2LqsSin8Sp4NHEgunv_jMgG_ursT3CU8Bifjg6Pm0

Yet the best the District can come up with is a highly compromised survey that:

- (1) Does not operationalize what it seeks to measure to the point where a reasonable person cannot even determine what its' purpose is
- (2) An "anonymous sample" which completely undermines the confidence that the respondents are actually the stakeholders the District wants to hear from OR that they are actually "confidential" and District parents were misinformed about tracking (a very big ethics no-no)
- (3) That was designed in a way that is clear to everyone to engineer information the District can twist to mean whatever it wants.

You should know that the survey sent to parents on word study was a running joke for about a week in the school community.

If you are not celebrating or measuring something correctly or at all, you are telling students and parents that "it doesn't matter." If the highest level of this District refuses to be held accountable with data, then why should our students? What clarity do teachers have on the academic goals of the District? What are their thoughts on what can correct our proficiency problem? Why should students be the only people in the District that get marks?

Last year (before the most recent declines to what was an already problematic proficiency issue within the District), I wrote an article on what the District could do to improve, and they are the body of my recommendation for repairing this factor.

"Having interim targets or long-term objectives in our community plan can be very valuable:

- (1) **Having targets present in our planning documents and as part of the ongoing conversations solidifies them as priorities** – goals and objectives people are unaware of are of no use at all. One of the main reasons goals are established is to give individuals and teams direction and reinforcement of that outcome. Could you imagine being evaluated on goals you weren't aware of or were never really discussed with you at your job?
- (2) **Having goals present can lead to discussions about and the development of interim internal measures that mirror the state targets.** These can allow us to compare ourselves to other Districts that keep track of and report on their progress. It can allow us to reach out to these districts and discuss differences in approach that may explain differences in outcomes from a similar basis more frequently in real time.
- (3) **Having the information front and center allows the public and the District to ask more relevant questions** because as it becomes a more significant part of the culture people pay attention more to the decisions made with those goals in mind -there is clarity on what is important when there are competing priorities.
- (4) **It reminds the BOE that while State targets are important, they are ultimately accountable to our community.** Berkeley Heights may feel the state targets are too low. Maybe the majority of people in Berkeley Heights feel 80% [much lower now] on Algebra I is simply unacceptable for a District with our resources and applies public pressure on the District to aim higher. It's not as simple as saying that a copy and paste of state goals would make everyone happy – [but that starting point alone could potentially bring a lot of value.](#)

Think about this. We constantly talk about how our sports teams are doing – and we should. We celebrate **wins**, mourn **losses**, we review **scores**, we follow **stats** on an individual level even – **so far as to report them on the local news EVERY WEEK.** As we get more excited about our teams, we post pictures and talk about things like getting new lights for fields (I think we have petition going around with three million signatures)- we are motivated to invest in them more because we have bought into their success. Shouldn't we at least do a fraction of that when it comes to Math and Science?

And while more years to accomplish the state targets than many parents thought we had is good, what is the plan for that time?

More time by itself doesn't ensure a better outcome. Do you, as a parent, have a good command of what the District is doing in that time? The evidence connected to that plan? What can we reasonably expect concerning measurable gain (not something state targets can answer)? Does the District have internal mechanisms to measure progress? "<https://bhcommunitywatch.com/2022/10/09/one-more-really-long-article-about-proficiencies-and-metrics/>)

These targets can be discussed at the next BOE meeting when the Superintendent discusses her evidence to support that COVID and apathetic AP Students are why we experienced the most significant declines while having the highest per-pupil costs out of the seven comparable schools in our area.

I will add that the Superintendent's evaluation should include these targets, and her performance evaluation **this year** should seek to hold her accountable for the results we've seen and establish benchmarks for the next round. It is clear that the performance of our leadership needs to be tied to the success of **all our students**.

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Berkeley Heights Community Watch



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Factors Likely Connected to the BHPSNJ Decline: Lawyers and Loss of Focus

1 message

bh communitywatch <bhcommunitywatch1@gmail.com>

Wed, May 24, 2023 at 6:58 AM

To: Angela Penna <apenna@bhpsnj.org>, jyoung@bhpsnj.org, "Foregger, Thomas" <tforegger@bhpsnj.org>, "Khanna, Dipti" <dkhanna@bhpsni.org>, qbradford@bhpsni.org, ihyman@bhpsnj.org, rcianciulli@bhpsni.org, pstanley@bhpsnj.org

Last year the BOE Majority and Administration took strange and unprecedented steps in using District funding to ensure that a newly elected BOE Member and an agenda for change would fail.

Before Sai's term, concerns about the District's legal representation were widely discussed in the community, due to the violations of law connected to the reconfiguration (<https://bit.ly/3akGqw5>), violations of OPMA (also connected to the reconfiguration) that led to a de-facto settlement with the Prosecutor (<https://bit.ly/3udgLvp>) and an ethics complaint related to Nepotism that the Superintendent has now admitted to - also connected to reconfiguration (<https://bit.ly/3q9qnt9>).

Parents had no choice but to go to third parties to vet the process as the BOE and Administration were unreachable. Instead of providing the BOE with good counsel, Attorneys threw the term "baseless" at everything until it was rendered meaningless. This term was used to describe Ms. Akiris complaint to the Attorney General in a letter to the editor (that complaint ended up being validated) and then again by the District's Attorneys in communication to the Judge charged with deciding the Superintendent's Nepotism case (which again, the Superintendent admitted to).

During 2022, instead of working with Ms. Akiri, the BOE majority decided to hide behind attorneys and policy changes to fight what she and Dr. Foregger were asking the BOE to consider every step of the way. Fully documented here (<https://bit.ly/3OvBVRE>)

Also, during this time, meetings were reduced to once a month, last-minute agendas, last-minute agenda changes, and unnecessary policy changes, many of which directly contradicted the platforms elected by the public (<https://bit.ly/424Jfqk>) drove almost every meeting.

The District's Attorneys would act as elected members and provide incorrect information starting with the budget meeting (<https://bit.ly/43mQRFT>) as BOE Members snickered.

BOE Members expressed feigned shock, and Attorneys intervened in ways that were apparent conflicts of interest when Ms. Akiri and Dr. Foregger questioned legal bills. (<https://bit.ly/3Cb89KJ>)

The year culminated in two BOE Members from the BOE Majority introducing motions to file ethics charges against Ms. Akiri - many of these charges have been dismissed and the ones that remain are just inaccurate (for example, the District's attorney removed the term "proper performance" in presenting the violation to the SEC from the following ethics standard):

"I will support and protect school personnel in **proper performance** of their duties."

Changing it to mean that the BOE should support ANYTHING the Superintendent does. Do you as a body want the Board to be this powerless over the Administration?

Ironically, the BOE Member whose ethics complaint against Ms. Akiri was funded by the District has more SEC-validated violations moving forward to the Judge than Ms. Akiri, and the only BOE member from the prior year without an ethics complaint against him is Dr. Foregger - who voted against funding Ms. Stanley and Mr. Cianculli's complaint.

Throughout this, we also had minutes that inaccurately painted the positions of the two new BOE Members sent out to the public at the speed of light at opportune times to undermine their positions before important votes and the election. Why would any BOE member in their right mind who wants to fix this District trust a subcommittee out of the public eye whose minutes may be inaccurately weaponized?

Lastly, the District engaged Attorneys to protect overly redacted responses to OPRA requests and appear to be creating a false backlog early on in an effort to delay and hide even more information from getting to the public. This is the final piece to the puzzle- shutting down Zoom, hiding in committees and misrepresenting the work accomplished, shutting down social media comments, having attorneys bark at parents with improper cautions, and creating policies limiting what BOE members can share with the public on social media and fighting record requests tooth and nail- all while draining the District's coffers.

Now you might be asking yourself:

"What does any of this have to do with proficiencies?"

And that is precisely the question one should ask.

Nothing.

The answer is **nothing**.

The BOE Majority and this Administration spent an entire year and an enormous amount of money and effort on anything but proficiencies.

The leadership of this District have handed our schools over to lawyers and BOE members are using tax dollars to protect their seats and find ways to hide from the public. The complete focus of the BOE Majority appears to center on gaming the system to advance a leadership philosophy and set of objectives that seem non-existent to anyone on the outside looking in.

As a result, the audited report shows that our legal cost per pupil is nearly double the other six Districts we have included in our comparisons, while what we spend on textbooks is dead last.

My recommendations include seeking new counsel that views its role as an advisor instead of a political operative, whose loyalties reside with the best interest of the District, not Administrators or a select group of BOE Members they know will continue to hire them.

The District should institute greater oversight of legal spending by voluntarily complying with state requirements prior to hitting a threshold the Business Administrator will never admit we've reached and by simply following its existing policy on when it is allowed to use legal services.

The District can also work to reduce vulnerabilities - make documents like correspondence available at meetings versus forcing OPRA requests- and normalize it's OPRA process which is currently adversarial and clearly intended to deliberately slow down the flow of information to the public.

Many of the changes I recommended in my last email on increasing stakeholder access to information, meetings and influence would also go a long way in normalizing relationships with the community so that members of the public would feel less of a need to seek third party intervention which often incentivizes the District to seek legal counsel.

This is my last email on this subject for the time being. I hope there were moments when you could consider what I've written objectively and that what I've written has caused you to rethink your current approach to the management of and leadership over this District.

If it has, I would be happy to assist you or the District in walking through some of these changes - especially concerning surveys, data collection, and goal development.

John Migueis