



**Saddle River School District**  
**Board of Education**  
**97 East Allendale Road, Saddle River, NJ 07458**  
201.327.0727      [www.wandellschool.org](http://www.wandellschool.org)      Fax: 201.236.8166



October 3, 2023

**RE: Board of Education Middle School Exploration & Feasibility Study**

Dear Saddle River Community,

At the September 13, 2023 Board of Education Meeting, Special Counsel, Kerri Wright and General Counsel, Matthew Giacobbe presented on why the Board has embarked on a feasibility study, what is contained in such a study, how the process works, and our current middle school contract and possible middle school send/ receive options. The Board is grateful to the members of our community who participated and shared their contrasting perspectives. We hope to post the next scheduled public meeting in January as soon as each expert is ready to present their findings.

The Board thought it would be helpful to create a “frequently asked question” list to provide facts for members of the community who were unable to attend.

Please review the FAQ on the following pages and if you have any further questions please contact our Board Secretary, Kaitlyn Lawler, at 201-327-0727, x203 or [klawler@wandellschool.org](mailto:klawler@wandellschool.org). Please provide us time to respond to you as this process is extremely complicated and revolves around following the many legal mandates.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

The Saddle River Board of Education



## **Frequently Asked Questions on Middle Exploration & Feasibility Study**

### **1. Why did the Board engage in a feasibility study?**

Over the last several years, members of the community requested that the Board explore middle school options instead of our current send/receive agreement with Smith Middle School. In order to make any changes to a current send/receive agreement, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) requires a feasibility study. Therefore, the Board approved a feasibility study vendor and special counsel, Kerri Wright from Porzio, Bromberg & Newman, at the March 28, 2023 Special Meeting, to ensure all necessary requirements will be followed.

### **2. Which School Districts did the Board ask to participate in the feasibility study?**

The Board and Dr. Cinotti contacted three potential receiving school districts (Allendale, HoHoKus, and Upper Saddle River) as well as our current send/receive Ramsey to inquire if they would participate in the feasibility study and explore a possible send/receive agreement. All district Superintendents and Board Presidents were contacted on more than one occasion within the last year. Two districts responded promptly that their Boards were not interested in participating. One district entered preliminary discussions but after exchanging some data and assessing their own needs, they declined from participating in the study. There is no requirement for the potential receiving district school boards to take a public vote regarding their decision.

The Ramsey School District continues to cooperate with Saddle River throughout the feasibility study and has made all of their data available.

### **3. What is the feasibility study going to examine?**

The required data collected throughout a feasibility study is utilized by the New Jersey Department of Education and the Board to determine the educational, financial, racial/demographic, and architectural impacts that would occur with any changes in the current send/receive agreement.

Since the three QUAD districts (Ho-Ho-Kus, Allendale & Upper Saddle River) declined to explore a middle school send/receive option, the feasibility study will only explore creating a Pre-K-8 school district within the current Wandell school building, creating a Pre-K-8 school district with a Wandell addition, or maintaining the current send/receive agreement with Ramsey.

### **4. Why is building a new middle school not included in this study?**

In order to build a new middle school, the New Jersey Department of Education Commissioner would have to provide approval. The current number of Saddle River students attending middle school is quite low and therefore it is expected that the Commissioner would not approve the district applying for a referendum to build an entirely new middle school; rather, an addition to the existing building would be more likely approved if needed.



**5. What is the timeline for completing a feasibility study?**

- The vendor will gather data from Saddle River, the sending district, as well as Ramsey, the receiving district. Special Counsel Attorney Kerri Wright advised the Board and public that it will take three to four months to compile all of the data into a detailed 150-200 page report.
- The vendor and special counsel will present the completed study to the Board in executive session.
- The experts who worked on the feasibility study will present the study in a public session.
- The Board of Education will make a determination:
  - a) the current send/receive agreement will remain the same

**OR**

  - b) the recommendation of changing the send/receive agreement to bring middle school students back to Saddle River.

**6. What is the process if a change of the send/receive is recommended by SRBOE?**

- The SRBOE files a petition and submits the feasibility study to the Commissioner of Education.
- The Commissioner of Education reviews the feasibility study and petition subsequently making a ruling.
- Ramsey has the right to legally oppose the petition before the Commissioner.
- If Ramsey opposes the petition, the dispute would go before an Office of Administrative Law Judge who would hear the evidence from both sides, including witness testimony and will then issue an initial decision to the Commissioner of Education. However, the Commissioner of Education has the ability to accept, reject, or modify the Office of Administrative Law Judge's decision. *The Commissioner of Education has the final authority to approve or deny any changes to a send/receive agreement.*
- If there is litigation, the decision is delayed and it can take an additional 1-2 years added to the process.
- Throughout this process the Ramsey-Saddle River send/receive agreement remains in place until both parties agree with the Commissioner's decision or litigation is complete.

**7. How much does the feasibility study cost?**

The feasibility study costs \$78,000. Originally it was approved at \$76,000 at the March 28, 2023 Special Board Meeting. However, additional costs have been added to incorporate a thorough architectural assessment.

**8. When was the last one done?**

At the BOE meeting we stated that the last feasibility was completed in approximately 1998. We reviewed our records and the last feasibility study was completed in 2001. So it has been more than twenty years since this data has been collected.



**9. Which students would be affected by a change in the send/receive agreement?**

It is important to note that a change in the send/receive agreement only applies to future middle school students. Students currently enrolled at Smith Middle School (or who are enrolled at any time up to the completion of any petition or litigation before the Commissioner) would be required by the Commissioner to finish their middle school matriculation at Smith. If applicable, a phased re-entrance to the district plan would be devised to hire personnel and rearrange classrooms starting with a newly matriculated sixth grade class.

**10. What if the recommendation requires building a school addition or a tax increase above the allowed yearly 2% budget increase?**

Any time the School District requires funds beyond the allocated tax levy, the district must get approval from the taxpayers through a referendum. The public gets the final vote in a referendum.

**11. What happens if the Feasibility Study shows that there would be a negative impact to separate from Ramsey?**

If the feasibility study results demonstrate that the current/send receive relationship with Ramsey is the best option for our students educationally, financially, and racially/demographically, the Board would not move forward with trying to move our middle school students. However, if the feasibility study provides data to support moving our students, the Board would consider filing a petition to seek authorization from the Commissioner of Education to move our middle school students. The Commissioner of Education would not approve a change in the current send/receive contract if the Commissioner concludes that moving our middle school students would present a substantial negative educational, financial or demographic/racial impact for either Saddle River or Ramsey.

**12. What would happen if Saddle River did not meet to negotiate or renew the Ramsey Send/ Receive Agreement while awaiting the results of the study?**

If Saddle River did not meet to negotiate or renew the Ramsey Send/ Receive Agreement, the agreement would remain in place. However, Saddle River would be in breach of contract which would allow Ramsey to open the contract and eliminate any of the current financial discounts and credits they previously provided. In our current agreement, Ramsey approximately charges Saddle River \$14,500 per student and also provides us with an \$80,000 credit. Our send/receive agreement increases 3% each school year, which is standard in many school agreements.

**13. What is the current term of the Send/ Receive Agreement with Ramsey?**

The current Send/ Receive Agreement with Ramsey is from 2014-2024, ending June 30, 2024. The Board is required to send a letter of intent to Ramsey by October 2023, to keep the current credits that are currently in the agreement. Both Boards of Education will engage in negotiations, which are confidential and cannot be discussed in public. When an agreement is reached, both Boards of Education will have a resolution on their Board of Education meeting agendas, approving the agreement.



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**14. What if I do not want to send my child to Smith Middle School? Can I get a credit for my taxes if I send my child to another middle school?**

If you elect to send your child to a public or private middle school (public or private) outside of the Saddle River School Districts' send/receive agreement, the parent/guardian is legally obligated to pay for that tuition. New Jersey does not provide any type of voucher program for students. You cannot get a credit for your property taxes if you choose to send your child to a middle school outside of the district's current send/receive agreement with Ramsey.