

IMPORTANT INFORMATION REGARDING THE TERMINATION OF THE SENDING-RECEIVING AGREEMENT

Background

For 85 years, Montague sent its high school students to Port Jervis High School. In 2013, a decision was made to enter into a new sending-receiving agreement with High Point Regional High School. Unfortunately, this new agreement has not worked out. The New Jersey Herald aptly described the relationship between Montague and High Point Regional as both “frosty” and “icy,” resulting in numerous disputes between the two Boards.¹ This broken relationship has led to High Point Regional filing several lawsuits against Montague, and Montague unanimously approving a symbolic resolution in February 2018 not to renew the send-receive contract with High Point Regional when it expires in June 2024. As is clear, the relationship between High Point Regional and Montague has not worked. Indeed, in settling one of its lawsuits with Montague, High Point Regional specifically agreed not to oppose any effort by Montague to end the sending-receiving agreement. In particular, High Point Regional agreed “not to oppose, hinder, or in any way obstruct any effort by Montague to terminate, withdraw from, and/or not renew the Agreement...”²

In early 2019, Montague retained Porzio, Bromberg & Newman to help with the preparation of a feasibility study on the possible termination of the sending-receiving relationship between Montague and High Point Regional. In October 2019, Statistical Forecasting, LLC, Steven Cea, M.B.A., and John Kazmark, Ed.D. issued a feasibility study recommending the termination of the existing sending-receiving agreement and for Montague to enter into a new sending-receiving agreement with Port Jervis. These highly qualified experts found that there will be no substantial negative impact on Montague’s or High Point Regional’s quality of education, financial condition, or racial composition should the existing sending-receiving relationship be severed. Montague also received and reviewed a traffic study by MBO Engineering that identified the hazardous nature of the travel from Montague to High Point Regional, hailing the relative safety of the travel to Port Jervis.

Based on the recommendations in the feasibility study and the traffic study, Montague filed a petition with the Commissioner of Education on December 24, 2019 seeking to terminate its current sending-receiving relationship with High Point Regional and enter into a new sending-receiving relationship with Port Jervis to educate Montague’s students in grades 9-12.

As part of the consideration of Montague's unopposed petition, members of the public have been given 20 days to submit comments on whether the Commissioner of Education should grant or deny Montague’s petition. In particular, the comments should address the following question:

Will the termination of the existing sending-receiving relationship and/or the proposed new sending-receiving relationship between Montague and Port Jervis,

¹ <https://www.njherald.com/news/20190606/montague-seeks-renewed-ties-to-port-jervis-hs>

² Settlement Agreement and Release between Montague Township Board of Education and High Point Regional High School Board of Education, dated November 20, 2018

whereby Montague students in grades 9-12 would attend Port Jervis High School, result in a substantial negative impact on any of the affected districts in one or more of the following areas: financial implications; quality of education received by students; and racial composition of the student populations.

To help the public with this process, Montague thought it would be helpful to summarize several key facts found in the feasibility study.

Educational Impact

Quality Of Education

Both High Point Regional and Port Jervis offer a quality educational program that has the potential to benefit Montague students. All test data indicates that students from each of these schools perform consistently with one another. Two such examples, include:

Student Teacher Ratio (2018)

High Point Regional:	11:1 ratio.
Port Jervis:	11:1 ratio

Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) (2018 averages)

High Point Regional:	Math: 537	Reading/Writing 543
Port Jervis:	Math 515	Reading/Writing 538

Port Jervis Is Closer And The Communities Have A Long-Standing Relationship

The impact of the long-standing, close-knit relationship that the communities of Montague and Port Jervis have shared should not be understated. Due to the 85-year relationship and close geographic proximity, Montague and Port Jervis have a great relationship working together for the betterment of their students and communities. Montague citizens and its students have not shared the same level of involvement with the program in High Point Regional that they have continually shared with Port Jervis.

No Change In Ability To Attend Other Public Schools

Students residing in Montague still will have the same alternative educational opportunities available to them should severance be granted. This includes attending school districts that participate in the Interdistrict School Choice Program, such as High Point Regional and Kittatinny Regional. It continues the ability to attend vocational schools, such as the Sussex County Technical School, and magnet schools.

Montague Students Will Receive In-State Tuition At State Colleges in Both New York And New Jersey

A significant added benefit to Montague students and their families is that attending Port Jervis allows these students to receive the in-state tuition rate at state colleges in both New York and

New Jersey. This greatly expands the educational opportunities for students who might not otherwise be able to afford a college education.

Financial Impact

Reduction In Montague's School Tax Levy

If the severance were approved, Montague would see its annual tax levy reduced by \$378,000. Given the size of its budget, this decrease for Montague is significant. The reason for the reduction is due to the maximum tuition rate at Port Jervis being \$3,893 less than High Point Regional's tuition rate.

Reduction In Montague's Transportation Costs

Port Jervis is closer to Montague than High Point Regional. The most direct route from the center of Montague to High Point Regional is 13.5 miles and takes 22 minutes. The route to Port Jervis is 10.1 miles and 20 minutes, or 3.4 miles and 2 minutes shorter than the trip to High Point Regional. Over a school year, the decreased mileage to and from school would result in a reduction of hundreds of miles traveled for Montague students. Additionally, the route to High Point Regional crosses High Point State Park with an elevation that exceeds 1,400 feet, compared to the route to Port Jervis, which is less than 500 feet. As a result, there is an expected decrease in transportation costs due to the reduced mileage and better terrain.

Minimal Impact On High Point Regional

The increase in High Point Regional's tax levy would only be \$120,500 per year (after the four-year phase-in is taken into consideration). That is less than 0.5% of High Point Regional's projected expenses, which are more than \$25.5 million.

This increased cost should be offset by the decrease in High Point Regional's expenses due to it having to educate fewer students. Taking into consideration the four-year phase-in period,³ the change in the number of High Point Regional teachers would be reduced by 2.25, which could be handled through attrition.

As a result, there would be no substantial, negative financial impact to High Point Regional.

Financial Benefits To Port Jervis

The tuition received for the 98 new students will exceed the cost of the additional teachers, benefits, and supplies by more than \$257,000.

Racial Impact

³ The four-year phase-in period refers to the fact that those students who already have begun high school in High Point Regional would be allowed to stay there through graduation. As a result, the transition to Port Jervis would be "phased-in" over four years.

The experts found that the severance of the sending-receiving relationship will not result in a substantial negative impact on any of the districts' racial composition.

High Point Regional's racial makeup would be largely unchanged:

High Point Regional's Minority Percentage With Montague:	11% ⁴
High Point Regional's Minority Percentage Without Montague:	10% ⁴

Port Jervis's racial makeup also would remain essentially unchanged:

Port Jervis's Minority Percentage With Montague:	24% ⁴
Port Jervis's Minority Percentage Without Montague:	24% ⁴

Student Safety Due to Travel

Montague's Students Are Safer Traveling To Port Jervis

While the routes from Montague to High Point Regional are scenic and picturesque, they provide challenging terrain and topography for motorists, particularly young drivers and school bus operators. This is because the routes have extreme roadway terrain conditions, which are exacerbated under inclement weather and road surface condition. This includes crossing High Point State Park with an elevation that exceeds 1,400 feet. Comparatively, the route to Port Jervis is less than 500 feet.

The traffic conditions along the route to High Point Regional have worsened and continue to worsen and the terrain that must be driven over is far less safe than the route to Port Jervis. The trip to Port Jervis also is 3.4 miles shorter than the trip to High Point Regional.

Thus, the safest route for Montague students is the shorter route to Port Jervis on less challenging terrain.

Conclusion

Montague has the opportunity to provide its high school students with a similar or better educational opportunity than they experience at High Point Regional, with the potential to do so at a lower cost. Port Jervis has agreed to receive Montague's high school students, as had been the case for the 85 years prior to the severing of the relationship in 2013.

⁴ Rounded to the nearest whole percentage.