

South Hunterdon Regional School District Concerns

A summary of major concerns with our local school district

Mike Spille, October 2024

- Capital Facilities Budgeting & Spending
- Budget increases over time
- Per-Student expenditures
- Test scores
- Local Enrollment
- Space for Universal PreK Program

Capital Spending is far Above the \$33.4 million referendum Amount

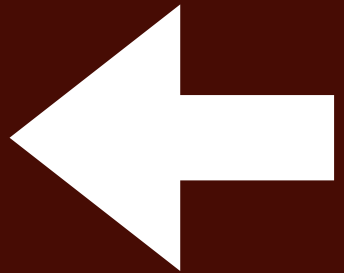
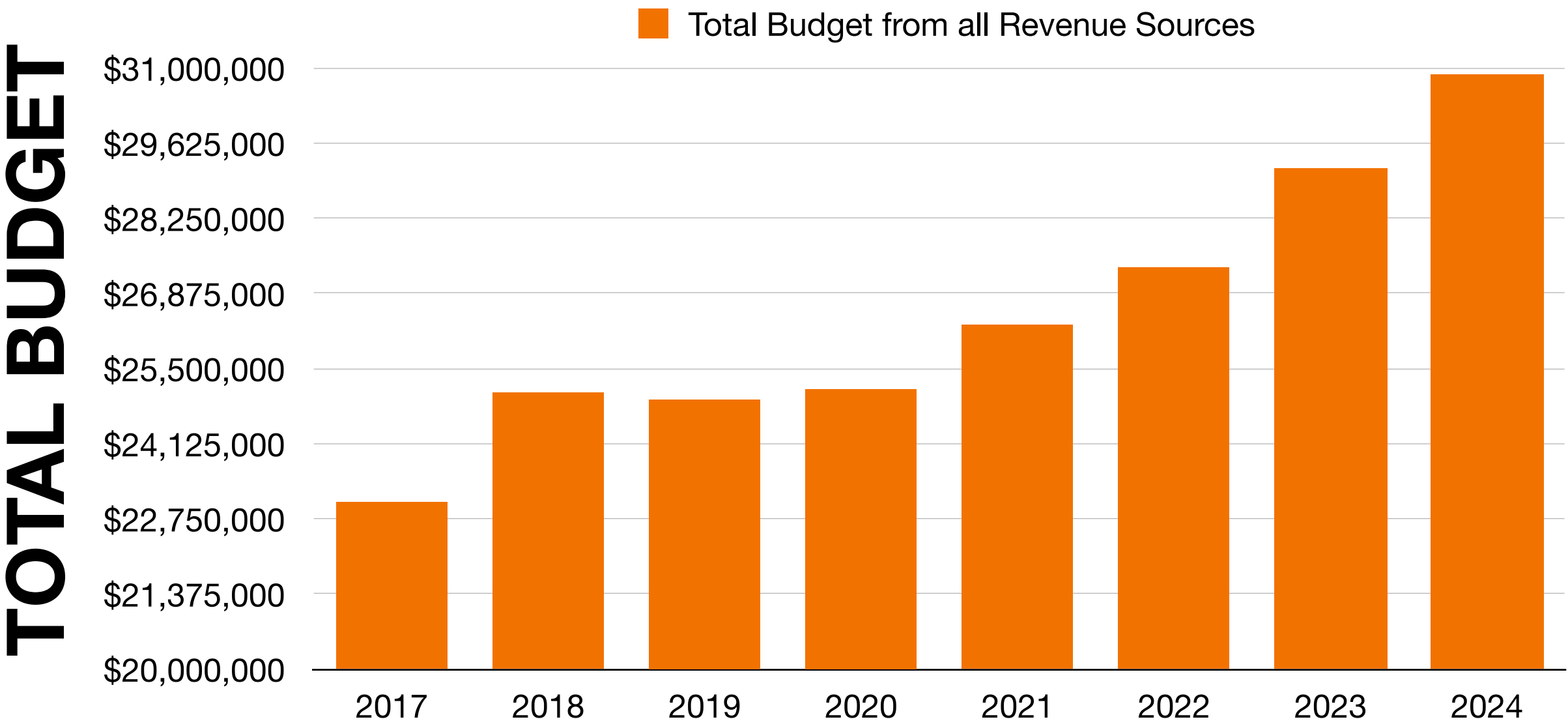
Recent and proposed capital spending

PURPOSE	DATE	AMOUNT	COMMENT
Referendum	Nov 2021	\$33.4 million	Renovate LPS, new MS, close WAS. Partial DoE funding.
New LPS Roof	Jul 2022	\$1.295 million	Not referendum funded. In 2021 Superintendent told voters roof was in great shape. In 2022 they determined it needed full replacement. Partial DoE funding.
LPS Add'l HVAC	Jan 2024	\$494,000	Not referendum funded, Gym HVAC. Partial DoE funding.
Referendum Overage Budget	Apr 2024	\$2 million	Anticipated cost over-runs for Middle School so far. Funding likely from referendum bond interest
PreK Capital Investment	2025	\$2 million-\$5 million	All options waste significant classroom space. Contingent on DOE funding Universal PreK operations indefinitely.
Total		\$39-\$42 million*	

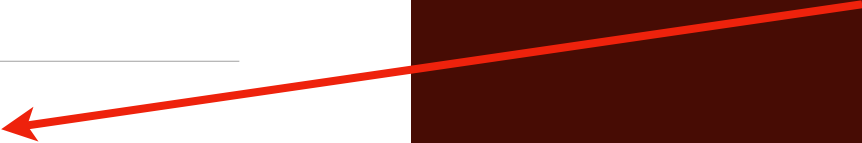
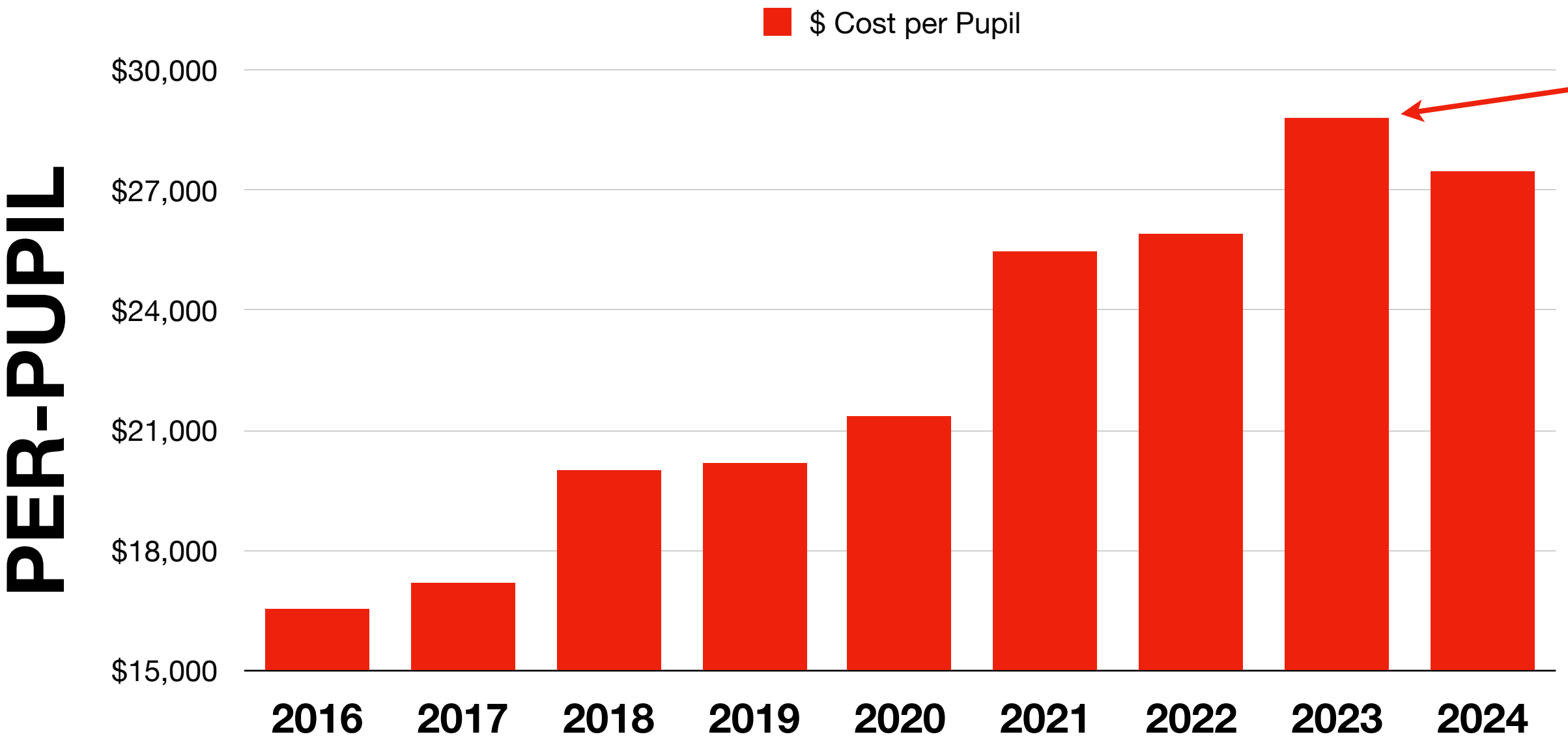
The above table outlines the capital reserves the district has spent or proposes to spend in the near future on school building construction.

This table does NOT include costs such as the \$600,000+ it took to lease the Jesus School for the 2023/2024 school year, and similar knock-on costs to LPS construction.

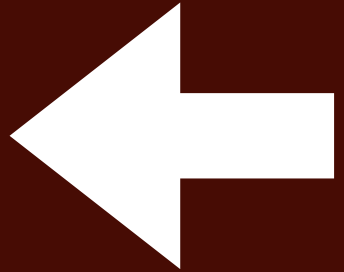
SHRSD BUDGETS OVER TIME



INCREASED
\$7.8 Million, 34%
From 2017 to 2024



2023: Jesus School Process
Leasing the Jesus school cost a tremendous amount and stressed our faculty and staff

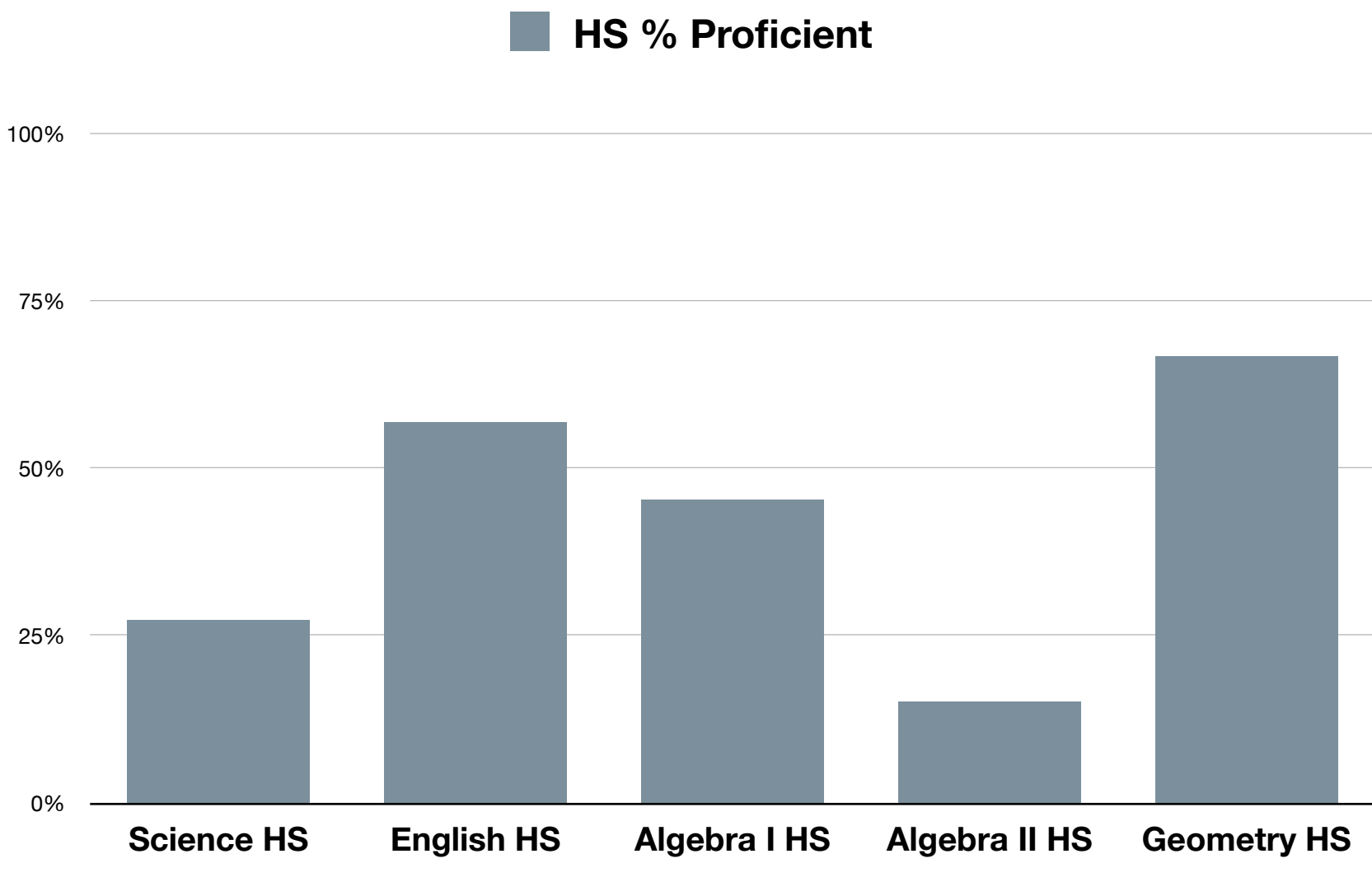
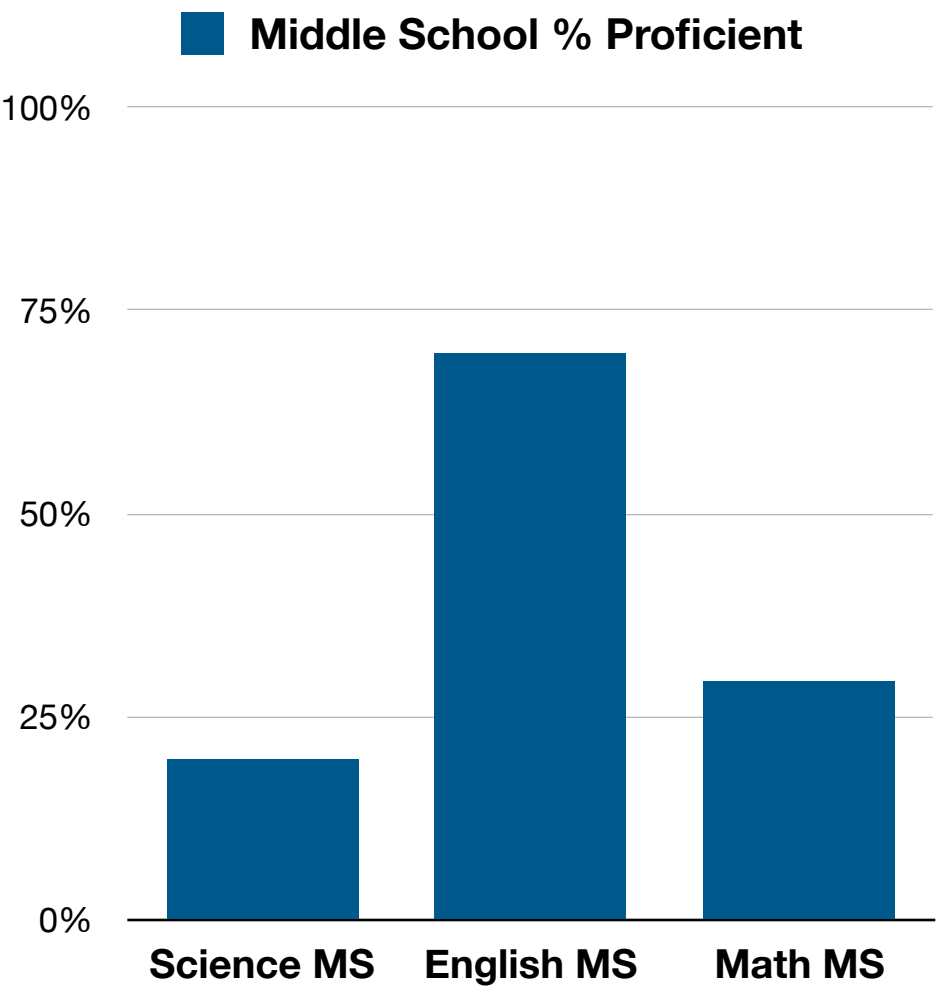
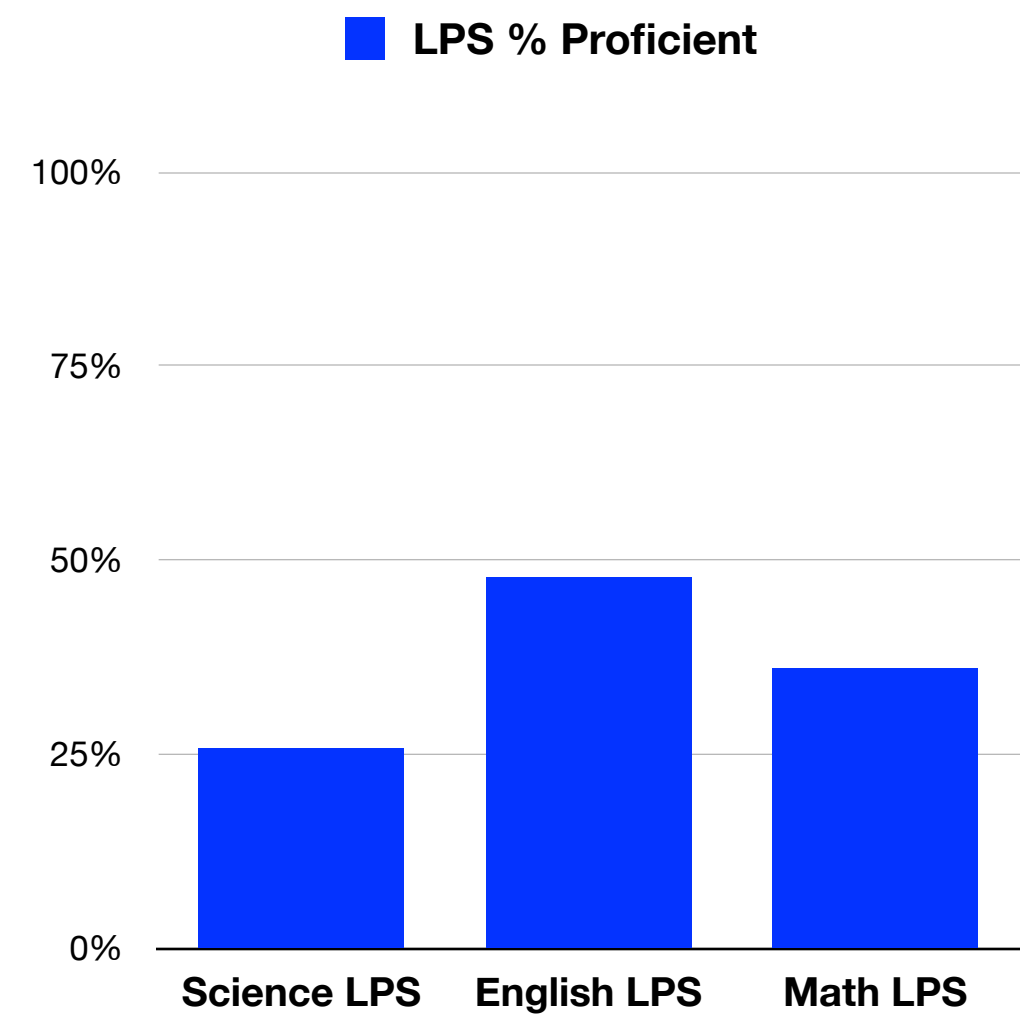
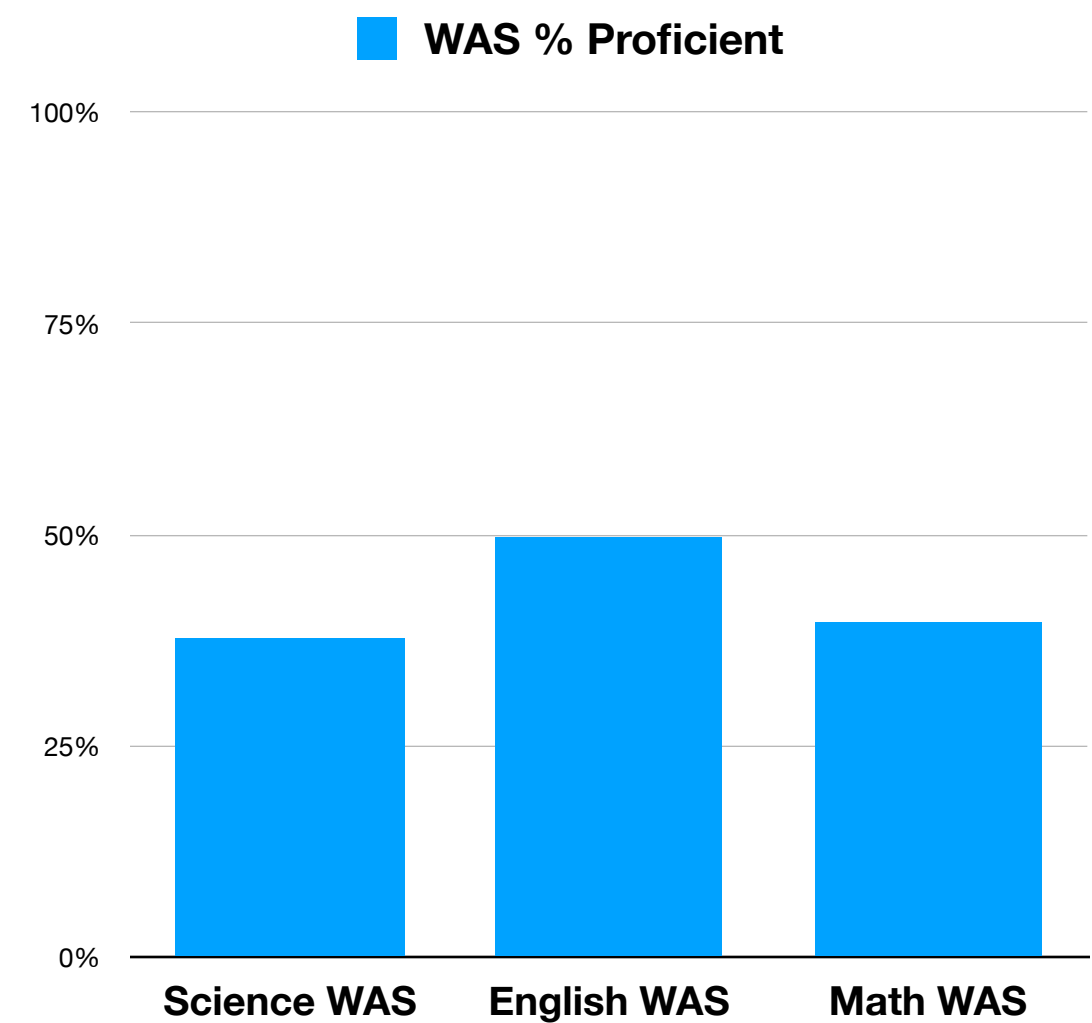


2016-2024: +\$10,911 / Student
Increased cost per pupil over 7 years
66% total increase

* Source: South Hunterdon Annual User Friendly Budget

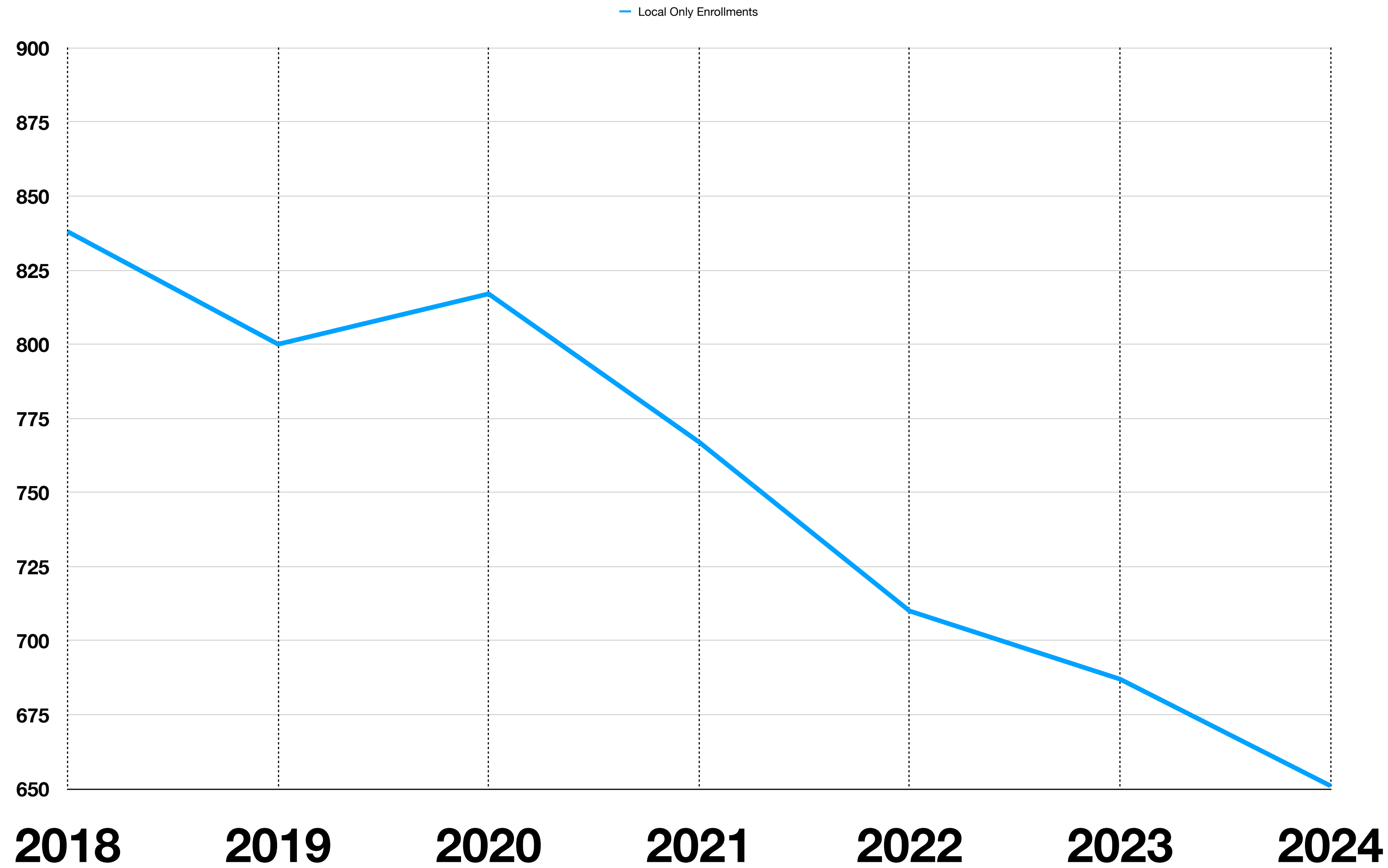
SHRSD STANDARDIZED TEST SCORES

- Our elementary schools cannot even manage to get half of its students proficient in English, Math, or Science
- Standardized scores show a steady decline as students progress through the system, with Math proficiency dropping in most subjects and science proficiency absolutely plummeting
- Poor test scores, and constant budget increases has lead to a flight of students and faculty from the district.



* Source: 2019 NJ State Standardized Test Score Report

LOCAL SCHOOL ENROLLMENT



-187 Students
22.3% Decline

Local district enrollment has been shrinking since the district was created, and this trend shows no sign of abating

SHRSD PreK-Program History

- PreK was historically offered tuition-based (paid) in Lambertville only (LPS)
- NJ State started supporting a “Universal” PreK program a few years ago:
 - State would fund “free” universal PreK programs for districts that apply and qualify
 - Funding would only cover operations and PreK playgrounds, not buildings
 - State requires districts to plan to support their full “universe” of PreK students
- District applied for Universal PreK aid in October 2021
 - Required to provide for up to 90 students (6 classrooms, 4 more than we have)
 - The District does not have 4 extra classrooms
 - In the short term district is splitting kids between WAS and LPS and gets \$1 million/year in aid
 - There is no guarantee the State will fund PreK forever
 - Potential loss of this aid should be considered along with the capital options

Future of District “Universal” PreK

- The following pages outline the longer term options the district has for finding space for Universal PreK
- None of these options are ideal, as the district did not consider additional PreK classrooms as part of the referendum
- All options will involve major compromises in terms of finances, student experience, and impact to parents
- Note that the Universal PreK program is entirely voluntary
- Many districts have held back until they better understand the full costs of the program
- South Hunterdon jumped into the program without fully understanding it
- Universal PreK funding will almost certainly not last indefinitely
- The following pages walk through options presented by the Superintendent in September-October 2024. Note that these options are not the only ones, but those the Superintendent chose to present

Universal PreK Student Capacity Options

Below are Some of the Potential Classroom Options for PreK

NOTE: Numbering of these options do not match the Superintendent's numbering, and adds in a number of factors the Superintendent did not consider.

#	PreK At...	Option	Description	Capital	Other Costs
A1	HS	High School (minimal)	All PreK moves to middle school area at South, bathroom exemption (no bathrooms in classrooms)	+\$3.5 million	Lower - Sell WAS
A2	HS	High School (full)	Like Option A, but with bathrooms per classroom	+\$5 million	Lower - Sell WAS
B1	LPS	Reconfigure LPS PreK-3, MS 4-8	Move 4th grade to MS, all PreK classrooms at LPS. MS has no space for this, Suozzo does not want 8th grade in HS	\$0	Lower - Sell WAS
B2	LPS	Increase LPS K-4 classroom sizes	Replace 3 classes per grade K-4 with 2 classes per grade, use extras for PreK	\$0	Lower - Sell WAS, Staff Reductions
C	LPS & WAS	PreK Split LPS and WAS	2 PreK classrooms at LPS, 3-4 at WAS using existing configurations	\$0	WAS OpEx
D	WAS	All PreK to WAS	All PreK to WAS. Use 2 existing K classrooms, renovate 6 1st-3rd classrooms down to 4 additional PreK	\$2 million	WAS OpEx
E	LPS, 3rd Parties	Partner with 3rd Parties	Keep LPS PreK, remainder to 3rd party pre-schools.	\$0	? - Facility Rent, Sell WAS

PreK Option A1 - High School (Minimal)

- Options A1 and A2 involve putting PreK at the High School, and will still move 7-8 grade to the new middle school
- Board determined “this was not feasible” (despite no BOE vote on matter)
- No explanation why cost is so high compared to WAS reconfiguration
- Having toddlers at High School is probably a bad idea
- All PreK will be bussed
- Middle school gym is completely wasted
- WAS can be sold
- Walkability lost for Lambertville PreK
- Empty LPS classrooms

#	PreK At...	Option	Description	Capital	Other Costs
A1	HS	High School (minimal)	All PreK moves to middle school area at South, bathroom exemption (no bathrooms in classrooms)	+\$3.5 million	Lower - Sell WAS
A2	HS	High School (full)	Like Option A, but with bathrooms per classroom	+\$5 million	Lower - Sell WAS
B1	LPS	Reconfigure LPS PreK-3, MS 4-8	Move 4th grade to MS, all PreK classrooms at LPS. MS has no space for this, Suozzo does not want 8th grade in HS	\$0	Lower - Sell WAS
B2	LPS	Increase LPS K-4 classroom sizes	Replace 3 classes per grade K-4 with 2 classes per grade, use extras for PreK	\$0	Lower - Sell WAS, Staff Reductions
C	LPS & WAS	PreK Split LPS and WAS	2 PreK classrooms at LPS, 3-4 at WAS using existing configurations	\$0	WAS OpEx
D	WAS	All PreK to WAS	All PreK to WAS. Use 2 existing K classrooms, renovate 6 1st-3rd classrooms down to 4 additional PreK	\$2 million	WAS OpEx
E	LPS, 3rd Parties	Partner with 3rd Parties	Keep LPS PreK, remainder to 3rd party pre-schools.	\$0	? - Facility Rent, Sell WAS

PreK Option A2 - High School (full)

- Like previous option, but with full bathrooms in all classrooms
- Board determined “this was not feasible” despite no BOE vote on matter
- No explanation why cost is so high compared to WAS reconfiguration
- Having toddlers at High School probably a bad idea
- All PreK bussed
- Middle school gym is completely wasted
- WAS can be sold
- Walkability lost for Lambertville PreK
- Empty LPS Classrooms

#	PreK At...	Option	Description	Capital	Other Costs
A1	HS	High School (minimal)	All PreK moves to middle school area at South, bathroom exemption (no bathrooms in classrooms)	+\$3.5 million	Lower - Sell WAS
A2	HS	High School (full)	Like Option A, but with bathrooms per classroom	+\$5 million	Lower - Sell WAS
B1	LPS	Reconfigure LPS PreK-3, MS 4-8	Move 4th grade to MS, all PreK classrooms at LPS. MS has no space for this, Suozzo does not want 8th grade in HS	\$0	Lower - Sell WAS
B2	LPS	Increase LPS K-4 classroom sizes	Replace 3 classes per grade K-4 with 2 classes per grade, use extras for PreK	\$0	Lower - Sell WAS, Staff Reductions
C	LPS & WAS	PreK Split LPS and WAS	2 PreK classrooms at LPS, 3-4 at WAS using existing configurations	\$0	WAS OpEx
D	WAS	All PreK to WAS	All PreK to WAS. Use 2 existing K classrooms, renovate 6 1st-3rd classrooms down to 4 additional PreK	\$2 million	WAS OpEx
E	LPS, 3rd Parties	Partner with 3rd Parties	Keep LPS PreK, remainder to 3rd party pre-schools.	\$0	? - Facility Rent, Sell WAS

PreK Option B1 - Reconfigure LPS to PreK-3

- Options B1 and B2 involve putting all PreK students at LPS, which would mean changing the classroom configurations
- B1 involves reconfiguring LPS from PreK-4 to PreK-3
- Superintendent Suozzo says this is not feasible as the MS has no space to be a 4-8 school. Referendum left 0 room for expansion.
- MS could be 4-7 school, with 8th grade staying at HS. Suozzo says this “doesn’t make educational sense”, without any references or citations
- Walkability retained for Lambertville PreK
- WAS can be sold

#	PreK At...	Option	Description	Capital	Other Costs
A1	HS	High School (minimal)	All PreK moves to middle school area at South, bathroom exemption (no bathrooms in classrooms)	+\$3.5 million	Lower - Sell WAS
A2	HS	High School (full)	Like Option A, but with bathrooms per classroom	+\$5 million	Lower - Sell WAS
B1	LPS	Reconfigure LPS PreK-3, MS 4-8	Move 4th grade to MS, all PreK classrooms at LPS. MS has no space for this, Suozzo does not want 8th grade in HS	\$0	Lower - Sell WAS
B2	LPS	Increase LPS K-4 classroom sizes	Replace 3 classes per grade K-4 with 2 classes per grade, use extras for PreK	\$0	Lower - Sell WAS, Staff Reductions
C	LPS & WAS	PreK Split LPS and WAS	2 PreK classrooms at LPS, 3-4 at WAS using existing configurations	\$0	WAS OpEx
D	WAS	All PreK to WAS	All PreK to WAS. Use 2 existing K classrooms, renovate 6 1st-3rd classrooms down to 4 additional PreK	\$2 million	WAS OpEx
E	LPS, 3rd Parties	Partner with 3rd Parties	Keep LPS PreK, remainder to 3rd party pre-schools.	\$0	? - Facility Rent, Sell WAS

PreK Option B2 - Increase LPS K-4 classroom sizes

- Retain LPS overall grade configuration
- Increase K-4 class sizes to make room for more PreK classes
- Walkability retained for Lambertville PreK
- WAS can be sold
- No room for expansion due to referendum choices
- Larger class sizes
- HS 7th and 8th grade classroom spaces and gym wasted

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A1	HS	High School (minimal)	All PreK moves to middle school area at South, bathroom exemption (no bathrooms in classrooms)	+\$3.5 million	Lower - Sell WAS
A2	HS	High School (full)	Like Option A, but with bathrooms per classroom	+\$5 million	Lower - Sell WAS
B1	LPS	Reconfigure LPS PreK-3, MS 4-8	Move 4th grade to MS, all PreK classrooms at LPS. MS has no space for this, Suozzo does not want 8th grade in HS	\$0	Lower - Sell WAS
B2	LPS	Increase LPS K-4 classroom sizes	Replace 3 classes per grade K-4 with 2 classes per grade, use extras for PreK	\$0	Lower - Sell WAS, Staff Reductions
C	LPS & WAS	PreK Split LPS and WAS	2 PreK classrooms at LPS, 3-4 at WAS using existing configurations	\$0	WAS OpEx
D	WAS	All PreK to WAS	All PreK to WAS. Use 2 existing K classrooms, renovate 6 1st-3rd classrooms down to 4 additional PreK	\$2 million	WAS OpEx
E	LPS, 3rd Parties	Partner with 3rd Parties	Keep LPS PreK, remainder to 3rd party pre-schools.	\$0	? - Facility Rent, Sell WAS

PreK Option C - PreK split between LPS and WAS

- Continue temporary arrangement in place today
- Some PreK stays at LPS, rest remains at WAS
- No WAS renovation, re-use existing spaces
- Non-ADA bathrooms suddenly doesn't matter?
- WAS cannot be sold
- PreK universe split
- Wasted grade 7-8 space at MS

#	PreK At...	Option	Description	Capital	Other Costs
A1	HS	High School (minimal)	All PreK moves to middle school area at South, bathroom exemption (no bathrooms in classrooms)	+\$3.5 million	Lower - Sell WAS
A2	HS	High School (full)	Like Option A, but with bathrooms per classroom	+\$5 million	Lower - Sell WAS
B1	LPS	Reconfigure LPS PreK-3, MS 4-8	Move 4th grade to MS, all PreK classrooms at LPS. MS has no space for this, Suozzo does not want 8th grade in HS	\$0	Lower - Sell WAS
B2	LPS	Increase LPS K-4 classroom sizes	Replace 3 classes per grade K-4 with 2 classes per grade, use extras for PreK	\$0	Lower - Sell WAS, Staff Reductions
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D	WAS	All PreK to WAS	All PreK to WAS. Use 2 existing K classrooms, renovate 6 1st-3rd classrooms down to 4 additional PreK	\$2 million	WAS OpEx
E	LPS, 3rd Parties	Partner with 3rd Parties	Keep LPS PreK, remainder to 3rd party pre-schools.	\$0	? - Facility Rent, Sell WAS

PreK Option D - All PreK to WAS

- Renovate WAS and move all 5-6 PreK classrooms there permanently
- LPS becomes K-4
- Lambertville loses walkability for PreK
- LPS underutilized (was planned to have PreK)
- WAS cannot be sold
- Taxpayers were **vehemently** told WAS could not be renovated during 2021 referendum push
- Majority of WAS empty
- 7th and 8th grade areas at HS empty

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A2	HS	High School (full)	Like Option A, but with bathrooms per classroom	+\$5 million	Lower - Sell WAS
B1	LPS	Reconfigure LPS PreK-3, MS 4-8	Move 4th grade to MS, all PreK classrooms at LPS. MS has no space for this, Suozzo does not want 8th grade in HS	\$0	Lower - Sell WAS
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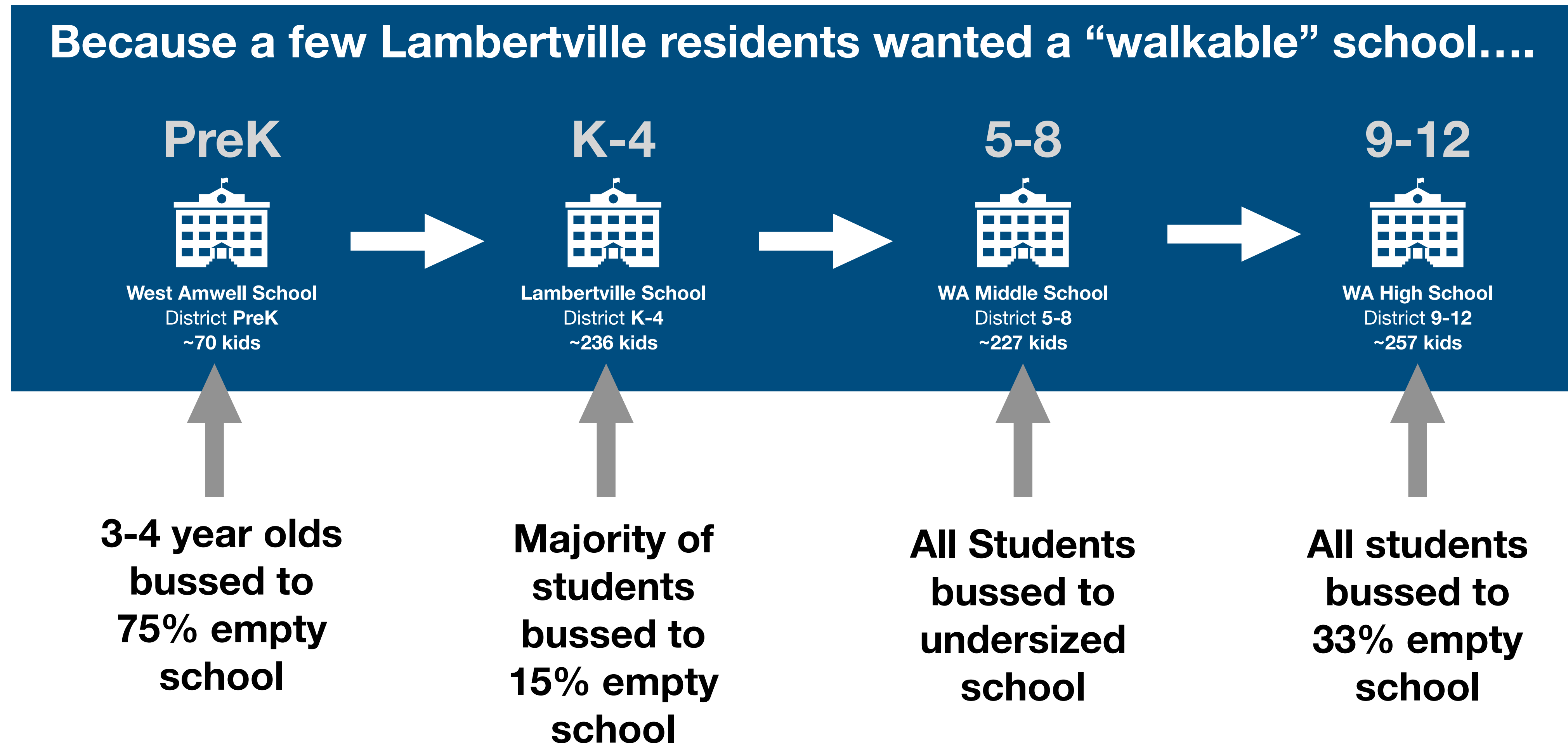
PreK Option E - Partner with 3rd parties

- Continue with PreK at LPS
- Look to 3rd parties to fill gaps in classrooms
- Sparse options, one local school refusing, St. John’s already ransomed district for \$600K in 2023. How much will they fleece the district for open ended PreK program?
- WAS can be sold
- MS 7th and 8th grade areas unused
- District has less control

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A2	HS	High School (full)	Like Option A, but with bathrooms per classroom	+\$5 million	Lower - Sell WAS
B1	LPS	Reconfigure LPS PreK-3, MS 4-8	Move 4th grade to MS, all PreK classrooms at LPS. MS has no space for this, Suozzo does not want 8th grade in HS	\$0	Lower - Sell WAS
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Potential Student Journey Through District Schools

Here is what our students journey through the system would look like if WAS renovated to become the West Amwell PreSchool Academy.



Universal PreK Questions and Observations

PreSchool Expansion Aid vs. Universal PreK Program

Words matter. Superintendent Suozzo focuses on Pre School Expansion Aid (PEA). The focus of the Murphy administration is **Universal** PreK.

“Universal” PreK means the district providing space for all 3 and 4 year olds in the district, which would require seats for 90 students

Many districts have hesitated to take PEA as they evaluate the all-in costs to each district. Why didn’t South do this in 2021?

What happens if the State stops the PEA program? Because - eventually they will. How will we pay the \$1 million/year bill on our own?

General Questions Around Program

Why are STEM, Math, Art “specials” called out as being difficult to provide for? What is being done in these areas for *3 and 4 year olds*?

Why are we proposing spending millions of capital budgets on three and four year olds, and almost nothing on high school students? Where is the cost-benefit analysis broken down by grade and grade-complexity and benefits (e.g. by definition HS programs will be more comprehensive and complex than those for toddlers).

Why isn’t “sale of WAS” one of the evaluation criteria?

Why isn’t “walkability” one of the evaluation criteria?

How is the board “determining” what options are and are not feasible? Where are the votes recorded for this “determination”?

What is the projected percentage uptake rate for Lambertville, West Amwell, and Stockton? Does the entire District need Universal PreK, or is this another Lambertville special perk?

High School PreK Option Questions

Why is the HS renovation \$3.5-\$5 million and nearly equivalent work at WAS only \$2 million?

What is being done with the completely wasted Middle School gym (regardless of PreK)?

HS Program expansion - this has already happened. What do these programs have to do with classroom space?

CEA Space - if we have a space crunch, why are we selling facilities access to CEA for a mere \$160,000/year?