



# Borough of Collingswood

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## Collingswood Schools and Borough A Plan for Partnership

The Borough presents this proposed "Plan for Partnership" as a collaborative effort between the schools, the Borough, and our community. This proposal represents the outcome of extensive work by the Borough's professional team. It reflects a creative-thinking approach to addressing the expressed needs of both the schools and the community at large, while also considering the financial implications of these needs.

This is a holistic and comprehensive plan, intended to be adopted in its entirety. While each component will require thoughtful discussion and input to reach a consensus, no part of the proposal should be considered in isolation. We encourage you to review the full proposal before making any judgments, as only by considering the proposal in its entirety can we ensure balanced and sustainable solutions. We want to acknowledge that there may be school-related variables or information we don't yet have or fully understand, and we remain committed to discussion, flexibility, and collaboration to work through the details outlined below.

1. Based on our review of the prior year's school budgets available to us, the school district can make an accounting adjustment to increase revenues by \$222,500 immediately. Prior year budgets apply the borough's Parkview PILOT as a deduction from the tax levy, rather than adding it to the tax levy. This can be accomplished with a simple accounting adjustment. This adjustment would gain the district an additional \$222,500 for the next 5 years.

2. There are three (3) existing PILOT projects, the largest of which expires in 5 years (Parkview). These payments are used to pay for Borough infrastructure improvements (water system, sewer system, roads, vehicles, and equipment) and to reduce debt. The Borough has reevaluated its 2025 budget and has made cuts and transfers and will increase its payment to the schools from \$222,500 to \$495,000 for the 2025-2026 budget year. Later steps are intended to fill the gap long-term. This will require the Borough to increase the municipal 2025 tax increase from an average of \$71 to \$91 per year. This meets the board's request to provide an additional 10% for this year.

3. There is one (1) "new" PILOT project. The Borough has been escrowing 80% of the PILOT payment for school/community shared recreation and arts facilities; the board asked for 50% of payments on "new" PILOTs. To date, the Borough has accumulated \$123,675. The Borough proposes using these funds to purchase Chromebooks, as was discussed as a need at the board's public meetings. This exceeds the board's request for this year and will ensure it does not impact school funding from the state.

4. The Borough has a surplus of \$1.8 million. We are required to keep a balance between \$1,076, 408 - \$2,152,816 to adhere to credit rating policy and to ensure we have funds for any municipal emergencies. We can however commit as a demonstration of good faith \$135,967 for the 2025-2026 school year.

5. To further address cost savings moving forward, the District and Borough will jointly review the 2025-2026 school budget to find opportunities for cost savings through sharing services, most notably in transportation costs. Once completed, the District and Borough will jointly decide on an amount to propose an operating revenue referendum for September 2025. The District and Borough will jointly present and support an operating bond referendum to implement sustainable funding for the schools. Important note: the State of New Jersey recently indicated that there will be a mechanism for "certain" districts to exceed the 2% cap. The Borough will assist in getting clarity of this point in the event we can pivot to another mechanism outside of an operating bond referendum.

6. As part of the partnership between the District and the Borough on the operating referendum, the District and the Borough will support the negotiations with the Collingswood Education Association, as well as any other bargaining units with expiring contracts, to help reach a resolution. The goal is to ensure that the agreed-upon costs to settle these contracts are included in the operating referendum or any tax increase for September 2025, without interfering with the negotiation process itself.

7. The Borough will bond (borrow) approximately \$15 million to design and construct recreational facilities at the middle school/high school complex and for passive recreational facilities in Knight Park. The District and Borough will enter into a redevelopment agreement for the Borough to complete this work and for the school and community programs to jointly use these facilities. This can be done with virtually no impact on taxpayers because this bond will replace retiring municipal debt.

8. A private developer has purchased the old Zane School on Haddon Avenue and intends to keep the building as offices. Once the renovations are complete, the District and the Borough will enter into a lease agreement, relocating their respective administrative offices into the Zane School. This move will eliminate the need for capital expenditures and foster stronger day-to-day collaboration by sharing space.

9. The above action items allow the Borough to sell Borough Hall and apply the proceeds to paying the \$15 million in municipal debt from building new school and community recreation and arts facilities. The Borough will acquire the Good Shepherd School for either public use, such as a school or senior housing. We would want more community feedback on potential use. Any resulting proceeds or PILOT payments would also be applied to the debt service of the \$15 million municipal bond for recreation facilities.

10. The District and Borough will collaborate on developing a volunteer program that brings together residents and high school students to personally visit every senior in Collingswood, to assist them in applying for the new Stay NJ property tax relief program. The Stay NJ program provides property tax benefits to eligible homeowners aged 65 and older, reimbursing up to 50% of their property tax bills, with a maximum reimbursement \$6,500. To qualify, applicants must have owned and lived in their home for the entire 12 months of 2024 and have an income below \$500,000.

11. The District and Borough will create a joint task force that includes resident representatives to develop a plan to address the goals of the 2024 Bond Referendum—facilities capital needs and creating a more equitable learning structure. This task force will consider the use of new state legislation allowing for county improvement authority bonding and construction of school facilities with a leaseback by the school district, secured by municipal credit guarantee as a mechanism to achieve modernization of facilities and equity among the schools.

The Borough presents this proposal as a new path forward, one that requires a strong partnership between the District and the Borough. We are eager to work together with the district, staff, and our residents to achieve our shared goals.