

County Superintendent Recommends Rejecting

Cape May's Bid to Leave Regional School

VILLAS- Cape May County's Interim Executive Superintendent of Schools is recommending Lower Cape May Regional School District continue to operate in its current configuration and not be subject to Cape May's request to dissolve or withdrawal from the school district.

The school district is comprised of Lower Township, West Cape May and Cape May.

A March 14 report from Robert Bumpus, interim executive regional superintendent for Cape May County, noted Cape May withdrawing from the regional school district with its students continuing to attend the middle school and high school on a sending district basis would cause taxes for the average household in Lower Township to increase by 60 percent.

He recommended that alternative configurations for the regional school contained in a June 2013 report prepared by Cape May, "be rejected, not permitted to move forward," based on its impact on the school district.

"It is evident that the students attending the Lower Cape May Regional School District are receiving a well-rounded, thorough and efficient education," Bumpus stated in the report. "There is no educational basis to interrupt or interfere with this positive learning process."

He noted the loss of significant revenue coupled with the increase in taxes to residents in Lower Township and West Cape May would "create a negative financial situation which would be detrimental to students."

Bumpus stated the result would be a reduction of administrative and teaching staff, the elimination of courses, reduction of extra-curricular programs as well as supplemental services to students.

"In essence, the total learning environment would be negatively impacted," he stated. The regional school's debt service of approximately \$1.6 million would become the sole responsibility of Lower Township, according to the report.

Bumpus said New Jersey's practice of basing a municipality's contribution on the equalized valuation of property "is exactly that...equalized."

"It creates a level playing field so that all students no matter what their zip code or amount of their family's income have equal access to a quality education," he said.

Bumpus stated Cape May having a send-receive agreement with another school district was "questionable" since tuition rates are volatile.

"What was really a pleasant surprise was the strength of the language the county superintendent used," said Lower Township Mayor Michael Beck.

The mayor said it was folly to think if Cape May wins a lawsuit and withdrawals from the district or the district is dissolved, the school system would not be irrevocably damaged. Beck said he hoped Cape May City Council would carefully read the county superintendent's report.

"I hope their council uses this as a chance to stop the train," said Beck. "Go back to the people of Cape May City and say 'We did the best we could, it's not going to happen and we think if we go further, we're just wasting money.'"

The next step would be a voter referendum which Cape May fought six months ago, he said.

