



MIDDLETOWN
Rhode Island

TOWN ADMINISTRATOR

TOWN OF MIDDLETOWN

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To: Members of Middletown Town Council

From: Shawn J. Brown, Town Administrator

Date: February 26, 2026

Re: Consolidated Questions and Answers about School Regionalization

Attached for your review is a consolidated Question and Answer document addressing policy, governance, financial, academic, labor, and statutory issues raised during prior meetings of the Town Council, School Committee, and Joint City/Town sessions . The document compiles questions posed by elected officials and organizes the responses into a structured format to support informed deliberation.

The purpose of this compilation is to provide a clear summary of the current proposal framework, the applicable statutory requirements under Title 16, the reimbursement structure for school construction, projected financial considerations, governance mechanics, and transition implications. Where applicable, the responses distinguish between existing law and provisions that would require enabling legislation and voter approval.

This document was prepared by the administration for discussion purposes only. It has not been reviewed by legal counsel. The information contained herein is intended to support policy discussion and does not constitute a formal legal opinion or binding interpretation of law.

This document does not advocate for or against regionalization. Its intent is to ensure that all identified questions are addressed in writing and available to both policymakers and the public as discussion continues.

Please let me know if additional analysis, clarification, or financial modeling would be helpful as you evaluate next steps.

CONSOLIDATED QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT
SCHOOL REGIONALIZATION

March 4, 2026

Purpose, Rationale, and Timing

1. What is the reason for pursuing school regionalization at this time?

The answer to this question is largely twofold. For some, regionalization is viewed as a potential cost-containment strategy. For others, it is seen as an opportunity to expand academic access and programming for students.

On the financial side, prior analysis has suggested that a combined district could reduce certain administrative and operational redundancies, potentially allowing resources to be redirected toward instruction. Enhanced State Housing Aid eligibility has also been a factor in prior discussions, as reimbursement rates are tied to formation of a statutory regional district.

On the academic side, regionalization has been discussed as a way to broaden access to Advanced Placement courses, CTE pathways, STEM programs, arts, and dual enrollment opportunities across both communities. The premise is that a larger combined district may be able to offer more diverse programming than two smaller districts operating independently.

Whether those assumptions ultimately bear out depends on governance decisions, implementation strategy, enrollment trends, and long-term fiscal management. National experience shows that regionalization can produce efficiencies and academic expansion, but outcomes vary based on execution and local conditions.

2. What has changed since Newport voters rejected regionalization in 2022?

For Middletown, several material changes have occurred since the November 2022 vote. Financially, the School Department's position has stabilized. The shared services model between the Town and the School Department has strengthened oversight and improved budget predictability. Annual increases have normalized

at approximately 4 percent, compared to significantly higher growth rates in prior years. That structural alignment between town and school leadership has reduced volatility and increased confidence in fiscal management.

On the capital side, construction of the new grades 6 through 12 middle/high school at 1225 Aquidneck Avenue is underway. The 211,000 square foot facility is projected to receive more than 55 percent state reimbursement and is currently reported to be on time and on budget, with an anticipated opening for the 2027–2028 school year. The project has been cited statewide as a model for school construction delivery.

Academically, all Middletown schools now hold at least a “3 Star” rating under the Rhode Island Department of Education accountability system, marking the first time that has occurred in the history of the Middletown school system. School climate and morale among students, families, and staff have also improved.

Leadership has been a contributing factor. The Superintendent and shared facilities leadership, along with faculty and staff, have played central roles in stabilizing finances, advancing construction, and improving academic standing.

In short, Middletown enters any renewed discussion from a materially different position than in 2022—financially stable, capital projects underway, and accountability metrics improved.

3. Why is this initiative being considered now, given current school construction projects?

According to members of the Town Council who support renewed discussion, the rationale remains financial sustainability and expansion of student opportunity. Council President Paul M. Rodrigues and Councilors Charlie Roberts and Dennis Turano have publicly stated that they question whether current school spending levels are sustainable over the long term and have expressed interest in a structured, fact-based evaluation of whether regionalization could reduce costs while broadening academic access.

A central financial component of that discussion is State Housing Aid. Under prior regionalization legislation, enhanced reimbursement rates were tied to voter approval of a statutory regional district. The act provided that, subject to approval by the qualified voters of both communities, general obligation bonds issued for school construction within a defined statutory window would qualify for state housing aid at a ratio of at least 80 percent of debt service. Bond anticipation notes issued within the same window were similarly eligible.

Absent voter approval of regionalization, reimbursement reverts to the applicable core allotment and any available bonuses under existing law. In other words, the higher reimbursement ratio is contingent upon the establishment of a statutory regional district through referendum.

Accordingly, supporters frame the timing question as a fiscal one: whether enhanced reimbursement and potential operating efficiencies justify revisiting the issue, while opponents note that local finances and facilities have materially improved since 2022 and that eligibility depends on new or renewed legislative authority.

4. Why is an accelerated timeline being proposed rather than allowing more time and a later public vote?

The Town Council has stated that Middletown will not advance a townwide referendum on regionalization unless its outstanding policy, financial, and operational questions are satisfactorily addressed and the proposal demonstrably serves the community's interests. That position places substance ahead of schedule.

With respect to the proposed timing of placing the question on the November 3, 2026 general election ballot, the City of Newport has indicated that timing is important to its planning and fiscal considerations. From Middletown's perspective, there are practical administrative and financial factors tied to election timing. Holding the question during a regularly scheduled general election avoids

the cost of a standalone special election, which is estimated at a minimum of \$30,000. It also avoids diverting staff time and municipal resources to staging a separate vote. In addition, turnout is historically higher during general elections, which can strengthen the legitimacy of the result.

Accordingly, the timing discussion reflects two considerations: Newport's stated urgency and Middletown's interest in administrative efficiency and voter participation. The Council's position remains that any decision to place the matter on the ballot will be driven by whether the policy case is complete and persuasive, not by timing alone.

5. Does the proposed timeline align with legislative and reimbursement requirements?

By any objective measure, that timeline is compressed. If the AIAC were to begin substantive work immediately, draft legislation establishing the full structure of a new regional school district would need to be completed, reviewed, and approved by both governing bodies in time to adopt ballot resolutions by the end of July. The local Boards of Canvassers would then need to meet and certify the ballot question by early August in order to meet the statutory deadline - typically no later than August 5 - for submission to the Secretary of State for placement on the November ballot.

That sequence leaves very limited time for drafting detailed enabling legislation, public review, financial modeling, labor consultation, and formal legislative action. It also compresses the window for community engagement prior to a binding referendum. In practical terms, the schedule would require parallel drafting, legal review, fiscal analysis, and public discussion occurring simultaneously. Whether that pace is feasible depends on the scope of legislation being contemplated and the level of consensus required before placing the matter before voters.

6. Is this effort primarily about academics, finances, or both?

It is fair to say that, for supporters in Middletown, regionalization is framed as both a financial and an academic initiative.

On the financial side, the argument centers on long-term sustainability, potential operating efficiencies, and eligibility for enhanced State Housing Aid under a statutory regional district model. Prior comparative analysis suggested that administrative and overhead savings may be possible in a combined district, depending on implementation choices.

On the academic side, supporters point to expanded access to Advanced Placement courses, CTE pathways, STEM programming, arts, and dual enrollment opportunities that could be made available across both communities. The work of the Academic Integration Advisory Committee is intended to examine those educational dimensions in greater detail.

Whether these assumptions ultimately bear out depends on the data sets used, the financial modeling applied, the legislative framework enacted, and the governance decisions made after formation. National experience shows mixed results, with outcomes heavily influenced by local execution and context rather than structure alone.

Governance, Structure, and Authority

7. What does “administrative regionalization” mean in practical terms?

“Administrative regionalization” is not a term defined in Rhode Island General Laws Chapter 16 and has no independent legal meaning under state statute. The enabling legislation under consideration by the Councils is based exclusively on the regional school district structures authorized in Chapter 16.

The phrase originated during discussions at the Newport City Council level but was never formally defined in statute, policy, draft enabling legislation, or resolution. It was used informally to reference the concept of sharing administrative functions, but no legally recognized governance model was adopted under that label.

Because the term does not appear in Chapter 16 or in the proposed enabling legislation, it has no operative effect. Any proposal advancing to voters would need to conform to the regional district framework expressly authorized under Rhode Island law.

8. What is being proposed at this stage of the discussion?

At this stage, what is being proposed is the creation of a single, fully regionalized school district that would combine the existing Newport and Middletown school systems into one unified district. This proposal is set forth in draft legislation authorizing the two municipalities to establish a regional school district, subject to approval by the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education and majority approval by voters in both communities at referendum.

The draft contemplates replacing the two existing school committees with a seven-member Regional School District Committee elected at-large across both communities, with minimum residency representation from each municipality. That regional committee would exercise all powers granted to school committees under Rhode Island law, including authority over operations, personnel, contracts, facilities, and budgeting.

The structure also includes a Joint Finance Committee, appointed by the Newport City Council and Middletown Town Council, which would review and approve the regional budget prior to municipal appropriations. Operating costs would be apportioned between the two municipalities based on a per public pupil calculation using prior October 1 enrollment figures.

The legislation establishes a transition period through June 30, 2028, during which the existing school committees would continue to operate their respective districts while the regional governance structure is organized and prepared for full implementation.

In substance, the proposal is not a limited shared-services arrangement or administration-only model. It is a statutory regional district under Title 16 with consolidated governance and operational authority.

9. What governance model is under consideration?

The governance model under consideration is a fully regionalized school district established by special act of the General Assembly and operating under the regional school district provisions of Title 16.

The draft legislation provides for a seven-member Regional School District Committee elected at-large across both communities, with minimum residency representation from Newport and Middletown. This body would replace the existing local school committees at the conclusion of the transition period and would exercise all powers and duties conferred by law upon school committees, including authority over operations, personnel, contracts, facilities, and budgeting.

The model also establishes a Joint Finance Committee appointed by the Newport City Council and Middletown Town Council. The regional school committee would adopt a proposed budget, but the Joint Finance Committee must approve it before it is submitted for municipal appropriation.

Operating expenses would be apportioned between the two municipalities based on a per public pupil calculation using prior October 1 enrollment.

In summary, the model is a consolidated regional governance structure with a single elected regional school committee, subject to joint municipal fiscal oversight through a finance committee, rather than an administration-only or shared-services arrangement.

10. Is the proposal for a full regional district, an administration-only model, or a hybrid structure?

The proposal reflected in the draft legislation is for a full regional school district, not an administration-only or hybrid arrangement.

The act authorizes the City of Newport and the Town of Middletown to combine their existing school districts into a single regional district governed by a Regional School District Committee, with all powers and duties conferred upon school committees under Rhode Island law.

The regional committee would assume authority over operations, personnel, contracts, facilities, budgeting, and collective bargaining, and state and federal education aid would be paid directly to the regional district once operational.

Because governance, budgeting, and operational control are consolidated into one regional entity - subject to voter and state approval - the structure constitutes a statutory Title 16 regional district rather than a limited shared-services or administrative consolidation model.

11. What would the organizational structure and lines of authority be?

Under the draft legislation, the organizational structure would place ultimate authority in a seven-member elected Regional School District Committee. That committee would replace the existing Newport and Middletown school committees at the conclusion of the transition period and would exercise all powers and duties conferred upon school committees under Rhode Island law.

The Regional School District Committee would appoint and employ a Superintendent of Schools on a contractual basis. The Superintendent would have all powers and duties imposed upon a superintendent by law and would be responsible for the administration and operation of the regional district, reporting directly to the regional committee.

During the transition period, the existing local school committees would continue operating their respective districts while the regional committee develops and implements plans for unified operations, including staffing, programs, transportation, facilities, and finances.

From a fiscal oversight perspective, the Regional School District Committee would prepare and adopt a proposed budget, but that budget would require approval by a Joint Finance Committee composed of representatives appointed by the Newport City Council and the Middletown Town Council before municipal appropriations occur.

In summary, the lines of authority would run from the elected Regional School District Committee to the Superintendent, and through the Superintendent to district administration and schools, with municipal fiscal oversight exercised through the Joint Finance Committee rather than through separate local school committees.

12. What authority would remain local and what would shift to a regional body?

Under the draft legislation, primary educational governance authority would shift to a single Regional School District Committee once the transition period concludes. That regional body would have all powers and duties conferred upon school committees under Rhode Island law, including authority over operations, personnel, collective bargaining, curriculum, policy, facilities use, contracts, and preparation of the annual school budget.

The Regional School District Committee would also employ the Superintendent and exercise care and control over all public schools in the combined district. State and federal education aid would be paid directly to the regional district once it becomes operational.

Authority that would remain local includes municipal responsibility for appropriating each community's proportionate share of the regional budget, based on a per public pupil calculation. In addition, existing school construction debt issued by each municipality would remain the responsibility of that municipality, and each city or town would continue to appropriate funds for its share of regional district indebtedness.

A Joint Finance Committee, appointed by the Newport City Council and Middletown Town Council, would provide municipal fiscal oversight by approving the regional budget before appropriations occur.

In summary, educational governance and operational control would consolidate at the regional level, while taxing authority, debt obligations, and ultimate appropriation authority would remain with the individual municipalities, subject to the statutory budget process.

13. How would representation and voting authority be structured?

Under the draft legislation, representation would be structured through a seven-member Regional School District Committee elected at-large by all voters in both Newport and Middletown. All candidates would run district-wide, but the act requires a minimum of three members to reside in Newport and a minimum of three to reside in Middletown. The seventh seat would be filled by the next highest vote-getter, regardless of residency.

Each member would have one vote. A quorum for conducting business would require at least four members present, and both municipalities must be represented for business to proceed.

With respect to fiscal oversight, voting authority over the annual budget would also involve a Joint Finance Committee appointed by the Newport City Council and the Middletown Town Council. The regional school committee would adopt a proposed budget, but it would require approval by the Joint Finance Committee before municipal appropriations occur. The composition of that committee would shift depending on which municipality holds four seats on the regional committee in a given year.

In summary, representation would be district-wide and at-large, with minimum residency safeguards, equal voting rights among members, and an additional layer of municipal voting authority through the Joint Finance Committee for budget approval.

14. What authority would a regional school committee have?

Legislative Bill - "Section 7: Powers and duties of the regional school district committee. (a) The regional school district shall be a body politic and corporate and shall have all of the powers and duties conferred by law upon school committees, and all additional powers and duties conferred upon regional school districts provided for in section 16-3-11 of the general laws."

Under the proposed legislation, the Regional School District Committee would have all powers and duties conferred upon school committees under Rhode Island law. In effect, it would replace the existing Newport and Middletown school committees once the regional district becomes operational.

The regional committee would have authority over:

- Adoption of the annual school budget (subject to Joint Finance Committee approval)
- Employment and evaluation of the Superintendent
- Collective bargaining and labor negotiations
- Curriculum, policy, and academic programming
- Student assignment, transportation, and school operations
- Facilities use and maintenance of schools operated by the regional district

The committee would prepare and adopt a unified district budget, but that budget would require review and approval by the Joint Finance Committee before municipal appropriations occur. Municipal taxing authority would remain with the individual city and town councils.

In summary, a regional school committee would exercise full educational governance and operational authority for the combined district, subject to statutory budget oversight mechanisms and voter-approved enabling legislation.

15. Would a regional finance committee be required, and what would its role be?

Legislative Bill - "Section 14 (c) The joint finance committee shall consist of seven (7) members. The members of the joint finance committee shall be appointed by the respective councils of the city of Newport and the town of Middletown. The members of the joint finance committee representing the city of Newport shall consist of the city manager or a designee, and two members of the city council appointed by majority vote of the city council...The joint finance committee shall approve a budget by March 15 of each year. Upon the approval of a budget by the joint finance committee, the regional committee shall, within seven (7) days, post the budget at Newport city hall and Middletown town hall...Upon approval of the budget by the joint finance committee, each municipality shall appropriate the funds for the regional district which shall be apportioned between the municipalities on a per public pupil calculation using enrollment as of the prior October 1."

Yes. Under the proposed legislation, a Joint Finance Committee would be established as part of the regional governance structure.

The role of the Joint Finance Committee is fiscal oversight. After the Regional School District Committee adopts a proposed annual budget, that budget must be submitted to the Joint Finance Committee for review and approval before it proceeds to the member municipalities for appropriation. The finance committee therefore acts as an intermediary check between the regional governing body and the city and town councils.

Members of the Joint Finance Committee are appointed by the Newport City Council and the Middletown Town Council, ensuring municipal representation in the budget approval process. The committee does not manage day-to-day school operations or set academic policy; its authority is limited to review and approval of the annual financial plan.

In summary, the Joint Finance Committee is required under the proposed act and serves as a fiscal safeguard, providing municipal oversight of the regional district's budget before local tax dollars are appropriated.

16. Would a regional school committee have independent taxing authority?

Educational governance and operational control would consolidate at the regional level, while taxing authority, debt obligations, and ultimate appropriation authority would remain with the individual municipalities, subject to the statutory budget process.

17. What exit or modification options would exist if the model does not work?

Legislative Bill - "Section 13 2 (b) Any member city or town of the regional school district may petition to withdraw from the district at any meeting of the district committee upon six (6) months written notice, provided that the petition for with-drawal shall have been approved by a majority of the qualified voters of the city or town voting at a referendum called for that purpose. Such petition shall not be approved except upon payment to the regional school district of any costs which have been apportioned and certified during the year in which the withdrawal is to take place."

Once established, a regional school district is a statutory entity under Title 16. It is not a contractual arrangement that can be dissolved unilaterally. Exit or modification would require formal legislative and voter action.

Under Rhode Island law, changes to the structure of a regional district - such as withdrawal of a member municipality, alteration of representation, or dissolution - require approval consistent with the statutory framework governing regional districts and, in most cases, approval by the General Assembly and the voters of the affected communities. A municipality cannot independently withdraw without following that statutory process.

The proposed legislation also establishes governance and fiscal oversight mechanisms - such as the Joint Finance Committee - that provide structured checks within the system. Those internal controls are intended to manage disagreements before more drastic structural remedies are considered.

If a regional district were dissolved, assets, liabilities, contracts, and debt obligations would need to be apportioned in accordance with statute and any enabling act. Existing school construction debt remains with the issuing municipality, but operating obligations, collective bargaining agreements, and shared assets would require formal unwinding.

In summary, exit is legally possible but procedurally complex. It would require coordinated legislative action and likely voter approval. A regional district is designed to be a long-term structural arrangement rather than a temporary agreement.

Advisory Committees and Public Process

18. What is the role and authority of the Academic Integration Advisory Committee?

The Academic Integration Advisory Committee (AIAC), as established by municipal resolution, is advisory in nature and does not possess binding decision-making authority. The resolution authorizes the AIAC “to provide recommendations” regarding educational integration and regionalization between the two districts; it does not delegate governing, fiscal, or operational powers.

19. Is the advisory committee’s input binding or advisory?

The Academic Integration Advisory Committee (AIAC), as established by municipal resolution, is advisory in nature and does not possess binding decision-making authority. The resolution authorizes the AIAC “to provide recommendations” regarding educational integration and regionalization between the two districts; it does not delegate governing, fiscal, or operational powers.

The AIAC is not a statutory body under Title 16 and is not granted authority to adopt policy, bind either municipality, negotiate contracts, or commit public funds. Any decision to pursue regionalization, adopt a governing structure, or place a

question before the voters would require formal legislative action and voter approval as outlined in the draft regionalization act.

Accordingly, the AIAC's role is to study, analyze, and recommend. Final authority remains with the respective governing bodies, the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education, and ultimately the voters of each municipality.

20. How many members will serve on the advisory committee and what perspectives will be represented?

The AIAC has six members from both Middletown and Newport. In Middletown, Town Councilor and lifelong educator Barbara VonVillas was appointed along with School Committee Chairperson Greg Huet. The other four members were selected from a group of local residents who applied and offer a range of experiences in the field of education.

21. Who appoints advisory committee members and to whom are they accountable?

The City Council and the Town Council each appointed six members to the AIAC.

22. Will a consultant support the advisory committee's work?

Yes. The City of Newport, on behalf of both municipalities, has issued a formal Request for Proposals (RFP# 2026-FIN-002) to retain a qualified consulting firm to conduct an accelerated feasibility and design study regarding potential regionalization of the Newport and Middletown school districts. The cost of the consultant is projected at \$300,000, with Newport and Middletown splitting the cost of the effort equally.

The scope of work contemplates comprehensive academic, financial, governance, and operational analysis; stakeholder engagement; development of regionalization scenarios; and preparation of public-facing materials to support informed decision-making. The consultant's work is intended to inform the Academic Integration

Advisory Committee (AIAC), municipal officials, and the public, not to predetermine an outcome.

The RFP anticipates an approximately eight-week engagement, structured project management, formal public presentation of findings, and development of implementation considerations and financial modeling to support policy discussions.

23. How will potential risks and drawbacks of regionalization be identified and shared publicly?

Once identified, the AIAC should be responsible for compiling a list of “pros and cons” of regionalization and forwarding this information to each community to dispense, although there is nothing in the group’s charge that formally binds them to this request. Ways the information can be disseminated include at MiddletownRI.gov, our social media channels and through the Middletown Today monthly newsletter. Ultimately, how the AIAC decides to share its findings is up to the group itself.

24. How will the public be informed and engaged throughout the process?

Like all meetings, the AIAC sessions are open to the public and can be taped for future review by residents and businesspeople, although again, there is nothing formally binding the group to follow this recommendation. Ultimately, how the AIAC decides to engage the public is up to the group itself.

To participate in a joint advisory process, each municipality must take formal legislative action through its governing body. That action is typically accomplished by adoption of a resolution authorizing participation, defining the advisory scope, and establishing the appointment process. The City of Newport previously adopted a resolution calling for formation of a Joint Academic Integration Advisory Committee (AIAC) to provide recommendations on advancing educational integration and regionalization. The Town of Middletown then adopted a corresponding resolution formally joining the effort, defining the

advisory role of the AIAC, and authorizing the Town Clerk to advertise for applicants and the Town Administrator to coordinate with the City.

These resolutions establish participation in an advisory body only. They do not transfer governing authority, bind either municipality to regionalization, or require voter approval. The AIAC's role is to study, analyze, and recommend.

Accordingly, the required formal actions are passage of resolutions by each municipality's legislative body specifying participation, scope, and appointment authority. A referendum would be required only if a statutory regional district were proposed for voter approval.

State Oversight and Reimbursement

25. Has the Rhode Island Department of Education reviewed or provided guidance on any proposed structure?

According to the minutes of the last meeting between Middletown and Newport officials, RIDE does not take a stance on regionalization proposals in the state. Rather, the process is guided by state law and the decisions are left up to the involved communities. Also of note in the minutes, "there is only full regionalization not administrative or partial, the legislation submitted for the prior regionalization vote is not in effect, new legislation must be drafted to place a question on the ballot and outlining the structure/framework of the regionalization between the City and Town and the following questions were asked to RIDE and answered."

Visit https://www.middletownri.gov/DocumentCenter/View/23016/jan12_26tc for more.

To date, there has been no formal approval by the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) of a specific regional structure. Under Title 16, formation of a regional school district requires review and approval by the Council on Elementary

and Secondary Education following voter approval of the enabling legislation. That approval occurs after, not before, local authorization.

RIDE's role is regulatory and supervisory. It ensures compliance with state education law, oversees accountability systems, administers the funding formula and State Housing Aid, and reviews school construction projects. However, RIDE does not design local governance structures absent enacted legislation.

Questions have been posed to RIDE regarding reimbursement eligibility, funding formula treatment, and statutory interpretation, but any binding guidance would depend on the specific legislative language adopted. Until a defined proposal is enacted or formally submitted for review, RIDE's involvement remains advisory and informational.

In summary, RIDE has not approved a regional model because no final structure has been enacted. Formal review would occur only after voter approval and submission of enabling legislation consistent with Title 16.

26. Under what laws would state reimbursement be provided?

State reimbursement for the Middletown school construction project is governed primarily by Rhode Island General Laws §16-7-35 through §16-7-47, commonly referred to as the School Housing Aid statutes. Specifically, §16-7-41 establishes that approved school construction projects are reimbursed at the district's school housing aid ratio applicable at the time the project is approved by the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education. The housing aid ratio itself is calculated pursuant to §16-7-40. Project eligibility and approval are overseen by the Rhode Island School Building Authority under §16-105-1 et seq. Together, these statutes establish the reimbursement formula, lock the applicable reimbursement rate at project approval, and authorize state payment subject to annual appropriation.

27. What costs would be eligible for reimbursement, and for how long?

Under RIGL §16-7-41 and related Rhode Island School Building Authority regulations, eligible costs for school construction reimbursement generally include approved capital expenses such as new school construction, additions, and major renovations; structural, mechanical, electrical, HVAC, and code-compliance upgrades; site work directly related to the project; architect and engineering fees; construction management; demolition tied to the approved scope; and certain project-related equipment, furniture, fixtures, and limited building-integrated technology infrastructure. To qualify, these costs must be included in the SBA-approved project scope and budget and must comply with required procurement and reporting standards. Routine maintenance, operating expenses, and costs unrelated to approved capital construction are not eligible for housing aid reimbursement. Typically, the reimbursement lasts the life of the bond.

28. How would reimbursement funds be allocated and restricted?

State Housing Aid reimbursement is governed by Rhode Island General Laws §§ 16-7-35 through 16-7-47. The State reimburses a percentage of eligible principal and interest on approved school construction bonds. Reimbursement is calculated based on the municipality's approved housing aid ratio and paid through the regular state aid distribution process.

Eligibility is restricted to bonded indebtedness for approved school construction projects. A municipality must incur eligible debt service in order to receive reimbursement. The State does not provide advance payment; reimbursement follows actual principal and interest payments.

In a regional structure, existing school construction debt remains the responsibility of the municipality that issued it. Accordingly, reimbursement attributable to Newport-issued bonds would flow to Newport, and reimbursement attributable to Middletown-issued bonds would flow to Middletown. These funds are not automatically pooled into the regional operating budget.

The restriction applies at the eligibility level: reimbursement is tied to approved capital debt service. Once received, the funds reduce the municipality's net debt

service obligation. They are not an unrestricted education operating grant and cannot be received absent qualifying bonded debt.

In summary, reimbursement funds are allocated based on each municipality's eligible school construction debt and are restricted to offsetting approved principal and interest costs under the State Housing Aid statute.

29. Is there any formal commitment regarding reimbursement levels?

Yes. Rhode Island's State Housing Aid program provides statutory capital reimbursement for approved school construction projects under §§ 16-7-35 through 16-7-47. Each municipality has a base housing aid ratio, and the State reimburses that percentage of eligible principal and interest on approved bonds.

In addition to the base ratio, Rhode Island enacted a temporary 20% housing aid bonus program. For projects approved within defined statutory windows, the State provides an additional 20 percentage points above the municipality's base housing aid ratio. For example, a municipality with a 35% base rate would receive 55% total reimbursement if the project qualifies. This increase is established in statute but is time-limited and contingent on meeting approval and bond issuance deadlines.

Separately, under R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-7-40, regional school districts receive capital reimbursement enhancements, including a 2% increase per grade consolidated and a 4% increased share ratio for qualifying renovation projects. These provisions apply when a statutory regional district is formed and eligibility criteria are satisfied.

In summary, capital reimbursement may consist of:

- The statutory base housing aid ratio;
- The temporary 20% bonus (if eligibility windows are met); and
- The regionalization-related capital bonuses under § 16-7-40.

Each component is grounded in statute, but eligibility depends on project approval, timing requirements, and, in the case of regional bonuses, formation of a statutory regional district.

30. How does the state interpret reimbursement eligibility for an administration-only model?

Title 16 does not recognize or define an “administrative regionalization” structure. The statute provides for the creation of a regional school district as a separate legal entity governed by a regional school committee with consolidated authority over operations, budgeting, and educational programming.

Because State Housing Aid incentives and regional bonuses are tied to that statutory structure, reimbursement eligibility is linked to formation of a legally constituted regional district. There is no statutory mechanism under current law that provides enhanced reimbursement for a model limited to shared administration while retaining separate districts.

It is also important to clarify that the City and Town are not pursuing an administration-only model. The structure under discussion has been a full statutory regional district, subject to voter approval and state authorization.

Accordingly, the reimbursement analysis is based solely on the Title 16 regional district framework.

31. How does reimbursement deferral work, and what risks are associated with it?

In this context, deferral refers to a municipality delaying its formal submission to RIDE certifying that a school construction project is complete and ready to enter the State Housing Aid reimbursement schedule. Housing Aid reimbursement begins once eligible debt service is recognized and included in the state’s distribution process. If a municipality defers certification, reimbursement does not begin.

Deferral may be used to coordinate bond timing, manage cash flow, or align reimbursement with broader financial planning. However, reimbursement is not advanced automatically; it begins only after formal approval and inclusion in the state aid schedule.

The primary risks are financial and timing-related. Until reimbursement begins, the municipality must carry 100 percent of the debt service locally. Delays can increase local interest exposure and affect multi-year financial projections. In addition, reimbursement rates are governed by statute, so changes in law before entry into the reimbursement schedule could affect the applicable rate.

In short, deferral delays the start of reimbursement but does not eliminate eligibility if statutory requirements are met. The tradeoff is extended local carrying cost in exchange for timing flexibility.

32. Would delaying a public vote affect reimbursement eligibility or timing?

Potentially, yes - depending on the statutory framework in effect at the time. Enhanced State Housing Aid incentives, including higher reimbursement ratios tied to regionalization, are created through specific legislative language and are often subject to defined timelines. Eligibility for those enhanced rates typically depends on voter approval of a statutory regional district and compliance with bond issuance or project deadlines written into the law.

If a public vote were delayed, eligibility for any temporary or enhanced reimbursement provisions could be affected if statutory windows expire before voter approval and bond issuance occur. There is no automatic carry-forward of enhanced incentives absent legislative extension.

By contrast, standard State Housing Aid under existing law continues to apply based on the municipality's approved reimbursement rate. Delaying a vote would not eliminate eligibility for standard reimbursement, but it could affect eligibility for any enhanced regionalization-specific incentives tied to timing.

In short, the impact of delay depends entirely on the statutory language in effect. The timeline must align with legislative deadlines to preserve any enhanced reimbursement benefits.

Financial Impact and Cost Allocation

33. What are the current school budgets for each district?

The current approved budget in Middletown is \$46.28 million, 68 percent of which is dedicated to personnel. Published reports indicate the current Newport school budget is \$49.4 million.

34. What are the current per-pupil education costs, and how are they calculated?

According to the latest report cards from the Rhode Island Department of Education, Newport spent \$31,376 per pupil in 2024-2025 compared to \$23,230 in Middletown over the same period.

(Visit <https://www.middletownri.gov/DocumentCenter/View/22709/Middletown-Newport-RIDE-Report-Cards> for the latest data)

Per-pupil cost is generally calculated by dividing a district's total annual education expenditures by its total student enrollment, typically based on October 1 certified enrollment. The numerator usually includes operating expenditures such as instruction, support services, administration, transportation, and benefits. It may or may not include debt service, capital outlay, and certain grant-funded programs depending on the reporting framework used.

Rhode Island's funding formula defines "reference year cost of the basic program" under § 16-7-16 and uses that as the foundation for state aid calculations.

However, local "per-pupil spending" figures commonly reported in budget documents often differ from the state formula amount because they reflect actual appropriated expenditures rather than just the foundation calculation.

35. How would differences in per-pupil spending be addressed?

Based on data provided by the Rhode Island Department of Education, Middletown has a total student enrollment of 1,860 in 2024-2025 and 208

educators. In Newport, the total student enrollment in 2024-2025 was reported by RIDE at 1,795 and 224 educators.

According to the latest report cards from the Rhode Island Department of Education, Newport spent \$31,376 per pupil in 2024-2025 compared to \$23,230 in Middletown over the same period. The total difference is \$8,146.

(Visit <https://www.middletownri.gov/DocumentCenter/View/22709/Middletown-Newport-RIDE-Report-Cards> for the latest data)

Under a statutory regional district model, operating costs are apportioned annually between the member municipalities based on a per-public-pupil calculation using prior October 1 enrollment. Once consolidated, there is a single regional budget rather than two separate district budgets. The question becomes not how to “equalize” historical per-pupil figures, but how to design and fund a unified operating budget going forward.

Historical differences in per-pupil spending do not automatically carry forward as separate obligations. Instead, the regional school committee would adopt one district-wide budget reflecting agreed-upon staffing levels, program offerings, and operational standards. Each municipality’s required contribution would then be determined proportionally by enrollment under the statutory formula.

In practice, differences would be addressed through policy choices:

- Whether to align programming upward to the higher-spending model,
- Whether to standardize staffing ratios and course offerings,
- How to negotiate labor agreements over time, and
- Whether to phase in changes to avoid abrupt fiscal shifts.

If one district currently spends more per pupil due to higher staffing levels or program costs, the regional committee would determine whether those expenditures are retained, reduced, or expanded district-wide. Over time, collective bargaining and unified budgeting would tend to normalize structural differences.

In summary, disparities are not “averaged” mechanically. They are resolved through creation of a single unified budget, enrollment-based cost apportionment, and policy decisions made by the regional governing body.

36. How is the per public pupil cost calculated for the regional school district?

Section 11 of the proposed legislation establishes the method for apportioning costs. The total education costs of the regional district are apportioned between the City of Newport and the Town of Middletown based on a per public pupil calculation using enrollment as of the prior October 1.

The process operates in three steps:

- First, the Regional School District Committee adopts a single unified operating budget for the district. This includes instructional expenses, support services, administration, transportation, benefits, and other operating costs. Existing capital debt remains the responsibility of the issuing municipality and is not pooled.
- Second, each municipality’s certified October 1 enrollment is divided by the total regional enrollment to determine its percentage share. That percentage is applied to the total regional education cost to determine the municipality’s required contribution.
- Third, gifts, grants, payments, and federal or state aid associated with students or programs of one member municipality are allocated to that municipality and credited toward its proportionate share of costs. This ensures that regionalization does not adversely affect the receipt or allocation of targeted funding.

In summary, the per public pupil cost is calculated by dividing the total regional operating budget by total enrollment, and each municipality pays its proportional share based on student count, with community-specific aid credited accordingly.

37. What efficiencies or cost savings are expected, and when would they occur?

Potential efficiencies are generally discussed in three areas: administration, facilities, and program scale. However, given the proposed “no job loss” framework and the fact that personnel and related benefits comprise the majority of school spending (approximately 68 percent of Middletown’s current \$46.28 million budget), significant immediate savings are unlikely.

Administrative savings could result from consolidating central office functions such as superintendent leadership, business operations, HR, procurement, and certain support services. Prior regional analysis suggested that some overhead duplication may be reduced in a combined district. Any such savings would occur gradually, typically after the first year of transition and over multiple contract cycles as positions are reduced through attrition or retirement rather than layoffs. Facilities efficiencies may arise from portfolio optimization - fewer total sites, reduced square footage to maintain, and newer average building age, as identified in prior studies. These efficiencies depend on long-term decisions about grade configuration and building use. They are not automatic upon formation of a regional district.

Program scale efficiencies could include broader course offerings delivered across a larger student base, shared professional development, coordinated transportation, and unified purchasing. While economies of scale are often cited, actual savings would depend on vendor negotiations and implementation decisions. There is no guarantee that increased size alone produces measurable cost reductions.

It is also important to account for one-time transition costs - legal services, labor negotiations, IT system integration, HR restructuring, facilities coordination, and consulting - that would occur upfront. These expenditures could offset early efficiencies.

Comparisons with Rhode Island’s existing regional school districts show per-pupil expenditures generally comparable to Middletown’s. Anticipated savings are therefore not automatically supported by statewide comparison alone.

In summary, efficiencies are possible but not immediate or guaranteed. Any savings would likely be incremental and long-term, dependent on governance decisions, labor negotiations, enrollment trends, and disciplined implementation rather than structural change alone.

38. What one-time transition costs should be anticipated?

Without knowing the precise structure of any regional model, it is difficult to quantify transition costs with precision. The scope of consolidation - governance only, full operational merger, or deeper systems integration - directly affects cost exposure. There would, however, be unavoidable one-time expenditures.

Legal services and labor counsel would be required to draft enabling legislation, structure intergovernmental agreements, and negotiate successor collective bargaining agreements. Contract alignment alone can be complex and resource-intensive.

Administrative integration would likely require significant HR, payroll, finance, and facilities restructuring. Technology alignment could be substantial, particularly if student information systems, financial platforms, cybersecurity infrastructure, devices, and networks are not currently standardized. Large-scale system integration projects frequently involve multi-year licensing, data migration, hardware replacement, and outside consulting support.

Beyond these identifiable categories, experience with comparable public-sector consolidations shows that unanticipated expenses often arise once implementation begins - parallel operations, temporary staffing, severance, system upgrades, and compliance adjustments. Initial estimates typically address known variables; actual costs can expand as operational realities emerge.

In summary, while exact figures depend on final design, significant upfront expenditures should be expected in legal, labor, administrative systems, facilities

coordination, and technology integration. Those transition costs would need to be evaluated against any projected long-term efficiencies or reimbursement benefits.

39. How would ongoing costs and savings be shared?

Under the draft regionalization act, ongoing operating costs would be apportioned annually between Newport and Middletown based on a per-public-pupil calculation using prior October 1 enrollment figures.

Each municipality's share of the regional school district's total budget would therefore rise or fall proportionally with its student enrollment.

State and federal education aid attributable to students in each municipality would be credited toward that municipality's required contribution before calculating the net local appropriation. The Regional School District Committee would adopt a proposed budget, which must then be reviewed and approved by the Joint Finance Committee before municipal appropriations occur.

During the transition period, each existing district would continue operating under its current structure until the effective date of the regional district. The first regional budget would be developed in accordance with the statutory apportionment formula and subject to the same joint finance oversight process.

With respect to savings, the act does not create a separate "savings distribution" mechanism. Any operational efficiencies realized by the regional district would reduce the total budget requirement and therefore reduce each municipality's proportional contribution under the enrollment-based formula. Conversely, new costs would be shared in the same proportion.

In summary, both costs and savings would be shared based on each community's share of total enrollment, with state and federal aid credited accordingly and fiscal oversight exercised through the Joint Finance Committee.

40. What safeguards would prevent one district from subsidizing the other?

The draft regionalization act addresses this concern through structural safeguards built into governance, cost apportionment, and budget oversight.

First, operating costs are apportioned annually based on a per-public-pupil calculation using prior October 1 enrollment. Each municipality's required contribution is tied directly to its student count, not to the other community's historical spending levels or financial condition. As enrollment shifts, the proportional obligation adjusts.

Second, state and federal education aid attributable to students in each municipality is credited toward that municipality's share before calculating the net local appropriation. This prevents one community's aid from being used to offset the other's obligation.

Third, the budget must be approved not only by the Regional School District Committee but also by a Joint Finance Committee appointed by the Newport City Council and Middletown Town Council. That dual-body approval requirement provides municipal oversight before appropriations occur.

Fourth, existing school construction debt remains the responsibility of the issuing municipality. Pre-regionalization capital obligations are not pooled.

The structure does not eliminate all fiscal risk—future budgets are subject to policy decisions of the regional governing body - but it does ensure that contributions are enrollment-based, aid is credited appropriately, debt remains local, and municipal oversight is preserved through the finance committee process.

41. Have the long-term financial positions of both districts been fully evaluated?

A preliminary financial analysis has been conducted in prior studies, including review of operating expenditures, enrollment trends, State Housing Aid eligibility, and comparative per-pupil spending. That analysis focused primarily on projected

operating efficiencies and capital reimbursement impacts, not on a comprehensive municipal credit review.

A full evaluation of long-term financial position would require a broader due-diligence review, including each municipality's audited financial statements, bonded indebtedness, pension and OPEB liabilities, fund balance levels, revenue stability, and credit ratings. Because Rhode Island school districts are dependent districts, bond ratings and long-term liabilities are generally tied to the municipality rather than to the school department as a standalone entity.

To date, there has not been a publicly issued, side-by-side credit or balance-sheet analysis comparable to what would occur in a private-sector merger. That level of financial diligence could be incorporated into the consultant's scope of work under the current RFP for regionalization consulting services.

In summary, operating and reimbursement impacts have been analyzed at a high level, but a comprehensive long-term financial and credit position review would require additional structured due diligence beyond what has been publicly presented to date.

Staffing, Academics, and Enrollment

38. How would one superintendent manage a regional district with multiple labor contracts?

Under the draft act, the Regional School District Committee would employ one Superintendent with full statutory authority to administer the combined district.

During the transition period, all existing collective bargaining agreements in Newport and Middletown would remain in force until expiration or renegotiation, and employees would retain tenure, seniority, and retirement credits.

As a result, the Superintendent would initially oversee multiple bargaining units operating under different contracts, pay scales, benefits, and work rules.

The regional district would be subject to the Rhode Island State Labor Relations Act and the jurisdiction of the Rhode Island State Labor Relations Board for collective bargaining, unit determinations, and unfair labor practice matters. In addition, the district would remain bound by the federal Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), including wage and hour classifications, overtime rules, and recordkeeping requirements.

Operationally, this structure is legally permissible but administratively complex. Contract alignment would occur only through collective bargaining as agreements expire. Any harmonization of salary schedules, benefits, or work rules could increase, decrease, or redistribute personnel costs depending on the negotiated outcome.

42. How would differences in pay, benefits, and work rules be addressed?

Under the proposed structure, existing collective bargaining agreements in both districts would remain in effect through their stated expiration dates. Employees employed at the time of transition would be offered employment in the regional district in the same or substantially similar positions, with seniority and accrued rights preserved.

Accordingly, pay scales, health benefits, duty assignments, and work rules would not automatically equalize on the first day of regional operations. The regional district would become the successor public employer and would administer multiple contracts until each expires or is renegotiated.

Alignment would occur through collective bargaining as agreements expire. The regional school committee would negotiate successor agreements under Rhode Island labor law, and any harmonization of salary schedules, step systems, stipends, or benefit structures would be subject to negotiation with each bargaining unit. There is no unilateral mechanism to “average” contracts.

Timing would therefore depend on contract expiration cycles. If contracts expire in different years, disparities could persist for a period of time. Ultimately, alignment would be a policy and fiscal decision made through negotiation, and it could increase, decrease, or redistribute total personnel costs depending on the terms agreed upon.

43. How would instructional schedules and staffing models be aligned?

Under the proposed structure, alignment would occur during the transition period prior to the first operational year of the regional district. The Act provides for a transition phase during which plans for effective operation of the unified district are developed before full implementation. That period would be used to reconcile differences in calendars, bell schedules, grading periods, staffing ratios, and duty assignments.

Instructional schedules would need to be standardized to permit shared programming, cross-enrollment in courses, transportation coordination, and common professional development. Calendar alignment is a prerequisite for any meaningful academic integration.

Staffing models would be reviewed against enrollment, program needs, and established staffing ratios. The regional district would have authority to set district-wide staffing frameworks, but changes affecting terms and conditions of employment would be subject to collective bargaining. Existing contracts remain in force until expiration or renegotiation, so alignment would occur through negotiation rather than unilateral change.

In practice, reconciliation would likely follow a phased approach:

1. Establish district-wide instructional design (schedule structure, course sequencing, student contact hours).
2. Analyze enrollment-driven staffing needs.
3. Develop a unified staffing model tied to student allocation formulas.
4. Negotiate contract modifications as agreements expire.

The authority to align exists within the regional governance framework. The pace and structure of alignment would depend on planning, fiscal capacity, and collective bargaining outcomes.

44. Is it feasible for a single superintendent to manage a district of this scope?

Yes, from a structural and legal standpoint, it is feasible.

The draft act provides for a single Superintendent employed by the Regional School District Committee, with all powers and duties imposed upon a superintendent under Rhode Island law.

The combined district would include all grades and programs currently operated by Newport and Middletown and would function as one unified district beginning July 1, 2028, following the transition period.

Feasibility, however, is operational rather than legal. The Superintendent would oversee multiple schools across two municipalities, initially administer multiple collective bargaining agreements, and integrate two administrative structures. That scope would require an appropriately structured central office, clear delegation of authority to building leaders, and disciplined financial and labor management.

Many Rhode Island superintendents already manage districts of comparable or larger enrollment and budget size. The effectiveness of a single superintendent in this model would depend less on the title and more on organizational design, leadership capacity, clarity of governance, and whether the regional structure eliminates duplication or simply layers complexity.

45. How would existing shared services in Middletown be affected?

Under the draft act, the regional school district would become a separate body politic responsible for operating, maintaining, and administering all public schools in both communities beginning July 1, 2028.

While each municipality may retain title to its buildings and continue paying its own school construction debt, the regional district would assume responsibility for maintenance, upkeep, and operations of the leased facilities.

Middletown and Newport currently operate with shared municipal services (e.g., finance, HR, facilities, IT) - those arrangements would not automatically continue. The regional district would prepare and administer its own budget, employ its own superintendent, and function as an independent public employer.

That structure is not inherently aligned with embedded municipal shared-service models.

- Accordingly, existing shared services in either municipality would need to be restructured. The likely options would be:
Transfer those functions into the regional district as district employees; or
Negotiate formal intergovernmental service agreements between the regional district and one or both municipalities, subject to approval by the regional committee and Joint Finance Committee.

The draft legislation does not preserve existing shared-service structures by default. Any continuation would require deliberate design and formal agreement within the regional governance and budget framework.

46. Would current town-school operational arrangements need to be undone?

Under a full statutory regional district model, the regional school district would become a separate public entity responsible for its own operations, budgeting, and administration. That structure is different from a town-school integrated shared-services model.

Middletown currently shares certain services between the Town and the School Department, including facilities and business operations. If a regional district were formed, those functions would need to be evaluated. The regional district would be the legal employer and operating authority for schools, and it would prepare and

administer its own budget. As a result, the existing embedded town–school operational model could not continue unchanged.

That does not mean shared services would be prohibited. Services such as facilities management, finance, IT, or procurement could continue through formal intergovernmental agreements between the Town and the regional district. However, those arrangements would need to be contractual, clearly defined, and approved by the regional governing structure.

In summary, regionalization would require restructuring the current integrated model. Functions could either be transferred to the regional district or provided through formal shared-service agreements, but the present embedded structure would not automatically remain in place.

47. Have school staff and labor unions been engaged in discussions?

To date, there has been no formal collective bargaining process initiated regarding regionalization. Any binding labor discussions would occur only after voter approval and formation of a regional district, and only within the framework of Rhode Island labor law.

The prior regionalization legislation provides several labor-related safeguards. Employees employed as of the effective transition date would be offered employment in the same or substantially similar positions in the regional district. Collective bargaining agreements in effect at the time of transition would remain in force until their stated expiration dates or until successor agreements are negotiated with the regional school committee. Employees would retain credit for prior service for purposes of seniority, pensions, and related benefits.

The legislation contemplates that the regional school committee would become the successor public employer and would assume responsibility for future negotiations. It does not authorize unilateral modification of wages, benefits, or work rules.

In summary, staff and unions have been informed at a high level through public discussion, but formal engagement on labor terms would occur only if and when a regional district is legally established, and all changes would be subject to collective bargaining and applicable state and federal labor law.

48. Would students remain in their current schools for the foreseeable future?

Under the proposed regionalization structure, students would remain in their current schools at the time the regional district becomes operational. The legislation contemplates consolidation of governance, not immediate consolidation of school buildings or grade configurations.

The prior regionalization report likewise assumed that existing facilities would continue to operate, with any future changes to grade alignment, program location, or building use determined through strategic planning by the regional school committee. There is no automatic redistricting or reassignment provision triggered solely by the act of regionalization.

Over time, a regional school committee would have authority to review enrollment trends, facility utilization, and program delivery and could recommend adjustments if educationally or financially warranted. Any such changes would require public process and formal action by the governing body.

In summary, regionalization itself does not require students to move schools. Students would remain in their current buildings unless and until a future policy decision is made through the regional governance process.

49. How would regionalization affect accountability ratings?

Under Rhode Island's accountability framework, STAR ratings are assigned by RIDE at the school level and at the district level based on aggregated student performance data, growth measures, graduation rates, and other indicators. A regional district would receive a single district-level accountability designation

once formed, while individual schools would continue to receive their own school-level ratings.

Regionalization itself does not automatically raise or lower STAR ratings. However, combining two districts would result in a new, aggregated district profile. The overall district rating would reflect the combined performance of all schools in the regional district. If the two districts currently have different performance levels, the regional district rating would mathematically reflect the weighted average of those outcomes.

School-level ratings would remain distinct. A higher-performing school would retain its individual accountability designation based on its own student data. There is no mechanism in the accountability system that “averages” school ratings across buildings.

In summary, the effect on accountability would occur at the district level through aggregation of performance data. School-level ratings would remain tied to each school’s results. The ultimate impact would depend on how student performance trends evolve after consolidation, not on the act of regionalization itself.

50. How would educational benefits be explained clearly to families?

Educational benefits should be communicated in clear, student-centered terms and grounded in the forward-looking work of the Academic Integration Advisory Committee (AIAC). The AIAC was established to provide recommendations on how to advance educational integration and improve outcomes for all students in both communities. Its work is intended to focus on academics first, not governance mechanics.

As the AIAC evaluates curriculum alignment, program access, equity, and instructional opportunities, those findings can translate directly into plain-language explanations for families. For example: expanded access to Advanced Placement and dual enrollment, broader CTE pathways, aligned K-12 curriculum, coordinated professional development, and shared enrichment programs. Families should see

clearly what new or enhanced opportunities would be available to their children and at what grade levels.

The AIAC's analysis can also help articulate measurable outcomes - such as improved course access, increased certification opportunities, strengthened middle school programming, or expanded arts and STEM offerings. Presenting defined goals tied to student experience allows families to evaluate the proposal based on educational value rather than abstract structure.

Finally, communication should clarify stability. Students remain in their current schools absent future policy decisions through public process. The AIAC's role is advisory, and its recommendations inform, but do not bind, elected bodies.

In summary, the AIAC's future-looking academic work provides the framework for explaining benefits in concrete terms - what improves, who benefits, and how progress would be measured over time.

51. How would higher-performing schools be protected from academic dilution?

Higher-performing schools are not automatically diluted by regionalization; outcomes depend on governance, expectations, and implementation. A regional district would be governed by a single regional school committee with full authority over curriculum, policy, staffing, and academic standards. That structure allows the district to adopt unified academic expectations and align instructional practices upward rather than downward.

The 2022 regionalization analysis emphasized expanding access to advanced coursework, CTE pathways, AP offerings, and STEM programming across both communities. In a regional model, the intent is to leverage the strongest programs in each district and make them available to all students, not average them out. A properly structured regional strategic plan would focus on raising performance where needed while preserving and scaling successful practices.

Operational efficiencies identified in the financial analysis are assumed at the administrative level, not in classroom instruction. That distinction is important. If savings are reinvested into instructional quality, professional development, and expanded programming, higher-performing schools are more likely to see reinforcement rather than erosion.

Ultimately, protection against academic dilution is not automatic. It depends on the regional school committee establishing clear performance benchmarks, maintaining rigorous curriculum standards, monitoring subgroup data, and holding leadership accountable for continuous improvement across all schools. The governance model provides the authority to do that; execution determines the outcome.

52. What are recent enrollment trends in both districts?

The following data was gathered through the RIDE Report Cards

School Year	Newport	Middletown
2024-2025	1,795	1,860
2023-2024	1,856	1,961
2022-2023	1,906	1,971
2021-2022	1,975	2,073
2020-2021	1,995	1,955

(Visit <https://www.middletownri.gov/DocumentCenter/View/22710/RIDE-Report-Cards-For-Student-Enrollment-Middletown-Newport> For Supporting Documentation)

53. What enrollment projections were approved by the state for recent school construction?



Middletown Public Schools Middletown, Rhode Island

The following graph is a brief summary of the end-of-year enrollment forecast for the district, which is expanded upon in great detail in the demographic study report included in this Stage II submission.

	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	2030-31	2031-32	2032-33
Total PK-3	727	720	663	661	655	678	699	700	702	705	707	712	712	706	696
Change		(7)	-57	-2	-6	15	29	1	2	3	2	5	0	-6	-10
% Change		-1.0%	-7.9%	-0.3%	-0.9%	2.3%	4.3%	0.1%	0.3%	0.4%	0.3%	0.7%	0.0%	-0.8%	-1.4%
Total 4-5	362	357	313	333	386	302	295	300	327	326	333	332	329	333	336
Change		-5	-44	20	-27	-1	-17	15	27	1	6	-1	-3	4	3
% Change		-1.4%	-12.3%	6.4%	-8.1%	-1.3%	-5.6%	5.3%	9.0%	0.3%	1.8%	-0.3%	-0.9%	1.2%	1.5%
Total 6-8	538	536	496	490	490	471	461	447	431	444	458	468	492	493	492
Change		-2	-40	-16	10	-19	-10	-14	-16	13	14	30	3	7	-1
% Change		-0.4%	-7.5%	-3.2%	2.1%	-3.9%	-2.1%	-3.0%	-3.6%	3.0%	3.3%	6.6%	0.6%	0.4%	-0.2%
Total 9-12	643	627	618	650	597	600	594	569	600	585	574	548	562	573	589
Change		-16	-9	32	-53	3	-6	-25	31	-15	-11	-26	14	11	16
% Change		-2.8%	-1.1%	5.2%	-8.2%	0.5%	-1.0%	-4.1%	4.9%	-2.5%	-1.9%	-4.5%	2.6%	2.0%	2.8%

Forecast developed August 2023
 Green cells (2022-2023 and earlier) are historical data
 Blue cells (2023-2024 and later) are forecasted years

54. How would uneven enrollment changes be addressed fairly?

Uneven enrollment changes would be addressed through the cost-apportionment and governance structure established in the proposed regional act. Under the draft legislation, the total education costs of the regional district are apportioned annually between Newport and Middletown based on a per-public-pupil calculation using prior October 1 enrollment. That structure means each municipality's financial obligation adjusts proportionally to its actual student count, rather than being fixed or averaged over time.

In practical terms, if one community experiences a steeper enrollment decline, its proportional share of operating costs would decrease correspondingly. Conversely,

if one community's enrollment grows relative to the other, its share would increase. Because state and federal aid associated with specific students or programs is allocated back to the originating municipality and credited toward its proportionate share, enrollment-driven funding differences are reflected in the annual cost allocation.

At the governance level, representation on the regional school committee is structured to ensure minimum representation from both communities, and the joint finance committee reviews and approves the annual budget before municipal appropriations are made. Together, the enrollment-based apportionment formula and the dual-committee budget approval process are intended to ensure that uneven enrollment trends are managed transparently and that neither community subsidizes the other beyond its proportional student share.

Legal Issues and Comparisons

55. What is the legal basis for using housing-related reimbursement funds for education?

Under Rhode Island law, State Housing Aid is paid to a municipality as reimbursement for eligible principal and interest on approved school construction bonds. The statutory framework ties eligibility to incurring approved school housing debt, and reimbursement percentages are established pursuant to the State Housing Aid program.

Once the reimbursement is received, however, it is deposited as municipal revenue. The statute requires that the municipality have eligible debt service in order to receive the aid, but it does not earmark the reimbursement proceeds in a separate restricted account for a specific educational line item. In practice, the reimbursement offsets the municipality's net debt service obligation and reduces the amount of local tax revenue required to support that obligation.

As a result, while Housing Aid cannot be received without eligible bonded indebtedness for approved school facilities, the funds themselves are not legally

segregated upon receipt. They function as general municipal revenue that reduces overall debt service costs. Any decision to redirect resulting fiscal capacity toward education, bond reduction, or other municipal priorities is a policy decision made through the local budget and appropriation process.

Accordingly, the legal limitation applies to eligibility for reimbursement, not to post-receipt expenditure tracking, so long as the municipality continues to meet its bonded debt obligations and statutory requirements.

52. Is creating an education endowment using such funds legally permissible?

State Housing Aid is paid as reimbursement for eligible school construction debt service under Rhode Island law. While those reimbursements reduce a municipality's net cost of bonded indebtedness, the creation of a permanent education endowment would require separate enabling legislation. That legislation would need to clearly define the legal structure of the endowment, governance and fiduciary oversight, permissible uses of funds, investment authority, reporting requirements, and its interaction with annual appropriations and debt service obligations.

If an endowment were to be pursued, the most orderly approach would be to incorporate the required enabling language directly into the regionalization legislation so that the structure, authority, and operational rules were fully vetted and approved as part of the same legislative process. Including it in the regionalization act would ensure that voters and the General Assembly were evaluating a complete statutory framework rather than an undefined future proposal.

However, the City has formally withdrawn the concept of creating an education endowment, and it is no longer under consideration. Accordingly, no such enabling language is currently proposed as part of the regionalization legislation.

56. What lessons can be learned from other Rhode Island regional school districts?

There's no one overwhelming consensus about regionalization. Anecdotally, some swear by it, saying combining services is a natural winner. On the other hand, others say the examples across Rhode Island note it's anything but a slam dunk.

From a basic financial standpoint, the following RIDE data shows comparable per pupil costs:

District	Students (24-25)	Per Pupil Cost	School Star Ratings
Middletown	1,860	\$23,230	3.2 (5 Schools)
Newport	1,795	\$31,376	1.7 (3 Schools)
Bristol-Warren	2,693	\$22,944	3.3 (6 Schools)
Chariho	2,966	\$23,315	3.4 (7 Schools)
Exeter-West Greenwich	1,544	\$25,071	3.5 (4 Schools)
Foster-Glocester	1,273	\$22,150	3.5 (2 Schools)

Minus the outlier of Newport, the per pupil costs for Middletown are in line with the four regional school districts in Rhode Island – and actually lower than two districts.

Obviously, it's difficult to do a detailed, apples for apples comparison on what's offered in the six districts under consideration. However, it's clear based on the LEA School Accountability Star Ratings that Middletown falls within the independent Star Ratings spectrum of each of the four regionalized school districts.

At the same time, while not the best standard, news reports of strife and unhappiness among the member communities in Chariho, Bristol-Warren Exeter-West Greenwich and Foster-Glocester aren't uncommon.

Typically, these reports revolve around one of the member districts charging the other wasn't paying enough money or contributing its fair share.

57. How relevant are examples from other states with different funding and governance systems?

Examples from other states can provide useful context, but they are not directly transferable to Rhode Island without careful adjustment for structural differences in governance and finance. School funding and governance frameworks vary significantly by state. Rhode Island school districts are “dependent” districts that rely on state aid formulas and specific statutory reimbursement structures, including housing aid incentives tied to Title 16. Other states, such as Massachusetts, Texas, or California, operate under different funding formulas, local taxing authority models, and state oversight systems. As a result, financial outcomes achieved elsewhere cannot be assumed to occur under Rhode Island law.

Out-of-state case studies are most helpful in illustrating governance transition strategies, change management practices, academic alignment, and stakeholder engagement approaches. They can show how districts have managed consolidation, structured leadership, or sequenced implementation. However, they are not reliable predictors of financial performance in Rhode Island because housing reimbursement rates, state incentive structures, labor frameworks, and accountability systems differ materially.

For financial modeling, reimbursement eligibility, governance authority, cost apportionment, and legal structure, Rhode Island examples operating under Title 16 provide the most relevant comparisons. Accordingly, while national examples can inform operational considerations, any fiscal or statutory conclusions must be grounded in Rhode Island law and regulation.

58. What would regionalization achieve that cannot be accomplished through shared services or cooperative agreements?

A full statutory regional district accomplishes structural changes that shared services or memoranda of agreement (MOAs) cannot.

First, governance consolidation. Under the draft act, one elected Regional School District Committee would replace the two local school committees and exercise all powers granted to school committees under Rhode Island law.

Shared services arrangements do not merge governing bodies; they preserve separate policy authority and can be terminated unilaterally.

Second, unified budgeting and cost apportionment. The regional district would adopt a single budget, with costs apportioned between Newport and Middletown based on a per public pupil calculation.

MOAs can share specific expenses, but they do not create a consolidated financial structure with a statutory allocation formula and joint finance oversight.

Third, direct eligibility for regional incentives and housing reimbursement rates applicable to regional districts.

These statutory incentives are not available to informal cooperative agreements.

Fourth, permanence and scale. A regional district consolidates labor, administration, transportation, facilities operations, and program delivery under one legal entity. Shared services can coordinate discrete functions, but they do not eliminate duplicate governance structures, separate bargaining units as legal employers, or parallel central offices.

In summary, shared services can improve efficiency in targeted areas while preserving full local control. A statutory regional district restructures governance, finance, and legal authority into a single entity. The policy question is whether those structural changes provide benefits that outweigh the loss of independent local governance.