

Porzio Selected by Salem County to Conduct School District Consolidation Study

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By: Kerri Wright, Vito Gagliardi, Jr., David Hesper

Porzio, Bromberg & Newman P.C. (Porzio) is conducting a study to determine the financial, educational and demographic impact of converting all school districts within Salem County into a single, county-wide public school district. If such a plan were to move forward, it would be the first of its kind in State history. The Salem County Board of Chosen Freeholders selected the Morristown-based law firm to conduct this precedential study.

Porzio has been selected by the Salem County Board of Chosen Freeholders to study whether switching to a single, county-wide public school district would be educationally and fiscally viable and beneficial for the communities of Salem County. The feasibility study, which is funded fully by a state grant, will determine the educational, demographic, and financial implications of reducing the County's 14 school districts to one. The attorneys and experts will evaluate demographic and population trends, labor agreements with teachers and administrators, and programming and transportation.

"We are pleased that the Salem County Board of Chosen Freeholders recognized Porzio's experience in education law and chose us to conduct this very important study," said Kerri A. Wright, Principal of Porzio and co-chair of the Education and Employment team. "We are confident that the various perspectives that our team brings to this project will serve the residents of Salem County well."

In addition to Wright, the team working on the study includes firm managing principal and Education and Employment co-chair Vito A. Gagliardi, Jr. and Education Team member David C. Hesper, of counsel.

Gagliardi, who also serves as President and CEO of the firm's subsidiaries, Porzio Life Sciences, Porzio Governmental Affairs and Porzio Compliance Services, represents school districts in numerous matters, and handles a range of employment law matters for public and private sector clients in state and federal courts and agencies, and before arbitrators. He has handled the only three regional school district dissolutions in New Jersey's state history. Gagliardi's work includes transforming K-6 and K-8 districts into K-12 districts, and he has been involved with the creation, expansion or severance of sending-receiving relationships including dual sending-receiving relationships, ultimately helping taxpayers in many communities save millions of dollars while developing more efficient and comprehensive school systems and negotiating financially beneficial agreements. Also, he is the Chairman of the New Jersey Law Revision Commission, which is tasked by the legislature with identifying areas of the law that require revision for clarification and simplification.

Wright brings significant experience representing and counseling school boards, charter schools, private schools and colleges. She is one of only a few professionals in the state who has worked to reconfigure school districts, including the creation and dissolution of regional school districts and the creation and termination of sending-receiving relationships. As an elected member of the Chester Board of Education in Morris County, Wright is serving in her fifth term. She served several years as the President of the Board, and currently serves as the Chair of the Board's negotiation committee.

Hespe has been appointed twice as New Jersey's Commissioner of Education, and is an accomplished policy leader with decades of experience throughout all levels of New Jersey and New York education matters. He handles education law matters for schools, school districts and higher education institutions, including personnel issues, student discipline, bullying, special-needs students, and litigation and other actions involving school policy. He counsels clients and education leaders on matters such as training, legislation, and strategic planning and governance.