



# How Senator Sweeney's School Consolidation Bill Will Be Regionalization as Cover for More Segregation?

*Predatory serial segregationists have hijacked the school consolidation agenda and are already lining up to feed at the public trough*

"Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves." Matthew 7:15



hoping no one notices, and no one cares

- While Senator Sweeney has called for the consolidation of school districts for cost savings and efficiency there has been a rash of school district break-ups resulting in greater racial segregation and economic inequality.
- Recently a group of clever and well-paid lawyers and consultants led by Vito Gagliardi of the Porzio law firm have figured out a way to circumvent the courts, and the law, by compiling false and misleading data and hoping no one notices, and no one cares

*Vito Gagliardi "has handled the only three regional school district dissolutions in New Jersey's state history"* from *Porzio Selected by Salem County to Conduct School District Consolidation Study* – Porzio News 11/20/2020 | [Porzio, Bromberg & Newman P.C.](#)

- The latest of these is a petition from the majority white Absecon school district trying to secede from the majority black and brown Pleasantville High School.
- Last year the Gagliardi gang succeeded using nearly identical arguments to pull majority white Maywood out of majority black and brown Hackensack.
- In 2015 they split majority white Merchantville from majority minority Pennsauken despite Pennsauken's herculean effort to stop them.
- Gagliardi argued there would be no negative impact, but now Pennsauken (Senator Sweeney's hometown high school) is more segregated, impoverished, and underperforming than ever before.
  - Now 90% Segregated and over 60% poor.



*"Vito Gagliardi turned Pennsauken in to an apartheid School district"* - former Pennsauken Board School member.



- In 2015 Chris Christie's Education Commissioner, David Hespe, signed off on the Pennsauken secession and then joined the Gagliardi gang as one of their high paid "education experts"

*Merchantville's secession will "not result in a substantial negative impact upon the quality of education, the financial condition or the racial composition of any of the districts involved," according to Hespe's decision in 2015*

- Today Gagliardi, Hespe, and the rest of his team are involved in every *de-regionalization* case in the state where a majority white district is attempting to secede from a majority black and brown district...
  - *and being well compensated for it*
- But despite the damage to Steve Sweeney's high school and his role in every successful *de*-regionalization case in the state, Gagliardi now brags that he helped write the Senate President's school regionalization bill, S3488, that is now before the Legislature.
- He has been assuring his clients that the bill will "not affect" their secession plans and can even be used for more *de*-regionalizations and "withdrawals" in the name of regionalization...
  - BUT NOW the state will pay for it.
- Despite his record as a self-proclaimed *de-regionalizer* he somehow snagged the state funded contract for a Salem county pilot project to explore a "unified county district"

*...while assuring the county's white parents and taxpayers there will be no unified district "only certain sections"*

  - Senator Sweeny's consolidation bill S3488 could be a positive step forward and part of the answer to greater inclusion and equity as well as "efficiency and cost savings"...
  - ..but instead, it is being brazenly hijacked by people who have declared they are going to use it for the opposite purpose...
    - *to secede and to exclude, discriminate and segregate.*

Language now in the bill requiring proposed consolidations to *avoid segregation* is not enough. Gagliardi's has shown that more is needed to plug all the loopholes he and his clients intend to exploit.

**S3488 can be made into a bill that cannot be used for more segregation:**

**Summary**

1. Do not allow withdrawals, separations or dissolutions as a part of any proposed consolidation plan.
2. Require an affirmative obligation to create a racially and socioeconomically integrated consolidated district.
3. Require affirmative obligation to show impact toward desegregation and poverty de-concentration within the region where consolidation is being proposed.

**1. It must not permit “withdrawals” or “separations” as a step toward regionalization.**

- A withdrawal or separation is *not* consolidation or regionalization it is *de-regionalization!* It is the exact opposite of the spirit and purpose of the bill.
- Allowing withdrawals, as a step toward consolidation, will only lead to more racial segregation, isolations and abandonment of poor children.
- The bill must strike “withdrawals” and “separations” and make feasibility studies that include withdrawals and dissolutions ineligible for grants.
- ...including a provision that makes clear that no grant under the statute can be used for a feasibility study to investigate and/or support terminating any sending receiving relationship under 18A:38-13.

**2. It must require an *affirmative obligation* to advance inclusion, diversity and integration within the school district being consolidated.**

- Just as the bill has affirmative goals for efficiency and cost savings it must also include an obligation to achieve racial and socioeconomic integration within the consolidated district (as defined by the demographics of the region).
- The bill must make goals, projections and plans for socioeconomic inclusion based on regional demographics a requirement for grant eligibility.

**2. It must require an *affirmative obligation* to advance inclusion, diversity and integration in the larger region:**

- Applicants must be required to demonstrate how proposed consolidations will have an impact on the de-concentration of poverty and a reduction of racial segregation within the region as defined by the county, Metropolitan Statistical Area and among contiguous surrounding districts.

*Simply avoiding segregation is not enough. The state is too diverse and too fragmented for required inclusion goals not to be included. Districts that consider consolidating without being required to include inclusion will be compelled to segregate by race and or class.*

If the bill can make “*improved efficiency and cost savings*” a required goal of consolidation it can make *inclusion and the reduction of segregation and poverty concentration* a required goal.

After all, school segregation is illegal, and the courts have made clear that the state has an *affirmative obligation* to reduce it not just avoid it. And reducing poverty - especially concentrated poverty in our schools - will do more to promote cost savings for New Jersey taxpayers than almost anything else we can do.

With these changes the Senate President’s School Consolidation bill will become a meaningful starting point for a powerful reform legislative agenda to end the shame of school segregation in New Jersey.

We look forward to working with Senate President Sweeney on a powerful reform agenda that includes

- Strengthening funding for diverse and integrated schools
- Directing more funding to local integration and desegregation best practices where diversity already exists.
- Reforming the *Interdistrict Public School Choice* program to advance integration within regions based on opportunity analysis.
- Providing for and incentivizing integrated regional and consolidated schools.
- Supporting pro-integration magnet schools in urban areas and for county schools.
- Reforming legislation to require charters to advance integration instead of promoting segregation.
- Increasing & enforcing *Mount Laurel* obligations on “far flung” high opportunity communities with exclusionary schools.
- Reforming and strengthening the civil rights capacity and enforcement requirements of the Department of Education.
- Other “carrots & sticks” to reward inclusion & discourage exclusion.

*We do this by building support among a multi-racial coalition of leaders from suburban and urban diverse school districts and legislative districts across the state...*

*...and by attending September 24 statewide conference on the Problem of School Segregation in NJ and What We Can do About it.*

*September 24 is the 64<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the day federal troops were deployed to integrate Little Rock High School.*

*Conference Center at Mercer, West Windsor, 10 AM to 3 PM*

