

The

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Educational
Growth



in
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Jersey!

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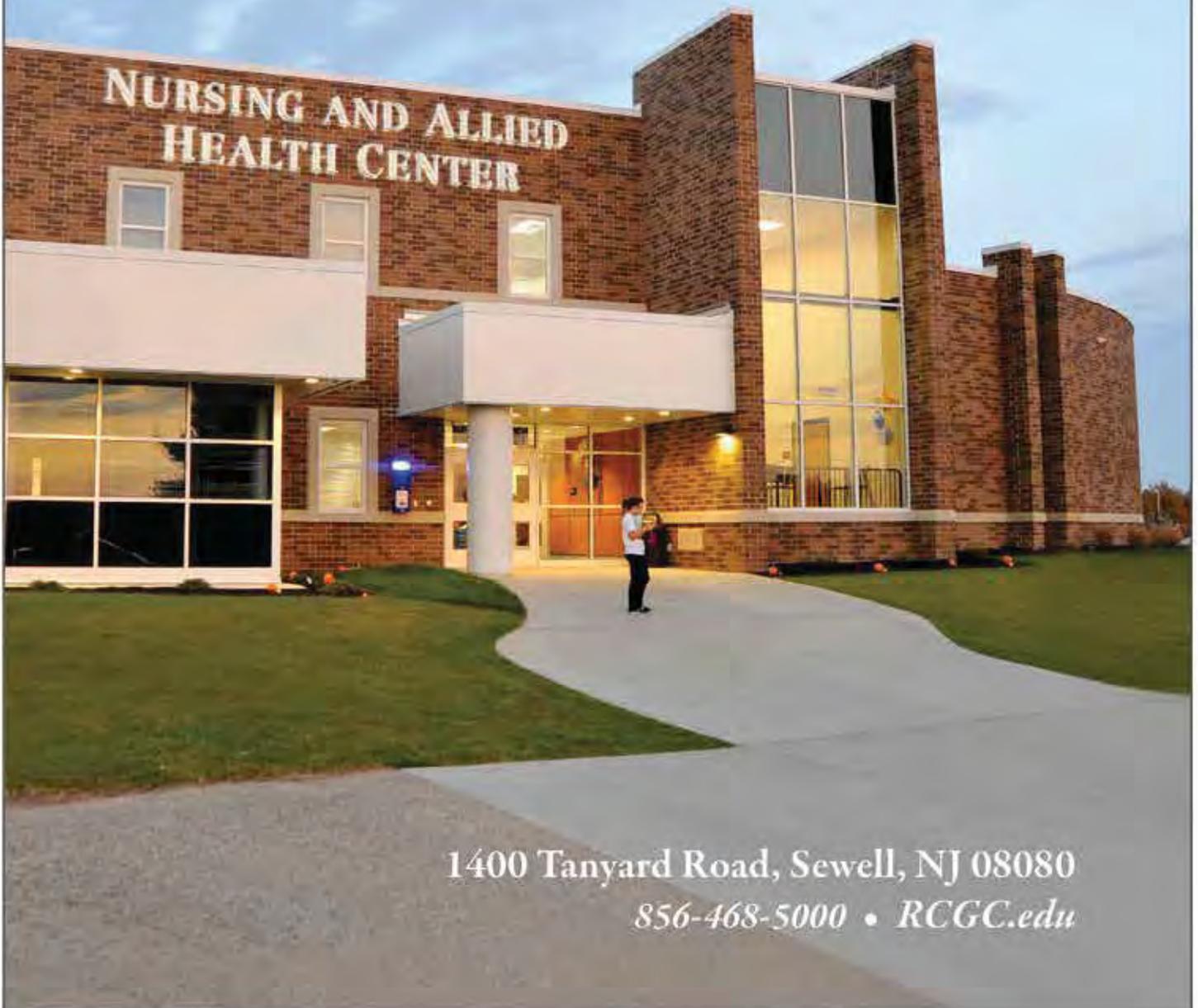
SOUTHERN
NEW JERSEY
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Rowan College

at GLOUCESTER COUNTY

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Funding New Jersey Public Schools

Garrison Architects, a second generation family-owned architectural firm, represents over 60 southern New Jersey school districts including charters, regular operating, special services and technical/vocational school districts.

We are often asked, "So how do New Jersey's K-12 schools get funding for larger capital construction projects?" It is mandated that most School Districts get voter approval after which the local Board of Education is authorized to borrow money and retire that debt over a long period of time...much like your home mortgage.

About 591 out of 616 districts follow that model. Another 13 technical/vocational schools are districts that get both their annual operating funds and capital outlay funds direct from government allocation, primarily at the county level.

All but the Charter Schools can compete for a share of monies offered by the State to reduce the burden on the local taxpayer. The largest sustainable New Jersey state aid program is known as Debt Service Aid. The other program that needs legislative funding is the ROD (Regular Operating District) Grant Program. Under both programs, the District and their Architect submit NJDOE applications that delineate need, scope and cost of the proposed project(s).

Need is determined by a demographic study projecting the future number of students in a district by grade level and comparing that with standards for schoolhouse capacities. Districts with "Unhoused Students," that is insufficient seats usually due to residential development growth, can get funding for those students.

Need can also be determined based on security, health and life safety, essential building system replacement after a full facilities assessment.

Enrollment and physical/functional building needs are often delineated in a Long Range Facilities Plan (LRFP) that proposes a capital expansion or improvement. Review of the LRFP and the architect's plans for improvements by

the Planning & Facilities Office of the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) and an application of rigorous formulas result in a determination of a level of aid offered under each specific program. Districts can submit under both programs and analyze the different levels of aid after an offer is made by the NJDOE.

Under the Debt Service Aid scenario, a district borrows the entire amount of its project costs; the State pays a portion of the school district's debt service payments consisting of principal and interest. In the ROD Grant Program, the State provides an up-front grant and the district borrows the remaining costs. Both programs have the same economic effect on the school district's taxpayers.

One of our firm's largest projects is the Cumberland County Technical High School under construction in Millville. This new 201,118 square foot Technology High School will accommodate up to 900 students. The Technical Education Center is located adjacent to the County College providing for shared educational, administrative and athletic programs and spaces, shared administrative and adult programs, and is oriented to the STEM programs needed to meet 21st Century education goals.

The Cumberland County Board of Freeholders included the funding for the new school in a \$70 million bond ordinance that financed both the new school and other county improvements. The new school received State Debt Service Aid, which will finance approximately 69% of the County's debt service allocated to the school for a term of 30 years.

The requirements for Charter School capital improvements are more restrictive than the requirements for a public school district. One example is Camden's Charter School Network and the new Camden's Pride Elementary Charter School. Annual Operating Funds for Charter Schools come through the host District based on the number of students enrolled. Construction funds are another story. A Charter School has statutory limits on borrowing debt long term

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Funding New Jersey Public Schools *(continued from page 8)*

and the lease term cannot exceed the length of the Charter. Therefore, the prohibition on the use of public funds for construction of facilities, as well as the limitations on long term debt, makes it difficult for a Charter School to directly finance the construction of a new charter school (except a “turnkey” arrangement) or undertake major renovations.

Camden’s Charter School Network, located in the Cramer Hill neighborhood, opened in 1998 at the middle school level in a 2-story office building and then three years later at the High School level in a school that was substantially rehabilitated from an adjacent 1-story abandoned brake manufacturing building. In 2004, the PAC Center, a

Gymnasium and Media Center, was added. By 2010, a freestanding 2-story Pride Elementary School was constructed on an adjacent lot. In a current project, the Charter School Network is converting the Rosedale Church Center to the Katz A to Z Charter School serving Grade K to 4 students. How did the Charter School finance so many worthwhile projects over the last few years? Their excellence in education was recognized by county government and through the Improvement Authority the projects were bonded and constructed. Other Charter Schools form similar partnerships, non-profits, and shared space concepts to enable their visions to become a reality.



CUMBERLAND COUNTY TECHNICAL EDUCATION CENTER | MILLVILLE, NJ

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**SUPPORTING
EDUCATION IN
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O'Donnell & Naccarato is providing ongoing structural engineering services for the \$45-million, 202,000 SF technical high school to be situated alongside the Cumberland County College Campus. The 2-story structure will house classrooms, a media center, technical laboratories, a greenhouse, a gymnasium, and other amenities. The full-time school will offer technical training, such as welding, plumbing, heating ventilation and air-conditioning, auto-mechanics, cosmetology, and standard academic courses.