

Brian Donohue
Mar 23, 2026, 11:17 AM
to Kristen

Kristen,

There was a presentation slide at last week's Red Bank Borough Board of Education meeting that included some statistics I have some questions about for a possible story. I also noticed some items on the Board of Trustees minutes that I had some questions about (I often read the minutes of past public meetings because I can't attend all the meetings). I'll put my questions here in this email, although, as always, am open to discussing them in a phone call or sit down if you prefer.

I'll start with the stats from last week's district Board of Ed meeting.

Specifically, the district presented numbers showing the current enrollment at the Red Bank Charter School at 169, with 23 of those students coming from outside Red Bank.

Are these numbers accurate? If so, they seem to represent a fairly significant change in both the total enrollment and the makeup of the population at RBCS. What has caused these changes? If the total enrollment of RBCS is 31 students below its maximum of 200 students, is there still a waiting list for any of the grades there?

As both a reporter and a former RBCS parent, I was unaware non-district students were legally allowed to attend RBCS. (Possibly because it didn't seem to be happening when my children went there.)

What is the mechanism by which non Red Bank students attend RBCS? Do they pay tuition? If so, how much? Is the amount of money Red Bank Borough Board of Education sends to RBCS reduced by a corresponding amount?

I also have a couple of questions about some actions taken by the RBCS Board of Trustees in the fall: specifically, the change in health care for employees and retirees that terminated RBCS's participation in the Medical Plan & Prescription Drug Plan thereby canceling coverage provided by the SHBP and/or SEHBP for all its active and retired employees.

Can you describe what changes were made? Was a new provider hired?

The second change seems to be a resolution giving the Head of School the power to sign for loans and mortgage documents. Why was this done? Who held that power before, just the board of trustees?

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Brian Donohue
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Kristen Martello
Mar 25, 2026, 2:39 PM
to me

Brian,

The following should answer all of your questions. I would appreciate it if you could share your article prior to publication. Thanks! Let me know if you have any additional questions.

Our current maximum enrollment is 195 students. This reflects a change made a few years ago to limit Pre-K enrollment to 15 students rather than 20. Under state guidelines, every Pre-K classroom of 15 students requires one teacher and one instructional assistant. Maintaining an additional teacher and instructional assistant for only five additional students was not financially sustainable, so the adjustment was made for budgetary responsibility.

At present, our enrollment is 168 out of the 195 available seats. Of those students, 23 reside outside the district and 3 qualify under the McKinney-Vento Act.

The Red Bank Charter School admission policy states that enrollment of students who do not reside within the district is subject to space availability. Priority is given to siblings of current students and Red Bank residents respectively.

We also maintain a waiting list each year. Our annual lottery will be held on March 27 at 9:00 a.m. at Red Bank Charter School. Applications must be received by March 26 at 3:00 p.m. to be included in the lottery for the 2026–2027 school year. Applications received after that time are added to the waiting list in the order they are received.

Charter Schools in New Jersey are funded through the resident school districts of the students who attend them. Funding is based on per-pupil allocations, meaning that when a student enrolls in a charter school, a portion of the funding that would have gone to the local district is redirected to the charter school instead.

The enrollment data used to determine funding is collected through the New Jersey Department of Education's Charter School Enrollment System. There are two key data collection dates: October 15 and June 30. Charter Schools are responsible for entering student enrollment information into the system, and the resident school districts must then review, verify, and certify that data.

Once the data is certified, it is used by the State Department of Education to calculate the amount of funding each charter school will receive from the respective resident districts. As a result of fewer Red Bank students attending the school, Red Bank Borough Schools sees a reduction in what they pay to RBCS.

The State Health Benefits Plan experienced a projected increase of over 30% for the upcoming year. In response, we carefully reviewed alternative providers, worked closely with our staff in reviewing healthcare, and ultimately transitioned to NJ Solutions Joint Health Insurance Fund to ensure we were being responsible stewards of school resources. Through this change, the increase in health benefit costs was kept to under 6%, while maintaining comparable health coverage for all employees. This approach allowed us to manage rising costs while continuing to provide strong benefits for our staff.

The Board of Trustees remains the governing body of the school and retains full authority over all financial decisions, including the approval of any loans or mortgage obligations. The resolution simply authorizes the Head of School to sign and execute related documents once those actions have been formally approved by the Board. This change streamlines the administrative process while maintaining full Board oversight and decision-making authority.

Brian Donohue

Mar 31, 2026, 12:55 PM

to Kristen

Kristen,

Thanks for the reply. My timeline for publishing this story has been pushed back due to other stories popping up, but I expect to be writing soon. We do not share stories before publication (I don't of any news outlet that does). If you want a general sense of what the story's focus is going to be I'm happy to convey that closer to publication. I also may also have follow up questions once I do more reporting and sit down to write. Thanks.

Brian Donohue

Brian Donohue

Apr 20, 2026, 1:36 PM (1 day ago)

to Kristen

Kristen,

I am still working on the story about the Charter School enrollment changes and am moving closer to publication (Mostly this is just because my time and attention get turned to other matters and other news stories.)

I just wanted to double back on a few points.

I also asked district school officials for comment on the numbers and wanted to give you a chance to respond to one explanation they gave for the reduced RBCS enrollment, which does seem more precipitous than the decrease in enrollment the primary and middle schools have seen in the past few years.

The district's assertion is that more families are choosing to send their kids to the district schools because they have realized the quality of educational offerings they provide. They attribute the change to a reversal of what they call a "false narrative" that the charter offered better educational opportunities and outcomes.

There does seem to be a lack of Red Bank residents on the waiting list and a sharp reduction overall in Red Bank parents choosing RBCS. In my initial list of questions I asked what the reasons are for this or the factors driving it, but I didn't see that in your response. Just want to give you another chance to reply and also respond to the explanation offered by the borough schools.

Thanks

Brian Donohue

Kristen Martello

6:26 AM (8 hours ago)

to me

Brian,

Red Bank Charter School remains firmly grounded in its mission to celebrate individuality, value cultural diversity, and develop students who demonstrate strong character, accountability, and a commitment to their community. As a National School of Character recognized by Character.org, we are proud to offer an educational experience that is both rigorous and uniquely responsive to the needs of our students.

We respectfully disagree with the assertion that our school's value has been based on a "false narrative." Red Bank Charter School has consistently provided a high-quality educational program that extends beyond traditional classroom instruction. Our students benefit from a wide range of enrichment opportunities, including clubs, character education, service learning, partnerships with local businesses that offer real-world learning and internship experiences, and strong family engagement initiatives that foster a true school and community connection. In addition, we have recently strengthened our academic program by hiring a dedicated literacy

coach to further support student achievement and instructional excellence.

We remain confident in the strength of our program and the outcomes we provide for students. Families who choose Red Bank Charter School are seeking a personalized, community-centered environment where academic growth and character development are equally prioritized.

We respect all schools in our community and believe families should have access to high-quality options. At the same time, we stand firmly behind the value and impact of the educational opportunities we provide. We will continue to innovate, listen to our families, and ensure that every child is supported, challenged, and prepared to contribute meaningfully to their larger world.