

YEAR TWO---YEAR END REPORT

HEMPSTEAD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Distinguished Educator

John E. Bierwirth

November, 2019

NOTE:

MY SERVICE AS THE DISTINGUISHED EDUCATOR APPOINTED TO THE HEMPSTEAD PUBLIC SCHOOLS ENDED AT THE BEGINNING OF OCTOBER 2019. THIS REPORT REFLECTS EVENTS AND SITUATIONS PRIOR TO THAT TIME. IT DOES NOT REFLECT ANY EVENTS OR CHANGES SINCE. THE ASSESSMENTS ARE MINE ALONE.

JB

INTRODUCTION

I would like to express my deep appreciation to the Chancellor of the Board of Regents and the Commissioner of Education for their strong personal investment in Hempstead's turnaround over the past two years. My thanks also go to the many staff at the New York State Education Department who went out of their way to assist whenever, wherever and however they could and to do so as q Tc 0.m8 (u 0.ms)-i3 (1.2 (c3

is no reason why Hempstead cannot

One Board member has referred to the "experiment". In one very important respect, I have had and continue to have deep

In all other respects, however, it has been a great success. The progress made to date in areas critical

real. At the same time, the amount of work still to be done should not be underestimated. That too is real.

As stated explicitly and repeatedly in all recent reports, progress is not the same as success. While that has been stated repeatedly in prior reports, it needs to be said again because it has been misunderstood. Significant progress has been made in a wide variety of areas. The progress is real and the progress is substantial. At the same time, no---repeat no---level of performance in any area has yet to reach a point that could be considered as a complete "success". While the District is moving in the right direction, much more needs to be done.

The graduation rate for Hempstead High School (High School) provides a good illustration of this. The exact percentage of graduates in 2017 is uncertain due to some questions about the numbers, but the figure was around 40%. Two yw [(a)5a (u)-0.7 0.006 Tw 0.6g(a)l4217 0 006 Tw 0.6g(a)l4[a (ec 0 Tw 1.38 0 Td((01)m)-9.4 (c

3

- The District had budgeted for the purchase of two buses in 2017-

While Hempstead's business operations and finances are approaching a more normal level, they are not yet fully normal nor have policies and practices become fully institutionalized. That is not intended as a criticism but an acknowledgement of reality. Policies and practices need to be refined and made routine practice year after year. This is going to require stability, focus and dis (q3 (ali-9t)-3 (in)2.7 ())TJ-0.004 Tc 0.02 (Tw 0.217

but with the manner in which charter schools are funded. However, it is the responsibility of the District to deal with this challenge and manage it appropriately.

The cost of tuition and transportation for charter schools paid by the Hempstead District rose from \$25 million in 2017-18 to \$43 million in 2019-20. Based on expansion plans for two charter schools already approved by the Board of Regents and SUNY the figure is estimated to rise to \$55 million by 2021-22. It is reasonable to project that half of this increase will come in 2020-21 and half in 2021-22. Final figures are dependent upon how many students come from Hempstead and how many from other communities as well as whether enrollments at the charter schools increase in line with the approved plans but based on previous years' experience enrollment will increase in line with approved numbers and the vast majority will come from the Hempstead community.

The District dealt with the projected increase for 2019-20 in a responsible, although very painful fashion, balancing the budget by cutting 100 positions. It also dealt with the shortfall due to the unexpectedly rapid increase in charter school enrollment in the prior fiscal year, 2018-19, by dipping into reserves. Without additional assistance, the District will have to make similarly deep cuts over the next two fiscal years.

Furthermore, without some advance notice of significant financial assistance well before the approval of the State budget in spring 2020, the District will be forced to prepare multiple budgets for 2020-21 starting at or prior to the time of this report. Such a situation would have an adverse impact on any district's ability to plan for 2020-21 but it will

6 3. (i4.9)-4.717 0 Td51 1c7(40.0-- Tt)-134.9

The safety and security of children is a paramount concern of parents in Hempstead as in every other community. The situation at the High School in fall 2017 was troubling not just to parents of students at the High School but also to parents districtwide. The Board, administration and schools must continue to give safety and security top priority so parents can have full reassurance that their children are safe. Staffing levels and the placement of security staff need to be reviewed and rationalized. Up to date training of all security staff needs to be ensured. The new Supervisor of Security should present a plan of action in December if not sooner for the administration and Board to review and approve.

FACILITIES

The Di2 (u)-0.8 (ro(.)11.)4.(t)-3 (4b[(ac)-1.9ku)-87 (r)Tv Dir tho r7.9 (v)-5.5 (ie)7.9..6 (ard)2.2 (t)2 Tc 0 Tw 3erain2.2 (an)2

Initially, the response to the report was relatively slow not through lack of intent but due to lack of experienced leadership capacity in both the facilities department and the business office. However, a number of significant steps were taken in Spring 2018:

- Maintenance contracts were re-instituted in many areas

when there was an intent to start addressing facilities problems, there were minimal funds. This began to change with the 2018-19 budget and it has continued into the 2019-20 budget. However, this can only be considered a start in light of the issues raised in paragraph 4 below.

3. Fire at the Prospect School---in August 2018 the Prospect School which housed Kindergarten students was struck by lightning causing a major fire. Parts of the building were over 100 years old. With the assistance of the Commissioner, key staff at NYSED and key officials at Nassau BOCES, the District was able to identify and then lease a well-maintained parochial school building in a neighboring community to house the students who would have attended Prospect during 2018-19. The lease and relocation were accomplished within a matter of weeks, smoothly and efficiently, with only a few days of school lost. However, this diverted time, energy and funds which could have been devoted to fixing the District's facilities. As of the start of the current school year, Prospect School has been completely reconstructed. (c) (1) (b) 3.2-lj-0.009c3,ffi(c)-4ailuTc 0.0e3

- The Acting/Interim Superintendent needs to meet regularly, probably every two weeks, with key facilities and business office staff to discuss progress on:
 - The Rhodes School construction
 - The preparation of the Energy Performance Contract and then its implementation
 - The maintenance of old, failing and/or inadequate equipment and structures such as the High School air conditioning system until such time as they can be replaced; and
 - Problems that have been identified and need to be addressed before they become even greater problems.
- The Board and administration, with community and staff input, need to come to agreement on a plan with a timeline and process to remove all remaining portable classrooms so all Hempstead students can be housed in permanent structures. The opening of the new Rhodes School will allow for the removal of many portables but there will still be a substantial number left at that point. The community needs to know when the remaining ones .5 (t) id b g6 (w)-3.4 ng b .9 (y)-7.5 (a)-3.3 (n)-0.

In Fall 2017 several other issues further compounded this longstanding situation:

1. Daily Fights---efforts to address instructional concerns were difficult, if not impossible, if the school was unable to focus on academics due to the fear of violence. The fights began with the start of the 2017-18 school year and continued through the Fall as noted in the section on safety and security including during the time starting in late October when the Superintendent at the time began spending most of his time based in the High School. In late January 2018 the Interim High School Principal who had begun work just before the start of the 2017-18 school year was injured in the process of breaking up a fight. This incident prompted the Commissioner to seek the involvement of the New York State Police, the Nassau County Police and the Village of Hempstead Police. Working with the Acting/Interim Superintendent and law enforcement officials, the Commissioner was able to arrange for greater police presence. What really turned the situation around, however, was the return of the principal who had been in the position the prior year.
2. Weak Leadership—the Interim High School Principal who began at the start of the 2017-18 school had no prior experience as a high school principal in any high school much less one as large, complex and challenging as Hempstead. (Despite the tight controls exercised by NYSED over schools in receivership, one power neither NYSED nor t engas.YSNe (r)-2.8 ()10.6 (e02 Tc -0.076 -1.272(h)2.

passing rate for Regents Chemistry increased from 54% in 2018 to 80% in 2019. For Earth Science it increased from 21% to 23%. For Living Environment, the passing rate increased from 35% to 63%.

As noted in the Year Two Third Quarter report the numbers of AP courses and students taking them has increased. For 2018-19 the numbers were:

AP Course	Enrollment	Test Taken
AP Biology	33	27
AP Chemistry	4	4
AP Environmental	10	9
AP US History	30	29
AP World History	57	54
AP Cal AB	14	13
AP Cal BC	1	1
AP Stats	5	5
AP Computer Science	29	27
AP Art	6	0
AP Lit [English]	41	

gaps in the formal education they received in their home countries. Hempstead should continue to try different strategies with different subgroups of students to try to match student needs with particular strategies. There are also districts elsewhere on Long Island faced with the similar challenges with whom Hempstead should consider even stronger alliances than have

Note that from 2015-16 to 2016-17 the percentage of levels 3 and 4 on Grades 3-5 increased and the percentage of level 1s decreased but overall performance was still well below adequate.

Sch.	LEVEL 3 & 4				LEVEL 1			
	2015-2016		2016-2017		2017-2018		2018-2019	
	EL	MAT	EL	MAT	EL	MAT	EL	MAT
	A	H	A	H	A	H	A	H

•

The situation on the Middle School level is more concerning. As with the High School, the ABGS Middle School had been deemed by NYSED as “Persistently Struggling” and placed in “receivership”. The data from the NYS ELA and Math assessments underscore this. In 2015-16 only 7% of students in ELA and 4% of students in Math scored at level 3 or 4. 61% scored at level 1 in ELA and 74% scored at level 1 in Math.

These percentages have improved significantly since 2015-16 and the Middle School has made its Demonstrable Indicators (DIs) as set by the State and the District for the Middle School each year. Both accomplishments are real and should be recognized. It should also be recognized, however, that performance in both math and ELA is still at an extremely low level.

,96 (D)-5.6 (il f)10.5 .6 (e)-3.1 (lx7..9 (t))TJ-0.00iJ-0.015 Td[(p81.9 (an)2.3a (l)1 (a.3 (d).3.2 54)5.3 (a)13.6-3.3 (r[(Th (t(p).

While District was late in implementing integrated co-teaching classes. While progress has been and continues to be made, State data from 2017-18 indicated 34% of Hempstead students with disabilities received instruction in a regular classroom for 80% of the day versus a State target of 59.5% and 44% of students with disabilities received instruction in a regular classroom for 40% of day or less versus the

prioritize student needs, an inability to attract and retain administrative talent, a lack of consistency, a lack of follow-through on agreed upon plans, and a lack of transparency.

Overall, my assessment and evaluation of the District's operations and practices reveals that **governance is the single most significant barrier to the District focusing its efforts and resources on the education of its students, which should be of paramount concern.** A review of recent legal proceedings before the Commissioner clearly illustrates the inordinate amount of the District's attention and resources that have

~~been expended on these issues. See, e.g., *State v. [redacted]*, 2017 WL 610461 (N.J. App. Div. 3, 2017) (No. 13-2366) (No. 13-2366).~~

Both successor firms that had previously worked for the District charge notably high fees. Reverting to these firms' services during the school year on short notice with pending cases demonstrates questionable priorities and judgement.

Additionally, shortly after hiring the new superintendent to begin in June 2017, the same Board majority hired four "master teachers," approved a consulting contract of just under half a million dollars, and employed a deputy superintendent. In total, these additions represent annual expenditures of roughly \$1.5 million that were not in the budget approved by the taxpayers in May 2017.

Questions have been raised about the manner of these new appointments given the apparently close connections between the new superintendent, the individuals selected as master teachers, the organization employed for consulting, and the deputy superintendent. The master teachers do not have job descriptions, their role is unclear to other school staff and parents, and they are not part of any bargaining unit.

the students in Hempstead are better off today than they were a couple of years ago. It is fair to recognize that this progress happened while the Board was in office.

- The Board completed the forensic audit and directed general counsel for the District to turn over the entire report to I

Commissioner's urging and the fact that the Commissioner had appointed a D

- The lease for additional administrative space at 100 Main Street is still hanging over the District as it has for many months. This is administrative space that the District does not need and has no budget for.

When the Commissioner first met with me regarding Hempstead she made it clear that the goal was significant and permanent change for the better for students. Given the limitations of the law no consequences for Hempstead were indicated if Hempstead did not take the steps it needed to but I believe that Hempstead has demonstrated that if it is given half a chance that significant progress with students can be made. Giving the District half a chance, however, requires that all adults—on and off the Board---contending for power put aside focusing on adult issues and come together to do what is necessary to improve the quality of education for students.