



# HOLMDEL TOWNSHIP SCHOOLS

## **SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT TO THE BOARD OF EDUCATION SEPTEMBER 25, 2019**

Good evening, everyone!

Well, we did it! After an incredibly hectic summer, we managed to have a very successful opening at each of our schools - from new parking lots and renovated learning spaces to our new full-day kindergarten program, new courses, new schedules, new teachers and other staff members and new Assistant Principals and administrators, this back to school season has been one for the record books! Congratulations and thanks to everyone who contributed to getting the year off to a great start. It was an amazing team effort, but I do want to make special mention of four men - Tom Paul, Ron Erickson, Todd Dandorph and Mike Norton- our Head Custodians - and their staff members - who worked a great deal of magic in the final hours leading up to September 4th! Thank you all!

In the midst of this hectic summer I had the chance to meet with a special Holmdel young person and former student - Sanya Jain, who this year is a senior at Biotechnology High School. Like most Holmdel students, Sanya is passionate about many things, and Mental Health is one of them. She is a strong advocate for having schools focus more of their efforts on Mental Health. Our Board members will recall some data from our recent Senior Exit Survey that speaks to this as well, especially responses to the question, "Think about any experiences you had in our school district that may have interfered with your being as successful as you wanted to be. If you could change anything about your experiences, what would you change?" We heard a lot of responses that spoke to stress and anxiety.

After teaching me a great deal about the importance of Mental Health for students, Sanya asked that in return I draw everyone's attention to an important date on the calendar - October 10th.

According to the World Health Organization, close to 800,000 people die due to suicide every year, which is one person every 40 seconds. World Mental Health Day is recognized each year on October 10th and the theme this year builds off that 40 second stat and encourages all of us to engage in "40 seconds of action" on October 10th.

Everyone can take part in whichever way makes most sense. Your activity may be private, for example, initiating a conversation with someone you are worried about or sharing a message of hope with someone who is struggling; or it may be public, for example posting a video message for local or national authorities about action you would like them to take on this issue.

As you know we are taking action here in the district as we recently expanded our prevention efforts by partnering with Rutgers University Behavioral Healthcare to bring a full-time clinician into our district and are implementing the LifeLines program. "Lifelines" is a comprehensive, schoolwide suicide prevention program for middle and high schools. The goal of the overall *Lifelines* program is "to promote a caring, competent school community in which help-seeking is encouraged and modeled and suicidal behavior is recognized as an issue that cannot be kept secret." All Health teachers, Counselors, Administrators and others have received training relevant to this program, with Counselors and Health teachers receiving training on curriculum implementation, which include evidence-based lessons in grades 7 and 9 with possible expansion to grade 10 with a new series of lessons developed by the creators.

I invite everyone to visit the website of the [World Health Organization](#) to learn how you can take 40 seconds of action on October 10th and I thank Sanya for sharing your passion with me and through me with all of us.

On the agenda tonight is a motion to approve the submission of the annual HIB self-assessment. The self assessment is used as a tool to document evidence to the state that we are implementing the various components of the law. It is not an assessment of the “state of HIB in the district” nor the quantity of cases investigated or quality of those investigations. It is a compliance report, and if you read the School Culture committee notes that Mrs. Collins provided this summer and her in-depth unpacking of the law and other research that we are grateful to her for sharing, it is important (as she has shared) that we begin to distinguish between HIB compliance and evidence based anti-bullying practices. Mrs. Collins has offered and I think we all agree that we need to be careful about not allowing the HIB law to be the sole driver of bullying prevention in our District. I am thankful that this committee continues to push us forward on this.

So, with compliance as the frame, the Self-Assessment requires each School Safety Team to rate its school on each of the 26 components that make up the following core elements:

- HIB Programs, Approaches or Other Initiatives (as were already reported to the board in the semi-annual Student Safety Data Report)
- Training on the BOE-approved HIB Policy and Procedures
- Other Staff Instruction and Training Programs
- Curriculum and Instruction on HIB and Related Information and Skills
- HIB Personnel
- School-Level HIB Incident Reporting Procedures
- HIB Investigation Procedures
- HIB Reporting

Not only are these components part of this self-assessment, but they are also part of the QSAC review process that we recently completed and achieved 100% compliance.

As you can see below, our scores this year are similar to previous years.

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Village	75	76	78	77	78
Indian Hill	75	76	77	77	77
W.R. Satz	75	76	77	77	77
High School	74	76	77	77	77
District	75	76	77	77	77

The area in which we missed the mark is in training in 3 of our 4 schools. All staff members are required to complete at least 2 hours of HIB prevention training in a 5 year period. Our records did not allow us to substantiate taking all points here, but last year, we started another "cycle" for staff members trained in the most recent 5 year cycle and we will pick up the remainder of those needing to be trained by January.

What happens after tonite, it that the assessment is submitted to the DOE and then the DOE verifies the grades of all public and charter schools, indicating how well each school and district follows the guidelines of implementing the components of the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act (ABR). Our most recent receipt of verified grades from the DOE (2017-2018) were received in June and posted to the [district website](#) as the law requires.

Also on the agenda this evening is the first reading of our 2019-2020 district goals. These include the following focus areas:

- Creating a common understanding of the skills, habits, and mindsets of social and emotional learning and developing a shared, systemic approach to integrating these into school and classroom practices through the adoption of evidenced-based character education and anti-bullying program.
- Reviewing district homework practices and policy, and through a study of current research, define best practices for the use of homework and revise policy as applicable.
- Expanding the collection of student growth data and the application of that data to increasing student achievement across content areas; and
- Continuing to drive the successful implementation of the Holmdel 2020 Initiative by completing 2019-2020 projects in a timely and cost-efficient manner.

These focal points have led us to articulate a set of related SMART goals that are already informing school goals, professional development plans, student growth objectives and professional development initiatives as we are wasting no time digging into these areas of focus and the specific SMART goals associated with them. I look forward to reporting on our progress as the year moves along

Speaking of the year moving along, while it is still young, we already have some congratulations to report:

Congratulations to the members of the Class of 2019 - 96% of whom are pursuing post-secondary education at one of 99 different institutions across the country and 4% of whom are either currently serving in the military or who have entered the workforce. As a comprehensive public high school, it is rewarding to see the

diversity of schools that our students have chosen to attend. We will be publishing this [list](#) on our website in the next few days.

Congratulations to our National Merit Scholar Semi-Finalists: Emily Levonas, Hannah Lin, Daniel Yuan, and Claudia Zhang. These students are part of an amazing national group of students that represents less than 1 percent of all high-school seniors in the U.S.

Congratulations to Indian Hill 5th grader Aiden Rukin, Christine Cho, and Annabella Urso for their winning short stories which will be published in the book, *Crazy Creatures 2019 - New Jersey* coming out in November, 2019.

Congratulations and thanks goes also to their Literacy teacher, Stephanie Gish.

Some other highlights from across the district these first few weeks include:

- The grand opening of our new HFEE-funded playground was a huge highlight for not only our kindergarteners who witnessed the ribbon cutting, but for all students who have enjoyed this new and wonderful space!
- The participation of Village and Indian Hill in International Dot Day was truly memorable. The celebration was inspired by the book The Dot by Peter H Reynolds. The Dot is a story about a teacher who believes in a student and helps make her feel confident enough to "make her mark." Led by Counselors and teachers, both schools held special events to celebrate the day and to explore ways they will make their mark this year!
- The launch of Helping Hornets at Indian Hill has everyone excited! Whenever a staff member witnesses a student helping someone, they give that student a Helping Hornet ticket. I wish I had had a ticket for the dad I witnessed telling his daughter to "help someone out today" as he dropped her off at school on one of the first mornings. At the end of each month, 10 students with tickets are randomly selected to attend a special lunch celebration.

- The Helping Hornets at HHS are also getting off to a great start as evidenced by some of our Peer Leaders, who, along with Mr. Brown, Mrs.. Riggi, Mr. Schillaci and our counseling staff held a “Helping Hornets Hangout” with students who are new to the district during lunch on Friday. This “HELLO HORNETS” luncheon included a Character Education team-building activity as peers got to know their new friends.
- A Social Media highlight of the year was the Class of 2020’s participation in the NJDOE “School Spirit” Competition. Their “We Believe” video showcased the positive school culture being embraced among HHS students and staff this year.

Finally, as this year gets rolling, we have to thank our Parent Groups for their incredible support:

- Special thanks to our PSA members for organizing Village’s welcome back teacher’s luncheon for staff on September 6<sup>th</sup> and PSA for their successful coordination of their Fall Festival on Friday, September 20<sup>th</sup>. Students, parents and community members were welcomed back to a new school year with games, food and fun provided by the hard working members of the Village School PSA!
- Thank you to the Indian Hill PLG for all of their help with the start of the 2019-2020 school year. All participating students had their supply boxes ready for them on the first day of school to help start the year off on the right foot. Thank you in advance for what I am sure is going to be a fantastic luncheon tomorrow.
- Thank you to the Satz PSG for hosting its annual “Welcome Back” bagel breakfasts this past Monday and Tuesday - the bagels were tasty and the kids really enjoyed them Meanwhile, the staff is really looking forward to the annual Welcome Back “Cookie Event” for the teachers in early October!
- Thank you to the Holmdel HS PTSO for hosting a delicious Welcome Back Tea for the HHS staff!

That's it for now, but I do want to wish all those celebrating Rosh Hashanah in the coming days, a sweet new year!

Robert McGarry, Ed.D.  
Superintendent of Schools