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November 13, 2020

Mr. Lamont Johnson, President  
Hempstead Board of Education  
185 Peninsula Boulevard  
Hempstead, NY 11550

Dear President Johnson and Trustees of the Board of Education:

Pursuant to Chapter 19 of the Laws of 2020, I am providing the Board of Education with my drafts of the academic and fiscal improvement plans for the Hempstead Union Free School District.

The document consists of two parts: a plan that focuses on the variables in the district that directly or indirectly impact the efficacy of our educational programs and services and a plan that considers the variables that impact the overall fiscal operation and procedures of the district. In each report there are a number of observations and recommendations for improvement.

The narrative in both reports consists of findings and recommendations that have been developed since July 1, 2020 when I first came to the Hempstead School District. In some cases these findings and recommendations need to be considered preliminary but in all cases, at a minimum, provide a starting point to work with the Board of Education and the district staff to improve, modify and in some cases replace programs, service models and procedures with the overall goal of improving both the academic outcomes of our students and the efficiency and effectiveness of the fiscal and business operations.

Both plans look beyond a single school or fiscal year. For the educational plans this essentially means that change over time will be measured annually and cumulatively. Year one can be looked at as a baseline year in many areas of recommended change since there is little information available on the last school year's student performance. For the fiscal plan, year one will involve balancing the next year's budget and developing some of the long-term plans that involve a fiscal plan. In the out years the Board and I will have to develop balanced budgets.

As you know a public hearing to discuss both plans, is scheduled for Monday, November 30<sup>th</sup> at 5pm via Zoom. Between now and the hearing the Board members need to review the draft plans and if the Board disagrees with sections of either plan they should commit that disagreement to writing on a form provided by the State Education Department which I have attached for your information and use. Both the

sections on which we agree and those on which we disagree will be discussed at the public hearing on November 30<sup>th</sup>.

Unless I hear otherwise from the Board of Education, I will have the Interim Superintendent translate the documents into Spanish and have by the middle of next week both versions available on the District website. Written disagreements with the plans by the Board of Education will also be placed on the District website.

I am hopeful that the Board and I can come to an agreement on the plan by the end of the public hearing. If because disagreements continue or because public input at the hearing warrants additional discussion, I will continue to work with the Board on coming to an agreement. If the disagreements persist, the plans and the disagreements as summarized on the attached form will be submitted to the Commissioner of Education who will in turn decide what should or should not be included in the plans.

If all goes as planned there should be Commissioner approved plans on or about January 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

I will be prepared to discuss either or both plans with the Board at its meeting on November 19.

Respectfully Submitted

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "William H. Johnson".

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William H. Johnson, EdD



## **ACADEMIC REPORT**

**Monitor's Academic Plan  
For the Hempstead Union Free School District**

The Hempstead Union Free School District (HUFSD or "the District") is located in the center of Nassau County. It is by several important metrics the poorest district in the county. The percent of students who are free and/or reduced-price lunch eligible is consistently above 70%. The District's combined wealth ratio, an index that compares a district's per pupil income and property wealth to the State averages, is .29. A District that had average per pupil income and property wealth equivalent to the State average would be 1.00. The average value for Nassau County districts is 1.441. The District serves approximately 9,000 students, 2,500 of whom currently attend charter schools. Approximately 6,500 students are enrolled in one of the District's seven elementary schools or in the Alverta B. Gray Schultz Middle School ("the Middle School") or Hempstead High School ("the High School"). The District enrolls almost exclusively students of color. The student population consists of 30% Black and 70% Latino students.

State Education Department statistics demonstrate that students in the District have consistently underperformed students in other districts, with only small percentages of District elementary and Middle School students achieving proficiency on State assessments in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics. In the 2018-19 school year, 26% of students in grades 3-8 were proficient in ELA and 26% were also proficient in math compared to a Statewide rate of 45% in ELA and 47% in math.

Over the last decade, there have been significant problems with inconsistent leadership in key administrative positions and constant turnover on the Board of Education ("the Board"). The turnover in keyboard and administrative positions has seriously undermined the ability of the District to maintain stability or consistency in the District's efforts to install new and better ways to provide and support instruction at every level of schooling.

During this same period, there has been an erosion of fiscal resources available to support meaningful change in the instructional program. There has been during this time a significant growth in the number of students who attend charter schools. Tuition payments to charter schools now accounts for more than twenty percent of District expenditures.

For the 2017-2018 and the 2018-2019 school years, the Commissioner of Education assigned to the HUFSD a Distinguished Educator, Dr. Jack Bierwirth. Although very different than the work of the Monitor, Dr. Bierwirth began a renewal process with the District that continues today. Addressing many of the very same concerns that created the need for the Distinguished Educator continues today as work for the Monitor. Dr. Bierwirth in his reports carefully distinguished between the progress that the District has been making and the fact that the District is not yet successful in terms of student outcomes. The Monitor in his plans will continue to underscore that distinction.

**Monitor Appointment**

The appointment of the Monitor was made possible by the passage of Chapter 19 of the laws of 2020. The Monitor is appointed by the Commissioner of Education and has the following responsibilities:

- Provide oversight, guidance and technical assistance related to the fiscal and educational policies, practices, programs and decisions of the District, Board of Education and Superintendent.
- Serve as an ex-officio member of the Board of Education and as such attend all meetings of the Board.
- In conjunction with the Board develop a proposed financial plan for the District.
- In conjunction with the Board develop a proposed academic improvement plan.
- Starting with the proposed budget for the 2021-2022 school year, annually review the District's budget to ensure that it is balanced and, to the greatest extent possible, consistent with the academic improvement plan and financial plan.
- Provide semi-annual reports to the Commissioner, the Regents, the Governor, the temporary President of the Senate and the Speaker of the Assembly.
- Work with the District's shared decision-making committee. And
- Assist in resolving disputes and conflicts between the Board and the Superintendent and among members of the Board.

### Process

The process used in reviewing the condition of the Hempstead schools has been twofold. One is to review existing data contained internally, regionally in the data warehouse or on the State website. The second is to interview and meet with individuals or groups who either work for the District or have a connection to the schools.

The data available on the District ends with the 2018-2019 school year and, therefore, for the most part does not reflect the performance of students during the last academic year, which was impacted significantly by the move to remote learning in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The most recent information is the District and school report cards for the 2018-2019 school year.

All principals and those in central leadership positions were interviewed. Meetings were also held with outside groups or members of their leadership team that were concerned with the overall performance of the school system. These included the clergy council, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), New York Community for Change (NYCC) and the Parent Teacher Association (PTA). Meetings were also held with Federal, State and regional elected leaders.

### General Findings

The overall impression of the external stakeholders and elected officials is that the District is in a state of continuous decline and failure. There is also the belief that there is a good deal of nepotism and corruption at the highest levels of the District, including the central office and the Board of Education. Every group and individual with whom the Monitor met wanted to work to reverse both this perception and the reality. The groups and the individuals are committed to Hempstead and want very much for the schools to become something to which they can point with great pride.

Internal meetings and interviews reveal a District in a state of reflective change and improvement. There is a recognition that the past decade has cast the District in the worst of lights, and the District has been consistently underperforming in terms of the education provided to students. Those

interviewed were often concerned with the consistent inconsistency of the Board of Education. There is a belief and hope that this is about to change. Those interviewed are hopeful that with the recent change in the law and the appointment of a monitor, the District can now count on stability in leadership and consistency in programming for the children of the district.

### General Findings and Recommendations

This section of the plan provides summarizes the Monitor's major findings and lists some recommendations directed at improving the operation of the district and the performance of students.

#### Findings:

1. There are approximately 9,000 public school students in Hempstead. Just under 6,500 attend the District's public schools and just under 2,500 attend a charter school. This represents a drop in enrollment in one year of about 500 students in the public schools. Charter school enrollment and the cost to the District has risen significantly in the last three years. The cost in this year's budget is \$49 million. The State share of the cost is \$11 million. The difference falls on the local district and has had a serious impact on resources available to students in the public schools.
2. The four-year Regents Diploma graduation rate for many years was below 50% and in one year, 2017, dipped below 40%. For the past two years it has risen steadily and for the 2019-2020 school year it is over 70%. These most recent numbers need to be audited and verified by the State.
3. The elementary schools and the Middle School have a significantly large number of students below proficiency in both ELA and math across all grades. For some schools in some grades the percentage of students achieving proficiency is in the single digits.
4. In order to serve English as a New Language (ENL) students, the District relies heavily on a bilingual class model. Building and program administrators are concerned that the children in these classes are not acquiring literacy skills at a rate that would allow them to keep pace with students in monolingual classes.
5. There are a larger than expected number of special education students in out of district placements. In this school year, more than 300 special education children are in BOCES and private programs outside the school district.
6. When school closing occurred due to the COVID-19 pandemic in the spring of last school year, the District did not have enough devices to support remote learning for all students. The new school year began with a hybrid model and not enough devices for every student. A device for every student is planned to be available before the end of the first quarter.
7. There are a good number of supplemental programs for students in every school and at every grade level supported by State and federal grants. Two of the programs are My Brother's Keeper and Empire I and II. Both are designed to improve student performance, and both need to be monitored for efficacy over time.
8. The Board of Education is involved in personnel decisions in a manner that creates problems for the operation of the District. For example, the Business Office had a vacancy for which there was an internal candidate that the Board rejected. The Business Office then found an outside candidate the next month who was also rejected for unknown reasons. The Business Office then had to reopen the search and find a third candidate

who was finally accepted by the Board. The position was vacant for more than four months and could have been filled earlier had there been a clear understanding of what might be acceptable to the Board.

9. In recent years there was significantly high turnover in key building and central office leadership positions.
10. Few students are transported to school at any level. This has been mentioned repeatedly by administrative staff and outside groups as a reason why there are attendance problems in the District.
11. All elementary schools and the Middle School have applied to become International Baccalaureate schools. All are hopeful that they will be certified this or next school year.
12. A key element in the increased graduation rate has been the attention paid to the master schedule and ensuring that students at each grade level in the high school have the courses and the credits needed to move to the next grade level or to graduate with their cohort.

#### Recommendations:

##### District:

1. The exodus of students to charter schools is creating a serious resource problem for the District and needs immediate legislative attention.
2. Although charter school student performance is public information, it should be part of a public discussion, including how the performance of disaggregated student groups in the charter schools compares to those in the District.
3. A focus at the High School should continue to be on enrolling all students in a schedule with enough classes and credits to move him/her to the next grade level or to have them graduate with their cohort.
4. The High School should continue to prepare all students for lifelong learning by establishing goals and measures of progress in terms of the percent of students earning a Regents Diploma with advanced designation and the percentage of students enrolling and being tested in Advanced Placement classes.
5. At the Middle School, both behavioral and academic expectations for all students should be consistent with those at the High School.
6. In preparing for the 2021-2022 school year, the District needs to formulate a plan that provides all sixth-grade students with a similar educational experience. This may include all sixth-grade students remaining at their respective elementary schools, all coming to the Middle School or all going to a separate sixth grade center. Having some at the elementary and some at the Middle School is not conducive to improving student outcomes.
7. Although there is a curriculum for each grade level and general agreement across the District on the use of programs connected to that curriculum and the standards at each elementary grade level, the use of data to inform instruction in the classroom needs to be more effectively utilized.
8. A model for measuring the effectiveness of the bilingual classes needs to be developed.
9. The spectrum of services in special education needs to be reexamined to ensure that students are in the least restrictive environment.



10. A device to support remote learning should be in the hands of every student by the end of the first quarter.
11. Although the Board should be concerned about the quality of its staff, it should focus on the process of hiring and the system of evaluation that empowers the appropriate administrative staff to select and keep the best candidate and employee.
12. Finding a way to transport students to school should be a priority.
13. Maintaining stability in leadership positions should be a priority.
14. The District should continue the activities designed remove it from all lists connected to underperforming schools and lists connected to correcting services and service models for special populations.

### Governance and Leadership

The Board of Education consists of five members. There is little stability on the Board. Two of the members are new to the Board this year. All members express the desire to see the District improve. However, there are clear divisions on the Board that make it very difficult for it to operate as a cohesive whole. For example, the Board recently hired an attorney to investigate two of its members that could result in Board member discipline or removal. The Board also gets involved in personnel decisions in ways that result in an interruption of service or positions remaining vacant that need to be filled. Board members will be severely critical of some aspect of the District finances or operations when in fact it is the Board members who are responsible. There is a perception among some in the community that some candidates get elected to the Board, at least in part, to get their friends, families and supporters jobs in the District. Both the perception of and the reality in the District must be that Board members act solely in the interest of ensuring that students get the best possible education. However, despite these shortcomings, there is still hope that during this year the District will join in working with the Monitor to put in place policies, procedures, and systems that will move this district forward.

The leadership teams at the District and the school level have corrected many of the most serious financial and programmatic problems identified by earlier audits and reports by the Distinguished Educator. There is stable and credible leadership in the Superintendency, even if on an interim basis, and in the High School and Middle School principalships. With this team in place, the graduation rate has improved significantly, more students are enrolled in credit bearing courses, and grants and State reports are completed correctly and on time. It is important to note that all members of the central leadership team work well with one another and work well with and take guidance willingly from the interim Superintendent.

#### Recommendations:

1. It is important that the Board work to focus on policy and procedures that enhance the operation of the District and enable it to utilize all its available resources to improve the overall performance of the District. During the upcoming budget development cycle, the Board and District will seek to secure a contract with either a BOCES service or the New York School Boards Association to review and bring up to date all Board policies and regulations.

2. The Board members have said that they want a nationwide search to find a new Superintendent of Schools. This is an achievable goal and one on which work should commence as soon as possible. By July 1, 2021 there should be a permanent Superintendent of Schools.

3. It is also important that the Board should have an objective procedure for the hiring of all staff. If the procedures are followed and the result is a recommendation from the superintendent, the Board should approve the recommendation.

4. Stability is one of the correlates of successful districts. It is important that the current leadership team be given the chance it needs to bring about the changes necessary to improve every aspect of the District's operations, services, and provision of instruction. If there are to be leadership changes, they should be done systematically and with great respect for community input and work already completed. Any leadership changes should await the commencement of service of a Superintendent on July 1, 2021.

### Teaching and Learning

At the heart of every successful school and district is effective instruction. The overarching problem in the District is the mismatch between what appears to be good instruction and the continuing number of students who do not achieve proficiency in either ELA or math. At both the elementary and middle school levels the percent of students scoring proficient in many grades is in the single digits in both ELA and math.

#### Elementary

At every grade level, there is in place a curriculum. There is also in common use at the elementary level a variety of programs connected to the New York standards in ELA and in math. That is not the problem. The problem appears to be in the fidelity of implementation of these instructional programs. Consistency across the six buildings that serve the 1<sup>st</sup> through 5<sup>th</sup> and some of the sixth grade is uneven.

In reviewing data for both ELA and math from the most recent New York State test results and looking at them as if they applied to the current enrollment in the elementary grades, the findings still suggest that the fewer than 10% of students are proficient in ELA and fewer than 10 percent in math..

Two years ago, the District began the process of having each elementary school become an International Baccalaureate school. The registration process is multiyear and requires the staff of each building to go through a rigorous self-examination and commit to a course of action that would require the staff to participate in a variety of activities and trainings designed to result in higher student performance. At least two of the schools will likely this academic year complete the registration process and become IB schools

During this pandemic, the District has decided on a hybrid model for all elementary schools. All elementary students attend schools two full days in each week and learn remotely for

three. This model relies heavily on the use of technology. The District intends to have a device available to every student by the end of the first quarter.

During this pandemic, no State data for the prior year is available for determining performance levels of students in ELA or math. Teachers have commenced the new school year with a limited amount of information about the entry level for each of their students.

There are several things the District can do to improve performance during this and subsequent school years. It is recommended that:

1. The District continue its commitment to having each school become an IB school by the end of next year;
2. Staff development efforts focus on the uniform implementation of the many programs used to meet the standards;
3. Iready tests in reading and math be administered the first and last quarter of this school year to provide a means for measuring growth during the year;
4. The District carefully review the data for sixth grade students, some of whom are in the elementary schools and some of whom are in the Middle School to determine if there are differences in the performance of students related to the grade configuration of the school the student attends. The District should then use the data to consider an appropriate configuration for the sixth grade.
5. To ensure consistency of instruction during the pandemic, teachers and students should be routinely taught how to effectively use each device and all the software used to support instruction.

### Middle School

The Middle School is a Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) School. Middle School students continue to struggle academically, with fewer than 10% achieving proficiency on the last administration of the New York State tests in the 2018-2019 school year.

The school has gone through a series of changes in leadership. The current principal, who is beginning his second year in the job, is being mentored and directed by the High School principal.

Shortly after the middle school Principal assumed his position, the pandemic caused the schools to go to fully remote instruction in spring 2020 and hybrid instruction in fall 2020. Although devices were available to only a small percentage of students in the spring, the District expects to have a device available for every student by the end of the first quarter.

The curricula at the Middle School is aligned with the New York State standards. The school in the past year has focused on increasing opportunities for students in eighth grade to acquire high school credit. All students have been enrolled in high school courses in Algebra, U S History and either Earth Science or Living Environment. The goal of the Middle School has become to prepare all students for the High School and, where possible, provide them classes that earn high school credit.

The Middle School, like the elementary schools, has embarked on the process of becoming an IB school. The school is in the last phases of registration and is planning to complete the process during this school year.

There are several afterschool resources available to Middle School students that are directly and indirectly connected to the curriculum offered during the regular school day. These are funded by State and federal grants and involve opportunities for students to remain after school to receive instructional support connected to their daily coursework. My Brother's Keeper and Empire I both provide a variety of options for students that include academics; Social Emotional Learning (SEL); Science Technology Engineering Arts, and Music (STEAM); sports; and co-curricular activities.

The Middle School is already implementing a School Comprehensive Education Plan (SCEP). The many recommendations being addressed in that plan will not be supplanted by those of this report. However, two themes that permeate the District Comprehensive Improvement Plan, namely assessment and staff development to improve student engagement, will also be addressed in this plan.

During this and subsequent school years, the following recommendations should be viewed as companions to the recommendations made by the Distinguished Educator and contained in the SCEP.

1. The school should complete this school year the process to become a registered IB school.
2. The performance of students needs to improve significantly. The Iready tests in reading and math should be offered in the first quarter of this school year to gather baseline data on each student. All teachers should be conversant in the data to assist them in the language arts component of every subject.
3. Staff development needs to focus on student engagement and assessment. Teachers need to be able to generate and interpret student performance data that enables them to routinely modify and improve instruction online and in the classroom.
4. A computing device will shortly be in the hands of every student. Students and teachers need to be trained to effectively use all software designed to provide and support the instructional program.
5. Although during this era of remote and hybrid learning it is difficult to accurately measure student attendance, attendance needs to be 90% or above on every day of the school year.
6. As mentioned earlier, the sixth-grade configuration problem needs to be resolved.

### Hempstead High School

The High School enrolls between 1,800 and 1,900 students during the school year. For many years, the four-year graduation rate languished below 50 percent. It was not unusual for students to have only a partial schedule with not enough courses or credits to move them to the next grade level. Low attendance and poor behavior were serious impediments to effective instruction for all students. Except for some special education students, all students walk to school.

Leadership in the school was until recently consistently in a state of flux. The current principal, who is now on his second assignment to that position, has changed significantly the High School program.

Currently, the school is on a semester rather than yearly block schedule. Courses begin and end within a semester.

Within the past year, the high school graduation rate was above 70%. Although the Regents graduation rate has increased significantly, the percentage of students achieving a Regents diplomas with Advanced Designation continues in the single digits. Of those who graduate, approximately 35% went to four-year colleges, mostly local. The majority of students who graduate and continue their education go to Nassau Community college. Last year the District was awarded a Smart Scholars grant to work with York College in New York City. This is the first year of the grant. It is designed to have as many as 250 students take credit bearing courses. Fifty students will be participating this year.

The High School principal works closely with the Middle School leadership team to increase the numbers of students entering the High School with credits already completed.

During the first wave of the pandemic in the spring, about 65% of the students had a device provided by the District. The High School this fall is, like all other District schools, on a hybrid model. Students, therefore, are two days in school and three days in remote learning. The plan is to have a device for every student before the end of the first quarter.

The High School is a Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) School. The District and the High School staff have coordinated efforts to assist the High School to be removed from CSI status based on 2021-22 school year results during the 2022-2023 school year.

As with the Middle School, there are grant programs, such as My Brother's Keeper, that provide high school students with opportunities for academic support outside the regular school day. It remains somewhat unclear the degree to which these programs have contributed to the recent improvement in student results.

Although considerable progress has been made in the past two years, there is still work to be done to, in the words of the Distinguished Educator, "achieve success." It is therefore recommended that:

1. The Regents graduation rate needs to continue incremental growth even though achieving in the mid-seventies is a laudable change. Success in this category will a graduation rate for all students above 90%.

2. Student schedules that reflect a commitment to education beyond high school need to include courses leading to a Regents with Advanced Designation.

3. Enrollment in AP classes should continue to grow as should the options available to students. (Since the middle and elementary schools have opted to participate in IB, a study should be conducted to determine whether the High School should also pursue IB accreditation.)

4. 100% of high school students should have access to a school supplied device.

5. Study the success of students graduating and attending two- and four-year colleges. Back mapping from college completion to high school transcript will provide insight into operant high school variables connected to college success.

6. Monitor carefully the participation of students in all grant programs and study the connection to success on Regents and AP coursework.

## Special Education

The number of students classified as students with disabilities is high, as is the number who are placed in more restrictive environments. At this time, approximately 19% of the students in the District have an Individualized Education Program (IEP). The District has been cited for disproportionality in the identification of African American students as emotionally disturbed. The co-teaching model became a part of the range of service and program offerings in the 2018-2019 school year. There continues to be a very high number of students enrolled in out of district placements. For this year that number exceeds 300.

Although a problem in the past, the procedures used for referral and placement has come into compliance with the timelines and procedures mandated by the State. Within the African American school population, there is a disproportionately high number of students identified as emotionally disturbed.

Graduation rates for students with disabilities was very low in comparison to the graduation rate for general education students. In 2019, the four-year Regent's Diploma graduation rate for special education students was 17%. That has recently changed. The District for 2020 is reporting a Regent's Diploma graduation rate for special education students above 60%. These numbers are pending certification by the State.

Curriculum and instruction in self-contained special classes parallel that for general education classes. The New York State standards and the local curricula tied to those standards are the guides for instruction in self-contained classes. Most of the instructional programs used in regular classes are used within the self-contained classes. At the high school level, curricula in self-contained special classes is the Regents curriculum in all major subjects.

- To continue further down the path of improvement, it is recommended that the District:
1. Develop plans for the appropriate return of some of the students in out of district placements and where appropriate send fewer students out of district.
  2. Where appropriate place fewer students in more restrictive environments.
  3. Lower the proportion of African American students in special education programs for emotionally disturbed children.
  4. Ensure that referred children are appropriately evaluated and placed within the state mandated timeframe.

## English Language Learners

The process for enrolling and registering all students, including English Language Learners, currently meets or exceeds the guidelines from New York State. Levels of English proficiency are determined almost immediately when a student is registered in the District. There is a wide array of services available to students with limited or no English proficiency.

In general, students placed in the District bilingual program perform poorly on the New York State tests and do not score high enough on the NYSESLAT to move into less intense service models. Even though teachers report anecdotally higher levels of reading and literacy, students

continue to score low on State exams and remain for long periods of time, often many years, in bilingual programs.

Many of these students do not remain in the District. They are a part of a larger problem of student turnover. In any year in any grade in any school there can be according to the principals as much as a 20% turnover of students. This means that 20% of the students who were enrolled this year are not there next year but are replaced with another group of new students equal in size to those who left. This results in as much as a 50% turnover of students during the time that a cohort is moving through an elementary school and as much as 30 to 40 percent turnover in a grade at the secondary schools.

ELL students struggle at the middle and high school levels. Many continue in bilingual classes, but the Regents content classes present serious challenges to them and, therefore, graduation rates are low.

Although the administration adheres very closely to both the letter and the spirit of Commissioner's Regulations Part 154, the overall performance of ELL's needs to improve. It is therefore recommended that the District:

- 1.Examine carefully the efficacy of the bilingual program to determine reasons for the continued low performance of the ELL students on all State measures of RLA and math.
- 2.Provide staff development opportunities to bilingual education teachers on the effective use of all reading and math tools used in monolingual classes.

### Organizational Structure

The organizational structure of the central office has both traditional and non-traditional positions. There is currently an Interim Superintendent of Schools. The person holding that position had been the Assistant Superintendent for Instruction. That position has been left unfilled since her ascendency to the interim superintendent position. Currently, she is doing both jobs. The other positions that fall into the traditional category of central office staff are Deputy Superintendent for Human Resources, Assistant Superintendent for Business, and Assistant Superintendent for Special Education. Falling in the category of nontraditional positions are Assistant Superintendent for Technology and the Assistant Superintendent for Special Projects.

At the District level, a single full-time coordinator is responsible for oversight of services for English language learners. However, some positions that are typically found in districts of this size do not exist in Hempstead. Among these are Director of Physical Education, Health and interscholastic Activities and Director of Music.

Civil Service leadership positions at the District level include those related to Building and Grounds, Security, and Food Services. There is no person assigned full-time to transportation.

At the school level, the organizational structures are typical of those found in most school districts. In other words, there is a Principal and Assistant Principals assigned to elementary schools and in addition to those positions there are Deans at the secondary level.

Although each of the positions in the District office have assigned responsibilities that on paper do not overlap, there is not always a clear chain of command that is consistent with the work normally assigned to the position.

There has been an erosion of leadership positions in the District over the past few years due to serious budget problems. Two examples are illustrative. The position of Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction was never filled when the person encumbering the position was elevated to Interim Superintendent. In addition, there are no Directors or Coordinators of Music and Performing Arts or Physical Education and Interscholastic Athletics

The current District Office structure has not changed since the assignment of the Distinguished Educator to the District. During this time, despite some nontraditional ways of getting things done, the District has shown that it can improve. What is important to keep in mind is that the current configuration of administrators represents stability in the District and one to which the staff has now become accustomed.

Currently, neither the Interim Superintendent nor all but one of the assistants or deputy superintendents has a contract. A motion to have contracts developed has been on recent board agendas. Each time the issue of contracts has appeared on the agenda, the recommended action was tabled or not approved by the Board of Education.

Based on these observations, the Monitor recommends that:

1. The District needs a permanent Superintendent of Schools, not an interim. A search should be concluded by the end of this school year.
2. All members of the central office, including the Interim Superintendent, be given contracts that clearly state their terms and conditions of employment.
3. Although in the short term the current organizational configuration is working to bring about specific changes in the instructional program, the District needs to determine the degree to which the District would benefit from putting in place a more traditional organizational structure.

#### Accountability

Currently, both the Middle School and High School are in Receivership. By law, the interim Superintendent serves as the Receiver for these schools, and in that capacity can override decisions by the Board that are inconsistent with these schools' improvement plans. She has never exercised that authority.

There is a District Comprehensive Improvement Plan for the 2020-2021 school year. The plan focuses on five priorities, which overlap and are consistent with the recommendations of this Monitor. In fact, since the plan is already in place and approved by various stakeholders, including



the Monitor, the priorities should be viewed as an extension of this report. Achievement of the benchmarks in the Plan will take the District one step further in its efforts to improve student academic performance.

An important component of accountability is the observation and evaluation of all administrators, teachers and support staff involved in the delivery of instruction. Although teachers and principals are required to be observed and evaluated pursuant to the Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) requirements, it is not clear if the APPR process is resulting in changes in instruction in the classroom. As a result of the pandemic, much of the APPR process, including observations, was suspended last spring. With most students returning to school, regular observations should resume.

Recommendations for this section include:

1. The Receiver/Superintendent will work with the administration to ensure that the benchmarks contained in the District Comprehensive Achievement Plan are met.
2. Ensure all instructional staff are appropriately evaluated and the recommendations for improvement included in the evaluations be monitored for implementation.

#### Human Capital

The District has a Deputy Superintendent for Human Resources. It is his responsibility to manage the process for filling every position in the District with an appropriately certified or classified candidate. In that role, he checks the credentials of all candidates and organizes the recommendations that are presented to the Board for action. He also manages all staff development related onboarding new staff and the APPR system for the District for both teachers and principals.

When a member of the staff is accused of any infraction, the Deputy either conducts the investigation himself or manages the investigation with the District attorney. These investigations will generate a report, which is then shared with the superintendent and the Board.

The Deputy is involved also in contract negotiations. Negotiations are, however, conducted by the school district attorney. The District contract with the teachers expired in 2013. This is one reason cited by administrators for a higher than expected turnover of teachers in the district.

Recommendations for this section include:

1. When teachers are hired, it is advisable that an assistant superintendent or the superintendent be involved. This will help to ensure consistency in the characteristics of the professional teaching staff.
2. The District needs to make efforts to conclude negotiations with its teachers during this school year and begin the next school year with a settled contract.

## Family and Community Engagement

The schools have very small numbers of parents participating in their respective Parent Teacher Associations (PTA). In some buildings the PTA is virtually nonexistent. According to principals low participation is not necessarily an indication that parents are uninterested, but rather that because of childcare or work-related problems parents cannot get to meetings held at the schools.

Community and Clergy groups would like to be better informed and more involved in the schools where appropriate.

Recommendations for this section include:

1. Schools should conduct virtual online PTA meetings to which parents are invited. Using one or more technologies should increase attendance and participation in meetings.
2. Technology should be used to disseminate the story of the Hempstead schools. Correspondence and messaging should be routinely shared with parents and the community at large. The District has a public relations firm to whom this should be assigned.

## School Climate and Social Emotional Learning (SEL)

The District has policies in place to protect the rights of all students. The District has in recent years had numerous staff development opportunities for both the professional and support staff to sensitize them to the characteristics and needs of various subgroup and potentially marginalized students. SEL programs for students have been introduced at every level of schooling. However, despite these efforts there are still problems with student conduct. There were last year more than 100 student ("3214") disciplinary hearings. These are hearings that come before the Superintendent of schools because of the serious nature of the infraction by the student.

Attendance is also a problem. In the 2018-19 school 42.9 percent of middle school students and 52.5 percent of high school students were chronically absent (i.e., these students were absent for 10 percent or more of the days in which they were enrolled in these schools). At both the Middle School and the High School, there are attendance teachers. Participation in extracurricular activities is low and sporadic. Less than forty percent of the middle and high school population participate.

It is recommended in this section that:

1. More SEL programs need to be brought into the District at every level of schooling and models of evaluation connected to student behavior need to accompany implementation
2. Restorative programs need to be considered to help reduce the number of incidents, thus resulting in fewer suspension hearings. A thorough analysis of the circumstances connected to the reportable incidents should be conducted. Incidents themselves may be avoided by systemic or program changes.

3. Even though the District dedicates two full-time staff members to the problems associated with attendance at the secondary level and one to the elementary school, additional measures need to be considered to reduce these numbers. For example, a review should be conducted to determine the extent to which community groups can assist families in getting their children to school.

#### Operations: Facilities

It has been well documented that the facilities in the District need considerable upgrading or replacement. There was a five-year plan developed in 2016 that pointed out many of the deficiencies that should be addressed by the District. For a variety of reasons, only a small portion of that work has been completed. The most glaring problem in the District are the large number of portable classrooms still in use long after they should have been replaced by permanent space. A new PreK to 5<sup>th</sup> grade school is currently under construction and scheduled to open in September 2021. Capacity in that school will be approximately 800 children.

The maintenance of the grounds and the custodial work in many of the buildings remains a problem. In the last two years, the District has acknowledged the depth and breadth of the problem and has addressed it by bringing in an experienced retired director to provide the needed leadership and to mentor a permanent replacement.

Enrollment has fluctuated from year to year. In the last five years there have been years of significant increases, but last year there was a significant enrollment decline. The usual studies based on cohort survival ratios are not going to produce accurate numbers needed for any long-term capital plan.

It is recommended in this section that:

1. The custodians, cleaners and maintenance staff be routinely observed, evaluated, and held accountable for their assignments.
2. The Board and administration commence a discussion about the short- and long- term facilities needs of the District prior to the development of next year's budget and include in that discussion the use of the new school and the assignment of sixth grade students.
3. The District conduct an in-depth study of enrollment prior to the discussion about long-term capital plans.

#### Operations: Pupil Transportation

Except for a few special education students, all students walk to school. There is a state imposed two- and three-mile transportation limit that precludes all District students from eligibility for transportation. Every group concerned about the schools mentioned this as their top priority for change. The District could provide transportation at lesser distances, but those costs would not be eligible for aid from the State. Consequently, the District has never put before the voters a proposition to change the eligibility criteria.

It is therefore recommended in this section that:

1. The District work with its legislators on a home rule bill that would reduce the limits in the Hempstead school district from 2 and 3 miles to .5 and 1 mile. Expenses for transporting children beyond those limits would now be eligible for State aid.
2. Should the District be successful in implementing Recommendation 1 in this section, the District should put before the voters a proposition for providing transportation to eligible riders.

### Operations: Technology

All operations related to technology are the responsibility of a single department administered by an Assistant Superintendent of Schools. This means that all decisions about the selection and purchase of equipment and the selection and purchase of software goes through a single office. Installation and maintenance of all hardware and software is also done through this single office. The District security plan and system are also managed through this office. Internally, if there is a single area about which many staff members have concerns, it is technology and how it is run in the Hempstead schools.

Support staff who work at troubleshooting, imaging and installation of software are provided through BOCES and are employees of a private company and are not public employees.

There is still a considerable amount of money available to the District through the New York State Smart Bond Act. Although a computing device will soon be available for every student and a good portion of the Smart Bond money was used to purchase those devices, there are classroom instructional and security needs that remain unmet.

It is therefore recommended in this section that:

1. In the short-term, the current configuration should be retained. In the long-term, how technology is managed should be part of a larger plan to reorganize the District office and reassign responsibilities as a result.
2. The relationship between the District and BOCES should be examined carefully to maximize effectiveness, contain cost, and maximize State aid.
3. A plan for use of the remaining Smart Bond money should be in place for implementation in the 2021-2022 school year.

### Operations: Security

Security has two main components in the District. One is technology based and the other is staff based. There are cameras in and outside of every building, which are monitored at the front desk. In terms of staff, the District currently employs 41 security aids, 5 drivers and a coordinator of security for the District. Security is available 24-7.

It is recommended in this section that:

1. Some portion of the remaining Smart Bond money be used to increase the number of cameras and update the technology.
2. The security staff levels need a careful review to ensure that the District and especially the middle and high school are appropriately staffed.
3. Security staff need to be trained annually on the newest information related to the management of the school environment and their potential role in avoiding reportable incidents and participating in restorative practices.

#### Operations: Food Service

Students in all the buildings are provided both a breakfast and a lunch. During the pandemic the food service stayed in operation and provided any family who came to the District distribution sites a lunch and a breakfast for their children.

The food services are currently being studied and audited by the State to improve quality and service.

#### Recommendation

It is recommended that the District look carefully at incorporating the suggestions for modification in next year's budget.

#### Early childhood

The District has an early childhood program that is housed in a single building. Until this year, the program was housed in two locations. Due to a significant drop in enrollment, the entire program was moved to a single school. It is a half-day program with a typical day involving motor, music, art, organized play and language arts. During this academic year, students are on a hybrid model.

#### Recommendation

It is recommended that the District broaden its efforts to have more children in the community enroll their children. At this time, fewer than 50% of the District's first graders have attended the preschool program.

#### International Baccalaureate

The District has made a commitment to have the elementary schools and the Middle School join the IB program. The IB program is best known internationally for its rigorous college preparatory program of study at the high school level. Less well known are the primary and middle level programs. The District's decision to have its schools become members is a clear statement of the District's commitment to excellence

and the incorporation of higher order thinking and learning skills into the daily life of the classroom. Two elementary schools and the Middle School will be eligible this year to become fully registered IB schools.

It is again reiterated that the District must maintain its commitment to become a full-fledged member of the primary and middle level program and consider later the possible adoption of the IB at Hempstead High School.

## Conclusion and Next Steps

It is clear that the District took advantage of the time and the recommendations of the Distinguished Educator, Dr. Jack Bierwirth. Many of his recommendations have either in their entirety or in part been implemented by the District. (See Appendix.) Dr. Bierwirth indicated on many occasions that while he observed progress, this did not mean that success had been achieved. The role of the Monitor is to take a careful look at that progress and match it to what the District would look like as a successful district.

It has become very clear to the Monitor that the stability in leadership during the past few years has provided the entire District opportunities to reflect on best practice, review current practice and make very real attempts at moving the needle in the right direction. This has occurred despite continued instability on the Board of Education.

To ensure that the District implements the provisions of the Academic Plan with fidelity, by March 1, 2021 the District shall provide the Monitor with a response to each recommendation contained in the Monitor's plan. For each response, the District shall do one or more of the following:

- Provide documentation regarding how the recommendation is being implemented by the District, which may include reference to the District Comprehensive Education Plan, School Comprehensive Education Plan, Targeted Assistance Plan, School Receivership Plan or other existing District and/or school plan.
- Identify the actions that the District shall take to implement the recommendation, which shall include timelines and performance benchmarks, and which may be done through amendment of existing plans.
- Provide an explanation for why the District will not implement the recommendation.

The District's response shall be considered a part of the Monitor's plan in the same manner as the Monitor's original report.

The next steps are easier said than done. The community needs to know what has transpired to improve the performance of the District in recent years and then through its elected officials work to continue on the path to higher student performance and district improvement.

On a personal note I would like to thank all those who have given of their time to help in the construction of this plan. In particular, I would like to thank Dr. Jack Bierwirth for the work he did to set the stage for the development of this plan and for helping so many in the District begin the process of renewal. I also need to acknowledge and thank the Legislature and the Governor for creating the opportunities this legislation creates for the children of the Hempstead School District. I would also like to thank the Commissioner of Education and the team of professionals assigned to provide assistance in creating this plan. But most of all I would like to thank the members of the community and the staff who gave their time and ideas because of their commitment to the children of this district and their desire to bring about positive change. As I have said before, where there is a will, and there is a way, there will be a way.

## APPENDIX A: SOURCES



## **Appendix A: Sources**

### **Websites:**

NYSED.Gov  
Hempstead Schools.org

### **Organizations**

NAACP  
NYCC (New York Community Change)  
Hempstead Clergy Council  
Hempstead PTA  
Long Island Association of ELL Teachers  
Hempstead Hispanic Counseling Center

### **Hempstead School District Staff**

Interim Superintendent  
Assistant and Associate Superintendents  
All Principals  
Middle and Elementary Coordinators of the International Baccalaureate Program  
Coordinator of ELL Programs and Services  
Director and Assistant Director of Buildings and Grounds  
Supervisor of Security  
Consultant to the Business Office

### **Reports:**

State Aid Runs for 2019-2020 and 2020-2021  
External and Internal Audits for 2019-2020  
Hempstead School District budgets for 2019-2020 & 2020-2021  
Distinguished Educator interim and final reports

### **Political Representatives, Leaders and/or Staff**

Supervisor and Councilwoman, Town of Hempstead  
State Senator  
State Assemblywoman  
Congresswoman  
US Senator

## **APPENDIX B: Distinguished Educator Final Report**

## **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 quickly as possible. They were enormously helpful.

My deepest appreciation--- and greatest respect---however, is for the many wonderful and dedicated people I met in Hempstead. I met some of the finest educators I have worked with anywhere during my career. If Board, staff, parents and community could work together with the support of the State, there is no reason why Hempstead cannot become one of New York's great success stories.

One Board member has referred to the two-year Distinguished Educator initiative as a "failed experiment". In one very important respect---governance---it has been for the most part, at least to date. I have had and continue to have deep concerns about the governance of the District.

In all other respects, however, it has not been a "failed experiment", at least as measured by the progress made to date in areas critical to the education of students. I believe that what Hempstead has demonstrated over the past two years is that if given half a chance significant progress can be made because significant progress has been made. To those who are inclined to be skeptical, I would say do not underestimate this progress---the paint is real, the graduates are real, and the bills being paid are

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 years later, the combined June and August 2019 graduation rate was at 63% plus an additional 5-6% who received a High School Equivalency diploma (HSE). HSE recipients do not count as graduates for official purposes but a HSE diploma is a valuable credential that provides access to higher education and better employment. It is certainly better than dropping out. A 63% graduation rate, or even higher if one counts HSE recipients, is significant "progress" in comparison with the 40+/- % of two years ago but it is not "success" on an absolute basis by any means. To reach "success" requires a significantly higher graduation rate reaching or surpassing the Statewide rate of over 80%, more students graduating by June, not August, of their senior year and a higher percentage of students taking and passing more rigorous courses such as Advanced Placement (AP).

When I first met with Commissioner Elia regarding Hempstead, she made it clear that the goal was significant and permanent change for the better for Hempstead students. During my initial assessment at the end of 2017 I noted that Hempstead had not lacked for plans. In fact, there had been a great many plans over the previous decades. The real issue was not lack of plans but implementation—failure to implement at all, failure to implement fully or implementation followed relatively shortly thereafter by a major reversal of direction (what was coined by one staff member regarding the instructional area as "consistent inconsistency"). In light of this finding and the affirmative response of the District to the Commissioner in January 2018, the focus for the past 21 months has been on making real changes, changes which would benefit students---not adults---directly or indirectly, and on reporting on actual improvements. This report will maintain that focus.

In the initial assessment and recommendation report of December 2017 concerns and recommendations were grouped into ten areas. This report follows the same format as previous reports except that the section on governance is at the end.

## **BUDGET/FINANCE**

In my initial report I noted many serious concerns regarding Hempstead's budget, business practices, accounting and finances. As serious as these concerns were at the time of the initial report, I revised this assessment downward at the end of the first quarter and downward even further at the end of the

second quarter of the first year as I realized retrospectively that the situation was even worse than I had initially determined. Of specific concern:

- The 2017-18 budget was vague, poorly formatted and the amounts in many budget lines were not in alignment with actual projected expenditures.
- Normal encumbrance practices as per guidelines from the New York State Education Department (NYSED) were not being followed with few projected expenditures encumbered. Accordingly, the members of the Board and District staff had only a very general sense of where the District stood financially whether they realized that or not.
- The findings of a team from the Office of the State Comptroller (OSC) from five years earlier had not been addressed for the most part nor had the recommendations contained in the three previous years' reports by the District's three audit firms. There were also no plans in place to address the OSC or auditors' concerns even though many of the findings were extremely serious. One audit firm had, in fact, recommended the creation of a financial oversight board. (It should be noted that there had been no consequences for the District or the Hempstead Board of Education as a result of the failure to implement steps to address the serious issues that had been raised by the OSC and the District's auditors. This seems to raise very significant questions about the ultimate effectiveness of measures undertaken over a decade ago to deter malfeasance after the scandal in another Nassau County district. Those measures assume that there will be appropriate responses if red flags are raised but what if there are not?)
- The Board's audit committee was not functioning in accordance with OSC/NYSED regulations and the Board as a whole had not been fulfilling its audit responsibilities.
- In early 2018 the District faced a significant cash flow deficit—approximately \$10-12 million—that the business office did not acknowledge. This shortfall was being dealt with by delaying payment to Nassau BOCES to the point that Nassau BOCES might not have been able to pay funds due to all other districts in Nassau on a timely basis.
- A single individual held the accountant and treasurer functions, contrary to NYSED guidelines.
- Preparation of the 2018-19 budget was virtually non-existent as of January 2018.
- Unbudgeted positions and contracts had been added to the 2017-18 budget after July 1, 2017. What budget lines these expenses (which totaled roughly \$1.7 million) were to be coded to and how they were to be paid for were still open questions as of December 2017.
- Many bills were paid late, often very late. Late payments had prompted some vendors to suspend or stop working permanently with the District.
- Many requisitions were not processed in a timely fashion depriving students of the instructional materials they needed and staff of the materials and equipment they needed to do their jobs.
- A State community schools grant for over \$3 million for 2017-18 had not been submitted and was still unprepared as of December 2017. This was intended and could have been used for the benefit of students for the full 2017-18 school year.
- While this would not emerge fully until later, the business office had been incorrectly charging over \$2 million in general fund expenses to a state grant. These expenditures were eventually disallowed, requiring the District to re-state its 2016-17 final expenditure report. (The State allowed the District to spend the grant funds in a subsequent year so the funds were not ultimately lost.)
- The District had budgeted for the purchase of two buses in 2017-18 without a transportation plan or any approval from the community for modifying bus limits or from the State.

- The final expenditure reports submitted to the State for 2016-17 were late and incomplete.
- Turnover in leadership in the business office was a very significant issue. I was told that the District had had 19 business officials in the previous 20 years. This may have been an exaggeration as it may have been only 15-16 in the past 25 years. Either figure, however, underscores a level of discontinuity and disruption in business operations.

The situation today is quite different:

- The District has a solid, appropriately formatted budget for 2019-20 and is already working on the 2020-21 general fund budget.
- Projected expenses are being appropriately encumbered in accordance with best practices and NYSED guidelines. Encumbrances for the 2019-20 fiscal year were done shortly after July 1, 2019, as they should be.
- The community approved the last two budgets on the first vote.
- The general fund tax levy increase was held to 0% two years in a row.
- The District's financial rating was upgraded.
- A new, experienced Assistant Superintendent for Business has just been appointed (but eighteen months after the prior incumbent left).
- Most bills are being paid on time and a much higher percentage of purchase orders processed in a timely fashion.
- The recommendations of the OSC and the three audit firms have been implemented or are in the process of being implemented.
- During 2018-19 the Board constituted itself as an audit committee of the whole. It met with each of the audit firms twice and reviewed their recommendations in depth. The Board also asked for, received and discussed the status of each of the recommendations made by the OSC and the three audit firms in prior years.
- Cash flows have been normalized and the District has successfully floated TANs and RANs. Rates have been much closer to those received by other Nassau districts than in the recent past. This bodes well for the bonds Hempstead will have to float to pay for the construction of the new Rhodes Elementary School.
- The residences of students enrolled in charter schools are being verified to assure that only charter school students residing within the boundaries of the District are charged to Hempstead. Dozens of students who should have been charged to other school districts have been identified. Bills are reviewed monthly.
- The business office has worked closely with the Acting/Interim Superintendent, the head of facilities and the architectural/engineering firm for the District to work out appropriate financing for the Rhodes project, the Energy Performance Contract and various capital projects.

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 discipline, things that for decades have been inconsistent at best.

Most importantly, the Board needs to follow a more normal budget development and adoption process. To the Board's credit it did confront the challenge of significant increases in charter school tuition at the time it adopted the budget to be presented to the community in May 2019. However, some of the most significant discussions in 2019 for 2019-20 were held after the Board adopted a budget to be placed before the community in May and after the community had voted to approve the budget. Deep cuts were clearly necessary. The Board needed to come to full closure, not what later turned out to be only tentative closure, before the budget was placed before the community as the community needs the assurance that what was approved is what, barring unanticipated changes in circumstances or emergencies, will be implemented.

To build on the progress to date, a number of steps are strongly recommended:

- The Acting/Interim Superintendent should meet on a regular basis, probably every two weeks throughout the year, with key business office staff to ensure that progress is continuing and that any problems are identified early and resolved quickly.
- As part of this, the Acting/Interim Superintendent needs to fully monitor the timeliness of the requisition/purchasing and payment processes. While there has been progress, neither area is at a level that would be considered completely normal. Hempstead students deserve instructional materials, voted on by the community, on a consistently timely basis. Vendors should be paid promptly all of the time.
- The Board should take time at every Board meeting to receive and discuss regular updates on the District's finances and business operations. In light of the magnitude of the impact of increasing charter school tuition and transportation reimbursement, deep and continuous Board involvement in the District's finances is more important than ever.
- The budget development process with the Board and the public needs to begin earlier and go into much greater depth than in 2018 for the 2018-19 budget or 2019 for the 2019-20 budget. As will be discussed below, the District faces significant financial challenges over at least the next two fiscal years and hard decisions may have to be made. The Board and the community need to be able to weigh options and make informed decisions in a timely fashion.
- The Board should ensure that all five Board members are fully involved in audit responsibilities as required by regulation even if an audit committee is re-instituted.

Although the District's finances are solid currently and business operations have improved significantly the District faces very major financial challenges. The primary challenge is paying for the cost of tuition and, where required, transportation for Hempstead students attending charter schools. It is worth noting that this is not an issue of financial mismanagement or poor budgeting on the part of the District 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 have an even greater impact on Hempstead given the fact that Hempstead is in the midst of turning itself around. Thoughtful input on the part of the Board, community and staff will be difficult, if not impossible, without some early clarity on potential aid.

Strong charter schools and strong regular public schools competing with each other to provide better instructional programs, rather than competing over an inadequate pot of funds, would best serve the Hempstead community and its school age children. Even with potential reductions due to lower enrollment, Hempstead on its own cannot meet the needs of both regular public and charter schools year after year in a manner that provides a competitive education for all students regardless of the school they attend. Charter school transition aid provides some relief but it is only short-term and partial. It is not a solution. A conservative estimate of the yearly assistance needed is \$10-13 million. This cannot be overemphasized.

As will be discussed later more fully, it is my strong hope that cases of potential malpractice referred by the District to law enforcement—a step for which the District should be applauded not condemned—result in indictments if warranted. This would help underscore the importance of having and following appropriate policies and practices in any function dealing with money and the potentially serious consequences if they are not.

As this report was being written, one case referred by Hempstead to law enforcement resulted in an indictment and guilty plea. It is my hope that other cases that were referred to law enforcement will be resolved soon. Criminal behavior and corruption should be eliminated from the District and punished. At the same time those not guilty of such behavior deserve to be cleared of charges and the cloud hanging over the heads of Hempstead staff who have done nothing wrong removed.



## **SAFETY/SECURITY**

There were two primary concerns in the fall of 2017. The first and most immediate was the daily fights at the High School that began shortly after the start of the 2017-18 school year. The High School staff and the security staff assigned to the High School seemed incapable of addressing this situation. To the credit of the then Superintendent he began spending most of his time at the High School as of the end of October/beginning of November 2017. (The head of security was directed by the Superintendent to relocate to the High School for at least a portion of the day. He did not.) Unfortunately, the fights did not stop and the situation did not calm down significantly until early 2018 when the previous High School Principal was reinstated and the new Acting Superintendent, now Interim Superintendent, was appointed. It has remained calm since.

In January 2018, simultaneously with the reinstatement of the previous High School Principal, the Commissioner of Education, the Acting Superintendent, the NY State Police and the local Hempstead Police were able to step up police presence. Additionally, funding was secured for two school resource officers to support security department staff.

The second area of concern was training of security staff. Thanks to assistance from staff at NYSED the District was able to identify and employ an experienced school security expert who provided an analysis of staffing deployment and security staff training. As noted in early quarterly reports, it was difficult to get a comprehensive plan of implementation in response to the consultant's recommendations from the security department for many months despite the fact that most of the recommendations were straightforward and could be quickly implemented.

In conjunction with the Technology department, improved security cameras were installed throughout the District. The location and number of the new devices were determined with the assistance of the building administrators and the security consultant.

Since Fall 2018---over 12 months ago---the head of the Hempstead schools security department has been on a paid administrative leave of absence for a disciplinary matter involving the alleged purchase of vehicles without a purchase order and without bids. Although the disciplinary hearing was opened to the public, I will not discuss the case in detail here. The cost in salary, benefits and legal fees of a matter that would have been resolved in most districts in a few weeks or less has totaled hundreds of thousands of dollars with no end in sight at this point. As with other areas in the District with uncertain leadership, the uncertainty regarding the leadership of the security department has been a significant drag on the efficient and effective operation of the department and a distraction to continued efforts to move the department forward.

Although the case with the head of security has not been resolved the District recently hired a permanent, experienced Supervisor of Security.

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 District lacked a consistent and effective facilities operation for decades---regular maintenance was inconsistent, capital investment was minimal and there was no plan to provide for the replacement of the dozens of portable (modular) classrooms scattered throughout the District which have been in use for decades (well past their normal life expectancy). Facilities staff were stretched and undersupplied. Some contractors who had not been paid in a timely fashion (some repeatedly) were reluctant or unwilling to continue to do work for the District. Various reports, including a lengthy report by NYSED staff in 2004, had documented many of the issues with facilities in Hempstead but those reports had had no real or long-lasting effect. No Energy Performance Contract (EPC) had been undertaken in contrast with many other districts with fewer and lesser needs that had undertaken at least one EPC and perhaps more. The Rhodes Elementary School had been shut 17 years earlier and condemned a decade earlier. While plans had been discussed about replacing it, nothing had moved forward.

When the first cold snap hit in fall 2017, there were schools that had closed due to heating systems that failed to operate. During the course of the investigation to determine what had happened and why, it emerged that the District had apparently cancelled the regular preventive maintenance program for school building heating systems. Problems with heating and/or inadequate insulation also led to frozen pipes and flooded classrooms at the Prospect School.

No real plan to address facilities existed in October 2017. I was handed a large ring binder with photographs of facilities issues around the District at the time of my arrival but this certainly was not a plan of action to resolve long-standing problems. While there were plans as required by regulation on file with NYSED, there was no real plan to put them into action.

As recommended in the initial assessment report to the Commissioner, the District hired the New York State School Facilities Managers Association to conduct a full assessment of the District's facilities and facilities operations. This was instituted on an accelerated basis by the organization that quickly sent in a team of some of the most experienced facilities heads in the State. There was a concern in advance as to whether building facilities staff and building administrators would welcome the team. In fact, the team was given extremely detailed and comprehensive information on each building by the administrators and staff located there which was compiled with recommendations from the team as well as District staff on how to address every issue in a 600-page report to the District.

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
- The Board voted to place a resolution before the community at the time of the budget vote in May 2018 to tear down the closed and condemned Rhodes School, build a new Rhodes Elementary School and remove a portion of the portable classrooms around the District. The measure was approved overwhelmingly and
- The District began the process of creating an Energy Performance Contract.

There has been very significant progress since Fall 2018. Progress prior to that had been halting and uneven due to a variety of factors:

1. **Weak Leadership**---leadership in the facilities and business departments was weak for a long time. The head of facilities in October 2017 was an interim appointment. He did not have sufficient experience for a position of this magnitude. Furthermore, there were other problems that surfaced over the subsequent months. The forensic auditor personally cited him in an interim report for potentially excessive overtime. This was not curtailed until the Acting/Interim Superintendent did so in Spring 2018. When issues of potential malfeasance of a different nature were uncovered, the head of facilities resigned. The matter was reported to legal authorities. This is the case in the news in September regarding an indictment and guilty plea. The next head of facilities was taken from the Civil Service list. His performance was deemed inadequate after a few months and the District moved to terminate him. Most notably, the District was almost unable to begin the 2018-19 school year on time due to the fact that one week before staff and students were due to return to school the District's buildings did not have new Certificates of Occupancy. This was due to lack of oversight by the new head of facilities. A retired, experienced interim head of facilities was hired immediately thereafter resulting in an almost immediate change in the quality of operations. Shortly before this report was written, the District hired an experienced permanent number two in the department. Shortcomings in the leadership of the facilities department were compounded by shortcomings in the leadership of the business department. The Assistant Superintendent for Business in October 2017 had never held an assistant superintendent for business position, much less one in a district as large, complex and challenging as that in Hempstead. His experience exacerbated the inexperience of the interim head of facilities in the position in fall 2017. However, as noted in prior reports the District was able to hire an experienced retired assistant superintendent for business as a consultant in February 2018. Although his position was, and still is, part-time, with his experience he was able to assist the facilities department, particularly after the employment of the interim (retired) head of facilities in fall 2018. The new permanent Assistant Superintendent for Business who just began work as this report was being written brings strong experience in the facilities area as well as strong experience in business operations.
2. **Inadequate Funding**---funding for both regular maintenance as well capital projects in the 2017-18 budget, as had been the case with prior general fund budgets, was inadequate to meet the facilities needs of the District. There was no capital reserve at that point. Consequently, even 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.
4. Long Deferred Maintenance---the consequences of long deferred maintenance have come back to repeatedly haunt the District's current efforts to upgrade facilities. Equipment that was inadequately or only sporadically maintained is more prone to failure and/or more expensive to maintain. Structures and equipment that should have been replaced years ago but were not due to inadequate funds or poor planning are also prone to failure and/or more expensive to maintain. Unfortunately, both equipment and structures have been failing faster than the District can replace them even as the tide is turning. Two examples illustrate this. Many of the District's modular classrooms ("portables") are way past normal life expectancy. They were intended to be temporary and yet they have been in use for decades. Some date to the 1970's and maybe earlier. They are extremely expensive to try to maintain. The District is moving to replace them but replacement cannot happen yet. The second example is the air conditioning system at the High School. It is over 50 years old. It will probably be replaced next year under the Energy Performance Contract the District is preparing but it is requiring extraordinary efforts to keep it functioning until then.

As this report was written, the District tore down the old Rhodes School and begun the construction of the new Rhodes School. The District is also finishing the preparation of an Energy Performance Contract (the District's first) that will fund the replacement of old, inadequate equipment at no net cost to the community taxpayers. Leadership in both the facilities department and business is experienced and competent. Most importantly, District facilities staff have demonstrated that they have the capacity to maintain buildings and grounds if given time, support and adequate funding. Significant progress has been made since fall 2018 and the pieces are now in place to support further progress going forward. However, and this must be strongly emphasized, decades of inadequate investment of time, energy, funds and staff cannot be reversed overnight or even in a couple of years. Progress can and should be made each year but it will take 5-10 years of sustained effort to reach the level where all grounds and facilities will be at the level they should be with all students housed in permanent structures.

I would recommend the following steps:

- 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 will be gone and where their children will be educated.
- The Board and administration, with community input, need to come to an agreement on a plan with a timeline and process to fund major capital projects which are not addressed in either the Rhodes bond issue or the Energy Performance Contract. Since the community must vote to approve such bond issues, the plans need to be laid out with details of specific projects 1-2 years in advance so the community is well aware of what will be done and how it will be paid for. The plan should also be tied to when existing bond issues are paid off so there is less net financial impact on the community.
- During the development of the 2020-21 budget the Board and administration should discuss and agree on the specific major facilities projects to be undertaken through the 2020-21 general fund budget so these are known to the community well in advance of the May 2020 budget vote and then work can be planned well in advance of implementation. While this would not be the case for emergency projects, it should become standard practice for the 2020-21 and future budgets for all facilities projects undertaken through the General Fund budget.
- All of these plans should be placed in a special section on the District's website with details of each major project and a timeline showing when each will be accomplished so that parents, students and community may be able to follow the District's progress.

## **HIGH SCHOOL INSTRUCTION**

The situation in the High School filled a significant portion of the initial assessment and recommendation report. The High School had been placed in "receivership" as a "Persistently Struggling School" as the school had had poor results for a long period of time. This was exacerbated by questions regarding the veracity of data and whether practices were in strict compliance with NYSED policies and regulations.

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 the Distinguished Educator has is the ability to veto key personnel appointments.) The lack of experience on the part of the Interim High School Principal was a significant hindrance to efforts to deal with both the daily fights and academic reform.
3. **Uncertain Plans**—previous school improvement plans filed with NYSED had not been retracted but they had clearly been shelved on a de facto basis at the time of the initial assessment. This left everything up in the air including the work of several consulting groups such as Johns Hopkins that had been hired to support the reform plan. The situation was painfully obvious at a meeting of the High School and District administration with the NYSED officials responsible for working with schools in receivership. In fact, this meeting was highly embarrassing. Clear plans were not re-established until the prior principal was rehired shortly thereafter.

Data available at the time indicated that the prior year's graduation rate was at or below 40%. The exact figure is uncertain due to questions about some of the enrollment data. Whatever the exact figure it was well below (roughly half of) the State and Long Island averages. Data also indicated that the passing rate for most Regents level courses was around 50% and that relatively few students took the most rigorous courses such as Advanced Placement (AP) or Regents level Physics and Chemistry.

As noted in the introduction to this report the current data shows significant improvement over the situation two years ago. Of the 522 students in the 2015 cohort (i.e. students who entered the High School in fall 2015 or joined that cohort when they transferred in) 297 graduated in June 2019 and an additional 32 graduated in August 2019 after taking classes during the summer. That is a combined June and August graduation rate for the 2015 cohort of 63%. In addition, another 26 students in the 2015 cohort earned High School Equivalency (HSE) diplomas no later than August 2019. These HSE recipients do not count as part of Hempstead's graduation rate but students earning HSEs are certainly preferable to students dropping out of school with nothing.

Passing rates in some critical Regents courses have also improved. For example, the passing rate for Regents Algebra increased from 21% in 2018 to 48% in 2019. The passing rate for English speakers in Regents ELA was 71%. However, it was still only 27% for students learning the English language. The 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	40
AP Lang [English]	33	33
AP Lang [Spanish]	29	27
AP Lang [French]	25	16
Total	317	285

Based on data from 2016-17 the US News and World Report high school rankings for 2019 ranked Hempstead High School as 904 of 1204 high schools in New York State. The data cited above should improve Hempstead's ranking in the future.

Again, as noted at the beginning of this report Hempstead High School has made significant "progress" but it is not yet at a level that could be defined as "success". To reach success I would recommend:

- **Graduation Rate**---the High School needs to set a target graduation rate of at least 75% for June and August 2020 and spell out in detail what must be done to get each of the members of the 2016 cohort to that goal. As was the case in 2018-19, there needs to be an intense effort with each of the students on the cusp of making it or falling short. The target for June and August 2021 should be to meet or exceed the State average of 82-83%. Again, there will need to be a detailed plan for each member of the cohort of 2017. Based on credit accumulation to date these goals are a stretch but they are doable.
- **Passing Rate**---passing rates improved in some critical courses but they are still way too low. The persistence of students in taking some courses repeatedly, and the teachers working with them, is admirable but the efficiency and effectiveness of the High School would be greatly improved if an increasing percentage of students could pass courses the first time.
- **English Language Learners (ELL)**---Hempstead received a large influx of recent immigrants a few years ago. It continues to receive more each year. Many of these students also have significant 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 existed to date. Improving the passing rate for Regents ELA for English Language Learners would increase overall passing and graduation rates more than any other single factor.

- AP—the High School has made significant progress in both expanding AP courses available and increasing student enrollment in them. This needs to be continued with clear encouragement to those capable of taking and passing these courses. Top students in Hempstead have been accepted at Yale and Harvard so colleges are recognizing what Hempstead graduates can do. This pool needs to keep expanding.
- College—As Hempstead High School's performance improves, it has an increasingly strong story to tell. Since reputations take time to catch up, Hempstead should actively reach out to college admissions departments to talk about its recent graduates to accelerate this process.

## **PRE K-8 INSTRUCTION**

Pre-K to Grade 8 performance suffered from what staff had described as “consistent inconsistency” over a long period. During the time of my assessment in fall 2017 I heard many talk about a history of repeated changes and the fact that consistency from one building to another, one grade level to another and even one class to another had been hard to maintain. I also heard about insufficient resources, lack of instrumental music, and the lack of AIS academic support services. In addition, I noted the assessment data from the NWEA was used only minimally and that the ABGS Middle School (Middle School) had just switched to another assessment so there would no longer be continuity of data on individual students from the elementary schools into the Middle School. Part of the reason for the minimal use of data from the NWEA was that the assessment had been introduced in conjunction with teacher ratings (APPR).

The chart below summarizes scores in ELA and Math for Grades 3-8 over the past four years. For analysis purposes the percentages of students with scores from 1 to 4 were separated into a combined figure for levels 3 and 4 and a separate figure for those with level 1. While this is an overgeneralization, students achieving a score of 3 or 4 seem reasonably likely to be prepared for Regents level work when they reach high school and those who are at level 1 are probably seriously deficient in basic skills, a level of deficiency which would—if not addressed—make earning a Regents diploma difficult.

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.



S c h .	LEVEL 3 & 4								LEVEL 1							
	2015-2016		2016-2017		2017-2018		2018-2019		2015-2016		2016-2017		2017-2018		2018-2019	
	ELA	MATH	ELA	MATH	ELA	MATH	ELA	MATH	ELA	MATH	ELA	MATH	ELA	MATH	ELA	MATH
B a r a c k O b a m a	1 2	20	2 4	36	3 3	40	3 6	45	4 8	47	4 5	40	2 8	35	3 2	34
J a c k s o n M a i n	2 2	39	3 4	43	3 4	47	3 6	42	4 1	37	3 2	34	2 0	25	2 6	30
J a c k s o n A n n e x	9	13	2 0	25	2 7	28	2 3	26	5 8	46	4 7	44	3 6	43	4 1	41
D a v i d P a t e r s o	1 2	15	2 1	27	3 9	25	4 4	39	5 1	56	4	40	2 8	48	2 4	29



- Scores on the State assessments continue to improve. More students are scoring at level 3 or 4. As with the High School graduation rate, "progress" is not yet "success", particularly since there are still roughly a quarter to one half of all students in grades 3-5 at level 1.
- Three elementary schools that had been on the State's "Focus" list were removed and deemed in "Good Standing".
- The District is well on its way to implementing the IB Primary Years Program. The District's elementary schools began their first year as candidate schools in 2018-19. With step by step implementation and staff training the District now expects to complete its candidacy in two more years with the goal of becoming full IB by the end of 2020-21. The training and implementation process in and of itself has been of value to the District in helping facilitate Districtwide reflection and discussion about what a rigorous and challenging elementary education should look like.
- Inclusion is becoming the norm for classes across the District.
- The elementary principals have been meeting on Saturdays on a voluntary basis to share ideas and analysis as well as provide mutual support.
- As noted earlier only minimal use had been made of the data available from the NWEA, possibly because of its tie to APPR, but increasing use has been made of data from iReady. The schools that pushed this furthest in 2018-19 seemed to show the most significant gains in State assessment results.
- Increased academic support (AIS) has allowed for better "Response to Intervention" services for students before possible classification with special education.
- Prospect School recovered from its year outside the District and enrollment rebounded.
- For 2019-20, where space was available, Grade 6 students were retained in the elementary schools rather than moved to ABGS Middle School.

To continue progress at the elementary level the following steps are recommended:

1. The elementary schools need to prepare a detailed plan of the steps necessary to cut the percentage of students in Grades 3-5 scoring at level 1 on the State assessments by a quarter by spring 2020 and in half by spring 2021.
2. In support of this, best practices in the use of iReady data need to be spread to all elementary classrooms.
3. If possible, the District needs to obtain permission from NYSED to drop the use of NWEA.
4. The Acting/Interim Superintendent needs to meet, if possible every two weeks, with the IB support staff and the elementary principals to discuss progress towards the full implementation of the IB Primary Years Program and the implementation of #1-2.
5. The Board and administration should publicly discuss achievement data and progress towards implementation of instructional improvement plans.
6. As discussed in the section on facilities the District needs to adopt a timeline and process for the elimination of all portables

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.

As with other areas, part of the problem and an ongoing concern has been changes in leadership and with those changes in leadership changes in approach. A new principal with solid experience as a secondary principal of schools as complex and challenging as ABGS Middle School took over shortly before the start of the 2017-18 school year. He resigned abruptly in fall 2018. Fortunately, the District was able to find an experienced administrator with knowledge of Hempstead who was able to step in on short notice and who has been able to continue for the 2019-20 school year. During the four years covered in the chart showing NYS assessment scores in ELA and Math there have been three different principals.

Given this history, I strongly recommend that the Acting/Interim Superintendent meet every two weeks with the key staff at the Middle School to ensure that the school remains on track. The move to the IB Middle Years Program is a positive step but a change of this magnitude is going to be hard to accomplish without greater stability and consistency.

The physical layout and condition of the building is also a significant hindrance to progress. The decision to keep some of this year's Grade 6 students in the elementary schools was a positive step but the building remains a hodge-podge of structures with roughly one third of the classroom space being portables and another third being a reconfigured 1960's open-space structure. There is no immediate solution to this but creating a cohesive functional structure long term must remain a priority for the District.

## **SPECIAL EDUCATION**

At the time of my initial assessment in Fall 2017 the District was under a severe corrective action plan signed by the District and NYSED as the District was identified under the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) for nine consecutive years due to poor academic performance of students with disabilities and longstanding noncompliance with regulatory requirements.

What I saw then and continued to see and report on quarterly since was a strong commitment on the part of the District to follow through on the corrective action plan, to eliminate all existing infractions and move to the point that it is no longer on any list of deficient districts. The District's efforts have been closely monitored by NYSED's Special Education Quality Assurance (SEQA) Long Island Regional Office.

The 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 State target of 19% or less. Since 2017-18 both percentages have improved with the first percentage increasing from 34% to 41% and the second being cut from 44% to 37%. As with the High School graduation percent, progress but not success.

The graduation rate (June plus August 2019 District) for special education students in the 2015 cohort was 56%. 14% received the NYS Career Development and Occupational Studies (CDOS) Commencement Credential in lieu of a diploma.

Hempstead needs to stay focused and not let up. It is my strong recommendation that NYSED and Hempstead officials meet to devise a plan with the explicit intent of getting Hempstead off any list of deficient districts in special education.

#### **ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS (ELL)**

Hempstead was also, and still is, under a corrective action plan relating to the needs of ELL students. As with special education, what I saw then and what I have continued to see and report on quarterly since is a strong commitment on the part of the District to follow through on the existing plan.

As with special education, Hempstead continues to make progress. Dual language programs are expanding and the language expectation for the IB program has reinforced the importance of language proficiency.

Hempstead instituted the New York State Seal of Bi-Literacy (NYSB) for High School graduates. The NYSEB recognizes high school graduates who have attained a high level of proficiency in listening, speaking and writing in one or more languages in addition to English.

In several of the most recent quarterly reports I have stressed the need for a strong and complete administrative team at the District level and my concerns that this had not come to fruition. As part of this I noted the need for an experienced Assistant Superintendent for Instruction with a strong background in the education of ELL students to help the District in this area. Two thirds of Hempstead's students are Hispanic. Most have some level of need to strengthen their English language skills. Many are recent immigrants, some of these with interrupted education in their home countries. Hempstead has made progress but the need to strengthen ELL education is still a very significant challenge.

#### **TECHNOLOGY**

The current Assistant Superintendent for Technology began earlier the same day I began work in Hempstead. As noted in the initial assessment report in 2017 the technology area in Hempstead had suffered the consequences of multiple changes in leadership and changes in direction. The fact that no one from Hempstead had even logged onto the State website to learn about the steps necessary to

apply for the NYS Smart School bond funds allocated specifically to Hempstead (approved by NY State voters in 2014), much less applied for those funds, meant that Hempstead students and staff had long been deprived of over \$9 million in technology resources which could have been used to their benefit.

Significant progress has been made in the technology area since 2017:

- A proposal was made to the State for half of the Smart School bond funds allocated to Hempstead. The proposal is in the queue for review and approval. (Although I have written in several recent quarterly reports that a proposal for the second half of the allocated funds was about to be submitted as that was what I had been told, no proposal for the second half has been written or submitted. It is still outstanding.)
- New security equipment was purchased and installed where needed in conjunction with the security department, the security consultant and building administrators. The existing security cameras had been a mix of a variety of types and quality.
- All existing IT equipment was reviewed to determine what was functional and what was not and then where the functional equipment should be located. This was supplemented by new IT equipment purchased with available funds.
- Management of the department was revamped in order to provide support service in a more appropriate and timely fashion.
- Although this has not been without significant bumps in the road there has been an effort to rebuild relations with the Nassau BOCES technology team.
- There has also been an effort to ensure that all vendors were providing top quality service.
- The technology department was appropriately involved in the rebuilding of Prospect Elementary School after the fire in August 2018 checking to determine what was still functional and could continue to be used and what had to be replaced.
- The Hempstead technology department also reviewed District use of various types of software. Particular attention was focused on PowerSchool. A review by Hempstead staff, Nassau BOCES, officials from the company and NYSED representatives determined that there were significant problems with how the PowerSchool software was being used in Hempstead and how data was stored. A comprehensive plan was developed and then implemented over a period of months. The significance of this should not be minimized. In August 2017 and then again in August 2018 Hempstead's data for critical State reports did not load properly and at one point Hempstead was apparently holding up NY's ability to report to the US Department of Education. With the software fix and staff training on the revamped system the District was able to proceed on a path to cleaning up its student data files.
- In conjunction with the work outlined in the previous paragraph the District also employed a trained and experienced data person during the 2018-19 school year. That individual in collaboration with other technology and building staff has now led to all of Hempstead's student data being properly accounted for. (Please remember that the Superintendent in place in the fall 2017 had directed that staff improperly remove roughly 300 students from Hempstead's rolls, an act that resulted in a major compliance issue with NYSED.) The significance of cleaning up student data should not be minimized. I have no first-hand knowledge of this but principals informed me that there have been "ghost" students on their rolls for many years. That issue is now a thing of the past and will remain so as long as the District keeps its data up to date going forward.

- The Acting/Interim Superintendent has begun seeking the assistance of Nassau districts known for their sophistication in the area of technology.

To continue this progress I strongly the following steps:

1. The Acting/Interim Superintendent needs to meet regularly, preferably every two weeks, with the leadership of the technology department to ensure that all initiatives stay on track and that problems are identified quickly and resolved.
2. The Acting/Interim Superintendent needs to continue to consult informally with superintendents in other districts who are the leaders in this field. Hempstead can benefit from both their expertise and the experience they have gained with various vendors.
3. The District should complete and submit an application for the second half of the Smart Schools bond funds. There is no reason for Hempstead students and staff to be deprived of use of these funds. District funds can supplement these plans when changes are needed.
4. Now that the technology area has been stabilized and upgraded, the District needs a comprehensive plan of action for the next steps going forward with key individuals given a chance for input and an opportunity for the Acting/Interim Superintendent to sign off on steps in advance. This needs to be carefully thought out as Hempstead needs to avoid repeating the serious issues of the past when it went off on its own.

## NUTRITION

The Hempstead nutrition program is currently under review by NYSED.

## GOVERNANCE

In the initial assessment report, the findings on governance took a prominent place. They did so for four reasons. First, the role of the Board is critical to the effective and efficient functioning of a district. Second, parents, staff and community members expressed deep concern about the Board. Third, what I witnessed in the period from October to December 2017 was extremely troubling. Lastly, numerous reports--- the Office of the New York Comptroller in 2014, the three prior years' reports by the District's three audit firms, the report by a 40 person team from NYSED in 2004 and decisions by the NYS Commissioner of Education---all identified similar, serious concerns.

While governance was not the only area with problems, it was clearly the most pivotal as noted in the findings section of the initial report that is copied in its entirety below:

### 1. GOVERNANCE

*Concerns regarding the Board of Education's practices were at or near the top of issues identified by most parents, community members, and HUFSD staff. Stakeholders spoke about deep divisions, long and rancorous Board meetings, an inability to collaborate even on commonly shared concerns, a failure to*

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 Board issues. Since 2014, several appeals and/or applications for removal have been filed with the Commissioner of Education regarding the District. These proceedings include challenges to the District's May 2014, 2015, and 2016 election results; the Board's alleged violations of the Open Meetings Law; challenges to the Board's contracting and procurement practices; and challenges to the Board's removal of one of its members. Most of these challenges have been mounted by the Board itself or by various groups of Board members.

Based on the record in these appeals, the Commissioner has been compelled to overturn the results of the May 2014 Board of Education election and order that the District cooperate fully with election monitors (Decision No. 16,660), and annul the Board's action in removing one of its members (Decision No. 17,263). Indeed, in such decisions, the Commissioner has routinely commented on the pervasive governance issues plaguing the District. For example, in her recent Decision No. 17,263, she stated:

"Finally, I am compelled to comment on the controversy surrounding respondent board in recent years which continues to plague this district, as evidenced by the record in this and several other cases involving the district (see e.g. Appeal of Watson, et al., 56 Ed Dept Rep, Decision No. 17,082; Appeal of the Bd. of Educ. of the Hempstead Union Free School Dist., 55 id., Decision No. 16,878; Appeal of Touré, et al., 54 id., Decision No. 16,660). Due to the significant academic and school governance issues the district continues to experience, effective October 6, 2017, I appointed a Distinguished Educator to the district in accordance with Education Law §211-c. In light of the above, I again admonish the district and the board, as I have in previous appeals, to take all steps necessary to ensure that such controversy does not continue and that the district's leadership and resources are focused on the paramount goal of providing successful outcomes for students. To this end, I am directing Dr. Jack Bierwirth, the appointed Distinguished Educator, to provide guidance and technical assistance to the district to ensure that this occurs (emphasis added)."

During my assessment as well as in the six months prior, many of the practices that were of express concern in the 2014 report by the Office of State Comptroller continued to be exhibited by the Hempstead Board of Education. In 2014, OSC noted that the Board exhibited a lack of transparency and a failure to adhere to Open Meetings Laws. OSC also expressed serious concerns about the Board's improper employment practices, including an admonishment for retaining two superintendents at the same time. The Board had appointed administrators, changed administrators, and entered into as well as amended agreements with no documented plan, reason, or clear benefit to the District.

In a direct example of a lack of follow-through on prior recommendations, in the spring of 2017, the Board employed a new superintendent one month before the end of the prior superintendent's contract, resulting in the District needlessly paying two superintendents simultaneously. In October 2017, the same Board majority approved the appointment of legal counsel for special investigations retroactive to August 1, an action contrary to the most basic of appropriate business practices and contrary to the expectations delineated by the Comptroller.

In late November 2017, the new majority resulting from the Commissioner's aforementioned reversal of the Board's action to remove a sitting member (Decision No. 17,263) immediately called an emergency meeting. The meeting was broadcast to the community as a discussion meeting, but resolutions dismissing the sitting counsel for special investigations and appointing a firm that had been previously employed by the District were hand carried into the meeting and approved. Neither the substance of the action to be considered nor the rationale were shared with the public in advance.

One week later, at a regularly scheduled Board of Education "work" session, additional resolutions were hand carried into the meeting and approved. These resolutions removed another law firm employed by the District effective immediately and transferred that firm's work to a different firm that had previously done work for the District.



*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. Furthermore, there has been no formal reorganization of administrative responsibilities to justify these roles. Whether the responsibility for defining these jobs rests with the Board or the superintendent is less important than the fact that they remain undefined while putting undue strain on the District's budget.*

*In addition to the specific issues resulting from the Board's decisions to date, their actions suggest that they lack a commitment to the level of transparency in the school budget development process mandated in State Education Law. This was illustrated by the District's planned purchase of new school buses through vaguely worded language in its 2017-18 budget. Before the purchase could occur, SED discovered that the District lacked the budget propositions and State approvals required by the property tax levy limit and State aid statutes. Due to the Board's failure to follow protocol, if the District had made the purchases, it would have risked being ineligible for State aid. In addition, the resulting payments would not have been appropriately treated as capital expenditures under the tax levy limit and therefore could have depleted the funds available for instruction. This example raises a red flag that the Board of Education lacks a basic understanding of the requirements of lawful and responsible school district budgeting.*

*While members of the Board of Education made assurances during the Distinguished Educator's assessment that they would put aside differences to address critical issues such as school safety, facilities management, and high school instruction – all of which Board members indicated they agreed on – those aspirations have not been realized. In fact, little or no time has been spent on these high-priority issues other than answering concerns raised by members of the public at Board meetings. When meeting as a group, this Board has proven completely unable to meet the critical challenges facing the District as detailed in this report.*

*It is noteworthy that this behavior was consistent during the leadership of two different Board majorities. Further, it is evident that the superintendent has been drawn into the clear divisions among the current Board majority and minority. The overwhelming perception of parents and the staff is that the superintendent was allied with the majority that was in leadership from June until the Commissioner's November decision that altered the balance of power. It is doubtful whether any leader could have successfully straddled the entrenched divide within the Board, but these political issues complicate the superintendent's capacity to lead the District.*

In all of the quarterly reports since as well as in the final report for Year One, I have been explicit about my continuing concerns about governance, concerns which I believed were the major threat to real and permanent improvement. When there have been positive steps that the Board had taken, I have also noted those along with my concerns. There are many positives:

- Over the past two years the District has made notable progress in many areas as described in brief in the earlier sections. Having witnessed the progress firsthand, it is discouraging to hear it questioned or minimized. It is real and it has been substantial. It has not reached "success" but

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 law enforcement for further investigation and, if appropriate, action.
- The Board reported several cases of potentially criminal activity to law enforcement including one case that recently resulted in an indictment and guilty plea.
- The Board proposed to the community that the former Rhodes School be torn down, a new elementary school be built and that a number of the portables then be removed. The community approved this proposition.
- The Board became personally involved in helping find a temporary home for students and staff displaced as a result of the August 2018 fire at the Prospect School.
- The Board constituted itself as an audit committee as a whole for the 2018-19 school year. They met with each of the audit firms twice and followed the actions taken to eliminate longstanding red flags identified by the three audit firms and the Office of the State Comptroller.
- The Board sent two balanced and appropriately formatted budgets to the community. The community approved both on the first vote. The 2018-19 budget restored AIS support services for students and elementary instrumental music.
- Faced with a very significant increase in charter school tuition reimbursement for 2019-20 the Board made deep and painful cuts to other areas of the budget to ensure that the budget presented to the community was balanced.
- Recently, the Board has approved the appointment of three key administrators in the business, facilities, and security areas.
- In the last month the Board also settled the first contract in many years. The new contract, with Hempstead's administrators, covers 10 years (back seven and forward three which shows how long it has been since a contract was settled).

At the same time, despite one personal visit by the Chancellor of the Regents and the Commissioner of Education, a second visit by the Commissioner and three meetings facilitated by the Director of the New York State School Boards Association, the Board has failed to make a clean break with the past and live up to what the Commissioner clearly stated (in bold for emphasis) in the November 2017 Commissioner's decision:

***"I again admonish the district and the board, as I have in previous appeals, to take all steps necessary to ensure that such controversy does not continue and that the district's leadership and resources are focused on the paramount goal of providing successful outcomes for students."***

This was in addition to what she had already made clear in words as well as in deed with the appointment of a Distinguished Educator a few months prior.

When I first entered Hempstead, I met with each of the Board members individually. I asked for their thoughts on each of the District's seven goals. There seemed to be a remarkably high level of consensus about the issues of substance and what needed to be done about them. However, despite the

Commissioner's urging and the fact that the Commissioner had appointed a Distinguished Educator a few months earlier due to an overwhelming concern about the District on her part, the Board spent little time discussing the areas covered in the seven goals (Student Achievement, Facilities, Transportation, Finances, Human Resources, Public Relations and Governance) from October 2017 through June 2018 with the exception of the Rhodes facilities project. The primary priority of Board members was adult issues with little discussion of the key issues affecting students---exactly the opposite of what the Commissioner had asked for. Not much has changed since.

What makes this fact particularly distressing is that these recent behaviors seem largely consistent with the behavior of boards in Hempstead over prior decades. Although the composition of the board changed numerous times over past decades and even in the period since October 2017, the behaviors have remained similar from one board and one board majority to the next.

Based on the outcomes of various sessions with NYSSBA and others, it seems clear that members of the current Board know what they need to do. They certainly have the capacity to do it. They just have not done it for the most part.

Different factions---on and off the Board---were and are currently contending for power. The 2018 election race was very personal and very ugly. The May 2019 election was equally personal and equally ugly with three different factions contending for power, as had been the case the year before. The Commissioner did not ask, and I do think that she expected, individuals to stop contending with each other for Board seats but she did expect that once they were on the Board controversy would stop and that the members of the Board at that time would figure out how to work together with all efforts "focused on the paramount goal of providing successful outcomes for students".

What is needed from the Board at this point is the same as what the Commissioner asked of the Board two years ago. Hempstead has made progress but that progress needs to be sustained and accelerated. The Board needs to demonstrate to parents, community and staff that it can work together with the administration to do just that and that it has plans on all of the critical issues affecting students.

At the moment, parents continue to "vote with their feet". Charter school enrollment continues to increase and there are reported to be substantial waiting lists at the two largest charter schools. I believe that the Hempstead Board and administration have a strong case to make at this point but they need to make it. To date, they have not. They also need to make the case to the State for additional funds so that Hempstead and the charter schools are not left fighting over an inadequate pool of money. To date, they have not.

To date, I have seen more concerted effort go into fighting the legislation appointing monitors than I have seen go into making the case to families considering sending their children to charter schools rather than the regular public schools or go into, making the case to the State regarding the need for additional funds or addressing the seven critical priorities which were clearly identified as issues of substance in October 2017 which are still relevant and critical today.

Many of the critical issues noted in previous reports are still outstanding:

- The need to build a strong and experienced leadership team. The three administrative appointments a month ago were a big step in the right direction. However, the assistant superintendent for business position was open for a year and a half, the superintendent was moved from acting to interim but there seems to be no clarity as to when or how this position will be resolved permanently, the assistant superintendent for instruction position is still vacant, and there is no real resolution regarding the head of security currently on a paid leave of absence. The consequences of selecting inexperienced and/or unqualified individuals for key positions has long term as well as short term ramifications for the District. The Board should reflect on the impact its own behavior has on the capacity of the District to attract and retain top experienced educators and how it could be a positive rather than the negative factor it has been for so long.
- The Board also needs to develop its own internal protocols on how to handle cases in which employees who may be in the process of being disciplined or terminated seek out their favor. Several cases including that of the head of security are very troubling.
- Legal costs continue at a very high level. These costs draw away much-needed resources from students. Part of this is understandable given some of the issues confronting the District. The Commissioner recognized this in her last visit but she also charged the Board with figuring out how to wind this down in order to start cutting legal costs as well as start focusing more time, attention and resources on student issues. This has not happened yet. Hempstead spends significantly more on legal costs than other districts on Long Island. This is mostly a matter of how the Board conducts its business with way too much behind the scenes or with subgroups of the Board.
- The settlement of the contract with the administrators union was a major step forward but other bargaining groups have also not had new agreements in many years. The District is squeezed financially but contracts should not go unsettled forever. The Board, Acting/Interim Superintendent and Labor Counsel need to discuss and agree upon the major terms of various contracts so the District goes to the table fully prepared.
- The Board, District administration and building leaders need to very significantly strengthen the school PTAs.
- One of the District goals in 2017 was to revamp the District's website and increase public relations. There has been much talk about creating an effective PR campaign using a variety of different active and passive tools. A plan is definitely needed but it has not been implemented. In fact, it has not been created to date.
- On a related note the District has also talked about the need to make the positive case to parents deciding between charter schools and the regular public schools. To date it has not.
- The administration and the Board, I believe, are committed to getting Hempstead off all lists of deficient districts. This is highly commendable. The Board as well as the administration needs to own this. To date it has not.
- The Board has made progress in setting agendas even for executive sessions but the Board still goes into executive sessions almost every meeting and for hours each time. The Board also still entertains "hand-carries" (last minute resolutions) with some frequency. Both were practices the Board indicated that it intended to curtail but has not.

- 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. 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.

## **FINANCIAL REPORT**

## **Monitor's Financial Plan For the Hempstead Union Free School District**

The Hempstead Union Free School District (HUFSD or "the District") has approximately 9,000 resident students who attend either the District's public schools or public charter schools. More than 80% of the District's students are eligible for free or reduced priced lunch. The District currently has a budget of \$225 million dollars. More than sixty percent of that is provided by State aid. The Board of Education has chosen not to increase the tax levy in each of the last three years. Consequently, increases in revenue are overwhelmingly a result of increases to State aid and not additional funds raised through the tax levy.

The State uses a combination of property and income to determine the wealth of the District in comparison to all districts in New York. The State calculates a ratio for every district. A district whose wealth and income per pupil are both equal to those of the state, would have a value of 1.00. For Hempstead, the combined wealth ratio is below .3. By this measure, Hempstead is the poorest district in Nassau County. As a result of both the high percent of children eligible for free and reduced-price lunch and the low combined wealth ratio, Hempstead is considered a low wealth high needs district.

It is believed by many in the community that residents ran for the Board of Education ("the Board") to get their friends, relatives and supporters jobs in the District. It was perceived that loyalty trumped competence. There was frequent turnover of power and majorities on the Board, which in turn lead to turnover in key administrative and leadership positions, which compromised the effectiveness of the overall instructional program. There were and continue to be accusations and rumors of misappropriation of funds, outright theft of goods and services, and widespread incompetence. To remedy the situation, the District contracted with a private firm to conduct a forensic audit two years ago. The audit was completed and sent to the Nassau District Attorney. To date, no action has resulted from that audit, and it is not available to anyone in the District.

### **Monitor Appointment**

The appointment of the Monitor was made possible with the passage of Chapter 19 of the Laws of 2020. The Monitor is appointed by the Commissioner of Education and has the following responsibilities:

- Provide oversight, guidance and technical assistance related to the fiscal and educational policies, practices, programs and decisions of the District, Board of Education and the Superintendent.
- Serve as non-voting ex-officio member of the Board and as such attend all meetings of the Board;
- In conjunction with the Board develop a proposed financial plan for the District.
- In conjunction with the Board develop a proposed academic improvement plan;
- Starting with the proposed budget for the 2021-2022 school year, annually review the District's budget to ensure that it is balanced and, to the greatest extent practicable, is consistent with the academic improvement plan and financial plan;
- Provide semiannual reports to the Commissioner, the Regents, the Governor, the Speaker of the Assembly and the Temporary President of the Senate;
- Work with the District's shared decision-making committee; and
- Assist in resolving disputes and conflicts between the Superintendent and the Board and among members of the Board.

## **The Process**

The process for developing this plan was to review the financial reports available on the State and District websites for the current and the prior two school years and review the current and prior year's audit reports. The second means of preparation was to meet with staff who currently work for the District or with outside individuals or groups with an interest in the District. The reports included the ST3, State aid runs, budgets and both internal, claims and external audits for this school year and last year. The Monitor has regularly met with the Assistant Superintendent for Business, the consultant to the Business Office, and the Interim Superintendent. Other meetings with Central office and program administrators have been on an as needed basis. The Monitor has also met with our Assemblywoman, the local clergy and the New York Community for Change (NYCC).

## **General Findings**

The overall impression of outside groups and elected officials is that the District continues in a state of poor governance and low performance. There is also a belief among many that there is a good deal of nepotism and corruption at the highest levels of the District, including the central office and the Board of Education. Every group and individual with whom the Monitor met wanted to work with the District to reverse both the reality and the perception. The groups appeared very committed to Hempstead and want very much for the schools to become something to which they can point with great pride.

Internal meetings and interviews reveal that the District is in a state of reflective change and improvement. There is recognition that in the past decade the District has been cast in the worst of lights, has developed a reputation for failure, and has schools that are consistently underperforming. Those with whom the Monitor met are also concerned with the consistent inconsistency of the Board of Education. There is, however, a belief and hope that this is about to change. They are hopeful that with the changes in the law that placed a monitor in the District that they can now count on stability in leadership and consistency in programming for the children of the District.

Until recently the budget development process has rarely or has not meaningfully involved the District leadership team and building administrators. Consequently, the budget may or may not in any given year reflect the needs of the school population or provide the resources necessary to appropriately educate all students.

## **Specific Findings and Recommendations**

This section of the plan provides a summary of the major findings related to the fiscal aspects of the District and provides recommendations directed at improving the operation of the District and improving its financial planning and implementation.

### **Findings:**

1. Of the approximately 9,000 school aged children living in the District, just under 6,500 children attend the District's public schools and just under 2,500 children attend charter schools.
2. The District is scheduled to receive approximately \$139 million in State aid for the 2020-21 school year. Tuition for students attending Charter Schools is \$49 million. The District receives \$11 million in State Aid for the students who attend charters, while their tuition costs the District



\$49 million. This disparity is having a serious impact on the District's ability to provide a full range of services to the children continuing in the public schools. Because of the pandemic, the State's shortage of revenue is starting to impact school aid. The District was recently informed that future payments of aid to the District may be reduced by 20%. This will only exacerbate the problems associated with needed resources for public school students. The tuition for resident students that the District must pay to charter schools is not scheduled to be reduced by the same 20%.

3. In each of the last two fiscal years, the District overspent the budget. There were good explanations in each of those school years that involved expenses such as charter school tuition and workers compensation. However, that practice damages the reputation of the District and impacts the rates of interest the District pays annually for monies it borrows. In each of those years, money from the fund balance was available to cover the overage in spending.
4. Again, this fiscal year, the Board has not raised the tax levy. Any additional revenue comes from federal grants or State aid.
5. The most recent external audit found no material weaknesses in the District financial picture.
6. Policies related to fiscal operations of the District are out of date.
7. The limits on transportation are those of the State. Only children who live more than two miles at the elementary level and over three miles at the secondary level are eligible for state aidable transportation. This means that almost all students are "walkers."
8. The age, size, and condition of the buildings warrant a long-term capital plan. Of particular concern is the use of many portable classrooms that are in a state of disrepair and are in use even though they have exceeded their expected life of service.
9. The audit committee of the Board was a committee of the whole for the 2019-20 school year. This committee never met during that school year. For the 2020-21 school year, the committee will be composed of Board members and nominees of each Board member. The composition of the committee and the meeting schedule has not yet been determined by the Board.
10. The cost of legal services is in excess of \$2 million. The Board at its reorganization meeting decided to engage the three firms representing the District on month to month contracts and begin the process of interviewing firms interested in working with the District. The Board in cooperation with the Monitor is still in the process of making a decision.
11. The District does not have a current contract with its Teachers' Association. The salary schedule has not changed in the seven years since the prior contract expired. Attempts at negotiating a new contract have failed. Teachers in the District are among the lowest paid in the county. This is leading to a high turnover of staff. The District is having difficulty attracting and retaining new teachers, particularly in areas of high need, such as staff certified in English as a New Language (ENL). During this time the teachers were successful in prosecuting two grievances against the District. The total liability for these two losses may exceed \$2 million dollars and will need to be considered in any contract settlement with the District.
12. The District is also without a collective bargaining agreement with its Civil Service employees.
13. The District continues to pay outside vendors for work that could be assigned to unfilled positions in the Business Office
14. The external audit for the 2019-2020 fiscal year has been completed and includes recommendations for the District to follow. As mentioned above, the most recent external audit found no material weaknesses that needed to be addressed.
15. The District does not have an Educational Foundation which would enable it to raise additional money separately from the budget and could make the District eligible for grants or partnerships with other foundations and grantmaking authorities.

#### **Recommendations:**

1. The District shall work with the Legislature and Executive to secure additional aid to compensate for the cost of charter students, to secure additional Foundation Aid, and a home rule bill for reducing the limits for transportation eligibility.
2. The District shall include in the 2021-22 school budget a plan to fully staff the Business Office.
3. A plan will be included in the 2021-22 school budget for having a Board Of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES), the New York State School Boards Association, or another qualified entity review and revise for consideration by the Board all policies related to the operation of the Business Office.
4. During this school year, the Board will select attorneys who have the knowledge and experience necessary to provide a full range of services and will seek to enter into retainer agreements with these attorneys to serve as labor and general counsel, so as to significantly reduce the cost of representation.
5. The Board will try again to reach an agreement with the Teachers' Association and the Civil Service employees.
6. Although the Business Office has made many improvements, it needs to continue on this path of improvement with a focus on its payroll and accounts payable practices.
7. Financial reports will continue to be sent monthly for the Board's review and acceptance.
8. The Audit Committee will be formed and meet during this fiscal year.
9. Expenditures will not exceed the budget during this fiscal year unless an emergency budget adjustment is authorized in advance by the Board.
10. The District should during this fiscal year create an Educational Foundation.

#### **Topics**

In this section of the report, the Monitor provides responses to a series of questions, organized by topic, along with recommendations for actions by the District.

#### **Governance and Programmatic Decision-making**

1. Are leadership roles and responsibilities clearly defined?

Roles and responsibilities are defined. However, there is overlap and a lack of consistency with what others might believe would be the normally assigned responsibilities of a titled position.

#### **Recommendation:**

1. Until a new Superintendent begins his or her tenure, positions as currently defined should remain intact since they are connected to positive changes underway within the District. In July 2021, when a permanent Superintendent is scheduled to begin, one of the Superintendent's first assignments should be the possible reorganization and reassignment of responsibilities in the Central office.
2. Are Board/District/Superintendent goals fully aligned with data-driven strategic plans?

The District has two schools in receivership and has had to develop a District Comprehensive Improvement Plan, which is part of an overall multiyear commitment to district improvement.

### **Budget Development**

3. Are expected programmatic results a factor in determining budget amounts?

Although not consistently done in the past, the development of the 2021-22 school year budget that gets underway in November will involve the entire administrative team. Results of program analysis and evaluation will be used to determine how monies will be assigned.

4. How does the District's budget relate to its strategic plan, long-term operating plan and capital plans?

To the extent possible the Monitor will work with the Business Office and the administration to ensure that the budget will be a blueprint for the District's support of its instructional, operational, and capital plans. Since 22% of the District's revenue is used to pay the tuition for resident students who attend charter schools, the District has had to curtail many of its plans to improve or fully fund its efforts to instruct, operate, or maintain its facilities.

5. Are outside influences or local economic factors affecting the tax base?

At this time, 70% of the property tax is paid by single or multiple family homeowners. Utilities and commercial establishments pay only 30% of property taxes, and that number is shrinking.

6. Is written information available to District staff regarding budgetary objectives and budget preparation procedures?

In the past, little was in writing since staff played a minimal role in the development of the annual spending plan. For the 2021-22 school year budget the new Assistant Superintendent for Business has indicated that all appropriate staff will be involved and will be informed in writing in advance as to the objectives and the process.

7. Does the District establish a budget calendar to ensure the various phases of the process are completed timely?

The calendar for the development of the 2021-22 budget was adopted formally by the board of education at its September public meeting.

8. How is public input solicited and considered in developing the budget?

The public is invited to participate in the three public budget development sessions.

9. Are the budgeted amounts for educational programs adequate to ensure all students meet the higher standards or does the District need to consider alternatives?

In the last three years, the charter school population has grown to almost 2,500 students. This now represents an expense to the District of \$49 million, which reduces significantly the monies available to support regular, special and remedial instruction as well as services and programs designed to supplement that instruction. While the budget lines are the same as those in other Districts, the amount

per student is less and, therefore, the services look the same but serve fewer and then only the neediest students.

**Recommendation:**

2. By January 15, 2021, when the new legislative session begins, the District will have developed a strategic plan for sharing the cost of charter school students with the State.
3. The District will develop a balanced budget within the time frame outlined in the adopted budget timeline.

**Cash Flow Management**

10. Does the District maintain accounting ledgers showing accurate and up-to-date balances?

The electronic financial management system is used to maintain all current financial information in a ledger format.

11. Is there a projection of itemized regular outflow and inflow?

A cash flow chart has been developed for the fiscal year, and there are monthly cash flow reports provided to the Board and approved at public Board meetings.

**Expenditure Controls**

12. How does the District avoid over-committing a budget line?

The business official routinely monitors the Appropriation Status Report. In addition, the internal claims auditor reviews each purchase to ensure that there are sufficient funds in the budget line or lines identified on the purchase order. If there are not, then the Business Office is notified for responsive action. In the past two years, budget lines have been overspent. One example is the tuition for charter schools. No one in the District predicted the large number of students exiting the District to attend charter schools in the 2018-2019 school year.

13. How does the District ensure separation/segregation of duties?

In the past, segregation of duties was identified in audit reports as a problem. At one time, the purchasing agent and the treasurer were the same person. In the past year the duties were segregated by assigning them to two separate individuals. It did not appear as a finding in the most recent audit report.

**Reimbursement Claiming Process**

14. How does the District ensure all available aid is claimed timely each year?

For State aid the District must provide to the State by certain dates information used by the State to calculate the next year's aid. All data was submitted timely for the aid calculations for the current and

next fiscal year. Both the accuracy and the timeliness of submission had been a problem in the past. There are calendars and systems in place to correct these problems.

Federal grants also require timely submission of forms by programmatic and business staff to ensure the District's timely receipt of these funds. Again, there are calendars and systems in place that enable the District to meet all deadlines.

Until recently, STAC forms, the forms used by the District and State to determine a special education student's eligibility for a specific level of aid, and Medicaid reimbursement forms were either not being done or were filled out correctly. In both cases, the District was not submitting the data for on time collection of aid or reimbursement or was submitting incorrect information. Available aid was not being claimed. The District hired a consultant in the 2018-2019 school year and has continued to work with the consultant to ensure that the data is assembled correctly and submitted on time.

For the past three years, the District had been laying out money to support a New York Empire State Grant that was awarded but not funded. The Board of Education was prepared to terminate the program unless the State came through with funding in this school year. In September 2020, a resolution was reached between the State and the District and the grant award will be paid in full this school year. Because the Board received assurance that the state grant money would be available this year it decided to keep the programs and services in place at least through the end of this fiscal year.

**Recommendation:**

4. Until the District can fully fund a position or positions in the District to process STAC forms and Medicaid reimbursement, the District should continue to retain the services of its current consultant.

**Revenue Outlook**

**15. What is the multi-year revenue projection process?**

There are three major sources of revenue in the District: the tax levy, federal and State grants, and State aid. In each case the means for projecting the future of this revenue source is different.

The Board of Education has kept the tax levy flat for the past three years. Even though the Board membership has changed with each election, each new Board has agreed that the local taxpayer cannot afford an increase in the tax levy. Approximately 70% of local revenue comes from local homeowners, and the Board has shown no sign that it will increase the tax levy. At an annual average increase of about 2%, the levy, if increased, could have generated during that three-year period almost \$5 million. However, because incomes within this relatively low-income community have seen little growth during that time a five-year projection that allows for anything more than an aggregated increase of 2 to 4% is not warranted.

How much Federal aid the District can expect in the immediate future is dependent to a significant degree on the actions of the new President and Congress and the status of the national economy. Given the pandemic and the serious problems with the national economy, it is unlikely that there will be significant increases in Federal aid to local educational agencies in the next five years.

State aid projections are more complicated. There are essentially two forms of aid to school districts, formula aid and expense driven aid. Formula aid for Hempstead is primarily driven by the Foundation Aid formula. The formula came into being to provide adequate funding for high need low wealth districts. The formula went into effect at almost the same time as the recession of 2008 and, consequently, was never fully funded. The formula, if fully phased in, would produce millions more in aid for Hempstead and other similarly situated school districts. Thus, aid connected to the Foundation formula has increased, but has not kept pace with the amount that would have been received had the formula been fully phased in, a situation which may have been exacerbated by the district's growing enrollment. .

Given actions already taken by the Governor, there is the possibility that the District will in this fiscal year have its aid reduced by as much as 20 percent, which in the worst-case scenario would reduce the District's State aid from \$139 million to \$111 million. Should this occur, the District may need to reexamine its expenditure plan for this school year and put in place midyear reductions to take place immediately.

State formula aid projections for Hempstead for the next five years must be built on the assumption that aid will continue to be as robust as the New York economy and closely aligned to growth in overall reportable income and the tax levy cap. Projections also need to be based on the amount of aid that the District will ultimately receive in the 2020-21 school year, which could be as much as \$25 million different based on what actions are taken by the Governor. If the past is any predictor of the future than it is likely that formula aid will grow at a pace closely aligned with these factors, which suggests an annual increase of about 2% from the 2020-21 school year base.

The other form of aid is expense driven. While changes in formula aid is driven almost exclusively by the decision of the legislature and Governor, expense aid while connected to wealth driven formulas is also a function of how the District spends its money. There is an opportunity for a District to increase aid by making sure it meets spending thresholds but also by examining its operations and connecting them to aidable expense. Even though in Hempstead the current proportion of these aids is low, these aids can account in the future for a larger share of growth in revenues. One key factor in estimating this aid growth is the degree to which the District outsources some of its current operations to BOCES.

This section is the longest in the report because changes in revenue will be critical in determining the resources that the District will have to address the needs of students. New programs and additional services connected to the improvement of the school system and student results cannot happen without some growth over time of both State and local revenues. Both the State and local taxpayers need to know that money spent on the public schools in Hempstead is money well spent.

### **Human Capital Needs**

#### **16. How does the District attract and retain qualified staff?**

The District is better at attracting than retaining professional staff. The District, like others in Nassau advertises for its openings on the Online Application System (OLAS), an electronic educational job posting site managed by Putnam Northern Westchester BOCES. The District has been able to fill all its teaching and administrative position with appropriately certified candidates. However, because there is no teacher contract, and the pay is close to the lowest in the county, many teachers who can go elsewhere for better pay, do.

**17. What is the status of the District's collective bargaining agreements?**

Both the teachers and the Civil Service employees have not had contracts since 2013 and 2015 respectively.

As mentioned earlier every effort should be made to negotiate successor agreements to those in place at this time.

**18. How does the District utilize temporary/seasonal/contract employees?**

The District uses substitutes, summer, and contract employees as do most districts. These employees are paid hourly or daily, are not part of a bargaining unit and, other than Social Security, have no benefits. There are a number of people who are contracted with to perform specific functions or provide a specific service. These persons have contracts with the District that are approved by the Board and are paid according to the terms and conditions of the contract.

**19. How does enrollment data factor into hiring decisions?**

Because of the changing population of the District, candidates who speak Spanish in addition to English are given preference in hiring.

**Other Major Expenditure and Enrollment Trends**

**20. How are local demographics and neighborhood and population trends used in planning processes?**

Enrollment trends are used to assist in staffing each building.

**Long Term Planning**

**21. How are resident concerns collected and utilized in multi-year planning?**

Residents are encouraged to come to public Board meetings where they are provided an opportunity to voice their questions and concerns. This is the description of what has taken place in a non-pandemic year. Public participation has been minimal during this time of virtual meetings.

**22. How does the District utilize its fund balances in projecting future tax levy calculations?**

According to information available through the Business Office, Fund Balance is not a consideration in the determination of the following year tax levy.

**Indebtedness**

The school District relies on two kinds of debt, bonded and operating. There are old capital projects currently being paid down using bonds, half of which come due in 2023. The newest construction of elementary school is funded each year by Bond Anticipation Notes.

The operating debt that is used to maintain a positive cash flow is approximately \$43 million. At present, this is funded by a Revenue Anticipation Note (RAN).

**Recommendation:**

5. Although the District's consultant recommends Revenue Anticipation Notes (RANs) rather than Tax Anticipation Notes (TANs), it would be worth revisiting this decision. TANs are usually connected to a more favorable fiscal rating and usually have lower interest rates.

**Organizational Structure and Internal Operational Efficiency**

23. Does the District maintain a complete and accurate organizational chart, showing all positions including vacancies and temporary/seasonal/contract employees?

The District does maintain an accurate and complete organizational chart for all positions, except temporary/seasonal and contract employees.

**Facilities and Transportation Status**

As has been indicated elsewhere in this report, the facilities in the District need extensive capital improvements, many of which were described in a Five-year Plan in 2016. Serious discussion of this plan and the work that needs to be addressed should be a part of this year's budget review.

The need for pupil transportation is another theme that has been referenced in this plan as well as the educational plan. Step one is to reduce the distance from 2 miles to .5 miles for aid eligibility at the elementary level and from 3 to 1 mile at the secondary level. If this were to occur, then transportation may become an affordable expense that the community might approve by referendum.

**Five Year Projections**

The intent of the legislation is to provide for a five-year projection of the revenue and the expenditures for the District. It needs to be clearly understood that these projections are based on assumptions whose accuracy will vary based on circumstances that are currently unknown. What is making projections even more problematic is the impact of the pandemic and the volatility and fragility of the economy. The Monitor will look first present his assumptions and then his projections.

**Revenue:** There are a number of revenue sources each of which requires separate consideration. They are:

1. The tax Levy. For the last three years, the tax levy has been kept at a zero increase by the Board. The adjusted base proportions, which is the amount of the levy assigned to any one of four categories of taxes, has continued to assign a higher proportion to single and multiple unit homeowners. This has meant that utilities and businesses now pay a smaller share of the property tax. This also means that even with a zero increase in the tax levy, homeowners' taxes are rising. It is therefore unlikely in the next year that the Board will vote to increase the levy.
2. State Aid. For the purposes of these projections, the Monitor has held aid for the next year flat and for the three remaining years increased it by 2% a year. This is a number connected to the caps on Aid and the levy and is in line with recent aid packages to schools.



3. **PILOTS.** These refer to payments in lieu of taxes. Again because of the volatility of the economy, the Monitor is not increasing them for the first year but then added \$200,000 in each of the subsequent years.
4. Other sources of revenue include appropriated fund balance, use of reserves, and miscellaneous revenues. These will be lower in the second and subsequent school years. In these economic times, the Monitor kept them unchanged at \$3 million.

**Expenditures:** As with revenue, there are a number of categories of expense and different assumptions built into each. The categories of expense are those used in construction of budgets and reporting to the State. They are (1) General Support, which includes central administration, building and grounds, the Board of Education and legal, (2) instruction, which includes all teaching and instructional support services, such as special education, guidance, and English Language Learner services, (3) Transportation, (4) community and (5) benefits. The assumptions for each category are:

1. For general support, the Monitor increased the line by 2% a year. This is commensurate with salary increases for staff within this category of expense.
2. Instruction. Most of this category is composed of teacher and building administrator salaries. Even though there is no new contract, the average change over time is about 2 to 2.5%. Charter school tuition will increase by formula and by increases in enrollment. The District will need to put an additional \$2 million dollars a year into the budget to cover these changes.
3. Transportation. Transportation expense is tied to the cost of living. Assuming the same numbers of students need transportation, the increase each year should not exceed 2%.
4. Benefits and Undistributed. The Teachers Retirement System contribution rate for this year is 9.53%. This is based on a five-year rate of return for investment by the system. When the system has lower rates of return, the contribution rates rise. The Monitor is predicting that rates of return on investments are likely to be modestly lower during the period of the financial plan, which will cause a modest increase in contribution rates. The rates applied were 10%, 10.5%, 11% and 12% for the next four years of the financial plan.

For the Employee Retirement System, which covers Civil Service employees, the rate this year was 13.5% and is expected to go to 16.2% in the next school year. The rates applied in the three out years were 17%, 18% and 18%.

Although health insurance has varied dramatically, it has averaged about a 5% increase per year for the past five years. That was the number used for costing out changes in health insurance.

Undistributed also includes money for debt service and capital.

The escalator percent that was found to best represent the changes for the next five years was 7%.

# REVENUE FORECAST (In Millions)

	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
TAX LEVY	\$ 75.9	\$ 75.9	\$ 75.9	\$ 75.9	\$ 75.9
STATE AID	\$ 139.9	\$ 139.9	\$ 139.9	\$ 142.7	\$ 145.6
PILOTS	\$ 4.8	\$ 4.8	\$ 4.8	\$ 5.0	\$ 5.2
OTHER	\$ 4.7	\$ 4.7	\$ 3.0	\$ 3.0	\$ 3.0
REVENUE	\$ 225.3	\$ 225.3	\$ 223.6	\$ 226.6	\$ 232.8

# EXPENSE FORECAST (In Millions)

	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
GENERAL SUPPORT (2%)	\$ 22.4	\$ 22.4	\$ 22.8	\$ 23.3	\$ 23.8
INSTRUCTION	\$ 149.6	\$ 149.6	\$ 154.1	\$ 158.7	\$ 163.5
TRANSPORTATION	\$ 8.7	\$ 8.7	\$ 8.9	\$ 8.9	\$ 9.0
COMMUNITY SERVICES	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
BENEFITS/UNDISTRIBUTED	\$ 44.6	\$ 44.6	\$ 47.7	\$ 51.1	\$ 54.6
EXPENSE	\$ 225.3	\$ 225.3	\$ 233.6	\$ 242.0	\$ 250.9
					\$ 260.1

# DIFFERENCE (In Millions)

TOTAL EXPENSE (BUDGET)	\$ 225.3	\$ 225.3	\$ 233.6	\$ 242.0	\$ 250.9	\$ 260.1
TOTAL REVENUE	\$ 225.3	\$ 225.3	\$ 223.6	\$ 226.6	\$ 229.7	\$ 232.8
DIFFERENCE**	\$ -	\$ -	\$ (10.0)	\$ (15.4)	\$ (21.2)	\$ (27.3)

\*\*Difference indicates revenue shortage year over year.

As can be seen in years two through five, the projected revenue does not come close to supporting the anticipated expenses. Consequently, in those years the District will need to make some very hard decisions about the future of staff and programs in the District. Whatever the plan, the expenses will need to match the revenue in each of those years.

## Conclusion and Next Steps

The fiscal integrity of this District is a crucial element of any improvement plan. Because of its history and allegations of corruption, there has been little faith that money provided to the District will be well spent. To complicate matters even more, the performance of the students declined precipitously during the last decade, reinforcing the perception of a failed financial and instructional system. Many families, because of this perception of corruption and failure placed their children in local charter schools in greater numbers and with a higher percentage than in any other district on Long Island.

Budget and fiscal management problems have been repeatedly identified in audits and are currently being corrected through District actions. In fact, the most recent external audit did not find any material weaknesses in the District at this time. This means that the systems put in place to correct many of the weaknesses are taking the District in the right direction.

The elephant in the room is revenue. Wherever one looks in the District, there are serious problems with aid, taxes and grants, all of which need to be increased to adequately serve the children and families of this community.

There remain enormous problems related to the fiscal, operational, and instructional health of the District that must be addressed in the upcoming budget discussions and legislative session. It is worth highlighting some of recommendations of the Monitor to address these issues as we conclude this report and plan.

- The District needs to make every effort to conclude negotiations with its teachers and Civil Service employees during this fiscal year;
- The District will need to seek to change the means by which charter schools are funded or seek additional aid to offset the expense in the budget;
- The District will need to address the transportation needs of its students and seek a legislative remedy that makes it affordable for the Hempstead taxpayer;
- The District will need during this fiscal year to engage under a retainer a legal firm with the expertise and experience to act as both general and labor council, which should control cost without compromising quality;
- The District will need to hold vendors accountable for goods and services provided;
- The District will need to produce a study of its predicted enrollment for the next five years;
- The District will need to regularly push out information that describes the many changes it has made to improve the operation and the instruction within the District;
- The District will need to examine alternative operational and instructional programs, services and systems that maximize State aid without compromising local control or quality.

In addition to the above concluding statement of recommendations, there are two actions that the District shall take in order to comply with the provisions of the Fiscal Plan:

- Annually, by September 1 each year, the District shall submit to the Monitor an updated five year financial plan such that for each school year the annual aggregate operating expenses do not exceed annual aggregate operating revenues and the major operating funds of the District are balanced in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles. The financial plan shall include statements of all estimated revenues, expenditures, and cash flow projections of the District; and

- By March 1 the District shall provide the Monitor with a response to each recommendation contained in the Monitor's plan. For each response, the District shall do one or more of the following:
  - Provide documentation regarding how the recommendation is being implemented by the District, which may include reference to the District Comprehensive Education Plan, School Comprehensive Education Plan, Targeted Assistance Plan, School Receivership Plan or other existing District and/or school plan.
  - Identify the actions that the District shall take to implement the recommendation, which shall include timelines and performance benchmarks, and which may be done through amendment of existing plans.
  - Provide an explanation for why the District will not implement the recommendation.

The District's response shall be considered a part of the Monitor's plan in the same manner as the Monitor's original report.

On a personal note, the Monitor would like to thank all those who gave of their valuable time to help develop this plan and the educational plan. Both the staff and community were thankful for the intercession of the State and gave the Monitor hope that together we can truly make a difference in Hempstead. They have convinced me that where there is the will, and it is there, there will be a way.

## **APPENDIX A: SOURCES**

## **Appendix A: Sources**

### **Websites:**

**NYSED.Gov  
Hempstead Schools.org**

### **Organizations**

### **NAACP**

**NYCC (New York Community Change)  
Hempstead Clergy Council  
Hempstead PTA  
Long Island Association of ELL Teachers  
Hempstead Hispanic Counseling Center**

### **Hempstead School District Staff**

**Interim Superintendent  
Assistant and Associate Superintendents  
All Principals  
Middle and Elementary Coordinators of the International Baccalaureate Program  
Coordinator of ELL Programs and Services  
Director and Assistant Director of Buildings and Grounds  
Supervisor of Security  
Consultant to the Business Office**

### **Reports:**

**State Aid Runs for 2019-2020 and 2020-2021  
External and Internal Audits for 2019-2020  
Hempstead School District budgets for 2019-2020 & 2020-2021  
Distinguished Educator interim and final reports  
Political Representatives, Leaders and/or Staff  
Supervisor and Councilwoman, Town of Hempstead  
State Senator  
State Assemblywoman  
Congresswoman  
US Senator**