

YEAR TWO---FIRST QUARTER REPORT

OCTOBER-DECEMBER 2018

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Summary and a Special Note Regarding Legal Matters

The District continues to make progress across many areas. As I have said in previous reports, progress is not the same as success. Hempstead has not yet achieved success. I do not think that anyone in the District would claim success either. There is, however, real progress and that should be recognized. As with previous reports to you, this report is divided into ten areas. I will provide updates in each.

Before I proceed to the updates, I need to inject a special note regarding legal matters. In prior reports I have been extremely circumspect in commenting on legal matters. I will continue to be circumspect in this report as well. However, I would like to note that the Board has followed through on its commitment to pursue all cases of possible infractions of law and significant violations of District policies or State regulations. Infractions of law have been or are being referred to the appropriate legal authorities and disciplinary actions have been or will be commenced for inappropriate behavior.

Just as the Board should be taken to task severely for any failure, now or in the future, to rigorously pursue illegality or inappropriate behavior, it is my hope that the community and the State will recognize and support the actions of the Board in this area and that when any of these cases comes to light the community and the media will applaud rather than condemn the District. No district wants to have cases like these but pursuing them rigorously rather than sweeping them under the rug in order to avoid embarrassment or negative publicity is an important and necessary step.

It should also be noted that pursuing these cases has taken very significant time, energy and expense. It would have been wrong to argue against this as that would have meant failing to pursue cases of wrongdoing but these are resources which deserve to be focused on students rather than on the inappropriate or illegal behavior of adults.

During your visit to Hempstead in December you urged that once the Board had done its part with various investigations and passed cases along to others for further action, the Board should shift as much time, attention and resources as possible towards instruction, facilities, etc. Obviously, they will need to continue to be involved to some degree in all of these matters on an ongoing basis but I believe that what you recommended was and is also the intent of the Board. They need to hold to that.

Governance

The members of the current Board have shown a willingness to devote a great deal of time and attention to the challenges facing the District. In fact, they held 33 meetings between July 1 and mid-December. A dozen were held in the first two months of this quarter (October and November). The vast majority of these meetings have not ended until just before or even after midnight.

As noted in the special note at the beginning of this report, much of this time has been devoted to several legal matters. These matters have imposed a heavy financial burden on the District as well as consumed a considerable portion of the Board and administration's time and attention. As you noted to various Board members in your meetings with them in December, it was your hope and theirs that attention and resources could be shifted to other pressing areas even as these legal matters proceed.

Many of the challenges I have listed in prior reports are still outstanding:

- Contract negotiations---Many contracts expired years ago. Little progress has been achieved in settling new ones.
- Building a strong leadership team at the District level—The District has not yet hired a full time permanent assistant superintendent for business or an instructional leader to replace the Acting Superintendent. In addition, the District depends in part on retirees who may not be available long-term.
- Holding a retreat to be facilitated by NYSSBA---The Board has talked about the importance of a retreat since July and Board members affirmed this in December. To date, no date has been set. Working out appropriate protocols within the Board and between Board members and staff is a high priority. Board members have shown an admirable willingness to reach out to parents, students, community members and staff. There are, however, insufficient protocols within the Board on how problems surfaced will be handled.
- Goals and who will do what when—In October, at the time of my reappointment, there was an excellent discussion about the District goals, what Board members individually and collectively would do to realize these, what the Acting Superintendent would do to realize these and what I would do specifically to assist both Board members and the Acting Superintendent. That conversation has not been completed.
- Putting District priorities into practice—The current Board has made clear from the beginning of July its intent to make “Students First”. Putting this into practice has been challenging, particularly given the burden of legal issues noted at the beginning of this report. The Board has tried to offset this by meeting more frequently. What they have been less successful in doing is using Board meetings to focus on in-depth presentations and discussions of priority areas. This is not a negative but a case of missed opportunities.
- Auditors---The Board followed through on their commitment to meet with all three audit firms. These meetings were lengthy with the auditors reviewing the status of prior recommendations and discussing what needs to be done now. The Board now needs to meet with the internal control auditors to set the targets for this year's risk audit and schedule year-end meetings with all three firms.
- 100 Main—The District has explored the possibility of renting additional space at 100 Main since last summer. This is still up in the air.

Due to vacant positions within the leadership team and the demanding nature of some of the challenges facing the District the Acting Superintendent has not been able to get out to the buildings to meet face to face with parents and staff as frequently as would be desirable. In fact, this has happened relatively infrequently during this quarter. While this kind of interaction is important but difficult in any district, it is particularly important in Hempstead which has seen so many changes in leadership over past decades.

Business

Discussions during your meetings with Board members and District officials in mid-December underscored the continuing progress being made in the District's business operations but those discussions also brought to light the areas which still need work before they can achieve an adequate level of "normalcy".

The contrast with business operations a year ago could not be more dramatic, however. The District has a solid and accurate 2018-19 budget, cash flow is good, policies and procedures recommended by the three audit firms have been or are being implemented, the business and personnel departments have developed an accurate table of organization and the development of a budget for 2019-20 is on target.

While progress has been made in the timeliness of both the requisitions process and bill paying, more needs to be done to bring the speed of all transactions up to a satisfactory level. The backlogs are smaller, way smaller than they once were, but there are still backlogs which adversely impact instruction as well as District operations. A time table for this spring and summer has been established which will put the District on a normal timeline and process for the 2019-20 school year but it is imperative that the remaining backlogs be completely cleared up long before then.

Hempstead was in the first group of districts required to meet the new, more detailed State budget "transparency" reporting rules. This document was filed and accepted.

The District with the assistance of Nassau BOCES is preparing for the transition from Finance Manager to nVision this spring. This is a substantial undertaking but it will be beneficial, particularly in supporting closer communication and control between the personnel and business offices.

Funding for capital projects was secured on a timely basis so there is no lack of cash to undertake the work approved thus far. As noted in the section on facilities, the Board is currently considering the creation of a capital repair reserve. Over time this should give the District greater flexibility in financing its capital projects.

The 2019-20 budget outlook is favorable at this point but there are many very significant demands for potentially available funds given unresolved contracts, the need to improve and support instructional programs and redressing problems of serious, deferred maintenance.

The Office of the State Comptroller gave Hempstead a score of 28.3 (susceptible fiscal stress), just above a score of "no designation". The OSC also gave Hempstead a score of 71.7 for "significant environmental stress". Most of these, such as "percentage of Economically Disadvantaged Students" and "percentage of English Language Learners", are outside of the District's capacity to control. Clearly, Hempstead is a

district which faces significant fiscal challenges but as the OSC report notes the District is currently doing a solid job of managing them. Given the District's recent track record I had expected this level of score on the factors within the District's control. If the District's stays on course, next year's score should be lower.

Safety/Security

Security continues to be relatively good across all schools with few of the kinds of incidents which were happening on an almost daily basis at the High School in the fall of 2017.

The supervisor of the security department remains on administrative leave with pay while an investigation is being conducted. This has placed a strain on the District but operations have been maintained at a satisfactory level.

Facilities

Phase 1 of the Rhodes Elementary School demolition and construction of a new school was approved by NYSED in mid-December. Phase 1 involves the demolition of the existing building and some site preparation. Bids are being solicited and should be awarded in mid-February.

Plans for Phase 2—construction of the new building---will be submitted to NYSED for review around the end of January.

The Board interviewed the two top companies who responded to the RFP for construction manager for the Rhodes project. A formal decision should be made shortly.

Two proposals for an Energy Performance Contract were submitted by companies which have done many of these projects on Long Island. Both are currently under review. The total amount of work proposed is considerably smaller than what had been estimated—only \$5-6 million—but this is still substantial. There are many much-needed projects included. The winning proposal should be submitted to the Board and community for review shortly.

Work on the restoration of the Prospect School, which was severely damaged in a fire shortly before the start of the 2018-19 school year, continues on track with substantial completion expected on time in late spring.

The appointment of a new Director of Facilities, an individual with considerable experience in the field, along with the appointments of heads of various functions has brought a substantial improvement to the District's facilities operations. There is a great deal of deferred maintenance which needs to be addressed which cannot be fixed easily, cheaply or immediately but the work is underway.

The Board is considering a proposal which could be submitted to the community at the time of the budget vote this spring to establish a capital repair reserve. If approved, this reserve will take time to fund but the establishment of such a reserve would give the district another tool to address outstanding facilities problems in addition to the General Fund budget and bonds.

The District has been negotiating for the lease of more space at 100 Main Street for potential use for offices and/or students. There is nothing conclusive at this point.

Many of the District's buildings had to be placed on "fire watch" when it was determined that devices in many buildings were not connecting with emergency services. The problems were corrected except for one which is currently being addressed as of the writing of this report.

High School

The High School was approved for the AP Capstone Program.

The High School leadership team has divided the students who are on the cusp for graduation this year in order to maintain a high level of personal contact with each of these students. They are trying to ensure that these students receive all necessary support so they do not fall off track. This has been done in the past but not to the same degree. The results of the January Regents should give an indication of the rate of progress. Improving the graduation rate of current seniors and ensuring that students in grades 9-11 on track for graduation is the overwhelming priority.

Pre K-Grade 8

Implementation of the IB Primary and Middle Years programs continues to move forward. Two days of professional development workshops were held for appropriate staff in early December. In my initial assessment over a year ago I quoted a teacher who spoke of a long history of "consistent inconsistency". Implementing IB will take years to implement fully but it will bring consistency and rigor across classrooms, grade levels and buildings which will directly address the historical issues and lead to a steady progression of increasingly well-prepared students entering grade 9 at the High School.

While the NYSED Grades 3-8 ELA and math assessments will not be administered for several months and the results not available until months thereafter the winter administrations of the NWEA and iReady assessments should give some indication of whether progress continues to be made.

Despite considerable turmoil at the District level and secondary school level last year, the elementary schools individually and collectively were largely able to maintain a high degree of focus on instructional improvement. I think there is reason to believe that this is at least part of the reason for the increase in 3's and 4's and the decrease in 1's on the NYS assessments. I would like to note that elementary principals have been meeting as a PLC (professional learning community) and that there has been considerable analysis and discussion of data district-wide and at the building level. This level of focus, if consistently maintained, plus the efforts to implement the IB Primary Years program should pay off in steady improvement in achievement.

The principal of ABGS Middle School resigned on short notice. He has been replaced by an experienced, recently retired principal who had worked in Hempstead a number of years ago in another position. The search for a permanent replacement will begin shortly.

The move to four small learning communities in the Middle School is a work in process with benefits only partially realized at this point.

In the paragraph above I noted the reduction in the percentage of 1's and the increase in the percentage of 3's and 4's on State assessments in the District's elementary schools over the past three years. This was reaffirmed by three schools earning a status of "Good Standing". Please note that the other two are also making progress but they have not yet achieved at an absolute level sufficient to earn the same status. There are no elementary schools in receivership.

Special Education

The District continues to implement the Corrective Action Plan agreed to by the District and NYSED.

ELL

The District continues to implement the Corrective Action Plan agreed to by the District and NYSED.

The High School is encouraging more students to apply for the Seal of Biliteracy. This program was initiated last year. It was well received.

Technology

There are three significant initiatives currently underway on top of continuing efforts to upgrade the District's technology infrastructure:

- Implementation of corrective steps to deal with the issues identified in an audit of the District's use of PowerSchool. This process is well underway but it will take more time to complete. Implementation of these steps is necessary to ensure that District data can be easily and properly uploaded for required reports to NYSED.
- A move from Finance Manager to nVision. All departments affected by this—primarily technology, business and personnel---must prepare their operations to meet nVision's requirements before the changeover can be implemented.
- Preparation of a proposal for the second half of the District's SmartSchool allocation. The target date for this is before the end of March.

Food Service

The issues identified in the NYSED review last spring were all addressed and the program continues to run on a sound footing.