

YEAR TWO—SECOND QUARTER REPORT

JANUARY-MARCH 2019

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In this and future reports I will increasingly focus on the long-term future of the District's efforts to sustain and, where possible, accelerate improvement efforts. Long term, permanent improvement was and has remained your goal from the beginning. It has guided my work with the District.

In your initial charge you included Commissioner's Regulations 100.17, the last section of which stated the following:

"Upon completion of service of the distinguished educator, the district and school shall prepare and submit to the commissioner a written report describing how they shall continue, sustain and extend the continuous improvement structures and systems that have been implemented to reverse chronic failure and to support improved academic achievement and improved graduation outcomes."

Completion of this task is the responsibility of the District but preparing for that step as we move from resolving immediate problems to sustained improvement is a large part of the framework for this and future quarterly reports.

Before I provide an update on progress on the areas noted in prior reports over the past quarter I must note a very significant new concern which has arisen since my last quarterly report. Over the past 18 months I never mentioned adequacy of funds as a concern. While more money would allow the District to do more, I felt that there were adequate funds to address the District's priorities. As I noted to you in my special report on February 28, 2019, however, adequate funds are now a very significant concern. The primary factor is the cost of charter school tuition reimbursement. A year ago, the cost was \$25.9 million. This year the total bill is expected to be \$34.3 million. Next year, based on February projections from the charter schools (without adjusting for additional approved expansions), that figure is expected to rise to \$42.9 million. With an increase in State aid for 2019-20 of less than \$2 million the District will be forced to pay for this by making deep cuts in the 2019-20 budget and by dipping into reserves for one shot revenues which cannot be repeated in future years. With projected increases in charter school tuition reimbursement in 2020-21 and subsequent years and with diminished reserves to draw upon, the squeeze on the District will only become greater.

The Hempstead community would be best served by charter and regular public schools that are both adequately funded and competing with each other to improve academic performance for all students. The current situation seems not the fault of the charter schools or the result of mismanagement by the

District but the ramification of the formula by which charter schools are funded when carried to an increasingly extreme level.

This situation threatens to seriously undermine the progress in instructional improvement made to date and the capacity of the District to sustain and accelerate instructional improvement efforts long term. I cannot emphasize this danger enough. While I have been pleased to note progress in past reports and while I will note further progress in many areas over the past quarter in the paragraphs below I am very concerned.

I am further concerned by the fact that there seems to be insufficient recognition of the severity of the District's financial situation (current and future) by virtually all parties. I realize that part of this is the normal lag between hearing about a problem and having the reality sink in but it is a concern. Dealing with the ramifications of this new reality would be a challenge for any community. It is a particularly difficult for a District which already had as many significant challenges as Hempstead has.

Governance

- The vast majority of the challenges facing the Board remain the same as in previous reports. I will not reiterate them here. Part of the reason they remain from one quarter to the next is that many are longstanding and very significant. That is understandable. Part is due, however, to the difficulty of the Board and Acting Superintendent coming together and functioning as an effective governance team. Time and time again—most recently, at a weekend March retreat facilitated by NYSSBA---the Board demonstrates that it understands both what needs to be done and how it needs to be done. Time and time again, implementation does not live up to plans. Much progress is being made across many areas as I have noted in this and prior reports. The Board and Acting Superintendent should be acknowledged and applauded for this but sustaining and accelerating this improvement requires more effective leadership.
- I remain concerned about the lack of a full experienced and highly expert team of administrators. Positions remain unfilled and the District is still too dependent on retirees who may not be available long term. In light of the challenges facing the District, Hempstead needs a solid team with the individual and collective experience and expertise to sustain improvement efforts for the next 5-10 years.
- As indicated above, there is currently insufficient recognition of the severity of the financial challenges facing the District or the steps which will have to be taken to meet them. Bringing the District and the community through this successfully, particularly if it is in the context of a Board election as divisive as last year's, is a significant challenge and a threat to the academic progress underway.

Budget/Finance

- The District successfully transitioned from Finance Manager to nVision.
- The draft 2019-20 budget was prepared in an appropriate and timely fashion. However, as noted above, the District's plans had to be dramatically revised mid-stream to account for a rise

in the cost of charter school tuition reimbursement from \$25.9 million last year to a projected \$42.9 million next year. The draft 2020-21 budget (which has not yet been adopted by the Board of Education as of the writing of this report) proposes to address the increase in charter school expenses by steep cuts and the use of one-time reserves.

- Several possible legal settlements could also have a substantial negative impact the District's finances this year or next.
- The financial picture does not take into account any new labor agreements.
- District business operations continue to improve and should approach a "normal" level through the end of this fiscal year and into next.

Safety/Security

- An interim head was appointed to temporarily replace the supervisor on a paid leave of absence.

Facilities

- Demolition of the Rhodes School will occur in the next several weeks.
- Construction plans for the new Rhodes elementary school have been filed and are under review.
- The renovation of the Prospect School which suffered serious damage as a result of a lightning strike last August is due to be completed on schedule mid-May.
- An Energy Performance Contract will be presented to the Board and community for review at the May Board meeting. This has taken far longer than I thought it should but it is nearing completion. Please note that this is the District's first EPC.
- Regular building and grounds maintenance and upkeep is occurring on a more regular basis. There is still, however, a significant amount of deferred maintenance which will take time and money to address. The EPC will help with part of the financial need but more will be necessary in future years.

High School Instruction

- Intense and individual support is being focused on students with the potential to graduate in June or August 2019.

PreK-8 Instruction

- Implementation of the International Baccalaureate Primary and Middle Years programs appears to be on track. This is the first full year of candidacy status.
- Data from iReady and/or NWEA is being used to more effectively target student weaknesses. Over the past three years, the percentage of 1's on NYSED assessments has been dramatically reduced and the percentage of 3's and 4's dramatically increased.
- Virtually all students participated in the 2019 assessments with minimal "opt-out".
- The results will tell whether the District has been able to sustain and perhaps accelerate improvement.

- Three elementary schools-Jackson Main, Barack Obama and David Patterson—recognized by the Better Outcomes Research organization for high performance.

Special Education

- District officials are working closely with NYSED staff to ensure that the District not only implements the current corrective action plan fully but also takes all steps necessary to get off any list of deficient districts.

ELL

- The District continues to implement the corrective action plan agreed to with NYSED.

Technology

- The most significant steps in the technology area the implementation of nVision, cleaning up data on Power School and resolving long-standing student data problems. The last is particularly noteworthy.

Food Service

- The District is looking forward to the upcoming State review to confirm that all of the remedial steps implemented after the last review meet all regulations.