

**Semi-Annual Report of the Hempstead Union Free School District Monitor  
(January 1, - June 30, 2021)**

**Introduction**

The Hempstead Union Free School District (HUFSD or “the District”) is in the center of Nassau County. It is by several important metrics the poorest and neediest district in the county. In terms of need, the percent of students who are free or reduced-price lunch eligible is consistently above 70%. In terms of wealth, the District’s combined wealth ratio, an index that compares a districts per pupil income and property wealth to the State averages, is .28. 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 a little over 9,000 public school students, 2,790 of whom currently attend charter schools. Approximately 6,250 students are enrolled in one of the District’s six elementary schools, 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 approximately of 30% African American and 70% Latino students.

In the 2018-2019 school year, New York State Education Department (NYSED) statistics demonstrated that students in the District underperformed their classmates in other districts, with only a small percentage of District elementary and middle school students achieving proficiency on assessments in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics.

The 2020-21 school year was like no other, and for the second year in a row there were no new State assessments administered to grades 3-8 students in English language arts and mathematics. Participation last year in District administered tests, the NWEA and i-Ready, was not high enough to create reliable baseline data for the District. Both tests are being administered in fall 2021, and it appears that participation will be high enough to create a baseline for future comparisons.

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”). Turnover in Board and administrative positions 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 was an erosion of resources available to support meaningful change in the instructional program. There was 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.

However, this year saw for the first time in recent history a large increase in Foundation Aid that enabled the District in its 2021-2022 budget to “build back” some of the services that and staff who had been lost. The 2020-21 school year also saw the infusion of significant amounts of federal aid that could be used in the 2021-22 school year and the next two years to help recover from the impact of the pandemic on the District and its students.

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 financial plan for the District.
- In conjunction with the Board develop an 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.
- 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.

### **General Findings**

The General Findings contained in the Academic and Fiscal Improvement Plans developed last fall began with the following statement: "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." This perception is changing, and there is a belief among many stakeholders that the District is in a period of transition and improvement. For example, it was said at a recent Clergy Council meeting that the "...narrative needs to change to meet the reality."

As was stated in the plan last year, and which remains true, the staff in the District view themselves as being in a state of reflective change and improvement. There was and is a recognition that for the past decade the District was consistently underperforming in terms of

the education provided to students. There is a belief and hope that this is about to change given the transformations made this past year and those on the immediate horizon.

There were two plans that were adopted by the Board and approved by the Commissioner last year. One focused on academics and the other on finance. They included a series of findings and recommendations. And each had a section dedicated to governance.

### **MAJOR FIRST YEAR IMPRESSIONS**

When I first came to the District in July 2020, the District was still recovering from the pandemic shutdown during the last third of the school year and preparing for an opening that was going to rely heavily on the use of technology to provide instruction. Consequently, the first months of my time in Hempstead were dedicated to supporting the District's efforts to secure a laptop and internet access for every student in the District. By the first week of November, every student had access to a District provided laptop and the internet. This was done while I also worked to learn how the District functioned both academically and fiscally. What emerged in November from my efforts were a series of academic and fiscal recommendations that I believe will bring about significant improvement in the operations of the District and the performance of its students. After a year of continued learning, I am now in the process of updating these recommendations.

I have during this first year been able to develop a positive working relationship with the Board and the Administration. They have taken to heart the recommendations contained in the Academic and Fiscal Improvement Plans, and I am supporting them as they work to make them a reality in this school community. I believe that, although at times rough around the edges, this Board is making a concerted effort to work with one another and to have systemwide procedures in place that facilitate their decision-making. This is best seen in the procedures that the Board has agreed should be used for the hiring of staff. It remains to be seen if, when the procedures are utilized, the Board will approve timely the recommendations made by the Superintendent. A positive harbinger is that because of these discussions, the District now has a permanent rather than an interim Superintendent and a new labor attorney.

My relationship with the administration helped produce a balanced budget for the 2020-21 school year. In fact, the expenditure plan that the District developed and that I recommended the Commissioner approve produced a surplus. On the academic side of the ledger, I began and continue to work on excellence in student performance and what it should look like in Hempstead. As I had recommended in the Academic Improvement Plan, the Superintendent and her administrative staff took the steps necessary so that sixth grade students now attend the elementary schools; Advanced Placement (AP) coursework has expanded; eighth-grade students are enrolled in Regent's math, science, and/or social studies courses; all teachers are involved in staff development on the use of computers for instruction; and all but one of the elementary schools was approved and registered as International Baccalaureate (IB) schools.

The Superintendent on behalf of the District has prepared an Annual Report that summarizes and characterizes the District's response to each of the recommendations made in my Academic and Fiscals plans for the 2020-21 school year. The report, which is posted on the District website, provides a listing of the 2020-21 recommendations, a characterization of the

District response, and then a brief narrative describing the actions that addressed each recommendation. Colors are assigned to each recommendation. Blue signifies completion; green, work commenced and on schedule; yellow, work commenced but behind schedule; and red, work that has not commenced. A review of the Annual Report will show that most responses are either yellow or green. This means that work on the recommendation has commenced but there are varying degrees of progress.

During this first year of implementation of the Academic and Fiscal Improvement Plans, there were several noteworthy changes that reflect the direction in which the District is heading. A more complete version of first year implementation accomplishments can be found in the District's 2020-21 school year report on implementation of the academic and fiscal improvement plans. In addition, I have worked with the District to develop updated Fiscal and Academic Improvement Plans with new or revised recommendations for the 2021-2022 school year that are scheduled for an adoption vote by the Board at its November 18, 2021 Regular Board meeting. Both the 2020-21 Annual Report by the District on the implementation of the Academic and Fiscal Improvement Plans and the updated 2020-21 school year Academic and Fiscal Improvement Plans will be posted on the District website, Hempstead Schools.org. In this semi-annual report, I will provide a partial listing and summary of the information contained in the other documents.

I will divide this semi-annual report into two parts: academic and fiscal accomplishments and 2020-21 school year challenges that will continue to need attention during the 2021-22 school year. This summary will focus first on the academic and then on the fiscal elements of the plans.

## **ACADEMIC**

### Accomplishments:

- The Board appointed the Interim Superintendent to a permanent position and provided her with a three-year contract.
- All but one of the elementary and the middle school have been officially certified by the IB organization and are registered as IB schools.
- For the second year in a row, the four-year August graduation rate for Hempstead High School was at or above 78%. In addition, the number of AP courses offered in the 2020-21 school year for the 2021-22 school year rose from 14 to 18 and the number of planned participants increased from 462 to 471.
- Despite all the threatened delays because of COVID-19, the new Rhodes school opened on time. As a result, many of the portable classrooms in the District will be taken out of service.
- A laptop was made available to every student in the District, thus enabling opportunities for virtual learning by every student attending the HUFSD.
- All teachers were trained on the use of electronic devices to provide both synchronous and asynchronous instruction to students.

- The sixth grade was taken out of the middle school and, for the 2021-2022 school year, sixth graders were placed in elementary schools.

#### Major Focal Points for the 2021-22 Revised Plan

There continue to be several areas that present unique challenges to the District. While detailed information can again be found in the District's annual report, there are some challenges of note:

- Although the four-year graduation rate has improved significantly, approximately 20% of the students are not graduating on time. Continued improvement in the graduation rate remains a high priority for the District.
- The transportation limits remain unchanged for the 2021-22 school year. They remain at three miles for secondary students and two miles for elementary students. Any student who lives closer to his or her school than those distances is not eligible for transportation. Lowering those limits or finding another way to provide transportation for currently ineligible students remains a priority for the District, its legislative representatives, and many within the community.
- Having the Rhodes school come online for the 2021-22 school year was a significant accomplishment but also highlights the need to modernize other buildings within the District. Aging facilities need updating, and the remainder of the portables need to be put out of service.
- Attendance problems for teachers and students continue. Successful instruction is highly correlated to the connection of students with teachers. When students and/or teachers are routinely absent, the efficacy of the instructional program is seriously threatened.
- Although assessment data for the past two school years is scant, what is available from either the administration of the NWEA or the i-Ready tests, as well as the State test results released in October 2021, suggest that Hempstead students at the elementary and middle schools are not performing up to expectations, and unacceptable numbers are performing below grade level.
- The Superintendent used her Receivership authority to add fifteen minutes to the instructional periods for students at the high school and the middle school; however, this additional time will expire when receivership status ends for these schools. This added time may appear minimal but is crucial for the scheduling of special services during block periods. The District and the teachers' association will need to find a way to continue this provision in future collective bargaining agreements.
- Service models for English language learners (ELLs) students again need to be evaluated and efficacy determined.

## FISCAL

### Accomplishments:

- The budget for the 2020-2021 school year was balanced. In fact, revenues were underestimated by approximately \$7.2 million, and the budget was underspent by approximately \$4.5 million. Currently, the 2021-2022 budget appears out of balance by approximately \$3 million because of the underestimation of charter school tuitions. However, if the actions being taken by the Business Office continue, the budget will be balanced at the end of the fiscal year
- The Civil Service employee contract was settled.
- The District finished the construction of its newest elementary building, Rhodes Academy, on time. The building opened in September 2021. There are continuing discussions by the District with its architects about plans to float another bond issue during the 2021-22 school year that will address many of the problems with aging buildings that are sorely in need of repairs or renovation.
- Timely financial reports were regularly provided to the Board. In addition, the Business Office continued its efforts to maximize revenue from Medicaid reimbursements and submit to the NYSED STAC (System to Track and Account for Children) forms on time. There were minimal errors or problems with either payroll or accounts payable. Payrolls and payments to vendors were, with very few exceptions, timely and accurate.

### Major Focal Points for the 2021-22 Revised Plan

- Charter school costs continue as a major challenge for the District. Costs for charter school tuition for resident students rose from approximately \$49 million in the 2020-2021 school year to an estimated \$58.8 million for the 2021-22 school year. This \$9.8 million dollar change is a 20% increase, making it by far the largest area of increase in the District's budget. No other expense comes close to an increase of that magnitude or that rate of increase. In addition, because of pending increases in student enrollment in charter schools and the formula for charter school tuition, the District is facing significant future increases in charter school costs.
- Although the District budget and expenses for the 2020-21 school year were balanced, the 2021-22 school year budget year presents challenges, e.g., new staff and shifts of expense to federal grants to cover the cost of charter schools, that could easily, if not monitored regularly and carefully, cause the expenses to exceed the budget.
- While the District was successful in providing a laptop for every student, it now must develop multi-year plans for the maintenance and replacement of all the District's electronic equipment, including those laptops.

- The school District was the recipient of substantial sums of temporary financial assistance from the Federal Government in its American Rescue Plan (ARP) and Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER II) grants. The District will need to monitor expenses to ensure that expenditures are made timely and are consistent with the plans submitted and approved by the State.
- The Front Street elementary school is a facility rented from the Diocese of Rockville Centre. The lease expires at the end of the 2021-22 school year, and the Diocese has decided to rent the facility to another entity. The District will need to find another school for the 350 students attending Front Street by the opening of school in September 2022.
- Renting a school should be viewed as a temporary fix for a larger problem that involves adding another school or adding space to currently existing facilities. The District also continues to use portable classrooms at some of its schools. This is another reason for adding space to its elementary schools. The District should develop plans for addressing this need. Concurrently, the District should be addressing the renovation and maintenance of all its aging facilities as part of a comprehensive facilities plan for presentation to the voters within the next year.
- As part of the Monitor's Fiscal Plan for the 2020-21 school year, there was a five-year projection of revenues and expenses. For a variety of reasons, these projections were inaccurate and will need to be updated on the basis of changes introduced for the 2021-22 fiscal year.

### **SUMMARY AND CLOSING**

This report is an update that provides highlights of both the accomplishments and the continuing needs and challenges of the District. It needs to be viewed in the context of the District's Annual Report and the 2021-2022 school year revisions of the Academic and Fiscal Improvement Plans. The Annual Report provides a detailed response by the District to the original set of Monitor recommendations and the 2021-2022 school year revisions that will be considered for acceptance by the Board in November 2021 provide very specific changes to the 2020-2021 school year recommendations.

The law requires that I attach to this semiannual update a list of approved contracts with service providers. I have included as Appendix I, a listing of those contracts.

I would like to conclude with a note of thanks to the Board and the community for its willingness to look critically at the education it provides to its children and consider and implement changes that will enhance life in this community and improve instruction for its children. I would also like to thank the administration, the teachers, and the entire staff for their commitment and dedication to the students and the community during this unique school year and look forward to continuing to work to achieve excellence for all students.

APPENDIX 1: List of Board Approved Contracts from January,2021 through June,2021

<b>VENDOR / DOCKET DATE (S)</b>	<b>SERVICE</b>
MILBER, MARCUS, PLOUSADIS, SEIDEN 1/21/21, 2/17/21, 6/14/21	SPECIAL COUNSEL
SCHER LAW FIRM 1/21/21	LABOR COUNSEL
TCA CONSULTING 2/25/21	COMPREHENSIVE SUPPORT
ROCKVILLE CENTER SD 2/25/21	HEALTH/WELFARE SERVICES
MALVERNE SD	" "
JERICO SD	" "
FARMINGDALE SD	" "
FREEPORT SD	" "
UNIONDALE SD	" "
"	
LEAH MURPHY	" "
"	
TEXTBOOK CENTRAL 3/11/21, 4/8/21 ,6/17/21	TEXTBOOK LOAN PROGRAM
HMB CONSULTANTS 3/11/21 ,4/8/21	FOOD SERVICE CONSULTANT
MINEOLA SD 3/18/21	HEALTH/WELFARE SERVICES
LYNBROOK SD	" "
"	
HICKSVILLE SD	" "
"	
SYOSSET SD	" "
"	
SOUTH HUNTINGTON SD	" "
"	
WEST ISLIP SD	" "
"	
<b>HEMPSTEAD PUBLIC SCHOOLS JANUARY-JUNE 2021</b>	<b>PROFESSIONAL SERVICES</b>
<b>VENDOR</b>	<b>SERVICE</b>
<b>DOCKET DATE (S)</b>	
FAMILY HEALTH INTERNATIONAL 3/18/21	CONSULTANT SERVICES
ELITE CONSTRUCTION 5/21/21	CONSTRUCTION MGR/ENERGY



ELENA CACAVAS LLP  
6/17/21  
ED CULLEN  
6/17/21

COMPLAINT INV.  
CONSULTANT SERVICES

**CULTURE PLAY**

**GRANT PROGRAMS  
EDUCATIONAL CONSULTANT**

4/15/21

HISPANIC COUNSELING CENTER

“ “

4/15/21

RESTORATION HAIR STUDIO

“ “

4/15/21

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY COMMISSION

“ “

4/15/21

TIARA ADAMS/DANCING

“ “

4/15/21

TOUCH POINT PRODUCTIONS

“ “

4/15/21

MORRISON MENTORS

“ “

4/15/21

RICHARD CELESTINE CONSULTANTS

“ “

4/15/21

ARC 7

“ “

4/15/21

BAKES BY B. WILSON

“ “

4/15/21

YOUNG ENTREPRENEURS

“ “

4/15/21

FAMBRO MGT

“ “

4/15/21,6/29/21

HEMPSTEAD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

JANUARY-JUNE 2021

VENDOR

SERVICE

DOCKET DATE (S)

**GRANT PROGRAMS (CONT.)**

INT. CTR. FOR LEADERSHIP

EDUCATIONAL CONSULTANT

5/20/21

ED. TRAINING INST.

“ “

5/20/21

A-3 WORKOUT

“ “

5/21/21

ORMEGE ALLIANCES

“ “

5/21/21

TECH TOOLS FOR LIFE

“ “

5/20/21

REDZ INC.	“	“
5/21/21		
YORK. COMM. COLLEGE	“	“
5/20/21		
ECHO 4 CHANGE INC.	“	“
5/20/21		
JAQUELINE THOMAS	“	“
5/21/21		
QUEENSBORO COMM COLLEGE	“	“
5/21/21		
VYUSE	“	“
6/17/21		
LI DISP. RES. CTR.	“	“
6/29/21		
R CELESTINE CONS.GROUP	“	“
6/29/21		