



THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT / THE UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK

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Commissioner of Education  
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February 15, 2018

Ms. Regina Armstrong  
Acting Superintendent of Schools  
Hempstead Union Free School District  
185 Peninsula Boulevard  
Hempstead, NY 11550

Dear Ms. Armstrong:

Thank you for sharing the Hempstead School District's Course of Action Response to the Distinguished Educator's Action Plan. I appreciate the response you provided to address the 10 areas of concern put forth by the Distinguished Educator, Dr. Jack Bierwirth.

For this Course of Action to be successful, the District must begin to implement it immediately. At the same time, your Course of Action Response should be considered a starting point and is a living document that should be updated regularly as the District revisits its policies and practices and benefits from additional community engagement and professional development. I further recognize that your ability to successfully implement the Course of Action will directly reflect the level of support you receive from the Board of Education.

As you move forward, I expect that you will update the plan to respond to certain critical issues raised in the Distinguished Educator's plan that are not adequately addressed in the Course of Action Response:

**School Safety and Security:** Not only is school safety the top concern raised by parents in your school community, but we also know that students cannot succeed in an environment where they are not comfortable and secure. There are recommendations in the Distinguished Educator's Action Plan regarding school safety and security that are not explicitly referenced in the Course of Action, including the need for proactive measures to prevent bullying and harassment, address gang-related activities, and create smaller learning communities at Hempstead High School. In addition, I urge you to develop and communicate a capital plan for the District to ensure that the physical environment is conducive to learning.

**High School Instruction:** High school instruction is a significant area of needed improvement for the District. In this section, as well as in other areas of the plan, there is a reliance on professional development as a corrective action. Professional development does not, in itself, automatically result in changes in practice. The District should not be soliciting one-off trainings, but

rather should be creating clear expectations for staff and providing professional development that supports them in meeting those expectations. Monitoring implementation should go beyond sign-in sheets to establish measurable milestones for compliance with policies and standards and improved teaching and learning.

**Educating All Students:** While implementing this Course of Action, you must also continue making progress on the implementation of the Corrective Action Plans that are currently in place with the Department's Office of Special Education and Office of Bilingual Education and World Languages. Efforts to improve instruction for all grade levels should recognize that *all* teachers, regardless of certification or assignment, are teachers of English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities and therefore need to understand their educational needs. The District must implement and describe supports to decrease the number of ELLs who are dropping out of high school and increase the number of ELLs who graduate, including but not limited to ensuring that all District staff are aware of and trained to provide appropriate supports.

**Budget and Fiscal Operations:** Recommendations 1, 3, and 4 from the Budget and Fiscal Operations review in the Distinguished Educator's Action Plan are not addressed in the Course of Action. These relate to referring audit findings to the appropriate government agencies; soliciting training to avoid unnecessary losses of state aid or tax levy issues; and implementing fully all corrective action plan steps previously prescribed no later than June 2018. The current audit must be treated with the urgency it requires and these recommendations should be incorporated into the Course of Action.

As you move forward with the plan's implementation, it is my expectation that you will work closely with Dr. Bierwirth to keep track of and report data points, metrics, and action steps, and establish specific dates for milestones.

To ensure that the Department is aware of how your work is progressing and to best determine the Department's role in supporting your efforts, I am directing you to provide me with monthly progress reports on the 10 areas of concern, the first of which is due to the Department no later than the 15<sup>th</sup> of each month, or the first workday thereafter if the 15<sup>th</sup> is not a workday. These monthly reports will be in addition to informal reports that Dr. Bierwirth makes to the Department over the regular course of his appointment as Distinguished Educator.

Thank you for your commitment to ensuring that every student in the Hempstead Union Free School District receives the instruction and associated supports that they need and to which they are entitled.

Sincerely,



Mary Ellen Eja  
Commissioner