



THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT / THE UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK / ALBANY, NY 12234
Office of P-12

Ira Schwartz, Associate Commissioner
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May 24, 2018

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

Dear Ms. Armstrong:

I am writing to inform you of the Commissioner's decision regarding a Demonstrable Improvement determination for Hempstead High School based on 2016-17 school year results.

In a letter dated October 26, 2017, Commissioner Elia informed the Hempstead Union Free School District that she would defer making a Demonstrable Improvement determination for Hempstead High School due to potential data quality issues with the indicators used to make a determination. The Commissioner indicated she would only make a determination after the completion of a review of the indicator data.

In a letter dated January 29, 2018, I informed you that the New York State Education Department (NYSED or "the Department") would conduct a Demonstrable Improvement Indicator Verification Review beginning on February 12, 2018.

The primary purpose of the review was to determine if the district accurately reported to NYSED the percentage of students at Hempstead High School who earned five or more credits during the 2016-17 school year. To determine this, NYSED reviewed the high school transcripts of the students in the applicable cohorts. (This review did not seek to determine whether the school awarded credits in accordance with the district's grading policies.)

As the attached report indicates, the Department found significant and substantial differences between the results the district reported to the Department and the results that could be verified on student transcripts. For example, the district reported that 90% of students who first entered grade 9 in the 2014-15 school year earned 5 or more credits during the 2016-17 school year. However, the Department's review of transcripts found that only 57% of these students earned five or more credits. Among the reasons Department reviewers noted for the differences between the Department's results and those reported by the district were:

- student information reported on transcripts did not match the cohort to which the students were assigned in NYSED's records;
- cohort assignments could not be determined based on transcript data;
- course information was missing from some transcripts; and
- some transcripts for students who were reported as members of a cohort showed them as not attending during the 2016-17 school year or the transcripts were blank.

The Demonstrable Improvement Verification Review did not result in a finding that the school's performance on any of the four indicators reviewed was below the school's progress target for that indicator. However, due to the substantial variance in the data reported, the Commissioner determined she does not have sufficient confidence in the indicator data to make a formal decision regarding Demonstrable Improvement for the 2016-17 school year. Rather, the Commissioner will use 2017-18 school year data to make the next Demonstrable Improvement determination for the school.

In addition, please note that if the district again reports inaccurate data to the Department, the Commissioner may be unable to make a determination that the school has made Demonstrable Improvement, which would result in the appointment of an Independent Receiver to the school.

As this review demonstrates, it is critical the district improve its data collection systems so that the district can accurately determine high school cohort membership and the performance of students on key academic measures, such as credit accumulation. The Hempstead School District has had persistent and long-standing issues with maintenance of complete and accurate student records. For example, in February 2015, the Board

of Regents received an audit report that found that the district had failed to maintain adequate controls over access to the district's student information system. The prior year, the Board of Regents received an audit report that found that:

- the District had no policies and procedures for changing student grades;
- the majority of the grade changes for students in the audit sample were not supported by documentation; and
- many of the sampled students whose grades were changed (failing to passing) had numerous absences which could have affected their ability to receive a passing score.

The Department has also had issues with graduation rate cohort information provided by the district. In addition, Jack Bierwirth, in his Distinguished Educator Action Plan issued last year, noted that "Currently, the District's technology infrastructure (instructional, security, and administrative) continues to suffer from a lack of focus, inadequate planning, and high risk to due poor security for both digital and tangible IT assets."

These examples describe poor internal controls within the district that led to inaccuracies of data and a lack of guidance and documentation for staff. It is important for the district to promote and practice adequate internal controls to provide accountability for its activities. These internal controls must be implemented and communicated throughout the district.

The Commissioner has directed Jack Bierwirth, the Distinguished Educator for the district, to continue to provide assistance to the district in this area. In addition, the Commissioner has directed Assistant Commissioner Kim Wilkins, who will visit the district in June, to provide technical assistance regarding proper recordkeeping.

We thank the district for its cooperation in the Demonstrable Improvement Verification Review and look forward to receiving timely and accurate data for the 2017-18 school year.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ira Schwartz".

Ira Schwartz

Enclosure

cc: Members of the Hempstead Board of Education
Jack Bierwirth
MaryEllen Elia
Jhone Ebert
Angelica Infante
Sharon Cates-Williams
Kim Wilkins
Thalia Melendez