



September 28, 2017

Dear Hempstead Family,

Every month of the school year, I would like to issue a report to the community. In this report, I will outline three steps my administration is taking to improve the outcomes for our students: the Transition Team, Contract Negotiations, and Attacking Corruption. New York State Commissioner Elia also took a step to help our district by appointing a Distinguished Educator, Dr. Jack Bierwirth.

Before I continue, I just want to give a shout out to all our wonderful teachers, teaching assistants, secretaries, clerks, business officials, nurses, security aides, custodians, cafeteria workers, groundkeepers, psychologists, social workers, and administrators who greeted our students with a smile, inviting classrooms and dedication. I want to thank the families who are entrusting us with your most valuable possession – your children. May we uphold your trust and give our children the best education possible. I had a big smile as I walked into many classrooms that proudly displayed:

One – our one mission: To Empower Learners and Inspire Leaders to Make this a Better World.

Two – our two rules: Do what will make our parents proud and don't do what won't make them proud.

Three – our three values: Humility, Empathy, and Courage.

What I found so amazing is that I did not mandate this, but I found many teachers teaching these things to our students with excitement and a sense of purpose. I love it! I also want to give a shout out to our Board of Education who have selected me to lead our District. I am honored that you have placed such trust in me. I also want to thank you for your support in difficult decisions that I've already had to make. You have the *courage* to fight for our children, the *empathy* for all our families and the *humility* to learn from one another. You live our values!

### Transition Team

There are three phases to the transition;

1. Listening – in this phase we established a transition team and we are listening to the community, talking to different constituencies, and gathering data to help establish a strategic plan.
  - a. In July our Board based upon my recommendation instituted a powerful transition team that includes board members, distinguished experts from outside of Hempstead, influential members of the Hempstead community, labor leaders, principals, teachers, teaching assistants and parents.
  - b. We have five committees (Mission, Leadership and Organizational culture; Teaching and Learning; Operational effectiveness and efficiency; Equity; and Family and Community Engagement) working hard to assess, analyze, prioritize, and develop a strategic plan by January 2018.
  - c. Listening Tour: On September 17, 2017, Randi Weingarten, President of the AFT and Co-chair of the transition team, and I listened to the concerns and aspirations of members of our community.
2. Assessing and Analyzing – this phase will take place during the months of November and December as the committees will assess, learn, and begin to strategize.
3. Strategic Plan – the committees will formulate a four-year plan for the community and submit the plan to the Superintendent and Board. This plan will serve as the road map for our district as we move forward and will be used as the basis upon which the Superintendent will be evaluated on a yearly basis.

In addition to the Transition Team's efforts to help make a plan for Hempstead UFSD, I am conducting six separate assessments; Facilities, Instruction, Behavior, Budget, Procurement System and Supervision. My team and I have completed an exhaustive facilities assessment by examining each classroom, hallway, bathroom, toilet, boiler room, walls,

attics, and closets. A full report of each of our facilities will be given to both our board, principals, and to the Operational effectiveness and efficiency Committee.

A facilities review is critical for the education of our children. According to Timothy Gregg, our Assistant to Facilities Director, "I have known 9 other Superintendents in Hempstead. Dr. Waronker is the first Superintendent to do this kind of thorough review of facilities." 1,600 of our 8,300 students are in classroom trailers (some dating back to 1983).

*Impact on Students: The District has not had a comprehensive Strategic Plan. This has resulted in dismal student results. Hempstead is one of the lowest performing districts in New York State. A General once told me, "If you fail to plan, plan to fail." I believe that a clear plan devised by the community in conjunction with the Superintendent will set the District in the right direction.*

*Moreover, I focused on the environmental assessment first, because in dingy, graffiti-ridden environments, fights and incidents increase. In classrooms that are too hot or too cold, the teacher has difficulty teaching students. When we take care to have beautiful, comfortable facilities, our students feel welcomed and respected and in turn respect their environment.*

### **Contract Negotiations**

When I arrived both our Middle and High Schools were under Receivership by the State. We had to negotiate agreements with the Teachers' Union. Two previous administrations in two years failed to negotiate agreements. In one and a half months, we negotiated two successful agreements. However, we have a long way to go. All five union contracts have expired. We need to roll up our sleeves and make sure our employees are valued and in turn give our students the best education possible.

*Impact on Students: Research shows that the quality of the teacher is the single greatest determinant of student achievement. Contracts can help us attract, set up systems for development of staff and retain talent in our district. Unfortunately, out of 52 districts in Nassau, we are towards the bottom in pay for our employees. The contracts will have a direct impact on student instruction.*

### **Attacking Corruption**

This month, one of our teachers was arrested for grand larceny. As Board President Maribel Toure said, "This is sad." It is sad on so many levels: but I will focus on only one – our students get less resources, because people are diverting resources away from them. We are currently conducting three additional investigations. Furthermore, we have hired a Forensic Auditing Firm to help us uncover even more illegal activity. Much more will be uncovered in the months ahead.

*Impact on Students: Corruption takes needed resources from our students. This is unacceptable and I and my administration will do everything we can to root out corruption.*

### **Distinguished Educator Dr. Jack Bierwirth**

On September 14, Commissioner of Education Elia appointed Dr. Bierwirth as a Distinguished Educator overseeing Hempstead. She gave seven reasons for her decision:

- Hempstead UFSD has been identified since the 2012-13 school year as a Focus District because of low academic performance and is one of only five districts with at least ten schools in which more than 1/3 of the schools have been identified as Priority. Hempstead UFSD is one of only two districts in New York State outside of the large five City School districts with more than one school designated for Receivership.
- Hempstead UFSD is one of eighteen districts in New York State with a New York State Education Department (NYSED or "the Department") enforcement action plan to address noncompliance with special education laws and regulations.

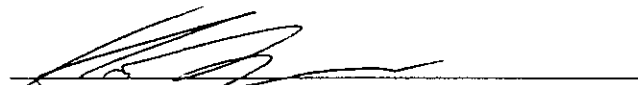
- Hempstead UFSD has been identified since the 2011-12 school year as a District in Need of Intervention under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act because of low academic performance of students with disabilities and compliance issues with special education laws and regulations.
- Hempstead is one of four districts in the State that was reviewed as part of the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) federal audit in September 2016 for longstanding noncompliance with special education laws and regulations. Of the four districts, Hempstead UFSD had the highest total number of issues of longstanding noncompliance. Specifically, 75 of the 81 identified issues were from Hempstead UFSD.
- Hempstead is one of seven districts statewide operating under a Part 154 Corrective Action Plan pursuant to complaints filed with the New York State Education Department (NYSED). Only 11% of Hempstead's English Language Learners/Multilingual Learners (ELLs/MLLs) graduate, compared to 57% of non-ELLs/MLLs in the district. Furthermore, 43% of Hempstead's ELLs/MLLs drop out, compared to 7% of non-ELLs/MLLs in the district.
- Hempstead is the only district statewide mandated to meet monthly with NYSED and engaged in other actions pursuant to an Order issued by the Commissioner after the district maintained a waiting list of over 50 children eligible to enroll in the district for several months. The New York State Office of the Attorney General (OAG) is also conducting enforcement with the district due to this incident, and NYSED is coordinating with OAG.
- Hempstead is the only district in the State that was found to have improperly administered the 2017 NYSESLAT to more than half of the district's 930 ELL/MLL student population by allowing two test sessions to be administered on one day and allowing the third session to be administered over two days. This is a direct violation of the administration policy described in the NYSESLAT School Administration Manual, which states schools may administer just one session per day. As a consequence, Hempstead UFSD was required to submit a Corrective Action Plan to the Department.

Dr. Bierwirth and I have already had a few conversations. I want to express my appreciation to both Commissioner Elia for sending us a man of his credentials, experience and wisdom and to Dr. Bierwirth for agreeing to take this assignment. Let us extend a warm welcome because we need good talented people to help us make things right for our students.

*Impact on Students: Dr. Bierwirth has been a successful Superintendent for over 30 years. He will sit on our Board ex-officio (meaning he has no vote). He will help in conjunction with our transition team establish a Strategic Plan and help me implement it. His purpose is to help guide our community to take the necessary steps to improve student outcomes.*

I just want to say that I am very hopeful. A lot of good things are happening and I am looking forward to working with our Board, parents and staff alike to help our students achieve their dreams.

Educationally yours,



Dr. Shimon Waronker  
Superintendent of Schools