

# WYANDANCH

## Union Free School District

### *An Important Message*

Dr. Mary Jones  
Superintendent of Schools

*Great Things Are Happening In Wyandanch!*

April 2019

Dear Parents, Guardians and Community Members:

We have heard and felt the pain, outrage and disappointment from members of our district. In spite of our efforts, it appears we need to let everyone know the set of events that have conspired to put our district in the fiscal stress we find ourselves in today. Be assured that everyone on the board and administration are working tirelessly to not only get the district in good standing but to ensure that we never revisit this. Moreover, the budgetary problems have overshadowed the great strides the district has made in terms of academic achievement. This achievement testifies to our total commitment to improving the district regardless of the hardships.



It was about four-years-ago that we began enrolling unaccompanied minors. These young English Language Learners also came with "special needs" that the district had to address as per state mandates. The burden was even more cumbersome than we could have possibly anticipated. Over a two-year period, we accepted more than 300 migrant students, most of whom could not read or speak English and some who could not read or write in their own formal language. The language problem, as daunting as it is, was only the beginning. These children came to America with a myriad of challenges including psychological and physical health. It is the district's duty (morally and state-mandated) to meet all of these needs.

Those requirements demanded more space and resources than the district could handle. Thus we spent a total of 1.25 million dollars to construct portable classrooms on the grounds of Milton Olive Middle School. But students kept coming and this overcrowding factor necessitated the need to "lease" classroom space in Half Hollow Hills school district. This action further gave rise to our having to transport 369 PK and K students out of district. This unanticipated demand ran us well over a million dollars. Bear in mind also that we bus ALL of our students without regard for the mileage recommendations imposed by Education Law. With a small fleet of 15 busses that are active (with 3 in reserve, as mandated by DOT), drivers and matrons have to make multiple trips to handle the population and at times, pickups and drop-offs have been late. Despite the difficulty, we have never left anyone behind at bus stops, nor have we ever had any student waiting for over an hour to be transported to school. Bussing is an extremely expensive undertaking that costs the district on average, Six Million (\$6,000,000) per year. We also bus students to parochial schools (200+), and door to door for some special needs students. There is also a Medical bus for medically-challenged students.

Our Special Education budget is affected by the costs of the high needs of students, lack of space to provide programs and students who transfer into Wyandanch and who already have an Individual Education Plan (IEP) in place. This year, to date, we've had 30 students move into Wyandanch with an IEP. For Special Education, the issue is not only for immigrants but also includes transient students who move in and out of the district and many of whom come already enrolled in high cost programs (BOCES, private school, residential schools). When they move into Wyandanch, they bring with them expenses that are not budgeted for – including increased transportation costs.

We have been providing medical and other benefits to all full time employees for many years. Ninety percent (90%) of all staff and their families receive these benefits. This is one of the ways in which we support our employees and their families so that our staff can support our scholars. We pay benefits to employees where other districts don't and we provide busing for all Wyandanch scholars where the state only reimburses about 55%. Many districts contract out many of their support services such as transportation and security as a cost-saving measure. We are beginning to explore possibilities in that direction as well.

We are working diligently to overcome our budgetary issues, without harming scholars or our dedicated staff, and we promise you that solutions, short-term and long-term, will be realized very soon. Despite the well-documented budgetary issues, the district has improved measurably over the past three years in terms of academic achievement. Here is an overview of some of our accomplishments:

**Curriculum:** Milton L. Olive Middle School exceeded statewide growth targets for ELA and Math which in turn led to their removal from the NYS Receivership List.

# WE ARE RISING!

## Annual Budget Vote & Trustee Election May 21, 2019!

Lafrancis Hardiman and Martin Luther King Schools were both removed from the NYS Priority Schools List last year, and are now identified as Schools In Good Standing. We maintained a rigorous RTI (Response To Intervention) program in which 121 students were serviced during 2017 - 2018 academic year resulting in decreased referrals to SpEd Services. We are continuing this program and its strategies this year. Overall, ELA proficiency grades 3-8 increased from 17% to 32%; a growth in the number of students scoring proficient of nearly 88%. Math proficiency rose as well, particularly when 8<sup>th</sup> grade Algebra scores are used to replace the 8<sup>th</sup> grade math assessment.

We have increased our 8<sup>th</sup> grade Algebra Regents offerings by 3 classes at the Milton Olive Middle School. We now have 5 classes, totaling 105 students, who will sit for the Regents exams in June. We have also increased the number of students who are taking Living Environment Regents courses by 2 classes. These 80 students will also sit for the Regents exams in June. These offerings will create the opportunity for our 8<sup>th</sup> grade students to enter High School with 3.5 credits towards graduation. This will also prepare them for taking College Level courses while they are in High School. Last year at MOMS, 95 eligible students tested on the Foreign Language Administrator's Consortium of Chairperson's and Supervisor Checkpoint A) FLACS A exam and 68.4% earned high school credit. We are hoping to see even larger numbers this year.

At the Wyandanch Memorial High School - 23 out of 27 students passed the Spanish FLACS B - 1 out of 1 student passed French FLACS B, which is now changed to New York State Association of World Language Administrators (NYSAWLA). These exams allow students to be eligible for an Advanced Regents Diploma. The creation of double period Algebra classes for all 9<sup>th</sup> grade students provides for greater access to dual enrollment college classes and the upper level Math courses needed for an Advanced Regents Diploma. Science Research students at the WMHS competed at the Long Island Science Olympiad and the Long Island Science and Engineering Fair. The number of college dual enrollment courses at the WMHS, in partnership with Farmingdale State College has increased exponentially. There are currently 13 sections of University in the High School courses being offered with a minimum of 2 additional courses awaiting approval for next year. These SUNY credited classes are available to all students at a reduced tuition rate. Last year's graduating students received up to 21 credits which allows them to enter college as sophomores. The PTECH program, also with Farmingdale College, provides students the opportunity to earn an Applied Associates degree in Mechanical Engineering at no cost to the student or their family.

**All of our schools are in Good Standing for Opting in on NYS Assessments (95%). We are excelling in the Arts and have received many awards at music competitions.**

**Professional Development:** We provided professional growth opportunities to teachers to improve their skills in teaching our children. This began with new teacher orientation - Grades K-2 (use of new Frog Street series). Grades K-12 teachers received SIOP (Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol) training for teachers of English Language Learners. Curriculum writing and mapping workshops were provided to all teachers K-12, and training in Autentico strategies to help students develop Spanish fluency. We collaborated with Western Suffolk BOCES to provide a 5-day Math Academy for 5<sup>th</sup> grade teachers, and the Go-Math support series for teachers in grades 6-8 was implemented.

**Stem:** Google Classroom/Google Education: In the 2018 - 2019 school year we expanded Google Classroom/ Google Education to all 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Grade classes, eight teachers in the middle school and all 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade core classes as well as some 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Grade core classes. The majority of classes in grades 3, 4, 9 and 10 have full-time access to Google Chromebook carts, as well several classes in the middle school and additional upper level grades in the high school.

Smartboard/Interactive board - the majority of elementary classrooms in the 2018 - 2019 school year will have an interactive board. The majority of middle school classrooms in both the 2017 - 2018 school year and 2018 - 2019 school years have Interactive Boards. All High School classrooms have interactive Boards since the 2014 - 2015 school year.

Recently, district staff, along with members of the Community Engagement Team were asked to present at a NYS conference in Albany regarding best practices for Receivership schools. This conference also resulted in Wyandanch serving as a model for districts in Receivership. Poughkeepsie Middle School administrators recently visited MOMS to look for way to improve their own middle school.

We could not have realized all of these achievements if we had been neglectful, or incompetent. Our teachers, administrators and staff are 100% dedicated to making our district one of the best in the entire state and We Are Truly Rising! **So thanks a million! Let's continue to work together. I implore you to keep an open mind as you read or hear stories that have been posted. Above all else, keep the faith. Things will get better.**