

**PRESS CONFERENCE QUESTIONS
DECEMBER 2017**

GENERAL:

- 1. What is the district's policy for students being alone in the classroom either before or after school with a teacher?**

The District expects teachers to give support to students both before and after school. The District's Code of Conduct states explicit expectations for teacher behavior and we have a DASA policy in place. If a parent has a question or concern relative to teacher behavior, they should have a conversation with the teacher and, if not satisfied, should talk to the principal of the building.

- 2. Is it possible for the district, in keeping within their procurement guidelines, to investigate using the same vendor for school pictures in all the buildings? It would be helpful for parents with children in multiple schools because they could take advantage of the "3rd child free" price packages offered by many photographers.**

The District does not have a role in the selection of school photographers as this is handled through student clubs, student council and PTA.

- 3. The students at all school levels are now using Chromebooks. Assignments are being given which have the students making and posting videos on Google Classroom. As this is a shared site, the videos are seen by all classmates and are no longer private. What precautions are being taken so that there are no issues with cyber-bullying, copying and/or sharing other students' videos to other shared sites? How is privacy, in general, maintained while using Google Classroom? In addition, what education and training is being given to both students, as well as parents, regarding responsibility, accountability and etiquette in regards to where they are filming and what they are submitting?**

Google Classroom is part of the G Suite for Education. Our District subscribes to G Suite which ensures that our Google community is private and can only be accessed by faculty, staff, and students with a "Syosset" Google account. Therefore, content cannot be shared outside of our Google community. When a teacher posts an assignment in Google Classroom, a student responds privately to the teacher. If allowed by the teacher, a student or a group of students can post a video as an "announcement." The "announcement" is private to the classroom and the teacher always has control to disable an announcement. As a part of our 1:1 Chromebook initiative, all students and parents have signed the District's "Digital Learning Initiative Chromebook User Agreement" which includes abiding by the Acceptable Use Board of Education Policy and our Code of Conduct.

- 4. Historically the pool had proper stadium-style bleachers. For many years now the seating is just three rows of very low to the ground bleachers. Not only does this limit the seating but as the seats are low to the ground it is extremely difficult to see the activity in the pool. Is it possible to replace the seats and ensure a return to stadium-style seating?**

As part of the annual budget process, the District will review the costs to replace the existing pool bleachers with stadium-style seating or bleachers that sit higher. We will evaluate this request among the other facilities needs of the District.

- 5. Without divulging too much about the district's security protocols, can you elaborate on how secure the classrooms are in the event that an intruder was to enter a building? How are the windows on the classroom doors to be covered?**

All public schools in New York State must perform four (4) "lock-down" emergency management drills annually. These drills simulate the steps all building occupants are to follow should an intruder enter a building. Additionally, in the coming months, we will begin work on the \$7.7 million of Phase I – Health and Safety capital projects approved by the community in May 2017. These projects include replacing existing classroom doors with reinforced doors with smaller windows and safety locks that meet the latest New York State Department of Education building and safety codes. Also we are replacing any glass corridor walls and creating security vestibules at each school to act as a buffer before visitors gain access to the interior of the school building.

- 6. There is concern that our schools are being used as polling stations while the children are there. Who determines where voting takes place? If it must take place in the schools, then can school either be closed or can the location in each school be one where there is only one way in and out and there is no access to the rest of the school?**

The Board of Elections determines the polling stations. We have reached out to the Board of Elections to determine if alternative sites are available. Additionally, we are exploring alternative areas in the existing polling places that would provide greater control over access. We will also be placing additional security at polling sites in the future. We are taking these concerns into consideration as part of the annual calendar development process.

- 7. Why are students required to attend instrumental music lessons if they have a private music teacher outside of school? Has the district considered exempting those students from in-school lessons?**

While there are numerous benefits to private instruction on a musical instrument, there is much more to an in-school music lesson than individual instruction. Our teachers use these lessons to teach ensemble skills that cannot be learned individually. Performing music is a collaborative process that cannot be learned in isolation. Students learn to work together and to problem solve as a section of the larger ensemble. Teachers also use this time to

work on instrument-specific issues in the ensemble music that cannot be addressed within the constraints of a large ensemble rehearsal.

- 8. Many documents on the district website (all schools) are not up to date (club lists, staff directory, etc.) Can the documents include an "as of date" so that we know they are current? How is the website maintained?**

The District website is maintained by Syntax, a communication consulting provider. The District is currently seeking ways to upgrade our website so that our information is timely and relevant to the community. The suggestion to "date stamp" our documents is helpful and will be communicated to Syntax.

- 9. Some sports use off-campus coaches and facilities. These coaches and facilities are most often at student expense. In the case of the newly formed gymnastic team, we do not have facilities for training so they will be training at an outside facility at the district's expense. Why then, do students on other teams pay for their own training at an outside facility?**

Some sports do go to outside facilities for enhanced facility training. Specifically, cheerleading uses a local cheer gym to do their floor and tumbling training as we do not have the facilities to accommodate that type of training. The cheerleaders choose to add this training to their program, in conjunction with the parents, as the outside facility has a springboard floor and high ceilings. Our Board of Education approved coaches to attend all training sessions. The team holds multiple fundraising events which make the off-site training very inexpensive. The Booster Club will help with any student who cannot afford the cost. Kickline also uses an off-site facility for their choreography 3-4 times a season. With one dance studio and 4 teams sharing practice space, it is difficult to schedule consistent days in that facility. Gymnastics is using the Massapequa School District's facility and equipment which, at this point, only requires an expense for the bus, which is being underwritten by the District. There is no fee for the use of the facility.

- 10. Some students need to take 2 academic summer classes (Math and English). With the limit being 2 classes per summer, these students do not get to take any "fun" classes. Can these students be allowed to enroll in a 3rd class (gym, cooking, etc)? Also, can the program be expanded to include additional sections of current classes, as well as new classes?**

Students who take remedial courses can take three classes inclusive of enrichment. The only eligible enrichment class is third period for those students. These classes are filled on a first come first serve basis. We have over 1,000 students in summer school. At this time, the District does not have plans to expand the summer school program.

11. Can the computer class that is offered in the summer program be aligned to technology and curriculum that our elementary students are exposed to during the school year?

The elementary and middle school computer curriculums have been updated this year to include KidOYO, Robotics, and Google Platform. These updates will be incorporated into the summer program.

12. How does the district decide what days are school holidays? In conjunction with this, in recent years, the life and methods of Christopher Columbus have faced significant negative skepticism and controversy. Is it still appropriate and necessary to celebrate Columbus Day?

The Board of Education adopts a calendar typically in December or January. Some holidays are determined by the Board, but many holidays *are required by law*. New York State Education Law (§ 3604(8)) states that no school shall be in session on a legal holiday and NYS General Construction Law (§ 24) defines those public holidays to include “the second Monday in October, known as Columbus Day.”

ELEMENTARY:

1. How did the district decide on the 25/27-student cap for class size? Can the cap ever be lowered?

The class size cap was established by a Board of Education resolution in 1990. Lowering class size would have an impact on staffing and facilities space, both which would have significant cost implications.

2. Does the district put a cap on the number of students in a group music lesson? How many students per individual class can be taken out at one time?

The District has not placed a cap on the size of lesson groups, but is in the process of evaluating the current size of these classes and the efficacy with which we are delivering instruction, especially for beginners.

3. Would the district consider updating the Parent Portal to include the feature that provides parents with more information regarding their child’s progress? For example, can they post reading elementary benchmarks, levels and testing scores, along with the dates that they occurred? If not, why?

Parents have access to their child’s progress through the report cards in the portal. Reading benchmarks and classroom assessments are considered instructional data which is not collected in Infinite Campus. We encourage parents to reach out to the classroom teacher to discuss their child’s progress on an ongoing basis. This data is best discussed

at parent teacher conferences where the teacher is able to explain and interpret the information in context with the individual student's performance.

4. Would the district consider posting, via the Parent Portal, teacher assignments, bus information and the back to school information, as well as sending the information through the U.S. Postal Service?

Once the Parent portal is open at the beginning of the school year, teacher assignments are posted under the students' schedule tab for secondary students. For elementary students' the teacher assignments can be viewed once attendance has begun (starting the first day of school). We are not able to post the bus information in Infinite Campus. Back-to-school information has been sent electronically for the last few years to save costs. With our more robust technology infra-structure, we plan to have more electronic communications.

5. Has there been any thought in increasing the amount of time for recess? What does the latest research reveal about the importance of quality recess time as it relates to improving the learning environment for students?

The US Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention published "Strategies for Recess in Schools" in January 2017 (https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/physicalactivity/pdf/2016_12_16_schoolrecessstrategies_508.pdf)

The Centers for Disease Control defines recess as a "regularly scheduled period within the school day for physical activity and play." Further, the "CDC, SHAPE America, and other national organizations recommend giving elementary school students at least 20 minutes of recess daily." Our elementary students are afforded a 55 minute lunch period of which 25-30 minutes is devoted to recess. The CDC publication states that "Students who are physically active tend to have better grades, school attendance, classroom behaviors, and cognitive performance." In addition, our elementary Physical Education Program complies with the New York State education mandates of 120 minutes per week.

6. There is a perception that district lunches, currently through Aramark, are unhealthy, especially at the elementary school level. Parents have found that some of the food is not fresh and it is of low quality. How can district lunches be improved?

Aramark is required to provide lunches that meet all federal nutritional standards. We are also required by law to follow the competitive bidding process in the selection of a food service provider and it is through this process that we make modifications to the lunch program to enhance menu options and improve the quality of the food. We are planning another bid this year and are working with an independent food services consultant to create a bid to upgrade the quality of the food and expand the menu options, and include an online ingredient list to help parents manage food allergies.

- 7. What is the mindfulness program and how is it replacing Fitness 15 in grades K-3 and ½ hour of physical education in grades 4-5? Have the teachers been trained in this? Is there a way to opt out of it like yoga in 2nd grade? Also, why are children lying on the floor during the mindful meditation?**

Mindfulness is a reflective relaxation technique that was implemented to prepare students for the day's activities and to start the day off in a relaxed, focused manner. We also use Mindfulness after recess which allows for a regathering of thoughts and hopefully provides better focus for the remainder of the day. This activity is solely for the students who do not have physical education on that day. The teachers were trained in basic techniques during the August conference days and this has been reinforced by building staff who have expertise in this area. The children lie down in an effort to maintain a relaxed position for the activity. There is no alternative activity. Research has shown the benefits of a Mindfulness program <https://www.nytimes.com/guides/well/mindfulness-for-children>.

- 8. Because of the new school day schedule and the addition of the mindfulness program, the music program which has always been one of Syosset's greatest achievements has been disrupted not only during school but in some cases before school as well. The before-school program is about ten minutes shorter and the in-school music program has gone from two 30-minute classes per week to one 45-minute class. Please explain why these changes were made?**

This year the Syosset Central School District enacted a new elementary schedule designed to align with several overarching district goals and to amplify instruction in all areas. Some of the highlights of the new schedule are:

- Longer blocks of time to allow for deeper and more meaningful work in all subjects including bringing ELA and Math instruction aligned with the minimum recommendations of Teacher's College and Go Math.
- Increased Social Studies and Science instruction from 60 minutes per week to 90 minutes per week.
- Time for teacher collaboration work to align similar concepts being taught in multiple curricula areas.
- Arts Integration to enhance instruction in all areas by helping students to make connections between the arts and all other aspects of the curriculum. While time scheduled for General Music was shifted from 30 minutes two times a week to a longer block of 45 minutes once a week. In addition, each building is shifting to integrate music with other subjects. The addition of Arts Integration reflects the District's commitment to its strong and well recognized music program. Syosset has a fundamental belief in the power and importance of music education and sees this change as an opportunity to incorporate music in all areas of instruction. Some examples of this integrated approach have so far included: examining the role that music and dance played in Native American cultures (4th grade Social Studies); song and dance to help students to visualize and internalize the movement of the Earth around the Sun and the Moon around the Earth (1st Grade Science); and a comparison of patterns as they are found in both music and math (Multiple Grades, Math).

- More consistent instruction in World Languages by having one language teacher in each building and the addition of instruction in American Sign Language for all kindergarten students to align with our district wide literacy goals and Foundations program.
- Addition of Mindfulness instruction, which has strong evidence-based support to give students needed skills in stress management and helps students with relaxation and focusing techniques. This time allows Syosset to meet the New York State mandate for Physical Education.

We are currently working in each elementary school to look for ways to make the best use of time, which is our most limited commodity. There has been some impact on rehearsal time for performing ensembles that meet before school. The district is working on this and is committed to making sure that these schedule changes positively benefit all of our programs.

MIDDLE SCHOOL:

- 1. Posting homework on Google Classroom is extremely helpful, in high school as well as middle school. Many times posts arrive late at night or in the middle of the night for an assignment due in the morning. Can a cut off time be put into play so that students have sufficient time to complete the assignment? This can be very important especially early in the year when a student might not know a classmate to call.**

Teachers are sensitive to providing students with adequate time to complete assignments. As many students use their cellphone to receive “push alerts,” these alerts may be delayed for a variety of reasons due to their cellular service provider or their Google Classroom app settings. Students should check their settings to ensure that they are receiving immediate notifications.

- 2. Can you explain why students are not permitted to bring in lunch for 8-10 friends on their birthdays but parents are asked to encourage their children not to wear identical party favor apparel to school following weekend events, which would involve 80-100 students? Both situations promote feelings of exclusion and isolation, even if unintentional. Why one is permitted but not the other?**

Both practices are not authorized at our middle schools. Outside food for exclusive groups is not permitted in the cafeteria and wearing of party apparel is discouraged. Schools also include a specific reminder to parents in the opening of school letter, prohibiting group lunches and decorating of lockers for birthdays, due to the same inclusion/exclusion reasons. As far as the school principals are aware, this has not been an issue. We encourage parents to reach out to the building principals in case of concerns regarding either one of these issues.

- 3. Now that the children are using mostly Chromebooks, they have been required to print out reference material such as chapters from books, pages of information from websites, etc. Can the teacher photocopy and distribute the information as not everyone has a printer or endless supplies of ink?**

Students are not required to print out material that can be accessed electronically and are encouraged to utilize their Chromebooks to promote a paperless environment. Please contact the teacher directly if a student is required to print on an on-going basis.

- 4. Can guitar be added as a school instrument option given that two audition options are available for NYSSMA and All County?**

Currently, we offer opportunities for students who play guitar to participate in co-curricular jazz ensembles in many of our schools. Guitar was formerly a unit in our general music curriculum. Student interest decreased and there was not enough participation to sustain the program.

- 5. Please share details on how our middle school and high school students are collaborating with other science research institutions on Long Island (e.g., Brookhaven National Labs, Cold Spring Harbor Labs, etc.).**

- 1) Our research students work in many different programs. We have students in programs as well as separately working with mentors.

Example of Programs:

- Stony Brook: SARAS, Biotech, Garcia, Simons
- Cold Spring Harbor Labs: Partners for the Future
- Brookhaven National Laboratories: HSSRP (High School Summer Research Program)
- Hofstra: HSSRP

- 2) Our 9th grade Honors Biology students take a trip to Stony Brook to complete DNA labs. Our AP Biology classes subscribe to the Cold Spring Harbor Curriculum Center and attend a workshop there as well.
- 3) Our high school Robotics students attend the Composite Prototype Center in Plainview to take a course and gain hands-on experience with materials processing, engineering and building. They also collaborate with and teach other schools how to begin a Robotics program.
- 4) Our middle school students have attended trips at Cold Spring Harbor Labs and their educators have come to work with our 6th grade classes on DNA transformation lab activities. We also have students participating in the BOCES Outdoor Education Program at Fire Island.

- 6. There are often times that the middle school students are watching movies that do not relate to the subject matter being taught. Is there a better way to use instructional time in order to prepare the students for the rigor of the Syosset High School curriculum?**

Popular movies are sometimes shown on rainy days at lunch. Occasionally, the sixth grade team will plan a movie for the final days of school if inclement weather is expected. Any full length movie or clip shown in class is related to our academic or social-emotional curricular goals. We welcome any questions about specific movies and specific lessons.

HIGH SCHOOL:

- 1. Why aren't the highest-level instrumental music ensembles in the high school (Chamber Orchestra and Wind Ensemble) considered honors level classes? In order to enroll in these classes, a student must successfully pass an audition and play at NYSSMA level 5 or 6. Other honors classes in the high school require far less from a student to enroll.**

Syosset High School only offers honors credit to courses specifically designated as Honors Courses and to College Board AP courses. No other courses get this credit, including non-AP college level courses.

- 2. SHS students need to view the Parent Portal to know what their grades are and if an assignment has been marked missing. Can students have their own login? Currently, most students are using their parents' login which allows them to see siblings' grades in addition to their own. Students who don't have access to the Portal are at a disadvantage.**

In Infinite Campus, there is a way for students to have student accounts and log-ins. This individual account would only allow each student to view their progress and would not allow access to their sibling(s) account. We will investigate whether this is a feasible capability to be added.

- 3. In the High School Curriculum Manual, they mention some BOCES programs but there is no mention of the Long Island High School for the Arts. Why it is not considered as an option for students?**

The Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) runs unique programs that supplement areas where the District may not have an offering for students. The arts programming in the Syosset Schools has been recognized as one of the very best in New York State and in the nation. Accordingly, our course offerings and opportunities in the arts generally have not needed supplementation.

SPECIAL EDUCATION:

- 1. What is the district policy for reassigning a special education co-teacher to another classroom as a substitute teacher if there is a shortage of substitute teachers in a building? This should not happen as per individual student IEPs, so why does this occur?**

It is not the District's practice to assign a special education teacher to serve as a substitute teacher. A special education teacher may volunteer to cover a class during his/her prep periods or lunch period as an extra class for the day should there be a shortage of substitute teachers on any day.

- 2. It would be beneficial for those children in special education, with special needs or with any type of classification to have a guidance counselor who specializes and is knowledgeable about the various programs available to them. Is it possible to assign students to a guidance counselor who specializes in helping students with special needs?**

The secondary Guidance Counselors have knowledge of the District's programs/activities for students regardless of whether the program is designed for students with special needs or not. A student identified as having special needs has access to all secondary programs/activities as appropriate. Guidance Counselors are members of all CSE and Section 504 meetings for students. In addition, the Guidance Counselors are members of the building Instructional Support Teams at which students are recommended for a Tier II/III support program. We believe this model leads to the best inclusion of special education students in the general education population.

- 3. Is there a policy about keeping IEP students, ELL students and Tier 2 students tracked in the same mainstream classes each year? How does this benefit the students? It seems unfair for the same students to be with each other year to year. They are missing out on opportunities to develop friendships with other students across the grade level.**

There is no policy for keeping these students in the same mainstream class each year. Questions relative to the class placement procedures used in a building should be directed to the building principal.

