

**PRESS CONFERENCE
MAY 2017**

GENERAL:

1. Attending Board of Education meetings is important so that parents and community members can stay informed. Would it be possible for the district to video record and post on the district website the Board of Education meetings so that people with young children and active work/family lives can view the proceedings at any time?

The decision to record and archive an official video of the Board meetings would rest with the Board of Education. The Board has not discussed altering the current practice of broadcasting the meetings by radio at this time.

2. Can the district send out “push” notices when information is posted on our child’s parent portal account?

The district can enable push notifications. After consultation with parents, the district will enable these notifications September 2017. The district will work with a parent focus group on a communication plan for all parents on how to manage individual notifications.

3. With students receiving and using Chromebooks in the classroom on a regular basis, what protections are in place to protect student data from being stolen?

Syosset District meets the requirements of Common Core Implementation Reform Act, NY Ed Law 2d which outlines guidelines for student data privacy.

Our District is involved with a BOCES service that researches all Chromebook applications used on our devices and ensures they stand up to the requirements, specifically student data privacy and secure disposal of student data. We have implemented additional recommended safeguards such as preventing Google Voice, sharing of data between personal and Google Apps for Education accounts, etc., to maintain a secure data privacy envelope.

4. Is it possible for the district to look into having nebulizers in the schools to treat children who are having severe asthma attacks?

This is currently under consideration.

5. Does the district hire substitute nurses? If so, from where are they hired? Does each school have a specific substitute nurse assigned to that building to provide consistency? What happens when a nurse attends a field trip or there are multiple field trips in the

district, or other events, such as kindergarten registration occurring at the same time throughout the district? If/when that occurs, is there ample nursing coverage for each building?

The district hires substitute nurses and continuously reviews the adequacy of our coverage. When there are multiple events taking place in the district, the district employs an agency to fill in with additional nursing coverage.

6. Can substitute bus drivers be given clearer directions and highlighted route maps so they can make the runs more smoothly and quickly and not rely on students for directions?

The regular driver on each of our routes completes turn-by-turn directions, often referred to as left/right sheets, and a copy of these directions are kept on file. When a substitute driver is assigned a route, they use these directions to complete the assigned route. We have asked Huntington Coach to remind their drivers to make sure that the left/right sheets are updated.

7. What are the mandated hours, as per the collective bargaining agreement, that the teachers in middle school and high school are required to be in their buildings each day?

The mandated hours for high school teachers are 7:30 - 2:30, with one "extra help" session offered to students per week before or after school. The mandated hours for middle school teachers are 7:55- 2:55, with one "extra help" session offered to students per week before or after school.

8. What are the hiring qualifications for lunch monitors and what training do they receive? For example, is knowing how to perform the Heimlich Maneuver a requirement?

The Nassau County Civil Service Commission does not require any formal educational or specific experience requirements for school monitors. All candidates are required to obtain fingerprint clearance from New York State prior to employment. Monitors are offered the opportunity to participate in CPR/AED training. The Heimlich Maneuver is part of this training. In an effort to ensure that school monitors in each building are properly trained, CPR, AED and Heimlich Maneuver training will be offered during a Superintendent's Conference Day in the 2017-2018 school year.

9. When a child is ill and absent from school but does not need to go to the doctor, can a parent's note suffice for an excused absence rather than a doctor's note?

An excused absence is defined as an absence, lateness or early departure from class or school due to personal illness, death in the family, religious observances or court appearances. At the elementary level, absences due to personal illness will be considered excused with an accompanying note from parent or guardian. For students in grades 6 and 7, a personal illness of fewer than three days will be considered excused with an accompanying note from parent or guardian and a doctor's note for absences of three or more consecutive days. For students in grades 8 through 12, since students are enrolled in credit-bearing courses, absences due to personal illness will only be considered excused with an accompanying doctor's note. In-school exempt absences include absences excused by the teacher, psychologist, guidance counselor, administrator and absence due to assignment to alternate educational placements. Absence by nurse is considered excused.

10. What would be the criteria for the district to consider rezoning?

Rezoning is one of several strategies districts sometimes employ to address any number of challenges – extreme enrollment growth/decline, transportation costs, or demographic disparities. Should the District experience one or more of these challenges, it would consider whether rezoning or another strategy would be the optimal response.

11. Now that we have a new Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, what kind of impact do you foresee her policies having on our school district in the short term and in the long term?

While Ms. DeVos has been a longstanding proponent of vouchers and charter schools, the Federal government's existing leverage for these policies is fairly limited. Likely of more impact to Syosset will be the Executive Budget Proposal (President Trump's proposed budget for education), which recommends cuts of more than \$400 million in aid to New York in after-school programs, teacher training grants, English language acquisition programs, and student financial aid. Those cuts would fall most heavily on schools serving higher proportions of students in poverty. The President's proposal now goes to Congress for amendment or adoption.

<http://www.nysed.gov/common/nysed/files/federal-budget-fact-sheet-6-2-17.pdf>

12. Now that the district has backed out of the land sale contract for the Woodbury School, what are the next steps?

The Board of Education has not yet outlined a process for determining next steps with the property. However, at the Board meeting at which the sale was canceled,

the President indicated that any process would be inclusive of the entire community.

13. Since New York State offers various resources for non-English speaking parents and parents of ELL students to help them transition into the school district, would the district be willing to offer ESL classes for parents and to pay for this program by applying for a grant from the State? For example, there is an ELL Parent Orientation video--currently available in Arabic, Bengali, English, French, Haitian, Traditional Chinese, Simplified Chinese, Russian, Spanish, and Urdu (with more translations to come).

Syosset Schools utilize translated parent resources from the New York State Education Department's Bilingual Education and English as a New Language website including Parent Guides for the New York State Identification Test for English Language Learners (NYSITELL) and the New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test (NYSESLAT) as well as parent notification letters for English as a New Language Eligibility and Placement Forms. This school year, our ESL teachers created an elementary and secondary Parent Orientation program unique to our District that articulates our English as a New Language program. We have contacted the New York State Education Department and were advised that at this time there are no grants available to fund Parent English Language Learner programs.

14. Is it possible for the district to call parents the night before if a two-hour delay is going to be implemented?

The District will be open for instruction consistent with the District calendar unless weather conditions make it clearly unsafe to do so. As weather conditions and forecasts can literally change by the hour, decisions to alter the schedule (closure or delay) are made as close to the start of school as possible. On the rarest of occasions, the conditions are so unambiguous that such a decision might be made as early as the evening before. While we understand the convenience of earlier notification, the forecast is very seldom reliable enough to do so.

15. Is the 2% state cap in the budget increase going to be enough for our school district down the road?

The District has been able to manage the costs under its control. However, three of the biggest budget factors are controlled by the State: annual increases in state aid; annual changes in health insurance premiums; and annual changes in pension contribution rates. As long as these three factors remain stable (within inflationary ranges) the budget can remain balanced within the cap on the tax levy. If those factors become volatile, however, it may be difficult to compensate.

16. Typically, the school calendar includes 180 days of instruction. The 2017-2018 school year appears to have 178 days of instruction and 3 superintendent conference days. This change will impact both students and working parents. Are these modifications representative of how the calendar will look going forward?

As was described at the Board of Education meeting last December, the 2017-18 year is particularly challenging from a scheduling perspective. Because of that, it was specifically stated that it would be a poor year to consider as precedent-setting for subsequent years.

17. How often are vents cleaned in all buildings and in various locations, such as bathrooms and classrooms? Is the protocol reviewed, by whom and how often?

Custodians and cleaners perform high dusting, which includes the dusting of vents in both classrooms and bathrooms. It is the responsibility of the head custodian in each building to periodically inspect the high dusting areas to ensure that proper cleaning occurs. The frequency of high dusting does not appear to be consistent among all of the schools. We recognize the importance of consistency and the district's new Executive Director of Operations is developing custodial and maintenance protocols, that include vent cleaning, for application in all district buildings.

18. Recently, when logging onto Naviance, it was noted in the school selection list that our district middle schools are now included. Since Naviance is a tool to assist in college planning, how is it being used for middle school students? Is the district cost for Naviance a flat fee, a per school fee or a per student fee? How many years after high school graduation does a student have access to his/her Naviance account?

South Woods and H. B. Thompson both piloted the middle school module in Naviance for staff as part of our ongoing mission to engage students in career development and academic planning activities that enable them to realize their interests and strengths and prepare them for transition to high school and their future goals. Alumni to the high school have access to their Naviance account after they graduate as long as they keep their user name and password. The fee for Naviance for the 2017-18 school year will be \$3,800 and it is contracted through BOCES. This year both middle schools began with training and providing professional development for their staff in preparation for next year's implementation.

ELEMENTARY:

1. Why are kindergarten registration and kindergarten orientation only held on a weekday during specific times? Why are there no evening appointments available as it is hard for working parents to take off? Would the district consider consolidating these into one day?

Kindergarten registration is held during regular school hours on designated days posted on the school district calendar during the month of March in each of our seven elementary schools. However, each building will make accommodations for working parents to register between the hours of 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. when the main office staff are available.

Kindergarten orientation is held after the registration process has been completed and students are officially enrolled for the coming school year. As the kindergarten registration process is comprehensive, a student's registration cannot be processed by the district in a single day. Therefore, kindergarten orientation is scheduled in May or June when all registrations have been completed. The orientation includes programs run by each elementary school and/or their PTA, either during regular school hours or on Saturdays.

2. The Stingray swimming team is very popular among elementary and middle school children. Right now it is only offered from November to March. Would it be possible to extend it for the whole school year?

The possibility exists that the pool would be available for the Stingray program, however there are both staffing and coordination factors in this decision. If a change to full year swimming is made, Syosset would have to switch from the Municipal League to the US Swim League. The US Swim League is more competitive and categorizes student swimmers in a more strict fashion.

3. Is there a cell phone policy for the elementary schools? If so, what is it and if not, can one be implemented?

All of our elementary schools discourage students from bringing cell phones to school as they impede on the instructional environment and are at a risk for being broken, lost, or stolen, as students do not have lockers to secure them. The Board of Education "Acceptable Use Policy" is currently under review for the 2017 - 2018 school year and it will address the use of personal and district-owned devices, including cell phones. This policy will be disseminated to all families in the beginning of the school year as part of our Technology Chromebook initiative at the elementary, middle, and high school level.

4. Can you explain what the Superintendent's Student Cabinet Meeting is? How are students selected to represent his/her school? Does each school representative take questions from peers to ask that day?

The Student Cabinet is an opportunity for student representatives from all schools to meet with the members of the Superintendent's Cabinet to engage in conversations with district administration. Students do not typically take questions from their peers.

At the elementary level, some student participants represent their schools as the Council President and Vice President, or are selected by a team of teachers and the principal. The team works together to select students with attributes that demonstrate being a good role model, their connections to their peers and the school. At the middle schools, students are recommended by a team of teachers and guidance counselors. At the high school level, student representatives who attend the Superintendent's Cabinet are student government elected office holders.

5. Is each elementary school required to follow the Allergy Committee's Policy on approved foods allowed in the building? If so, who is overseeing that the parent room reps, the school nurse, the classroom teacher and the administration are adhering to it at all times?

All schools are required to adhere to all Board policies; this also includes implementation recommendations from the Allergy Committee. All questions regarding building implementation should be directed to the building principals. In the event, after speaking with the principal, a satisfactory resolution has not been achieved, the parent/guardian may opt to contact Peggy Grosso, Coordinator of Educational Services.

MIDDLE SCHOOL:

1. Being that we live in a world of technology, why are the students in the middle schools and the high school walking around with backpacks loaded up with multiple, heavy binders? Additionally, why should students have to print out multiple papers instead of using the textbooks bought by the district?

Middle school students use binders to help store and organize their work and the lesson resources distributed by their teachers. At the present, print resources are still very much a part of our curriculum and instruction, however as we move to a more digital environment, we are constantly re-evaluating how students access and use printed materials. As middle school students will have Chromebooks beginning next year, we have begun to review supply lists with the goal of streamlining the number of binders. As in the past, the teachers may continue to supplement with

purchased textbook resources for enrichment and support materials to enhance learning.

2. Can we have consistent programs in place at both middle schools regarding the participation in First Lego League? H. B. Thompson has been consistently doing the robotics tournaments but South Woods has been inconsistent about participating. What is needed to have this robotics club with tournament participation as a standard program?

FIRST Lego League is a club at both South Woods and H. B. Thompson Middle Schools. Our clubs are driven by student interest and as we move forward, both schools will continue to participate in First Lego League tournaments and competitions.

3. Can the Skills Classes in 6th grade address study skills, time management, and organization to better help students with their transition to middle school? Perhaps once learned it will also ease the transition to high school, as these are all issues that arise there as well.

The sixth grade Study Skills course is designed to provide students with the skills necessary for a successful transition into the middle grades. Students currently engage in lessons around topics such as organization, learning styles, active listening, note taking, study techniques and tools, writing, research, and effective communication. Students learn strategies for success in all curricular areas, with a special emphasis on mathematics. In addition, planning is underway to develop a program involving the ninth-grade “High School Peer Educators” class as mentors working with the sixth-grade students on the topic of transitioning to middle school.

4. Many neighboring school districts like Jericho, Plainview, Massapequa, Great Neck, and Herricks all currently offer Chinese as part of their foreign language choice. What is the possibility of Syosset adding it to the middle school curriculum foreign language choice as well?

As an extension of our 2015 World Language Study Committee’s work, we have been investigating options for offering a non-European language option for students in grades 6-12. By starting in middle school, we would offer students a way to build their proficiency as they work from Checkpoint A (8th grade) through Checkpoint B (10th grade), and on to Checkpoint C (12th grade). A long-range, articulated course of study would create a path to the Seal of Bi-literacy for graduating seniors. We want to engage parents, students, our staff and the Board of Education in our decision-making process.

5. Currently, there seem to be questions concerning which 9th grade classes 8th grade students are directed towards, when selecting classes for high school and the appropriate fit of these classes. Can these options be introduced and explained to parents before the (their 8th grade) students are asked to decide what they want to take? This would properly prepare parents to help their students make the most appropriate choices.

The high school course catalog is accessible online and available to all parents at any time. The high school course selection process begins each January with a full month of information-sharing before students make choices. In early January, all middle and high school guidance counselors meet with each department administrator to review course offerings. In January, middle school teachers discuss course options in their classes, the high school holds an evening orientation for students and parents, and high school guidance counselors visit the middle schools to present course overviews and answer student questions. After this information has been shared, students receive course selection forms in order to complete their choices by early March. During this time, students and parents conference, or meet individually, with their guidance counselors, and families have access to the High School Course Guidebook online.

HIGH SCHOOL:

1. Can we make the marching band requirement for 10th graders a club that the students get club credit for instead of a requirement for the class? It's unfortunate that many students drop out of our wonderful music program because they don't want to put on the outfit and parade in front of their friends at games as sometimes they are teased. The orchestra and choral students have no similar requirements. Additionally, is it possible to get them more modern uniforms?

The District will investigate a more modern uniform for marching band. Marching is an important part of the history and culture of bands in America and therefore is an important part of the school band curriculum. Here in Syosset and at Syosset High School, the Marching Band contributes to a sense of school pride and school spirit by performing at four home football games. The Marching Band's annual performance at the Syosset Memorial Day Parade is also a way for our students to give back to a community which is very supportive of its schools and of the music program. The time commitment requested of band students is minimal in comparison to many other local high school band programs. Due to the extra time devoted to the four home football games and the Memorial Day Parade, band students do get club credit for participation.

2. The high school offers a very important time management workshop for students; however, in order to sign up for the workshop, some students have to get excused from class to attend. Therefore, a lot of students opt not to take advantage of this workshop. To help our children learn how to cope with the increased workload and pressure in high school, can the high school provide a series of mandatory workshops including time and stress management to the freshmen, so that this will help them adjust to the high school work load going forward? Alternatively, would it be possible to create a half-year alternate day course that the students could take?

Every freshman meets with their guidance counselor in September to review strategies to deal with time and stress management. The workshops are an excellent extension of those meetings. We are looking for opportunities to expand the availability of these workshops. However, at this time, we have no plans to offer a half year course.

3. Does the high school keep data on course changes from AP and Honors courses to less intensive courses? If so, can this information be provided to parents?

The high school monitors data on students changing courses during the year. Through this process a review is conducted and changes are made as needed. This data is not publicly available.

4. Without interfering with individual teaching styles and objectives, is there a way to create consistency and collaboration among teachers that are instructing different sections of the same class?

There are many opportunities for teachers to collaborate with each other through grade level meetings and department meetings on an ongoing basis. Content and delivery of instruction are also reviewed with district and building administrators through formal and informal conversations to maintain continuity.

5. Our secondary grading system consists only of whole and plus grades. That seems outdated. In the general/college academic world, minus grades exist. There is a rather large gap between a plus grade and the next whole grade. In many cases, if we used minus grades, a student might have earned it, thus promoting more confidence than the plus grade below (i.e. a B- vs. a C+). Under what circumstances would the district consider adding minus grades to the grading system?

We periodically review our grading policy and find that the present system is the most advantageous for our students. Utilizing plus and minus grades can add layers that are more confusing to everyone.

SEPTA:

1. Who attends Instructional Support Team (IST) meetings? Are all IST meetings handled the same throughout the district?

IST members include the following: principal or assistant principal, psychologist, special education teacher, reading/math support teacher, speech and OT therapists, and general education teacher of the student(s) being reviewed. Additional members may be included based upon the student's presenting issues, i.e. physical therapist, counselor. IST procedures include a referral process to gather supporting data from the general education teacher(s), review current assessment information, and identify concerns/issues affecting the student's school performance. These procedures are followed consistently throughout the District.

2. Once a student has been identified as needing services, what is the timeframe before services start?

Once the IST makes the determination that a student would benefit from Tier II or III interventions, the parent is informed and parental consent is secured. The services are then started. The timeframe varies depending on the time needed to contact the parent or any scheduling adjustments that may be required, but generally services begin within one week or less.

3. How often are students that are identified as needing services reviewed before moving to the next level (i.e. Learning Center to Resource Room)?

Building level supports are reviewed on a ten week cycle. Performance data may be reviewed sooner if results suggest that the student is not satisfactorily responding to the intervention and a referral to special education may be initiated. However, a move from Learning Center to Resource Room would only happen after a referral to special education has been completed and the CSE determines that Resource Room services are warranted. A referral to special education may take up to 60 calendar days to complete.

4. What is the district's vision pertaining to the Learning Center? Do all the elementary schools still have Learning Centers? Are Learning Centers and their tutors being discontinued? If so, how will this affect students who are not classified but who still need extra help?

The District is not changing its Learning Center model. These four questions are related to the provision of support services for students within the general education program and appear to express concern that the district is discontinuing

the Learning Center model at the elementary schools. The State Education Department has recommended that the services provided under a district's Academic Improvement Service (AIS) plan be included under a Response to Intervention (RTI) model. Syosset has developed its RTI model to incorporate the Learning Center. RTI is a research-based model which encompasses Learning Center services.

5. With the special education population rising and co-teaching not available through all the grades, in what other ways will the district support this increase?

The special education population over the past five years has remained stable. The provision of special education services within the general education classroom utilizing a co-teaching model is available in all buildings. The elementary schools and high school utilize the consultant teacher model to deliver these services. Co-teaching is also available in certain sections of our General Studies special class programs in the middle and high schools. The district remains focused on continuous improvement of its special education services to address the developing academic/social/behavioral needs of our students.