

## Spring 2018 Press Conference Questions

### General:

1. **What is the district's policy on teachers voicing their opinions, i.e. politics, during class time to students?**

During the school day, teachers refrain from sharing their individual personal political views. However, teachers (especially in Social Studies and English) are encouraged to give students opportunities to explore multiple sides of important social issues.

2. **In reference to the recent events surrounding school violence, what are we doing as a school community to address the social-emotional learning (SEL) needs at the elementary, middle and high school levels? What is being done to train teachers and staff of the warning signs of depression, anxiety and mental problems in the student body?**

The District has been addressing the social and emotional development and learning (SEDL) of students for the past eight years as part of its multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS). The District has an "RTI Today" committee of K-12 staff members that is responsible for continually iterating our practices. We provide staff training to ensure awareness of students' SEDL and mental health needs. Our psychologists and social workers maintain ongoing contacts with local mental health services and community resources from the NYS Office of Mental Health in order to ensure resources are available to any students in need.

3. **What is the district doing about the middle and high school students using e-cigarette products in school? With e-cigarettes disguised as a USB drive (or JUUL) and giving off little to no vapor, students are bringing these into schools, under the radar, across the country. Clearly, these products are dangerous to the smoker and those around them and have been shown to be quite destructive with irreversible damage to the health of teenagers who are still growing. Does the health curriculum incorporate education on this?**

All of our students are educated through our Wellness Program and the Health Education program about the dangers and ramifications of vaping and tobacco use. This includes an education about the long and short term effects on the human body. Our faculty and staff have been trained to identify the new devices, the cartridges and the smell that they give off. Possession of these devices by persons under age 18 is illegal and students found to be using them will receive consequences per the Code of Conduct.

4. **With the recent success of the HS Robotics team and the future of robotics, has there been any thought to bringing elements of robotics to the middle schools and elementary schools as many families seek outside robotics instruction for kids as young as 1st grade?**

This year we have expanded our robotics program in grades K-12. Our elementary Library Media Specialists have been using various robotics programs with all grades K-5 (for example,

they are using Ozobots, Bee-bots, as well as Dash and Dot). Our middle school students have been working with a virtual robotics curriculum in their Technology 6 classes. In addition, both of our middle schools currently have robotics clubs and have sent teams to the First Lego League competitions (FLL). This fall (2018-19), all students in grades 5-12 will work with Lego EV3 Mindstorms, which will allow them to build a strong foundation in coding and the engineering design process, which in turn is designed to complement our K-12 coding program (kidOYO).

5. **Has there been any response from the Board of Elections regarding moving voting places out of schools? This is especially concerning due to the recent school shootings and it is a concern to have the school easily accessible to any outsider while our students are in school.**

The Board of Elections has not advanced a proposal to move elections out of school buildings at this time. They did tour the District's buildings to identify suggestions that would better segregate election traffic from school personnel. For the 2018 general election in November, all elementary schools will be closed for instruction due to parent-teacher conferences.

6. **What is the process by which administrators and educators are given opportunities to pursue continuing professional education in order to improve their knowledge and effectiveness?**

The District provides many opportunities for professional growth for faculty, staff and administration. The District:

- Hosts a NYS Teacher Center (Tract Center) which provides a number of professional development courses;
- Participates in the BOCES Model Schools program that provides ongoing professional development aligned to our K-12 technology initiatives;
- Has professional staff developers from Teachers College Columbia University provide support and training to teachers and administrators K-6 in support of our reading and writing curriculum;
- Will be having staff trainers helping implement the District's new ("Next-Generation") science program (K-5);
- Administrators engage their faculty during monthly faculty and grade-level meetings and during the summer Learning Institute; and
- Frequently sends staff to participate in professional learning organizations' and BOCES' workshops.

Once teachers are issued an initial certification, they have 5 years during which to complete their master's degree and get 3 years of professional experience which qualifies them for a professional certificate. In order to maintain the professional certificate, teachers are required to complete 100 hours of professional development through approved providers every 5 years. Teachers are also required to re-register their certificates every 5 years.

At the end of the year, teachers are asked to reflect on professional growth which helps us continually identify opportunities for additional professional learning.

**7. Given the talent of our students at all levels, would the district consider creating a district-wide marching band for the purpose of competition?**

These kinds of opportunities are driven by student interest. This year, based on student feedback, the District invested in updated uniforms for students participating in events like the Memorial Day parade.

**8. Is the district considering switching from Google Classroom to CANVAS? What are the costs involved?**

Syosset High School is currently engaged in piloting a Learning Management System in order to prepare our students for post-secondary experiences utilized by colleges and universities. Our early experience thus far reflects that our students' online/virtual learning has been enhanced and that students are demonstrating greater self-direction and responsibility in learning. The current CANVAS pilot appears to integrate well with the Google for Education Platform.

**9. What does the district do to ensure that the best coaches are being employed for each team in every sport? How are the coaches being evaluated? What input is being sought from current and former players (who feel more free to speak out)?**

The District begins a search for coaches within District's faculty and staff. If we are unable to find a qualified candidate within our system, the Athletic Director will reach out to other Athletic Directors for possible teacher candidates. If we still do not have a candidate, we will canvas non-certified teachers who hold a temporary coaching License from the NYS Department of Education. In recent years, recruitment has become more challenging. Head coaches are evaluated annually by the Athletic Department.

PE teachers are trained to work with students with disabilities and TA's are provided for students with disabilities requiring assistance. The Principals, Athletic Director and coaches all stay in contact to provide best practices on a case by case basis.

**10. Why are the students responsible for paying for teachers to go on field trips (i.e., 5<sup>th</sup> grade tickets to a Broadway show)? Is there a fund the district or individual schools have in order to pay for these events so that it does not inflate the costs?**

The funding of field trips comes from different sources including district funds, student activity funds and participants. The district reviews field trips with a focus on educational relevance and relationship to curriculum, student experience and enrichment, cost and funding sources, safety and logistical issues, including the approval process. The cost of trip chaperones is either incorporated into the student cost or paid through the Arts-in-Ed budget. The field trip

policy is scheduled to be reviewed in the 2018-19 school year and we will share any updates with you when available.

**11. What are the policies and procedures for the district's school recycling program? Is it consistently implemented at each school?**

Under the New York State Solid Waste Management Act of 1988, recycling is required of all schools whenever waste is generated. All schools in the District have a recycling program that is consistently implemented.

At six (6) of the elementary schools, plastic and glass products are collected and picked up by the Town of Oyster Bay weekly. At Robbins Lane elementary plastic bottles and cans are recycled by the PTA.

HBT and South Woods Middle School both operate recycling programs, with the program at South Woods operated by the students with weekly pick-up by the Town of Oyster Bay. The High School is working with the Town of Oyster Bay's Deputy Commissioner of Sanitation to have the High School participate in the Town's Single-stream recycling program pilot. Single-stream recycling is a system in which all recyclables, including newspaper, cardboard, plastic, aluminum and mail are placed together in a bin for recycling. The District will work with the Town to determine if single-stream recycling can be implemented at all schools in the community.

**12. With so many students and staff members out with the flu, how has the district changed its cleaning protocols?**

Hard surfaces, such as desktops, water fountains and door knobs, are cleaned and disinfected on a daily basis throughout the school year. Our protocols are developed in conjunction with the Nassau BOCES health and safety service to ensure that they are consistent with state guidance and best practices.

**13. Many students come to school with a fever or active flu. Has the district considered sending out a letter to parents as to when it is safe to send their child back to school?**

If a student exhibits symptoms of illness, they are sent to the Student Health Office for evaluation. If necessary, their parent is contacted and asked to cooperate in keeping their child home until at least 24 hours after they no longer have fever or signs of a fever without use of fever-reducing medicine. We are required by the Nassau County Health Department to actively monitor and report influenza and other communicable diseases.

**Elementary:**

**1. How is the library curriculum (library class and computer room usage) changing in light of all the new technology that is being used by the students?**

The Library Media Center is the “hub” for technology in our elementary schools for students as well as faculty and staff. Our Library Media Specialists are currently engaging students in many of our district technology initiatives, including the KidOYO Coding Platform, Robotics, and the Google for Education platform including Google Classroom and Google Apps for Education. Our Library Media Specialists also provide students with instruction on Digital Citizenship and library and research skills.

**2. Is there a district policy for allowing students into the building prior to 9 am if they are not coming for a specific purpose like extra help, chorus, etc.?**

The elementary instructional day begins at 9:15 AM with students entering their classrooms beginning at 9:05 AM. Typically, buses begin to arrive at 8:55 AM. Although faculty and staff are in the building prior to the start of the instructional day, they are engaged in professional development, scheduled extra-curricular activities and extra help, Response to Intervention (RTI) team meetings, and other activities that allow for preparation for instruction. Therefore, the District cannot offer to supervise students that arrive earlier. If you need childcare prior to 8:55 AM you can take advantage of the SCOPE Program. Information can be obtained by contacting the elementary building’s main office.

**3. Why does the PTA translate fliers and information for the district? Shouldn’t the district be sending out information in other languages in order to reach as many families as possible in our diverse school district?**

Official school documents are translated into the District’s top 5 languages through the use of the BOCES translation service. In addition, parents requiring translation services for registration or individual meetings (i.e. CSE meetings or teacher conferences) may request a translator through the District. In addition, the District’s website is configured with a Google Translate feature. Fliers related to PTA events are frequently translated by PTA volunteers. However, district personnel have been providing assistance to our PTA Council with reviewing and editing fliers to help disseminate pertinent information in various languages to meet the needs of our diverse community.

**4. Are there any impacts to the district if children opt-out of the Common Core standardized testing?**

The new Federal ESSA law increases potential consequences to school districts for low participation rates. In short, those consequences will escalate annually as follows:

- Year 1 – Schools that “persistently and substantially” fail to meet the 95% participation requirement must conduct a “participation rate self-assessment” and develop a “participation rate improvement plan”.
  - Schools that rank in the bottom 10% of participation across the State will be required to submit their plan to NYSED for the Commissioner’s approval.
- Year 2 – Schools that implement a plan and do not improve must develop an updated plan.

- Year 3 – Districts with schools that implement the district’s improvement plan and do not improve must contract with a BOCES to conduct a “participation rate audit” and develop an updated plan.
- Year 4 – Districts that implement the BOCES improvement plan and do not improve may be required to undertake activities specified by the State Education Department to raise student participation in State assessments.

**5. Does the district have a multi-year contract with SCOPE or is it reevaluated every year? Has the district looked into other options for after-school care? What is a parent's recourse if they have concerns about SCOPE, other than simply pulling their child out? Does the district have any oversight authority?**

SCOPE operates under a contract that is approved annually. Parent concerns can be directed to the District’s Coordinator of Human Resources who works closely with SCOPE management to resolve any issues.

**6. The elementary schools offer an after-school recreation program with Art/Sports. Is it possible to expand into other areas such as coding/computer classes?**

The after-school recreation program was expanded recently to accommodate additional student interest. With the advent of expanded coding and computer opportunities in the regular elementary school day, the after-school program has continued to emphasize arts and sports.

**7. We understand that according to the Nassau County Civil Service Commission, no formal educational or specific experience is required to become a school monitor. Can the district require CPR/AED training (including the Heimlich Maneuver) instead of just offering it? Are lunch monitors trained to look out for bullying behaviors and to employ positive discipline skills? Are they trained to use an EpiPen?**

Training for CPR/AED/Heimlich is available to district staff members, including school monitors. Participation has been voluntary and there is a high level of participation of staff. Monitors are trained on Epi-pens and DASA (Dignity for All Students). The District will implement training for CPR/AED/Heimlich as part of the ongoing training for monitors during next school year.

**8. What would the Administration like to see elementary school parents do more/less of to better support our children’s education?**

For very young children, the best activity a parent can do is to read to (and with) your child daily. Allow your child to take turns reading with you. As your child grows, approach their learning with a “Growth Mindset” in order for students to learn to take risks, make mistakes, learn perseverance, and grow. "Parents are a really critical force in child development when you think about how motivation and mindsets develop," says Kyla Haimovitz, a professor of psychology at Stanford University. She coauthored the study, published in Psychological Science with colleague Carol Dweck, who pioneered research on mindsets. "Parents have this

powerful effect really early on and throughout childhood to send messages about what is failure, how to respond to it."

The thoughts in this article would be a great discussion point with parents as we work together to support all children's education.

<https://www.kqed.org/mindshift/45022/talking-about-failure-what-parents-can-do-to-motivate-kids-in-school>

### **Middle School:**

- 1. Why do students have to choose between a musical instrument and a vocal class at the middle school level? A child who is athletically inclined is given the opportunity to pursue varied sports based upon seasons. However, those who are talented musically are forced to make a choice. It limits children and their potential to grow their talents at a young age. What can be done to rotate the musical areas of interests at the middle school level, so children can excel in all areas of music and grow their talent, instead of having to choose?**

Unlike sports teams, the musical ensembles in the middle school are curricular programs. Band, orchestra and chorus classes meet on alternate days for the entire school year. Middle school curriculum requirements do not afford students time in the school day to enroll in more than one music class. The district gives elementary students opportunities to participate in multiple ensembles so that they have enough experience to guide their decisions for middle school. Students who remain committed to performing in multiple ensembles are able to program those classes into their schedules on the high school level. Additionally, there are opportunities for students to participate in extra-curricular vocal and instrumental clubs at the middle school level. This affords students who choose band or orchestra an opportunity to sing, or students who choose chorus class the chance to continue to perform as an instrumentalist.

- 2. Now that teachers are going to be wearing ID badges, is the district looking into getting them for students in the secondary schools?**

The District will be requiring badges for students at Syosset High School. No decisions have been made about badges at middle schools at this time.

### **High School:**

- 1. When a varsity team has "alternates" on the team ready to participate when needed, what is the justification for taking players from JV and not using the varsity alternates already in place? What is the point of having alternates on the team if they are not going to participate and they are going to keep getting passed over for JV participants? Alternates train alongside varsity players so they are clearly able to step in when needed. JV players need to be brought up to speed.**

The existing varsity players will likely receive the most playing time. However, coaches will sometimes add JV students to the roster in order to have additional depth in positions and will make playing time decisions based on game situations. Alternates may or may not be called upon to participate before JV players who were moved up. Generally alternates will be called upon before JV players, though it is the coaches' decision as to who fits the scenario best for any given situation.

**2. How often does the athletic director “pop in” on team practices, unannounced, to observe what is happening?**

During all seasons, the Athletic Director frequently visits all athletic practice and competition sites (the gym, pool and fields) and will spend time based on the number of simultaneous activities. Visits are typically unannounced. The Athletic Director not only observes how things are going but also interacts with the athletes. Off-site visits (bowling, golf, cross-country, etc.) are less frequent.

**3. Can there be a BOCES (Barry Tech) presentation made to all students and parents?**

The BOCES Barry Tech program is a general education vocational program available to all of our students. The high school guidance department presents BOCES offerings at its evening workshops with parents and students. Additionally, the counselors review BOCES programs with their students during their “Introduction to Program” meetings, as well as during individual programming meetings.

**4. Has there been any consideration regarding replacing/repairing the High School lockers?**

The District's construction plan consists of aspects that will be addressed through the Phase 1 and Phase 2 projects, as well as additional projects identified to be addressed in the District budget. Lockers were identified in the Building Condition Survey and will be addressed through the District budget portion of the construction plan. The District, high school administration and our architects are working on a plan and timeline for this work.

**5. Some students are not comfortable going into the bathrooms at the High School due to vaping and other matters. In addition, parents understand that aides are not permitted in the restrooms. What steps have been taken/can be taken to ensure the security, safety, health, and well-being of the students while in the restrooms?**

There is a staff member outside of every bathroom that ensures that there is a measure of supervision provided. The District is exploring additional means of monitoring the bathrooms that do not infringe on the rights of the students properly using the facilities.

**6. There has been discussion on the percentage that Regents grades count towards a student's GPA for the school year. Although understood, could there be an exception made for the years that have the “transition Regents” such as Social Studies this year? It does not seem fair to the student that is struggling considering all of the problems that the Regents had last year with geometry.**

We recently reviewed the calculation of GPA and concluded that no adjustments are warranted. For example, the State gave full credit for the erroneous questions on the Geometry exams thus raising students' final scores.

- 7. The SHS website was re-designed but it has been more than 6 months and there is very little content geared for parents. Will there be additions made in the near future? Can all HS Clubs be required to add a description, requirements, contact information, social media, advising teachers, and any other pertinent club information to the SHS website? This will give students a better opportunity to find a club that suits them. It would be helpful in the middle schools too.**

The SHS website is run by our students as a learning opportunity and they have been given the unique opportunity to redesign and update the site. They are working with the club advisors and students to improve their communication. We have shared this suggestion with them.

- 8. We know that the District upgraded the Wi-Fi systems in all buildings. However, in the high school there are many dead spots. What is being done to address the dead spots to ensure connectivity is available throughout the building?**

During the Summer of 2017, we successfully upgraded our Wi-Fi infrastructure in all of our buildings in order to support our District Technology Initiatives including our Chrome Book deployment. When faculty, staff, and students returned in September, we were able to “test” the demands and identify areas that needed additional access points in all of our ten school buildings. The majority of the additional access points have been installed in the instructional locations with mostly offices remaining. Additionally, the District is in the process of planning “customized” Wi-Fi access that will supplement existing large meeting areas at the high school, such as the gyms, so that large groups of students can work simultaneously.

### **Special Education:**

- 1. With the new RTI (response to intervention) program, how long will it take for a student to get the necessary academic support they need if it takes 4 weeks to “test” a single strategy that may or may not work? Who is responsible for recording the data through this process?**

Once the determination is made 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. The determination of success of the intervention(s) is reviewed after 10 weeks. The teacher providing the intervention(s) is responsible for data collection. Please note the RTI program is now 8 years old.

- 2. When students receive a 2 or lower on the State Test what services will they receive? Do they get additional instructional time in the form of a pullout? How are the services implemented?**

Students who score a 2 or lower on the State ELA or Math tests receive support services in the general education setting. These services are a part of the District's MTSS/RTI model. The service frequency and location will vary depending on the student's demonstrated needs and response to the intervention(s) provided. Parents are encouraged to speak to the building principal for specific information on the delivery of these services.

- 3. Can self-advocacy skills be taught more extensively from 9th-12th?**

Self-advocacy is an emerging skill for students during their high school career. The development of these skills is a process which relies on consistent collaboration between the student, school, and family. Advocacy skills are the centerpiece of the student's transition planning for post-secondary endeavors. These skills are addressed at each high school student's annual review CSE meeting. Parent and student input is critical for the success of this process. Enabling a student to self-advocate, function independently, and understand the nature of his/her disability is an ongoing focus of every special education program.

- 4. How many classified students does a guidance counselor handle? How are they aware of the special education laws, in light of the fact that they change so frequently?**

Each high school guidance counselor is responsible for approximately 20 – 25 classified students. While special education laws are very stable, changes in SED graduation options for students with disabilities have occurred recently. Guidance counselors are kept abreast of these changes by receiving SED guidelines and attending training conferences/workshops. Guidance counselors address accessing college support services at the special education college transition meetings.

- 5. Are there different general studies sections for high functioning and low functioning skilled students? How do we accommodate the wide range of student abilities in general studies if they are not grouped in such a way?**

The General Studies curriculum is designed to enable the student to successfully sit for the Regents examination in that subject area. The special education teacher differentiates instruction and adjusts the classroom learning pace to accommodate each student's needs. The appropriateness of the placement for a student is determined by the CSE based upon the student's present levels of functioning, transition needs, and post-secondary goals.

**6. Are there teacher aides/assistants in general studies classes?**

The General Studies classes are set at a 15:1 student to teacher ratio. The need for the additional support of a teaching assistant or aide for a student or a group of students within the General Studies program is determined by the CSE.

**7. Why isn't there a separate transitional meeting for parents and students with special needs in all schools, similar to the one for parents from preschool to elementary school? Even though needs are so different, many of the general questions parents have can be addressed at this smaller, more intimate meeting. Specifically, the transitional meeting for the incoming high school students is too overwhelming and does not pertain to many special education students or their parents.**

The transition needs of students are considered individually at the student's annual review CSE meeting. For students entering Grade 6 and Grade 9, representatives from the new school are in attendance at the CSE meeting. This serves to provide the parents with an opportunity to meet and ask questions relative to the student's transition into the new building. In addition to the general education orientations and the special education college transition meeting that addresses accessing supports at college, individual tours of buildings and parent meetings with staff to define programs are provided regularly upon request. Parents are encouraged to contact their school's psychologist or guidance counselor (at the middle school) to make a special transition support request prior to the student's move to a new building. The District is forming a workgroup to review the transition programs for Grade 8 to 9 that will include a special education component.

**8. Why aren't parents who have students in the elementary schools allowed to meet with tutors and consultants that work with their children? They are a vital part of their children's success.**

Parents may request team meetings with their student's service providers when specific issues are of concern. Depending on the nature of the issues, the team meeting may include tutors/consultant teachers. Parents are encouraged to speak with the building principal to establish the need for a team meeting and the members to attend. As a result of building schedules, the availability of a tutor/consultant teacher to attend a meeting may be limited.

**9. Why do students in the self-contained classes that do not take finals or Regents need to miss school during testing weeks?**

During mid-terms and final examinations the high school follows a testing schedule; regular classes are not in session. Students are encouraged to prepare for any examination they may have scheduled during this time.