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# CONTINUING PROGRESS

## A Report on the East Ramapo Central School District

December 2018

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(appointed November 2018)



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# Continuing Progress

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## **Commissioner's Charge to the Monitors**

On August 16, 2016, New York State Education Department (SED or "Department") Commissioner MaryEllen Elia appointed Charles Szuberla and reappointed Dr. John Sipple as monitors ("Monitors") for the East Ramapo Central School District ("District")<sup>1</sup>. The 2017-18 school year monitoring initiative built on the work conducted by State monitors since June 2014 and included working with the Board of Education ("Board") and District leadership to implement Strategic Academic Improvement and Fiscal Improvement Plans; improve fiscal and budgetary planning; and provide oversight as required by Chapter 59 of the Laws of 2017.<sup>2</sup> In addition, the Monitors oversaw the District's successful completion of Phase II of a \$58 million bond proposition to fund critical capital repairs and projects. This report focuses on the academic and fiscal condition of the District for the 2017-18 school year.

### **2017-18 District Accomplishments**

1. All student subgroups showed improvement on the grades 3-8 English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics State assessments.
2. The New York State Comptroller upgraded the District's fiscal condition from "moderate stress" to "undesignated."<sup>3</sup>
3. The Board of Education and teachers' union agreed on a new contract that runs through June 2021.
4. The District completed Phase II of the \$59 million capital construction program on-time and on-budget.
5. The District added six special education collaborative classes.
6. The District added six teachers in English as a New Language ("ENL") and bilingual instruction.
7. The District assigned eight teachers to implement effective instruction in the high schools.
8. The District added 12 teachers for the arts and music.
9. The District implemented a teacher collaboration model at the high schools.
10. The District added academic standards facilitators for all grade levels.

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Sipple concluded his work as a monitor on June 30, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Chapter 89 of the Laws of 2016 was amended by section 48 of Part YYY of Chapter 59 of the Laws of 2017 and Chapter 59 of the Laws of 2018.

<sup>3</sup> In 2015 and 2016, East Ramapo was classified by the Comptroller as a district in "significant stress." In 2017, East Ramapo was classified by the Comptroller as a district in "moderate stress." In 2018, the District did not appear on the list of schools under fiscal stress.

11. The District expanded summer academic program offerings to include:

- Instrumental music summer camp for grades 4-8 (400 students);
- Computer sciences summer academy for grades 2-8 (250 students);
- Health sciences summer academy for grades 2-8 (250 students);
- Extended school year program for grades K-8 (255 students); and
- Student with Interrupted/Inconsistent Formal Education for grades 9-10 (60 students).

## Enrollment Overview

*Table 1. Enrollment*

<b>Subgroup</b>	<b>2015-16</b>	<b>2016-17</b>	<b>2017-18</b>
Pre-K (Half Day)	1,691	1,686	1,691
Pre-K (Full Day)	100	98	99
K-12 Public	8,472	8,598	8,843
K-12 Non-public	23,834	24,579	26,526

*Table 2. K-12 Public School Enrollment by Ethnicity*

<b>Subgroup</b>	<b>2015-16</b>	<b>2016-17</b>	<b>2017-18</b>
Black or African American	37.0%	34.4%	31.7%
Hispanic or Latino	53.1%	56.4%	59.6%
Asian/Native American	4.5%	4.2%	3.9%
White	4.4%	4.0%	3.9%
Multiracial	1.0%	1.0%	0.8%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	0%	0%	0.1%

*Table 3. K-12 Public School Enrollment - Other Groups*

<b>Subgroup</b>	<b>2015-16</b>	<b>2016-17</b>	<b>2017-18</b>
English Language Learners	29%	34%	37%
Students with Disabilities	21%	20%	21%
Economically Disadvantaged	87%	88%	89%

## Academic Accountability

The District is currently classified as a focus district. Of the District's 14 schools, six are focus schools and one is a priority school. Elmwood Elementary School attained “good standing” status in 2017-18.

*Table 4. District and School Accountability Status*

<b>NAME</b>	<b>2017-18 Accountability Status</b>
<b>EAST RAMAPO CSD (SPRING VALLEY)</b>	<b>Focus District</b>
FLEETWOOD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	Good Standing
GRANDVIEW ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	<b>Focus School</b>
HEMPSTEAD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	Good Standing
KAKIAT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	Good Standing
MARGETTS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	<b>Focus School</b>
EAST RAMAPO EARLY CHLD CTR AT KAKIAT	Good Standing
SUMMIT PARK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	Good Standing
CHESTNUT RIDGE MIDDLE SCHOOL	<b>Priority School</b>
SPRING VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL	<b>Focus School</b>
POMONA MIDDLE SCHOOL	<b>Focus School</b>
ELMWOOD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	Good Standing
RAMAPO HIGH SCHOOL	<b>Focus School</b>
LIME KILN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	Good Standing
ELDORADO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	<b>Focus School</b>

### State Assessments

A new baseline for State assessments was established in 2018 due to the change from three- to two-day testing. As a result, proficiency levels cannot be compared with prior years. Nonetheless, the new baseline on the grade 3-8 State assessments is encouraging. The Monitors stress an increasingly urgent need to focus on English Language Learners and students with disabilities whose test results, while improving, are unacceptably low.

*Table 5. 3-8 English Language Arts Proficiency*

<b>Subgroup</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>
General Education	28%	28%	32%
Black or African American	21%	24%	31%
Hispanic or Latino	17%	18%	22%
White	35%	36%	40%
English Language Learners	2%	3%	5%
Students with Disabilities	2%	4%	6%

*Table 6. 3-8 Math Proficiency*

<b>Subgroup</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>
General Education	21%	23%	26%
Black or African American	15%	17%	21%
Hispanic or Latino	13%	16%	18%
White	31%	36%	39%
English Language Learners	2%	5%	6%
Students with Disabilities	2%	3%	5%

### High School Graduation Rate

Graduation rates, with the exception of Black students, have steadily declined since 2015. The Hispanic and Latino graduation rate is unacceptably low, especially compared to the Statewide graduation rate of 68% for Hispanic and Latino students in 2017. The graduation rates for English Language Learners and students with disabilities are also unacceptable and well below the State averages of 27% and 54% respectively. The District has implemented a new system called *Final Five* to track all students' progress towards graduation and post-graduation plans to ensure struggling students are getting they extra help to stay on track for graduation. The *Final Five* tracks attendance/behavior, Regents exams/grade point average, SAT/ACT exams, completer 200 community service hours and application to at least one college.

*Table 7. Four-Year High School Graduation Rate*

<b>Subgroup</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>
General Education	69%	67%	59%
Black or African American	68%	73%	75%
Hispanic or Latino	53%	52%	37%
White	56%	48%	44%
English Language Learners	12%	7%	4%
Students with Disabilities	31%	52%	43%

### **Enhanced Course Offerings**

After years of drastic cuts, the District is now offering Advanced Placement (AP) and other college-level courses. Last year, 508 high school students out of a total of 2,700 took advantage of enhanced courses.

*Table 8. 2018 Advanced Placement Enrollment and Results*

Total AP Students	148
Number of Exams	302
AP Students with Exam Scores 3+	81
% of Total AP Students with Scores 3+	54.7%

## College Courses

Thirteen percent of high school students in the District took college courses in 2017-18. The passing rate for Spring Valley High School students was 95.5% (149 out of 156 students). The passing rate for Ramapo High School students was 97% (198 out of 204 students). College courses taken by East Ramapo students in 2017-18 included:

- English Composition I
- English 101
- College Speech
- Media Communication
- Spanish I
- Algebra
- Physics
- Multicultural Dance
- Public Affairs
- Psychology

## **Restoration of Staffing Cuts**

The District has restored a total of 185.5 positions since the drastic cuts that began in 2008 and were outlined in the November 2015 Hank Greenberg Report. Enrollment has increased by more than 2,100 students since 2008. A summary of the restorations is listed below.

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**Table 9. Staffing Reductions and Restorations**

	2008-09	2009-12 Cuts	2012-13 Cuts	2013-14 Cuts	2014-15 Cuts	2017-18 Cuts	2018-19 Cuts	Total Cuts	Restored as of 6/30/18	Net Change
Elementary Teachers		75						75	26	-49
Elementary Art/Music Teachers									21	21
Secondary Teachers		93.2		16				109.2	47.5	-61.7
Secondary Art/Music Teachers									22.5	22.5
Special Education Teachers				15				15	1	-14
One-on-One Aides		19		5				24		-24
Teaching Assistants		49					15	64	10	-54
Attendance Teachers		1						1	0.5	-0.5
Guidance Counselors									2	2
Family Resource Center Coordinators									5	5
Substitute Teachers		8.3						8.3	0	-8.3
Social Workers		15						15	1	-14
Supervisors		4	1					5		-5
Academic Standards Facilitators									4	4
Deans		12.5						12.5		-12.5
Dept. Chairpersons		10						10		-10
Secondary Asst. Princ.		2						2	2	0
Elementary Asst. Princ.		11						11		-11
Building/Grounds Admin.		1						1		-1
Transportation Admin.		1						1		-1
Central Office Admin.		3					2	5	1	-4
Directors of Secondary Education		1	1					2	1	-1
Teacher Training for Technology		1	1					2		-2
Title I Summer Program Coordinator of Health		1	1					2	1	-1
Nurses		1	0.5					1.5		-1.5
Civil Service		88	2	7	20	17	3	137	40	-97
<b>Totals</b>		<b>397</b>	<b>6.5</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>506.5</b>	<b>185.5</b>	<b>-321</b>
<b>FTE</b>	<b>1,898</b>	<b>1,501</b>	<b>1,495</b>	<b>1,450</b>	<b>1,430</b>	<b>1,413</b>	<b>1,392</b>		<b>1,577</b>	

*Notes for Staffing Cuts and Restorations Table:*

1. Data is based on information supplied by the District and a review of official Board of Education minutes from September 2008 to June 2018.
2. Due to changes the administrative structure of the District, a direct comparison of staffing levels from year to year is difficult. For example, Department chairs in secondary education were replaced by Academic Standards Facilitators to focus on instruction and teacher development.
3. Public Pre-K-12 Student Enrollment:  
 2009: 7,752 (94 pre-K students)  
 2018: 9,855 (1,790 pre-K students)
4. A significant portion of the reductions in civil service positions is due to privatizing student transportation.
5. Improvements in the personnel office resulted in the District finding multiple candidates for each open position for the 2018-19 school year.

## Average Class Size

Table 10. Average Class Size\* by Grade Level

	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
<b>Common Branch</b>	19	20	22	25	24	26	26	<b>25</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Grade 8</b>									
English	17	22	21	19	20	21	23	20	20
Mathematics	18	21	21	19	19	21	23	21	21
Science	19	20	21	20	20	23	22	22	21
Social Studies	18	21	22	21	20	23	24	21	22
<b>Grade 10</b>									
English	21	21	21	20	20	22	22	18	20
Mathematics	21	20	18	21	21	22	18	20	24
Science	20	21	20	20	21	19	22	20	21
Social Studies	20	22	21	22	20	22	22	21	21

\*Average Class Size is the total registration in specified classes divided by the number of those classes with registration.

Common Branch refers to self-contained classes in Grades 1–6.

Currently, maximum class sizes are limited in the teachers' contract as follows:

Pre-K/ESL	15
Kindergarten/ESL	26
Grades 1-3/ESL	28
Grades 4-6/ESL	31
Grades 7-12	25
Grades 7 -12 (At-risk)	24
Grades 7 -12 Honors	29
Grades 7-12 AP	30

## Chapter 59 of the Laws of 2017

The enacted 2017-18 State Budget continued \$3 million in State funding for the District (section 48 of Part YYY of Chapter 59 of the Laws of 2017). Chapter 59 of the Laws of 2017<sup>4</sup> required the District to update three major plans in collaboration with the community stakeholders and the State Monitors:

<sup>4</sup> Chapter 59 of the Laws of 2018 extended the requirement until June 30, 2021.

- 1) Long-term (2016-2020) strategic academic plan;
- 2) Long-term fiscal improvement plan; and
- 3) Expenditure plan outlining the use of the \$3 million in State funding, which the District used in the 2017-18 school year to implement full-day kindergarten and restore arts programs in the elementary schools.

The updated fiscal improvement plan and the comprehensive expenditure plan for the additional \$3 million in State funds for the 2017-2018 school year were developed in consultation with the State Monitors as required by Chapter 59 of the Laws of 2017. The 2017-18 educational investments funded with the \$3 million were aligned with recommendations 8 and 10 included in the Monitors' December 14, 2015 "Opportunity Deferred" report:<sup>5</sup> Recommendation 8 was to provide students with full-day kindergarten classes and recommendation 10 was to continue investigating the feasibility of streamlining grade configurations and start times.

Together, the three plans addressed core areas identified as needing improvement either by the Monitors or by the District and community through the root-cause analysis exercise that was conducted during the development of the strategic academic plan. The strategic academic plan provides measurable objectives and explicit strategies to address areas where improvements are needed, including but not limited to:

- Financial stability;
- Academic opportunities and outcomes for all students;
- Education of and accelerated rates of success for students with disabilities;
- Education of and accelerated rates of success for English language learners; and
- Compliance with applicable State and federal laws and regulations.

The fiscal improvement plan aligned fiscal resources with a strategic academic plan, noted risks and liabilities, identified internal control improvement opportunities, and examined long-term fiscal sustainability.

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<sup>5</sup> The "Opportunity Deferred" report can be accessed at:  
<https://www.regents.nysed.gov/common/regents/files/East%20Ramapo%20Report%20Pub.pdf>.

## Strategic Academic Plan

The East Ramapo Central School District mission states:

*“As a unified community, the East Ramapo Central School District is committed to educating the whole child by providing a healthy, safe, supportive, engaging, and challenging environment.”*

On September 26, 2016, Commissioner Elia approved the District’s first long-term strategic academic and fiscal improvement plan, which contained a comprehensive expenditure plan (“improvement plan”). Thereafter, the District implemented the improvement plan to manage resources more effectively. The plans were updated and approved by the Commissioner in October 2017 and the District received funds in February 2018. The plans were developed with three goals in mind:

- 1) Educating the whole child;
- 2) Improving and maintaining the physical environment of schools and grounds; and
- 3) Implementing a solid resource management system.

### Educational Strategies

The District’s strategic plan rests on Four Pillars. The pillars define the skills and capacity needed to achieve the District’s goals and provide a framework for the contributions of teachers, leaders, staff, families, and community partners.

#### Pillar 1: High Expectations for Teaching & Learning

Standards-aligned instructional system:

- Align curriculum, assessments, materials, and pacing guides with the most current learning standards and ensure consistent day-to-day implementation in every school and in every classroom.
- Full-day kindergarten for all students.
- Provide access for every student to participate in integrated arts programs and Advanced Placement, honors, and college courses.

Responsive instruction and student engagement:

- Implement a common set of research-informed core instructional practices to facilitate culturally responsive, “good first teaching” across academic areas, grade levels, and student groups.
- Strengthen early literacy and numeracy foundations in pre-K to grade 2 with age-appropriate materials, supports, and ongoing staff development.

- Strengthen student engagement and ownership of learning through a student portfolio system that includes setting academic and behavioral goals, personal monitoring of progress, and student-led conferences and expositions.
- Require every high school graduate to complete a concrete post-secondary plan collaboratively with staff, peers, and parents/caregivers.

## Pillar 2: Culture of Safety and Strong Relationships with Families & Community

### Positive behaviors & student voice:

- Implement and monitor all tiers of the Positive Behavior and Intervention System in every school and every classroom to create a safe culture for learning and work.
- Implement a student-to-adult or student-to-student mentoring program.
- Conduct at least one student-led summit annually as a forum for open, mutually respectful communication among students, staff, and parents/caregivers.

### Family education and collaboration:

- Provide ongoing training to parents/caregivers regarding effective strategies for strengthening language and math skills of students in kindergarten through grade 2.
- Engage parents/caregivers in ongoing training, collaboration, and communication to better understand and support student achievement.
- Educate parents and caregivers about how to access school and community resources that support family health and wellness and behavioral and life success for students.

### Internships and dual degree programs:

- Develop community partnerships that provide opportunities for students to enroll in courses at local colleges and universities and to participate in internships and apprenticeships with local employers and community organizations.

## Pillar 3: Results-Focused, Collaborative Professional Learning

### Standards-based professional development:

- Define and implement the standards-aligned instructional practices that all teachers and classroom-based support staff will master and deliver.
- Define and implement professional standards for support staff at all levels and provide ongoing staff development aligned to those expectations.

### Evidence-based collaboration:

- Provide dedicated time for teachers, leaders, and staff to engage in Data Summits at the end of each assessment cycle, with emphasis on analyzing student data, reflecting on professional practices, and planning for the next assessment cycle.

### Teacher and administrator leadership networks:

- Develop a cadre of highly skilled and well-trained teachers, leaders, and staff to facilitate professional learning at the school, department, and district levels.

#### Pillar 4: Data-Driven, Effective, and Efficient Systems

##### Timely assessment system:

- Implement an assessment system to provide timely and authentic feedback about student growth, instructional practices, interventions, and communication with parents.

##### Planning, public reporting, and celebrations:

- Set performance targets and develop results-focused improvement plan for each school and District-level unit.
- Implement a public reporting online dashboard to share school and District progress at least three times per year.
- Organize school- and District-based ceremonies to celebrate the accomplishments of staff and students at least twice during the academic year.

##### Culture of service excellence:

- Organize central roles, resources, and processes to better support schools.
- Strengthen faculty and staff professional relationships through a shared vision, improved communication, challenging work, and career development.
- Conduct periodic staff satisfaction surveys to measure feedback and ensure staff satisfaction.

#### Professional Development

The District administration believes that a healthy, safe, supportive, engaging, and challenging learning environment is necessary to educate the whole child. In partnership with the Efficacy Institute, staff receive ongoing training in the Efficacy School Transformation Process (ESTP) – a comprehensive school reform process that engages educators in the collective effort to accelerate all students to academic proficiency and strong character. The ESTP is designed to help educators improve student engagement, motivation, and performance.

Through workshops, coaching, and other professional development, participants engage in a results-driven package for school transformation: mission, mindset, and method. The three-pronged package builds consensus around a mission of academic proficiency and strong character for all students and establishes a healthy mindset to support it — that is, a belief in the capacity of all students (and their teachers) to learn to achieve at high standards, backed by a data-driven method of self-directed improvement. Through critical and compassionate reflection, educators are equipped with the knowledge and tools in service of more equitable and inclusive learning environments.

The District provides the following professional development opportunities:

- High-Quality learning targets that are unpacked with students to create student ownership of learning.
- Formative assessment practices, including common checks for understanding to be used daily in instruction.
- Engagement practices that include protocols and other strategies that challenge student thinking.
- Use of data to inform instruction, including strategies to scaffold and differentiate learning to meet the needs of all students.
- Leadership development and sustainability of effective teachers and principals, including both external and internal on-site coaching.
- Standards-aligned curriculum and instruction.
- Special Education and ENL/Bilingual classroom implementation of standards-based curriculum and instruction.
- Promoting a culture of social and emotional learning through efficacy and growth mindset.
- Conferences, workshops, and resources designed to enhance student achievement and engagement in learning.
- Workshops focused on the integration of core District goals and preparing students with 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills.
- Expanded training for all aspects of the Dignity for All Students Act (DASA).
- Enhanced resources and supports for Part 154 and 154-3 implementation.
- Supporting ALL learners through instructional practice aligned with the standards and Universal Design for Learning (UDL).

The above list is not exclusive to any one particular professional development offering. Each item in the list above refers both to professional learning experiences that selected individuals were required to attend and voluntary offerings (typically offered external to the District) that enhance teacher and leader knowledge and practice. For the 2017-18 school year, the District designed and coordinated mandatory sessions that were intensive, collaborative, job-embedded, data-driven, and classroom-focused; specifically, Efficacy Institutes, Eureka, and EL Education on-site coaching, algebra and global studies curriculum writing, specially designed instruction, leveraged leadership, and quality teaching for English Language Learners. The District's voluntary offerings included Eureka Math August Summer Institutes, Cultivating District Leadership for ELL

Success, New Norms for Healthy Schools Training, and Classrooms as Culturally Responsive Learning Communities.

### Academic Challenges

As noted above, test results for English Language Learners and students with disabilities are unacceptably low. In addition, the graduation rate for Hispanic and Latino students is very low. The District has launched the new programs described below to help improve instruction for these students and emphasize a mindset that all students can achieve at high levels. The programs noted below are a significant step in the right direction, but more investment is needed to accelerate student achievement and increase graduation rates.

### Programs for English Language Learners (ELLs)

The District offers students many opportunities to receive language acquisition instruction. The District currently offers Transitional Bilingual Education, Dual Language, and English as a New Language classes.

#### *Transitional Bilingual Education*

Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE) Programs are currently offered to students in kindergarten through fourth grade.

During their first year of bilingual instruction, students receive 70% of their instruction in Spanish and 30% in English<sup>6</sup>. For every year that the student is enrolled in the TBE program, the percentage of English instruction will increase and instruction in Spanish will decrease by 10%. For example, when students are in year two of the TBE program they receive 60% of their instruction in Spanish and 40% in English. The changes in percentage of instruction in each language continue until the student has become proficient in English as per the New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test (NYSESLAT), which is administered every spring.

#### *One-Way Dual Language Bilingual Education*

The One-Way Dual Language Bilingual Education model was selected for ELLs in grades 9-12. Unlike the TBE classes, the One-Way Dual Language classes do not require teachers increase instruction in English and decrease instruction in Spanish for every year that the student is enrolled in the classes. Instead, students

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<sup>6</sup> The District does not have a sufficient number of students to require creation of Haitian Creole Bilingual Classes at the Elementary Level. All ELL students receive English as a New Language instruction as noted below.

can receive instruction in the core area classes (science, math, and social studies) in Spanish. This method of language acquisition best meets the instructional needs of the District's high school ELL population for the two reasons described below.

Students must pass five Regents exams or complete an approved four-plus-one graduation pathway to obtain a Regents Diploma. Regents exams are available in Spanish, except for the English language arts Regents Exam. Therefore, providing students with consistent instruction in their home language afford them the opportunity to be successful on the exams.

Within the last five years, there has been a marked increase in the enrollment of students between the ages of 17 and 20. Several research reports indicate that learning an academic language can take between 7 to 10 years of quality instruction in English, which makes it imperative that students continue to receive instruction in their home language. To provide students with the opportunity to graduate before turning 21 years old, the District builds on students' prior knowledge and previous instruction in Spanish.

The goal of each language acquisition approach is to maximize student academic and linguistic achievement by providing them with instruction in English and their home language and to foster a learning environment for English Language Learners to succeed academically, socially, and emotionally.

#### *English as a New Language*

All ELLs receive English as a New Language (ENL) instruction. Elementary students in a bilingual setting receive their ENL instruction with their classroom teacher, taught through the content area such as English language arts, social studies, and science. High school ELLs have class periods designated for ENL instruction and taught by a teacher certified in English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). The number of periods of ENL instruction the student receives is based on their English language proficiency level as per the New York State Identification Test for English Language Learners (NYSITELL) or New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test (NYSESLAT). Students at the beginning stages of English proficiency receive both integrated ENL and stand-alone instruction, while those at higher levels of proficiency receive only integrated ENL instruction.

The Monitors will continue to focus on student outcomes for these programs that serve English Language Learners, as well as programs for students who do not make adequate progress while in elementary school and late arriving students in high school with an interrupted formal education.

## Student Support Services

Evaluative services (on an as-needed basis) are provided for students struggling academically, socially, and behaviorally to help ascertain eligibility for special education services. Students who are not eligible for special education (IEP) services, building-level support services and 504 services are also available (these services are annotated with an asterisk in the list below). These services include:

- Special class (Ratios: 8:1:2, 12:1:4, 12:1:2, 12:1:1, 15:1)
- Integrated co-taught classes (K-12)
- Resource room / consultant teacher\*
- Speech/language therapy\*
- Occupational therapy\*
- Physical therapy
- Teacher of the visually impaired
- Teacher of the deaf
- Psychological counseling\*
- Parent training
- Consultant audiology services
- Assistive Technology Behavior Intervention supported by Behavior Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBAs)

At the high school level, the District is focused on improving the graduation rate for all students and is carefully tracking the progress of every student towards graduation. The District's new schedule with single universal lunch period for all students provides more time for students to receive extra help or take electives.

## **Enhanced Programming**

The voter-approved budget<sup>7</sup> built upon the progress made in 2016-17 and included the following new programs:

- Summer Academic Programs
  - Instrumental music summer camp for grades 4-8 (400 students)
  - Computer sciences summer academy for grades 2-8 (250 students)
  - Health sciences summer academy for grades 2-8 (250 students)
  - Extended school year program for grades K-8 (255 students)

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<sup>7</sup> The first budget presented to voters in May 2017 included a 1% tax override. The budget was overwhelmingly defeated. The voters approved a revised budget in June within the tax levy cap. Transportation for non-public students on days when the public schools are not in session was not included in the budget.

- Students with Interrupted/Inconsistent Formal Education for grades 9-10 (60 students)
- Elementary Education
  - Arts instruction (3 teachers)
  - ENL and Bilingual instruction (5 teachers)
  - Academic standards facilitators
- Middle School Education
  - Arts instruction (3 teachers)
  - Expanded ENL and Bilingual instruction (5 teachers)
  - Academic standards facilitators
- High School Education
  - Effective Instruction (8 teachers)
  - Teacher collaboration model
  - Academic standards facilitators
  - ENL and Bilingual Instruction (4 teachers)
- Special Education
  - Increases collaborative classes (24 classes in grades 3-12)
  - Increases clinical services including speech and language, occupational, and behavior specialists

The District continued conversion of Chestnut Ridge Middle School, a Priority School, to an International Baccalaureate (IB) School. The conversion is funded with a \$2,497,895 federal School Improvement Grant that was received in the prior school year. The grant provides funding for five years. The school is making satisfactory progress towards becoming an IB school.

### Academic Changes for 2018-19

#### *Curriculum & Instruction*

- Scheduled data-driven Professional Learning Community time (K-12)
- Middle-level Regents-level course offerings at all middle schools: Algebra 1 & Living Environment (working toward 2 additional offerings)
- Spring Valley High School 9th Grade Academy
- 50 high school freshmen will have the opportunity to accelerate the completion of high school studies while earning up to 60 college credits

- District will be offering high school juniors and seniors an opportunity to earn the New York State Seal of Biliteracy. District data shows that over 150 students have already met many of the criteria points.
- Increase of seven collaborative special education-general education classes at the K-8 level (moving from 12 classes to 19)
- Expansion in collaborative courses at the high schools (9th-12th) in the areas of English, math, and science
- Ability to offer all 15 excessed teaching assistants the opportunity to return as full-time teacher aides, to meet increased IEP mandates. Positions have been added and will be funded by a federal IDEA Grant.
  - 2 of 15 called back to a teaching assistant position within the District
  - 4 of 15 have accepted positions as full-time teacher aides (1 pending)
  - 4 of 15 have turned down the positions due to other job offerings
  - 2 of 15 have turned down the positions due to lack of interest
  - 3 of 15 did not respond or come in at the time to fill out paperwork

#### *Arts Education & Activities*

- The cultural arts after-school program will continue to grow and offer students more time to develop their instrumental music skills. Students can participate in band, orchestra, and elementary marching band.
- The "Little Miracles" Show Choir for 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade students will begin in September after school at Kakiat.
- District will offer the "Miracles" show choir in the middle school this year for 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students.
- The spring musical will be offered in each of the middle schools.
- Both high schools offer dance, fall drama, and spring musicals.
- The marching band will continue to participate in football games, local events, and New York State Field Band competitions.
- Our students will continue to participate in New York State School Music Association Solo and Major festivals.
- Beginning this year, general music and chorus will be offered to all students K- 6<sup>th</sup> grade.
- Beginning this year, visual art will be offered to elementary students in all K-3 and 4-6 schools.

- Elementary school instrumental enrollment has continued to grow from 0 in 2015 to upwards of 785 in 2018.
- All elementary schools had concerts. Many schools had additional art shows.

## **Fiscal Improvement Plan**

### Building on the Work of the 2016-17 School Year

The District's 2017-18 student population comprises approximately 8,843 public students and an estimated 26,825 non-public students. The public student population grew slightly by 245 students. The non-public student population growth is estimated at over 1,500 students. Of the public student population, 89% are economically disadvantaged (as per free and reduced lunch count) and 37% are ELLs. Furthermore, 32% are African-American and over 60% are Hispanic.

The growth of the special education student body has an enormous impact on the District finances. The percentage of students with disabilities in the District has grown significantly: 54% since 2003. More importantly, this growth has happened at the same time the total (public and non-public) student population has declined. While students with disabilities represented 11% of the total students in 2003, it reached an all-time high of over 19% of student population in 2016. Recently, this trend has evened out. In 2017-18, the number of special education students saw a slight increase from the previous year, from 1,558 to 1,578. However, the proportion of special education students relative to the total student population decreased from 17.8% to 17.5%.

Notwithstanding the fiscal constraints due to its specific challenges, the District has worked and continues to focus on improving its fiscal status. The District's unassigned fund balance has shown significant improvement during the last four years, moving from negative to 3.6% of the 2018-19 fiscal year budget. New York State's legal limit for a school district's unassigned fund balances is 4% of the next fiscal year approved budget. The unassigned fund balance as of June 30, 2018 stood at \$8,413,535. At the end of the fiscal year 2017-18 the District added another \$244,853 to this fund balance.

### Comprehensive Expenditure Plan for the \$3 Million Legislative Grant

The District continues to support two major academic programs with the \$3 million grant: full-day kindergarten and arts education.

In accordance with Chapter 89 of the Laws of 2017, in the 2016-17 fiscal year the District fully implemented its first goal of providing full-day kindergarten for all students. The

District created 28 full-day kindergarten classes, a dramatic increase from the four full-day classes offered in 2015-16.

The District hired seven Monolingual kindergarten teachers, four Bilingual kindergarten teachers, and one additional teacher of the arts. All classes are fully equipped with the instructional technology including Smart Boards and desktop computers for daily teaching. In addition, two teachers of the Arts were hired for a total of 43.5 teachers. This school year, the District entered into a lease-purchase agreement to provide 400 musical instruments for students. Ten elementary music classrooms were equipped with Smart Boards and other instructional supplies.

In 2017-18, the District served 734 students in full-day kindergarten. For fiscal year 2018-19, the entire \$3 million fund will support the same services as in the previous two years serving 707 students.

### Improving School Buildings and Grounds

The District has responded to the Monitors' Recommendation 3 included in the December 14, 2015 "Opportunity Deferred" report to create a comprehensive and community-inclusive process to develop a new bond issue for purposes of making much-needed capital improvements. During the 2016-17 fiscal year, the District refocused its efforts to secure financing for its infrastructure needs. It held and passed a bond referendum on December 6, 2016. The referendum contained the following:

- Bonding \$58,018,350 to address the most critical work needed in all District buildings, including basics such as roofs, boilers, air ventilation units, and windows.
- Authority to use \$1,127,920 of State EXCEL funds for new windows/doors, exterior doors, and the small courtyard windows at Kakiat Elementary and new windows at Fleetwood Elementary.

The capital construction is being phased over a four-year period that began in the summer of 2017.

- Phase I was started in the summer of 2017 with more than \$16 million. It was successfully implemented with major capital work completed on four school building roofs and the administrative building's roof, two high school athletic fields, two school building boilers, and K-8 model school conversion work at Kakiat STEAM Middle School.

- Phase II accounts for an estimated \$24 million that was started in early Spring of 2018 and will be completed in December. Major capital work was completed or is being done in 11 school buildings, including eight roofs, six boilers, three ventilation systems, phase II of K-8 model school conversion work at Kakiat STEAM Middle School, and a new library at Chestnut Ridge Middle School.
- Phase III, accounting for an estimated \$19 million, will start in Spring of 2019. Phase III includes roofing, boilers, windows, and paving at the remaining buildings.

### Improved Fiscal Condition

In 2017-18 fiscal year, the District fiscal stress designation<sup>8</sup> by the Office of State Comptroller improved from “moderate fiscal stress” with a score of 51.7% to “no designation” with a fiscal score of 23.3%. The Comptroller’s office designates districts as significantly stressed if the fiscal stress score falls between 65-100%. Given that in 2014-15 the District’s fiscal stress score was 86.7%, the District has made significant fiscal improvement.

The primary reasons for the District’s upgrade include restoration of fund balance and several years of balanced budgets. Based on the preliminary 2018-19 fiscal year audit numbers, which indicate an assigned and unassigned fund balance total of 3.6% of the approved 2018-19 budget, the District expects to maintain a fiscal stress level of “no designation.” In addition, Moody’s rating for the School District remains at Baa2 with outlook “stable.”<sup>9</sup>

### Potential Risks and Future Liabilities

During 2017-18, the District focused its attention on assessing potential risks and future liabilities as well as resolving as many of them as possible. Below is a full list of identified liabilities and an update on the work to address them:

- In 2011, the District entered into an energy performance contract with Johnson Controls, Inc. to install numerous energy efficient controls and devices throughout the School District's buildings. Due to disagreements regarding the contract and

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<sup>8</sup> The Office of the State Comptroller’s Fiscal Stress Monitoring System Search Tool can be found at: <http://www1.osc.state.ny.us/localgov/fiscalmonitoring/fsms.cfm>.

<sup>9</sup> Additional information about the district’s credit rating can be found at: <https://www.moody.com/credit-ratings/East-Ramapo-Central-School-District-NY-credit-rating-600033656>.

project funding, this matter proceeded to mediation. There is now a Board-approved agreement between the District and Johnson Controls to pay \$1 million over a five-year period starting in fiscal year 2017-18. In July 2018, the District made its second payment of \$200,000 towards this settlement.

- In 2011-2012, the District charged the school lunch fund for \$724,616 for capital expenditures that did not receive prior approval by New York State Education Department. The District entered in a Board-approved agreement to reimburse the school lunch fund for the above amount during a seven-year period starting from 2017-18.
- The District has an ongoing unresolved issue with the Ramapo Central District about the processing of claims for parentally placed non-public students who reside in East Ramapo. The District has filed an application for “administrative review of a claim for payment” with the New York State Education Department. The amount involved is \$183,645 that East Ramapo owes the Ramapo Central School District (Suffern) for the fiscal years of 2013-14 and 2014-15.
- School transportation was a significant area of weakness in 2017-18. Bus runs were scheduled inefficiently, resulting in higher costs than budgeted and necessitating mid-year adjustments in bus routes.

### **2018-19 Contingency Budget**

The voters twice defeated the Board-approved budget. As required by law, the Board adopted a contingency budget which represented the elimination of \$4,375,787 from the Board-approved 2018-2019 budget. The 2018-19 school budget is fiscally in balance with projected revenues of \$231,084,269 and expenses of \$231,084,269. The 2018-19 tax levy is \$151,461,007 and was frozen at the prior year’s level (there was a 1.48% tax levy increase for the 2017-18 school year). The budget does not include an allocation for transportation to non-public schools on days that public schools are closed, nor does it allow for flexibility regarding when transportation is provided for non-public students.

*Table 11. Sources of Funds to Meet Contingency Budget Reduction of \$4,366,787*

Use of Fund Balance	Reduction in Principal Payment to Capital Bond	Reductions of Staff, Services, and Retirements
<b>\$959,000 = 21.8%</b>	<b>\$1,163,742 = 26.6%</b>	<b>2,253,045 = 51.6%</b>

The proposed budget accounted for 15 retiring teachers. Accounting for the savings from three teaching assistants added \$148,462 to the savings. The total savings from 14 additional retiring teachers in addition to the 15 anticipated retirements saved an additional \$252,000. The savings also included the retirement of the Assistant Director of Transportation, who was replaced by a staff member with a lower salary. The difference between the salaries resulted in a savings of \$31,600. No teachers were laid off.

Additional cuts and attrition included:

- The Director of Secondary Education, a position that was included in the originally proposed budget, will assume supplemental and school improvement responsibilities that allow for the position to be 80% funded by alternative funding streams, coming to \$151,222 to be saved in the general fund.
- The Director of Elementary Education will also devote a greater percentage of time on remedial pedagogy and programs (up to 80%), resulting in a general fund savings of \$57,203.
- The clerical staff will be reduced by two staff members, representing a savings of \$231,352.
- Increasing the percentage of service to other funding sources for one storekeeper and one clerical (up to 80% grant funded) resulted in a savings of \$40,381.
- Special education will reduce 15 teaching assistants from non-mandated programs, totaling \$625,000 in savings. The District's shift to a collaborative teaching model reduced the number of teaching assistants required. All teaching assistants were offered positions as teacher aides. Students with disabilities will continue to receive all services dictated by their Individualize Education Plans (IEPs).
- The reduction of one nursing staff member represents a savings of \$67,123.
- The retirement of the Safety Supervisor in the Transportation Department contributed \$131,508 to the total savings because the District is not filling the position. The District's Transportation Director will oversee safety.
- Reducing central administration non-salary expenses, such as, supplies and materials resulted in \$26,194 savings.

## **Implemented Monitor Recommendations**

The District implemented several of last year's Monitors' recommendations including:

- Convening an advisory group to review existing polling site locations and recommend changes to address access and overcrowding. As a result, the Board approved two new polling sites.
- Convening a budget advisory committee,
- Creating a newsletter and videos,
- Pre-approved non-public textbooks, and
- Improved translation tools on the new District website.

## **Concerns**

More than 93% of school districts have passed their budgets on the first or second vote in the last five years. East Ramapo is an outlier with three contingency budgets in the last five years. Looking ahead, it remains critical the community comes together to build support for school budgets, especially those that adhere to the tax cap.

The estimate for simply maintaining support for existing academic programs and increasing bus ridership is more than \$20 million over the next five years. Failure to pass any budget over the next five years will result in virtually all the cuts coming out of academic programs, which comprise the bulk of the budget. Budget defeats mean larger class sizes, fewer supports for English Language Learners and students with disabilities, and reductions in Advanced Placement and college course offerings. In addition, budget defeats threaten the District's ability to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers and administrators.

For this district, it is not enough to simply pass a budget within the tax levy cap. As noted above, the District has already fallen behind other districts that have managed to consistently pass budgets. The only way for the District to catch up is to begin passing small tax levy cap overrides.

Transportation and healthcare currently represent more than 25% of the budget and have been growing at more than 5% annually – more than twice the rate of inflation. Transportation costs are driven primarily by increases in ridership. Healthcare costs are driven by significant increases in health insurance and prescription drug prices. It is critical the District find ways to contain these costs.

East Ramapo is at a crossroads. Significant improvements have been made in classroom instruction and leadership, and school buildings and facilities are being brought up to

current standards. However, the District cannot sustain another contingency budget. It is unclear what level of tax levy the community would support. Budgeting is not a one-year-at-a-time activity. The Monitors are committed to working with the entire community to forge a long-range plan for success.

## **Recommendations**

1. The Board of Education and the Superintendent should reach out to the community to explain how strong public schools can benefit everyone in the community.
2. The District should prepare charts showing the following annual trends over the last five years:
  - General fund revenues and expenditures;
  - Fund balance and operating surplus/deficit;
  - Local tax levy and State Aid; and
  - Budgeted versus actual State Aid.
3. Create a community workgroup to establish a five-year budget plan to adequately support students and outline the federal, State, and local revenues needed to support the plan. The workgroup should solicit input from the community on student achievement goals, graduation rates, equity, non-public transportation, and tax tolerance.
4. The District should develop a primer for the public on how funds are allocated for non-public students and post the primer on the District web site.
5. Seek a change to the pre-K State Aid formula to include a count of non-public and public students. Pre-K programs in East Ramapo serve all students in the District, including a significant number of students who will attend non-public K-12 schools.
6. The District should request an audit of the transportation program by the New York State Comptroller to establish a baseline for performance improvements and cost efficiencies.
7. All Board members and District staff should attend the District's training related to adopting a mindset that all children can learn and the District's efficacy approach. It is critical that the District is successful in changing attitudes to reflect the expectation that all students can be successful.
8. The District should digitize the ordering, lending, and inventory of pre-approved textbooks to non-public schools to ensure schools receive their textbooks in a timely fashion.