

COMMACK UFSD

ADVOCACY PLATFORM

March 5, 2019



COMMACK LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY COMMITTEE MEMBERS

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Steven Hartman, Board of Education President
William Hender, Board of Education Trustee

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COMMACK LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY COMMITTEE

The Legislative Advocacy Committee was established to assist the Board of Education in implementing solutions regarding legislative matters. The Legislative Advocacy Committee is comprised of the Superintendent of Schools, Board of Education members, Commack residents, High School students, Commack staff, and members from the collective bargaining units. The committee centers its efforts on assessing the impact of existing and proposed State and Federal education legislation, promoting legislation that supports the District's mission, and communicating vital information to our residents. Further, the committee is charged with effectively communicating Commack's needs to our local, State, and Federally elected representatives.

On March 5, 2019, the committee will travel to Albany to communicate Commack's needs to our local and State-elected representatives. The High School students on the committee are traveling to Albany on a bus with other Commack students who will be performing in the Grand Concourse as part of the Commack's musical performances for the day. The Committee, led by the High School students, will advocate on the following platforms: Foundation Aid, Charter Schools, Eliminating Unnecessary Testing and School Safety/Security. High School students have been framing talking points based upon these platforms and will deliver our message directly to Legislators.



Commack 2019 and Beyond Our Story

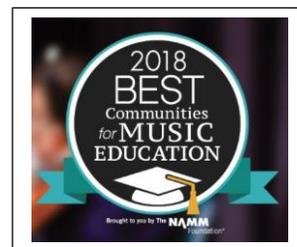
History: The Commack School District has a long standing history of providing an outstanding educational program for all students; an education designed to support students in accomplishing whatever they want to accomplish upon graduating from our schools. To that end, Commack has endeavored to provide the best possible general education, special education, and advanced programming available to all students.

Commack's Exit Statistics and College Attendance Rates for ALL Students

Graduation Rate 98%

Advanced Regents Diploma Rate 78%

1. For all Suffolk schools, Commack ranks 3rd with;
2. For all schools graduating more than 300, Commack ranks 1st.

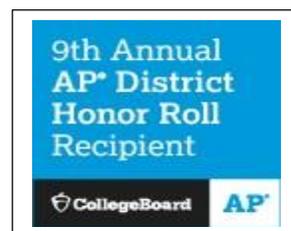


Commack High School has the Largest IB Program in North America

- Approximately 25% of all graduates earn a full IB Diploma;
 - The following districts have visited Commack seeking to replicate our program: Dobbs Ferry, Long Beach and Locust Valley to name a few.

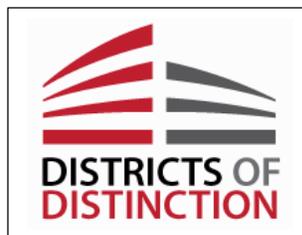
Commack High School was named to the College Board's AP Honor Roll

- Commack has the highest AP exam passing rate in Suffolk County;
- 2nd highest on Long Island



College-Level Course Enrollment Class of 2017

- Enrolled in 1 or more 92%
- Enrolled in 3 or more 79%
- Enrolled in 5 or more 62%



Commack's College Attendance Rate 97%

Commack's College Retention Rate 90%* (one of the highest in NYS)

Sub-Group Performance

Commack's New York State Master Teachers (11 Math and Science teachers)

- 552 Master Teachers in New York
- 9 Master Teachers in Commack (1.6% of all NY Master Teachers)
 - 600,000 Teachers in New York
 - 575 Teachers in Commack (0.096% of total in NY)

State Aid Calculations

Commack's Combined Wealth Ratio is 1.122 (the State Ave. is 1.0/LI Ave. 1.5)

- State Average - \$8,114 per pupil
 - Quoted by Governor
- Commack - \$4,682 +/- per pupil
 - $31 \text{ million} / 6,700 = \4682

Preamble

In our efforts to keep perspective, the Commack Board of Education and I routinely visit schools talking to staff and students and visiting classrooms. These visits are designed with a purpose; to see best practices in action, and what we see on our visits is amazing. What we see each and every time leads us to say that Commack Schools have never been stronger; never provided a better education; and never had as many high-quality teachers and staff as we do right now -- all this despite the best efforts of the Governor, other policymakers, and the media to diminish public schools and public school teachers.

Over the last several years we have fought to stop the implementation of a developmentally inappropriate, year-in and year-out Common Core testing model for young children in grades three to eight going so far as to offer strident testimony to Senate and Assembly committees; and we have fought the implementation of poorly-designed Common Core standards and curriculum developed in such a way as to force schools to the middle; a middle designed by test makers and non-educators; and we have fought an ill-conceived, mandated APPR system, a mandate we have vociferously opposed from the outset – teacher evaluation must be locally controlled.

At this point, the anti-public school contingents have “created a fog” around the issues by continuously forwarding “solutions” to problems that do not exist in the vast majority of public schools. This “fog” leaves us fighting on numerous fronts.

Given the breadth of “reforms” and some recent developments, below are the positions of the Commack School District:

School Funding

Exemplary, high performance, middle class district squeezed by factors outside its control

Background: Commack School District has **delivered** for all students; it's an education story that should make New York proud. While the school-community partnership is strong, the financial aid commitment from the State is necessary in order to provide the best possible balanced educational program for every student who enters our doors.

Why Commack is Unique and Deserves Special Attention:

- Commack tax payers are stepping up as they have in the past via additional school tax levy of 3% which brings in approximately just under \$4,000,000. A budget gap still exists of nearly \$1,000,000 due to the mandated expense increase.
- Commack is a true middle class district and the implications are as follows:
 - There is **no tax upswing** from high value properties in the district.
 - As opposed to other school districts that average out at middle class income levels, Commack students are almost universally from middle class families; yet, the school has consistently produced **high academic standing** as compared to higher wealth school districts in Suffolk and nearby counties.
 - The combination of Commack's true middle class position and its elevated academic profile has led to a consistently **growing representation** of families with **diverse backgrounds** in the district.
 - For these positive trends to continue, Commack has to do its part in managing its budget judiciously, but we cannot afford to be undercut by unaccounted costs outside our control. Without the state's help, we risk jeopardizing the environment that has created such a positive growth story.

Requested Relief:

- Raise the level (percentage) of Commack's foundation aid¹ increase **from .2% to 2%**²
- **Remove the cap from expense-driven aid** so that incurred expenses are funded more appropriately.

Mandated Expenses: At the arbitrary .2% foundation aid, Commack receives \$57,000, a negligible amount in light of the following **mandated expense increases:**

- Increasing Special Education Population (approximately 18% of student population)
- Healthcare Plan increase of 8.68%: \$1,700,000

These two mandated increases by themselves introduce **\$2,550,000** of **unaccounted costs** in this year's budget. This does not factor in other incremental cost items (total of **nearly \$1,000,000**) which the school district has managed to maintain at favorable rates.

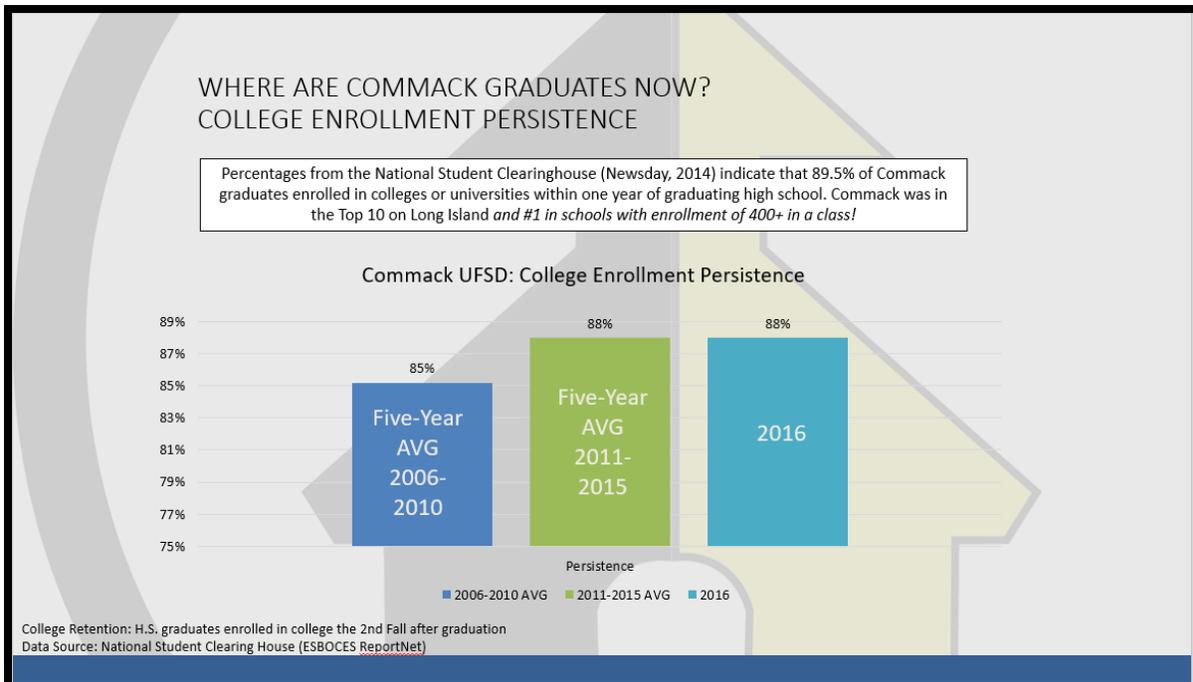
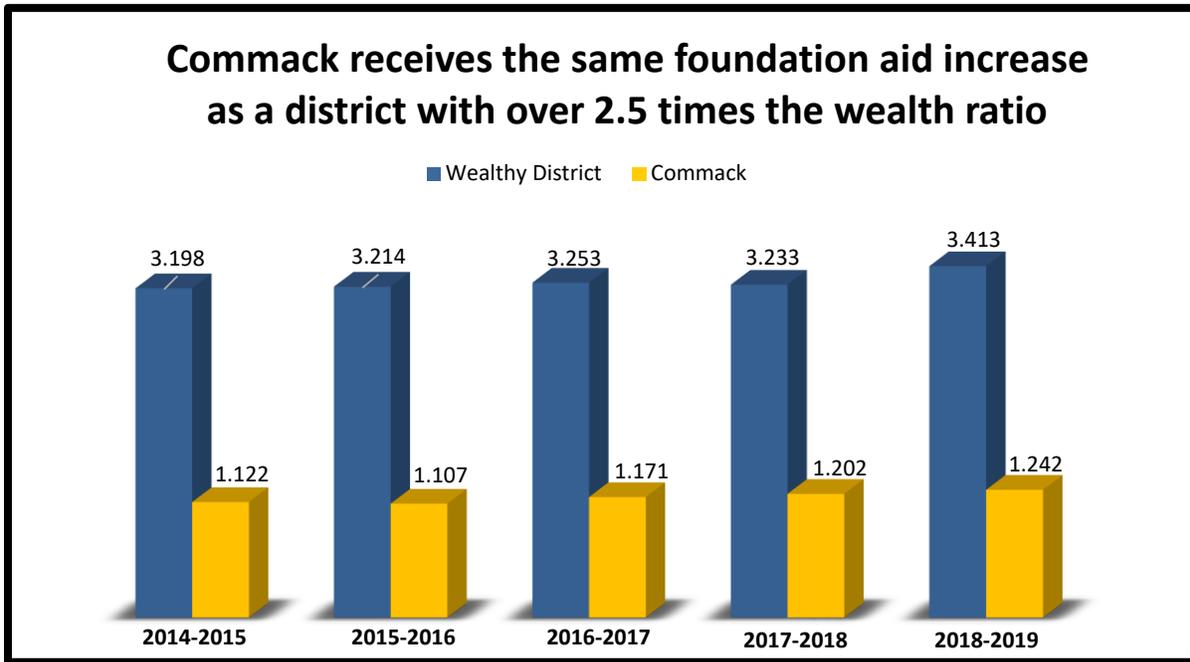
¹ There are two primary vehicles of state aid:

- Foundation aid which is non-expense driven and makes up roughly 70% of the overall aid
- Expense-driven aid which is tied to specific expenses, such as special services, but is capped currently

² Doing so increases the amount Commack receives from \$56,000 to \$560,000

Foundation Aid Formula is Unfavorable to Commack:

- Combined Wealth Ratio (CWR) is a criteria known to be used by New York State to assess the need for aid. Commack has a CWR of 1.202 – the higher the CWR, the wealthier the district. New York State records reflect that, for example, Commack received the same foundational aid increase level (.2%) as a Western Suffolk school district with 3.233 CWR. This is one illustration of disproportionate treatment that begs adjustments to the state’s aid formula framework.



School Safety Advocacy Position

All students have a right to a safe and supportive school environment where they can develop into social-emotionally healthy individuals.

Background: The Commack School District works diligently to maintain a safe and social-emotionally healthy environment for all students. However, in light of the tragedy in Parkland, Florida, and the seemingly endless school shootings, the Commack School District must be proactive in its efforts to deter violence, protect our students and support their healthy development. Therefore, assessment, preparation and social-emotional support structures are essential.

Commack has long prioritized the safety and security of all students and staff. Five years ago, the District conducted a security assessment and implemented its recommendations. Commack's belief in the five-year follow up and the increased climate of school shootings resulted in a new assessment.

In 2018, Commack conducted a comprehensive security assessment by Covert Investigations and Security. The District has created a strategic security action plan containing six components. These components include:

1. Professional Development and Awareness
2. Protocols and Practices (drills)
3. Infrastructure
4. Hardware and Software
5. Capital
6. Personnel

Proposed Recommendations:

Security Infrastructure, Hardware, and Software

Task	Priority (1, 3, 5 year plan)
District-wide video surveillance and access control system	1
Assess the potential of moving towards an integrated VMS software platform	1
Enhance video storage capabilities	1
Deployment of additional cameras to cover areas that have been analyzed and recommended as enhancements to the current overlay	1
Deploy mobile devices (iPads, etc.) to enable security to view the video surveillance while on their post and conducting mobile patrol	1

Capital

Task	Priority (1, 3, 5 year plan)
Pass through Windows Security Vestibules	1 – 2 3-5
Classroom Locksets	1
Purchase additional security vehicle and repost at street-level of high school Install fencing on Scholar Lane (driveway-to-driveway)	Ongoing
Camera Control Center relocation to HS lobby	1
Exterior Door Access Control Conversion	2-5

Implementing the recommendations from this review came at a cost to local taxpayers. Further, this type of assessment must be completed regularly given the changing dynamics of security and the needs of our community.

In addition, effective school safety efforts need to address the developing and emergent social-emotional development and needs of students. Generally, this work is done daily through regular programming and daily supports. However, there are, unfortunately, students through no fault of their own, who present with more significant issues. The vast majority of students with emotional and/or behavior needs access social-emotional support services in school and this is an ever-growing population. At a recent presentation by the President of the School Psychologists Association, Dr. John Kelly, it was indicated that 1 in 5 students presents with anxiety. The mental health of all of our students needs to be our top priority.

There is no doubt that schools are understaffed to deal with this type of need, a need that if unaddressed may lead to other issues. We must bolster support for our students so we can address warning signs that may be presenting themselves, before it is too late. Lastly, many of our students now live in a constant state of hyper-awareness when it comes to their own security during the school day, resulting in increased stress and detracting from their ability to focus on their schoolwork and related activities. We must ensure that all students receive the support they need to cope with this new reality.

While the school community continues its efforts achieving safety and emotional support goals, the commitment from the State needs to be much more significant. School safety is a shared responsibility.

Requested Relief:

- Additional Targeted Funding: Provide additional funding, beyond Foundation and other current state aid categories, to support the Commack School District’s safety and security needs. For example, targeted annual funds for the following; additional mental health professionals, school resource officers and semi-annual security reviews by trained professionals. In addition, provide one-time allocations for physical plant safety improvements such as secure vestibules, egress improvements, security cameras, and facilities gating (where needed).
- Further, the Smart Schools bond initiative designed to support school improvements in technology and security measures was approved several years ago. However, said program languishes as districts wait years for plan approval. Therefore, the request is to immediately approve Smart School plans as these plans contain school safety measures.

Location	Projected Cost Phase I Transaction Windows	Projected Cost Phase II Vestibules	Total Projected Cost
Commack High School	\$ 13,272		\$ 13,272
Commack Middle School	\$ 13,500		\$ 13,500
Burr Intermediate	\$ 23,937		\$ 23,937
Sawmill Intermediate	\$ 23,937		\$ 23,937
North Ridge Primary	\$ 7,708	\$ 137,896	\$ 145,604
Indian Hollow Primary	\$ 8,288	\$ 152,785	\$ 161,073
Wood Park Primary	\$ 12,457	\$ 137,896	\$ 150,353
Rolling Hills Primary	\$ 7,708	\$ 147,353	\$ 155,061
Hubbs Admin Center	\$ 23,937		\$ 23,937
	\$ 134,746	\$ 575,930	\$ 710,676

Common Core Testing

We have long indicated our concern with the proliferation of mandated, high-stakes testing associated with Common Core standards and curriculum. While standardized testing may be illustrative in highlighting student growth, as well as areas for improvement in the curriculum, the current testing format accomplishes neither of these goals. The current testing does not allow for the tracking of student growth nor does it provide data that will drive instruction either for individual students or whole classrooms. Additionally, the current framework does not properly allow for teachers to implement and focus on a developmentally appropriate curriculum, particularly for younger students.

Given the manner in which some states, New York included, utilize the mandates set forth in Federal legislation, the following adjustments are strongly recommended for implementation:

1. For Younger Students (Grades 3 to 8):
 - a. Modify grade-level State tests to include more developmentally-appropriate expectations and aligned materials
 - b. The duration of the assessments should be developmentally appropriate for the age and grade level of the students being tested
 - c. Advocate with federal policy makers to reduce annual testing requirements (i.e., schools should not be required to test every year)
 - d. Request the state to share item analysis data from tests with schools to assist them in making educationally sound decisions about curriculum and instruction, as well as to better track student learning

2. Special Education Students:
 - a. Expand the qualification requirements to participate in “alternate assessments,” from 1% to 2% of students with disabilities
 - b. Test students at the appropriate grade level as opposed to chronological age
 - c. Exempt students based on IEP recommendations to forgo testing based on issues such as medically diagnosed anxiety, long term medical conditions and other criteria that preclude the need for summative testing

3. English Language Learners:
 - a. Extend the time from one- to two-years before testing English as a New Language (ENL) students to give them greater opportunity to acquire the English language

Teacher Evaluations

Repeal 3012d Teacher/Principal Annual Professional Performance Review

We have long advocated that the teacher evaluation process should be left to local school districts only to be told that there is language in the Federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act, now Every Child Succeeds Act (ESSA), requiring that New York mandate and govern a teacher evaluation process state-wide. Under the guise of NCLB, New York instituted 3012d APPR and mandated compliance through coercive actions including, but not limited to, threats of withholding state aid for failure to comply. However, at this time, the U.S. House of Representatives has passed HJR57* and the US Senate is considering, and will likely pass, SJR 25* each of which would “do away with regulations from the Obama administration regarding accountability under the Every Child Succeeds Act...” thus placing the authority for such with individual states. Therefore, with no Federal legal requirement binding New York to the 3012d APPR law, we are calling for the unconditional repeal of such returning the responsibility for teacher and principal evaluation to the local level.

School “Choice;” Charter Schools; School Voucher Programs

We vehemently oppose school choice/charter schools and/or school voucher programs. In that regard, specifically:

- We strongly oppose any school choice, charter or voucher program, particularly in school districts with a proven track-record of success – success that goes beyond test scores;
- We strongly oppose the reduction of funds to any public school in an effort to fund “choice” and/or charter schools and/or school voucher programs of any kind;”
- We strongly oppose any voucher program that would drain funding from public schools and make an already challenging financial picture even more challenging;
- We strongly oppose the concept that “choice” and/or charter schools do not have to meet the same requirements and are not subject to the same level of scrutiny as public schools;
- We strongly oppose the concept that “choice” and/or charter schools, etc. would not be required to maintain a demographically diverse student population that mirrors surrounding public schools.

Statement:

Our utmost concern regarding charter schools is the cost incurred to support these schools. Charter schools take money away from traditional public schools.