

COMMACK UFSD

Advocacy Platform

March 3, 2020



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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.



COMMACK SCHOOL DISTRICT OUR STORY



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%

- For all Suffolk schools, Commack ranks 3rd
- For all schools graduating more than 300, Commack ranks 1st

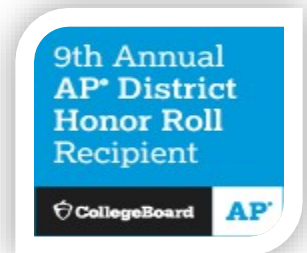


Commack High School has the Largest IB Program in North America

- Approximately 25% of all graduates earn a full IB Diploma
 - Many districts have visited Commack seeking to replicate our program. Including but not limited to: Dobbs Ferry, Long Beach, and Locust Valley

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 2019:

- Enrolled in 1 or more 92%
- Enrolled in 3 or more 75%
- Enrolled in 5 or more 65%

College Attendance Rate: 97%

College Retention Rate: 90%



SCHOOL FUNDING

INCREASING COSTS AND DECLINING REVENUES ARE **OUTWEIGHING**
ACCESS AND OPPORTUNITY
FOR STUDENTS

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:

- 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.
- 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.

Our Success Story Will Continue So Long as Our Most Prized Programs Are Maintained

- International Baccalaureate Program - Commack High School is the home of one of the largest International Baccalaureate (IB) program in North America and the largest in New York State.
- Two Regeneron Scholars at Commack High School!
- School-to-Career Courses That End with Industry Recognized Certifications
- 98% Graduation Rate
- 92% of Students Are Enrolled in 1 or More College-Level Courses
- Cutting Edge Elementary Movement in The Arts Program – movement, recreation, and play that link sensory-motor, cognitive and social-emotional experiences provide an ideal setting for brain development
- Enrichment for All – Program designed to provide students with an opportunity to explore their own subject areas of interest.

“Our aim in Commack is to prepare every student for whatever they want and need to achieve at their next level of learning...”

-Dr. Donald A. James



Requested Relief:

Based on the Governor's proposal he made the decision to consolidate 10 expense-based and categorical aids into foundation aid as part of his budget proposal. We respectfully request that items such as BOCES aid, high tax aid, textbook, library, software, and computer hardware among others be separated out of the foundation aid. Nothing guarantees that expense driven aid would continue to be supported if it were to become part of foundation aid.

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 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.

VAPING

Background: Electronic cigarettes and vaping devices were originally developed to aid individuals who were trying to quit smoking traditional cigarettes. However, today the uses of these new smoking methods include more than just their intended purpose. They are used by teens all over Suffolk County, and the country, as a means of enjoyment and status. This is a cause for concern because of the harms that these devices can cause the body.

Effects of Using Electronic Cigarettes:

- As a result of electronic cigarettes recently becoming available to consumers, many scientists are still researching the long-term effects of the use of vaping products.
 - However, many short-term effects have been studied. These effects include but are not limited to, increased chances of asthma and other pulmonary diseases. These diseases stem from inflammation, and the likeliness of developing cancer and cell toxicity. Further, there is a rise in dependence due to vape flavors.
- There are additional risks that come with the presence of nicotine in the vape juice.
 - There is a multitude of damages that nicotine can inflict on the human body. The alteration of brain chemistry is highly dangerous, and teens are the most susceptible. A change in an individual's brain chemistry can make them more vulnerable to addiction to other more potent and dangerous forms of drugs in the future.

Requested Relief:

Financial Support for Education:

- Education is one of the most important tactics in combating the rise in the usage of vaping products.
 - By targeting vape education to younger ages, who have yet to be introduced to these kinds of drugs, we can inform them and allow them to understand the harms of these drugs before they are introduced to these drugs as teenagers.
 - This will also lead to a decrease the belief teens have in the myth that vapor products are a “healthy” alternative to smoking and only contain water vapor.
- Society’s decrease in the number of smokers is a true testament to the effectiveness of childhood drug prevention education however that message is not applicable to the drug usage and issues of today’s culture.
 - Childhood education should be altered from an anti-cigarette perspective to an ideology where the message conveyed is that air should be the only thing in one's lungs.
 - While childhood education regarding vaping is of the utmost importance, educating parents will aid in informing them about the reality of the epidemic and the seriousness of the issue.

Increased Governmental Regulation:

- We acknowledge that recently the state government has banned all flavors of electronic cigarette juice except for menthol and tobacco.
 - This new legislation will make obtaining vape products, especially those marketed towards youths, harder. This will lead to a decrease in the number of teens vaping because of the lack of enjoyment that came with flavors.
 - However, there are still ways for minors to obtain flavors by using the black market, online sources, and other non-regulated and illegal methods.

- Increased FDA and state government regulations will decrease the accessibility of vape products to teenagers, which in turn could lead to a decrease in drug addiction issues among groups of individuals, such as college students and parents.
 - Increased state involvement in the vaping industry would benefit the health of teenagers across New York State and decrease the number of people who will be affected by drugs in the younger generations.

Prevalence of Nicotine Vaping among Adolescents, 2017-2019*

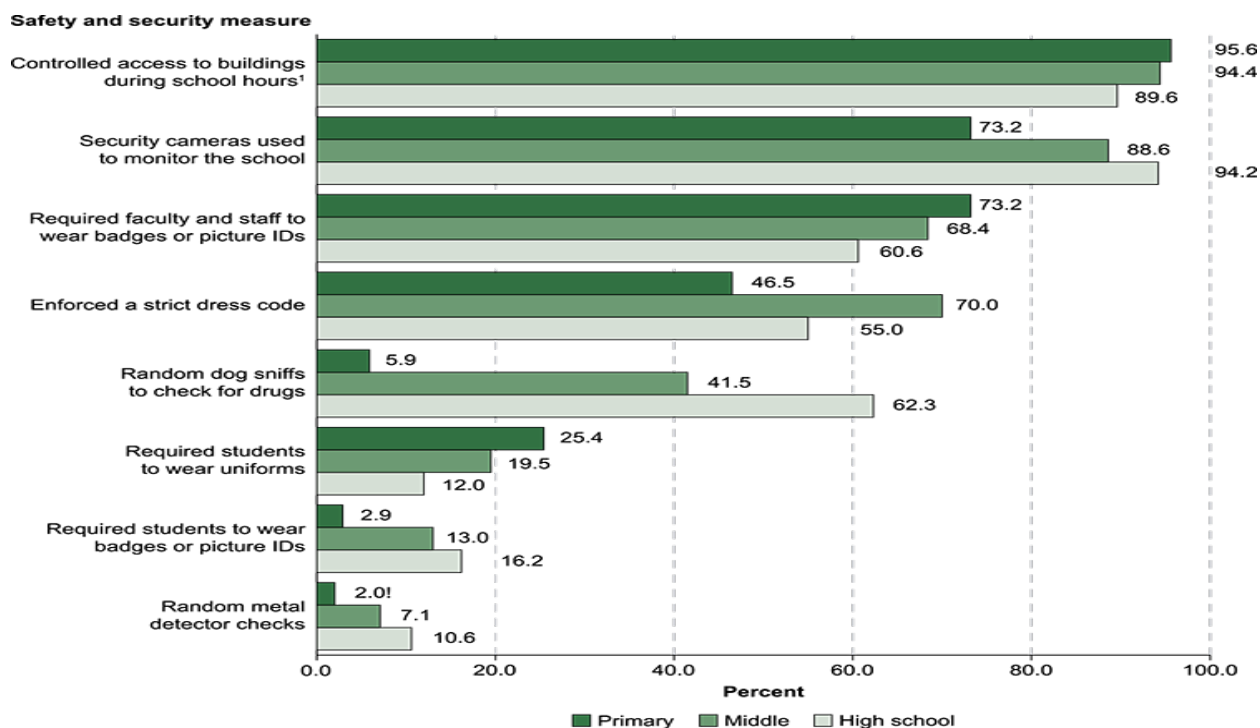
Reporting Interval and Grade in School	Prevalence in 2017 (95% CI)	Prevalence in 2018 (95% CI)	Prevalence in 2019 (95% CI)	Change, 2018 to 2019 (95% CI)
Past 30 days				
12 th grade	11.0 (9.2-13.0)	20.9 (17.7-24.5)	25.4 (22.6-28.4)	4.5 (0.9-8.1)
10 th grade	8.2 (6.6-10.2)	16.1 (14.0-18.6)	20.2 (17.8-22.8)	4.1 (0.9-7.2)
8 th grade	3.5 (2.9-2.4)	6.1 (4.0-18.6)	9.0 (7.6-10.5)	2.8 (1.2-4.4)
Past 12 months				
12 th grade	18.8 (16.5-21.4)	29.7 (26.1-33.6)	35.1 (31.8-38.6)	5.4 (1.1-9.6)
10 th grade	15.8 (13.6-18.3)	24.7 (21.9-27.7)	31.1 (28.3-34.0)	6.4 (2.7-10.1)
8 th grade	7.5 (6.6-8.5)	10.9 (9.4-12.6)	16.1 (14.1-18.2)	5.2 (2.8-7.6)
Ever				
12 th grade	25.0 (22.4-27.7)	34.0 (30.3-38.0)	40.5 (37.3-43.8)	6.5 (2.3-10.7)
10 th grade	21.4 (19.2-23.9)	28.6 (25.8-31.6)	36.4 (33.5-39.4)	7.7 (4.0-11.5)
8 th grade	10.6 (9.5-11.8)	13.5 (11.8-15.3)	20.7 (18.5-23.1)	7.2 (4.6-9.9)
Daily				
12 th grade	--	--	11.7 (9.8-14.0)	--
10 th grade	--	--	6.9 (5.7-8.0)	--
8 th grade	--	--	1.9 (1.4-2.5)	--

**In all years, increases in prevalence are significant at $P < 0.05$. The 95% confidence intervals (CI) have not been adjusted for multiple comparisons. Unweighted sample sizes vary slightly by outcome in 12th grade, the change is from 4077 to 4310; in 10th grade from 4420 to 4721, and in 8th grade, from 4382 to 4909.*

SCHOOL SAFETY

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 recent increase in the frequency of 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)
Establishment of a student identification system to be able to track student entry and departure from buildings and insure all persons on school property are authorized to be there (ie, Scholarchip)	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	3
Deploy mobile devices (iPads, etc.) to enable security to view the video surveillance while on their post and conducting mobile patrol	1

Capital & Personnel

Task	Priority (1, 3, 5 year plan)
Purchase additional security vehicle and repost at street-level of high school Install fencing on Scholar Lane (driveway-to-driveway)	Ongoing
Additional guards during peak times when buildings are occupied.	2-5

Professional Development and Awareness

Task	Priority (1, 3, 5 year plan)
Creation of an education program for students and staff that can further enhance security protections already in place	5
Review of drill protocol using local, state and national data	3

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.

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.

Recent approval for the first phase of the Smart Schools Act has allowed the district to take some initial steps toward increased safety measures but school safety is an ongoing task. The Commack district and community is grateful for the state support of the Smart Schools Act funding and it is the hope of the district that such programs will continue to be available for schools to enhance their safety measures.

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 school resource officers and semi-annual security reviews by trained professionals. In addition, provide allocations for physical plant safety improvements such as egress improvements, security cameras, security technology and student identification enhancements.
- Further, student and staff educational programming regarding school safety and security needs to be enhanced. Although drills are in place regarding school safety there is no developed education program for students or professional development for staff.

Data Support:

- In the 2017–18 school year, 94 percent of public schools reported that they controlled access to school buildings by locking or monitoring doors during school hours. Other safety and security measures reported by public schools included the use of security cameras to monitor the school (81 percent), a requirement that faculty and staff wear badges or picture IDs (68 percent), and the enforcement of a strict dress code (53 percent). In addition, 25 percent of public schools reported the use of random dog sniffs to check for drugs, 21 percent required that students wear uniforms, 7 percent required students to wear badges or picture IDs, and 4 percent used random metal detector checks. <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=334>
- Schools must be supported to develop an active school safety team that focuses on overall school climate as well as crisis and emergency preparedness, response, and recovery. School safety and crisis response occur on a continuum, and crisis planning, response and recovery should build upon ongoing school safety and mental health services. School crisis and emergency preparedness training should encompass prevention/mitigation, early intervention (which is part of ongoing school safety), immediate response/intervention, and long-term recovery.



Cowan, K. C., Vaillancourt, K., Rossen, E., & Pollitt, K. (2013). A framework for safe and successful schools [Brief]. Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.

ALTERNATE PATHWAYS

Background: Currently New York State provides high school students with multiple pathways to graduation. These pathways are extensive and attempt to provide access and equity of education. The state has measures in place that guide the pathway options. The state is now in the process of reviewing these graduation measures to determine what a state diploma should signify to ensure educational excellence and equity for every student. During this process the state has asked for input during every step of the graduation measure review process, so as to ensure they hear diverse viewpoints from every region of the state. Keeping this in mind, Commack School District is mindful of the five guiding questions suggested by the state in seeking out the changes of these measures.

Requested Request:

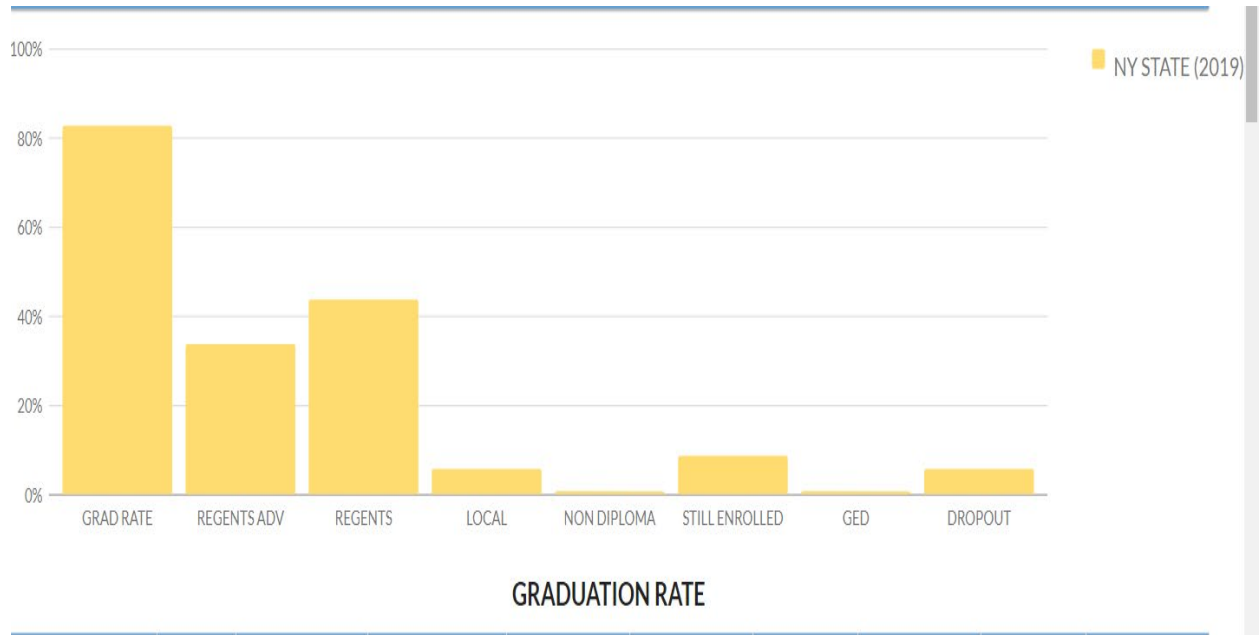
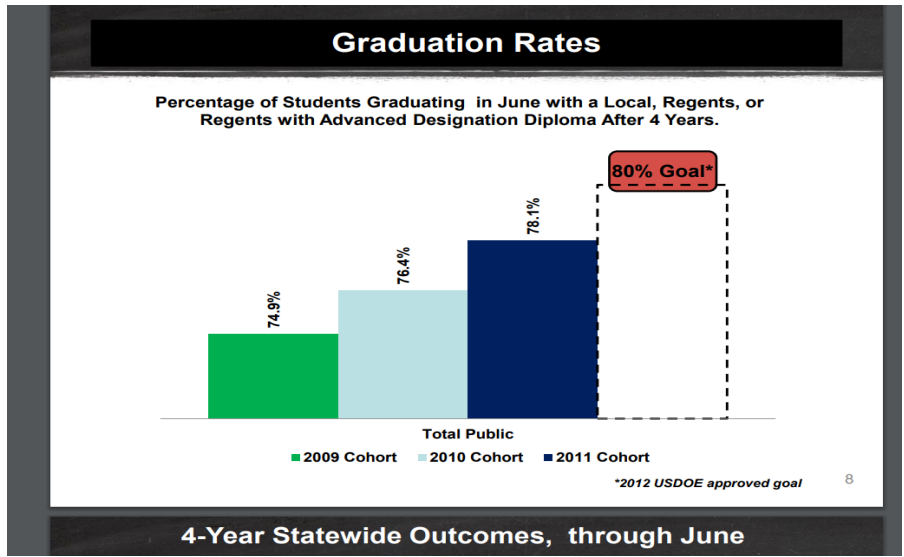
Given the impact that these changes can have on the students' ability to graduate with a meaningful diploma, the following are recommendations for implementation:

For ALL Students:

- Access to the highest quality educational opportunities, services and support.
- Continuum of standardized curriculum
- Standardized culminating assessment that reflects college and career readiness. As a whole from a professor's perspective of what should be exemplified and proven to be worthy of college readiness, "A comprehensive college preparation program must address four distinct dimensions of college readiness: cognitive strategies, content knowledge, self-management skills, and knowledge about postsecondary education."- David T. Conley (professor of educational policy and leadership and director of the Center for Educational Policy Research in the College of Education at the University of Oregon) <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/oct08/vol66/num02/What-Makes-a-Student-College-Ready.aspx>

For Special Education Students/English Language Learners:

- Alternate assessments, projects, WBLE (Work Based Learning Experiences) to ensure a standard of learning
- Equitable alternative educational opportunities, services, and support.
- Discretionary local options available to each school district
 - Alternative assessments that reflect standards



MENTAL HEALTH

Background: The Commack School District works ardently to maintain and promote a mentally stable environment for their students. Mental health is an essential part of being a successful student and be a productive member of the community. Mental health and emotional stability can have a significant impact on the student success and outcomes. In order to thrive in all aspects, students must first be mentally at peace. Mental health is the foundation for success in the classroom as well as after graduation. No progress can be made until one's mind is in a healthy place.

Why mental health is so important in Commack: Mental health challenges impact many people in a variety of ways. Whether they know someone that struggles with a mental illness or they have personal mental illness diagnosis themselves, it is a topic that is forefront of our current society. Mental health is equally important here in Commack. After a deeply saddening event last year, when a Commack Middle School student took his own life, this topic is very significant to families in Commack. With the purpose of helping Commack students with mental health, we hope that such a devastating event won't happen again. These small changes in how we deal with mental health can help so many students and hopefully save a life.

- **Different approach to assemblies:** Many of the current assemblies and presentations regarding mental health is primarily focus on a parent telling the story of their child who committed suicide. These are very impactful stories and many students emotionally connected with them. We can, however, add a different lens to the narrative. Additionally, State provided, assemblies should be given by people who have firsthand experience of struggling with mental illness but have overcome them. These presentations can show how people, just like them, have struggled too but fought through and came out on the other side. This addition can provide both stories they connect with that end in tragedy, as well as allow them to connect with stories that still show struggle but result in success.
- **Training teachers:** State required workshops are necessary for teachers to receive certification. We believe there should be an additional mandatory workshop focused on supporting students with mental health. This workshop could provide explicit instruction of the most common mental health diagnosis and symptoms. Additionally, teachers could be provided strategies to connect to their students and have a greater impact with mental health needs. Since students are most often with classroom teachers, this mandatory meeting will help early detection of concerns and strategies for interventions prior to the involvement of support staff. If teachers have the tools to provide a safe, understanding space for their students, the students may be more likely to reach out to their teachers and talk to them.

MENTAL HEALTH and YOUTH

13%

OF CHILDREN
ages 8-15 experience a
mental health
condition

13-20%

OF CHILDREN
living in the U.S.

17%

OF HIGH SCHOOL
STUDENTS
seriously consider
suicide

50%

OF CHILDREN
ages 8-15 experiencing a
mental health condition
don't receive treatment



(1 out of 5 children)
experience a mental
health condition in
a given year

1/2

OF ALL LIFETIME CASES
of mental illness begin
by age

14

Despite effective treatments there are long delays—sometimes
decades—between onset of symptoms and treatment