

# Wyandanch Union Free School District's Report to Commissioner and Regents

The Wyandanch Union Free School District's Report to the Commissioner and Regents is submitted to the Commissioner by August 31 each year.

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i.

## Executive Summary

The work detailed in this report began essentially and for all intents and purposes on August 17, 2019, when the new superintendent launched the creation of a climate and culture focused on accountability, communication, and transparency. A directive was placed on all department heads to put an end to confirming purchase orders and take a deeper look at purchasing requests to “hold the line” on purchasing and rebuild the fund balance.

The COVID19 pandemic that began in March 2020 assisted the district in keeping budget lines static while also forcing the district to make larger, unexpected purchases. CARES Act funding made available in the 2020-21 school year was utilized to support the heavy technology purchases needed to see our students through virtual learning and beyond.

The school year of 2020-21 started for Wyandanch, as it did for many other schools, with uncertainty. However, in Wyandanch, we looked at the silver lining of the crisis. The quick actions of our technology department in March 2020 meant that by November 20, 2020, we were a completely 1:1 district

where every student had either a Chromebook or an iPad. We leveraged these devices to launch a technology-driven family engagement initiative through ParentSquare in winter 2020-21. ParentSquare provided us with the method to communicate with families digitally with real-time translation of parent and staff messag

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Given that all families had a Chromebook in the home, we leveraged this opportunity to encourage families to monitor their children's attendance and grades using Parent Portal. We upgraded the website to provide access to tutorials that assisted parents in logging into Portal and ParentSquare.

We also started a systemic operationalization of our existing structures. Given the loss of an onsite transportation department, we created a Secure File Transfer Protocol (SFTP) that would export our student data to the offsite routing software and then import student bus routes directly into our student management system. Changes such as these continue to maximize existing resources while lessening the load on our human capital.

Academically, we took a deeper look at the impact that trauma has on students, as well as a focus on closing skill gaps K-12. Our curriculum leaders have worked extensively on embedding the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusivity standards, as well as using data to make decisions. Moving forward this year, we will leverage our lead teachers in becoming a data driven school and our social-emotional leaders in becoming a trauma-informed school. Our district was among the authors of the New York State Social-Emotional Learning Benchmarks, and that work continues to provide the foundation for our daily infusion of social-emotional learning. Additionally, the district follows the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and

## **ii. Organization of the Plan**

In an effort to create an extensive overview of the district, this report is made up of several sections:

- The first section provides a high level overview of the report for the reader.
- The second section explains how the report is organized.
- The third section is an introduction to the report that provides contextual information about the district.
- The fourth section is a copy of the district's latest mission and vision statements.
- The fifth section provides important statistical information about the district
- The sixth section provides information on the fiscal status of the school district.
- The seventh section provides an overview of the academic, fiscal, and operational status of the school district.
- The eighth section identifies areas in which the district recommends that the academic and/or fiscal improvement plan be amended for the 2021-22 school year.
- The ninth section provides information on the district's priorities for the 2021-22 school year.
- The tenth section concludes the report and thanks those who worked on implementation of the plan and development of the annual report.
- The last section is an appendix that provides information on the status as of June 30, 2021 of the district's implementation of each recommendation contained in the academic and fiscal improvement plans.

## **iii. Introduction**

Prior to August 2019, the Wyandanch Union Free School District had been plagued by a lack of sustainable systems and structures for several years. Since that date, there has been a shared commitment to creating those same systems and structures so that we can continue to operate on a solid foundation for improvement.

The fiscal uncertainty came to a head at the end of the 2018-19 school year when after two unsuccessful budget votes, the district was forced to cut \$9,000,000 from the budget. These cuts included the elimination of several key administrative staff positions, as well as the entire transportation department. Later that summer there was a change in the central administration leadership, as the board appointed a new superintendent and the existing business official resigned. Simultaneously, there was an effort by local elected officials and concerned community members to provide fiscal oversight to the district and create a climate of trust.

The Wyandanch School District serves overwhelmingly children from diverse and economically disadvantaged families. It is a four-square mile hamlet with a population of 12,990, as of the April 1, 2020 census. The median household income was \$59,076 and the median value of owner-occupied housing as reported on the 2020 census for the period between 2015-19 was \$252,700. Approximately 93% of students in the district qualify for federal free reduced breakfast/lunch programs and 24.5% of persons living in the community were designated as living in poverty according to the 2020 United States census. One of the factors that contribute to the high poverty rate is that the cost of living is high, and the income generated by the community is not able to support all needs. Every year between 70 and 120 people are rendered homeless. Approximately 6.5% of the population is incarcerated, 35% adults are not in the workforce and 40% receive public assistance. Health Department data indicates that Wyandanch has one of the highest incidents of HIV infection, sexually transmitted diseases, and use of illegal drugs on Long Island and in New York. As a result, a significant number of students are disadvantaged by various health deficiencies before they enter the school district. In addition, Wyandanch also has one of the highest concentrations of foster populations on Long Island and in New York State. These students bring with them a myriad of educational challenges.

The construction of affordable housing within the boundaries of the Wyandanch School District has seen the population of the community and the population of the school district expand dramatically. Since September 2010, the school district has seen a 31.3% overall growth in enrollment. Not only has the population grown, but also it has also shifted demographically. In the 2001-02 school year, the Wyandanch UFSD was a predominantly minority district made up of 88% African American and 12% Hispanic

Inspire the mind,  
learning and teaching  
all students to achieve  
their full potential.



MISSION STATEMENT





The four-year high school graduation rate as of June 2021 for the 2017 high school graduation cohort at WUFSD is 65% with one-third of students unable to cross the high school finish line due primarily



	6/30/2013	6/30/2019	6/30/2020	6/30/2021		
	Balance	Balance	Balance	Balance		
	500,000			1,000,000	Restricted Reserve for Retirement ERS	
Retirement ERS				444,974	Restricted Reserve for Retirement	
Workers' Compensation			750,000	952,895	Restricted Reserve	
Unemployment				140,000	Restricted Reserve	
			3,100,000		Restricted Reserve for Employee Benefit	
			1,200,000		Restricted Reserve for Insurance	
			-		Appropriated Fund Balance	
				1,250,000		
	2,026,484	5,203,724	6,748,288		Unappropriated Fund Balance	
	5,071,511	6,188,922	5,508,767		Total Fund Balance	
17,230,266				56,248,705	71,318,257	69,006,597
20,000,000				2,391,000	2,001,000	3,000,000

Even with the impact of the \$3.1 million deficit financing removed from the 6/30/21 estimated balances, the district's fund balance and reserves as a percentage of the budget increased to 17.34%. While the improvement is significant, we still believe we are well below the Long Island average (estimated to be 26.6%).

Using this table, the business administrator for the district led a discussion with the Board of Education regarding the percentage of reserves that would be appropriate for the district as a fiscal goal. The Board of Education was informed that the average Long Island district had an estimated 26.6% of their budget saved in fund balance and reserves. A discussion then took place regarding the district's dependency on state aid, and exposure to large variations in expenditures for facilities and special education. It was proposed that Wyandanch would be best served by maintaining a percentage of fund balance and reserves that was greater than the Long Island average because of its State Aid exposure.

With regard to the 2020-21 operating projection, please note the following comments based on budget to actual variances:

1. The surplus includes a one-time revenue from the sale of excessed busses in the amount of \$235k.
2. The surplus includes a one-time reimbursement of unemployment insurance expense in the amount of \$359k.
3. The surplus includes approximately \$278k of excess interest reimbursement on Qualified Zone Academy Bond (QZAB) bonds that should have been accrued in the prior year.
4. Special Education came in under budget by \$949k. with most of the savings occurring in BOCES and contractual services.
5. Occupational Education and Special Schools came in under budget by \$402k.

6. Interscholastic Athletics came in under budget by \$274k.
7. Transportation came in under budget by \$941k.
8. Unemployment Insurance came in under budget by \$42k.
9. Health Insurance (NYSHIP) came in under budget by \$1.2 million.
10. Supplemental benefits came in under budget by \$280k.
11. Debt Service came in under budget by \$215k with Tax Anticipation Note (TAN) interest accounting for \$163k of the surplus in these codes.
12. The deficit financing bond for \$3,159,503, which was received by the district in 2020-21, is included in the estimated fund balance and reserve table above.

It should also be noted that the district failed to submit a timely claim with the Department of Taxation and Finance for 2020-21 STAR reimbursement. Therefore, \$1,456,395 in revenue was missed for 2020-21. This revenue is collectable and will be booked as revenue in 2021-22.

Another significant challenge the district will face in the near future will be in the area of recruitment of highly qualified central office administrators. Administrators in Wyandanch are ranked among the lowest paid on Long Island. In addition, the state recently approved a charter school to operate in the district. The tuition payments to this charter school are projected to have a materially adverse impact on the district's ability to deliver services to the majority of the remaining student scholars. The tuition payments will also threaten the recent financial successes the district has experienced.

Operationally and academically, WUFSD is a data-driven district and uses quantitative and qualitative data broadly to drive the direction of our programs. We are committed to sharing data and outcomes with NYSED and our monitor, and to continuous improvement through feedback and iterating on our model. We are fully committed to using existing evidence-based practices as well as to monitoring our own progress and making decisions based on what has proven effective. Our district has extremely limited resources and has operated under an austerity budget in the past, which has left us no room for error in our efforts. We must rely on evidence and research to ensure our resources are maximized. Our five district priorities form the framework for not only the District Comprehensive Improvement Plan (DCIP), our two School Comprehensive Education Plans (SCEP), and our two Schoolwide Plans (SWP). In the Wyandanch

WUFSD will continue to work with a team of staff who are committed to school improvement and make room in their workloads to focus on our five district priorities, detailed below. This group engages the community in a variety of ways, including PTA meetings, community agency partnerships, engaging state and county administrators, Parent University meetings, and student assemblies. We will continue to survey stakeholders and integrate feedback into our improvement plan over time, recognizing that needs and perspectives change. Our focus remains aligned with our five district priorities around chronic absenteeism, graduation rate, culturally responsive and socially just curriculum, developing systems for reciprocal family and community engagement, and addressing trauma for staff and students.

### **viii. Recommendations for Modifications to Academic and Fiscal Improvement Plans**

Fiscal – The increase in State Aid for the 2021-22 school year enabled the school district to increase the proposed budget significantly and to add back school-based positions that had been cut during the contingency year of 2019-20. As a result, projections for future years will need to be revised to account for the higher base year budget of 2021-22. The Business Office will be working in conjunction with the Fiscal Monitor to update those figures and the assumptions going forward.

Operationally and academically, the district will continue to utilize the District Comprehensive Improvement Plan (DCIP) and School Comprehensive Education Plans (SCEP) to provide a roadmap for school improvement that is grounded in the mission of the district. Our focuses this year will be continuing to analyze data in closing achievement gaps, reducing chronic absenteeism, implementing curriculum that is socially just, developing systems for reciprocal family and community engagement, and addressing trauma for staff and students.

### **ix. District Priorities for the Next School Year**

The District's main priority in terms of implementing its Fiscal Improvement Plan is to end the 2021-22 school year with a material operating surplus and in doing so, obtain more fiscal evidence that the district budget is structurally well positioned. Leadership, technical skills and transitioning to more informative and generally accepted fiscal communication methods will all be very important in this process.

In alignment with the district's DCIP, which is submitted to the New York State Education Department, our five priorities are:

- Increase graduation rates
- Decrease chronic absenteeism
- Create avenues for reciprocal family engagement
- Empower student voice with culturally responsive curriculum

## Address trauma for staff and students

These priorities provide guide the work of all stakeholders in the district. The district is utilizing a three-prong approach to address each of these priorities: understanding data, maximizing stakeholder engagement, and creating an engaging culture. Students in grades K-12 will be taking the i-Ready diagnostic tests this year, a suggestion from our Instructional Support Partner, Lead teachers, and building-level administrators will engage in data chats at both the department and grade level. These data chats will lead to adjustments in teaching and learning. Vertical alignment between teams will occur through the school year as the teams converge with a curriculum specialist from Western Suffolk BOCES. Elevation will serve as a progress monitoring tool for English Language Learners and will provide a repository for skills and strategies that can be utilized across content areas.

### x. **Conclusion**

We have worked diligently to set our district on a course towards Destination Graduation and develop a shared understanding of how none of us is as smart or as capable as all of us. We are in the process of developing a true team mentality and working partnership. We continue to be supported by our monitor, Albert Chase; our board of education; Western Suffolk BOCES; and the New York State Education Department. Critical to the completion of this report were Dr. Gina Talbert, Superintendent of Schools; Kester Hodge, Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources; Dr. Christine Jordan, Assistant to the Superintendent; Shamika Simpson, Assistant to the Superintendent; and Rich Snyder, School Business Official.

### xi. **Appendix: Implementation of Academic and Fiscal Recommendations**

The appendix contains the district's assessment of its initial year implementation of each of the recommendations contained in the academic and fiscal improvement plans. The information should be provided in the same format as has been used by the district to provide its quarterly reports to the Monitor.

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Basis of Judgement</b>
Board meetings shall include the State Monitor and, with certain limited exceptions, the Superintendent (ongoing)	1	All meetings held have continued to include invitations to the Fiscal Monitor and Superintendent since this recommendation was made.

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Basis of Judgement</b>
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Recommendation	Status	Basis of Judgement
The BOE should avoid, wherever possible, the practice of “walk-in” board resolutions.	1	The Board of Education has not submitted any late-developing resolutions that require immediate action during the last quarter of the school year.
The District should consider both the short- and long-range goals of the school district in developing budgets.	1	The budget development process continued, and updated budget amounts were established, given increased state aid revision. The revised 2021-22 budget was analyzed critically for staffing additions for the various student and building needs of the district. Budget Discussions were held with the Superintendent’s Cabinet to review suggested updates. The revised budget was then presented to the board, and the budget was adopted. Short-term goals include the Sewer Project implementation, which is currently in progress. The long-range plans and goals to be addressed are the new facility for the district scholars from the Half Hollow Hills rental space, which will be included in the 5-year financial plan.

The District shall consider having a number of budget meetings

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Recommendation	Status	Basis of Judgement
The school district should ensure budget development continues to include community input.	1	The district has continued to value transparency and communication with the community by engaging all stakeholders with translated budget newsletters, translated town hall meetings, and regular updates on the district website and social media accounts. The community voice was heard and valued through these efforts, as well as the public budget workshops listed above. The survey tool, Polleverywhere.com, and the Zoom poll have been used to gather feedback from stakeholders.
The school district shall ensure that all grants are expended in conformance with grant requirements.	1	The district submits semi-annual reports that detail payroll expenditures and allowable expenditures to the NYSED Office of Innovation and School Reform. We regularly communicate with the Office of ESSA Funded Programs to ensure that our federal grants are aligned with allowable expenditures. FS10s, FS10As, and FS10Fs are submitted timely and in compliance with all Uniform Grants Guidance (UGG). The Business Official and the Superintendent’s cabinet held a meeting prior to June 30 <sup>th</sup> to review policies and policies that are consistent with the UGG manual such that the district is in full compliance.
The District should continue to explore all grant opportunities, to maximize funds from non-tax sources.	1	In January 2021, the district submitted an application

Recommendation	Status	Basis of Judgement
<p>Maintain a comprehensive database to accurately track staff vacancies and the availability of specific budget lines to pay for the positions.</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>HR sends ongoing lists of new hires and vacancies to the business and technology offices. The board approved new salaries/hourly rates should be applied and steps and any overtime has been projected for year-end estimates. HR also coordinates with the Grants office to ensure accurate representation of grant-funded personnel.</p> <p>The Business Office is continually updating a staffing list, which was provided by the Monitor. It is set up by budget code and will be updated with the new hire lists from HR and the Grants office. The list is being continually monitored.</p>
<p>Redact bank account numbers from statements provided to the Board or staff</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>This has been incorporated into the information submitted to the Board of Education in the package of monthly reports. This process has been implemented. The Business Official reviews and confirms all bank account numbers are redacted during the bank Reconciliation process</p>

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Basis of Judgement</b>
Ensure the Business Office makes transfers among personnel budget lines as early in the fiscal year as possible.	2	Correctly aligning personnel was part of the foundational work and will not be required as frequently moving forward. The Business Office collaborated with HR while the 2022 budget was being built to ensure that all personnel was correctly encumbered. The Business Official continues to analyze the needed budget transfers across salary lines that require additional funds and will be completed.



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**Recommendation**

**Status**

**Basis of Judgement**

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Basis of Judgement</b>
<p>Have the Superintendent provide the BOE with analyses of estimated fund balances as well as recommendations for their use (each June).</p>	<p>2</p>	<p>The Superintendent has provided the BOE with an analysis of Estimated Fund Balance beginning in October, and on a cumulative basis from July 2020 through March 2021. During the month of June 2021, the Business Official proposed that the BOE establish reserve funding levels for the accumulation of the budgetary surplus. The following reserves were authorized to receive funding in this resolution: TRS/ERS Unemployment, Worker’s compensation, compensated absences, and Insurance.</p>
<p>Use a small portion of the fund balance to reduce future tax impacts. An assumption that this would occur has been incorporated into the long-range fiscal plan.</p>	<p>2</p>	<p>Wherever appropriate and agreed upon through discussions with the Superintendent, Fund Balance will be utilized to reduce future tax impact to the community in our long-range fiscal plan. This mitigation effort will reduce the tax burden to the community while keeping the tax levy impact fairly level.</p>
<p>Continue to plan for the future of its facilities, including the possibility of bonding.</p>	<p>2</p>	<p>Health and safety facilities enhancement and upgrades are being considered for the possibility of bonding and extending the payment terms, such that there is a stream of payments instead of a large single payment. The BOE has formed a Governmental/Community Relations Committee to garner support and engage a collective effort as it pertains to facilities planning.</p>
<p>Open negotiations for the extension of the Pre-K lease with Half Hollow Hills, until such time that new facilities within the Wyandanch UFSD can be established.</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>There are 2 years remaining on the existing lease with Half Hollow Hills, and the district has been given “right of first refusal” as part of the lease agreement. This provides the district the opportunity to extend the current lease.</p>

Recommendation	Status	Basis of Judgement
Time the issuance of new debt to coincide with the retirement of currently outstanding debt to minimize the impact on the tax base.	1	The issuance of new debt such as deficit financing of \$3.1M was timed to coincide with the extinguishing of the library bond, which drops off in August 2021. In considering future bonding needs, the district will analyze the retirement of current debt before acquiring new debt to minimize the impact on community. The Business Official will discuss with the Superintendent the timing of new debt to coincide with the extinguishment of existing debt to ensure a smoothing of the debt service costs over future years.

In light of circumstances created by the pandemic, ensure the Facilities Director has continued input into the budget-making process, particularly in regard to health and safety issues.

1 Given the pandemic, the Director of Facilities is aware of the budgetary needs for health and safety issues and protocols as put forth by NYSED and is planning accordingly. He remains an active participant in the budget degT-1 (ds)-1( f72.96 696.06 696.48 0. (i)

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Basis of Judgement</b>
Submit an updated five-year financial plan to the Monitor by September 1st each year. The financial plan will be balanced as to revenues and expenditures. This plan shall include statements of all estimated revenues and expenditures, including a cash flow plan.	2	The district will work collaboratively with the monitor to update the five-year financial plan, which will be submitted to the Monitor by September 1 <sup>st</sup> each year for the next successive years. The plan will be balanced as to total revenues and total expenditures. The plan will also include statements of estimated revenues, expenditures, and a cash flow plan. All pertinent analysis will be performed during the five-year plan presentation to the Fiscal Monitor.
Borrowings for the Wyandanch Public Library should be undertaken separately from those of the school district, if possible – to provide transparency to the public.	2	To the extent possible given any legal considerations, the Wyandanch Public Library borrowings will be undertaken separately from the district's. This process will provide the necessary transparency to the Wyandanch community. The notification was sent by Certified mail, return receipt, and via email to the President of the Wyandanch Library informing them of their obligation to secure TAN funding through the district.

Per usual requirements for revenue anticipation loans, the library must demonstrate that the funding is required. The goal should be for the library to plan, so that these annual loans are no longer needed and the financial relationship of the two entities is more distinct, as is the case in other communities.



<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Basis of Judgement</b>
Remittances for Library employee retirement payments should be made directly by the Library to the NYSLRS, rather than through the school district.	2	The library has not obtained its own ERS number to allow it to make the retirement payments directly to the NYSLRS. The district will continue to invoice the library monthly until such time as it gets its own identification number. In May 2021, the library accountant informed the district that the library was waiting for its own ERS Identification Number. However, we are still paying ERS expenditures on the library's behalf and uncollected receivables remain on the books.