



Report of September 21, 2020

Without a doubt, the #1 Health & Wellness Issue is how the schools are dealing with keeping both Staff & Students safe during this new school year. While there are literally dozens of pages of direction issued by the State Education Department and the New York Department of Health, we need to keep in mind that some of this direction is subject to interpretation and that not all school districts will be handling things in exactly the same way. We must also remember that this is a very fluid situation and that some decisions that were made early on, may have been needed to be “walked back” (one of just many expressions that will become very familiar to us this year) due to further examination & analysis of a particular matter. The decision by Section XI to postpone the start of school sports here in Suffolk until January 2021 is an example of such a “walk back”. Every school district is different in the amount and size of their school buildings compared to the number of students enrolled, so we should hesitate to compare our home school district with others in the county. The number of students who have opted for 100% virtual schooling is also a major factor in what a particular district can offer. One of the few school districts that was able to offer all students “five days a week in school instruction” was only able to do so because 16% of the student body went all virtual. The NY State Department of Education has developed many comprehensive guidance documents & resources in response to the pandemic and these are available for viewing on their dedicated Covid-19 web page. There is also a “Reopening Schools” web page on the NYS-DOE web site that you can use to access information & resources regarding school reopening. Last week, the Board of Regents acted on their 5th series of Emergency Regulations to ease burdens on educators & students in the wake of the pandemic and these can be viewed by hitting the following link <https://bit.ly/3SEkDLB>

Mental Health is something that we’re going to need to keep a close eye on this school year, as the lack of sports (at least for the first few months), limited (if any) clubs and/or musical (band, chorus, orchestra) opportunities, the things that most of our students find pleasure & enjoyment with, along with the limited social interaction that will result by not having these extracurricular activities, will undoubtable cause serious morale issues among the student body. Staff members are also going to experience problems, as well. New York Teachers now have an online support group to help them process feelings and concerns about the return to school and gain some support with coping skills during these unprecedented times.

While not Covid related, I wanted to mention that earlier this month, community members in Northport/East Northport filed a class action suit against the school district due to conditions (that may have caused serious health problems for students & staff) at one of the Middle Schools. I bring this up, not to argue the merits of the suit, either for or against, as that will be determined in a court of law. I mention it only to point out that there will be occasions where parents are going to need to hold a school boards “feet to the fire” to get appropriate actions taken to protect Health & Wellness. It was only after numerous parental complaints that some environmental testing was performed that determined there were unsafe levels of chemical substances on the school grounds. Levels that were high enough that it was decided that the school needed to be closed during the last school year. Remedial work has since been performed on site and a bus depot that was located immediately behind school building (another major parental concern) has been relocated prior to the school being reopened this month.

For those of you on Facebook, I’d like to encourage you to follow/like the NYS-PTA page, as their our occasionally some excellent Health & Wellness articles that you should be aware of to stay current. Most recently there was one about the “Benadryl Challenge”, a social media game found on Tik-Tok that can be dangerous, perhaps even fatal.

In closing, I'd like to thank Wendy Natalone for getting out some important information for me over the last month or so to the Suffolk Region Board of Managers including "Governor Cuomo announcing School Reporting Requirements and Online Dashboard to Track Covid-19", "Suffolk County Health Departments Role in Reopening Schools" and "How Safe is Your Schools Reopening Plan? Here's What To Look For" an excellent article that was published by National Public Radio.

Respectfully submitted ... Gerry Bringmann