

HIGH POINT REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL

BOARD OF EDUCATION

299 PIDGEON HILL ROAD – SUSSEX, NJ 07461-2733

fax 973-875-0904 www.hpregional.org

Mr. Seamus W. Campbell
Director of Curriculum & Instruction
Phone 973-875-3170
scampbell@hpregional.org

Dr. Scott D. Ripley
Superintendent
Phone 973-875-7204
SRipley@hpregional.org

Mr. James Minkewicz
Business Administrator/Board secretary
Phone 973-875-7205
JMinkewicz@hpregional.org

April 28, 2017

Dear High Point Community,

I am writing to you at this time to address concerns which have been expressed regarding the decision to eliminate the position of Substance Awareness Coordinator (SAC).

Over the past few weeks High Point Regional High School has had to make difficult decisions as it worked to produce a budget for the 2017-18 school year. Our school's enrollment has dropped more than 40% in the past decade (1,446 students in 2006-07; 890 students in 2017-18). This precipitous decline in enrollment, coupled with the economic hardships faced by many in our community, demands a substantial reduction in spending. Since more than 74% of our budget goes towards salaries and benefits, staff reductions were unavoidable.

The staff cuts I recommended to the Board of Education included reducing the position of Substance Awareness Coordinator (SAC) from full-time, to part-time (60%). Following this recommendation, members of the Board and the administration went out into the community and presented High Point's proposed 2017-18 budget. The response to these presentations was consistent and strong: your school is doing an outstanding job, but the budget remains excessively burdensome. In an effort to be responsive to these fiscal concerns, the Board, on April 25th, chose to eliminate the SAC position.

Many community members have questioned why this position was chosen to be reduced, and ultimately eliminated. After a careful analysis of High Point's support services, it was determined that our school's counseling services and supports for at-risk students, while vitally important, and being carried out by exceptional educators, are uncommonly substantial. Further, every other single staffing category at High Point (administrator, teacher, maintenance, custodial, secretarial, paraprofessional) has endured **numerous** staff cuts in recent years. At the same time that these other departments were losing staff, and enrollment was dropping, counseling services actually increased.

For the 2017-18 school-year High Point's efforts to assist at-risk students will include:

- A full-time crisis counselor/behaviorist who has many years of experience working as a counselor, and working with adolescents battling substance abuse
- Five exceptional guidance counselors, one of whom is a certified SAC with experience in this field

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- A full-time Director of Safety and Security who brings decades of law enforcement expertise to our campus, and who has overseen drug-reduction programs in schools
- An Intervention & Referral Services Team which seeks to provide support to any student struggling at High Point, and which is funded (stipend) by our *Title I* grant
- RTI (Response to Intervention) a multi-tiered system of support services targeting Math and English
- Restorative Practices: a program of discipline which seeks to teach and heal as opposed to punish and suspend
- An enhanced Child Study Team which includes two psychologists, as well as, a licensed clinical social worker

High Point first implemented a SAC in 2000; at that time, none of these support services existed to such a degree.

Our efforts to help at-risk students has grown more than **any** aspect of our institution, and as the budget required greater scrutiny, so did the resources allocated to this area. We have surveyed our region and are confident that **for the 2017-18 school year High Point will allocate more significant resources toward counseling and support services than any high school in northwest New Jersey.**

High Point has approximately 100 staff members who are deeply committed to the wellbeing and success of all of our students; the community can be assured that our efforts to battle substance abuse in our community will not subside. Our allocation of resources toward holistic counseling and support services for at-risk students remains a priority.

Balancing our obligation to protect and support all students, with acute fiscal constraints, is a daunting task. We continue to demonstrate an unwavering commitment to successfully meeting this challenge.

Sincerely,



Dr. Scott D. Ripley
Superintendent