

Hempstead on deadline

- **State cites** school district's failures on immigrants
- **Must have plan** for educational fixes by Dec. 3

BY JO NAPOLITANO
jo.napolitano@newsday.com

Hempstead schools failed to properly enroll, assess and place dozens of immigrant children who recently arrived in the district and must give the Education Department a plan for corrective action by Dec. 3, state officials said.

Officials said.

The findings were announced in a report released yesterday after two visits from the department's Office of Bilingual Education and Foreign Language Studies.

Nassau BOCES, after an investigation ordered by state Education Commissioner John B. King

Jr., came to similar conclusions in a separate report submitted to the agency last month.

The issue concerning immigrant students came to light after parents and activists said at least 34 Hispanic children — some unaccompanied minors who came from Central America — had been turned away from Hempstead schools since classes started in September.

Under pressure, the district on Oct. 22 opened a "transition school" in district-leased space at 100 Main St., calling it the Hempstead High School Annex.

The state team, among an array of specified failures, said school employees were confused about who should be admitted to the annex, that enrollment procedures were disorganized, and students were not being taught at their level of English proficiency, grade level and content knowledge.

Call for proper screening

Some high schoolers were "reviewing the alphabet by cutting out letters," and "appeared insulted at the level of the instruction material" they received, the report said.

All of the students must be properly screened and placed in the appropriate settings, the report said.

School board president Lamont Johnson said last night he was surprised by the state's findings.

"I have been to the school several times and the students appear to be happy and in a good environment," he said. "They are eager to learn."

The state investigators, who conducted a monitoring visit on Oct. 23 with a follow-up on Nov. 5, found that Hempstead wrongly classified several children as having missed years of schooling in their home countries when that was not the case.

They also discovered that the district did not have a clear protocol for evaluating foreign transcripts or for awarding credits earned by students overseas.

"As a result, the vast majority



Activists want to know how Hempstead's "transitional school" students will make up class time. ■ **Video:** newsday.com/hempstead

of new high school students in 2014-2015 were placed in 9th grade regardless of whether they presented a foreign transcript and how many years of previous schooling they completed," the report said.

Only now — more than two months after school started — are enrollment and registration staff trying to assess how many credits these children have earned, the report found.

Lucas Sánchez, director of the Nassau County office of the non-profit New York Communities for Change, said the report confirms what he has been hearing from parents and students for weeks.

"We hope that this will ensure that these kids will finally, at some point, get access to the education they have been denied since Sept. 3," he said. "Here we are and it's almost Thanksgiving and these kids are not receiving the educational services they deserve."

The monitors also found that administrators, enrollment and registration staff and teachers are "in dire need" of professional development on the instructional needs of English Language Learners. They said, too, that the district must change its requirements for documents that stu-

dents and their parents or sponsors submit for enrollment. The system has demanded that students produce an original birth certificate and that foreign certificates be translated into English.

Maribel Touré, who joined the school board two weeks ago after a special election ordered by the state, said she has witnessed some of these problems firsthand.

'Enough is enough'

"We cannot play with this," Touré said. "Enough is enough. We are liable for this. We cannot keep denying an education to these children."

Johnson said the district will act on the state's orders. "We want to be in compliance," he said. "We are going to do the work to get everything in order."

The Nassau BOCES report said 54 students had not been placed in a classroom by Oct. 20. Interviews with eight students and their guardians showed they had been turned away for weeks.

Hempstead school officials told the state they received a total of 1,290 new students this school year, including 434 homeless children. They said they were overwhelmed and had run out of space and teachers, with 50 children in some classes.

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