

# One-year 'nightmare'

Hempstead sup't on paid leave says he'll keep fighting

BY KESHIA CLUKEY  
keshia.clukey@newsday.com

Hempstead schools Superintendent Shimon Waronker, in his first public appearance since district trustees leveled charges of mismanagement and negligence against him five months ago, called Wednesday for the "nightmare" to end and again strongly disputed the accusations.

"For the past 365 days, my family and I have been patient and waiting for this nightmare, created by members of the Hempstead school board, to end," Waronker, who has been on paid administrative leave since Jan. 9, 2018, said during a news conference in the Hempstead office of his lawyer, Frederick K. Brewington.

The school board voted 3-2 a year ago to place Waronker on paid leave while the panel investigated its accusations. Waronker immediately challenged the board's decision in a lawsuit filed in federal court in Central Islip, which is ongoing, saying he had been deprived of due process and the right to speak out about problems in the long-struggling system.

"It has not been easy watching every positive addition which I added dismantled so that any possibility of creating an educational culture shift was destroyed," Waronker said. "I have been targeted with allegations which are little more than fiction, yet they have been inflated to fill some 344 pages by lawyers that have padded their pockets at the expense of children and teachers for no good, and certainly no moral, reason."

The news conference, to address the pending court case and the deadlock between the administrator and the district, marked Waronker's first public comments in nearly a year.

"We intend to win and we intend to be reinstated, so that we can do the work," Waronker said. "And that's why I'm fighting."

Jonathan Scher, a Carle Place-based attorney who represents the district and board, said in an



Embattled Hempstead schools Superintendent Shimon Waronker with attorney Frederick K. Brewington. ■ Video: [newsday.com/education](https://newsday.com/education)

emailed statement that the news conference was a "classic example of a lawyer trying to change the subject when he does not like the facts of his case."

Scher attempted to attend the news conference but was asked by Brewington's staff to leave, both attorneys said.

Waronker, 50, started work as schools chief on June 2, 2017, under a four-year contract that pays \$265,000 in base salary plus benefits. In the event of a labor dispute, the contract entitles him to a hearing before an independent hearing officer.

Brewington said the district has delayed the process.

Scher, in an emailed response to several reporters' inquiries, said that Helen Freedman, a retired state Supreme Court Appellate Division justice, was selected, but it is taking time to pin down "arbitration administrative fees and the resolving [of] the compensation rates and related issues attendant to the hearing."

Attorneys from both sides had a conference call with Freedman last week, and another is scheduled Friday, Scher said.

Waronker said he has used the time on leave to pray, study the Torah and work with Brew-

**For the past 365 days, my family and I have been patient and waiting for this nightmare, created by members of the Hempstead school board, to end.'**

— Shimon Waronker, on being placed on leave as Hempstead schools superintendent

ington on his case. He said he has lost 20 pounds since being placed on leave.

Asked if he would resume working as schools chief if reinstated as the active superintendent, Waronker replied, "Yes."

"I want to serve the students of Hempstead, even as difficult and challenging as the assignment is, in addition to having a board that has some challenges," he said. "I want to say that I feel I've been designed for this kind of work. I've done it in the past successfully and the children of Hempstead de-

serve that opportunity."

Months after placing Waronker on leave and barring him from district property, the school board in August brought an internal labor action against him with extensive charges. In October, the panel filed amended charges. The board did not release either set of its accusations, citing the dispute as a personnel matter.

Brewington publicly released the August charges — which alleged misconduct, negligence, bid-rigging and sham hiring, among other things — a few days after the board filed them and called the accusations "false and contrived." On Wednesday, he refused to release the amended charges, which he said cover 344 pages and are "total fabrications."

Scher and school board President LaMont Johnson, in separate statements, said Brewington should release the amended charges and supporting exhibits. "Let the community see the evidence and evaluate the amended charges and specifications for themselves," Johnson said.

Waronker, Brewington and the community members called for all five board members to resign. They also alleged that the board

moved \$500,000 from teacher salaries to pay for legal services, with Brewington pointing to minutes from board meetings that documented such transfers.

Brewington provided members of the media with 15 pages worth of billing records showing nearly \$818,000 paid by the district to the Scher Law Firm between February and October 2018. Brewington said the documents were procured by a resident under the Freedom of Information Law. Some of the records show Waronker's name and billed amounts, but it was unclear how much of the total was used for work related to Waronker's case.

Scher in his statement said his firm has and continues to "vigorously" defend the district.

Waronker, a Harvard-educated administrator, came to Hempstead with a reputation for turning around low-performing New York City schools.

The system has paid Waronker nearly \$277,100, including salary, car allowance and health insurance, from the day he was placed on paid leave — Jan. 9, 2018 — to Dec. 31, according to payroll data Newsday obtained under the Freedom of Information Law.