

The Empire State Supervisors and Administrators (“ESSAA”) had its monthly Stakeholder Meeting with Commissioner of Education, MaryEllen Elia, Executive Deputy Commissioner, Elizabeth Berlin, Senior Deputy Commissioner for Educational Policy, Jhone Ebert and Deputy Commissioner for Higher Education, John D’Agati on Wednesday, January 6, 2016.

Present at the meeting for ESSAA were: Albert (Skip) Voorneveld, ESSAA Executive Vice President; Carol Conklin-Spillane ESSAA Executive Board Member, Tarrytown School District; David Wagner, ESSAA Liaison; Ryan Schoenfeld, ESSAA Vice President, Lockport School District; Rick Kimble ESSAA Vice President, Corning School District; John Rickert, ESSAA Member, Niskayuna and Michael A. Starvaggi, ESSAA Executive Director. Matthew Kravatz, ESSAA Member, Monroe Woodbury; participated in the meeting by conference call.

The topics discussed were as follows:

East Ramapo Monitor

SED has issued a report with the findings of Dennis Walcott, its appointed monitor for the East Ramapo Central School District. The report includes recommendations on a range of issues including academics and facilities. The Commissioner stated that the long-term viability of the district is a concern and that SED has limited resources to address the issues facing East Ramapo, pointing out that receivership is done by individual school, not by district. Further remedial action would require legislative action. Local legislators already have the report and SED is looking to the legislature for next steps.

The Commissioner’s message to school leaders is to give SED the opportunity to come in and appoint monitors to any Districts that are experiencing significant problems. She also said that creative approaches to funding should be explored in these situations since SED funding is limited.

Buffalo Receivership

The Commissioner informed us that the Superintendent in Buffalo, who has been appointed as a receiver, has requested SED intervention because of difficulties reaching an agreement in collective bargaining. The Commissioner stressed that she

takes a fair and objective approach in her findings, noting that both sides have legitimate concerns.

Common Core Task Force Report

Referring to the Task Force Report and the new Regents Rules, the Commissioner described the intent to “keep the APPR system moving forward” with no consequences to teachers and principals as a result of Common Core testing. She also confirmed that the Common Core standards review would proceed in the interim.

Our delegates asked how the various committees which were recommended by Task Force would function and the Commissioner stated that content groups (e.g. early childhood) are being put together from all stakeholders including teachers, administrators and higher education professors. Mrs. Conklin-Spillane inquired about the Commissioner’s vision of choosing individuals for the committees and the Commissioner said that various stakeholder groups will have an ability to name people for committees. The process will start with the content groups making recommendations. The Commissioner also stated that a focus of these groups will be the feedback from the recent common core standards survey. She stated that the response to the survey was strong and very helpful. The Commissioner did not provide details regarding the rest of the process after these content groups conclude their review.

Algebra II Regents

Our members expressed great concern about the roll-out of the new Algebra II curriculum, which was released in December. There is an obvious problem regarding how to prepare the current cohort for a spring Regents exam when the curriculum was announced mid-year. Dr. Schoenfeld suggested that SED lower the cut score as they did for Algebra I. Mrs. Conklin-Spillane suggested offering both the old and new Regents exams for an additional year. The Commissioner agreed that this is a concern that needs to be addressed and will take our suggestions into consideration.

Graduation Requirements

Mrs. Conklin-Spillane stated that the new minimum passing scores for incoming freshman of 75% on the English Regents and 80% in the Algebra Regents -- both required for graduation -- represent significant challenges for students with disabilities and English language learners that will interfere with graduation rates. We

recommended options (i.e. modified passing rates for targeted populations or alternative s such as RCT exams).

The Commissioner said that she feels we are “not even at Day 1 yet” and that they are working on many aspects of public education in New York. She stated that a visionary document is coming out soon with additional “pathways to graduation” such as expanding of the four-plus-one system. There are some pending proposals in place to lower some cut scores as well. However, the Commissioner expressed that she does not want to allow the exceptions to swallow the rule. She feels it is important not to dilute the value of a New York State diploma and therefore the graduation rules should not become too loose.

APPR

Ms. Berlin stated that 83 districts have approved plans under the new Section 3012-d. In those districts that are still operating under the “old” APPR (3012-c), the new Regents Rules will mean that any state score component will simply not count toward the final composite score and the rest of the evaluation will constitute the teacher/principal’s evaluation.

As to districts governed by the new APPR, there is a meeting coming up very soon at SED to discuss how to implement the new rules. Guidance will follow.

The Commissioner emphasized that the intent is to creating a “fair and multi-faceted school accountability system.” She said “many times I feel like I am sitting in your chairs. I want to do what's good.” But she also made it clear that we are stuck with the law and that we need to work creatively towards its implementation.

We asked about the calculation of “informational” state growth scores during the four year hiatus under the new Regents Rules and how those scores will be used. The Commissioner said that the scores will be calculated and made available on the same basis that they have in the past. The difference is that the scores will not affect evaluations.

Opt-Outs

A discussion was held about changing public and professional perspective about opt-outs. The Commissioner said that SED intends to put out a document with talking points for how testing has already changed and how it will continue to change, thus garnering support for the system. However, the Commissioner stated that SED is

struggling to find resources for initiatives like this one. We made it clear that SED needs to demonstrate what is now different about 3-8 assessments, both in substance and in purpose, before any attempt can be made to have a meaningful dialog with parents. Dr. Schoenfeld volunteered to assemble relevant information and suggestions from the field so that we can have further dialog on the topic with the Commissioner at future meetings.

Another initiative the Commissioner described was speeding-up the turnaround time for test results. The goal is to get state test scores out before the end of the school year – but that should not be expected for this year.

Substitute Teacher Shortages

This was an area of concern that was on their agenda as well as ours.

We discussed the possible expansion of the school law 40 day rule, and the fact that such would require legislative action. The Commissioner pointed out that many teachers' unions want to make sure that districts are not using subs as a way to avoid hiring an adequate number of full-time teachers.

Our members stated that the goal should be to encourage more people to go into the fields of teaching and educational leadership.

Teacher Registration

Mr. D'Agati described the new five year/100 hour CTLE system saying that rolling registration will start the five year clock on the birthday of the certificate holder and that reminders will go out as the deadlines approach.

Mr. Voorneveld offered the idea of administrators conducting workshops and inquired as to how the approval process would work. This is an area in which our Long Island region (CAS) has been forward-thinking. Once a CTLE approval system is in place, they intend to use small workshops for the purpose of satisfying the 100 hour requirement.

Conclusion

ESSAA strives to provide our members with timely information about our interactions with educational policymakers in our state. We do this not only to inform you, but also to solicit your feedback so that we can bring your voice to Albany and

deliver a clear message based on the thoughts and concerns of the actual practitioners who strive every day to deliver the best education possible to students statewide.

We meet regularly with the Commissioner, attend all Regents meetings and have a powerful lobbying presence as well. Therefore we encourage your responses to the items discussed above and any others issues of concern. We will use your feedback to set future agendas with policymakers.

Your feedback is essential. Please send your comments to us at ldorsey@essaa.org.