

The Empire State Supervisors and Administrators (“ESSAA”) had its monthly Stakeholder Meeting with Commissioner of Education, MaryEllen Elia and Senior Deputy Commissioner for Educational Policy, Jhone Ebert Monday, June 27, 2016.

Participating in the meeting for ESSAA were: Carol Conklin-Spillane, ESSAA President-Elect; John Rickert, ESSAA Member, Niskayuna School District; Paul Scampini, ESSAA Liaison; Ryan Schoenfeld, ESSAA Vice President; Skip Voorneveld, ESSAA Executive Vice President; and Michael A. Starvaggi, ESSAA Executive Director.

The topics discussed were as follows:

General

Ryan Schoenfeld thanked the Commissioner for attending ESSAA’s Administrator of the Year meeting and for issuing a field memo regarding transgender students soon after our request for guidance at the last stakeholder meeting. Skip Voorneveld also thanked the Commissioner for the recent revisions to the emergency drill requirements. We see these items as evidence that Commissioner Elia’s administration listens to the needs of administrators and acts upon them.

Growth Model

Carol Conklin-Spillane asked about the progress of SED’s review of the value-added growth model. The Commissioner stated that they intend to calculate the advisory growth scores with this year’s data and use that information as part of the overall assessment of the model. Commissioner Elia further stated that they anticipate changes to the model and that they are looking at “other options” in addition to the value-added approach. She also said that the review is tied to development of new accountability policies under the Every Student Succeeds Act.

APPR

Michael A. Starvaggi asked about the criteria required for a district to obtain a waiver of the APPR independent evaluator requirement. The Commissioner said that if a district that can demonstrate a need for an exemption under the regulatory categories (cost, building safety, lack of qualified personnel and number of teachers), there should be a problem being approved for the waiver.

Mr. Starvaggi also asked for clarification of the new December 31st deadline for APPR plans under Section 3012-d. The Commissioner stated December 31, 2016 is the deadline for submission of new plans, but the hope was to get plans submitted sooner. Deputy Commissioner Ebert said that approximately four hundred (400) 3012-d plans have been submitted and about half of those have already been approved.

Testing

Ryan Schoenfeld asked if NYSED had prepared a survey to solicit feedback from the field regarding experiences with administration of state tests. Deputy Commissioner Ebert said that such a survey is pending and will include feedback on the administration of traditional “pencil and paper” tests as well as experience with computer-based testing.

Dr. Schoenfeld asked if the computer testing can be done at a particular grade level in one school but not another within the same district. Deputy Commissioner Ebert responded that right now this is a pilot program in New York. In other states, certain grades can only be tested in designated weeks so as not to overwhelm the system, but New York does not have any specific guidance on those types of issues yet. The Deputy Commissioner did add that the program so far has been very successful and well-received. She stated that the pilot group consisted of approximately 60,000 students and that very few errors or complications were reported.

Carol Conklin-Spillane pointed out that some educators have been expressing frustration at a perceived disconnect between the breakdown of Regents testing areas as stated on EngageNY and the actual test as published. Some of these educators state that they tailored their preparation based on the announced criteria only to have the assessment focus on other areas of the curriculum. The Commissioner was not aware of the issue and asked us to forward some of the comments from these forums so that the Department could respond appropriately.

ESSA Think Tank

Ryan Schoenfeld announced that he would be ESSAA’s representative on NYSED’s Every Student Succeeds Act Think Tank. Dr. Schoenfeld participated in the first online meeting and said that Ira Schwartz did an excellent job. The next Think Tank meeting is on July 14th and Dr. Schoenfeld will be ESSAA’s voice at the meeting.

Graduation Options

Carol Conklin-Spillane asked about the progress of biliteracy “Checkpoint B” graduation options using regional exams in the place of Regents examinations. Deputy Commissioner Ebert said this was still under review and that NYSED will provide us with a proposed timeline for the implementation of changes. Ms. Conklin-Spillane reinforced that the timeline was very important from a curriculum-planning perspective.

Deputy Commissioner Ebert added that Marybeth Casey has been doing presentations explaining the various components of alternative graduation options and that she is available to provide further guidance. Ms. Casey is also educating BOCES staff as an arm of SED to be familiar with the various pathways and therefore to be a local resource for practitioners.

Principal Advisory Team

NYSED has invited ESSAA to nominate principals to participate in an Advisory Team project commencing this summer. Carol Conklin-Spillane said that we are soliciting participation, but asked if any of the meetings can be attended remotely. The Deputy Commissioner said she would speak to John D’Agati, who is spearheading the project about that question. She also noted that it will be very important to have ESSAA representatives on the team.

Please feel free to send any feedback you may have about these issues to info@essaa.org.