

Summary of ESSAA Stakeholders Meeting

June 5th - 6th, 2019

The Empire State Supervisors and Association (ESSAA) held its monthly Stakeholder Meeting on Wednesday, June 5th, 2019 via phone conference with Commissioner of Education - Mary Ellen Elia and Senior Deputy Commissioner - Beth Berlin.

ESSAA was represented by President – Carol Conklin-Spillane, Executive Director – Mike Starvaggi, Executive Vice President – Skip Voorneveld, ESSAA Vice President – Dr. Andrea Hamilton, ESSAA Vice President – John Rickert, and NYSED/Regents Liaison – Paul Scampini.

Topics discussed at the meeting included:

1. Update on Status of APPR for Principals/Administrators

Commissioner Elia was asked for an update on development of APPR guidelines for principals. Mrs. Conklin-Spillane recently participated in the APPR discussions with the Evaluation and Assessment Workgroups and expressed concern that, to date, most of the conversation has been about teacher evaluations with very little attention being paid to principals.

Commissioner Elia responded that she is aware of the importance of developing a more effective process for principal evaluations. She went on to say that meetings will be scheduled in the near future with stakeholder groups, including ESSAA, to specifically discuss recommendations for improving the process of evaluating administrators.

Commissioner Elia was also asked if the new guidelines would be expanded to include more administrators, and not just principals. The Commissioner responded that she could not commit one way or the other, but as the law is currently written, APPR only applies to principals and she does not anticipate any changes to the legislation in the near future.

2. 3-8 Testing

Several ESSAA members have expressed concern about the difficulty students experienced with completing 3-8 ELA tests. The second day of ELA testing for third graders was specifically mentioned as being particularly challenging. Principals shared that students were very fatigued due to the amount of content on the test and do not feel the scores will be an accurate reflection of their academic abilities.

Commissioner Elia responded that she has heard similar comments from other stakeholder groups. She went on to say that NYSED will be sending a survey out to the field in the near future to gather feedback on the amount of content being included on the assessments and on the “timed versus untimed” issue. Based on the feedback they receive, NYSED will be sending guidance out to the field with ideas on how best to assist students who struggle with the time required to complete the tests. The Commissioner also stated that any changes to the testing format would not occur until the 2020-21 school year when the assessments tied to the new learning standards are implemented.

3. Computer Based Testing (CBT)

Mrs. Conklin-Spillane raised concerns about the problems which occurred with the Computer-Based Testing (CBT) again this year. She emphasized that with all the preparations required by principals to ensure a secure and appropriate testing environment, technical difficulties are extremely disruptive and frustrating to both staff and students. Mrs. Conklin-Spillane also mentioned that the technical problems will make districts/schools hesitant to participate in Computer-Based Testing in the future.

Commissioner Elia responded that NYSED learned a great deal about how to implement significant improvements to CBT from the problems that occurred. She went on to say that they are currently working on guidelines to assist districts with setting up their technology infrastructure to help avoid future

problems. Finally, the Commissioner emphasized that she is committed to increasing the use of CBT by more schools in the future.

4. Maintaining 3-8 Student Test Scores

The Board of Regents recently approved an amendment prohibiting the inclusion of 3-8 assessment scores on student permanent records. The Commissioner was asked at a previous stakeholder meeting for some clarification on the policy to ensure administrators are in compliance. NYSED forwarded a guidance document for us to review that still did not provide the information we are looking for.

Mr. Scampini asked Commissioner Elia for some additional clarification regarding what constitutes a student's "permanent record" and how it relates to the maintenance of 3-8 test scores. Commissioner Elia responded that she will bring the issue to the District Superintendents for discussion at an upcoming meeting and get back to us in the near future.

5. Status of Memorandums of Understanding Between School Districts and Higher Education Institutions

In an effort to increase the number of schools across the state that are working with student teachers, the Board of Regents recently passed an amendment that requires all districts to have a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with a college or university. Mr. Voorneveld asked Commissioner Elia about how receptive higher education institutions have been to the new requirement.

The Commissioner responded that the feedback she has received thus far has been very positive. She also noted that an added benefit of the amendment has been that many districts across the state are working with teacher preparation programs toward utilizing teacher candidates to assist with the current substitute teacher shortage.

ESSAA Members:

If you have any feedback on the foregoing issues or would like to suggest a topic to be addressed with the Commissioner at an upcoming meeting, please e-mail us at info@essaa.org. New topics will be submitted to our Stakeholder Committee for consideration.