

The Empire State Supervisors and Administrators Association (ESSAA) held its monthly Stakeholder Meeting on Tuesday, August 6th, 2019 via phone conference with Commissioner of Education - Mary Ellen Elia, Senior Deputy Commissioner - Beth Berlin and Deputy Commissioner of P-12 Instructional Support, Kim Wilkins.

ESSAA was represented by President, Carol Conklin-Spillane; Executive Director, Mike Starvaggi; ESSAA Vice President, Greg Avellino; ESSAA Member, Kristin Randhare and NYSED/Regents Liaison, Paul Scampini.

Topics discussed at the meeting included:

Transition Planning

Commissioner Elia will be leaving her position as of August 31st. Mrs. Conklin-Spillane asked the Commissioner for an update on NYSED's transition plan for Acting Commissioner Beth Berlin.

The Commissioner did not offer many specifics but did say they are working to make the transition as smooth as possible for Acting Commissioner Berlin. Commissioner Elia shared that the departure of Deputy Commissioner Jhone Ebert and Deputy Commissioner Angelica Infante-Green, along with the recent resignations of Chief Counsel, Alison Bianchi; Deputy Commissioner for Higher Education, John D'Agati and Lissette Colon-Collins from the Office of Bilingual Lingual and World Languages will present challenges. The absence of individuals in these key positions could significantly extend the timelines for implementing several of the initiatives NYSED is working on.

Commissioner Elia also expressed appreciation to ESSAA for our strong partnership during her tenure as Commissioner and wished our organization continued success. We at ESSAA are also very appreciative of her openness to our feedback and suggestions during our meetings.

School Climate Surveys

Mr. Avellino asked Commissioner Elia about the implementation status of the regulation which will require all schools to administer School Climate Surveys.

Previous NYSED communications have indicated that the administration of School Climate Surveys across the state would be required for the 2019-20 school year. Commissioner Elia stated at our meeting, however, that the plan most likely will not be implemented for the coming year. She anticipates that 2019-20 will be another year for schools to administer pilot surveys on a voluntary basis.

Mrs. Conklin-Spillane shared that many districts have already been utilizing a variety of school climate surveys to monitor school climate. She asked if districts will have the

option of using the surveys they have been administering rather than the Education Department Survey that is currently being used in the pilots. The Commissioner responded that a final determination has not yet been made, but she is in favor of requiring that all schools use the DOE survey. Commissioner Elia feels the DOE survey has been subject to rigorous psychometric analysis for reliability, is cost effective and creates a level of consistency for comparison of data.

Commissioner Elia suggested that anyone who is interested in piloting the DOE survey during the 2019-20 school year should email Beth Berlin at Beth.Berlin@nysed.gov.

Computer Based Testing (CBT)

Mrs. Conklin-Spillane asked for an update on NYSED's progress with addressing issues associated with Computer Based Testing. Commissioner Elia responded that she anticipates more schools will be participating in the coming school year. She went on to state that NYSED staff are actively recruiting and supporting districts who choose to participate by providing technology assistance to minimize potential problems.

NYSED Task Forces

ESSAA members continue to take an active role in serving on many NYSED task forces and committees. Mrs. Conklin Spillane asked Commissioner Elia for an update on the progress of the work groups.

School Safety Committee - At this time, the committee is working to develop guidelines which will assist schools/districts with ensuring they are in compliance with school safety requirements.

The NYS Comptroller's Office recently identified seventeen districts across the state that are not in compliance with the current regulations and need to take corrective action. The Commissioner stated that the committee is developing a School Safety Checklist, which will be sent out in the near future to assist schools/districts with making necessary changes to their safety plans.

ESSAA is represented on this Task Force by Karen Marconi, Middletown School District.

Principal Preparation Project - Mrs. Conklin-Spillane asked Commissioner Elia about the status of the Principal Project and if the departure of John D'Agati would affect the ongoing progress of the initiative. Commissioner Elia responded that another staff member has been assigned to the project and she anticipates funding to be extended through the Wallace Foundation. She went on to emphasize that recruiting and retaining principals is vital to the success of education and a top priority for the Education Department.

ESSAA will follow up with John D'Agati to gain more specific information on the current status of the project.

APPR – At this time, the workgroups associated with APPR evaluations and assessment are not meeting.

NYSED representatives are currently meeting with stakeholder groups to gather input on how best to approach APPR for teachers and principals. When the meetings are completed, the collected information will be submitted to the Board of Regents for review.

ESSAA is represented on this workgroup by Carol Conklin-Spillane (Evaluation Workgroup) and Shelley Baldwin-Nye, Niskayuna School District (Assessment Workgroup).

Data Security Task Force – Commissioner Elia shared that the protection of Personally Identifiable Information (PII) is a growing concern in the Education Department. Last week, four districts in the state were subject to ransomware attacks. NYSED is currently working with the Cybersecurity Task Force to prepare recommendations for districts to better secure data.

ESSAA is represented on this Task Force by Jon Klomp, North Babylon School District and Dr. Denise Toscano, Elwood School District.

Graduation Requirements

At the most recent Board of Regents meeting, Chancellor Rosa announced the formation of a Blue Ribbon Panel to review current NYS graduation requirements and make recommendations for changes.

The Commissioner stated that she feels the formation of the committee will be significantly delayed due to the shortage of key staff members at NYSED.

Update on Mandatory Vaccinations

Commissioner Elia updated our group on the new health law recently passed concerning vaccinations. The law, which goes into effect for the 2019-20 school year, expands the range of students who are required to have vaccinations.

The Commissioner stated that homeschooled students who participate in any school-related activities are now required to have the mandated vaccinations. The law also applies to special education students who are homeschooled but receive certain supports such as speech therapy or physical therapy from their home district as part of their IEP requirements.

NYSED is currently collaborating with the NYS Health Department and the Office of Children and Family Services to develop a guidance document on the new law which will be sent out to districts in the very near future.

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.