

Summary of Tuesday, May 19th, 2020 Stakeholder Meeting

The Empire State Supervisors and Administrators Association (ESSAA) held its monthly Stakeholder Meeting on Tuesday, May 19, 2020, via videoconference with Interim Commissioner of Education, Shannon Tahoe; Deputy Commissioner for P12 Instructional Support, Kim Wilkins; Deputy Commissioner for Higher Education, William Murphy; and Chief Financial Officer, Phyllis Morris.

ESSAA was represented at the meeting by ESSAA President, Carol Conklin-Spillane; ESSAA Executive Director, Mike Starvaggi; ESSAA Executive Vice President, Skip Voorneveld; ESSAA Vice President, John Rickert; ESSAA Vice President, Greg Avellino; ESSAA Vice President, Brian Farrell; ESSAA Vice President, Rick Kimble; ESSAA Vice President, Tony Baxter; ESSAA member Maria Paese; ESSAA member John Zampaglione; and Regents/NYSED Liaison, Paul Scampini.

Specific Topics discussed during the meeting included:

Returning to School Task Force

Deputy Commissioner Wilkins provided an update on the status of the task force which will be developing a framework for how to safely and effectively reopen schools.

Four regional meetings will be scheduled across the state in the coming weeks to gather stakeholder ideas and feedback. The task force will also work closely with the Department of Health and local county agencies with the goal to have a finalized reopening plan in place by mid-July. The Commissioner acknowledged the significant differences between regions, what is necessary and appropriate for the North Country may be different from what is required in NYC, Long Island and Westchester Counties. She emphasized the need for the plan to be a fluid document that covers the wide range of potential scenarios New York could face in September.

Mrs. Conklin-Spillane asked if school administrators are regarded as essential workers. Interim Commissioner Tahoe responded she has not heard of any formal designation from the Governor's Office, but is of the opinion that all educational staff who contribute to the continuity of learning for children in schools should be considered essential.

Interim Commissioner Tahoe also shared that NYSED is working with the Department of Health (DOH) and the Governor's Office on soon to be released guidance for conducting graduation ceremonies. Mrs. Conklin-Spillane commented that this has been a very difficult issue for building principals who are receiving a lot of pressure from parents, students and community groups. She added that guidance from the Governor could significantly ease the problem.

Budget Status/CARES Act Funding

Chief Financial Officer Phyllis Morris provided an update of the status of the education budget and the federal CARES ACT funding.

The Chief Financial Officer shared that they are still waiting for the NYS Department of Budget (DOB) to release adjusted budget allocations and anticipates there will be significant reductions. Interim Commissioner Tahoe commented that there are currently very stringent DOB restrictions on expenditures which is making it difficult for NYSED to access funds. She also stressed that NYSED is continuing to advocate for additional financial support from the Department of Education.

In late March, the federal CARES Act was passed to provide a \$30.75 billion in funding to assist schools with the financial challenges associated with the coronavirus pandemic. \$13.2 billion is allocated for the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSERF) of which New York has been allocated \$1.037 billion. NYSED submitted an application for the funding which was approved by the Department of Education (DOE). The NYSED Budget and Finance Department is currently working on calculating the final allocations which will be sent to districts.

New York State has also been allocated \$164.2 million under the federal Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund (GEER). The funding includes provisions for Re-think K-12 Schools competitive grants to promote further implementation of remote learning across the state.

Mrs. Conklin-Spillane expressed reservations about the implications of increasing emphasis on remote learning at this time. Concerned that virtual instruction could become part of a prescribed educational routine, she stated that she has always been very proud that New York has been protective of policies that promote the value of personal interaction between teachers and students. Mrs. Conklin-Spillane stressed that remote learning is currently a stopgap measure, and does not come anywhere near the value of the day to day personal interactions between students and teachers. Mr. Rickert added that it is impossible to replicate true teacher-student interactions through a remote platform. Mr. Voorneveld shared that the feedback he is receiving from stakeholders indicates that, for the most part, parents and students are very frustrated with the virtual learning experiences.

Commissioner Tahoe responded, that based on her experience both in her role as Interim Commissioner and as a parent, she is in total agreement that remote learning cannot compare to the benefits of personal teacher to student direct instruction. She feels that if virtual learning does need to continue into the future, it will require a more structured schedule similar to a regular school day for students. She also stressed the need for increased funding to address the significant inequity with technology access.

Status of Summer School

Deputy Commissioner Wilkins shared that an announcement regarding the status of summer school and Extended School Year services should be made this week. The Deputy Commissioner anticipates, that while programs will occur, they will most likely be held remotely. Note: cancellation of summer school for 2020 has subsequently been announced by the Governor.

Grading Policy Guidance

Deputy Commissioner Wilkins stated that guidance with regards to K-12 grading should be released this week. She anticipates that the recommendations will propose: Pass/Fail/Incomplete format for middle schools and high schools.

A narrative summary of each student's academic progress for elementary schools.

Mrs. Conklin-Spillane commented that many districts have already implemented adjusted grading policies and therefore assumes the anticipated guidance is intended to be just that – guidance, with no requirement to comply. This was confirmed by the commissioner.

Teacher/Administrator Certification

Deputy Commissioner Murphy reviewed the three amendments passed at the most recent Board of Regents meeting regarding measures to provide flexibility for teacher and administrator certification candidates whose programs have been interrupted in recent months. The amendments include:

1. Approval of an Emergency COVID-19 Certificate for teacher and administrator candidates which provides a temporary exemption from passing certification exams if all other program requirements have been completed between the Fall 2019 and Summer 2020 semesters.
2. The expiration dates for Initial and Provisional teaching certificates that are due to expire in August will be extended until January 31, 2021.
3. Providing teacher candidates who were student teaching in Spring 2020 or who plan to student teach in Summer 2020, with the option of taking the Assessment of Teaching Skills – Written (ATSW) Exam instead of the edTPA Exam to complete certification requirements.

Graduation Requirement Initiative

Mrs. Conklin- Spillane asked if there is any formalized process in place for collecting data on the process districts are using this year to both monitor student progress and establish graduation criteria. She added that, while work on the Graduation Requirement Initiative is currently suspended, this information could be extremely valuable to the Blue Ribbon Committee when work on the project resumes.

School District Budget Votes

Mr. Scampini asked whether, given all the financial uncertainty at this time, school districts will have the option of conducting a revote if their proposed school budgets are defeated in June.

Interim Commissioner Tahoe responded that she has made a formal request to the Governor's Office to allow districts to hold a revote this year. The Interim Commissioner went on to say that at this time, it is unclear whether a revote is possible without an executive order. If they are not allowed, districts would be forced to implement a contingency budget if their proposed budget is defeated.

The Interim Commissioner also emphasized the need for districts to closely monitor both how budget votes are conducted, and how individual votes are processed and tabulated. She is anticipating the NYSED will receive an increased number of appeals from districts this year due to the change in how the voting process will be conducted.

APPR

Interim Commissioner Tahoe shared that she still has not had a response from the Governor's Office with regards to a decision on APPR requirements for teacher/principal evaluations and awarding of tenure. If any ESSAA member has unresolved questions about a tenure issue, please contact an ESSAA representative.

Special Education - IEP amendments

Interim Commissioner Tahoe mentioned that the department has been receiving questions about meeting the required number of instructional days included in student IEPs. She stated that IEPs can be amended to reflect the adjusted date for the end of the school year. There is no relief of IDEA regulations being granted.

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.