

The Empire State Supervisors and Administrators Association (ESSAA) held its monthly Stakeholder Meeting on Wednesday, September 30, 2020, via videoconference with Interim Commissioner of Education, Betty Rosa; Deputy Commissioner for P12 Instructional Support, Kim Wilkins; Assistant Commissioner for Public Affairs, Emily DeSantis; Deputy Commissioner, John D'Agati; and Chief Financial Officer, Phyllis Morris.

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

Mrs. Conklin-Spillane began the meeting by welcoming Interim Commissioner Rosa to her new position and expressed that she looks forward to continuing the collaborative, collegial and productive dialogue that has characterized recent stakeholder meetings.

Specific Topics discussed during the meeting included:

### **Reopening of Schools**

Deputy Commissioner Kim Wilkins asked the ESSAA meeting representatives for feedback on their experiences with reopening schools.

Mr. Rickert shared some thoughts from the perspective of his role as principal at Niskayuna High School. He began by expressing appreciation to NYSED for the Reopening Workshops that were conducted over the summer. He felt the guidance greatly assisted his staff in implementing an effective reopening plan. Mr. Rickert stated that he feels follow-up workshops where administrators could share their reopening experiences, talk about lessons learned, and discuss areas to focus on moving forward, would also be very beneficial.

With regard to remote instruction at the high school level, Mr. Rickert expressed the need to:

1. Address the gap in access to technology for students.
2. Provide more professional development for teachers on best practices for delivering effective remote instruction.

3. Explore ways to improve the level of student engagement with remote instruction.
4. Provide teachers with guidance on how best to integrate effective, authentic and meaningful assessment with virtual instruction.

Mr. Baxter shared his experience with the reopening model used at Sleepy Hollow High School in Tarrytown. He stressed that a commitment to planning and preparation on the part of the entire school community contributed to a successful reopening. Mr. Baxter feels that the digital divide remains a significant challenge in spite of the fact that they distributed Chromebooks to all students. The reopening at Sleepy Hollow occurred in four phases:

Phase 1 – Four Superintendent Conference days for staff professional development.

Phase 2 -- Three days of remote learning with teachers delivering virtual instruction from the school building.

Phase 3 -- Four days of student orientation where students were acclimated to health and safety and procedures along with the school schedule.

Phase 4 -- Implementation of a hybrid learning schedule currently being utilized.

Mr. Baxter also shared that they have successfully enrolled several newly registered ELL students since the opening of school and have systems in place to assist students and families to become acclimated to the school environment.

Dr. Fasciglione shared some thoughts on her reopening experience as an elementary principal in Niskayuna. Along with her staff, Dr. Fasciglione took steps to implement a hybrid model that combined reduced class size with the creative use of expanded learning space. She feels this contributed to a very successful, positive, and safe integration of the new kindergarten students into her building.

## **School Funding**

Mrs. Conklin-Spillane expressed her concern for the impact the recent funding and staffing cuts are having on the ability of high needs districts to offer quality instruction and maintain a safe school environment for our most vulnerable students. Chief Financial Officer Phyllis Morris stated that, based on the information she is receiving from the Division of Budget, the 20% reduction in state aid will continue until additional federal aid is approved.

Mrs. Conklin-Spillane also mentioned the unfairness of the fact that district payments to charter and private schools have not been reduced, despite the reduction in state aid funds. Interim Commissioner Rosa shared that she is aware of this inequity and is having conversations with legislators to address the issue.

Mr. Farrell brought up significant negative impacts the funding cuts are having on special education students. He feels the cuts are making it increasingly difficult to stay in compliance with federal and state regulations, particularly with regards to Least Restrictive Environment mandates.

Interim Commissioner Rosa commended Mr. Farrell for his commitment to advocating for his students. She acknowledged that students with special needs have been heavily impacted by the cuts, and expressed her commitment to seeking increased special education funding.

Mrs. Conklin-Spillane also expressed that the increasing number of litigation cases being pursued by parents of special education students in certain districts across the state is resulting in a huge drain on districts.

### **Increased Flexibility for Obtaining Administrator/Teaching Certification**

Mrs. Conklin-Spillane expressed appreciation for the recently approved amendments that have increased flexibility for candidates pursuing teacher/administrator certification. Mrs. Conklin-Spillane also emphasized the need for ensuring that NYSED continues to actively support the recruitment of future school leaders during the COVID-19 crisis.

Mr. D'Agati responded by expressing interest in working with ESSAA members toward developing a more comprehensive plan for both recruitment and providing flexibility with pathways to certification.

## **Status of Regulatory Compliance – APPR, 3-8 Testing, Regents Exams**

Mr. Scampini asked for an update on the status any changes associated with mandated assessments and APPR for the 2020-21 school year.

With regard to APPR, Deputy Commissioner Wilkins stated that NYSED staff are currently working on potential APPR revisions for both teachers and principals, but the process is in the early stages.

Earlier this week, ESSAA members received an email with information from NYSED on the status of the potential administration of state assessments during this school year. Links to the information are also provided below.

[Letter to Educators](#)

[Memorandum](#)

## **Student Code of Conduct Guidance**

Mrs. Conklin-Spillane expressed that principals are continuing to struggle with how best to address behavioral expectations associated with virtual learning. She feels that specific guidance is needed to assist principals with dealing with the unique situations that are occurring. Interim Commissioner Rosa responded that NYSED is working with the Office of Children and Family Services on several items related to this issue and an update should be forthcoming in the 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](mailto:info@essaa.org). New topics will be submitted to our Stakeholder Committee for consideration.***