

The Empire State Supervisors and Administrators Association (ESSAA) held its monthly Stakeholder Meeting on Tuesday, April 20, 2021, via videoconference with Commissioner of Education, Betty Rosa; Deputy Commissioner for P12 Instructional Support, Kim Wilkins; Assistant Commissioner for Public Affairs, Emily DeSantis; 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 Director of Information Resources, Celia Strino; ESSAA Vice President, Dr. Shireen Fasciglione; ESSAA Vice President, Tony Baxter; ESSAA Vice President, Rick Kimble; ESSAA member, Mike Moran; and Regents/NYSED Liaison, Paul Scampini.

Specific Topics discussed during the meeting included:

Review of Enacted New York State Budget

NYSED Chief Financial Officer, Phyllis Morris began the meeting with an update on the recently approved New York State Budget. The primary components of federal and state funding were reviewed which included a summary of the various federal funding streams related to pandemic relief, the anticipated timelines for spending the funds, and key increases, cuts and restorations associated with the state budget.

Increased allocations in the state budget included:

- A \$1.8 Billion overall increase in state aid
- A \$1.4 billion increase in Foundation Aid
- Over \$100 million dedicated to expansion of Pre-K programs

During the most recent Board of Regents meeting, Commissioner Rosa expressed frustration with the Division of Budget over delays associated with the release of pandemic relief funding to districts. Mr. Scampini asked the Commissioner about this issue and whether there has been any progress made. Commissioner Rosa responded that the release of the funds is still being held up and the situation has not yet been resolved. While she and her staff are continuing to stress to legislators the importance of being

able to get money into districts, their frustration with the lack of response continues.

During the budget discussion, Chief Financial Officer Morris highlighted that money was restored to several programs supporting recruitment and professional development of teachers in the state budget.

Mrs. Conklin-Spillane expressed concern that there is no mention of funding to promote the recruitment and development of future principals. She went on to stress that financial support for building a qualified pool of future educational leaders must be a priority. Commissioner Rosa responded that she understands the important role principals play on the front lines of all the issues schools are facing. The Commissioner added that, while not specifically mentioned in the budget, principal recruitment and development is being considered as part of current NYSED budget discussions and will be included in future conversations as the goals associated with the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Project are further developed.

Mr. Voorneveld asked If the enacted budget will allow NYSED to hire additional staff to assist with the disbursement of the approved federal funding to districts. Chief Financial Officer Morris responded that they have received approval to hire some time limited staff but, due to logistics associated with the Civil Service hiring process, her department is still a couple months away from seeing a real increase in staff members.

Mrs. Conklin-Spillane asked if districts are allowed to store any federal pandemic relief related funds in reserve for future use. The Chief Financial Officer responded that, while permission to store funds in reserve was requested, the proposal was denied by federal regulators. Commissioner Rosa recommended that districts spend federal money before the funding timeline expires and that it would be advisable to hold available state funds in reserve.

The link below provides access to the summary of the enacted state budget that was presented at the most recent Board of Regents meeting.

<https://www.regents.nysed.gov/common/regents/files/SA%20-%20NYSED%20Review%20of%20the%202021-2022%20Enacted%20Budget.pdf>

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Initiative

Mr. Voorneveld expressed appreciation for the information from NYSED relating to the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Initiative.

Commissioner Rosa noted that she is very excited about the opportunities the project presents in bringing about real change. Mrs. Conklin-Spillane added that the initiative presents an opportunity for integration of the DEI goals with the implementation of both the Next Generation Learning Standards and the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSELs). The Commissioner strongly agreed and mentioned that work is already being done to coordinate these areas within the DEI Framework.

The link below includes a summary of the DEI Initiative Framework that was presented at the most recent Board of Regents meeting.

<https://www.regents.nysed.gov/common/regents/files/421brd1.pdf>

3-8 Assessment Update

The day of our stakeholder meeting coincided with the second day of 3-8 ELA testing. Deputy Commissioner Wilkins shared that “so far, the testing has gone smoothly with a minimum number of issues.” The Deputy Commissioner did mention there had been questions from the field regarding the fact that some students were recognizing questions which had been present on tests administered in previous years. The Deputy Commissioner acknowledged the presence of repeated questions. Since no field testing occurred during the pandemic, the bank of available questions has been reduced, resulting in the need to reuse questions.

Teacher/Principal Preparation Requirements

Mr. Voorneveld expressed appreciation to Commissioner Rosa for NYSED’s ongoing flexibility with student teaching internships and the completion of edTPA exams. Mrs. Conklin-Spillane shared that the pandemic situation presents a creative opportunity to thoroughly evaluate and analyze the components of both student teaching and administrator internships to make improvements.

Member Input Sought for May Stakeholder Meeting

At the conclusion of the meeting, Commissioner Rosa informed us that the May Stakeholder Meeting will be a longer session to focus on school needs for upcoming summer programs and the reopening of schools in September. As part of the discussion, the Commissioner is seeking the perspective of current school leaders as NYSED works to develop future policies and logistics.

As we prepare agenda items, we invite and encourage ESSAA members to send us thoughts and opinions on recommendations, concerns, priorities, obstacles and opportunities related to summer programming and school reopening. Items you would like to have included in the agenda can be submitted via the email below. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

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.