

**The Empire State Supervisors and Administrators Association (ESSAA)** held its monthly Stakeholder Meeting on Monday, March 29, 2021, via videoconference with Commissioner of Education, Betty Rosa; Deputy Commissioner for P12 Instructional Support, Kim Wilkins; Assistant Commissioner for Public Affairs, Emily DeSantis; Executive Director for the Office of Educator Quality and Professional Development, Alex Trikalinos; Chief Financial Officer, Phyllis Morris; and Assistant Commissioner for the Office of Accountability, Jason Harmon.

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, John Rickert; 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:**

### **Status of Anticipated Pandemic Related Federal Funding**

NYSED Chief Financial Officer, Phyllis Morris began the meeting with an update on federally approved COVID-19 related funding. While NYSED is awaiting direction on how the CARES Act Phase 3 funding can be spent, it is anticipated that significant portions will be dedicated to:

- IDEA related needs
- Assistance to non-public schools
- Resources to support technology and telecommunications in schools, libraries and museums

Funding received from Elementary & Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) must go directly to school districts. Ms. Morris anticipates that the next round of allocations will be released to districts in late April. At this time, it appears that 20% of the 8-billion-dollar allocation will be dedicated to assisting students who were most significantly impacted recover from pandemic-related learning setbacks. The funding will support evidenced based interventions such as summer enrichment and after school programs. Commissioner Rosa emphasized that the funds do not need to be dedicated solely to academics and can be used to support social/emotional support and wellness. She also stressed that the monies are targeted to support all students and is not designated for specific subgroups.

Mr. Voorneveld asked if school districts will be allowed to amend proposed school budgets based on the additional money they will be receiving from pandemic relief funds. Ms. Morris responded that she is not sure and would look into it.

Ms. Morris also reminded us that districts should be developing plans for the return to in-person learning.

## **Issues Related to 3-8 Assessments and Regents Exams**

Deputy Commissioner Wilkins provided an update on issues related to the federally required 3-8 assessments and Regents Exams. NYSED is working to support schools as they develop testing plans by providing flexibility with administration protocols and assisting with the questions regarding the various unique situations that arise. Deputy Commissioner Wilkins stressed that principals need to plan for managing communication with parents to determine the number of students, especially “opt ins” that have been participating in remote instruction, who will be sitting

for the tests. She went on to say this is especially important with planning for students who receive special testing accommodations. The Deputy Commissioner also stated that Commissioner Rosa continues to communicate with the Department of Education voicing her objections to the mandated tests in hopes they can still be cancelled.

Mr. Rickert asked if there was any guidance available from NYSED to assist schools with encouraging students to take exams. He cited an example of students in his school who must take certain Regents Exams to qualify for scholarship eligibility. Commissioner Rosa cautioned that it is important that parents understand the complexities of deciding whether or not to have the child(ren) sit for the tests. She went on to say that a certain tension exists with the public about whether the testing is necessary and has any potential value. The Commissioner went on to stress that principals need to be careful of the language that goes out regarding the purpose of the testing, the potential benefits, the value of assessing academic progress without punitive effects, and how results will be reported.

Dr. Fasciglione asked about the 95% participation rate requirement associated with Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Deputy Commissioner Wilkins responded that the requirement has been suspended for this year. Dr. Fasciglione also asked about when principals would have access to 3-8 assessment results and what the student and data reports will look like.

Dr. Wilkins responded, that due to the shortened versions of the test that are being administered this year, she anticipates the results could be available as early as July. With regards to how the data will be presented and disaggregated, she indicated she will check with the assessment vendor and get back to us.

With regards to Regents Exams, Mr. Baxter expressed concerns about 2021-22 exams and the readiness of students to sit for three-hour cumulative exams that they have little or no experience with. He asked if there are plans to modify future exams to allow students to ease back into the Regents Exam format next year. Deputy Commissioner Wilkins responded that the current plan is to implement the full slate of Regents Exams in 2021-22 and there are no plans to modify the schedule or content.

## **APPR and Retirement Incentive Legislation**

Mr. Starvaggi asked for some clarity with regard to the current modified APPR regulations for principals. He cited an example where, prior to the pandemic, an untenured principal could have received an APPR rating of “Developing” and due to the suspension of APPR requirements, would not have had an opportunity to improve his/her rating over the past two years. Would this principal be ineligible for tenure?

Mr. Trikalinos responded that as long as APPR requirements have been completed over the past two years, tenure can be granted. He added that, in a situation where a probationary principal was originally rated as “Ineffective,” tenure could not be granted. The district, however, would have the option of extending the probationary period.

With regards to the current proposed Retirement Incentive Bill, Commissioner Rosa stated that NYSED is evaluating the pros and cons of the proposed legislation. She went on to explain that while the initial reaction within the department was very positive, they need to closely examine the long-range implications of offering the incentive. NYSED departments are currently reviewing the bill and Commissioner Rosa has yet to decide on whether to propose certain amendments and whether or not they will support the overall passage of the bill. Mr. Starvaggi asked

Commissioner Rosa if NYSED would share information with us as they continue to develop a position on supporting the bill.

Mrs. Conklin-Spillane emphasized that the possibility of a retirement incentive compounds the continuing need to advocate for funding dedicated to recruit and support future education leaders. She feels the proposed incentive provides us with an excellent opportunity to advocate for expanded recruitment efforts and also make the APPR evaluation process more reflective of the multi-dimensional roles carried out by effective educational leaders.

***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.***