

The **Empire State Supervisors and Administrators Association (ESSAA)** held its monthly Stakeholder Meeting on Wednesday, June 8th, 2022, via videoconference with Commissioner of Education, Betty Rosa; Asst. Commissioner for Public Affairs, Emily DeSantis; Deputy Commissioner for P-12 Instructional Support, Angelique Johnson-Dingle; Deputy Commissioner for P-12 Operational Support, Jason Harmon; and Executive Director of Education Innovation and Strategic Initiatives, David Frank.

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, Tony Baxter; ESSAA Vice President, John Rickert; ESSAA Vice President, Dr. Shireen Fasciglione; ESSAA Vice President, Rick Kimble; ESSAA member John Zampaglione, and Regents/NYSED Liaison, Paul Scampini.

Specific topics discussed during the meeting include:

Areas of Focus for NYSED Summer Efforts

Asst. Commissioner DeSantis opened the meeting by asking ESSAA attendees for ideas and suggestions with regards to how NYSED could best focus their efforts this summer to best support the work of school administrators in their continuing efforts to effectively lead schools in these difficult times.

Mrs. Conklin-Spillane emphasized the need for guidance to assist principals with evaluating both the new and ongoing challenges that need to be addressed. Mrs. Conklin-Spillane stressed the need to provide resources, guidance and exemplary models to support educational leaders in moving away from the reactionary leadership model the pandemic has required and returning to the intended role of being leaders of teaching and learning. This shift will enable principals to return their leadership focus to long term goals associated with initiatives such as DEI, reevaluation of graduation measures, and implementing the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSELs).

Commissioner Rosa stressed the need for connecting wellness and mental health as educational leaders focus on building a supportive health culture that supports teaching and learning. She cited exemplary models she has observed in schools she has visited, and agreed to provide us with information from about some of these programs. Mrs. Conklin-Spillane suggested that a certain percentage of grant money related to mental health support be awarded to principals who are working to implement innovative and creative wellness/mental health initiatives in their buildings.

Dr. Fasciglione stressed the importance of focusing on the link between technology and mental health issues and the need to educate students and parents on how best to navigate these challenges. Commissioner Rosa strongly agreed with Dr. Fasciglione and offered that resources

are available from various stakeholder organizations that they will share with us for distribution to ESSAA members.

Mr. Voorneveld emphasized the overall fatigue, apprehension, and anxiety so many administrators are experiencing due to the constant changes and new regulations associated with the pandemic. Mrs. Conklin-Spillane added that this is especially prevalent among new administrators, and emphasized the need for effective mentoring.

Mr. Voorneveld also expressed the need to rethink various components the Red Flag Law as it relates to schools. He cited a specific example that allows students who have been suspended from one school district for violent behavior to transfer to another district to without having to serve the suspension. In addition, the district the student is transferring from is not allowed to share any information relating to the student's violent behavior with the school/district receiving the new student, which jeopardizes the safety of students and staff in the new school.

Commissioner Rosa responded that, due to the recent events, there has been an increasing number of conversations with lawmakers about amendments such as this which would better balance both the rights of the students with the rights of the school community. Mrs. Conklin-Spillane expressed that this would be an excellent area to address over the summer to ensure that a solid policy is in place for the start of school in September. She also suggested NYSED provide user friendly translations and/or inventory checklists that relate to new legislative bills to assist educational leaders with interpreting and understanding the changes.

Cancellation of 2022 US History Regents Examination

Mrs. Conklin-Spillane asked for some clarification on the reasons for the cancellation of the US History Regents Exam.

Commissioner Rosa responded by first emphasizing that the specific question that was publicized as being the reason for the cancellation was not poorly written, and under normal circumstances, would be an excellent exam question. The Commissioner went on to explain that, out of respect for the students/families who were impacted by the tragedy in Buffalo, NYSED staff reviewed the US History exam questions to ensure that no questions were in the exam which would add any additional emotional distress to individuals already trying to deal with the situation. After several internal conversations between NYSED staff, and a conversation with the Superintendent of the Buffalo Schools, the decision was made to cancel the exam.

Mrs. Conklin-Spillane expressed many educators have expressed concerns that cancelling the exam was a step backwards in the efforts to truly engage students in the essence of learning about history. She went on to stress the importance of supporting the difficult conversations

educators will need to navigate if we truly move forward with implementing Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

Commissioner Rosa responded that while the decision was very difficult, it ultimately rested on respecting the pain the Buffalo community was going through, and consideration for the perceived insensitivity and anger that could have been generated if the test was administered. Deputy Commissioner Johnson-Dingle expressed that consideration was also given to the fact that students would be taking the test in a crowded room with no immediate support available if they experienced emotional distress during the exam.

Commissioner Rosa concluded the meeting by expressing her appreciation for the feedback which was shared by the ESSAA representatives and that NYSED fully supports the difficult guided conversations that will need to take place in classrooms across the state in the 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.