

The **Empire State Supervisors and Administrators Association (ESSAA)** held their monthly Stakeholder Meeting on Wednesday, May 14, 2025, via videoconference with Commissioner of Education, Betty Rosa.

ESSAA was represented at the meeting by Board Members: Executive Director, Mike Starvaggi; Executive Vice President, Skip Voorneveld; Vice President, Lisa O'Neill; Director of Information Resources, Celia Strino; Director of Professional Learning, Eva Jones; Vice President for Professional Development, Shelley Baldwin-Nye; Regents/NYSED Liaison, Paul Scampini; and ESSAA Delegates Jennifer Martino and Luke Sotherden.

Topics discussed during the meeting included:

- 1. Legislative Bill Banning Cell Phone Use in Schools**
- 2. School Funding Status**

Legislative Bill Banning Cell Phone Usage in Schools

The majority of this month's discussion focused on the recently passed **Cell Phone Ban Law** which will go into effect beginning in September 2025. Commissioner Rosa stressed that there are still many questions that need to be addressed with the Governor's Office regarding provisions of the new law.

The Commissioner stated that she recognizes the need for schools to have policies in place to minimize disruptions caused by cell phones. She has long advocated, however, for local control and allowing individual districts to develop their own policies based on their specific needs and concerns. The Commissioner feels that many districts already have effective policies in place and expressed frustration that the legislature failed to recognize the unique needs of individual districts with choosing to move toward a very restrictive blanket policy.

Mr. Starvaggi asked about current dialogue that is occurring between NYSED and the Governor's Office about the concerns many districts are raising. Commissioner Rosa responded that there are regular conversations occurring with representatives from the Governor's Office to work out specifics of the law and discuss potential flexibilities with the policy language. The Commissioner also mentioned she is especially concerned with the increased potential for complicated discipline/suspension situations that could result from student behavior incidents relating to the more restrictive cell phone policy.

Mr. Voorneveld noted that approximately 17 school districts have been recognized as already having cell phone policies in place that closely align with the Governor's plan. He asked if it would be possible for NYSED to share these plans with other districts to assist them with

developing their own plans. Commissioner Rosa responded that she would look into the possibility of sharing them and get back to us.

The Commissioner also emphasized the need for districts to have a policy framework in place as soon as possible to ensure that staff, parents and students have ample time to become fully aware of the logistics of their district's plan before the start of school in September.

State and Federal Funding Update

Mr. Voorneveld commended Commissioner Rosa on NYSED's efforts with successfully advocating and ensuring that certain key areas of the education budget were either increased or maintained.

The Commissioner responded that, while she was pleased with many aspects of the approved budget, she still has many concerns. She noted that she is especially worried about the potential restructuring of federal grants, reductions in federal aid to support special education students and English Language Learners, and the impact a proposed national voucher program to fund tuition support for private school students could have.

Commissioner Rosa stated that "schools tend to be healthier when they operate with predictability and, unfortunately, we are in a very unpredictable time in education." She recommends that districts plan ahead based on the federal funding you currently expect, but also include plans for how you will adjust if budget conditions change.

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.