

The **Empire State Supervisors and Administrators Association (ESSAA)** held their monthly Stakeholder Meeting on Thursday, December 11, 2025 via videoconference. Participants representing NYSED included Commissioner of Education, Betty Rosa and Assistant Commissioner for the Office of Educational Policy, David Frank.

ESSAA was represented at the meeting by Executive Director, Mike Starvaggi; Vice President John Rickert; Director for Professional Learning, Eva Jones; Vice President for Professional Development, Shelley Baldwin-Nye; Director of Information Resources, Celia Strino; Vice President, Dr. Shireen Fasciglione; Vice President, John Zmpaglione; Regents/NYSED Liaison, Paul Scampini; and ESSAA Delegates, Jennifer Martino, Kathy Barboulis, Vince DiGrandi, Luke Sotherden, and Doug Cronk.

This month's discussion focused on the growing concerns among school leaders with the implementation of the **Portrait of a Graduate** initiative. ESSAA representative, Eva Jones, began the meeting expressing that educational leaders are working diligently to grasp the key concepts associated with the Portrait of a Graduate and how they can best begin efforts toward successful implementation. Ms. Jones stressed, however, that school leaders are at a point where they need more specific guidance, especially with how to ensure that instruction and assessments align with the exit standards of the new requirements. ESSAA delegate Luke Sotherden, a middle school principal, expressed that school administrators are at a point in the school year where plans for the 2026-2027 school year have already begun. He expressed frustration with the fact that there has been so little information from the Blue Ribbon Commission on initial implementation steps and that there is confusion with recommended course offerings and how best to schedule students, especially those moving on to high school.

As an example, Mr. Sothergen cited confusion with the status of Regents Exams and the uncertainty that exists among school leaders, teachers and parents regarding whether students should be enrolling in courses that lead to a Regents exam. He went on to express that there are many questions about whether schools should be offering alternative courses that lead to performance-based or portfolio based assessments, and whether these alternative courses/exams are acceptable options in place of state exams to meet graduation requirements.

Commissioner Rosa responded that the key concepts associated with the **Portrait of a Graduate** support a mindset that **shifts instruction and learning to a focus on learning progression and more depth of content rather than predetermined linear goals such as exit exams**. The Commissioner went on say that classroom emphasis needs to move away from "snorkeling the surface of large amounts of content" and move toward building deeper connections with conceptual ideas that support real world project-based learning.

The Commissioner suggested setting up a series of meetings with educational leaders from around the state to address questions and concerns such as those expressed during the meeting. Commissioner Rosa went on to say that she feels this would assist NYSED with gaining an awareness of the key barriers administrators, teachers and parents are experiencing as schools continue to work through the initial stages of implementation.

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.