



The Empire State Supervisors and Administrators Association (ESSAA) held its monthly Stakeholder Meeting on Wednesday, September 1, 2021, via videoconference with Commissioner of Education, Betty Rosa; Deputy Commissioner for P12 Instructional Support, Kim Wilkins; Senior Deputy Commissioner for Educational Policy, Jim Baldwin; and Asst Commissioner for Public Affairs, Emily DeSantis.

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, Tony Baxter; ESSAA member, John Zampaglione; and Regents/NYSED Liaison, Paul Scampini.

Specific topics discussed during the meeting include:

### **Graduation Measures Initiative**

Deputy Commissioner Wilkins opened the meeting with an update on the status of the Graduation Measures Initiative which was suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Initiated in the Fall of 2019, the project aims to review research and current policies toward the goal of revising current graduation requirements and increasing access to multiple graduation measures opportunities.

The Five Pertinent Questions that are being used to frame the scope of the project include:

- What do we want students to know and be able to do before they graduate?
- How do we want students to demonstrate such knowledge and skills?
- How do you measure learning and achievement (as it pertains to the answers to question #2) to ensure they are indicators of high school completion?
- How can measures of achievement accurately reflect the skills and knowledge of our special populations, such as students with disabilities and English language learners?
- What course requirements or examinations will ensure that students are prepared for college and careers or civic engagement?

The Deputy Commissioner informed us that work will resume this Fall to continue reviewing research and gathering stakeholder feedback with approximately nine additional meetings to be scheduled. Additional feedback

will also be collected to examine post-COVID 19 perspectives based on experiences with remote learning that might reshape some of the ideas shared during the original meetings. NYSED continues to work with the educational research firm, West Ed, to gather and organize research data and feedback. The first preliminary reporting of data could be presented to the Board of Regent's members as early as the October 2021 meeting.

Mrs. Conklin-Spillane asked if preliminary feedback results are currently available for review. Deputy Commissioner Wilkins responded that West Ed has not yet released any of the feedback at this time.

### **Reporting of 2021 3-8 Math testing Results**

Assistant Commissioner DeSantis informed us that, since so few students took the 3-8 Math test last Spring, the results will be presented to the public in a different format from previous years. The Assistant Commissioner said the results could be released as early as late September.

### **School Reopening Guidance**

On behalf of the all ESSAA members, Mrs. Conklin-Spillane expressed her thanks to Commissioner Rosa for the strong leadership and guidance she provided in her recent reopening guidance letter.

Commissioner Rosa emphasized that, due to the lack of guidance from the Governor's Office or the NYS Department of Health, it was necessary for NYSED to take a strong stance to provide some clarity with safety protocols and minimize the political posturing that is occurring in many areas with regards to COVID – related health and safety measures. The Commissioner went on to express that she hopes the consistency with issues such as masking, will help reduce some of the potential areas of conflict principals will have to address as schools reopen.

Mr. Baxter, an assistant principal in Sleepy Hollow, expressed the need for consistency with health and safety protocols to eliminate comparison shopping among districts. He went on to express that, while there is still resistance to masking among members of his staff and school community, the guidelines are being fully supported and he is appreciative of the strong position taken by the Commissioner.

John Zampaglione, a principal in the Levittown School District, shared that last week his district moved from optional to mandatory masking. He went on to express that he has been pleased that the majority of his community is in favor of the requirement.

Mrs. Conklin-Spillane expressed concern that contact tracing protocols are still very vague and more guidance is needed. Deputy Commissioner Baldwin responded that he anticipates updated guidance from the NYS Dept of Health to be released in the near future. The Deputy Commissioner also anticipates that screening and contact tracing guidelines will be facilitated by local Departments of Health through a process similar to the protocols used last year. He also emphasized that local Health Departments will continue the process of requiring the submission of daily health updates from districts for the coming year.

Mrs. Conklin-Spillane expressed the need for NYSED to continue delivering as strong and consistent a message as possible to assist principals with minimizing conflict over health and safety protocols. Commissioner Rosa stated that NYSED is struggling to avoid turning health and safety mandates into political issues that create significant challenges for districts. Referencing reports from New Jersey, she also cautioned that districts need to be mindful of the potential of strategic organized efforts coming from outside organizations to subvert health and safety mandates, especially in districts where there is disagreement amongst Board of Education members.

## **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Initiative**

Commissioner Rosa reemphasized the Board of Regent's commitment to the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusiveness Initiative (DEI). Mr. Voorneveld thanked the Commissioner for the Board's commitment to DEI and Mrs. Conklin Spillane emphasized ESSAA's full support with implementing the project goals. Mrs. Conklin-Spillane suggested that it would be helpful for principals to have more specific information with regards to "what DEI is, and what DEI is not." She feels this would assist them to effectively guide the dialogue as they either begin or continue their efforts. Mrs. Conklin-Spillane also asked for FAQ type guidance to support proactive communication, correct misinformation and defuse tension with a consistent voice across the state. She added that this would be of great assistance to administrators with deescalating potential areas of conflict and guiding conversations in the right direction, especially during the early stages of implementation.

Assistant Commissioner DeSantis shared that there is a one-page DEI summary highlighting the key points of focus, along with a short DEI rationale document outlining the initiative that could be very helpful. Links to these two documents are included below as a resource for you to review and share with staff and community members.

[DEI RATIONALE](#)

[DEI ONE-PAGER](#)

## **Questions Regarding Certification and Tenure**

Mrs. Conklin-Spillane expressed concerns regarding the lack of clarity with certification and tenure status that many administrators across the state are experiencing in situations such as administrators moving back to the role of classroom teacher. Deputy Commissioner Baldwin responded that he would set up a meeting in the near future between ESSAA representatives and staff members from the Office of Higher Education to address the questions and provide some clarity.

*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.*

