



## **EMPIRE STATE SUPERVISORS AND ADMINISTRATORS ASSOCIATION**

Supporting school leaders, every day.

### **Summary of February 2024 Stakeholders Meeting**

The **Empire State Supervisors and Administrators Association (ESSAA)** held their monthly Stakeholder Meeting on Monday, February 26, 2024, via videoconference. Participants representing NYSED included Commissioner of Education, Betty Rosa; Deputy Commissioner, P12 Instructional Support, Angelique Johnson-Dingle; Assistant Commissioner for the Office of Educational Policy, David Frank; and Deputy Commissioner, P-12 Operational Supports, Jason Harmon.

ESSAA was represented at the meeting by ESSAA President, Carol Conklin-Spillane; Executive Director, Mike Starvaggi; Executive Vice President, Skip Voorneveld; Vice President, John Rickert; Vice President, Shelley Baldwin Nye; Vice President, Russell Buckley; ESSAA member, Jennifer Martino; ESSAA member, Lisa O'Neill; ESSAA member, Vince DiGrandi; and Regents/NYSED Liaison, Paul Scampini.

#### **Topics discussed during the meeting included:**

- 1. School/Workplace Safety for Students and Staff**
- 2. Foundation Aid Formula Reform**

#### **Important Note:**

The informational summary provided by NYSED prior to the meeting is available as an attachment at the end of this meeting report. The summary includes updated background information, data, and links to additional guidance and resources on each of the areas being discussed. It also contains updated information on several topics not discussed at the meeting including:

- 1. Changes in Mandated Reporter Training Requirements**
- 2. Proposed Guidelines for Mixed Competition in Athletics**
- 3. NY P-20 Literacy Initiative Update**

4. **Guidelines for Serving English Language Learners Who are Eligible for Special Education Services**
5. **Computer Based Scoring for Grades 5 and 8 Science Tests Information**

## **School/Workplace Safety**

The main topic of this month's discussion related to increased concerns being expressed by ESSAA members associated with escalating levels of violent and aggressive student behaviors.

In recent months, NYSED has adopted new regulations relating to **Student Behavioral Interventions** (August 2023) and **Workplace Violence Prevention** (January 2024). Many school administrators feel that competing tensions associated with the two mandates are compromising the safety and wellbeing of students, teachers and administrators.

Deputy Commissioner Johnson-Dingle responded that NYSED understands our concerns about staff and student safety. She recommends the use of restorative practices and providing access to options such as meditation rooms as effective tools for dysregulating students.

Mrs. Conklin-Spillane acknowledged that the use of restorative practices and meditation rooms as de-escalation strategies can be useful for certain behavioral situations. She strongly emphasized, however, that they are not appropriate options for addressing the aggressive and violent behaviors that educators are dealing with on a consistent basis. Mr. Buckley added that while exclusionary discipline is certainly not a desired behavioral intervention, certain egregious behaviors leave principals no other choice.

It was also expressed that restrictions on suspensions are limiting the ability of principals, especially those in high need districts or in schools that serve very young children, to attract and retain quality teacher candidates.

ESSAA member, Ms. Jennifer Martino cited some concerns with her recent experience with Workplace Violence Prevention training. She noted that the training has been adapted from a program used in corporate settings to now cover instances of student-to teacher violence in schools. Ms. Martino feels that the recommended restorative policies that limit the removal of students from class, even when their behavior poses threats to faculty and staff, is another example of how the ability of educators to maintain a safe learning environment is being compromised. She expressed that the competing aspects of ensuring workplace safety and effectively managing student behavior need to be clarified in both the training and student behavior guidelines.

Commissioner Rosa responded that she is aware of the overall decline in student mental health and the increase in violent behaviors. She cited NYSED's efforts to work with the Governor's Office, the NYS Office of Mental Health and the Office of Children and Family Services to support School Based Mental Health Clinics, and Family Opportunity Centers.

With regards to advocating for change, she emphasized the need for educators to communicate their concerns in writing to legislators. She recommends that rather than simply expressing dissatisfaction with the policies, she feels detailed descriptions of the incidents educators are experiencing can be more powerful in conveying the urgency of our concerns.

Deputy Commissioner Johnson-Dingle ended the discussion by stating that NYSED will work at clarifying some of the competing areas of confusion in the Workplace Violence Prevention Guidelines and training.

A copy of the document with a detailed overview of current guidelines and policies relating to School Safety and Student Behavior which NYSED provided prior to the meeting, can be found as a separate attachment/link, or to request a copy please contact Bonnie Berry at: [bberry@essaa.org](mailto:bberry@essaa.org). Topics covered in the document include:

1. New Behavioral Supports and Interventions in Schools (formerly corporal punishment)
2. Restorative Practices
3. Workplace Violence Prevention Guidelines
4. School Safety and Educational Climate (SSEC) Data Collection
5. Codes of Conduct Guidelines
6. Dignity for All Students (DASA)
7. Emergency Response Plans

Additionally, below you will find a link to a newly posted FAQ document relating to the new **Behavioral Supports and Interventions Policies**.

<https://www.nysed.gov/sites/default/files/programs/student-support-services/updates-to-behavioral-supports-and-interventions-in-schools.pdf>

## **Reforming the Foundation Aid Formula**

Mr. Voorneveld commended Commissioner Rosa on NYSED's efforts to secure legislative funding to reevaluate the **Foundation Aid Formula**.

Commissioner Rosa responded that she is very disappointed that the funding was not included in the Governor's budget proposal. She stressed that a certain degree of school budget predictability from year to year is extremely important, and the current process is devastating many districts. She also expressed frustration with the fact that the annual inconsistencies with the distribution of Foundation Aid hurt the credibility and public trust of NYSED, the NYS Legislature, and the Governor.

**NYSED Agenda Summary Notes** - A copy of the document can be found as a separate attachment/link, or to request a copy please contact Bonnie Berry at: [bberry@essaa.org](mailto:bberry@essaa.org).

***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.***