



The **Empire State Supervisors and Administrators Association (ESSAA)** held its monthly Stakeholder Meeting on Tuesday, June 30, 2020, via videoconference with Interim Commissioner of Education, Shannon Tahoe; Deputy Commissioner for P12 Instructional Support, Kim Wilkins; Assistant Commissioner for Special Education, Chris Suriano; and Executive Director of the Charter School Office, 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, John Rickert; ESSAA Vice President, Greg Avellino; ESSAA Vice President, Tony Baxter; ESSAA member Michael Moran; ESSAA member John Zampaglione; and Regents/NYSED Liaison, Paul Scampini.

Specific Topics discussed during the meeting included: CARES Act Funding

Interim Commissioner Tahoe began the meeting by providing an update on the status of the CARES Act funding. The Interim Commissioner shared that the federal funding includes an Equitable Services provision which requires that non-public schools receive a share of the funding. There is currently disagreement in the US Department of Education and across states regarding the formula that should be used to determine the allocation that private schools receive. She anticipates the issue will be resolved within the next couple weeks.

The Interim Commissioner stated they are also still waiting for final NYS budget allocations from the Governor.

Mr. Rickert asked if school districts would benefit if the Heroes Act is passed. Interim Commissioner Tahoe stated that she is strongly advocating for the passage of the bill, which is currently being debated in the Senate, as it would assist with easing the financial burden school districts are currently facing.

Mrs. Conklin-Spillane questioned the any anticipated impact of the recent Supreme Court ruling on non-public school funding, Interim Commissioner Tahoe agreed it was something to carefully monitor.

Regional Meetings of the Statewide Task Force for Reopening Schools

Deputy Commissioner Wilkins provided an update on the recent meetings held by the Statewide Task Force for Reopening of Schools. Several regional meetings were conducted in recent weeks and the Deputy Commissioner stated she was pleased with the feedback they received. She was particularly impressed with the level of student participation, especially with their passion in expressing how much they have missed attending school and their strong desire to return.

NYSED is currently reviewing the feedback collected from the meetings with the goal of presenting a finalized plan to the Board of Regents at their July 13th meeting. The proposal will include guidelines/regulatory changes in the areas of:

1. Transportation/Facilities/Nutrition

2. Teaching and Learning
3. Digital Equity and Access
4. Budget and Fiscal
5. Social-Emotional Needs
6. Special Education
7. Bilingual Education/MLL/ELL
8. Safety/Human Resources

Interim Commissioner Tahoe shared that they are still waiting for guidance from the Governor's Office and Department of Health on the ninth category - Health and Safety. The Interim Commissioner stressed that these guidelines are crucial to implementing the other eight areas. She is hopeful that the Health and Safety guidelines will be available in the next couple weeks but cautioned us that the release could be delayed by fluctuations in the number of COVID-19 cases across the state.

Once the Task Force recommendations are approved by the Board of Regents, a NYSED portal will be set up for districts to submit Reopening Plans. The Interim Commissioner mentioned that most guidelines and regulations will provide flexibility for how districts meet certain requirements based on their specific needs and logistics.

Special Education

Assistant Commissioner Suriano provided an update on the status of requirements for delivering special education services. He stressed the need to be familiar with the two most recent NYSED guidance documents regarding provisions to students with disabilities during the statewide school closures.

The Assistant Commissioner stressed that hybrid models which combine in-person and remote delivery of instruction are acceptable, including for completion of annual evaluations that have not yet been finalized.

Mrs. Conklin-Spillane acknowledged the stresses that resulted from short notice and tight turn-around time and commended Assistant Commissioner Suriano on the thoroughness and clarity of the guidance documents which are included in the links below.

<http://www.p12.nysed.gov/specialed/publications/2020-memos/special-education-supplement-2-covid-qa-memo-6-20-2020.pdf>

<http://www.p12.nysed.gov/specialed/publications/2020-memos/special-education-supplement-3-covid-qa-memo-6-20-2020.pdf>

Re-Think K-12 Schools Grants

Executive Director of the Charter School Office, David Frank, shared an update on the status of the federal **Re-think K-12 Schools Grant**. NYSED recently submitted an application which, if approved, would provide 19 million dollars to support improvements in the delivery of blended/remote instruction in three main areas:

1. Training to the field on instructional best practices
2. Evaluating what additional resources are needed for the improvement of remote teaching and learning
3. Determination of the long term supports that NYSED needs to implement to build capacity and provide ongoing guidance in both pre-service and in-service professional development.

Mr. Frank anticipates that they should be notified about grant approval in August so that professional development activities associated with the grant could begin as early as this Fall. He emphasized that

the purpose of the grant is *not* to promote distance learning over in-person learning, but to provide resources for distance programs to the extent they are needed.

Mrs. Conklin-Spillane asked if grant funds could be used to reduce the digital divide New York is experiencing with technology access. Commissioner Tahoe responded that while the **Re-think K-12 Schools** funding is limited to the area of professional development, she is actively pursuing other funding streams to address the digital divide.

Also, with regards to remote learning, Mrs. Conklin-Spillane expressed concern about the need for guidance to assist school leaders with the increasing burden of monitoring virtual instruction platforms and software to ensure appropriateness and compliance with regulations. Interim Commissioner Tahoe responded that they have learned a great deal during the past year and that they are working on developing guidelines. She also added that she would appreciate any feedback and ideas on streamlining and improving this process from ESSAA members based on their experiences.

Guidance for Reopening

Mr. Starvaggi asked for any guidance that would assist administrators with planning for the reopening of schools such as looking at alternative capacity/scheduling models. Interim Commissioner Tahoe responded that at this point, without guidance from the Department of Health, it is very difficult to make any definitive plans. The Interim Commissioner did mention she anticipates that school leaders will be expected to organize classes and scheduling in such a way as to keep cohorts of students together throughout the day to the fullest extent possible to minimize the number of students an individual comes in contact with on a given day.

The Interim Commissioner encouraged principals to build local support for individual school plans by including a broad range of stakeholder input into the process of examining options and implications for decision making in reopening schools. While it is critical to follow district and state requirements, nothing builds student, staff, and parent confidence better than thoughtful communication from the principal and school administrators. She indicated administrators can consider the guidance issued for the opening of special education programs this summer as a reference tool for developing plans for re-opening schools while awaiting anticipated guidance in mid-July.

Codes of Conduct

Mrs. Conklin-Spillane shared that principals are experiencing difficulties addressing behavioral expectations related to remote learning with the way current Codes of Conduct are written. The Interim Commissioner responded that NYSED is working on guidelines to address this issue which should be available in the near future. Interim Commissioner Tahoe went on to say she is seeing an increase the number of appeals to suspension that are being overturned due to the failure to follow due process regulations. She stressed the importance of strictly adhering to appropriate procedures to ensure suspensions are upheld.

Mrs. Conklin-Spillane offered the support of ESSAA members to provide assistance with developing the new Codes of Conduct guidelines.

School District Budget Votes

Interim Commissioner Tahoe mentioned that she was extremely pleased with the overall number of school budgets that were approved across the state. She is waiting to hear from the Governor on approval for the eleven districts whose budgets did not pass to conduct a revote.

Thanks to Principals and Administrators

The Interim Commissioner concluded the meeting by expressing praise and appreciation to all administrators across the state for their ongoing efforts to care for New York's children in the recent months.

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.