



Executive Viewpoint

Kevin S. Casey, Executive Director

A Time to Play

I recently heard a commentator note that there was tension between absolute positions on public policy and the ground level implementation of those policies. I laughed aloud when I heard this. "Tension" between absolutism and the messy reality of real people in an infinite variety of circumstances is a vast understatement.

Regardless of which side of the political spectrum an absolute policy originates, in my opinion it is doomed to failure. Remember NCLB's 100 percent student pro-

iciency, or the war on poverty's promise to eradicate hunger? It reminds me of when my children were very young and every single new person they met was either nice or mean, and there was no in-between. Such a binary world, without nuance, rarely works beyond age five.

I understand that simplicity aids clarity and clarity aids advocacy, most often for policy proponents. Policy opponents are often in the position of explaining their version of the impact of a proposed policy (lobbyists refer to this as

playing defense), often relying upon examples of the messy real world to make their case. This will sometimes defeat the proposed policy, but can also result in compromise and policy modification that pushes toward the center of the political spectrum.

To advocate for a particular policy, or to oppose it, requires being heard. There are some high profile examples of this, such as recent press releases from Commissioner Elia and Attorney General Schneiderman on protecting immigrant and transgender students. While released in the context of an update on existing law, the policy message being sent to Washington was clear. There are also solicitations from SED for input from practitioners on potential indicators of

school quality and student success for inclusion in the ESSA state accountability plan that will be submitted to the USDOE. I respectfully suggest that most SAANYS members have a direct interest in the content of that plan, and input into the SED survey is strongly recommended.

On March 8, members of the SAANYS Government Relations Committee (GRC) met with Commissioner Elia and her senior staff, and also lobbied state legislators on state level issues. Later this month, SAANYS will send a team of both staff and members to participate in the National Association of Elementary School Principals National Leaders Conference, which includes visits with federal elected representatives.

In April, a different team participates in a similar conference hosted by the National Association of Secondary School Principals.

I fully understand that our voice is one among many, but there are many like-minded voices. When spoken together they can raise the volume. I also understand that we are more likely than not to be playing defense, but at least we are in the game, and there are many deserving individuals and groups for whom we should play. Look around your schools and communities and you will see them in plain sight. I urge you to join us. ■

School Climate, Disciplinary Incidents, and the Link to Chronic Absenteeism

Sponsor Opinion Piece by Scott B. Crowder, CEO, Educational Vistas, Inc.

The Proposed New York State School Climate Index (SCI)

The New York State Education Department (NYSED) has begun a pilot program to evaluate school climate across the state and the potential effect it may have on the continuing problem of chronic absenteeism. Six districts and two BOCES/RICs have already volunteered (with others to follow) to participate in this project. The pilot will provide the state with valuable information,

initial data, and reports that will help drive a future statewide rollout and eventual creation of a School Climate Index (SCI). This new dimension will meld with current VADIR and DASA yearly reporting to NYSED. All of this is designed to improve school safety while reducing disciplinary incidents and absenteeism.

NYSED has chosen the United States Department of Education (USDE) to provide the valid and

reliable surveys necessary for the project. These surveys were released for use in 2016 and are free for schools to use. They consist of individual surveys for students (grades 5 and up), school personnel (both instructional & others), and parents, guardians, and the community. The proposed annual School Climate Index (SCI) will:

"Facilitate dialog and strengthen communication and collaboration among school administrators, staff, students, parents, and the community..."

"Incorporate task force recommendations for improving data collection that facilitates promoting safe and healthy schools, produce accu-

rate data, and strengthen how schools and SED can work together to compile information, track trends, and respond constructively to school safety and dignity indicators..."

"Provide school administrators with a multidimensional measure of school climate aimed at engaging students, staff, parents, and community..."

The School Climate Index (SCI), as a group, has a total possible point value of 500. Each of the Student, Personnel, and Parent surveys contains domains such as Environment, Safety, and Engagement, that are given scale scores with a total possible value of 300 (of the 500 points). Then the School Violence Index (SVI) is calculated against a new matrix to

provide an additional 100 maximum points (again of the 500). Finally, a new Chronic Absenteeism Indicator (CAI) calculation provides the final possible 100 points!

EdVistas is working with multiple districts and the Nassau BOCES RIC to post these surveys online in our SurVate secure-survey product for access by any and all participating schools. Custom reports will provide the valuable information necessary to meet the NYSED stated goals and objectives of the project. Stay tuned for future progress report. ■

The statements and opinions expressed herein do not necessarily imply or reflect the opinion or philosophy of the School Administrators Association of New York State.

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