



## Executive Viewpoint

Kevin S. Casey, Executive Director

### What is Our Responsibility on Mental Health?

In the recent past, SAANYS sent out a brief, unscientific survey to some of its members in order to attempt to identify issues deserving of priority attention. We were uncertain whether the results would provide any real clarity, as our membership is diverse in any number of ways, and I for one expected responses all over the board. I was wrong.

One question asked if you were given \$50,000 (a completely random figure) tomorrow to use in your building or district for any purpose, what would it be? About 70 percent of the responses (responses were

free form; no checklist of options was provided) identified a need for mental health services, increased school psychologist staffing, and other forms of student support services. That was an eye opener for me.

I don't know if there are increased numbers of students who could use mental health services compared to ten or twenty or thirty years ago, or if we are getting better at identifying mental health issues and that there may be a declining stigma associated with needing such services. I suspect there are in fact more people suffering from mental health issues today, but I

would be the first to admit that this suspicion is not based upon any data, but rather a gut instinct. Perhaps more importantly, I have no idea why this might be the case.

Shortly after receiving the aforementioned survey results, I was at a meeting of the Educational Conference Board (ECB), a board made up of the major educational advocacy groups in New York State. Its members, in addition to SAANYS, include NYSUT (teachers), NYSSBA (school boards), NYSCOSS (school superintendents), NYSASBO (business officials), NYSPTA and the Conference of the Big 5 school districts. Near the conclusion of the meeting, the executive director of NYSSBA, Tim Kremer, shared that his association was organizing a one day symposium addressing what he called "the growing mental health crisis among students," and solicited assistance from any organization that was

willing to assist. Thinking of our own survey results, I volunteered SAANYS on the spot. We are cooperating in hosting this day-long summit on May 20 in Latham (Albany County) entitled, "Your Role in Addressing the Growing Mental Health Crisis Among Students." (See saanys.org for details.) Several other organizations are also cooperating, but this symposium which includes, among others, SED, the Mental Health Association of New York State, and mental health experts from the University at Albany, SUNY has been driven by Tim Kremer at NYSSBA. Both Tim and NYSSBA deserve kudos for creating a venue to focus on an issue that many recognize exists, but few know how to deal with. I sincerely hope you will consider attending.

After that ECB meeting and having no connection to it at all, on March 30 the *Albany Times Union* reported on a survey

conducted by SUNY of 19,000 of its students. The survey showed that 49 percent of them self-identified as having an anxiety disorder, 36 percent self-identified as having depression, and 26 percent self-identified as having another major mental health disorder. SUNY acknowledged they were having trouble keeping up with the demand for mental health services.

Those that responded to the SUNY survey mostly came from your school districts. It seems unlikely to me that their needs first developed at college. With awareness comes a duty to act. I believe there is a need for identification of mental health issues and interdiction at a much younger age. I know this will cost money. Let's not get caught up in what those services might cost. Instead, we might consider the cost of failing to act. ■

## 2017 CBT – Reflections From the Field

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

As more schools move from paper-based (PBT) assessment administration to computer-based (CBT) test delivery, some important feedback, information, and recommendations are being gathered during this "operational" year. The goal of the NYSED is to be completely (where appropriate) computer-based for the ELA and math grades 3-8 by the year 2020. Recently, the commissioner has stated that this may not be a hard and fast date for the statewide adoption of CBT. We do find that goal is still referenced online within their current guiding documents.

Let's start with a review of the use of the Questar Assessment, Inc.'s Nextera™ test delivery system. Local administrators are assigned as either District Test Coordinators (DTC) or School/Site Test Coordinators (STC) and manage the entire process at the district/school level for all sessions. This is the "heavy-lifting" aspect of CBT. The more that a district spreads the work of "programming" or configuring the system over additional personnel, the faster and easier it is to prepare for each testing period. Overall, administrators that we have spoken with about this year's process were pleased or even very pleased with the software and requirements. However, it helped if the district participated in the field testing of CBT last year.

If district technology specialists set the web browsers up for kiosk mode and the computers, operating systems, and internet band-width requirements were met, then most schools had little to no problems this year. Nonetheless, there were some issues with secure sessions locking-up or "freezing" while the student was taking the test. In most cases these were short-term episodes that resolved quickly. In worst-case scenarios the computers were rebooted and the proctor pin number was reentered and the session continued with no loss of student work and responses. The auto-upload every 60 seconds to the server was very reassuring to staff. The identification of students who opted-out of the entire assessment or one or more sessions could be made more efficient by allowing the STC to choose the complete test, not each session individually.

It was very interesting to talk with teachers about the migration to CBT and to get their thoughts about the future of testing in NYS. They spoke with one voice to us and proclaimed loudly: "There is no way that we are going back to paper testing - ever!" ■

*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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