

At the April 2015 Board of Regents Meeting...

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Regent Collins pointed out, "This is a monumental task" and expressed concern about the timeline in light of department capacity. Building on timeline concerns, Regent Johnson said, "...these are important policies that affect children – two months is not enough." Regents Lester Young and Johnson spoke of the need to consult with experts in psychometrics and personnel evaluation; to which the senior deputy commissioner responded that \$1 million was appropriated in legislation for this purpose, but two months is not enough time to access the funds and implement the consultation.

Regent Charles Bendit asked, "What happens between June 30 (the due date to promulgate regulations) and November 15 (the date when the new APPR system is required to be implemented in school districts)?" Vice Chancellor Anthony Bottar responded, "Last time, the department was virtually shut down to meet a similar review requirement, by January." Senior Deputy Commissioner Wagner indicated that the department plans to identify "process efficiencies," but Acting Commissioner Elizabeth Berlin interjected, "Last time we had Race to the Top funds to support the reviews, which we do not have this time." Chancellor Tisch said that she is concerned about the timeline: "The department has capacity issues, and districts do too." Perhaps Regent Tilles best summed up the actions to be taken by SED by pointing out the need to establish the new system based upon research and best practices. He pointed out that SED acted in a hasty manner in establishing the current APPR system due to Race to the Top application timelines, and advised against acting too hastily again. Finally, in depicting what is expected to be SED's course of action, he said, "We are willing to work to make it (the APPR system) as good as we can get it; but that doesn't mean that what we will get done will be good."

Sentiments such as those in the above two paragraphs permeated much of the Regents meeting.

NYSED Leadership

Deputy Commissioner Cosimo Tangorra, Jr., who joined the State Education Department in July of 2014, will assume the position of school superintendent of the Niskayuna School District, located in Schenectady, New York, on June 2, 2015. His resignation from the State Education Department will be effective sometime in May, and his participation at the May meeting of the Board of Regents is uncertain.

For more information about the Board of Regents meeting or the provisions of the Education Transformation Act of 2015, contact James Viola, director of government relations at JViola@saanys.org and watch saanys.org for updates. Any educators or interested citizens wishing to comment upon the new regulations regarding the new APPR system may do so by writing directly to the State Education Department at eval2015@nysed.gov.

APPR: What Can be Learned From Other States?

Sponsor Opinion piece by Cynthia E. Gallagher, APPR Coordinator, Educational Vistas, Inc.

So here we go again, with hastily developed policies and regulations to implement a revised but still contentious teacher and principal evaluation system. Reengineering a three component evaluation system to two will be challenging and require substantial revisions to district APPR plans. This is not a welcomed task, but it does present an opportunity to reflect on district needs. Rubrics and processes that were not working, and may not be the right fit for the new requirements should be abandoned and replaced with comprehensive, powerful, and integrated systems that support this complex work.

The choice of rubrics will be more important than ever and is a good starting point for revising APPR plans. The construction of approved rubrics and how each one captures the work of teachers is essential. As we know now, the new APPR requirements prohibit the use of lesson plans, artifacts, and portfolios as components of the composite score. However, the use of such items as evidence within domains may be possible, depending upon how rubrics are constructed. Another consideration should be the management of the rubric itself. With the mandated use of external evaluators and optional use of peer reviews, the consistent and manageable use of rubrics becomes more important than ever. Districts have been frustrated with their prior choices and this may be an opportune time to make a change.

The second area that will be equally taxing is SLOs. Districts may need to consider a more structured SLO approval process to ensure that SLOs across grade levels and courses are comparable. There has been a great deal of variability in SLO target setting, and a balanced approval process may be beneficial. Also, as student participation in state assessments becomes less stable, group and school wide SLOs may be worthy of serious consideration.

Regardless of how APPR plans are revised, it is clear that districts need a comprehensive APPR system to manage teacher and principal evaluations. An ideal solution must be able to handle each component of APPR, provide districts easy access to multiple years of data, store evidence with the actual observations, allow staff to develop SLOs in an integrated way, and synch with multiple data sources. Adoption of a new product should efficiently support this complex work - not complicate it further. ■

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