



## Executive Viewpoint

Kevin S. Casey, Executive Director

# Taking Back Education

From time to time I feel compelled to reflect on the fact that school and program leaders are engaged in a profession of critical importance and value. A profession international in scope and impact, upon which our future relies. To some that may seem like a statement of the obvious, but I suspect to others it will sound like hyperbole, but it's not. Take stock of the importance of your role in preparing students for a future that changes with seemingly ever increasing rapidity.

I think many educators will acknowledge that it

is more difficult to leave their building or district for professional pursuits than it was in the recent past. I know many educators feel that the demands of the profession have increased markedly over the past few years, and that the voices of public educators, particularly front line educators such as teachers and administrators, have been drowned out by proponents of charter schools, test and rank policies, and for-profit entities all backed by staggering amounts of hedge fund money. A few years ago statements about the attempted hijacking of

public education by Wall Street would have been dismissed as the ramblings of an unhinged conspiracy-minded paranoid. Today it is simply accepted as an unfortunate, but well-documented, reality. But things are once again changing.

The changes are resulting from the continued push-back from parents and practitioners alike. The period of the voices of educators being drowned out appear to be ending, and the evidence is on the macro level. The new Every Student Succeeds Act sharply restricts the reach of the USDOE into the states. It also allows (but does not require) the states to set aside up to 3 percent of its Title II money for school leader activities, including professional development, induction, and mentoring. Commissioner Elia tells

me she is in favor of such a set aside.

Furthermore, the make-up of the Board of Regents will change with the election of a new chancellor and vice chancellor and the addition of three new regents. At the time of this writing it is unknown who the new people will be (although rumors abound), but given the policy dispositions of those leaving the board, I suspect a more practitioner friendly board is likely. In due course we can also hope for a legislature, and maybe even a governor, willing to revisit a statutory evaluation system that has been an unmitigated disaster.

What does a more practitioner friendly department and board mean? One which listens to practitioners, recognizing that practitioners are not monolithic. The USDOE

intends to involve practitioners in the development of ESSA implementing regulations. SED is soliciting practitioner input into standards and assessment creation. Now is not the time to remain locked in your building or district. Do not be an island. Now is the time to engage with SAANYS, with the National Association of Elementary School Principals and the National Association of Secondary School Principals. Now more than ever is the time to engage in your profession, something bigger than yourself, your building, your district. If enough public educators do so, they will be bigger and more influential than the education-enamored hedge fund managers, which in my opinion, is how it should be. ■

## Partners Not Vendors

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

It is interesting to see the evolution of public/private partnerships and the relationship between schools and technology companies in general over time. When computers and application software were first introduced into public education, word processing, spreadsheets, and databases were the focus of the day. Oh sure, you could add in paint, early games, and typing tutor to round out the offerings. Districts bought

their hardware from one vendor and software from many different sources as necessary, much like the way they had purchased books for years.

As the technology improved and became less costly, the machines were moved from offices, labs, and libraries into classrooms. Specific programs to manage H.R., student information, accounting, bus routing, AIS/IEPs, etc. pushed

districts to integrate "computer technology" into the fabric of day-to-day teaching, learning, and assessment. The number of critical – major – individual software management systems grew to the point where most public school districts currently maintain between seven and ten of these giants. Each one requiring varying degrees of support, updates, and on-going maintenance to function properly.

This has caused an explosion in perpetual hardware replacement costs and a dramatic increase in the number of technicians a district must employ or contract for.

Add to this challenge the number of reports, data file uploads, and extracts that schools must provide to the state and federal government, and you begin to see that critical mass has been reached. The final straw is/was when administrators realized that required data elements needed to be combined across systems to meet these mandates. Never mind that the data must be verified/validated, converted to specific codes, and lastly saved into a particular file structure/format to complete the process.

This brings me to the present. The majority of recent RFPs that we have responded to now contain

about 40 percent of the requirements that directly ask: how will you gather, integrate, and present the data...and display the information for this project? The districts are beginning/continuing to turn from vendors selling products in boxes to partners solving problems that demand thinking outside the box! This shift is mandatory for any enterprise seeking efficiency, data-driven decision making, and dashboards (analytics) for all stakeholders throughout the school community. ■

*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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