

Great Schools New Jersey – The Association of High Need School Districts Meeting – Tuesday, October 23, 2018 Fall Workshop, Atlantic City

I. Welcome: Dr. Michael Salvatore, GSNJ President, Superintendent, Long Branch Public Schools

Dr. Michael Salvatore welcomed meeting participants and introduced Diana Pasculli and Linda Eno from the Department of Education.

II. Discussion of Department of Education Assessment Outreach

Diana Pasculli began the discussion by noting that the Department hoped to get a little clarity on meeting participants' views and to take questions.

She noted that in Phase I of the Department's outreach, they talked to 2300 people in person as they toured the state in May and June.

She added that they understand there is a strong call to move to next generation assessments. They also understand the transition has to be smooth, done thoughtfully and focus on what NJ students need. She said people appreciate accessible data, want to maintain high expectations, be able to see growth in districts, and feel that assessments should be shorter with a more streamlined schedule.

Ms. Pasculli also said they heard a lot about disconnect between standards and standardized assessments. She said standards and assessments aren't meant to be two different systems. Instead, they were meant to be one cycle. She added that it's all about figuring out how to get students to standards and using data to do that.

She informed meeting participants about where the Department is presently. She said that based on what they heard they've started taking small steps. The Commissioner of Education reduced the percentage of test scores in teacher evaluations to 5% and in principal evaluations to 10%. They've also looked at ways they could streamline assessments at the high school level and proposed to the State Board of Education to reduce the number of high school assessments.

Ms. Pasculli said the assessments now have new names: NJ Student Learning Assessment Math / ELA. Also, the length of time devoted to standardized tests has been shortened for all grades.

She noted that all states are required to assess in grades 3-8 and once in high school. She said NJ still has an accountability system in place and is meeting federal ESSA requirements. The state also assesses in science, once each in elementary school, middle school and high school.

Ms. Pasculli also discussed the Department's proposal to the State Board of Education, which includes maintaining ELA 10 and Algebra I as graduation requirements. But the Department is proposing to administer ELA 9 and 10 only (and no longer administer ELA 11). She said there

Great Schools New Jersey – October 23, 2018

will be statewide, end-of-course exams in 9th and 10th grade only. These proposals are for Spring 2019 assessments.

Ms. Pasculli said that right now students in the class of 2021 must pass the ELA 10 and Algebra I assessments. If they don't pass, they have to sit for all required end-of-course exams, and they can no longer use the menu of alternative options for graduation.

She added that Algebra I taken in middle school counts towards meeting the graduation requirement. If students take Algebra I in 7th grade and Geometry in 8th grade, they only have to take the Algebra II assessment in high school.

She noted that the Department is going to take steps to streamline what is now a very complicated process.

Speaking of the Department's proposal to the State Board of Education about high school graduation, Ms. Pasculli said students will have to take ELA 10 and Algebra I. If they don't pass, they will have to take remediation, but it doesn't have to be a full year course. Also, students can retake the assessments, but they don't have to, and the menu of options will still be available to them. She said we shouldn't be focusing so much on assessments in high school. We need to focus more on what students need.

Ms. Pasculli reported that the Department worked with their test vendor to maintain the quality of data, while shortening the length of the test in all tested grades. She noted that the PARCC consortium dissolved last year, but the test items were transferred to New Meridian.

Then Ms. Pasculli moved on to discussion of Phase II of the Department's assessment outreach. She said they want to really dig in during this phase. There will be three different work streams: looking at standards, looking at practice (instruction), and looking at accessibility, increased cultural relevance, the tech platform and the kind of data educators want. Next generation assessments could involve new vendors. She also noted that Phase II will take all year, calling it a process with opportunities for input.

Lori Moore, Lindenwold Superintendent, asked about gathering data on ESL students. She said there's a huge difference between students who are fluent in their native language and had schooling throughout and students who have had significant interruptions in schools, lived and/or are living in poverty and experienced the trauma of immigration, which is the case for students in Lindenwold. She said her ESL 9th graders aren't prepared for ELA 10, and asked that the Department look at the continuum of ESL students.

Ms. Pasculli said the Department does want to dig in, noting that this is a good example of where we need significant discussion. She said the Department put out applications last week for people to apply to be part of working groups, and they are looking for people representing all different communities and concerns.

Dr. Salvatore said the things we learned today will create the headlines of tomorrow (he had started the meeting reading several press headlines about assessment), and thanked the Department for sharing information and for their transparency.

III. Legislative Update

Melanie Schulz, Director of Government Relations for NJASA, reported that Senator Ruiz, Chair of the Senate Education Committee, is restarting the discussion about QSAC. Ms. Schulz said she will circulate an email looking for feedback about QSAC. She also noted that the Joint Committee on the Public Schools will be holding a hearing on Dec. 4 about QSAC.

Ms. Schulz also reported that the week prior a small group went to talk to Senate staffers about school funding. She said a new group of districts that are losing adjustment aid have needs now, adding that it's important to educate and look for solutions in this regard.

Jorden Schiff, Hillsborough Superintendent, noted that at the funding meeting questions about the legislative intent of bill S2, which made changes to the school funding formula, were discussed. He said that going to referendum as the only way to raise the levy needs to change. He added that there are also questions about how state revenue will look next year and what that will mean for school aid.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:25 a.m.