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PRESS RELEASE

NYS PTA offers concerns on ESSA regulations, submits to U.S. Department of Education

July 28, 2016 (Albany) – This week, NYS PTA, on behalf of their nearly 300,000 members and the millions of parents and school children in New York, offered concern regarding certain proposed federal regulations related to implementation of the new Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

“Parents appreciate the intent of the new law; to enable more state and local input and control of our education system, more state and local control and input over standards, assessments and accountability measures and increased family engagement and focus on parental involvement under ESSA,” said Bonnie Russell, NYS PTA President.

NYS PTA Education Coordinator Catherine Romano noted, “family engagement is a critical component of the new federal law, we look forward to helping increase family involvement and engagement in the education of children and call for increased support and resources to support family involvement.”

“However, we urged caution regarding attempts in regulation to abrogate local and state control and decision making that was a cornerstone of ESSA,” added Russell. “We are concerned about certain proposals in federal regulation and want to ensure that parents continue to have the right to make informed educational decisions for their children, especially in areas connected to assessments.”

NYS PTA expressed concerns over the possible requirement that 2016-17 school year results and data be used to identify the first group of targeted improvement schools.

Vice President Jane Harsha noted, “appropriate time for development and implementation of a new accountability system is necessary to ensure meaningful collaboration between state education officials and stakeholders in order to develop a thoughtful accountability system that serves all children and schools.”

Further, NYS PTA shared concerns about the possible requirement that only the four-year graduation rate be used to determine graduation rates for accountability, noting that ESSA allows for graduation rates to include more than only a four-year cohort for determining which high schools must be identified for interventions if the rate falls below 67 percent.

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“Many states, including New York, report graduation rates from both five and six year calculations,” said Lana Ajemian, Federal Legislative Chair. “State and local control is critical to ensure states have the ability to accommodate learning environments for their students, especially at risk students, students with disabilities and English language learners.”

Importantly, NYS PTA wrote in concern with the regulations on participation in assessments, including requirements that states must take action by placing schools in the lowest accountability category if the school fails to meet the 95 percent participation rate requirement, and that if more than five percent of an accountability group on an accountability measure does not participate in state assessment, those students would be considered as non-proficient for reporting purposes.

“NYS PTA strongly supports a parent’s right to make informed educational decisions for their children,” noted Kyle McCauley Belokopitsky, NYS PTA Executive Director. “We fully support the right of every parent to decide what is best for their child, which includes decisions around their child’s participation in state assessment.”

Belokopitsky added, “NYS PTA believes that schools must establish a balanced use of assessments to inform instruction without over testing or emphasizing test performance. We do not support the use of a single test or assessment for placement, promotion, retention decisions or other high-stakes decisions affecting students. Over-emphasis on high-stakes testing, especially tests that can be linked to both educator and school accountability, is detrimental to students and the education process.”

For full comments and recommendations, please see the attached letter.

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