

**At Summer Leadership Conference, Rick Longhurst and Catherine Romano held a workshop session entitled "Hot Topics In Education."**

The following are questions that workshop attendees posted (in black) and answers provided to the best of our ability (in blue). Please note that when discussing school process, we provide a general understanding. For what actually occurs in your school or district, please speak to teachers, principals, district office leaders, and superintendents.

**Questions**

**Charter Schools**

- What is the best way to hinder formation of Charter Schools?

NYS PTA in the past has supported charter schools as potential *"incubators of creativity and innovation"* while insisting that funding of charter schools must not come at the expense of funding traditional public schools.

Establishment of charter schools is a local community decision. Advocacy requires being informed, sharing your views, and gathering the support of others when needed.

NYS PTA recommends staying informed of events related to your school and surrounding communities. Potential charter schools must hold public meetings before submission of application to the NYS Board of Regents or SUNY for authorization. It is important to attend those meetings, ask about the implications on your local school district and your students, and share your opinion.

**Student Testing Issues**

- Concern with testing in relation to kids with Asperger's Syndrome + high functioning kids who have difficulty with testing:

While each student is different, policy does not specify a differentiated testing Asperger's vs. high functioning special education students. All special education students are supposed to receive their accommodations during test administration. However, in spite of NYS requests to the contrary, students are mandated by federal regulation to be tested according to their age, not their instructional level.

- Do teachers use their specific students' test results to modify their approach to teaching their current class?

NYS PTA advocates that the prime purpose and use of tests should be to improve the overall quality of student learning. NYS PTA's Position Paper on Assessment, Testing and Learning can be found at: <http://www.nyspta.org/pdf/Advocacy/Position-Paper-Assessment-and-Testing-0715.pdf>

For local testing, teachers often prepare the tests, either individually or as a group. Once a test is graded, good teachers will adjust the pace of instruction and provide support or extension activities to students based on the results.

Once the state assessment data is available to Curriculum leaders in a district, there is usually deep analysis of the released assessment questions compared with individual and grouped scores (by classroom, by subgroup etc.). Scores are provided according to question with alignment to specific state standards and expected performance measures. That data is shared with the student's current teacher and teaching staff are usually briefed on how students performed and provided with recommended adjustments to teaching or curriculum.

View the currently released NYS assessment questions:

<https://www.engageny.org/resource/released-2015-3-8-ela-and-mathematics-state-test-questions>

To view the latest and archived Regents exams: <http://www.nysedregents.org/>

To view the NYSED document for parents to discuss assessment results with students:

<https://www.engageny.org/resource/families-to-students>

- What can parents do to fight Common Core testing? NYS PTA believes that high standards taught effectively and assessed appropriately offer hope to improve student learning in all classrooms across our state. Therefore we support the higher expectations of Common Core Learning Standards. However, we feel the rollout of new state tests designed to measure student learning by those standards has been flawed. Moreover, uses of the test results for high stakes decisions regarding teachers and schools has distracted from the aims of testing to ensure learning is aligned with these standards.

We are engaged in ongoing communication with NYSED, the Board of Regents, partner associations and the legislature to keep what is best for students at the core of policy discussions. Representatives of NYS PTA regularly attend the Regents meetings and participate in committees and focus groups when possible.

NYS PTA recently released two position papers that can help local PTA units and members in their discussions and advocacy:

Assessment, Testing, and Learning: <http://www.nyspta.org/pdf/Advocacy/Position-Paper-Assessment-and-Testing-0715.pdf>

Educating the Whole Child: <http://www.nyspta.org/pdf/Advocacy/Position-Paper-Whole-Child-0715.pdf>

- Why change from Pearson to Questar and what is the expected outcome? Other than size and location, what are the differences between Pearson and Questar?

NYSED uses vendors to develop grade 3 through 8 state assessments and manage data collection and analysis. The cycle for selecting vendors for the next five years resulted in a contract to Questar replacing Pearson as NYS assessment vendor. Recent legislation requires the commissioner to conduct an assessment of standards and assessments used to measure student growth. Comments by the Commissioner and Chancellor have supported a full review of the process used to design assessment questions, improve turnaround of data to districts, and enhance teacher participation in question design. The expected outcome is shorter assessments, stronger alignment to the standards, better results, and improved student learning and teaching.

- Are issues of privacy and FERPA being addressed? NYSED and local school districts are engaged in ongoing discussions of how to meaningfully share data while protecting student privacy.

- How does test refusal impact teacher evaluations? Test refusal impacts the ability to predict how well students are prepared to meet learning expectations and standards, and can impact the process used to determine an individual teacher's growth scores.

Teachers use assessment (testing) data when planning curriculum, adjusting teaching or seeking targeted professional development. District and school leaders use assessment data to plan for and to provide student support services and this data is one of multiple elements considered when planning classroom rosters for the coming school year.

For their annual evaluation (APPR), teachers and principals must have at least 16 student scores to be attributed to growth. This can be a combination of ELA and Math, or scores over a two year period. Should a minimum number of participants not be met or should the teacher be assigned to a non-test area, the student growth will be measured according to Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) or a building-wide assessment growth score that in turn is applied to that measure of APPR as agreed upon

between the district and bargaining units and approved by NYS. In anticipation that some teachers may not reach the 16 student score threshold, the education department requires that “backup” SLOs be developed to use as an alternative.

## **APPR**

- How do you grade teachers fairly? Should parents be asked to help? While these are opinion questions, in general NYS PTA believes student achievement and growth should be factors in evaluating teachers. However, the weight of these factors should be less than currently assigned by the Governor and legislature.

NYSPTA recommends teachers be evaluated according to measures aligned with the NYS Teacher Standards and Principals aligned with the ISLIC (Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium) standards. These standards cover a range of good practice expectations including observation, professional practice, knowledge of student, and interaction with parents and the community and were adopted by the NYS Board of Regents in 2011. Parent and student input should therefore be part of the evaluation process as knowledge of student and interactions with parents are elements of both standards. Legislation introduced by the Governor and adopted this past spring by the legislature does not, however, permit use of such input.

- What are PTA's thoughts regarding publication of individual teacher and principal ratings? We believe strongly in providing parents with the best data on their school's performance rather than relying on unsubstantiated opinion or rumor, while respecting individual teacher and principal privacy consistent with personnel policies. In an ideal world, parents would have as much good information about their child's educators to make good learning decisions, and that would include data about individual teachers and principals. However, we are not there yet.

We also know the current APPR system is narrowly focused; the assessment system and growth formulas are in flux and both determine individual teacher and principal ratings. Therefore, this data is considered by many to be suspect. In speaking with school leaders, we understand very few parents have actually requested access to their teacher/principal rating in the past year so believe parents understand the rating system flaws make this data unreliable in many circumstances.

- What can local PTAs and school boards do to state that we do not support high stakes testing and APPR in current form? As in all advocacy:

- research your position to provide both hard data and personal stories when formulating a written position to share with leaders
- contact your legislative representatives to discuss your position and the impact of the current system on your children first, your educators second then ask for support
- participate in dialogue sessions with representatives of NYSED, Board of Regents, Senate/Assembly, and Governors office sharing your advocacy story or ask NYS PTA volunteer leaders and staff to do so on your behalf.
- watch and react to ESEA reauthorization at the federal level which impacts our state education system

- Who does the independent observations? Independent observations must be conducted by an observer “trained” and certified by the district, and must not be listed on the school building roster of educators. For example, this may be a principal/administrator from another school or district, a central office administrator, a retired principal/administrator, college professor, or a teaching peer. But any outside observer must be certified by the district and aligned according to the state approved negotiated APPR plan.

## Struggling Schools

-NYS PTA needs to assist regions and local PTAs in these districts and needs guidance as to how. While NYS PTA receives information from the Regents and partner associations on many issues, we currently have few details on the receivership/struggling schools guidance. When we receive clarification, we will share that information.

- As our district that has encountered receivership recently, what are the benefits/ losses? How do we overcome this and help our children's education? Only a limited number of schools in receivership will receive a portion of the \$75 million grant funds. However all struggling schools are engaged in planning for turnaround. NYSED advocates use of the Diagnostic Tool for School/District Effectiveness, which contains sections that require parent participation. We recommend requesting full parent participation in the planning committee, training for parents on turnaround, school issues and reading/interpreting data. Further parent on the turnaround team must continually engage other parents and community members on the turnaround process and advocating for their schools and district.

- Why doesn't NYC have PTAs? NYC regulations dating back to the late 1960's limit participation in parent associations of the NYC school system. Thus, only parents with children currently registered in the specific school may be members of its parent association, teacher and principal participation in such groups is restricted, and there is no allowance for community membership in parent associations in NYC. These restrictions are inconsistent with PTA's inclusive membership policy. NYS PTA and National PTA are continually engaged with NYC leaders on this issue and have chartered community PTAs to overcome this limitation.

- Young parents who did not excel at school are not encouraging attendance and performance. How do we change this? - Struggling schools have many kids who don't attend regularly. What are PTA's recommendations? As PTA leaders, you can create programs to help parents understand the need to encourage participation in school, to improve school attendance, and set goals for performance. Many schools also benefit from programs that meet the National PTA Family-School Partnership standards and enhance parent communication and collaboration with teachers and other school staff.

Check out research by

Anne E Casey Foundation on attendance: <http://www.aecf.org/search?q=school+attendance>

Attendance Matters resources: <http://www.parent-institute.com/attendance.php>

Attendance Works: <http://www.attendanceworks.org/>

Houston Schools Program: <http://www.houstonisd.org/attendance>

NYS Resources on College Readiness: <https://www.engageny.org/search-site/student%20attendance?solrsort=score%20desc&&js=1>

- How can we get resources other than just money into struggling schools? This is a complex task that requires schools to reach within and outside the community for support. A critical first step is to use the National PTA Standards for Family-School Partnerships to analyze how your school and PTA can reach beyond yourselves to fill gaps in programs and create a supportive environment for volunteers and community participation. You should also keep communicating with school leaders regarding the plans outlined in the DTSDE and other turn-around models. Then share your story with others through the news and other communication vehicles.

- If struggling schools end up being taken over by a private operator, will they have to adhere to mandates, regulations etc. and will taxpayers be funding their operation? We do not currently have enough information to answer this question, but the issue is one that will need to be a top priority in the upcoming legislative session.

### **Pathways to Graduation**

- How do new pathways affect special needs students? [New or alternative pathways offer non-traditional means toward graduation by specializing in STEM/STEAM, language, and Arts courses to meet Regents history exam requirements for graduation. It is difficult to say how this will affect individual students, as each is unique.](#)

- Will kids get set back if they change pathways steps? [We are unsure as this is a newly implemented opportunity.](#)

### **New Forms of Teacher Preparation**

- How will this affect our schools? Could we lose many good teachers? [Improved teacher preparation programs should improve teaching and learning in our schools, but as this system is not yet established, we can only hope it works and that we will not lose future potential teachers. At the same time, the manner in which we do this will be critical to our future. Be prepared for a number of future questions on this topic.](#)

- What will the impact of certification changes be on tenure? [We are unsure.](#)

- Who pays for the 100 hours of teacher professional development need to maintain certification? [Some professional development is paid for by school districts according to negotiated contracts; the teachers unions offer some professional development; while other professional development would be the individual teacher's responsibility.](#)

### **Impact of student test refusal**

- What are long term ramifications if a school has a high opt out rate? Do we really know? Will schools lose their NY state Aid or Title I dollars if many students opt out of state tests? [For now, threat of losing Federal Funding has been removed for the past year. As to the future we are unsure. Assessment participation is currently being discussed by the Regents, NYSED, and the legislature. There is a focus on improving the 3-8 assessments, reexamining the growth score construct, and revising the scale score matrix, along with an effort by all to encourage assessment participation.](#)

-What are we teaching our children if they opt out? They need to face things in life? -Teachers and parents had an opt out rate over 50%. What stance have we reflected to show the "T" in PTA? [These are opinion questions which we all struggle with. We need to hear your thoughts.](#)

- What are the reasons we shouldn't opt out? [Please see the responses in the Student Testing Issues section and the APPR section.](#)

### **State Aid/ GEA**

-Can we join others to amend the State Constitution so the governor's power is more subject to true democratic process in the legislature?

- Can we get more information on possible hidden agenda attacks on local, public education to move taxpayer \$ into private hands?

[NYS PTA collaborates with a number of other organizations on these issues, including Educational Conference Board, NY Public Interest Group, Alliance for Quality Education, Campaign for Educational Equity, NYS League of Women Voters and others. For further discussion please contact Rick Longhurst at \[rlonghurst@nyspta.org\]\(mailto:rlonghurst@nyspta.org\).](#)

- How does the GEA work? Basically, in 2010 the legislature was implementing a four-year increasing aid formula called Foundation Aid, based upon the settlement of a major lawsuit. After a loss in state revenue that year, it was decided to enact a percentage reduction of State support to schools and title it the Gap Elimination Adjustment. This GEA was continued in subsequent years while state revenue lagged and the state budget gap widened. In the past two years, the state has predicted greater revenues and begun cutting the GEA reduction, thereby increasing Foundation Aid slightly across the state. Funding for some of the neediest districts was targeted first to be restored by reducing GEA by larger percentages. Some middle wealth districts are still awaiting full Foundation Aid restoration.

- What is so difficult about getting rid of the GEA? Why is it still an issue, even with being a hot topic, especially for the past two years? The legislature has been faced with two competing interests, increasing aid to low wealth, high need schools or to lower need, higher wealth districts. This is an especially difficult challenge with the presence of a property tax cap under which higher wealth districts can raise far more support for schools locally than low wealth communities. In the earlier years of GEA reduction, efforts were made to minimize aid cuts to the neediest school districts. Now, with only \$434 million in cuts to be restored, GEA reductions to low wealth districts have largely been eliminated leaving average to above average wealth districts the most likely to benefit from eliminating what remains.

At the same time that initial GEA reductions were originally imposed, Foundation aid was frozen. Phasing in Foundation tends to benefit low wealth, higher need districts. Rationally and politically, the legislature wants to provide larger bottom line percentage aid increases to low wealth schools than to those of higher wealth. In order to do that within the total amount they are willing to spend, they now have to put more money into increasing Foundation aid than into eliminating the GEA. Significant lawsuits addressing these issues that will be considered by the courts beginning in early November, and the Educational Conference Board will recommend both full elimination of the remaining \$434 million in GEA cuts and a major Foundation Aid increase in its 2016-17 state aid proposal. Please stay tuned. For GEA information see : [http://sap.questar.org/publications/taxcap/GEA\\_fs2014.pdf](http://sap.questar.org/publications/taxcap/GEA_fs2014.pdf)

### **Investment Tax Credit and non Public Support**

If the number of charter schools in NY continues to increase, how will we be able to fund both public and charter schools? We are not sure in the current environment how this will be accomplished. The legislature adopted some support for private schools in the 2015-16 school year based on money owed from previous year's private schools expenditures. Added public support for private and charter school expenditures is certain to be re-visited in the next legislative session.

### **Tax Caps and rebates**

- How does the income level of a community affect the tax cap?
- How does the income level of a community affect how much the school budget can be raised?

**There is no provision within the tax cap formula that adjusts for personal or income level in the community. Even if there were, experience suggests that low income communities would be less likely to approve a budget with a higher tax cap even if such an income adjust was included. Because higher wealth communities are able to raise nine to ten times the amount per student under a tax cap than the lowest wealth communities, it becomes imperative that the State adjust its aid formulas to prevent current expenditure gaps from growing even larger.**

## Administration of Medications

-We need clear guidelines on how Narcan administration will be available to nurses.

See <http://www.schoolhealthservicesny.com/faq.cfm?subpage=394> and <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/sss/documents/NewLawOpioidOverdosePreventMemo.pdf>

- Why do we want schools to be able to administer opiate antagonists? The rate of opiate overdose has been increasing at alarming rates across NYS. Naloxone/Narcan is a safe and effective medication that can reverse the effects of an opioid overdose. Having Naloxone/Narcan available on site can keep a person alive until emergency services can arrive. For more information about opiate overdose, please go to: <http://www.combatheroin.ny.gov/>

## Child safety/ DASA

-How can units help schools and parents prepare for the accommodation of transgender facilities? Should they advocate or educate? Read about the Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Students Guidance Document NYSED has distributed to all NYS school districts. <http://www.nysed.gov/Press/Transgender-and-Gender-Nonconforming-Students-Guidance-Document>

- We need strict regulation on e- cigarettes – NYS PTA has a position entitled ELECTRONIC CIGARETTES AND YOUTH, found in *Where We Stand*. PTAs can advocate on this issue directly to the US Food and Drug Administration. To learn more about e-cigarettes, you can go to: <http://www.fda.gov/TobaccoProducts/NewsEvents/ucm439029.htm>. PTAs can also reach out to the Wellness Team-- Wellness Coordinator Lucille Vitale: [wellness@nyspta.org](mailto:wellness@nyspta.org) and Health Specialist Anne Ehrlich: [health@nyspta.org](mailto:health@nyspta.org) and

- How can we advocate that all school buses have cameras that record stops? NYS PTA has a number of positions regarding school bus safety. You can review them in the Safety section of *Where We Stand*: <http://www.nyspta.org/pdf/Advocacy/WHERE-WE-STAND-2015.pdf> . If your PTA is looking to write a new resolution specific to this issue, go to: [http://nyspta.org/Advocacy/advocacy\\_resolutions.cfm](http://nyspta.org/Advocacy/advocacy_resolutions.cfm) . For additional assistance on writing a resolution, contact Resolutions Coordinator Dana Platin at [resolutions@nyspta.org](mailto:resolutions@nyspta.org). For any questions regarding pending legislation, contact Legislation Coordinator Susanne Smoller at [legislation@nyspta.org](mailto:legislation@nyspta.org).

- How are schools being held accountable for not taking action related to student safety? It is important to determine what the specific student safety issue is. If it is an individual student concern, parents should be encouraged to reach out directly to their building administration. If this is a building or district wide issue, PTA units and councils should work together with their district administration and/or their Board of Education to find a solution. There are also school and district committees that PTAs can join to help advocate for policy changes. Local PTAs should reach out to their Region PTAs for assistance. To access your Region, go to: [http://www.nyspta.org/AboutPTA/AboutPTA\\_Regions.cfm](http://www.nyspta.org/AboutPTA/AboutPTA_Regions.cfm)

## Nutrition, Alcohol/ Substance abuse

- School lunches are not good enough. How do you help companies provide more and better food?

- What is PTA's position on School lunches and how can we prevent waste and rising costs? NYS PTA has a position paper called PARTNERS FOR HEALTHY LIFESTYLES. This can help local PTAs to advocate for district specific policies. Also, under federal guidelines, school districts are required to have School Wellness Policies which are updated, assessed and revised every three years. The

regulations can be accessed at: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/local-school-wellness-policy> . PTAs can have representation on Wellness Committees that can review what food service vendors are brought in to the district. There are also “Smart Snack” guidelines that districts must follow. PTAs can advocate that districts comply. Here is the link: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/healthierschoolday/tools-schools-focusing-smart-snacks> .

- With food allergies growing exponentially, what steps can be taken to provide more education?

The NYS Department of Health has developed a guide for districts. To access the guide, see [http://www.health.ny.gov/professionals/protocols\\_and\\_guidelines/docs/caring\\_for\\_students\\_with\\_life\\_threatening\\_allergies.pdf](http://www.health.ny.gov/professionals/protocols_and_guidelines/docs/caring_for_students_with_life_threatening_allergies.pdf) Local PTAs can work with their Region PTA to collaborate with local cooperating partners that can provide education and support to districts and PTAs.

Contact Wellness Coordinator Lucille Vitale: [wellness@nyspta.org](mailto:wellness@nyspta.org) and Health Specialist Anne Ehrlich: [health@nyspta.org](mailto:health@nyspta.org) for programs and advocacy information to help with your question and to elaborate further.

### **Other?**

-What are the top two things good and bad that could happen if we have a state constitutional convention? This again is an opinion question, so we are dreaming or having nightmares -

#### **Good**

1. Limits on the Governor and Legislature interference in Education Policy by linking state dollars to unrelated program requirements. (e.g. linking aid increases to new APPR adoption requirements)
2. Streamlined and guaranteed funding to public schools without jeopardizing districts or schools for charter or non-public school subsidies in any form

#### **Bad**

1. Removing the current level of support required for public education that would decrease the funding responsibilities of the state
2. Increasing or altering the power of the Governor and/or the state legislature regarding education funding and policy
3. Significant changes to retirement system rules. This could be either good or bad, depending on your perspective but is certain to be one factor that state unions would use to argue against a constitutional convention