

New York State



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June 2009 Board of Regents Information

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For the Commissioner's Report to the Board of Regents, go to:
<http://oms32.nysed.gov/comm/2009/0609commrep.htm>

For a complete listing of the reports and materials for the June Board of Regents meeting, go to: <http://www.regents.nysed.gov/meetings/2009Meetings/June2009/0609monthmat-new.html>

The Full Board discussed the following:

Graduation Rates:

Commissioner Mills reported that rates were up and now average 74% statewide. There are differences; however that suggest policy decisions which will become necessary.

- Graduation rates are based on a four year cohort. Moving to a five year cohort would increase graduation rates among students of color but would have no significant impact on ELL students or students with disabilities. The commissioner did report that dropout rates had declined among these two latter groups so there are more of these students still in the "pipeline".
- Regents exam score improved in math and English but actually got worse in global studies and science
- The Regents have gradually moved toward requiring a Regents diploma for graduation of all students (22 credits and a score of 65 or better on five Regents exams.) This year's ninth graders will be the first cohort subject to the requirement. The current "local diploma" only requires a grade of 65 on four tests with a grade of 55 or better on the fifth. The question before the Regents will be whether or not to move to the full 5 exams at 65 or keep it where it is. The problem is that among students of color, students with disabilities and in the big five cities, local diplomas make up nearly half of all students graduating.

Commissioner Mills stressed the need for increased leadership training, especially that which focuses on student achievement.

Joint Committee on Audits and State Aid.

The Regents are concerned about district “fiscal fitness” and district fiscal health as it relates to student academic performance. Most districts in fiscal distress are lower wealth, higher need districts but there are also some lower need districts on the distress list. (e.g. Tuckahoe) SED looks at audit reports and designates districts as under stress or objects of concern based largely on the size of their end of year fund balance or deficit. Regents expressed concern that these reports are not timely since they only receive them well after the school year has ended and that there is measureable weakness in academic performance that accompanies most districts experiencing fiscal stress. There was one example of an exception (a small city in the Capital region) where academic improvement was noted. Problem was, in that district, where educational investment increased annually, tax levy did not. When the problem came, it hit hard with massive layoffs.

State Aid Committee.

The Regents met on this issue and have invited a smaller group (including NYS PTA) to provide input the next Friday. Regent Tallon and Chuck Szuberla described their version of an approaching perfect storm. Following the 2010-11 school year:

- Federal stimulus money is scheduled to go away
- Temporary NYS taxes on high income earners are scheduled to expire
- NYS Retirement system costs will take a large jump upward
- Retiree health costs are projected to increase
- There are projected to be fewer retirements that permit higher salaried employees to be replaced by lower salaried employees
- District will have exhausted reserves and expenditure cut opportunities designed to keep tax increases low

In designing their fiscal recommendations, the Regents are looking at several questions.

- Should the foundation formula be protected? If so, how? Keep in mind that the courts have and would continue to have something to say about this.
- There are increased costs for expense aids (BOCES, Building, Transportation and Special Ed) by about \$400 million per year. Is there anything that can be done to curtail these cost increases?
- Are there significant dollars to be saved through sharing and consolidation?

Race to the Top

NYSED, Regent Young, and Chancellor Tiche are vigorously pursuing the “Race to the Top” federal funding. They are “in it to win it”. The proposals will focus on four areas:

1. Recruitment, training, and retention of good teacher; 2. Enhanced data systems; 3. Improving low performing districts; and 4. Revision of standards and assessments. Comm. Mills reported that there does not seem to be any advantage in forming coalitions with other states. NYS will probably “go it alone”. The RFP draft will be out in July.