

**Notes from the Q & A portion of “In Conversation with Commissioner Elia” from the 2016 Annual Conference. These questions were asked and answered after Commissioner Elia’s opening words from the Networking Session with takes place each year on Wednesday afternoon to kick off the annual conference. All administrators, supervisors, teacher leaders, and conference attendees are invited to join this session.**

Q – My school is adopting a model of composite score of all RE scores for all teachers but English. For English teachers, SLO based on RE, they alone get their score only from their students RE exams.

A – We have over 750 districts and all are doing their own response to APPR. NYS has laws about evaluations for teachers – that’s the law you didn’t like. When we unplugged that, we were not able to get rid of the law. So we worked through a way we could have school districts provide for us, after they negotiate with their union and management, put in a new plan. Districts are doing different things. Some plans are approved, some not yet. They’re trying to be as flexible as they can. Go to your union to ask about. If it’s been approved, it shouldn’t be difficult to get a copy of what was approved. Talk to your union.

Q – Do you have a final decision regarding 2 vs 3 days of testing for this year?

A – Not yet. We have to change tests anyway in two years. Changing every year is problematic.

Q – Regarding the opt out movement - do you have a long term strategy for addressing that? We have a strong opt out on Long Island. This makes it more difficult to use it as a fair assessment

A – We need to change some of what we just talked about. The way the opt out went this year is interesting. It stayed flat, going from 20% to 21%. The other piece is that 50% of students who opted out the year before came back and took the test. And 50% of students who took the test last year opted out. People think there are characteristics of the opt out students – level 1s and 2s. They’re not ELL or SWD or free / reduced lunch. So , what we have to do is communicate changes we’re making, talk through that. We’re not going to get away from this overnight; there has to be a lot of conversation. You are the people parents most trust. If a parent wants to know what to do they go to teachers, not principals. There’s no question that when you have highest opt out in the nation that it creates problems for all of us. In the end, what else will they opt out of? 3rd - 8th grade tests but then jump in for 9<sup>th</sup> because they count? We’re getting data back earlier and need to do better so a teacher could get the report and know

how well they did or what we can do to support them. The whole idea of assessment is a reality in education. When we get back to equilibrium and parents see that opting out is a negative, I think they'll think differently about it. I'm not in favor of taking money away from kids. The federal government is very concerned, and probably there are going to be some really negative consequences. Hopefully teachers will be leaders of what questions come from parents and what to do with their child.

- Q – I got a beautiful letter of opt out because of consequences to teachers.
- A – I agree – we have to put in place a collaborative and productive eval system that's not just a gotcha. I don't think we can opt kids out of their life. I don't think it's positive to tell kids to opt out.
- Q – You mentioned changes to assessments. What do you envision that will look like? Length? Days? Number of passages?
- A – We have to have enough questions to differentiate kids' levels. I anticipate looking at all those things, and I assure you teachers in NY will write the questions. This past year, we had a question bank. And every one was reviewed by 22 teachers. If they didn't like question it went off the test. There has already been influx of teacher involvement. This summer people wrote questions that will be field tested this coming year. This year we'll do the same thing and doing the field testing on those questions written by NYS teachers. The following year all work will be done by NY teachers. We might be a little longer on a 2 day test vs a 3 day. Will it be the same time of year? There are some different things we can do. We are also required to change accountability system because of ESSA. The requirements for assessments are there. The law says must assess at every grade 3-8 in ELA and Math. We can't change that. Some models of assessments have kids assessed more times in a year. Standards have to be taught in that block of time. There are pros and cons to that. In some ways that restricts teaching.
- Q – Is there any discussion about alternative assessment for sub groups? Special ed? Trust with teacher is diminished because they succeed throughout the year but fail assessments.
- A – We get requested waivers every year with ELL and SWD students; particularly with SWDs who could do adaptive test formats. The Fed requires first questions to be on grade level, then it drops them to a lower level.
- Q – Regarding the 3-8 untimed portion – We can't find research that supports untimed testing; it says to write better tests. Students will get to the bar exam and say this reminds me of 8<sup>th</sup> grade ELA.

A – Some stay because they want to be perfect and others say “I’m out.” and could do better. We have a

technical advisory committee with psychometricians. No research says do it and none says it’s really bad. We heard kids get so stressed, as do parents and teachers. Some do timed, some don’t. The tests will be timed for next year, but the guidance can be more clear.

Q – What can we do to recruit new teachers?

A – We have a committee of varied people – co-chancellor, senate, assembly, unions, trying to come up with

10 actions. We are reviewing the teacher certification test. We’re looking at rules regarding possible opened reciprocity. Teachers could get certified, then after 3 years in another state with positive evaluations they can come to NY. We’re looking to see if that’s really bringing teachers in. We’re looking at ways of incentivize work in our high schools. High schools could put in programs of magnet HS for future teachers (with connections to local teacher college programs). We had projected 5 years ago a big retirement – but because of financial situations, many have stayed. At the same time, the financial situation caused 45,000 educators to be laid off. Some were hired back, some had gone to other careers. Everyone wants at least for there to be a chance you’ll get a job in the career you prepare for. Right now people aren’t thinking it’s a good option. The public has bashed teachers for a long time. We have a lot of work to do. We have to make it [teaching] a reasonable career. We have to support new teachers. Unfortunately, retention is not a focus, despite regulations. We’re facing shortages and as we move forward they’re only going to get worse.

Q – The cost of EdTPA is problem.

A – We are requesting funding for additional waivers, changing assessments, and negotiating a lower price

and changing the way it’s being done.

Q – What message should we bring back to our teachers?

A – That standards have been around for a long time. They are not a new new thing and no one did it to screw

the teachers of NY. Standards are a part of our career and they should be changed and reviewed and practitioners should expect them to change. They should drive the work in the classroom. Who better than teachers to give us that feedback? I send emails to all constituents requesting feedback. Let your teachers be the professionals they are and give us feedback. We’ve got a lot of things to solve; we can either all work towards it or not. I know it’s time consuming, so I’m asking administrators to give some time, but it probably won’t be enough. Still, I hope teachers take the opportunity.