

# COUNCILgram



CONNECTING THE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP COMMUNITY

## SUNDAY KEYNOTE CALLS FOR REINVIGORATING PLC MODEL TO MOVE “FROM PLC LITE TO PLC RIGHT”

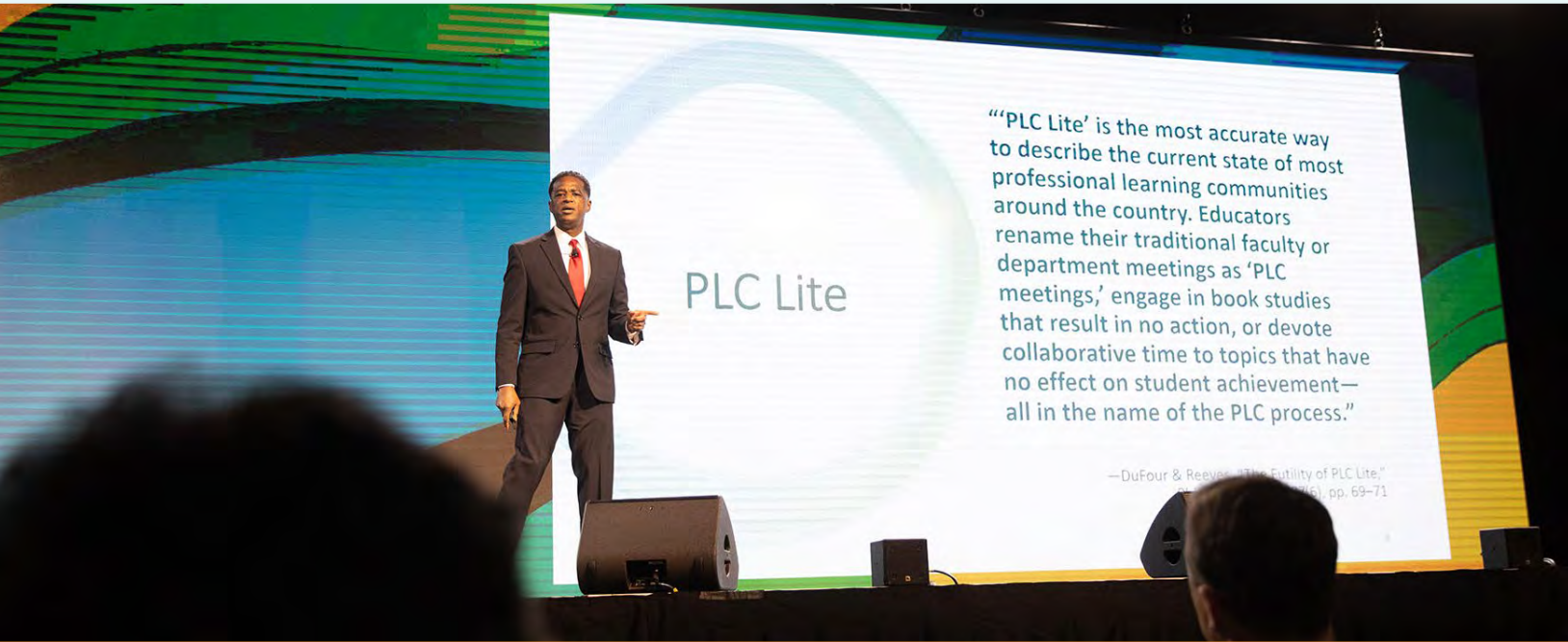
By Jill Aurora, Freelance Writer

In his keynote to kick off the NYSCOSS 2024 Winter Institute, **Dr. Anthony Muhammad**, CEO of New Frontier 21 Consulting, issued a call for educators to fully embrace the Professional Learning Community (PLC) model as a pathway for serving all students in the post-pandemic era.

“The pandemic disrupted every facet of our schools. This is not the time to back away from PLC work - this is the time to reinforce its foundation,” urged Muhammad, a renowned international thought leader. “Too often, we’ve settled for ‘PLC Lite’ with superficial book studies rather than actualizing the PLC process as intended.”

Muhammad reflected on the immense challenges facing educators over the past five years, from the March 2020 COVID-19 shutdowns to 2023 realities like 80% of teachers disliking their jobs amid strained conditions. “You can’t pour from an empty vessel,” he stated, advocating for treating educators as “thoroughbreds, not mules.”

Weaving personal stories with educational ideology and data, the keynote highlighted decades of policy impacts from *Brown vs. Board* to Title IX. Muhammad challenges attendees to think deeply about “What are we fighting for today?” CONT / 2



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The New York State Council of School Superintendents is a professional and advocacy organization with over a century of service to school superintendents in New York State. The Council provides its more than 875 members with numerous professional development opportunities, publications and personal services, while advocating for public education and the superintendency.

CAREER CENTER

Superintendent Vacancies

Superintendent of Schools  
 Location ..... Addison CSD  
 Addison, NY  
 Salary ..... base \$155,000

Superintendent of Schools  
 Location ..... Amagansett UFSD  
 Amagansett, NY  
 Salary ..... Regionally Competitive

Superintendent of Schools  
 Location ..... Arlington CSD  
 LaGrangeville, NY  
 Salary ..... Competitive

Superintendent of Schools  
 Location ..... Auburn Enlarged CSD  
 Auburn, NY  
 Salary ..... \$185,000 - \$225,000

Superintendent of Schools  
 Location ..... Bolivar-Richburg CSD  
 Bolivar, NY  
 Salary ..... Open

Superintendent of Schools  
 Location ..... Caledonia-Mumford CSD  
 Caledonia, NY  
 Salary ..... Up to \$175,000

Superintendent of Schools  
 Location ..... Cattaraugus-Little Valley  
 Cattaraugus, NY  
 Salary ..... Not less than \$165,000

Superintendent of Schools  
 Location ..... Cold Spring Harbor CSD  
 Cold Spring Harbor, NY  
 Salary ..... Regionally Competitive

Superintendent of Schools  
 Location ..... Depew UFSD  
 Depew, NY  
 Salary ..... starting at \$190,000

Superintendent of Schools  
 Location ..... Fonda-Fultonville CSD  
 Fonda, NY  
 Salary ..... \$150,000 - \$180,000

Superintendent of Schools  
 Location ..... Frewsburg CSD  
 Frewsburg, NY  
 Salary ..... Up to \$165,000

District Superintendent  
 and Chief Executive Office  
 Location ..... Orleans-Niagara BOCES  
 Salary ..... \$190,000 – \$208,250

Superintendent of Schools  
 Location ..... Oxford Academy  
 Oxford, NY  
 Salary ..... \$150,000 - \$165,000

Superintendent of Schools  
 Location ..... Romulus CSD  
 Romulus, NY  
 Salary ..... Competitive

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pointing to crises like boys’ academic struggles and soaring student anxiety and depression rates.

“In 2019, 11% of adults suffered from anxiety and depression. By 2021, it was 41%,” he shared. “We have to reset and address these deep ideological divides with urgency before recreating the pre-COVID stratified system.”

Muhammad contended the original PLC vision holds solutions, but it requires shifting from comparative, meritocratic mindsets to true collaboration around evidence of student learning and results. He urged leaders to prioritize becoming genuine learning organizations guided by PLC’s “three big ideas,” a focus on learning, a collaborative culture, and a renewed focus on results.

“To reach all students, the system itself has to change,” Muhammad stated. “We are our best hope for the future. What legacy will you leave?”



As educators grapple with profound challenges, Muhammad inspired conference attendees to move “from PLC Lite to PLC Right” by centralizing the researched PLC model as a transformative, equity-driven practice.

The keynote was sponsored by [Energia](#) and featured performances by the Windsor Central School District student Americana/Blue Grass rock band [The Butterbeans](#). NYSCOSS also honored Superintendents [Phyllis Harrington](#) of Oceanside UFSD and [Cosimo Tangorra](#) of New Hartford CSD with [Appreciation Awards](#) presented by [Mosaic Associates Architects](#).

**“We are our best hope for the future. What legacy will you leave?”**

## 2024 NYSCOSS EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE ELECTION

By Charles Dedrick, Executive Director, NYSCOSS

This year there are four seats up for election on THE COUNCIL's Executive Committee. The election will take place in-person on Friday, May 31<sup>st</sup> at the spring leadership meeting in Saratoga Springs, NY. The candidates with the three highest number of votes will each serve a 2-year term. The candidate with the fourth highest number of votes will serve a 1-year term, filling the remainder of Lawrence "Bo" Wright's term, since he was elected as NYSCOSS Treasurer beginning July 1, 2024. Whoever is elected to Bo's position will be eligible to run in 2025 for a full 2-year term.

To run for the Executive Committee, members must have served on the House of Delegates in the past five years or be an incumbent Executive Committee member. Alternates to the House of Delegates are not eligible.

Current Executive Committee members whose term expires this year include (in alphabetical order):

- [Corey Green](#), Owego-Apalachin CSD,
- [Catherine Huber](#), Otsego-Northern Catskill BOCES,
- [Ronald Masera](#), Center Moriches UFSD,
- [Raymond C. Sanchez](#), Public Schools of the Tarryowns, and
- [Cosimo Tangorra](#), New Hartford CSD

Four are eligible to seek election in 2024. Cosimo Tangorra is not eligible to run again.

As announced at the last House of Delegates meeting, all nominations for the Executive Committee must be submitted to NYSCOSS between April 16, 2024 and May 17, 2024 at 5:00 p.m. Send an email of your intention to run to Executive Director Chuck Dedrick at [charles@nyscoss.org](mailto:charles@nyscoss.org) or NYSCOSS Program and Membership Associate Allie Andress at [allie@nyscoss.org](mailto:allie@nyscoss.org). Further instructions will be sent to you following your nomination.

## NOMINATIONS FOR AASA GOVERNING BOARD ELECTIONS DUE APRIL 21

By Charles Dedrick, Executive Director, NYSCOSS

New York's total number of AASA members (734) this year allows our state to maintain our current number of seats on the AASA Governing Board. Each governing board seat has a 3-year term and board members may serve no more than two successive, 3-year terms (the terms are staggered to ensure a similar number of vacancies each year).

The current New York representatives on the Governing Board (in alphabetical order) are:

- [Jason Andrews](#), Windsor CSD
- [Cheryl Champ](#), Pelham UFSD
- [Raymond C. Sanchez](#), Ossining UFSD
- [Anibal Soler](#), Schenectady City, and
- [Luelle Brown](#), Ithaca City SD
- [Kevin McGowan](#), Brighton CSD
- [Kusum Sinha](#), Garden City UFSD
- [Randall Squier](#), Coxsackie-Athens CSD

Randall Squier, Coxsackie-Athens CSD will represent New York and our region on AASA's Executive Committee beginning July 1. [Gladys Cruz](#) of Questar 3 BOCES will serve as Past-President.

This year's AASA Governing Board election is for three seats, all currently held by incumbents. Kusum Sinha and Jason Andrews are completing their first 3-year term and are both eligible to run for a second. Cheryl Champ is eligible to run for two 3-year terms since she is completing an unexpired term this year.

Beginning March 31<sup>st</sup> through April 21, 2024, nominations will be accepted for AASA Governing Board positions. Nominations can be sent to [Allie Andress](#), NYSCOSS Program and Membership Associate at [allie@nyscoss.org](mailto:allie@nyscoss.org). The process allows self-nominations from qualified candidates. Or you may nominate someone else. You may also contact General Counsel [Jacinda Conboy](#), [Chuck Dedrick](#) or Allie with questions at 518.449.1063 or by email.

To qualify as a Governing Board Candidate/Representative for New York, you must be:

- An eligible voting member of AASA for at least three years (Active, Institutional-Active, College Professor Member); and,
- A member of AASA's chartered New York State affiliate, THE COUNCIL, for at least three years (active membership only).

In the event there are more nominations than open positions, an election will be conducted during May on dates to be announced. The three candidates with the highest total number of votes will be elected to serve a 3-year term, commencing July 1, 2024.

Governing Board members are responsible for attending two meetings per year – the AASA Summer Governance Meeting in July and the AASA National Conference on Education (NCE) usually in February scheduled for March of 2025. AASA reimburses travel costs for the Summer Governance Meeting, but not travel to the NCE. Governing Board members also serve on the NYSCOSS Federal Relations Committee and are expected to attend those meetings as well.

## COUNSELING MEMORANDUMS: DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN ADMONITIONS AND DISCIPLINE IN DISGUISE

By Cameron B. Daniels, Esq., Partner, Ferrara Fiorenza PC

On December 18, 2023, the Commissioner of Education handed down a decision regarding a counseling memorandum that may have implications as to how school districts will need to draft counseling and written directives to teachers moving forward. In *Appeal of Rogers*, Dec. No. 18,364, the Commissioner reviewed a counseling memorandum that was given to a tenured teacher, and determined that the memorandum was disciplinary in nature and, therefore, violated the teacher's right to a disciplinary hearing under Education Law Section 3020-a.

The decision involved a teacher who received tenure in 2002, and who had refused to comply with the Department of Health's regulations during the 2021-2022 school year which required public school employees to receive vaccinations for COVID-19, or to submit to weekly testing. As a result of the teacher's failure to submit proof of a vaccination or to consent to weekly testing, the teacher was put on an unpaid leave of absence in September 2021 and did not return to teaching until after the expiration of the Department of Health's regulations regarding vaccinations or testing in the fall of 2022.

Upon the teacher's return, the superintendent issued the teacher a counseling memorandum to "bring attention and closure to the district's concerns regarding [her] conduct related to the COVID-19 testing requirements which were in effect during the 2021-2022 school year." The teacher thereafter appealed to the Commissioner, asserting that the memorandum was disciplinary in nature.

Under the case law established by the Court of Appeals in 1984, New York State's highest court recognized a distinction between "admonitions to a teacher [that] are critical of performance" and "disciplinary determinations of a punitive nature." *Holt v. Bd. Of Educ., Webatuck Cent. Sch. Dist.*, 52 NY2d 625 (1984).

In interpreting the Court of Appeals' decision in *Holt*, the Commissioner has identified specific factors in considering whether written criticism constitutes a criticism of performance intended to address "relatively minor breach[es] of school policy" or an impermissible reprimand in violation of a teacher's disciplinary rights under Section 3020-a. These factors include (1) whether the letter is from the teacher's immediate supervisor or from the board of education; (2) whether the letter is directed towards an improvement in performance or is a formal reprimand for prior misconduct; (3) whether the letter is in the nature of a performance evaluation or a castigation for misconduct; and (4) the severity of the misconduct and of the admonition or reprimand. *Matter of Richardson*, 24 Ed Dept Rep 104, Decision No. 11,333.

In the recent *Rogers* decision, the Commissioner addressed only two of these factors, and determined that the letter at issue was not directed towards improving the teacher's performance but rather was a reprimand for past misconduct, and that the severity of the conduct addressed in the letter was of a level requiring discipline under Education Law Section 3020-a. The Commissioner specifically addressed some of the language in the memorandum which included phrases such as "[the teacher]'s deliberate insubordination of State-imposed requirements and the District's repeated directives and communication of its expectations ... not only impacted the District's operations, but ... resulted in an abandonment of our students," that the teacher's conduct was "unprofessional and showed a lack of integrity," and the teacher's "failure to comply with applicable rules and expectations for teachers undermines [her] credibility as a teacher responsible for enforcing classroom/school/District rules and expectations for students."

The Commissioner weighed this language against the expectations established by the superintendent in the memorandum and concluded that the memorandum's broad directives to the teacher requiring her to "follow the law and her supervisor's instructions" tipped the scales in favor of the memorandum constituting discipline rather than an admonition authorized by the *Holt* decision.

This case is an important one for school administrators moving forward. While the *Holt* decision and the Commissioner's factors interpreting *Holt* moving forward remain good case law, superintendents and administrators drafting counseling memorandums may need to give additional consideration to the language of the memorandum, and specifically the language in the memorandum directed towards improving the performance of the teacher. Language which is weighted too strongly toward criticism of the prior conduct of the teacher without expressing clear and specific expectations for improvement of the performance or conduct of the teacher moving forward may tip the balance of the Commissioner's analysis toward the memorandum equating to discipline.

A NYSCOSS Partner, Ferrara Fiorenza's school attorneys provide comprehensive legal services to public school districts/BOCES and assist their superintendents throughout Upstate and Western New York in all aspects of education law, school business operations, employment law and labor relations. Contact Cameron at [cdaniels@ferrarafirm.com](mailto:cdaniels@ferrarafirm.com) or Partner Colleen Heinrich at [cwheinrich@ferrarafirm.com](mailto:cwheinrich@ferrarafirm.com) or call both at 315.437.7600 for more information. You can also visit online at <https://www.ferrarafirm.com/>



FERRARA  
FIORENZA PC

## GOVERNOR'S OFFICE ADDRESSES BUDGET CUTS, SCHOOL FUNDING FORMULA AT WINTER INSTITUTE

By Jill Aurora, Freelance Writer

The frustration of school leaders was evident as senior education staffers from Governor Hochul's office defended proposed budget cuts and plans to revisit the Foundation Aid Formula during an interactive session moderated by NYSOSS and supported by Partner [Veregy](#).



[Terrance N. Pratt, Esq.](#), Senior Counsel to the Governor, acknowledged the state's \$6 billion budget deficit drove difficult decisions. "We removed the Foundation Aid hold-harmless provision for districts with declining enrollments and increasing reserves to avoid spreading funding too thinly," he explained.

While conceding "cuts in 54% of districts," Pratt argued most superintendents are better off compared to previous administrations. He stated the executive budget is just the starting point for negotiations with the legislature.

Deputy Secretary for Education [María E. Fernandez](#) echoed the priority of aligning revenues and results. Both cited the funding cliff as federal COVID relief money expires as an impetus for budgetary adjustments.

Superintendents pushed back vigorously, with one Long Island leader lamenting a nearly \$9 million cut despite being a high-wealth district only due to 30 affluent families. Another questioned using outdated wealth data that doesn't reflect current realities.

There was palpable frustration about depleting reserves amassed from past uncertain funding situations. "Realize we have reserves because you keep taking our money away," one superintendent stated bluntly.



On exploring district reorganizations and mergers driven by enrollment challenges, Pratt said, "Yes, we're open to those conversations."

The officials cited willingness to reexamine policies like exemptions allowing some retiree rehires and zero-emission bus funding. However, they maintained a firm stance on not funding the full \$1 million proposed for studying a new Foundation Aid Formula this year.

As for supporting science of reading initiatives, Fernandez noted allocating \$10 million for NYSUT to provide teacher training while working with SUNY on preparation program changes.

The conversation gave voice to the immense budgetary pressures' superintendents face. While appreciative of funding increase commitments in certain areas, many left dissatisfied with the proposed cuts' immediacy and lack of transitional aid.

"We're in a position where we have to make cuts, while still trying to catch up where we're behind," Pratt stated, foreshadowing more difficult negotiations ahead.

## TUESDAY CLOSING KEYNOTE A Q&A WITH STATE EDUCATION LEADERSHIP

By Katie Navarra Bradley, Freelance Writer

The 2024 Winter Institute concluded with a Q&A Session with the New York State Education Department. Commissioner [Dr. Betty Rosa](#), Senior Deputy Commissioner [Dr. Jeffery Matteson](#), and Chief Financial Officer [Christina Coughlin](#) took the stage to answer questions about hot topics across the state. The closing session was sponsored by [Keenan & Associates](#).



NYSCOSS President [Dr. Jason Andrews](#), Superintendent of Windsor Central School District, led the conversation and opened with a fan favorite topic—zero-emissions buses asking: [Can you help be the voice of districts in the room to support changes with the legislature and Governor so that districts can reasonably comply?](#)

“We have the dual role of advocating for resources to make sure it can happen and executing it from people who say they’re ready,” Dr. Matteson said. “We’ve submitted requests for staffing, we’ve received three staff members to work on this issue.”

These positions are contingent on the Governor’s budget to pass. In the interim, he suggests getting in the queue and submitting facility requests early.

In addition to staff, Coughlin said the Regents submitted a proposal to the Governor to convene a high-level state agency working group.

“We weren’t at the point of asking for a particular aid approach,” she said. “We’ve been talking to them behind the scenes and aren’t seeing the changes we were hoping for.” The Commissioner has directed us to start having phone calls with our federal agencies.”

Discussions are not a “money thing” yet, Coughlin added the Department is considering the state aid proposal and modeling approaches to address concerns around upfront costs.

“That doesn’t solve date or grid capacity problems, but [through] state aid modeling, we’re hoping to present something to the legislature that they’ll consider to help offset that first bad year where you make a purchase of an electric bus,” Coughlin said.

Dr. Andrews shifted to student achievement. [How does the Department’s work and research juxtapose with the Governor’s announcement and proposal about the Science of Reading?](#)

“There is no such thing as having a curriculum for the science of reading,” Dr. Rosa said. “The Department has been very clear that we are not going to support [legislative] bills specific to curriculum. We believe this is about honoring what we believe about local control.”

Beginning in 2019, State Ed has been working with Dr. Nonie K. Lesaux, professor of Education and Human Development at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, to update the state’s early childhood standards. Much of that work thus far has been helping people understand the strategies, the issue of cultural responsiveness, the issues of materials and professional development, and the students’ needs. The work also includes a path forward for specific teacher training at the higher ed level.

“We are here in a supportive role and absolutely challenged when it was set up as a mandate,” Dr. Rosa said.

She added that the Department is coming out with a tool to support districts in evaluating the materials they choose, whether produced or purchased, to ensure what they have chosen has strength in all the key elements.

Shifting gears, Dr. Andrews next addressed the Governor’s abrupt reversal on fully funding the Foundation Formula: [“What do you think a three-to-five-year transition plan would look like, and is this a warning shot for school consolidation?”](#)

“When this information came out, we immediately went to the list of 337 districts that were impacted,” Dr. Rosa said. “Obviously, the rural districts were impacted, but places like Mt. Vernon saw a \$2.9 million cut. Looking at this issue was like whiplash.”

Changes and planning will be necessary, but the Department has asked the Governor’s office and legislators for a longer runway, and to involve education experts in the process to allow for getting to a better place with a new formula, according to Dr. Rosa. CONT’/7



## TUESDAY CLOSING KEYNOTE... CONT FROM / 6

“Here’s what regionalization means to us because it’s not just about the money, said Dr. Matteson.

There is an issue with educational opportunities around the state. Some school districts will probably run out of kids before running out of money, he added. So, the goal must be to ensure kids have opportunities for the future that they choose, he added.

The goal is to create a model where conversations can happen and where districts can convene regionally to examine the problem and create innovative solutions rather than forced mergers. Ideally, funding will be restored, but regardless of the budget outcome, problems remain.

“We have falsely covered some of those challenges because they gave us a lot of money in a short period of time, making up for 10 years of withholding,” Dr. Matteson said. We’ve asked for them to give us the space to allow our professionals in the field to have a conversation and make some proposals that are reasonable and rational and meet the needs of kids.”

Coughlin said predictability is going to be elusive.



“You need to plan for unpredictability,” Coughlin said. “We’re going to continue advocating for restoration of some of those funds, [but we need to] start thinking about the changes to the system that Jeff was talking.”

Don’t panic, stressed Dr. Matteson. He has heard people in the field announcing that they are eliminating BOCES programs and making cuts.

“Having a good conversation with the board is smart, but we can’t panic,” he said. “Phone a friend, get schooled on BOCES cost methodologies, talk to more veteran superintendents who have been through the GEA, the DRA, the \$1.5 billion cut. If you have reserves, use one-time money to invest in some of those programs so that you can create a revenue stream.”

In a rapid-fire lightning round, Dr. Andrews asked about APPR: **Should districts be allowed to keep their current systems or be forced to transition to a new requirement?**

“Last year, we were almost there with APPR,” Dr. Rosa said. “Our focus has been on teacher and principal development and getting rid of the punitive stuff. All three of us voted against APPR. I want this to happen so that all of you can focus on professional development for your teachers or your principal. We’re hopeful. It should happen. There is no reason why it shouldn’t.”

To wrap up, Dr. Andrews quoted a keynote speaker from earlier in the institute who said, “One of the most hated words in education is equity.” **What advice do you have for school leaders to engage in these difficult, polarizing conversations?**

“All of you signed on to be courageous leaders, to protect and represent the cultures of your students, your communities, and your staff,” Dr. Rosa said. “We cannot do this work without really being true to the mission of DEI.”



# NOMINATE A SUPERINTENDENT LEADER FOR THE 2025 NEW YORK STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF THE YEAR AWARD BY MAY 17<sup>TH</sup>

By Theresa W. Moore, Associate Director, NYSCOSS



2024 NYS Superintendent of the Year Joe Famularo, Bellmore UFSD was recognized at AASA's National Conference on Education with AASA President, Gladys Cruz, District Superintendent, Questar III BOCES and AASA Executive Director David. R. Schuler. Photo courtesy of NYSCOSS Partner [Lifetouch](#).

AASA, The School Superintendents Associations' National Superintendent of the Year Award is acclaimed as the most prestigious honor a school system leader can attain. NYSCOSS uses the AASA awards application process to also select the [New York State Superintendent of the Year](#).

Our Distinguished Services Committee, composed of past presidents who are active superintendents and current officers (with the word president in their title), review all applications and make their final selection for our New York representative. We announce the selected New York representative at our Fall Leadership Summit and honor them at our Winter Institute each year.

## Streamlined Application Process

To ensure that as many qualified candidates who truly reflect the New York State landscape are included for consideration, the Distinguished Service Committee members invites various stake-

holder groups to nominate a candidate who they believe has significantly advanced their work. Invitations will be sent in April and include BOCES Joint Management Teams and members of the Educational Conference Board.

The committee also recommends that individuals continue to nominate a superintendent leader in their region who they think meet the criteria. Here is the timeline for the application process and we will continue to use the AASA SOY portal for the modified application.

- Nominations of an individual on the [AASA SOY portal](#) for the 2024-2025 process are due by **May 17, 2024**.
- Nominees will be individually notified of their nomination. They will create their own login on the AASA SOY portal to complete a shorter version of the application process. **Nominees are required to provide their CV (complete Education, Administrative Experience, and School District tabs on the portal) and answer two of the four essays presented in the portal by June 14, 2024.**
- The Distinguished Service Committee will review the basic submitted materials for each nominated candidate and invite several candidates for an interview via Zoom over the summer to select the 2025 New York State Superintendent of the Year.

## Final Application Process

The selected New York candidate will be notified once interviews are completed over the summer and be invited to complete the more extensive AASA application process with support from the Distinguished Service Committee to ensure its competitiveness for national consideration.

The final two questions, along with additional support material and artifacts under the Professional Growth tab, including recommendations and videos will be required.

The deadline to complete the entire application is **October 14, 2024**. THE COUNCIL is required to submit the final application to AASA by November 1<sup>st</sup> for inclusion in the National Superintendent of the Year process.

## After Application Submission

Once the application has been submitted to AASA via the portal, THE COUNCIL will coordinate an announcement with the selected candidate's school district. The application submission via the portal will then allow AASA's national blue-ribbon panel to review the application so they can narrow the field to four candidates from across the country.

- In December/January timeframe, AASA announces their four finalists who will participate in interviews and a moderated press conference. The National Superintendent of the Year is announced at AASA's National Conference on Education typically held in February each year. All state superintendents of the year are also recognized.
- A \$10,000 scholarship is awarded to a student from the high school from which the National Superintendent of the Year graduated from AASA.
- The Henry L. Grishman Scholarship is awarded to a student in the New York State Superintendent of the Year's District in recognition of receipt of this prestigious designation. CONT/9



# NOMINATE A SUPERINTENDENT LEADER... CON'T FROM / 8

## Selection Criteria

Each candidate is judged on the following attributes and skills:

- Leadership for Learning – creativity in successfully meeting the needs of students in his or her school system.
- Communication – strength in both personal and organizational communication.
- Professionalism – constant improvement of administrative knowledge and skills, while providing professional development opportunities and motivation to others on the education team.
- Community Involvement – active participation in local community activities and an understanding of regional, national, and international issues.

AASA’s program is open to all public-school superintendents in the United States and overseas and is co-sponsored by First Student, corebridge financial, and AASA. New York’s program is only open to active New York State Superintendents. You can review a complete list of New York State Superintendents of the Year since its inception in 1988 [here](#).

# NOMINATE YOUR SCHOOL BUSINESS OFFICIAL FOR ONE OF ASBO NEW YORK’S PRESTIGIOUS AWARDS

Deadline for Nominations: April 8, 2024

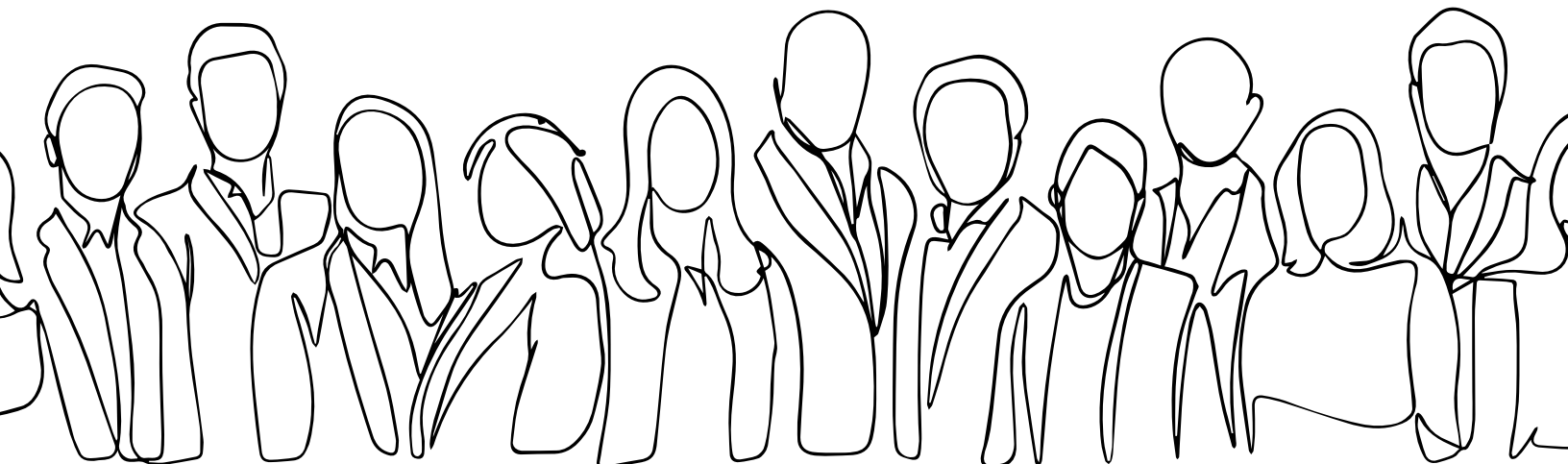
Attention superintendents! Do you have a standout School Business Official (SBO) in your district whose dedication and contributions deserve recognition? Now is the time to recognize their remarkable achievements by nominating them for one of ASBO New York’s prestigious awards! These awards present a wonderful opportunity to honor your SBO and join in celebrating excellence in educational leadership.



ASBO awards and scholarships aim to honor individuals who have demonstrated exemplary leadership, dedication, volunteerism, creativity, and more within their districts.

Contact: Amanda Wing, Deputy Executive Director at 518.434.2281 ext.107 or [amanda@asbonewyork.org](mailto:amanda@asbonewyork.org)

For more information on ASBO’s awards and scholarships, and to nominate your SBO for an award, visit [ASBO’s awards page](#). Please complete the nomination forms by April 8, 2024.



## SPECIAL EDUCATION ADMINISTRATOR OF THE YEAR AWARD NOMINATIONS SOUGHT FROM SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS

The New York Council Of Administrators of Special Education (NYCASE) Special Education Administrator of the Year award is presented annually to recognize an individual who excels in the service of special education, demonstrates solid leadership skills and advocates for the needs of students with disabilities. Criteria include:

- Outstanding leadership across disciplines for the benefit of students with disabilities and special education staff
- 21st century vision for special education that promotes opportunities for all students
- Staff development that promotes current best practices in instruction and support services
- Collaborative partnership with administrative colleagues
- Commitment to and awareness of the needs of students, parents and the community
- Outstanding contributions beyond those expected/required

In addition to these professional qualities, the candidate must:

- Be a current member of NYCASE (new members given equal consideration)
- Be a current administrator with demonstrated leadership and accomplishment in the field of Special Education
- The award recipient must attend the NYCASE Summer Institute scheduled July 15-17, 2024 at the Crowne Plaza/ Desmond Hotel in Albany N.Y. for recognition

Nominations are now being accepted. Superintendents and other school administrators may nominate a Special Education Administrator for this award. Please use this [link](#) to access the form.

For more information contact: [Linda Widomski, Ed.D.](#), Executive Director, New York Council of Administrators of Special Education at [lwidomski@nycase.org](mailto:lwidomski@nycase.org)



Elevate your school's technological infrastructure with the expertise of Edu Tek Ltd., your premier partner in educational technology, data services, and cybersecurity. Our dedicated team specializes in seamlessly integrating state-of-the-art educational technology solutions while prioritizing the security and integrity of your school's data. From implementing interactive learning platforms to safeguarding sensitive information, we deliver comprehensive support tailored to your institution's unique needs. Trust us to empower educators, protect students, and propel your school into a secure, technologically advanced future.



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Security Systems



Audio/Video



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Extreme, **Biamp**, Salto, Q-SYS, **Shure**, Belden, **Crestron**, Listen

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## ON THE MOVE...

## ACTING SUPERINTENDENTS

James Ducharme

2/24, Schuylerville CSD

Jennifer Dunn

2/24, Town of Webb UFSD

Daniel Kalbfliesh

2/24, Green Island UFSD

## NEW SUPERINTENDENTS

Rob McAuliffe

Superintendent of Schools

2/24, Chazy UFSD

*Elementary School Principal,**Chazy UFSD*VACANCIES... CONT FROM / 2

Superintendent of Schools

Location ..... Roosevelt UFSD

Roosevelt, NY

Salary ..... \$250,000 - \$265,000

District Superintendent

Location... Tompkins-Seneca-Tioga BOCES

Ithaca, NY

Salary ..... Up to \$208,250

Superintendent of Schools

Location ..... Waterloo CSD

Waterloo, NY

Salary ..... \$165,000 - \$190,000

## OTHER

Elementary School Principal

Location .... Delaware Academy CSD

Delhi, NY

Salary ..... Based on experience

Elementary Assistant Principal

Location ..... Fallsburg CSD

Fallsburg, NY

Salary ..... Up to \$100,000

Assistant Superintendent for Business

Location ..... Hendrick Hudson CSD

Montrose, NY

Salary ..... Open

Principal

Location ..... Pine Bush CSD HS

Pine Bush, NY

Salary ..... \$158,000 - \$175,000

Assistant Superintendent  
for Finance & Operations

Location ..... Tri-Valley CSD

Grahamsville, NY

Salary ..... \$125,000 - \$150,000

Assistant Superintendent for Operations

and Finance/School Business Official

Location ..... Watertown City SD

Watertown, NY

Salary ..... Based on experience

THE NEW YORK STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT'S  
2024 SCHOOL SAFETY SUMMITWednesday, April 17<sup>th</sup> – Thursday, April 18<sup>th</sup>, 2024

NYSED's 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual School Safety Summit will provide two full days of training, information, and resources on topics related to emergency response planning and creating safe and supportive learning environments for the whole school community. The conference will provide opportunities for New York State's schools and districts to engage with colleagues from other NY schools and to meet with experts from many of New York State agencies and technical assistance centers that provide high-quality resources and supports to schools.

**Audience:** New York's school and district personnel involved in the development and implementation of school and district safety plans, including Superintendents, Principals, and leaders of K-12 schools, district Chief Emergency Officers, members of the district-wide school safety team and/or building-level emergency response team.

**Dates:** Wednesday, April 17<sup>th</sup> – Thursday, April 18<sup>th</sup>, 2024  
(attendance both days is required)

**Time:** Check-in: 8:30 - 9:00 a.m.  
Conference: 9:00 - 4:30 p.m.

**Location:** Empire State Plaza Convention Center, Albany, NY

**Cost:** This is a FREE event; however, participants are responsible for their own travel expenses, meals, and beverages.

**Registration:** Registration is required. Capacity is limited. Priority for attendance will be given to school staff. A waiting list will be available when capacity is reached. Registration closes on March 30, 2024.

**Questions?** Contact us at [SafetyPlans@nysed.gov](mailto:SafetyPlans@nysed.gov)

The Summit will include sessions on topics related to Emergency Response Plan development and implementation and creating safe and supportive learning environments for the whole school community. Review an overview of the presentations and presenters that will be at this year's summit [here](#).

# Register Here!

## LEARNING FROM THE FUTURE: MOVING FROM WHAT IS TO WHAT IF?

By KK Neimann, National Director of District & Strategic Initiatives and Melanie Peterson-Nafziger, Professional Learning Facilitator, WorldSavvy

So often in education, when we talk about potential reforms or changes, we look to the past for answers. Where is the reassuring research? What does the data prove? While there is certainly value in understanding what came before, what gets lost when we only focus on incrementally improving someone else's 150-year-old dream for teaching and learning?

If we continue along the same path we have been taking for decades, for instance tweaking schedules/grading and analyzing data, we can foresee the likely outcomes: school leaders will continue to face student disengagement, inequitable outcomes, and teacher turnover as young people march through asymptotes, onomatopoeia, balancing equations, and the very Industrial Era for which 19<sup>th</sup>-century educators were preparing students.

Harvard business school says that effective leadership happens in three domains. The first is managing the present - taking what you already do and making it better. The second domain is forgetting the past. This means letting go of practices that fuel the current system, but also fail a new one. The final domain, and arguably the most difficult for school leaders to find time for, is creating the future.

Given the current state of education, it might feel irresponsible to turn our focus away from the present. School leaders are managing low test scores, high rates of depression and anxiety, divided communities, and unprecedented teacher shortages. But it is precisely for these reasons that we must reimagine education and bring forth a new vision.

What becomes possible when we shift our attention to shaping the future of teaching and learning? How might envisioning the future we want inspire experiments that breathe new creativity, shared vision, and joy into our teachers, students, districts, and communities?

If we want to develop problem solvers, perhaps in high school we eliminate subject area divisions, and instead invite students to explore real world issues through multidisciplinary projects and partnerships with community organizations and businesses. If we want young people to be global citizens, perhaps we institute a graduation requirement that requires a 4-week stay in another country, collaborating with peers to address global challenges. If we want to ensure that students are resilient and lifelong learners, perhaps we do away with grades, and instead embrace a model that encourages reflection and iteration - teaching young people to learn from exploration and failure.

While these ideas might feel impossible, we can derive value from what came before: 30 years ago, eliminating textbooks or teaching without a physical campus seemed preposterous. What is the next impossible dream?

Justin Reich, author and educational researcher at MIT, says "You don't start the work of change after you have figured out what it is you want to do, and you've gotten everyone on board. Starting the work is how you get people on board. Starting the work is how you figure out what it is that you want to do."

Let's get started.

*World Savvy, a NYSCOSS Partner, aims to create future-ready learning environments that prepare students for a diverse, complex and ever-changing world. We achieve this by providing district and school leaders and educators with support and tools to embed global competence into a school environment, teaching and learning. To learn more, please contact KK Neimann at [kk@worldsavvy.org](mailto:kk@worldsavvy.org) or learn more [here](#).*



## GOING TO THE DOGS

by J. Brett Carruthers, Senior Vice President and Director of Risk Management, New York Schools Insurance Reciprocal (NYSIR)

To put those three categories of animals in perspective, think about them in terms of curriculum. Service animals are akin to foundational courses, therapy dogs are like electives, and emotional support animals could be thought of as community education.

### A service dog is:

*Any dog individually trained to work or perform tasks to benefit an individual with a physical, sensory, psychiatric, or intellectual/mental disability.*

<https://adata.org/factsheet/service-animals>

Service animals are specially trained and certified to perform tasks for individuals who may be blind, hearing-impaired, have seizure disorders or other medical needs.

When presented with an employee who requires a service animal, a district's/BOCES' answer should be "yes," with team members coming together with understanding and empathy to make the situation work.

### A therapy dog is:

*An animal individually selected, trained and certified to work with its handler to provide emotional support, well-being, comfort or companionship. Those animals are not trained to do a specific task and are not service animals.*

<https://adata.org/factsheet/service-animals>

Therapy dogs usually are owned by their handler. Many districts are turning to those animals to provide emotional support to students and staff as they cope with mental health issues. Others use them as part of their social-emotional learning programs, reading programs or stress reduction initiatives.

The decision to start a therapy dog program involves considering a host of factors and developing a sound board of education policy. The New York State School Boards Association has an excellent model policy to aid in this development. Work with your insurer on those considerations.

### An emotional support animal is:

*An animal that may provide great comfort to a companion but has no specific task to perform if the person is having an emotional reaction.*

<https://adata.org/factsheet/service-animals>

Emotional support animals are not service or therapy animals and often are referred to as "pets with a vest." Emotional support animals are not trained to assist with an individual's disability or provide support to staff and students. There is no obligation to allow those animals into public schools.

Each situation is unique and should be carefully evaluated. Failing to accommodate an individual whose service animal was trained and certified with funding by local community service groups is a recipe for significant reputation risk. Therapy dogs require more study and buy-in. Many districts have successfully implemented them, but not without a lot of work to ensure they fit into the local school community and environment.

For more information, contact J. Brett Carruthers at [bcarruthers@wrightinsurance.com](mailto:bcarruthers@wrightinsurance.com) or 716.282.4890. The New York Schools Insurance Reciprocal is a Signature Partner of The Council and a unique not-for-profit insurance company governed by and created for the sole benefit of its member districts and BOCES. It is the leading provider of property/casualty insurance for New York State public schools. Visit online <https://www.nysir.org/>



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Kimberley James, **Deputy Superintendent, Corpus Christie Independent School District**

For more information, contact Jennifer Iannazzo at [jenn.iannazzo@justrightreader.com](mailto:jenn.iannazzo@justrightreader.com).

# UPCOMING LEAF/NYSCOSS EVENTS

## New Superintendents Coffee & Conversations / April 11, 2024 & May 16, 2024 / 8 – 9 a.m.

We invite all new superintendents to participate in our upcoming virtual sessions to connect and check in with colleagues from across the state. Join in on topic-specific discussions and share ideas with other new superintendents. You will also have the opportunity to connect with experienced superintendents to discuss issues and strategies.

## Aspiring Superintendents Workshop / April 29, 2024

This workshop, held in partnership with PNW BOCES, is designed to provide leaders who are considering the superintendency with an overview of the roles and responsibilities of this key leadership position. Participants will learn from current and retired superintendents about the rewards and challenges of the position.

*Cost to attend: \$229 pp. Sponsored by Day Automation.*

## Cabinet Leadership Summit & Women's Initiative – Saratoga / May 1-2, 2024

In partnership with WSWHE BOCES, we are excited to once again offer the Cabinet Leadership Summit and Women's Initiative in Saratoga Springs. These back-to-back events offer an opportunity to build your network and promote community with school leaders around the state while discussing critical topics in education and leadership.

*Cost to attend one event: \$259 pp, both events: \$489 pp. Sponsored by BetterLesson, Energy Systems Group & Title Sponsor NYSIR.*

## Aspiring Superintendents Workshop / May 7, 2024

In partnership with Erie 2 BOCES, this one-day workshop will discuss the hiring process, leading with authenticity and intentionality, the superintendent and school board relationship, roundtables with experienced superintendents and what to consider when pursuing a superintendency.

*Cost to attend: \$229 pp. Sponsored by Young & Wright Architectural.*

## Diversity & Inclusivity Workshop / May 14, 2024

This one-day workshop, held in partnership with Wayne-Finger Lakes BOCES, will focus on advancing the dialogue on diversity and inclusivity while shining a spotlight on district efforts to move this work forward across the state. This program is designed to foster meaningful discussions on equity, amplify the voices of students and underrepresented groups, and empowering leaders to cultivate inclusive school communities.

*Cost to attend: \$259 pp. Title sponsor Utica National Insurance Group. Session sponsor Newsela.*

## Pathways to the Superintendency Workshop / June 3, 2024

This workshop, held in partnership with Putnam Northern Westchester BOCES, is designed to provide leaders who are considering the superintendency with a more in-depth understanding of the position as well as how best to prepare for the job. Participants will learn from and engage with experienced superintendents about what to expect as well as how to determine next potential steps.

*Cost to attend: \$229 pp. Participants who opt to attend both the Aspiring Superintendents and Pathways to the Superintendency Workshops will receive a discounted fee of \$409 for admission to both offerings. Sponsored by SEI Design Group.*

### SAVE THE DATES!

**July 25-26, 2024**

**Women's Initiative / Buffalo co-hosted  
with Erie 2-Chautauqua-Cattaraugus BOCES**

*Sponsored by Title Sponsor NYSIR*

**August 5-6, 2024**

**New Superintendents Orientation / Albany**

**August 11 – 13, 2024**

**Diversity Symposium of Thought Leaders / Ithaca**

*Sponsored by Title Sponsor Utica National Insurance Company*

**September 22-24, 2024**

**2024 Fall Leadership Summit / Saratoga**

Scan here for  
more information/  
registration links:



# MERGING THEORY WITH DESIGN: SUPPORTING STUDENT LEARNING THROUGH EDUCATIONAL SPACE

By Melissa Renkawitz, ALEP, Principal, CSArch

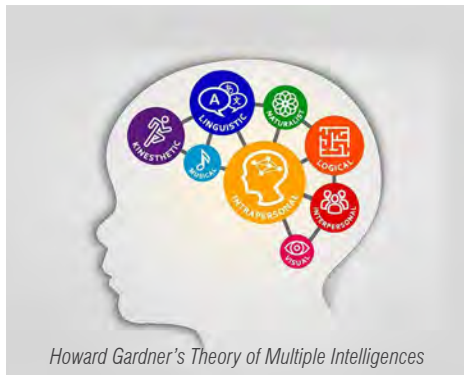
## “How” Before “Where”

When planning for capital improvement projects, administrators often focus discussions on looking forward, posing questions such as, “What does a classroom of the future look like?” and “Where can we find space for this program?” While these questions are certainly relevant for project planning, we must first understand how students learn before we begin to talk about where.

## Learning Theories

Examining a few learning theories can provide educators and architects with a greater understanding of how students learn to help inform the design of learning environments. Lev Vygotsky’s Theory of Child Development, for example, states that learning is socially and culturally bound, and there is a direct correlation between social interaction and our ability to learn.

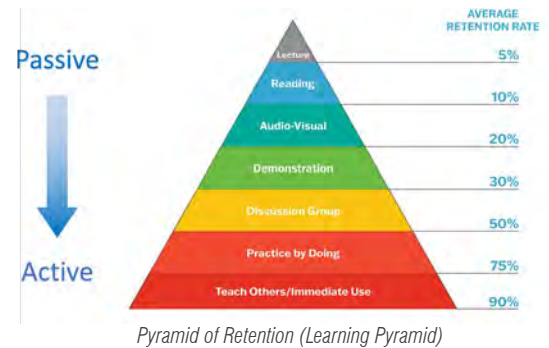
Dr. Kathryn Murray’s Brain-SET formula focuses on survival, emotions, thinking, and our brain’s need to first feel calm and safe before learning can occur. This theory aligns with a framework for trauma-informed design and the importance of supporting students not just academically, but socially and emotionally as well.



Howard Gardner’s Theory of Multiple Intelligences identified characteristics of learners that define how each of us are inclined to process information: Musical, Visual-Spatial, Linguistic, Logical-Mathematical, Kinesthetic, Interpersonal, Intrapersonal and Naturalistic. Simply put, each student engages and learns best in their own unique way.

The pyramid of retention, or learning pyramid, is equally informative as we consider how students learn. This methodology states that to achieve the greatest outcome of student learning and retention, education should be less passive with students playing an active role in learning through hands-on experiences and collaborative sharing of knowledge.

Through these, and countless other learning theories, we see several key words often repeated: Social Connection (Communication), Collaboration, Critical Thinking, Choice, and Flexibility. It comes as no surprise that many of those famous ‘C’ words of education present themselves time and time again.



## What does this mean for learning environment design?

As we continue to shift away from traditional classrooms with students sitting in one-directional rows of desks, it’s important to create space that is better aligned with diverse student learning needs and remains flexible for a variety of modalities.



With an understanding of how students learn, we can derive a framework for learning environment design through the following space elements that support all learning styles:

**Choice:** Support student autonomy with choice in how learners engage with their environment. Individual preference may change with each new task or day. In addition to a variety of furniture, create layers of space for students to retreat, observe, and engage.

**Collaboration Space:** Support collaboration among both staff and students with learning commons and break-out rooms. Transparency into adjacent spaces encourages use, allows for supervision of student groups, and puts learning on display. Ensure these areas have the furniture and technology needed to support a variety of uses.

**Social Space:** Recognizing the role social interaction plays in enhancing mental wellbeing, soft skills, and future readiness, look to provide spaces where students can socialize and engage with each other. Consider how common areas such



## MERGING THEORY WITH DESIGN... CON'T FROM / 16



as cafeterias and libraries can serve as hubs for social engagement. Understand generational shifts on how social interaction occurs and consider gaming or alternative learning opportunities and the unique needs these spaces may have. (But don't forget space for refuge and individual recharge are equally important!)

**Hands-On Opportunities:** Provide space where students can innovate and learn through hands-on activities. Look beyond CTE offerings and consider innovation labs, STEAM labs, or makerspaces where a greater cross-section of students can gain exposure to a variety of hands-on learning activities. Furniture and technology should remain flexible as student interests and workforce trends change and experiential learning offerings shift.

**Flexible and Adaptable:** Consider how spaces can remain flexible for today and adaptable for tomorrow. Support flexibility with mobile furniture, equipment, and partitions that allow for easy reconfiguration, and support a variety of modalities of learning, from independent study to more collaborative and active learning. Less reliance on built-in amenities and more emphasis on mobile and modular solutions help to provide adaptability for unknown future needs.

*Melissa Renkawitz is a Principal and Educational Planner at CSArch. Having received her certification as an Accredited Learning Environment Planner (ALEP) through the Association for Learning Environments (ALE), Melissa fuses her understanding of learning theories and expertise in educational design to create spaces that help students reach their full potential.*

*CSArch is a NYSCOSS partner and a premier education design firm that is recognized for designing learning lasting facilities that maximize state building aid, stand the test of time and inspire learners. Contact President Daniel Woodside, AIA at 518.463.8068 or visit online <https://www.csarchpc.com/>*



# CSARCH



Performance by students from Windsor High School CSD and their band the Butterbeans.



Performance by students from Windsor High School CSD and their band the Butterbeans.



Superintendent Phyllis Harrington, Oceanside received one of the 2024 Appreciation Awards on Sunday. Also pictured Executive Director Chuck Dedrick; Distinguished Service Award Chair Hank Grishman, Jericho; President Jason Andrews, Windsor; and Callie Gaspary, Partner at Mosaic Associates Architects, the award sponsor.



Keynote Dr. Anthony Muhammad spoke to attendees about the importance of Professional Learning Communities in a post-COVID world. The Sunday Opening Keynote was sponsored by Enigma.



Keynote Speaker Dr. Anthony Muhammad also participated in a book signing on Sunday sponsored by Partner Solution Tree.



Cosimo Tangorra, Superintendent of New Hartford received the second 2024 Appreciation Award sponsored by Mosaic Associates Architects on Sunday.



Members participated in four different roundtable discussions during the Sunrise Café session on Monday morning.



The Albany Marching Falcons from the City School District of Albany started our Monday morning with a bang.



Students from the Albany Marching Falcons performed the National Anthem on Monday morning at the start of the keynote.



Special thanks to Winter Institute Title Sponsor Utica National Insurance Group.



Amanda Pellegrino introduced her dad Dr. Joseph S. Famularo, Superintendent of Bellmore as the 2024 New York State Superintendent of the Year during the Winter Institute ceremony.



Executive Director Chuck Dedrick; Distinguished Service Award Chair Hank Grishman, Jericho; Amanda Pellegrino and President Dr. Jason Andrews, Windsor presented the 2024 NYS Superintendent of the Year award to Dr. Joseph S. Famularo, Superintendent, Bellmore on Monday morning.



2024 NYS Superintendent of the Year Joe Famularo performed an original NYSCOSS song during his NYSSOY presentation.



Dr. Barbara Mullen, Superintendent of Rush-Henrietta CSD joyfully presented her Ignite Session titled *Leveling Up: A Deliberately Developmental Journey to the Superintendency*. Thanks to Partner zSpace for sponsoring the Monday Ignite Keynote presentations.



Ignite Session presenter Dr. David O'Rourke, District Superintendent, Erie 2-Chautauqua-Cattaraugus BOCES had people chuckling with his Ignite titled *The Heart of Conflict: Leadership Lessons from Buffalo Bills Parking*. Thanks to Partner zSpace for sponsoring the Monday keynote.

Attendees listened intently to Dr. Terry Ward, Superintendent, Cato-Meridian CSD, and his Ignite Session: *When Parenting and the Superintendency Collide*. Thanks to Partner zSpace for sponsoring the Monday keynote.



Partner New York Schools Insurance Reciprocal (NYSIR) also participated in our Marketplace of Ideas Exhibit Hall.



Derek McManus was joined at the award ceremony with his family. His daughter Alison, wife Leslie and son Austin were so proud of their father and husband's achievements.



Derek McManus, Vice President of Business Development at Day Automation received the 2024 Friend of The Council award on Monday. Executive Director Chuck Dedrick; President Dr. Jason Andrews, Windsor; Distinguished Service Award Chair Hank Grishman, Jericho; and Suzanne McLaughlin, Executive Vice President of Custom Computer Specialists, the award sponsor, also participated in the ceremony.



Superintendent Dr. Aurelia L. Henriquez, Port Chester-Rye UFSD and Superintendent Dr. Anibal Soler, Schenectady City announced a special partnership between IEI Institute for Education Innovation and NYSCOSS and the NYS Educational Leaders of Color cohort to redefine leadership narratives and cultivate a pipeline of future leaders.



World Languages and English as a New Language K-12 Academic Administrator at Shenendehowa CSD Sarah Cioffi received the inaugural 2024 Past Presidents' Scholarship sponsored by Edjuncture, Inc. on Tuesday morning. Also pictured: Executive Director Chuck Dedrick; President Dr. Jason Andrews, Windsor; Laura Feijoo, VP of Leadership and Development, Edjuncture; Superintendent Dr. Oliver Robinson, Shenendehowa; and Distinguished Service Committee Member, Maureen Donahue, Southwestern.



At the Tuesday Keynote Session, Franky Simmons, Principal, OHS Castleton, Oceanside UFSD received the Dr. Mary Barter Scholarship sponsored by Energia. Joining him on stage was President Jason Andrews, Windsor; Superintendent Dr. Phyllis Harrington, Oceanside; Renee Fassano, Business Development Manager, Energia; District Superintendent Dr. Gladys Cruz, Questar III BOCES and Dr. Mary Barter Scholarship Chair; and Executive Chuck Dedrick.



President Dr. Jason Andrews, Windsor led a discussion at the Tuesday Morning Keynote with Chief Financial Officer Christina Coughlin, Commissioner of Education Dr. Betty Rosa, and Senior Deputy Commissioner Dr. Jeffrey Matteson all from the New York State Education Department.



Congratulations to Dr. Michael T. Carlson, Assistant Superintendent at Hampton Bays UFSD, who received the Raymond R. Delaney Memorial Scholarship at the Winter Institute. Thanks to Utica National Insurance Group and John J. Acee, Education Segment Specialist for sponsoring the 2024 award. Also pictured: President Elect and Superintendent Dr. Lars Clemensen, Hampton Bays; President Dr. Jason Andrews, Windsor; Distinguished Service Committee Member, Maureen Donahue, Southwestern; and Executive Director Chuck Dedrick.

## HOW DO WE HELP ALL STUDENTS SUCCEED? IT STARTS WITH CRITICAL THINKING.

By Dr. Laura Feijoo, Vice President, Leadership and Development, Edjuncture, Inc.

As superintendents, we want every single one of our students to succeed. Despite decades of work and numerous intervention strategies, schools continue to see persistent and troubling disparities in outcomes between student subgroups. Clearly, targeted reading and math interventions can only get us so far. Taking a deep dive into root causes with research-based interventions can lead the way towards academic improvement. One means by which educators can improve outcomes for students is to create opportunities for students to be informed thinkers.

Every human being, of any age, thinks—usually every single waking moment. To think critically requires a deeper level of understanding. The National Council for Excellence in Critical Thinking defines it as “the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information.” Critical thinking skills are a foundation for learning in any discipline. If we want students to go beyond passive repetition of facts and achieve true understanding of content, they need to first learn how to learn with a framework for understanding the content.

While this may resonate with all of us, most students do not receive explicit, ongoing, and embedded instruction in critical thinking. Colin Seale, author of *Thinking Like a Lawyer: A Framework for Teaching Critical Thinking to All Students* (Prufrock Press, 2020) believes that the disparities seen in student outcomes can be largely attributed to a critical thinking gap. In an interview with ASCD, he states, “When you start to look at how critical thinking looks in practice in K–12 classrooms, it is often being treated as a luxury good. You’ll see critical thinking in an after-school mock trial program, or for an honors program that serves eight percent of the school population, or for the special debate team or the selective entry school.”

Surveys show that critical thinking is routinely under-emphasized in the classroom, especially in the middle grades when students are at an ideal cognitive stage to develop many of these skills. Teachers are already under tremendous pressure to cover state standards and may believe that there simply isn’t time to cover critical thinking. In addition, surveyed teachers consistently say they need more resources and professional development in critical thinking to teach it effectively in the classroom. While resources and professional development are key, there must be a core belief that all learners can become critical thinkers.

If we want to achieve equity in educational outcomes, we need to first address equity in opportunities for critical thinking in framing our instructional practices. The brain coordinates information through eight specific processes to organize the information that it receives. Each one of these processes is represented by a Thinking Map that identifies the brain process and helps students to organize their thoughts efficiently to foster critical thinking at its core.

Done right, critical thinking is not something “extra” to do, and it does not take time away from core instruction. In fact, when students have instruction, tools, and strategies to help them activate critical thinking and metacognition, they are able to learn more efficiently. Active engagement with content using critical thinking leads to deeper understanding, better retention, and the opportunity to close the critical thinking gap.

*Edjuncture Inc, is a NYSCOSS Partner and creates advance thinking strategies for leaders, educators, and learners. In the post-Covid shift to collaborative thinking and independent virtual learning in school and at home-use the most effective tools from boardrooms to classrooms and home rooms for solving challenging problems. For more information contact Laura Feijoo [laura@edjuncture.com](mailto:laura@edjuncture.com) or Co-Founder and CEO, Harry Aurora at 516.827.9800. Visit us online at [www.edjuncture.com](http://www.edjuncture.com)*



## DISTRICTS EMPOWER STUDENT VOICE THROUGH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT PATHWAYS

By Jill Aurora, Freelance Writer

In a divisive social climate, many educators struggle with how to responsibly facilitate discussions around controversial topics and social justice issues. At an education session during the NYSCOSS Fall Summit, [Dwight Bonk](#), Superintendent of Wappingers Central School District, shared his district's approach - empowering student voice through civic engagement pathways.

"The work we do is more challenging than ever, with people afraid to get involved in difficult conversations," Bonk stated. "But we're doing students a disservice if we send them into the world unable to engage in civil discourse."

Wappingers has implemented the state's Seal of Civic Readiness as both a civics pathway and standalone option. This allows students to shape project-based learning around their interests and advocacy goals.

"Civics is embedded in the NYS social studies framework domains," Bonk explained. "Students have explored topics like water scarcity solutions, legislative bill proposals, and more."

While only 18 students pursued the civic readiness option in 2021-22, that number swelled to 90 the following year as interest grew. Bonk credited the pathway's ability to tap into adolescents' passion for social justice.

The district has proposed policy revisions encouraging teachers to "no longer avoid controversial topics" in favor of guided, impartial facilitation of civil discourse skills.

"We can't just deal with controversial issues as objectively as possible - students need to analyze different perspectives," Bonk said.

Wappingers partners with Passport for Good to provide digital portfolio tools that capture whole student data on civic engagement activities. The platform aligns with district goals while easing administrative tracking for graduation pathway requirements.

"Giving students an outlet to explore their interests and find their voice is the greatest civic engagement we can offer," Bonk stated. "These pathways empower them as agents of change."

As administrators nationwide grapple with how to build cultures of respectful dialogue, the Wappingers model positions civic engagement as an opportunity. By channeling student passions into rigorous projects, they amplify youth voices in the social justice movement.



## K-12 OMBUDS SERVICES OFFER CONFIDENTIAL AVENUE FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION

By Jill Aurora, Freelance Writer

A new support system is emerging in K-12 education - ombuds services that provide a confidential, informal resource for students, parents/guardians, and employees to resolve conflicts and address concerns. At a Fall education session, District Superintendent **David O'Rourke** and **Stacey Aliasso Rowcliffe** of Erie 2-Chautauqua-Cattaraugus BOCES highlighted the benefits of this offering.

"Ombuds comes from the Swedish term meaning 'representative,'" explained Rowcliffe, who serves as the E2CCB Ombuds. "An ombuds is an independent, neutral party that helps stakeholders express issues, manage conflicts, and find productive communication pathways."



Stemming from an employee-facing pilot, E2CCB has expanded ombuds services externally to parents and families as well. Rowcliffe stressed the utmost priority of confidentiality, operating outside formal administrative channels unless issues involve mandated reporting.

"Ombuds provide a safe space to be heard impartially and privately, without judgment," she stated. "We ask questions, listen actively, and guide people in developing their own solution pathways."

Rowcliffe, whose background blends special education, counseling and administration, handled 124 cases last year spanning harassment claims, discipline issues, interpersonal conflicts and more. Aggregate data informs recommendations for systemic improvements.

O'Rourke emphasized that ombuds services promote a "culture of caring" by demonstrating the district's commitment to ALL stakeholders. He recounted initial trepidation from administration and unions before the value became clear.

"Schools are wired for formal resolution processes," O'Rourke said. "But an ombuds helps find collaborative, win-win solutions before grievances or litigation."

The presenters shared examples like helping a parent understand IEP policies, then role-playing how to proactively discuss needs with teachers. For employees, ombuds aid in professional communication like responding to observations.

"We don't undo decisions, but we provide an outlet and help develop pathways forward through dialogue," Rowcliffe explained.

As district ombuds programs grow, O'Rourke and Rowcliffe see potential for expanded models targeting specific concerns. They are also working with New York State Education Department to establish ombuds as a BOCES-aided service.

"An ombuds reminds us to lead with compassion," O'Rourke said. "It's an investment in engaging all stakeholders and building the environment of respect we want for our school communities."



## REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIPS EMERGE AS INNOVATIVE SOLUTION TO TEACHER SHORTAGES

By Jill Aurora, Freelance Writer

With school districts across New York grappling with severe teacher shortages, a new model is gaining traction - Registered Apprenticeship Programs (RAPs) that blend college coursework with paid residencies. At our Fall Leadership Summit staff from the NYS Educator Workforce Development Hub outlined how these apprenticeships can strengthen and diversify the educator pipeline.

“This shortage has been 20 years in the making - RAPs allow us to shift our thinking for long-term solutions while addressing immediate needs,” stated Colleen McDonald, the Hub’s director. “Residencies allow candidates to learn complex skills on-the-job while earning a paycheck.”

The Hub’s **Steve Danna** explained that RAPs apply the proven workforce development approach of apprenticeships to teaching. Extensive research shows the residency model increases workforce diversity, reduces new teacher attrition, and boosts student learning.

**Amy Langworthy**, superintendent of Warrensburg CSD, shared her district’s experience piloting a RAP. With an anticipated need for a social studies teacher, they hired an apprentice to train for that role over two years while providing paid instructional support.



“The initial expense gets BOCES aid, and the long-term value of prolonged retention is invaluable,” Langworthy said. “We tap talent already in our schools as aides who want to become teachers.”

Danna noted RAPs allow hiring from chronically underutilized talent pools like paraeducators and career changers. “Apprentices are paid for the work at that moment which means they are not expected to accrue debt,” he explained.

The Hub assists districts in establishing fiscally sustainable RAP models through higher education partnerships, grant funding, and mitigating barriers like ensuring apprentices retain student status for benefits.

McDonald underscored RAPs as a powerful opportunity: “Transform teacher preparation, create a higher performing workforce, improve school culture, increase access and equity - all with paid employment that offers a higher ROI.”

Participants left with a comprehensive understanding of the RAP model’s advantages, planning resources, and creative funding avenues to implement what Danna called “a long-term solution that makes your job easier by hiring and retaining great teachers.”

With staffing challenges straining districts, Registered Apprenticeships emerged as an innovative, research-backed pipeline for cultivating homegrown instructional talent.



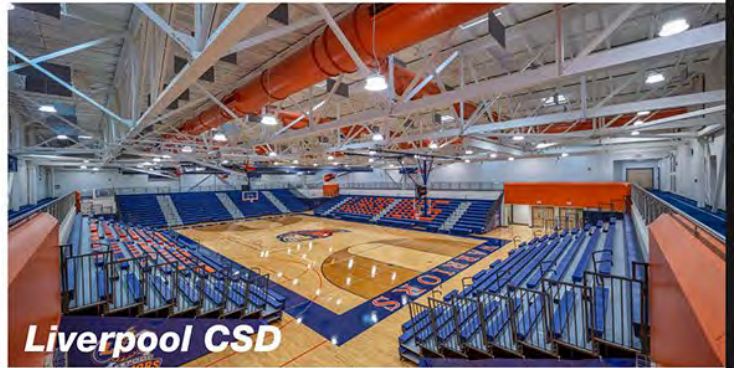
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