

***NYS TESOL Advocacy Brief:  
NYSCEA Triannual Meeting Report, Winter 2016***  
*by Juliet M. Luther*

The New York State Council of Education Association (NYSCEA) held a meeting on February 5, 2016. The council, which meets triannually, includes representatives from 42 organizations statewide. Members act as liaisons, reporting proceedings to their organizations.

New York State Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (NYS TESOL) sent its Executive Board president, Sarah Elia, and vice president of advocacy, Juliet M. Luther, to the meeting. The goals of this brief are to report on NYS TESOL's participation in the NYSCEA and on meeting highlights.

The NYSCEA provides an information and discussion forum to its members. Speakers from state government and education department offices make presentations, which provides member organizations with information about policy and legislation. During the presentations, members voice their concerns directly to those elected or appointed to shape educational policies. Each meeting typically includes two or three presentations. More information may be found [at NYSCEA's website](#).

Four guests spoke at the February 5 meeting—Jhone Ebert, Renee Rider, Stan Hansen, and Deborah Peck Kelleher. Their administrative roles and topics are detailed below.

Jhone Ebert, senior deputy commissioner for education policy, appointed in September of 2015 by the New York State Education Department (NYSED) commissioner MaryEllen Elia, is new to the NYSED. Ebert served for 25 years as chief innovation and productivity officer for the Clark County School District of Nevada. In support of her expertise to serve NYS students, she stated that previously she was responsible for a highly diverse district, ranging from multi-grade, one-room schoolhouses to large urban districts. Of particular interest to NYS TESOL, her population included many multilingual learners/English language learners (MLL/ELLs) whose numbers had recently increased and diversified.

Ebert spoke on two main topics: priorities for Smart School Bond Act funds and changes to assessment policy. Plans for the funds include addressing long-term-capacity building needs, such as improved access to twenty-first-century technologies, support for early learning, and classroom space. Increased capacity, she stated, would improve access to high-quality and specialized instruction.

Ebert also reported on changes to standardized exam policies. In response to critiques, the state took steps to provide educator input into test items and the review process for Grades 3–8 exams. In addition, she reported on key changes to format and administration: (a) parts were eliminated, (b) the number of items was reduced, and (c) the tests are now untimed. Ebert noted that Questar, Inc. will produce these exams.

In open discussion, Ebert responded to questions. Among them was an appeal to throw out field test items to which a majority does not respond; now, though only a tiny minority responds out of a large pool of test takers, the item is still included on the operational test. Other questions focused on testing stress and on reliability issues related to new-test introduction.

We at NYS TESOL raised concerns about the continued inappropriateness of standardized tests for many MLL/ELLs, due to students' insufficient time in English and inadequate educational opportunity prior to entering U.S. schools. We stressed the validity problem, including whether tests are administered in the student's home language or with accommodations (Abedi, Hofstetter, & Lord, 2004). We emphasized how exams become language tests, which has been shown to put MLL/ELLs at a disadvantage and impugn their teachers and schools in the process (Menken, 2009). Ebert spoke of supporting project-based assessments and a "no-consequences" testing policy. We at NYS TESOL look forward to learning more about this.

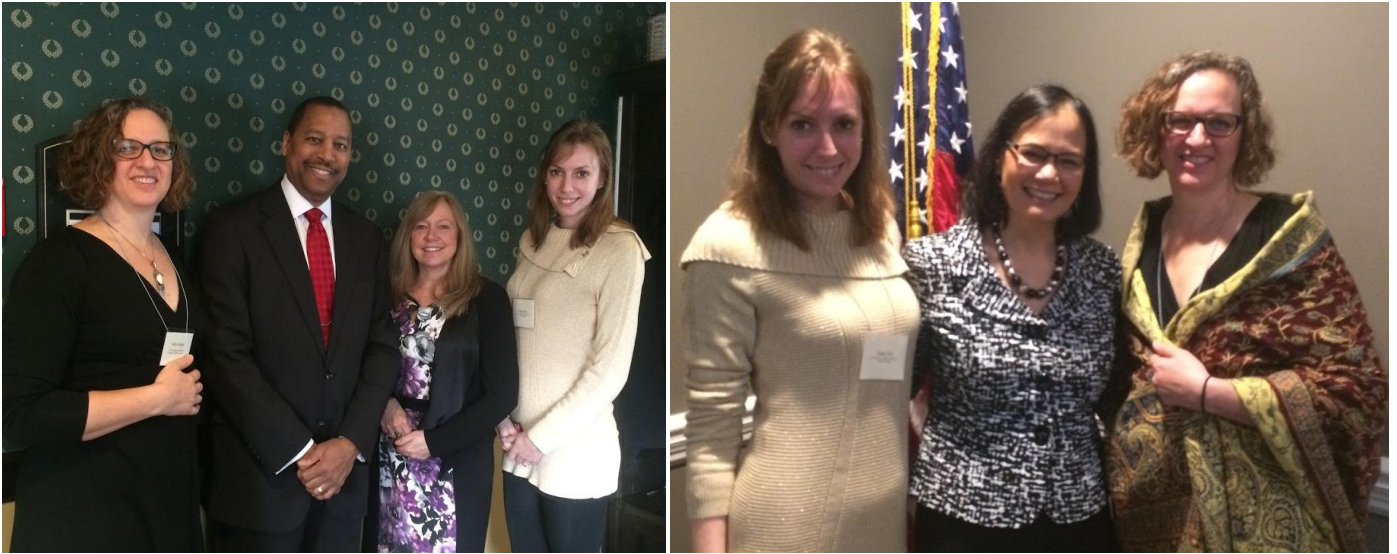
Throughout the meeting, Ebert stressed that she was listening and interested in hearing from all NYSCEA members. We will monitor these issues closely through the lines of communication now open.

Following this, Renee Rider, assistant commissioner, NYSED Office of Student Support Services, and Stan Hansen, executive director, Office of Post-Secondary Access, Support and Success, updated the NYSCEA on school counseling improvement, detailing the new regulations for school counselor preparation and responsibilities; staffing ratios were a main focus. Also presented were details about counselor certification, which was modeled on teacher certification. We asked in what ways the certification for counselors would address the needs of MLL/ELLs. Hansen encouraged us to examine eight principles established to guide certification, which we will do.

Deborah Peck Kelleher, director, NYS Senate Education Committee of the NYS Legislative Initiatives in Education, was the last speaker. Representing Senator Carl Marcellino, chair of the Senate Education Committee, Kelleher spoke about the budget; the main focus was on funds districts can expect after Gap Elimination Adjustment (GEA). The GEA, a product of a recent law, allows borrowing of school funds to cover the state budget deficit, and school districts contribute in proportion to size. It has been reported that \$434 million will be returned to districts. The process of approval is ongoing.

Kelleher said that questions should be addressed to her, and emphasized that educators should speak to their local representatives as well. NYS TESOL will examine the effects of budgetary decisions on our members and constituents.

The intent of this brief was to provide an overview of the NYSCEA meeting, with special attention to NYS TESOL's participation. We encourage you to share this report with your colleagues and to discuss the issues. Send comments or questions to [VPAdvocacy@nystesol.org](mailto:VPAdvocacy@nystesol.org).



### References

- Abedi, J., Hofstetter, C., & Lord, C. (2004). Assessment accommodations for English language learners: Implications for policy-based empirical research. *Review of Educational Research*, 74(1), 1–28.
- Menken, K. (2009). No Child Left Behind and its effects on language policy. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 29, 103–117. Cambridge University Press 0267-1905/09  
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*Juliet M. Luther, vice president of advocacy of NYS TESOL, has been a bilingual and ESL/ENL educator for over 18 years, all of those in public schools in New York City. She is a member of several advocacy organizations and actively promotes the interests of MLL/ELLs. Now in the final stages of completing her doctoral dissertation at Fordham University, her research interests include oral language, academic language, teacher theory of practice, education policy, and studies of human language. <[vpadvocacy@nystesol.org](mailto:vpadvocacy@nystesol.org)>*