**NJAGC meets with NJDOE to Discuss ESSA**

**New Federal Law Includes Gifted Education**

On Tuesday, August 9, three representatives of NJAGC met with eight key staff members from the New Jersey Department of Education to discuss the rollout of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in New Jersey. *[See photo and caption.]* NJAGC requested this meeting in order to discuss the impact of ESSA on national, state and local gifted and talented identification and service mandates, initiatives and funding. This is the first time that Gifted and Talented verbiage is included in federal law for all states to receive federal funding, including both options and requirements. As an advocacy organization, we feel it is imperative to keep our members informed. This information will help guide decisions about gifted education across New Jersey, starting in the 2017-2018 school year, and will include what changes will be necessary for a district to be in compliance and how data is reported.

Last March, two NJAGC officers represented its members at the National Association for Gifted Children Annual Affiliates Conference in Washington, DC. There they attended training about ESSA, and were advised to take an active role as their respective states decided how to implement the G&T mandates included in the law. To that end, Roberta Braverman, Advocacy Vice President of NJAGC, prepared a letter to the Commissioner of Education, David Hespe, that was signed by many attendees at NJAGC’s April 2016 annual conference and sent via US mail. Thank you for your signature if you participated in this effort. Roberta also delivered testimony to the State Board of Education on May 4, in Trenton[[1]](#footnote-2). The message was that NJAGC wishes to “help and have a seat at the table” and to represent the needs of gifted learners in every conversation about the new federal law that will impact our most able students in New Jersey. Finally, she set up this most timely and important meeting with the NJDOE. This introductory session and the information shared by NJAGC with the NJDOE, opened doors to dialogue about gifted education in state law and practices, and specifically with the dissemination of information about ESSA.

The goals of this initial meeting were very important for all stakeholders in educating and parenting New Jersey’s most able youth.

1. NJAGC wants to assure awareness of the provisions in the federal law specific to gifted education. The NJDOE will decide how to include these topics in the state rollout of ESSA: Title I and Title II funding as it relates to G&T students, the possible use of Computer Adaptive Assessments, G&T professional development for all teachers, the disaggregation of student achievement data at each achievement level on state and local report cards and G&T services for underserved populations.
2. NJAGC provided copies of a letter sent by NAGC Director, M. Rene Islas, to Commissioner Hespe, that included actual sections of the law. [[2]](#footnote-3)
3. NJAGC requested that the NJDOE communicate ESSA G&T initiatives clearly in directives, policies and procedures shared with Local Education Agencies (LEAs) through each district’s superintendent. A document of ESSA Updates for NJ is planned for release in November 2016.
4. NJAGC asked that a representative from the NJDOE attend and present ESSA information at our conference on March 17, 2017, to be held at the Mercer County Conference Center. More details about local advocacy and background about ESSA and state law relating to gifted education will be in a special *Promise* coming soon.
5. NJAGC offered continued help and guidance, drawing from the expertise and experience of its leadership and membership.
6. NJAGC seeks open lines of communication between NJAGC and the NJDOE, with a request to keep the organization abreast of any ESSA decisions being made that will impact gifted students in New Jersey.
7. NJAGC will contribute content to increase awareness via communications from the NJDOE about current educational issues and administrative code (school law), that already exists, pertaining to gifted education for all New Jersey school districts.
8. NJAGC asked that the NJDOE include easy access and updates to website pages about the Gifted and Talented Requirements in the New Jersey Administrative Code[[3]](#footnote-4), as well as the Frequently Asked Questions[[4]](#footnote-5) about Gifted Education.
9. A request was made to include a representative from NJAGC on the state ESSA Advisory Council and the ESSA School Improvement Advisory Council.
10. NJAGC invited more dialogue about teacher preparation, for those already in the field as well as pre-service teachers and administrators, to educate all about the academic and social emotional needs of gifted students. This is necessary in order to be able to provide appropriate modifications in all settings, as per administrative code.

As stated on the NJDOE website (NJDOE.org):

*The New Jersey Department of Education is examining federal guidance and recommendations from national and local members of the education community to determine the path forward for creating a new state plan in response to ESSA. During this process, the Department is eager to receive input as we develop a state plan that incorporates thoughtful and meaningful discussions with educators and other groups impacted by the law. More details will be posted on this web page as they become available.*

We are very pleased that the New Jersey Association for Gifted Children initiated this important dialogue and had the full attention of the participating DOE staff on August 9, 2016, as it was an essential step to achieve our goals. We were most grateful to have the expertise and teamwork of Michael Kaelber, Esq., the New Jersey School Boards Association’s Director of Legal and Labor Relations Services with us. Maryellen Moffitt, NJAGC Board member shared information about meeting the needs of G&T students from undeserved populations. NJAGC will be working closely with Dr. Dale Schmid, our contact for G&T curriculum and instruction at the Department of Education. For more information and to offer your help, please contact Roberta Braverman, NJAGC Advocacy Vice President, advocacy@njagc.org

1. Testimony to NJ State Board of Education May 4, 2016 <http://www.state.nj.us/education/sboe/meetings/pubtest/2016/May/RoomLRC/Roberta%20Braverman.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Read the letter here: [http://www.nagc.org/sites/default/files/Advocacy/NAGC%20memo%20to%20chief%20state%20school%20officers%20on%20ESSA%20%285-16-16%29.pdf](http://www.nagc.org/sites/default/files/Advocacy/NAGC%2520memo%2520to%2520chief%2520state%2520school%2520officers%2520on%2520ESSA%2520%25285-16-16%2529.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Look for G & T requirements here: <http://www.state.nj.us/education/aps/cccs/g_and_t_req.htm> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Changes to FAQs will be here: <http://www.state.nj.us/education/genfo/faq/faq_gandt.htm> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)