



Newest Statewide ESA Network - Up and Running

The movement toward more formal statewide networks of ESA's is growing and New York is the newest state to join. After realizing that they needed someone dedicated to helping them become more effective they took action.

As any maestro will tell you, getting a large number of people to work in unison on any task is nearly impossible. It takes a mixture of fortitude, intelligence and grit to get the job done.

Jessica Cohen hopes she has these attributes as she assists 37 New York state Board of Cooperative Educational Services, or BOCES, to work together.

Cooperation is important because the state has given BOCES the task of teacher licensing. The project is still in the early planning stages but already, the state BOCES know it is more efficient and cost-effective to have a single entity coordinate the effort.

That's where Cohen comes in. After a long career in education, including 10 years as a school superintendent, Cohen thought she retired three years ago. She was wrong. The BOCES needed her particular skillset to get this project off the ground and she has been at it since December, 2014.

The job right now is part-time and the first task is to get the 37 districts all on the same page and coordinated with the state Department of Education. A key component will be to create a clear statement of understanding between all the stakeholders about the role and potential of BOCES.

"This is where ESAs and BOCES shine," Cohen said. "This is an opportunity to take what BOCES are good at and expand it. We know we can provide cost-effective services for students in a way that embraces opportunity for students. We need to let everyone understand the potential in this time of much change in education."

ESA's provide leadership in many areas and when they come together across a state to address issues and solve problems, they are a formidable force.

John Fitzgerald
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