



THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT / THE UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK / ALBANY, NY 12234

Assistant Commissioner
Office of School Governance, Policy, and Religious and Independent Schools
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Dear Educator,

In July 2019, the New York State Education Department (NYSED) posted draft regulations for the process of determining substantial equivalence of instruction in religious and independent schools. After extensive comments were received on the draft regulations, the Board of Regents recognized a need to re-engage with key stakeholders in the religious and independent school community, as well as their counterparts in public schools, to devise an approach that would help guide our work moving forward.

As part of this consultation process, NYSED plans to conduct a series of regional meetings (conducted online, via the Zoom platform), with leaders from both public and private education. We also plan to engage in other forms of outreach as well. We invite you to join this process, which we hope will result in a solution that satisfies the requirements in law and is effective, manageable, fair and respectful to all parties. We write today to inform you of the next steps and encourage you to participate, so that we can take your perspective into account as we move forward.

Regional Meetings: NYSED will conduct five regional meetings as part of our consultation process. To balance the opportunities to engage as much as possible, five regions have been designated by the Department. These were selected by grouping counties in a manner that sought to equalize (as much as possible) the enrollment in religious and independent schools that was represented in each region. Dates of the planned Zoom webinar for each of the five regions are listed below. For each region, a virtual meeting will be held to include public and nonpublic school stakeholders, members of the Board of Regents, and Department staff.

Participation in Meetings: Due to technical and logistical limitations, we may not be able to include all interested participants in the meetings. Since it is important that the regional conversations represent the perspectives of school leaders in that region as widely and as fairly as possible, we will need to select participants. To do so, we are seeking nominations of interested individuals who reflect the diversity of the state to participate in the virtual regional meetings. Nominees should have professional experience in elementary or secondary instruction.

You may submit a nomination form (for yourself or another leader) by **Wednesday, November 4, 2020** for the Tuesday, November 17, 2020 meeting. Nominations for all other

meetings are due **Thursday, November 12, 2020**. Nominations may be submitted using this [Google form](#).

Nominees should hold the applicable date and time for their region, as outlined below, in the event they are selected to participate.

Region	Counties	Meeting Date and Time
Rest of State	All other counties	Tuesday, November 17 2:00 – 5:00
Manhattan, Staten Island, Bronx	Bronx, New York, Richmond	Tuesday, December 1 10:00 – 1:00
Long Island & Queens	Nassau, Queens, Suffolk	Wednesday, December 2 10:00 – 1:00
Hudson Valley	Columbia, Dutchess, Greene, Orange, Putnam, Rockland, Sullivan, Ulster, Westchester	Monday, December 7 10:00 – 1:00
Parent, Student, Alumni	All	Tuesday, December 8 2:00 – 5:00
Brooklyn	Kings	Wednesday, December 9 2:00 – 5:00

Out of respect for some communities' religious beliefs, the Department will also use other forms of outreach. In addition, there will be one virtual forum for nonpublic school parents, students and alumni; information about nominations for that forum will be forthcoming.

Religious and Independent School Survey: Due to participation being limited in the regional meetings, we want to offer religious and independent school leaders an opportunity to share the ways that they monitor their students' progress as the students advance through their school programs. Therefore, we have developed a survey that aligns with the discussion points in the regional meetings and which we hope will provide us with a specific list of mechanisms that are in use in religious and independent schools across the state. Leaders of religious and independent schools will receive access to the survey via the Department's Business Portal, with instructions on how to do so under separate cover.

Survey responses received prior to the regional meetings will inform the stakeholder engagement session discussions. Responses submitted by December 4, 2020 will be reported to the Board of Regents for its deliberations.

Next Steps: The outcomes of the stakeholder engagement sessions and the survey of religious and independent schools will be considered by the Board of Regents as it develops regulations for substantially equivalent instruction for nonpublic school students. The Board has stated that, with meaningful collaboration with stakeholders, it intends to

adopt regulations that both respect the diversity of schools in New York State and ensure that all students have the opportunity to receive an education that fulfills their potential.

We look forward to this consultation and encourage you to participate through either the regional meetings or the survey. Your engagement will contribute to the development of a process that recognizes the wonderful work being done in schools across our state. Should you have any questions about this consultation process, please contact us at SERegionalMeetings@nysed.gov.

Sincerely,



Christina Coughlin
Assistant Commissioner
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