

Speaker:

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## **Commission**

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I would like to talk for the next few minutes about how we might become more flexible within our education system so that we might better prepare students for their future work and college lives.

Specifically, the discussion around online education has risen to the forefront of many discussion of this nature. Online education has been recognized as not only a growing way of addressing student learning needs but also as an effective means to address education. In multiple states across the country they have even implemented a requirement for graduation of students to take an online course or at the minimum have an online learning experience. The potential for this type of learning to help maintain or even expand the potential learning opportunities for students even in a time of depleted fiscal resources has been recognized at every level of education not only nationally, but in recent years also here in New York State.

This potential to enhance the education of students is recognized but not necessarily realized.

We have some examples in New York and specifically here in Western NY where BOCES and districts have had some success, such as AccelerateU in Wayne-Finger Lakes BOCES or the hybrid approach of tutoring we have begun exploring at Monroe 1 BOCES or the way that Rochester City schools as looked to address credit recovery. To take these success and help them become embedded in our organizations and systems however means that we have to recognize and address the constraints that our current system and regulations are putting on this potential and where we might turn to help move these programs forward.

One of the barriers that is frequently discussed is that of teacher unions. Teacher unions are put forth as being roadblocks in that they

supposedly view online education as replacing teachers in a traditional setting. I have worked with online education for students since 2000. In my time I have found that it is the teacher's unions which have been the ones to raise the questions around quality of education that we should all be asking. Although some do use this as a bargaining chip in negotiation, the vast majority that I have worked with are open to discussion once it is understood that quality teachers are still needed. The roles may change but the need for strong educators remains.

Additionally, with the roll out of the new APPR process and requirements, districts are also nervous to try new approaches to education. Teachers are hesitant to take on a whole new learning environment and practices when the risk they are taking could mean they are labelled as ineffective teachers.

Where we have seen great success is in those areas where traditional schooling can't or doesn't meet students learning or credit needs. For example: students on home tutoring, those in alternative school settings, those who need credit recovery, those who are taking higher level math or languages, those who wish to explore careers or specialized topics. With the current pressure on schools to ensure that students are meeting basic requirements in the core areas, it is those with special circumstances who do not fit the system. These students need a coordinator who is able to identify the best match for these needs and the openness of school leadership to embrace these alternative approaches. Another aspect of online education that is coming into play is the hybrid model or approach. That is where a portion of the schooling is conducted in a traditional setting but then another portion is shifted to online curriculum or instructional spaces. This model looks to maximize the benefits of online education within the current system.

For any of this to happen, we need awareness of the possibilities provided to those who are advocates for students, such as guidance counselors and principals. School leadership needs clarity from the State Education Department on what can be acceptable in meeting graduation requirements around seat time, the criteria that they should use in assessing a quality program and models of implementation that are acceptable.

We also need to leverage our current structures and resources to address what we can now. For example, there are regions in the state who have already leveraged the expertise of BOCES in both technology as well providing unique and creative services to develop programs. School districts should begin to dialogue with one another to see where they might be the opportunity to match a strong teacher who specializes in course with those students in other districts who might not have a teacher but do have the desire for that course. We have already had great success in this region doing just that for languages and upper level Math.

As you have heard me talk today, online education is already moving forward in New York. There are barriers which are continuing to impede the realization of its full potential. However, I do not want to leave you with the idea that online education is a separate initiative or goal. It should be part of the discussion around college and career ready. It is an essential element of the reform initiatives we are already moving forward within the state and should not be addressed as a parallel discussion. There are many organizations, including BOCES and some schools, who are ready to continue to move forward in reshaping our education system to meet the challenges and opportunities of the future.