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To: District Superintendents
Superintendents of Schools
Public School Administrators

From: Betty A. Rosa, Interim Commissioner

Subject: Welcoming Student Teachers into School Districts

During this time of unprecedented uncertainty and challenge, it is more important than ever to ensure that the pipeline of prospective teachers remains open and active. Given the teacher shortages that we already face, it is essential that student teachers are able to complete their preparation and become certified teachers of record. Providing student teachers with the opportunity to complete their required clinical experiences is essential to their preparation and to ensuring that the pipeline of teachers is ready to replace retiring teachers and address shortage areas. As such, the Board of Regents and New York State Education Department are strongly encouraging school districts to continue to welcome student teachers into schools and classrooms – whether in-person or remotely – during the 2020-21 school year.

In response to the pandemic, the Department has provided flexibility for student teachers to complete their clinical experience in a variety of alternative ways, such as assisting cooperating teachers with remote or virtual learning. Furthermore, we have asked teacher preparation programs to emphasize strict health and safety protocols to help ensure that student teachers understand and follow health and safety practices to minimize the risk of contracting and transmitting coronavirus. With these policies and practices in place, school districts should work in partnership with institutions of higher education to identify safe and appropriate ways in which student teachers can support classroom instruction (in-person or remotely), while ensuring that student teachers are given the opportunity to develop critical knowledge and skills.

Student teachers can be valuable assets for schools and classrooms, especially at this time, as classroom teachers will be challenged to identify and address gaps in students' learning. Student teachers can work with teachers and help address specific learning needs of their students, enabling the teachers to increase the potential for differentiated and individualized instruction and ultimately student success.

Student teachers must be under the direct supervision of a certified teacher who has official responsibility for the class. Although student teachers may not serve as teachers of record, they can serve as co-teachers, are an integral part of the instruction in the classroom, and should be viewed as more than visitors and volunteers in a school.

Serving as a cooperating teacher and working closely with and supporting a student teacher can often result in teacher and student growth, development, and learning as well as sharing and modeling best practices (NYS Teaching Standard VI: Professional Responsibilities and Collaboration). In addition, having a student teacher in the classroom can drive teachers to think more deeply about their pedagogical practice and to reflect upon their instructional choices, to the benefit of students as well as student teachers (NYS Teaching Standard III: Instructional Practice; Standard V: Assessment for Student Learning).

In closing, the Regents and the Department are keenly aware of the challenges related to reopening schools and institutions of higher education and are appreciative and supportive of current and future collaborative efforts to engage and include teacher candidates in classroom instruction and support activities.