

Values we should remember from a visionary colleague



By Betty Rosa
Regents Chancellor

I often say that, together, the individual members of the Board of Regents make a beautiful rainbow, comprised of men and women from different backgrounds, races and ethnicities. Recently, that rainbow lost a little of its brilliance when our friend and colleague, Regent Judith Johnson, passed away. Judith was a visionary, a pioneer and a true education leader. In a career

that spanned decades, Judith was dedicated, above all else, to the pursuit of educational equity and excellence for all students.

With Judith's passing, it is important to reiterate our guiding principles and to reflect upon the Regents' ongoing efforts to ensure equity for all.

The mission of the Board of Regents can accurately be described this way: we aim to ensure that New York's students have equitable access to the highest quality educational opportunities, services and supports; we aim to ensure that our schools provide effective instruction that is aligned with the state's learning standards; and we aim to ensure that our students feel supported in schools that provide them with positive and culturally-responsive learning environments.

It is a bold and just mission, and we are right to pursue it. If we remain on course and true to our mission, we will succeed in preparing all children for success in college, in

meaningful careers and as engaged citizens who contributing to their communities and the nation.

Perhaps the most important task currently before the Regents is our review of New York's graduation measures. Through this effort, we seek to reaffirm what it means to obtain a diploma in New York State and what that diploma should signify. At the board's meeting in July, Regent Johnson summarized the issue perfectly when she said, "We need to ask ourselves what is it that we can do to improve opportunities for all of our children to be successful."

At November's Board of Regents meeting, we launched the information gathering phase of our work. This first phase includes partnering with Achieve (a non-profit, non-partisan education organization) to conduct a thorough review of current research and best practices from other states and countries, focusing on innovative models that work.

From January through March 2020, we will hold regional meetings to help gather feedback on guiding questions to help inform the work of a Blue-Ribbon Commission that will be formed next year. At least one meeting will be held in each of the state's 13 judicial districts and will be led by the local Board of Regents member, the local BOCES district superintendent and staff from the State Education Department.

Our Graduation Measures web page (www.nysed.gov/grad-measures) provides information about the review process and a link to subscribe for updates. The specific



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dates and locations of the Regional Work Group meetings will be added as they become available. I am confident that, as always, NYSSBA and its members will contribute to this process in a thoughtful and professional way.

We know this work cannot be done overnight and our timeline will ensure ample time to select members of the Commission and for it to effectively carry out its work. Let me be clear: this effort is not simply about changing our graduation standards. Rather, it is about providing different avenues – equally rigorous –

for students to demonstrate that they are ready to graduate with a meaningful diploma. And it's about ensuring that what students learn is relevant to them and useful to society.

Of course, our work to review and renew New York's graduation measures is only one piece of an extraordinarily complex puzzle. It is our collective mission to create an ecosystem of success built upon a foundation of equity, diversity, inclusion, access, opportunity, innovation, respect, trust, caring, relationship-building, and so much more. Together, we will interrupt the practices that negatively impact struggling students. Together, we will create education environments that reduce the pernicious predictability of who succeeds and who fails.

At Regent Johnson's beautiful funeral service, I said that we cannot and will not disappoint her. Judith's life's work – her fight for equity and excellence in education for all children – will continue through all of us, until the day we are fully victorious in our ongoing pursuit of justice for all.



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