

EDUCATION

A JEWEL IN THE MANTEL OF NEW YORK STATE GOVERNMENT

The wisdom of our forefathers was reflected in their understanding that at the center of a successful government is the ability to educate its citizenry. The role that our forefathers played in 1784 in accomplishing this most important mission, was their establishment of the Board of Regents. This foresight has stood the test of time and continues to be displayed almost two centuries later.

The frustration that is currently felt at all levels of education in New York State--the local school district level, the Department of Education and at the legislative and executive branch levels---does not have its source in the wisdom of what our forefathers established, but rather, in the system that seems to have evolved which, in reality, has created indecision, divisiveness, a level of academic mistrust as well as isolationism. If we are unhappy with the progress of education reform in New York State, NOW is the time and the afforded opportunity to make a difference through a rejuvenation in the appointments to the Board of Regents.

There is no doubt that the current members of the Board of Regents have worthy ideals backed by an infinite display of wisdom and credentials. There is also no doubt, however, that in the scope of definition related to the equality status of education and politics, there breeds contempt for this equality to

prevail. What we are witnessing is a polarization between the forces which control the political venue of education direction and the forces which promulgate the philosophy required in raising the standards of education in New York State. It is this cornerstone of equality between education and politics that appears to evade the very nature of cooperation between State government and the Board of Regents (Department of Education)-- thus, promoting negativism about the worthiness and relevancy of an institution like the Board of Regents.

From my humble academic vantage point, to argue for or against the maintenance of the Board of Regents, may be fodder for the future. Frustration that percolates today, in relation to the function of the Board of Regents, often lends itself to a cry of removal and a "let's start all over again" approach. However, the reality of today is, can we create a more "user-friendly" Board of Regents through the development of an extraordinary re-engineering of cooperation and communication in order to provide our students throughout New York State the best education we can afford and one we can create-- neither one can be mutually exclusive nor supersede the other. This is my hope for the survival of education in New York State as we navigate the sometimes uncertain oceans of educational policies as we move into the twentieth century.

It is not the intention of this candidate to be didactic, but rather to demonstrate that having the opportunity to serve as a Regent means taking a proactive position in wanting the role of education on all levels to work successfully for all our students throughout their educational careers. As legislators, you have the right to know what my knowledge base is about the Board of Regents, what my contribution could be, what motivations drive me in the world of academics and most importantly what my role can be in cooperatively working with the legislative branch so that politics and education, as I stated earlier, are viewed as coequal.

SUGGESTIONS FOR A 'USER-FRIENDLY' BOARD OF REGENTS

With the Board of Regents being appointed jointly by the Legislature, it has a responsibility not to perform in a vacuum but rather to diligently exercise its responsibility in the scope of both meeting the needs of the judicial district appointed from as well as a strong foundation in the educational practices of school systems throughout the State. In this regard the Board of Regents should be looking at themselves as the guiding light toward preserving the values and roots of community while concurrently demanding of our educational institutions across the State to use every level of technical and academic principal in fulfilling the high standards of education reform.

To achieve the above, the Regents should meet four times a year to hold meetings on a regional level, with an open forum including the regional legislators to hear from superintendents, school boards, teachers, parents and students as to the role promulgated policy serves in the region and what their needs would be. Thus, moving a quarter of the meetings out of the Capitol and into the community, a greater appreciation for the consequences of promulgated educational policy can be the result.

Concerning an individual Regent, similarly, a bi-annual educational forum should be convened and co-sponsored by the State and local public officials to invite superintendents, building supervisors and, indeed, students to express their concerns about education practices in the community.

The fulfillment of quarterly regional meetings and semi-annual local forums would in no way increase the amount of time spent by a Board of Regent in fulfilling his/her responsibility, rather, the quality of being informed will be dramatically enhanced in the hope that decisions on education practices and policies and realistic budgets will be well rounded as opposed to one-sided.

Communication between the Regents and the Legislature must improve. This begins with a dialogue, but, ultimately should require collaboration between the two bodies. **Part of the development of trust and this working relationship is having concurrent sessions of both the Board of Regents and the State Legislature.** A tripartite dialogue between the Governor, the Legislature and the Board of Regents should also be ongoing so that the development of the budget, education services and legislation are well coordinated.

Therefore, establishment of a "Legislative Education Council" that would be required to oversee and encourage the full integration of the developmental work at the Department of Education with the requirements and budgetary considerations of the legislature in tandem with the governing direction of the executive branch is suggested. This "Legislative Education Council" should not be cumbersome and expensive. This one principle alone would create the equality of politics and education and make this unity functional in advancing regulation, having the fiscal integrity to support it and most importantly having an informed legislative and executive branch which understand the intention of the regulations. For example, the evolvement of "the New Compact for Learning" was brought about without a comprehensive effort to integrate the competency of the project in the minds of the legislators. What was witnessed, therefore, by the legislature was an unwieldy process of educational documents without having its roots in consultative interdependent

communication. **(Chancellor Auerbach imbibed the spirit of this proposed Council when state legislators were actively lobbied and informed of what was being developed and what was required of them to move ahead.) That is what is missing, now, and that is what we so vitally need to restore. It would be appropriate to indicate that an implicit responsibility in performing as a Regent is to engage in all necessary dialogue including lobbying strategies with his/her judicial district legislators to be able to sell the education ideas that are being discussed and potentially formulated within the Board of Regents. In this regard, infinite levels of dialogue are created top- down and bottom up to allow for the widest range of discussion.**

As a member of the Board of Regents, I strongly believe beyond the scope of my academic contributions, that I may humbly assist in providing dialogue and creating consensus so that appreciation for the management of the bedrock of education in our State can be favorably viewed by the executive and legislative branches of our State government, local municipalities, school districts, superintendents, building supervisors, teachers, students and the most important ingredient in any successful education environment, the concerned parents who must never be denied a place at the table of decision making. It is, therefore, the magnificent political structure that brings the diversity of our State together on the heels of the legislature which should and, I am sure in the future, will give strength to the academic professionals who develop education and make it the jewel in the mantel of New York State government.

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