



New York State  
EDUCATION DEPARTMENT  

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**Knowledge > Skill > Opportunity**

September 2019

## Best Wishes for a Successful and Rewarding School Year

Dear Teachers,

It is a pleasure to once again welcome you back to what I trust will be a rewarding school year for you and your students.

By the time you receive this note, I will have recently departed from my position as New York State's Education Commissioner. As an educator with nearly fifty years of experience, I know that teachers are often the single most important factor in determining a child's future. We are so fortunate to have some of the nation's best teachers leading classrooms across our great State.

When I became Commissioner in 2015, our education system was under significant stress. Teachers and parents felt strongly that too many changes had been forced upon them, too quickly, and without enough guidance and support from the State. And they rightly felt that their input had not been sought and their concerns had not been heeded. So, my first order of business as Commissioner was to make listening a priority; I travelled the State to speak with as many teachers, students, parents, administrators, and school and district leaders as possible. I felt it was important to engage directly with you to hear what you thought about the critical issues that have a direct impact on you and your students - issues like the State's learning standards, assessments, and accountability measures.

Based on what I heard and learned from teachers like you, I believe we have made significant strides in our work to reform school accountability and improvement programs; to offer improved professional development for educators; and to build an inclusive and responsive education system that is reflective of our diverse and vibrant student population.

I am proud of all we have accomplished, together, to advance equity and excellence in our education system. Of course, work remains to be done to meet our goal of providing all students with a high-quality, equitable education. But I am confident that we will get there. Like you, the Department is unwavering in its commitment to continuous improvement.

When you get bogged down in the day-to-day challenges, please take a moment to remember the positive impact that you and your colleagues make, every day, in the lives of your students. I have devoted my entire career to putting children on a path to success, both in school and beyond. And I will always be grateful for the opportunity to lead our State's school system. It truly was an honor and privilege to serve as New York's first female Education Commissioner.

I wish all of you nothing but success as you lead our students and your schools on to ever-greater heights.

Best always,

MaryEllen Elia