



New York State EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

Knowledge > Skill > Opportunity

Dear Parents and Families,

It is with great excitement that we welcome your students back to school! This time of year gives us all the chance to start fresh while also providing the opportunity to build on progress from prior years. The Board of Regents and State Education Department, teachers, and school leaders have been preparing to welcome your students to the classroom and are committed to ensuring they have the support and opportunities they need to grow and learn.

Our mission is to inspire and ignite teaching and learning. Through instruction and human connection, we can ignite excitement and inspire natural curiosity in our students, helping them explore and expand their horizons. That natural curiosity will allow students to make their connections in and outside the classroom throughout their academic career, improving educational outcomes and preparing them for college, career, and civic readiness.

We are dedicated to prioritizing students' mental health and well-being. Although we have come a long way since the start of the pandemic, we recognize the continued need to address pandemic-related trauma and meet the needs of students still struggling with academic, attendance, and mental health issues. With our students' mental health and social-emotional well-being in mind, we are dedicated to creating and sustaining safe, nurturing, and engaging learning environments for ALL students. This includes providing all students with an environment free from harassment, bullying, and discrimination. We know that students learn better when they feel safe and supported, and we are responsible for providing welcoming and inclusive classrooms and other learning spaces.

Here are some of the ways the Board of Regents and Department have been working with districts, schools, and educators to best support the needs of our students:

- We released an updated [framework](#) to help support schools foster educational environments that are safe, supportive, and affirming for everyone – including transgender and gender expansive students.
- We ended the use of demeaning [Indigenous names and mascots](#) in our public schools.
- In partnership with New York Attorney General Letitia James, the State Education Department issued [guidance](#) offering school recommendations and resources for

upholding the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI).

- We will continue our work to advance DEI in schools across the state, including implementing the [Culturally Responsive-Sustaining \(CR-S\) Education Framework](#), which marks the evolution toward leveraging difference as an asset and creating student-centered learning environments.

Equity and access are paramount to all we do at the Department, with a focus on improving service. Access to high-quality early learning programs with literacy and numeracy at their core is crucial to level the playing field, allowing all students to develop the critical cognitive, social, and emotional skills necessary to be successful. In August, the Department held its annual [P-3 Institute](#) focused on literacy, P-3 instructional tools, cultural education resources, and supporting English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities. At the other end of the spectrum, the [NYS Blue Ribbon Commission on Graduation Measures](#) held its [final meeting](#) over the summer to develop recommendations on which measures best demonstrate readiness for college or career for all students in New York. The final recommendations will be submitted to the Board of Regents this Fall, 2023.

We understand and recognize the need to remain steadfast and undeterred in these efforts, and we will continue to move forward with initiatives aiming to provide greater opportunities for students to thrive. Working together, we will advance equity, excellence, and access to foster lifelong learning and academic success for all New York state students.

Be sure to check out the Department's [Back to School website](#), which includes graphics detailing the Department's goals for the 2023-24 school year, messages from state lawmakers and our partner agency commissioners, and links to social media posts with Back-to-School tips and resources.

To personally welcome you and your students back to the 2023-24 school year, we wanted to share this video message with you.

Have a wonderful school year filled with learning and growth for your students!

Sincerely,

Dr. Lester W. Young, Jr.
Chancellor, NYS Board of Regents

Dr. Betty A. Rosa
Commissioner, NYSED