NY’s Children Have Lost a Great Advocate & Friend: Remembering Regent Judith Johnson

Dear NYSAPE friends,

A deep void is already being felt with the sudden passing of the honorable Regent Judith Johnson on Tuesday. Regent Johnson was in the last year of her first 5-year term on the Board of Regents representing Judicial District 9 (Westchester, Rockland, Putnam, Dutchess and Orange counties) when she passed. We were all looking forward to her serving another term.

When Regent Johnson joined the Board of Regents in 2015, she hit the ground running during one of the most intense times in recent memory for public education in the state of New York and around the country. Regent Johnson spoke out strongly about the detriments of focusing on high-stakes testing and understood that to pave the way for all children to have an equitable education, it was necessary to disrupt a flawed system. She never minced words and was very clear that we must do better for all children.

Regent Johnson served in many different educator roles and was recognized several times on the state and national level for her dedication to public education. Most notably, Regent Johnson was the first female and African American Superintendent for the Peekskill schools from 2001 to 2011. She also served as the interim Superintendent of Mount Vernon schools from 2012 to 2014. Her prominent career included serving at the U.S. Department of Education, first as Deputy Assistant Secretary and later as the Acting Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education.

One of the most important projects Regent Johnson was leading the charge on was reviewing and improving New York State graduation requirements; she wanted to ensure that they were more meaningful and accessible to all children.

The children of New York State have lost a true advocate and friend. The ripple effects of Regent Johnson’s contributions and service to public education will be felt for generations to come, and we are grateful to have had her be a voice for us on the Board of Regents. Our sincerest condolences to her family, friends, and colleagues. We will deeply miss Regent Johnson and know her legacy will live on to positively impact all New York children.