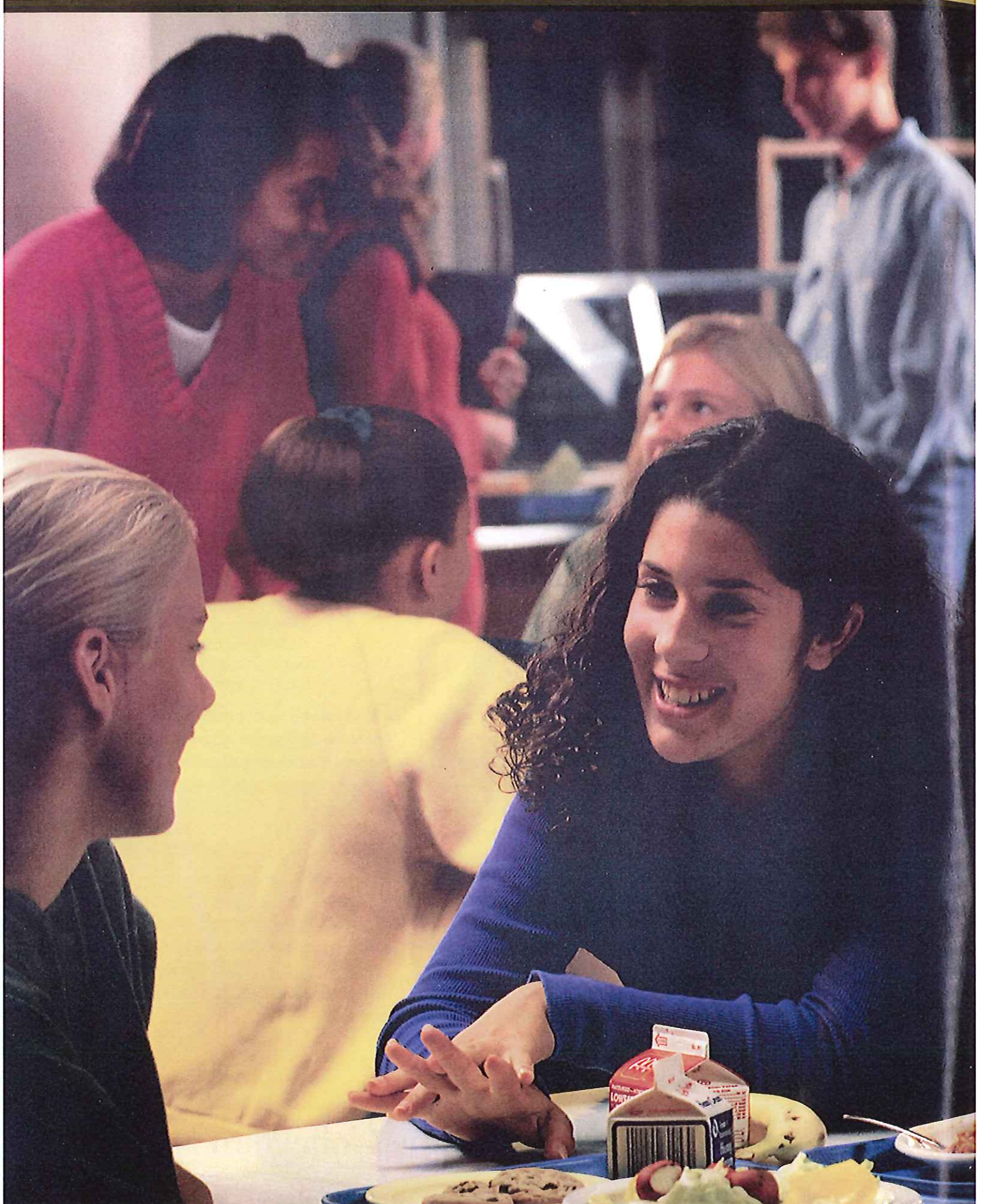


► **NYS Blue Ribbon Commission on**



Commission Finds the “3 Rs” Necessary But Not Sufficient

“**N**ew York State has witnessed a phenomenal transformation with regard to its education curriculum. Once a state where only one-third of students were applying for the Regents exam, New York now sees more young people taking and passing the exam than ever before.

However, essential to the livelihood and future of our children is an equal balance of objective and subjective learning. It is imperative that we work to ensure that the leadership traits of character, service, and citizenship are represented in the learning and development process of our children.

There is much more to be said about a child than how that child performs on a test. For the future and welfare of our community, state, and country, we must invest in programs that serve to develop and foster our children into well-rounded students and thoughtful leaders.”

– Carl Hayden, Commission Chair and Past Chancellor of the NYS Board of Regents



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On April 18-19, 2004, nineteen of New York State's most respected educational and community leaders descended on Saratoga Springs to pool their knowledge and leadership experiences, and address a perceived gap in our state's existing curriculum. Dr. Richard J. Thomas, president of the Magellan Foundation, addressed the Blue Ribbon Commission on Youth Leadership and invited guests by stating: "This evening, we begin a great journey on behalf of the children of New York State."

Thomas acknowledged that the "attention, effort, and resources devoted to raising academic standards of all children is both appropriate and worthwhile," but that to "prepare our children as citizens for tomorrow, these efforts alone are not sufficient."

The Findings

Nearly two years later, the commission's work is done, but the challenge is just beginning.

"The commission's job was to state the problem and some possible recommendations," said Thomas. "Now, we go to the operational phase of taking those recommendations and planning them so that they actually begin to work in the schools of New York."

The commission defined leadership as "the ability of individuals and groups to influence and organize others for a constructive purpose" with emphasis on social responsibility, character development, and real-world leadership

experiences. They also established core beliefs about leadership including that all students can learn leadership skills and should be involved in leadership activities; and that development of leadership skills should be an integral part of the curriculum and instruction, aligned with the NYS learning standards.

The report that outlined the findings, entitled *Leading Tomorrow: Developing Youth Leadership Skills*, presented four recommendations that need to be implemented as part of a statewide curriculum on leadership education in order for students to become engaged, develop self-respect and pride, and make valuable contributions to their communities and nation.

The Recommendations

The first recommendation is to recognize that all students can benefit from leadership skill development. This would include not just traditional vertical leadership experiences, but also horizontal leadership involving teams and community groups. In particular, educators should engage those students not typically selected by their peers and pay attention to classroom size, recognizing that smaller organizational units facilitate personalization and student ownership.

"Each human being has a contribution to make to society," said Rabbi Martin Schloss, a commission member who has devoted his entire life to spiritual, educational, and religious practice and has been involved in the New York

State Education Department and NYS Special Education Services for the past decade.


He elaborated, "It's not just about reaching those with the skills, and encouraging them to pursue excellence. It's about encouraging all individuals to not be afraid to take the quantum leap."

The second recommendation is to promote leadership application beyond the schools, requiring the collaboration of educators with community and business leaders and policymakers so that student leadership skills can be acquired and applied in local and global communities.

The third recommendation focuses on the need to establish a centralized student leadership institute to provide a systematic approach to the development of leadership skills in students. The institute will offer curriculum development and instructional resources, professional development, and student leadership programs, and it will provide technical assistance to schools in assessing leadership skill development, skill application, and program effectiveness.

The fourth recommendation is to formally recognize student participation in leadership activities with a program of incentives including certificates, notations on transcripts and diplomas, and awards from NYSED and the institute, whose significance can be communicated to colleges and prospective employers.

With the charge set, the planning process is set to begin, explained Thomas, with the development of the institute for Youth Leadership. The institute's initial goals include the development of curriculum, instruction, and delivery methods. An advisory committee will be recruited to see the operational plan through, including overseeing the fundraising, dissemination of funds, assisting

 "Some kids may not be leaders [in front of a group], but can apply leadership skills to their dreams and aspirations."

with the planning process, helping to organize the governing structure and management team, and addressing the hundreds of other issues that have to be solved.


"The advisory committee's mission is very different from the commission's charge," Thomas explained. "It isn't to state the problem, it's to help solve the problem."

Background – A Parking Lot Mentality

Former Regent and Chancellor Emeritus Carl T. Hayden joined the commission as chairperson in 2004 to help champion values he believes have become relegated to a "second curriculum status." Hayden has seen curriculum come full-circle and realizes a need for a complete package for our youth. In the '70s and '80s, character education, citizenship, and community service were all important aspects of a child's developmental curriculum. But, when our youth were still struggling upon graduation without necessary mathematical and reasoning skills, the emphasis shifted toward academics.

"In 1995, I saw a system that worked well for practitioners," Hayden recalled, "but not particularly well for the kids." "We had a 'parking space' for every child depending on their ability. We need to move leadership from the back burner to the front, and find the time to create the structures that will move the agenda of leadership principles in our children from a 'second curriculum' to a first."

According to Associate Commissioner of the New York State Education Department (NYSED) and commission member Jim Butterworth, the goals of the education system in New York have always been threefold. The *vocational* aspect prepares kids to be able to find jobs and focuses


The standards movement is about the acquisition of skill and knowledge. Leadership development – including service learning, participation in citizenship, and character development – is about the application."

on academic preparedness and the standards. *Citizenship* – where character development comes in – involves making sure students are well informed so they'll want to participate in society. *Personal competence* is the final stage and focuses on developing individual character traits like self-confidence, resilience, and personal characteristics that lead one to live a fulfilling life or become a good family member or member of their community.

"The S.A.V.E. legislation from 2000 had many components, including character development," Butterworth explained. "With the No Child Left Behind legislation and movement toward accountability and assessment, we've sort of lost that balance. You can prepare kids that end up being evil geniuses, without the balance of the three goals."

"Children who are involved in service traditionally perform better academically," said Silda A. Wall, president of Children for Children Foundation. "The earlier children become involved in their community, the more likely they are to stay involved, and involve their kids in a multigenerational response."

"Many New York City school districts have done very little in terms of character education." "It's 'on the books,'" Wall conceded, "but not much has been developed in terms of curriculum."

Blue Ribbon Commission Chief of

Staff Jim Collins agreed. "Character education was an unfunded mandate with little accountability," said Collins. "Some districts have great programs, some have none, and some just pay it lip service. Planning efforts aren't on the front burner for many districts."

"It's important as educators that we help children acquire skills and knowledge," said Thomas. "But it's equally important that we give them opportunities to apply that knowledge and skills. The standards movement is about the *acquisition* of skill and knowledge. Leadership development – including service learning, participation in citizenship, and character development – is about the *application*."

"It's much like a handshake," said Thomas. "One does not exist without the other – and we need both to call kids educated."

Effective Modeling

One of the strongest themes that came out of the early sessions was the need to model and emulate effective leadership.

"I led 8,000-10,000 sailors during Operation Iraqi Freedom," said Vice Admiral Barry M. Costello. "It was a privilege to watch 18-year-olds – who one year earlier attended their senior prom – launching airplanes off an aircraft carrier and doing things that a year ago they would have never envisioned."

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"Our children are the leaders of tomorrow," Costello reminded. "We need to create an environment, give/show them examples to emulate, and provide opportunities for them to be in leadership roles in order to have a better country down the road. And we need to remain open to the possibilities of change."

"Our children need it. The *country* needs it."

Linda Melton Mann spent years in the Poughkeepsie City School District, attempting to reach all kids through her work with minority populations. She learned leadership skills as the middle child in a family of nine and described herself as a shy child until someone saw she had a gift for public speaking, and encouraged and developed that leadership skill.

"People tend to view our children as people to talk 'to' not 'with' but today's

☉ *"Bullies are leaders that we can develop, if we harness and channel their leadership skills in a positive way."*

children are exciting, freethinkers with fantastic ideas! They're not just into their music," Mann explained. "Student government and student council programs are wonderful avenues for children to talk, lead, and share views."

"While principal of Poughkeepsie's Warring Elementary School," Mann continued, "I developed a student government program in grades 2-6 to involve kids and reduce bullying. Bullies are leaders that we can develop, if we harness and channel their leadership skills in a positive way."

Jeffrey Arnett, director of education and public programs for the National

Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum in Cooperstown, NY, described the many forms leadership can take, including the connection between effective communication and quality leadership.

"Leadership is intrinsic and applies to the individual," explained Arnett, "not to his or her relationship to the group. It doesn't mean a student has to be out in front of tons of kids. Some kids may not be leaders [in front of a group], but can apply leadership skills to their dreams and aspirations."

"You can't lead unless you can communicate effectively through the spoken and written word or through

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musical and artistic communication," said Arnett. "All children have unique talents and abilities. The charge for the teacher is to find the way the students with special needs can express themselves."

Restoring Balance

Contrary to popular belief, it doesn't take additional time to pay attention to character development and leadership development; they're not separate courses.

"What's not needed here is an elitist view," said Butterworth. "A lot of this

can be infused into the fabric of the school. It's really about the culture – about re-norming or re-culturing a school so that people care about one another and about their school and their community."

Butterworth noted that technology and trends in society lead people to live more solitary lives. They can become very insular and don't interact with others in social settings, so it's important to restore that balance. One way to do that is through involving kids in the development so they're not solely reacting to the rules.

"Most teachers you'll talk to went into

teaching to make a difference in kids' lives," explained Butterworth, "not to get kids to pass tests." "That never went away. I think this call to leadership is going to resonate and tap into an important need educators have felt for a long time to restore that balance." 🌟

Editor's note: Amy E. Tucker is a freelance writer from Clifton Park, NY, covering education and sports for the past decade.

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- James Butterworth..... Assistant Commissioner, NYS Education Department
- Vice Admiral Barry Costello..... Commander, Third Fleet, United States Navy
- Roseanne DeFabio..... Assistant Superintendent, Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany
- James Donnelly..... National Principal of the Year; Principal, Dolgeville High School
- John Flynn..... President, Capital District YMCA
- Blair Hartman..... District Governor, Rotary International
- Muriel Howard..... President, Buffalo State College
- Rocco Marano..... Director of Student Services, National Association of Secondary School Principals
- Kevin McGuire..... Professor of Leadership and Accountability, St. John's University
- Linda Melton Mann..... Professor of Education, Mercy College
- Barbara Nagler..... District Superintendent, Capital Region BOCES
- Donald Ogilvie..... District Superintendent, Erie I BOCES
- Dale A. Petroskey..... President, National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum
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