

June 19, 2009

**A message of congratulations from  
Superintendent Maria L. Goodloe-Johnson, Ph.D.**

Congratulations, Class of 2009! This month, I've spoken at graduations at five of our high schools, and I'm very impressed with the Class of 2009. As a whole, they provide us with a preview of a bright future. As individuals and as a group, they have embraced academics, sports, the arts and a sense of social responsibility. They are defining their own success, and I truly believe that they will pursue and achieve great things.

These graduates care about each other and about the world as a whole. Despite graduating in an economic downturn, they are full of hope and plans for making the world a better place. I want to thank every parent, guardian, family member, community member, teacher and SPS employee who has helped our graduates reach this pinnacle.

Helping more students graduate with the skills needed to succeed in higher education and in their careers is a primary goal of Seattle Public Schools. The benefits of postsecondary education have never been greater.

Today, the unemployment rate for those without a high school diploma is three times the rate for those with a bachelor's degree. In the 21st century economy, a high school diploma must prepare our students for their next step in life. But getting ready for college doesn't start when a student enters ninth grade. It is a process that begins when a five-year-old starts kindergarten excited and ready to learn and continues through elementary and middle school as he or she builds language and math skills.

To meet these critical academic milestones, we must provide a rigorous sequence of courses and support students along the way. That's why we are working to create a consistent, district-wide approach in reading and writing, math, and science. All students need access to college-ready courses in high school — like Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate. That's why we increased the number of AP classes across our district by more than 30 percent this year.

Students who enroll in these advanced classes are much more likely to stay engaged in school, to graduate, and to leave prepared for the next challenge. We also administered the PSAT district-wide to ninth-, tenth-, and eleventh-grade students to build a college-going culture and identify students who have the potential to be successful in AP classes.

This powerful data shows students that they too have the ability to succeed in higher-level classes. When we challenge students to meet high expectations, they rise to the occasion.

Along with a common curriculum and rigorous courses, students need teachers who believe they can reach higher. I am proud of our instructional staff, who work hard to give our children the best education possible and improve their skills.

Last year, we doubled the number of National Board Certified teachers — and Seattle ranked among the top districts in the nation in the number of newly board-certified teachers, many of whom are teaching in our neediest schools. Excellent teachers make a difference. Our teachers not only help our graduates learn how to read and write and become mathematicians and performing artists - but they teach our students HOW to learn - how to think and to reason. They encourage innovation and creativity.

So to all of our teachers and school-based staff: Thank You: These outstanding graduates of the class of 2009 are a testament to your skill, your dedication and commitment, and your caring. Working together, we will ensure that even more students graduate next year prepared for college, careers and life.