

# Regents chief to exit amid policy turmoil

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ALBANY BUREAU

ALBANY - The head of New York's education board will step down at the end of her term next year, a sign of the volatile times for education policy in the state and an indication of changes on the influential board.

Board of Regents Chancellor Merryl Tisch announced Monday she won't seek another term next March after seven years as chancellor and 20 years as a member of the board.

A former teacher, Tisch, 60, has led the board through the state's still-ongoing transition to the Common Core, the more-stringent education standards being implemented in more than 40 states. The state's rocky implementation led to unrest among parents and teachers, with Tisch becoming one of the faces of the push for higher standards and a frequent target of criticism.

See [EDUCATION, Page 10A](#)

## Article Continued Below

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[See EDUCATION on Page A10](#)

### Education

Continued from Page 1A

"I promise you that I will be deeply engaged in all these issues that have been the baseline of my daily existence for decades," Tisch told reporters after she announced her plans to the board.

Her term will expire at the end of March.

"To my last day in this seat, I will have your back and I will let it be known that it is an honor to have each and every one of you serve the great state of New York," Tisch told the 17-member board at its meeting Monday.

Tisch's decision drew calls for further reforms to New York education policies as both the state Education Department and Gov. Andrew Cuomo are convening panels to recommend ways to modify Common Core and tougher teacher evaluations.

"With this announcement, New York state can move past an era that put far too much emphasis on standardized testing and, too often, dismissed the concerns of parents and educators," Karen Magee, president of the New York State United Teachers Union, said in a statement. "This mistaken direction in state education policy led to a serious erosion of trust and confidence."

Cuomo said Tisch managed a difficult time for education. He has knocked the state Education Department for a poor rollout of Common Core, but has also called for stronger standards for students and teachers.

"It's a tough, tough area to work in because it is controversial and people have different ideas," Cuomo said Monday. "So I thank her very much for her service. This is also a time where you're going to see a lot of changes in the education system. The Common Core system I think almost everyone uniformly agrees needs dramatic reform, and we're working on that now."

### Resistance from within board

Tisch also was facing increased resistance from some of the 17-member board. In recent years, the state Legislature has elected members to the Regents who have been ardent critics of the state's implementation of the new standards, and they have called on the state to take additional steps to improve the system.

Newly elected Regent Judith Johnson, one of the board's most vocal skeptics from the Hudson Valley, praised Tisch for her

"bravery," but said more reforms will be coming.

"I think the Board of Regents will continue with its work around the issues of reform and that we will have learned from the experiences of the past seven years and that you'll see those leanings occur as the reform agenda goes forward," Johnson said.

Wade Norwood, a Regents member from Rochester, said the board has been "incredibly well served by the chancellor's clarity, her knowledge of education and her passion and energy."

He downplayed ongoing changes to the board, which will face another round of appointments this spring.

"This is not the first leadership transition nor will it be the last," Norwood said. "We will have to manage and adapt with new colleagues coming on in the spring and continue to do the work of the people."

Had she sought another term, Tisch would have had to receive approval from the state Legislature, which elects Regents in a joint session. But the process is controlled by Assembly Democrats, who make up a majority of the entire 213-seat Legislature.

Tisch's elevation to the Board of Regents came while the state Assembly was led by Speaker Sheldon Silver, D-Manhattan. In January, Silver stepped down after he was arrested on corruption charges and was replaced by Speaker Carl Heastie, D-Bronx.

The Regents will vote for their new chancellor next spring.

Heastie praised Tisch for being a "leading advocate for innovative methods to attract and retain high quality teachers in our schools."

"Dr. Tisch has been a principled leader who stood up for New York's struggling schools and a tireless advocate for higher standards that better prepare our children for future achievement," Heastie said in a statement.

Tisch remains the chairperson of the Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty, a major housing nonprofit based in New York City. When asked about her future, Tisch didn't reveal her hand, other than to say: "Stay tuned." She suggested she will remain active in education.

Some lawmakers said Tisch's move is an opportunity to rethink education in New York. About 20 percent of students last April declined to take the third through eighth grade exams in protest.

"I have said it time and again," Assemblyman Phil Palmesano, R-Corning, said in a statement. "If we are going to create a world-class education system in New York for our children we must treat our parents as partners, teachers as professionals and ensure our children's self-worth is not measured by how they score on a high-stakes standardized test."

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