

FROM THE POINT

SUNY chief looks ahead

SUNY Chancellor Kristina Johnson visited the Newsday editorial board Thursday, her first since she took office in September. Here's the top line:

She's largely satisfied with the results of her first state budget battle, but was coy on some of the financial details until the state finishes negotiations with faculty on a new contract.

Johnson wants to offer matching grants to universities that attract research dollars, but said a priority is to grow SUNY's endowment and attract partnerships to make that possible.

On the importance of a public university system having a flagship school — like Stony Brook University, for example — Johnson displayed her political savvy. Noting that she has visited nearly 40 of the system's 64 campuses, she said many "are the flagships of their communities." Each campus, she said, is distinctive and needs to be treated differently.

Johnson envisions SUNY as a starfish organization, a term popularized in the book "The Starfish and the Spider." The book uses biology — if you cut off the head of a spider, it dies, but if you cut off a leg of a starfish it grows a new one — to describe centralized and decentralized organizations. Johnson said she bought 64 copies and sent one with a note to each campus president.

Johnson said, "I appreciate the pride" people have in flagship schools in other states, which often revolves around the institutions' sports teams. And she has been rooting for Stony Brook's No. 1-ranked women's lacrosse team, an interest that stems not only from being the SUNY chancellor but also from her experience playing lacrosse at Stanford University.

While conceding she has more to learn, Johnson said she has seen and learned enough to know one thing about the strengths of the 440,000-student system she now leads.

Said Johnson: "SUNY needs to tell its story better."

— Michael Dobie

This is excerpted from *The Point*, the daily email newsletter of the editorial board. Sign up at newsday.com/ThePoint

The internet can overwhelm children

Many parents face fears as they send their children off to school or anywhere out of a parent or guardian's watchful eye. Access to the ever-evolving information highway in our homes can be overwhelming for a developing mind.

Parents need to find ways to reassure children and assess their states of mind.

Never be afraid to ask your children how they are feeling or if something is upsetting them. Make sure you ask at a time and in an environment when you both are most likely to be able to have a deeper conversation.

Don't avoid difficult conversations, acknowledge that you don't have all the answers, monitor TV and internet use, be sensitive to your children's responses and encourage hope.

A parent must also be aware that some issues, such as school violence or bullying, might not be easy for a child to discuss.

At those times, it can be best to get help from an expert in child behavior.

Karen Boorshtein,
Huntington

Editor's note: The writer is president and chief executive of the Family Service League, a social services agency.

JUST SAYIN'



Some state parkways in dangerous disrepair

Many local roads are in big need of repair. One example is the southbound side of the Wantagh State Parkway, from the Northern State Parkway to the Southern State Parkway. It was not repaved when they repaved the northbound side.

The southbound side has become dangerous, and the potholes seem to keep getting bigger.

The northbound side was repaved, and they did a very good job. Meadowbrook Parkway also needs repair. Potholes are forming and make it hard to change lanes.

Bob Viets,
Wantagh

JUST SAYIN' invites comment about public policy issues you're not seeing in Newsday. Send letters of up to 200 words to letters@newsday.com, with "Just Sayin'" in the subject line. Include name, address, phone numbers. Or write Newsday Opinion, 235 Pinelawn Road, Melville, NY 11747. Letters will be edited, become property of Newsday and may be republished in all media.

FROM THE POINT

What to make of per-pupil reporting mandate

BY LANE FILLER

In the next school year, some of New York's school districts are going to have to comply with a new state law which requires that per-pupil spending be reported school by school.

It's a contentious change that Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo pushed in the state budget, considering that a similar federal rule was passed in 2015 as part of the federal Every Student Succeeds Act, which requires much of the same reporting for all districts beginning in December.

But there is a difference.

The state law requires that the spending be reported beforehand, while the federal law makes districts report what they've already spent.

The state law also requires that the reports show the funding sources for each school, the policies by which money was allocated and a demographic breakdown of each school.

Cuomo's plan has a three-year phase-in, starting with districts in cities with populations of more than a million people (New York City only) and the approximately 75 districts that get more than 50 percent of their funding from the

state, which includes several on Long Island.

Cuomo's plan seems to be meant as another kick at Mayor Bill de Blasio, as well as a nudge at districts and teachers unions in areas where a lot of money is spent without great results.

Where districts are bigger and more diverse, there will be tremendous scrutiny on how funding in poorer or more minority-populated areas matches up to whiter, richer schools. That will be particularly true in mega-districts like New York City, and in districts with both high-wealth and low-wealth neighborhoods.

Long Island has some districts with significant socioeconomic or racial differences from building to building, and any discrepancies surely will be questioned.

Parents and prospective home buyers will scan the lists for differences in per-pupil spending.

Imagine a home buyer looking in both Merrick and Wantagh and finding the elementary schools in one spend \$3,000 more per student than the other. What would that mean?

It could show a bigger commitment to facilities, instruction or extras. But it also could

mean more special education, which can drive up per-pupil spending dramatically.

It could mean that the teachers, who have stuck around longer and earned more seniority, earn more. Or it could indicate that more kids aren't native English speakers and need more attention.

With all these figures available, it could take a rocket scientist to figure out what they mean.

Or at least a top-notch Long Island real estate agent.

Lane Filler is a member of Newsday's editorial board.