

## **From the President's Desk: Beginnings**

by Susanne Marcus, NYS TESOL President

*For last year's words belong to last year's language  
And next year's words await another voice.  
And to make an end is to make a beginning.*

—T. S. Eliot, "Little Gidding"

As a new school year begins, many of us will face changes at our educational institutions, changes in state or federal mandates, changes in student populations, and changes in leadership. For those of us who've been in the ESOL field over 20 years, we may think of the French epigram, "*Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.*" (The more things change, the more they remain the same.) But it does not have to be the same thing this year. We have new resources that can fully support our efforts more than ever. The publication of the *Blueprint for ELLs Success* by the New York State Department of Education is something that is not a change, but something new. Many K-12 ESL teachers have waited years for such a document from the NYSED. The publication of the long-awaited amended CR-Part 154 is also something new. We should all read it carefully, as it actually has changed—it is not "*la même chose.*" If it is the same thing, we must stop it and speak out. And why was it sent to the field of practitioners on July 9, with a deadline of August 23, 2014, to respond? By the time you read this letter, I hope you will have already sent in your comments on the proposed amendments.

New beginnings can be exciting, but they can also be frightening. We want change, but are not quite sure—and perhaps apprehensive about—how it will be implemented. The onset of a new school year is a perfect opportunity for each of us to reflect on a much bigger picture than the coming year. The beginning of our school year is wide open, if we keep ourselves open to change. Each year is a beginning, and as educators, we must be flexible or we will not survive. As we begin our classes in the (I hope) cool breezes of September, we must ready ourselves for the inevitable changes that await us. Clearly, we all know and are ready for the changes in our maturing students—for these are the changes we expect and welcome. When faced with other changes, however, some of which we may not have been part of, we often respond from an emotional perspective, feeling angry that we were left out of the decision-making process. Now, more than ever, we hear more people claiming to be experts on the challenges of public education; some of the most outspoken of these people have absolutely no background in education, particularly in public education. So this year, we are faced with a new beginning that includes speaking out from our first-hand experiences about what works in public education, and particularly about what works for our widely diverse group of English language learners.

One of my goals of my presidency a few years back was to be a better listener and help others to listen with intent. When individuals with no first-hand experience in public education present what they call "reforms," ask them to listen first to those of us on the front lines. It is a new beginning and our time has come. Listen with intent and hear the underlying message of others.

We have begun to enhance our collaboration with NYSABE and other advocacy groups. One concrete example of how we have moved beyond the beginning is our

upcoming NYS TESOL and NYSABE-sponsored symposium at St. John's University on October 25. This event celebrates and reflects on "Lau vs. Nichols: Embracing the Victories to Shape a Better Future."

Best wishes for a smooth beginning, with the openness, strength, and knowledge to advocate for what you do daily to empower the lives of your students.

Yours in NYS TESOL,  
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Lines from "Little Gidding" are from "The Waste Land" *and Other Poems* (New York, NY: Penguin Classics, 2003), xxi.