



## **New York State Council of School Superintendents Distinguished Service Award**

*Remarks Presented by*

**Retired Life Member Patricia Sullivan-Kriss**

September 22, 2019  
Saratoga Springs, NY

Thank you Bill, my colleague and longtime friend, for your kind words. And sincere thanks to the Distinguished Service Selection Committee and to NYSIR for sponsoring this award.

I was honored, and was quite surprised, when I received the phone call from Deidre Hungerford telling me that I had been selected to be the recipient of the 2019 Distinguished Service Award.

It is humbling and wonderful to be recognized for that which I have loved doing for so many years. The distinguished service award is bestowed upon a person who has exhibited service to education and NYSCOSS.....and I have great affinity for both.

While I know that this isn't an Oscar acceptance speech, I would like to dedicate this honor to the memory of my first and most powerful teacher....my dad, Paul Joseph Sullivan. I do so because he was the person who taught me to think beyond self and value involvement and service.

Paul Sullivan was a quiet man of faith who lived a life of doing for others. He lived his belief that a life well lived supports and nurtures family, profession and community. This perspective led to his daily demonstration of commitment to all three.

Dad was a WW II veteran who served in Europe and received the Purple Heart, Bronze Star and Silver Star. He was a Little League coach and the first commissioner of the Rockville Centre Pee Wee League; served as president of his church's Holy Name Society; was a member of the Rockville Centre Mayor's Finance Advisory Board; and a member of the Rockville Centre Board of Education for 6 years, as president leading it through a desegregation order by then Commissioner Gordon Ambach. In later life, he volunteered at Social Services, assisting the needy in preparing tax returns.

He accomplished all this while being an executive at Mobil Oil and being Ozzie Nelson as he raised his family of 5 children, along with our own Harriet Nelson, my mom Ellen, who is feisty as ever at 95 years old!

While I did not do it consciously, I believe my core values of supporting family, colleagues and community, sprung from my deep love and admiration for dad and how he lived his life.

My journey in education began in 1973 when I was a high school senior in at South Side High School in Rockville Centre, deliberating my career path. I knew that I loved helping children but was a bit baffled as to how to accomplish it.

Initially, I wanted to be a pediatrician. But, I struggled in high school to balance a chemical equation. Then a nurse, but to this day, I faint at the sight of blood. Then a physical education teacher, but I could not hit a softball or drive to the basket. Sound familiar Emma? Upon investigation, I realized that I could nurture and serve children in the new field of education called special education. Public law 94-142 had just recently been enacted.

From there my life exploded! Teacher, assistant principal, principal, assistant superintendent, deputy superintendent, superintendent, wife and mom of 4 children, Girl Scout leader, preschool fundraiser, Rockville Centre Education Foundation and Music and Performing Arts boards, and many professional organizations. I found myself never able to keep my hand down when volunteers were sought! I was Paul's daughter!

Dad actually never knew that the lesson of service which he taught me was used often when I answered that famous interview question, "Tell me a little bit about yourself." Whether it was in Maryland, Rockville Centre, William Floyd, Carle Place, Plainview-Old Bethpage, Hauppauge or West Hempstead, I knew how to define myself in terms of who and what I value. And, I knew the value of remaining true to that definition.

In choosing to be a superintendent of schools, each of us chose to be in a service profession. We give of self to children, parents, staff and community. As such, we play an important role in the development of so many lives. I applaud each of you for your commitment to others. I hope that you enjoy the giving and that each day you are thankful that your journey resulted in such meaningful service.

This afternoon, I am so very touched to be recognized by my colleagues and friends for what I hope will be viewed as my legacy .... providing as best I could, to all with whom I worked, the gifts of encouragement, support, insight and service.

Today is also an opportunity for me to thank those who have supported me and contributed to my journey of 41 years.

My husband and best friend for 40 years, Steve. You are my rock and have been in good times and tough times. You are the most kind and loving person I know. You are also pretty funny! Without your unwavering support, I could not have had career and family. Together we have navigated the waters of our careers and raised four amazing, wonderful children.

Joellen, Kieran, Daniel and Emma....I love you so deeply and admire the wonderful people who you are. Thank you for teaching me the lesson that all children are unique and that as a mom and an educator, each child must be treated as the special person he or she is. Every time that I met with a concerned parent, I saw your beautiful faces and would try to relate to the issue as if it were involving one of you. You taught me to listen carefully. You taught me compassion.

Thank you to Chuck and the NYSCOSS staff for everything that you have done for me and our organization. You are a dedicated and caring team of professionals who champion superintendents across New York State.

To my colleagues from Nassau, Suffolk and across the State, my thanks for your insights, support and friendships. They will always be treasured memories.

And to the many Strategic Partners who support our Council and who have become my friends, my gratitude. NYSCOSS would not be the organization we are without your support.

In closing, I thank you once again, dear colleagues, for recognizing my efforts with this award. It is so very special to me and my family.

And, thanks dad for being my teacher and sharing with me your legacy. Hope that you are smiling at mine!