KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY | College of Education
Office of the Nelson and Marilyn Galle Dean

September 14, 2026

Dr. Phillip Payne
Interim Dean of the Graduate School
Eisenhower Hall
CAMPUS

Dear Dean Payne,

I appreciate the opportunity to add my voice to the recommendation for a posthumous degree for Ms. Carmen Johnson from the College of Education's Community College Leadership Program (CCLP). These types of requests are always emotional, and this one is no different. What is different, in my experience, is that this request was initially driven by Carmen's peers in the cohort group of which she was a member. Once the spark was lit by the students, the faculty of the program and the Department of Educational Leadership saw the merit in the request and stridently joined in the effort to recognize all the Carmen accomplished.

Carmen was everything a university could want in a student. Dr. Collins' letter details her struggles with cancer and her determination to see the program through to completion. The CCLP program is cohort based, and synchronized in the timing of course offerings. In another program design, Carmen would have met all three of K-State's requirements for a posthumous degree. It is unfortunate that the CCLP program's format worked against her in this way, but for every requirement or rule there must be room for exceptions. We are asking for that exception in the case of Carmen Johnson. She was a model student who was dealt a tough hand and played it through to the end. Recognizing her at graduation would show our University's dedication to our students and the accomplishments of Carmen through three years without sacrificing the rigor of our programs. In fact, it would send a clear message that we are student-centered.

I strongly support the Department of Educational Leadership's request to award Carmen Johnson a posthumous EdD degree during the December 2026 Commencement ceremony and ask that you take positive action on the issue.

Sincerely,



Debbie K. Mercer, Ph.D.
Marilyn and Nelson Galle Dean of Education