

# REGENTS ADVISORY COUNCIL ON LIBRARIES

## Report to the Regents Cultural Education Committee - 2009

The Regents Advisory Council on Libraries, as the oldest continuing Regents advisory body, is responsible to keep the Board of Regents informed about the conditions and needs of the State's libraries, and to suggest policies and actions that would make those libraries more useful for the residents of New York State.

We recognize our responsibility to strengthen libraries and identify the resources libraries need to serve New Yorkers. We welcome the opportunity to join forces with the Regents to ensure the viability of our state's library systems and 7,000 libraries. Today we ask you to reaffirm your role as champion of our state's libraries and library systems; to help us set a new course for the future and to recognize that, in spite of economic challenges, quality library service must be available to every child and every adult in our state.

This year's report focuses on the unprecedented fiscal challenges facing libraries, the critical role of libraries in the larger educational mission of the Regents and the need to ensure the significance of libraries in a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Information age.

### 1. Fiscal Challenges

New York's libraries of all types — public, school, academic, and special — are critical to their users, communities, and institutions. Yet year after year, inadequate State funding (including funding decreases the last two years) has forced our 7,000 libraries to struggle, even while government officials seem to assume that libraries will continue to be able to do more with less and somehow provide needed services.

At the same time local municipalities, school districts, colleges and universities are reducing library support. Coupled with the loss of State funding, many library systems find themselves in danger of failing, particularly school library systems and rural public library systems, which receive nearly all of their funding through State aid. In addition, our urban library systems are faced with massive reductions in aid from their city governments, resulting in significant layoffs and library closings.

Nor can we expect the State Library to play its indispensable role in the successful delivery of statewide library services and leadership for all the libraries of New York. Stable funding and adequate staffing are essential for the State Library to ensure that all New Yorkers have the information and tools they need to succeed as citizens, workers, parents and students in a global economy.

The fiscal struggle of all libraries in New York has been exacerbated by the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, which has seen usage by the people of New York go up dramatically – 10-20 percent on average and, in some communities, as much as 50% or more. New Yorkers instinctively turn to libraries for the help they need to recover from their own economic distress. What they are only beginning to realize is that consistent underfunding means that many libraries must now dramatically reduce hours, eliminate staff and curtail resources – just when the residents need those most. In the library world, we are well past “doing more with less” and are forced into “doing less with less”.

To help New York's libraries serve our state's citizens at this time of need, we urge the Board of Regents to press right now to maintain and increase state and federal funding for our libraries and library systems. Along with funding for State Aid to Schools, the Board of Regents needs to make state and federal funding for libraries a Regents priority budget and legislative item, each and every year.

### 2. The Key Role Of Libraries In The Education Of All New Yorkers

We ask that you ensure that libraries and library systems are recognized as full partners in the educational process and as necessary for student achievement. Through a fully integrated collaborative approach with

teacher partners, School Libraries led by certified school library media specialists link curriculum resources, technology and information literacy instruction to promote student achievement and produce student learners who think critically and participate in an active process of building their own understanding and knowledge for the 21st century.

More than 60 research studies have shown that reading scores rise by 10 to 20 percent in schools with strong collections, strong library programs and certified school library media specialists – in spite of factors such as poverty levels, ethnicity, and per-pupil spending. To achieve such results statewide and to develop a life-long love of reading, we ask that you strengthen and expand your present mandates for school library programs to include certified library media specialists at the elementary school level.

The US Department of Labor has noted that the average worker will have several jobs and careers during the course of his/her lifetime. The current recession has set many people on a path to a new career already. New Yorkers will need lifelong learning, beginning but not ending in our P-16 institutions. These adults, too, are part of the State's educational mission and libraries are the main vehicles that adults have to obtain that necessary lifelong learning.

Among the tools that adults use in their educational advancement are the digital collections and electronic resources that are not available on the open Internet. Through its purchasing power, the State has made it possible for the residents of even the least affluent communities to have access to these resources. As electronic resources become even more important in this century, we ask you to ensure that this State Library role will not be threatened.

### **3. The Need To Re-evaluate Library Services In The Internet Age**

We are gratified that the recommendations of the 2000 Regents Commission on Libraries have remained a Regents priority over the past nine years. However, we are now at a more critical turning point in the future of libraries than was clear in 2000.

The world surrounding libraries has changed; the opportunities and threats posed by a much more important Internet are looming large. Moreover, we have a new State Librarian Bernard A. Margolis in place and will have a new Commissioner of Education next.

For all these reasons, we suggest that 2009 is the opportune time to re-examine the future of library services in New York State through a new *Regents Commission on Library Services*, which would chart new directions with legislative and executive leadership, educational leaders, and library supporters statewide.

We realize that it is our mutual responsibility to bring library services into the lives of all our state's citizens and to focus our efforts in a manner that resonates with every citizen and legislator so that vigorous library support is continued in good times and in bad. We offer our services to this end, and look forward to partnering with the Board of Regents to focus attention on the need of New Yorkers for 21st century library services.

#### Regents Advisory Council on Libraries

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