

Regents Advisory Council
Report to the Cultural Education Committee
April 2010

The Regents Advisory Council on Libraries, the oldest continuing Regents advisory body, is responsible for keeping the Board of Regents informed about the conditions and needs of the State's libraries. Members of the Council are vocal and engaged champions for libraries. This group of experienced library professionals and stakeholders is poised to articulate and advocate for the necessary tools, policies and support that will ensure future sustainability of libraries and free and open access for all residents of New York State.

New York's librarians, library workers and library supporters strive to strengthen libraries and meet the growing demand for quality programming, technology resources, services and collections each and every day. We know that libraries are a core component of the 21st century learning environment and work to identify, and advocate for, the resources libraries need to serve the tens of millions of New Yorkers that avail themselves of our services. Now more than ever, we rely on the Regents to ensure the viability of our state's library systems and 7,000 libraries and to ensure that quality library service must be available to every child and every adult in our state.

Priority One: Funding

Libraries are in crisis. The frequent announcements of library closings throughout the United States are chilling reminders that even though libraries are critical in times of economic distress, many are the victims of short sighted fiscal policies that gut library support in budget balancing efforts. As in other trying times in our Country's history, libraries are proving to be the place where distressed people turn for help and assistance. Now is the time to invest in the infrastructure that libraries provide to our society and educational systems.

Closings, reductions in services and layoffs in New York's libraries are inevitable and unavoidable unless cuts to library funding are stemmed and restored when the economic outlook improves. The Governor's proposed 2010-2011 budget includes what would be the 5th cut in less than two years for New York's libraries and library systems, bringing funding to pre-1998 levels. Library funding is the first to be cut in hard times, and the last to be funded in better times.

Libraries and Library Systems need the State Library to lead with a compelling and ambitious vision for the future, and have an indispensable role in the successful delivery of statewide library services. 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.

We ask that the Regents make Library and Library System funding a priority in relation to all other State Education initiatives. Schools cannot be successful if the communities that surround them cannot offer the preparatory and continuing support necessary to introduce and reinforce skills and learning. Learning occurs on a continuum, and libraries of all kinds -- school, public, academic and the Systems that support them -- are essential components of the educational process. Libraries need the Regents to be our most vocal cheerleaders on this front.

Priority Two: Strategic Support

Libraries and Library Systems need to be recognized as full partners in the educational process and integral for student and adult achievement; something the Regents can help to promote and support.

To achieve results statewide, develop a life-long love of learning, and improve the likelihood of successful educational initiatives, we ask that you expand the present mandate to include certified library media specialists at the elementary school level. To achieve this goal, we also ask that you actively support current and future legislative initiatives that enable libraries, library systems and the State Library to work together more effectively.

Libraries are at a critical turning point in our history. The opportunities and administrative challenges of technology create the pressing need to reevaluate the coordination and cooperation of libraries and library systems on local, regional and statewide levels between and amongst ourselves and with other institutional partners such as BOCES.

While the *2000 Regents Commission on Library Services* is a valuable planning document, it is time to look at the Commission with fresh eyes and a new outlook that takes into account the events and successes of the past ten years and will chart the course for the next ten. We ask that you take the lead in calling for a discussion about best practices in library and library system administration so that we can leverage opportunities and reduce any unnecessary duplication and create a Commission for the next decade of progressive library service to our State.

Each member of the Regents Advisory Council is taking an active role on the Council, and is reaching out to members of the Regents in an effort to engage active participation in local library events and foster an even deeper understanding of the needs, challenges and successes of school, public, academic and special libraries. We ask that you attend an event or program at a local library in your district, or schedule a tour and visit of a local library. We would be happy to make recommendations or connect you with a local library representative.

We are honored to serve as the Regents Advisory Council on Libraries, and look forward to working with you to ensure that New Yorkers have access to quality libraries throughout their lives; and that libraries can continue to serve as community centers, learning centers, connection centers, cultural centers and civic engagement centers for all New Yorkers. Thank you for the opportunity to work with you as partners as we look to the future of libraries in New York.

Respectfully submitted,

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