

# Report TO THE STATE BOARD OF REGENTS

By State Education Commissioner Richard P. Mills

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**The Meeting in Brief:** The Regents will consider for approval their recommendations for the 2006-07 budget, their conceptual proposal for State Aid, and the annual report on charter schools. The Board will discuss reports on USNY strategies to close the achievement gap, and to improve high school graduation rates.

## ***USNY Strategies to Close the Gap***

The resources among the institutions of the University of the State of New York are almost unimaginable. At least one Regent this year said it is time for us to draw greater attention to the full extent of what New York has. Consider, for example, the collections of the great museums of New York, the research capabilities in higher education, and the holdings in the thousands of libraries of all kinds. These and many other educational and cultural institutions have the capacity to educate the people of New York, and in so doing, build economic and civic vitality.

The resources of USNY provide our best opportunity to raise student achievement and close the gap in achievement. The Regents will discuss an item that describes five "levers for change" that engage USNY resources of many kinds to close the gap. For example, generating and disseminating instructional knowledge can leverage change when whole faculties share effective practice and add to their stock of what works. Effective practice emerges when several institutions, including schools, colleagues and

universities, BOCES, libraries, and other regional units collaborate.

We also learned in the USNY regional meetings this spring and summer that we must engage the whole system from pre-kindergarten through higher education. That system leaks talent at every point, but joint effort among the institutions could reduce those losses. It is particularly important to look at the transition points in the system. How can we make sure that children enter first grade ready to learn to read? How can we enable them to enter 9<sup>th</sup> grade with the skills for high school? What would make transition from high school to further education seamless and successful for more students?

Eight regional USNY meetings this year developed the idea of the aims that drive the whole system:

- Every child will get a good start.
- Every child will learn to read by the second grade.
- Everyone will complete middle school ready for high school.

- Everyone will graduate from high school ready for work, higher education, and citizenship.
- People who begin higher education will complete their programs.

The aims focus our actions. We know that results, while improving, do not yet show that we are meeting these aims for all the students in New York. The strategic task for the Board is to think about how we could better deploy the resources we have—the incomparable strength of USNY—to better educate everyone.

### ***USNY Summit, November 2***

On November 2, the first day of the Regents meeting that month, the Regents will host a Summit on education with leaders of the University of the State of New York. We intend to mobilize the vast capacity of USNY to raise achievement and close the gap in the face of a dynamic global economy. Regents and leaders in all sectors of the University prepared for this Summit in eight regional discussions this year. We tested the concept of five shared aims. With our USNY colleagues and many partners, we examined the data describing how close we have come to those aims, and how far we have yet to go. We have had tremendous support from a planning group of USNY leaders, from The Business Council and its chair, Linda Sanford, and from District Superintendents, Deputy Commissioners and other State Education Department leaders. We will discuss a draft Call to the Summit at the September Regents meeting during the Quality Committee.

#### ***What results do we want from the Summit?***

We seek consensus on the aims of USNY, and performance targets that can drive still greater achievement. We seek commitment to a few actions to be taken in concert with USNY leaders and institutions to accomplish those aims. We want to see USNY institutions mobilized to raise achievement and close the gap which exists from pre-kindergarten through graduate school. And we seek agreement on

what we will do after the Summit to ensure follow through.

#### ***What we learned in the regional discussions.***

The five aims posed in the regional meetings held up well, but we need a sixth one about the continuous learning essential for all adults. We learned that joint venture among several sectors of USNY is indispensable to further progress on the aims. Joint venture becomes a rational strategy for over-committed institutional leaders when we discover that the interests of our own institution, whether it's a college, a pre-kindergarten program or a State Education Department, match those of another in pursuit of the same goals. We learned also that USNY has to become more visible to realize its potential. But USNY, and the splendid array of educational and cultural institutions that it comprises, is New York's competitive advantage in the global quest for heightened knowledge and skill. And achieving these aims, seizing the advantages that are potential in USNY, and thriving amidst the global competition requires all of us to change in many ways. We will apply what we learned in the Summit and the months that follow.

***What will happen at the Summit?*** We plan a mix of keynote presentations, responses from USNY leaders, and discussions among all the participants, with most of the time devoted to intense discussions leading to action. After the Chancellor opens the Summit on behalf of the Regents, Kati Haycock, president of The Education Trust will describe the achievement gap from pre-kindergarten through graduate school, together with its implications. Nicholas Donofrio, executive vice president, IBM will raise the stakes even higher by describing the global race for knowledge and skill from his experience. Cooper Union President George Campbell will lead the plenary discussion in response to Dr. Donofrio's remarks. The ensuing discussion will focus on students at three points in the educational continuum: higher education, high school, and early

education, and what we can do together to achieve better results. The Regents have policy priorities at those three points, and our data show opportunities to improve. We want to emerge from the Summit with clarity on essential actions at those three points and widespread commitment to follow through.

## ***High Schools of the Future***

A third of New York students who enter 9<sup>th</sup> grade do not graduate by the end of the fourth year of high school and nearly a third of all college freshmen nationally do not make it to the sophomore year of college. And we heard in the regional USNY meetings from both employers and college presidents that many of those who do graduate from high school are not ready for further education or work. These facts compel action.

New York's high school strategy is straightforward. We know that 136 high schools in 12 school districts have graduation rates below 70 percent. Since January, we have assembled leaders of those schools for four days of professional education. We have formed a new relationship with them around a simple aim: raise graduation rates. Our focus is on a handful of strategies observed in high schools that are improving. We are trying, for example, intense help for 9<sup>th</sup> graders who scored low in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade exams; challenging Career and Technical Education programs; and a "catch-up" curriculum designed to strengthen math and reading that is far above traditional remedial programs.

There is a wider context for this work. In New York, we must think of high school as but one part of a USNY system from pre-kindergarten through graduate school. Attempts to "fix" high school that ignore the earlier problems, such as non-existent pre-kindergarten, poor child health, weak reading programs, or unfocused middle schools, cannot succeed. And high schools that do not seek and use messages of expectation from employers and colleges won't succeed

either, not matter how fast the graduation figures increase.

The context is wider than New York, however. The National Governors Association's National Summit this year made high school reform a national issue. The pillars of that effort include: standards, curricula, and assessments aligned with expectations in college and work; redesign of high school to enable all students to learn higher level skills with the support and options they need; incentives and training for teachers and administrators; accountability and intervention in low performing schools; and governance that links K-12 and higher education.<sup>1</sup> We could scan that list and say that New York is already doing this. But having the right agenda is not enough. Increasingly there appears to be one basic education reform agenda, and societies around the globe that can afford it are all pursuing that agenda. What matters now is excellence and speed in execution. The Regents have said that they don't see the gaps closing fast enough.

And let's look to a still wider context. In China, new primary and middle level curriculum starts rolling out in September 2005.<sup>2</sup> China intends to make 15 years of education universal by 2020. China's education leaders know that they have far to go, particularly in the rural and western areas. They say they will concentrate on curriculum reform, pedagogy, and teacher professional development. They also report work to foster student creativity, "value-added" assessment, and attention to students with learning difficulties. I will defer the statistics about China's rise for another time, but add here only that Chinese leaders, like all of us, see high quality education as indispensable in the global economic and political reality.

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<sup>1</sup> *An Action Agenda for Improving America's High Schools; 2005 National Education Summit on High Schools*. Sponsored by Achieve, Inc, and National Governors Association. (Prepublication copy), page 5.

<sup>2</sup> YANG Jin, *High School Education in China: Challenges and Priorities*. PowerPoint presentation, 2005.

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As we try to improve our high school graduation rates, we might reflect on why these institutions have endured for so long as they are. Curriculum, Regents exams, teacher certification, youth culture, and sports probably contribute to making high schools today resemble the ones we attended back in...well, some years ago. And public expectations also ensure stability. The people know what high school is supposed to be, and we will not change high school without thoughtful engagement with the people of New York, no matter how we regulate.

After listening to experts and my colleagues among the nation's commissioners for several days this summer, three strategies seem worth more attention:

1. **Make sure our standards represent 21<sup>st</sup> century knowledge and skills.** We have thought about this, for example, in the renewal of the mathematics standards to make them clearer, and more practical in the classroom. The Board decided the other standards a decade ago. A strategy to renew them might be appropriate.
2. **Build communities of practice in high schools.** This means sustained work to help teachers and administrators reflect on the data, their own practice, the academic products of students, and the research with a goal of continuous improvement in outcomes. This is a far cry from the one-shot professional development that we generally see, but it is characteristic of all high performing organizations. In my opinion, the best thing about the work with the 136 high schools is that we are seeing the beginnings of communities of practice.
3. **Engage the public.** The people of New York own the high schools. It's not enough to listen to advocates, take testimony, and have hearings about regulations. We need to invite the

average citizen at the table, ask the right questions, listen carefully, be prepared for surprises – and then act.

## ***Annual Charter School Report***

The law requires the Regents to report annually on the status of charter schools. In addition to enrollment, expenditure, and assessment data, the report includes the Regents recommendations for modification of the charter school law. The draft report covering 2003-04 is before the Regents for approval.

Here are some of the recommendations: require charter applications to be submitted prior to July 1. Allow the Board 120 days to review applications prior to decision. Allow the Commissioner to approve non-material changes in existing charters, and allow administrative disapproval of unacceptable charter applications. Allow charter schools access to construction and renovation financing through the New York State Dormitory Authority, and fully fund a Charter Schools Impact Fund to help offset the financial effects of new charter schools.

## ***2006-07 Budget Recommendations***

The Regents are scheduled to vote in September on their budget recommendations for the coming fiscal year. The recommendation appears in the form of the "Blue Book," which we will use this fall and throughout the legislative session to advocate for Regents budget priorities. The heart of the matter is on three summary pages: Regents Priority Budget Initiatives; Future Budgetary Needs; and Statutorily Mandated Needs. Details appear in the following pages, but the summary pages are intended to keep attention on the essentials. The recommendations reflect Regents priorities and discussion in the last Board meeting that sought to balance needs and economic feasibility.

Page 6 lists Regents priority initiatives totaling \$178.2 million for implementing the Statewide Plan for Higher Education, NOVEL, the VESID Employment and Independence initiative, access to higher education for persons with disabilities, SED staff capacity, school accountability, and two capital amounts for Cultural Education Collections Stewardship and Local Library Capital Construction. The overall amount reflects reductions from the earlier priority proposal by \$48.6 million. These amounts are requested in subsequent years.

Page 32 lists future budget needs. These are important items that we will bring to the attention of the Executive and Legislature. Most of them involve extensions of the priorities. Page 26 lists budget increases for local assistance and state operations that are mandated in statute.

The Board's budget deliberations, which began in April, included review of existing initiatives and Deputy proposals in the committees in relation to the Strategic Plan and the Regents policy priorities. In October, the Regents will adopt the final piece, the State Aid recommendation.

### ***Policy Decision on State Aid***

The Regents have scheduled a vote on their state aid recommendation in concept in September; the detailed proposal will come to the Board in October. The concept is designed to close the gaps in achievement with a proposal that is adequate, effective, and ensures accountability. For the third year, the Regents call for a foundation aid system based on the cost of successful programs, adjusted for regional cost differences and concentrations of needy students, with an expected local contribution adjusted for local capacity. The proposal for public school special education would apply a single weighting for the number of children with disabilities to the same foundation cost used for general education.

The 2006-2007 Budget Blue Book includes related recommendations for improved financial data systems to support state aid, new computer tools to inform local school boards and the public about district financial condition, and strengthened capacity in grants management and auditing within the State Education Department.

### ***Annual Report from the State Professional Standards and Practices Board for Teaching***

The Regents will have their annual conversation with members of the Professional Standards and Practices Board. That Board has continued its energetic promotion of the Code of Ethics for Educators. This is worth discussing. We have and use enforcement mechanisms to protect the public, but a Code of Ethics that is visible and active in the hands of teachers can help accomplish the same mission. A code of ethics is one hallmark of a profession.

The Regents might also ask fundamental questions about teaching. Is the quality of our teaching force improving, and how do we know? Are we making headway in preparing, hiring, and retaining teachers in mathematics, science, and other fields where there are shortages? Are we reducing the number of teachers who, while they are certified, are not certified in the subjects they are teaching? Given the rapidly growing awareness of global challenges, are we doing what we should to prepare teachers to in turn prepare our students for those challenges and to seize global opportunities? If we are not making sufficient progress on these points, what advice does the Standards and Practices Board have?

## **2005 SAT results**

The SAT results this year reveal a transformation in academic expectations, one that has been years in the making. 92 percent of New York high school seniors took the SAT exams last year. That is the highest participation rate in the nation, and five percentage points higher than the prior year. Math scores increased one point to 511. Verbal scores stayed flat at 497. The College Board reports that 40 percent of the 2005 seniors who took the SAT are first generation college attendees. And there is still more: Almost 18 percent demonstrated college level mastery of an Advanced Placement course in high school, and this also is the highest performance rate in the nation.

There are undoubtedly many contributing factors: the skill of New York teachers and administrators in preparing students to meet high standards, the Regents requirement that all students pass rigorous academic courses, earn 22 credits, and pass five Regents exams to graduate, the demanding admissions requirements of New York colleges and universities, and the clear signals from the business community that knowledge and skill will be rewarded in the marketplace. But the greatest credit goes to the students and their parents. They have internalized high academic expectations. We wish the high school class of 2005 – now the college class of 2009 – all the best.

At the same time, we still face great challenges. Too many students do not become seniors and graduate in four years. Yet more students are graduating now. Schools need to and are providing extra help to raise achievement and we can expect more progress in future years.