

# Report TO THE STATE BOARD OF REGENTS

By State Education Commissioner Richard P. Mills

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**Meeting in Brief:** The Regents will vote on their State aid recommendation for 2006-07. The Board will vote on high school mathematics graduation requirements. The Regents will complete preparations for the November 2 Summit and there will be an extended briefing on the topics to come before the Summit. The EMSC-VESID Committee will review policy and implementation issues related to IDEA. The Committee on Higher Education and Professional Practice will continue training on professional discipline. The Committee on Cultural Education will discuss renewal of the State Museum and the Archive's Documentary Heritage Program.

## **Regents State Aid Recommendation**

The Regents have before them for approval a State aid recommendation. In September, the Board approved its recommendation in concept. Now the Board will decide the financial details. This action will complete the Regents work on their 2006-07-budget proposal to the Executive and Legislature. And they will have fulfilled their commitment to advance this recommendation months earlier than in the past.

The Regents State aid recommendation would establish a foundation formula based on the cost of successful education programs, adjusted for regional cost differences, need, and a reasonable local share. It includes a simplified formula for excess cost programs (special education) that also uses the foundation concept.

The proposal responds to the Regents long-standing goal of raising achievement and closing the achievement gap. Once again, the Board will seek increases for the highest need school districts. The proposal responds also to the court decisions in the matter concerning the Campaign for Fiscal Equity. And the Board

recognizes the need for a proposal that is financially sustainable. There will be debate. However, a significantly larger amount would not be sustainable. And a significantly lower amount would not respond to the obvious need to create a fair and adequate foundation for achievement.

## **IDEA Performance Plan**

Congressional reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) will spark major changes throughout the education system. This is not a special education issue. It is a USNY issue, a gap-closing issue, and all parts of that vast system must respond. As the Regents item indicates, it will be challenging. On balance, however, New York's solid foundation on standards, data collection and use, support networks, professional development and school improvement make this an opportunity to embrace. We will have to move aggressively to realize that opportunity. We must move quickly in concert with partners and stakeholders because the reporting dates are fixed and near.

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The Regents item describes the three priorities that we must address: least restrictive environment, disproportionality, and effective general supervision. While these are precise terms within the law, in practice they mean that persons with disabilities are to receive a high standards education, and to the greatest extent possible, they are to receive that with their non-disabled peers. These have long been our aims, too.

The item shows that 9 of the 20 required performance indicators are new and will require new data collection. There are also significant accountability issues that must be handled deftly to avoid creating unrelated and potentially inconsistent improvement systems for special education and general education.

### ***Mathematics Graduation Requirements***

The Mathematics Standards Committee recommended three specific high school courses, and a program of Regents exams to certify achievement of the mathematics standards approved by the Regents. Here are the issues for decision:

1. Should a Regents exam be developed for each of the three courses: Algebra, Geometry, and Algebra 2 and Trigonometry? We recommend yes and propose a schedule that begins with Algebra in June 2009, with Geometry in 2010 and the third exam in 2011.
2. Should the graduation requirement be the passing of one Regents examination in mathematics and three credits in high school mathematics, with credit for Algebra limited to two credits? We recommend yes.
3. Should the graduation requirement for a Regents Diploma with Advanced Designation include passing three courses and all three Regents examinations, with the first two cohorts required to take two of the three? We recommend that students

pass all three courses and examinations for the Advanced Designation.

4. Should the Regents approve ways to recognize students who achieve mastery in mathematics and encourage students to continue mathematics in college and university? We support this proposal. USNY offers the opportunity to convene high school and university faculties in mathematics to create practical incentives for more students to study higher mathematics.

In these policy decisions, the Regents will seek to balance the need for the earliest feasible implementation of the new mathematics exams with the need to provide sufficient time so that students have an opportunity to learn the mathematics to be tested, and for teachers to provide that opportunity. This is not only a matter of common fairness but also an area established in case law. We must also allow sufficient time for test development to generally accepted testing standards. During the period of test development, students will continue to take the modified Regents Math A and B. Therefore, the State Education Department must ensure that those tests have predictable content, well grounded in the standards, so that students and teachers have an opportunity to prepare for the exams and demonstrate achievement of the standards.

### ***Preparing for the Education Summit***

The Regents and State Education Department staff have worked hard to prepare for the November 2 Education Summit, which will take place on the first day of the November Regents meeting. After the Chancellor and I sent letters to leaders throughout the University of the State of New York and many leaders in business, government and community organizations, Regents and Department staff underscored the importance of this meeting by making personal calls to those leaders. During

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the spring and summer, Regents and senior staff listened to hundreds of these leaders in eight regional meetings. Together, we developed six shared aims of USNY, and awareness that achievement requires joint venture that is based on institutional self-interest in higher performance. We have provocative keynote speakers who will define the achievement gap, and underscore the dynamic global context for closing the gap and the leadership imperative to raise achievement. At the October meeting, the Regents will complete their preparations with a briefing on three focal points for the Summit: higher education, high school, and early education. In all three areas, the Regents have adopted priorities and are developing policy views.

In the regional meetings it was evident that USNY leaders share common aims. But it was also clear that all parts of the system must share in accomplishing each aim. For example, the aim that "all students will graduate from high school ready for citizenship, ready for work, and ready for further education" depends not only on excellent practice within each high school, but also on what happens earlier in the system, and also on higher education's insistence on high standards for incoming students, and its own research and preparation of teachers.

As we convene the Summit, it won't be sufficient, therefore, to have separate conversations about how to improve results in higher education, high school, and early education limited to the practitioners in those particular parts of the system. Rather, we need the views of all at each of these points.

And likewise, it won't be sufficient to lay out long lists of actions as if we alone have the ability and resources to solve the problem. Rather, we should invite new thinking and new action by leading a search for the few catalytic actions that invite partners and spark change. There are parallels in the past. For example, the Regents decisions that all would take

Regents exams, that results would be public, and the schools farthest from the standards must improve or close led to creativity, new tradecraft, and, above all, improved results. But the situation now is far different. It will be much harder to close the remaining gap. What are the catalytic actions for today?

Might the Summit participants agree that graduation rates will rise to 75 percent within two years and commit to whatever it takes to get there? Might we commit to advocating for or supporting major investment in higher education infrastructure? Might the Summit decide that compulsory attendance should begin at age five, with all that could mean for early literacy? If the actions we pick are the vital few, New York can achieve those aims.

### ***New York State Testing Program***

The New York State Testing Program is designed to evaluate implementation of the State's learning standards at the student, school, district and statewide levels. In addition to administering the Regents examinations, over the past couple of years we have implemented or revised three key assessment systems: the grades 3-8 testing program required under No Child Left Behind; the New York State Alternate Assessment (NYSAA) for students with severe disabilities; and the New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test for English language learners. The report submitted to the Board provides an update on these programs, including the testing and scoring timetable for the grades 3-8 tests, changes being made in the NYSAA beginning in the 2005-06 school year, and improvements that have been made to the NYSESLAT.

The question before the Board is whether there is additional advice or direction for staff as they continue to implement the State's testing program.

## ***Documentary Heritage Program***

The legislation that created this technical assistance and grant program gives priority to supporting collecting, managing and making accessible the history under-documented groups of the population, activities and organizations. The program has supported valuable projects related to Latino, Chinese-American, Korean-American, African-American and other ethnic groups in this most diverse state in the union. In addition to saving the evidence of these histories, the projects have produced teaching materials and lesson plans that have been widely praised and heavily used. With \$400,000 for technical assistance and \$100,000 for grants, it is not possible to support the need to capture this documentation before it disappears. In the CE Committee, Regents will review the status of this program and the proposal to develop a Departmental bill to transfer a \$1 million from the CE Fund to this program, tripling the DHP funds to a total of \$1.5 million.

## ***Museum Renewal***

For several years, the Regents have recognized the need for the Museum's renewal and have sought the substantial funding necessary to enable it to happen. This year's budget provided a matching challenge fund of \$5 million for the Archives, Library and Museum. With those funds, which the institutions were able to match from a combination of competitive grants and private donations, it has been possible to begin that effort, as well as to begin high priority projects in the Library and Archives. At the Cultural Education Committee meeting, Regents will review the progress made and planned. Much more work waits, and substantial funding will be necessary to transform the Museum. By mid-winter, staff will have major conceptual plans for two new halls ready for Regents review and approval.