

**Mid-Hudson Library System**  
**Executive Director Report to the Director Association on May 3, 2011**

**Direct Access Plan**

A final draft of the Direct Access plan is included in the DA packet. Please read this plan over carefully.

Changes by the Ad Hoc Committee, which met after the April DA meeting, include changes to the thresholds of use by non-residents that determine when member libraries can claim “serious inequities and hardships.”

The Ad Hoc Committee also requested that an appeals process be included in the Plan. The appeals process provided under the current Direct Access Plan is included in this final draft.

In response to current practices and concerns around the remote use of databases paid for with local or county funds, preferences provided residents for programs, and the loaning of certain other resources such as ebook readers, the following possible restrictions have been added:

“Member libraries may give preference to the residents of their taxing district for attendance at library programs.

Member libraries may give preference to the residents of their taxing district for the use of computers and Internet resources.

Member libraries may restrict the loan of special, experimental or pilot collections or services purchased with local funds to the residents of their taxing district, (such as museum passes, eBook readers, equipment, and electronic content), but must notify the library system director when doing so.”

These limits and restrictions do not depend on a level of use to be reached by non-residents and have been reviewed by the library system’s liaison at the Division of Library Development, Cassie Artale. If approved by the DA and MHLS Board of Trustees, they are likely to be approved by the Division of Library Development and the Commissioner. At least one other library system already has an approved direct access plan with similar restrictions.

**Regents Advisory Council on Libraries**

Also available for download in the DA packet is a response to a request by the Regents Advisory Council for input that the Council will use to help “inform” the development of a new statewide plan for library services.

The Regents Advisory Council on Libraries provides 10 questions to help direct responses in their collection of ideas and concerns about library service, responses which were due by April 20, 2011. We had some discussion at Mid-Hudson around the questions concerning the challenges and needs of library systems, as well around the other key questions being considered by the Council.

According to the state library website, the Council plans to highlight the responses they gathered through April 20 to the Regents in May and open a second round of input from libraries and library systems in June. A draft of a new statewide plan that would be available for public review is planned for September 2011.

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**Rightsizing Local Government - Marist Poll**

Everyone should have had a chance by now to review the report *Striking a Balance: New Yorkers Speak Out on Rightsizing Local Government*. Funded by the Dyson Foundation, *Striking a Balance* reports on the results of a statewide poll conducted by Marist College on attitudes towards government consolidation, which included 4,500 state residents. The results are also broken down into nine geographic regions, including a Mid-Hudson region that includes Sullivan and Orange counties as well as the five counties in MHLS.

If there is good news in the results of this survey for library systems and libraries, it is that more state residents support "consolidation" as the "sharing" of services rather than the "merging" of services. Sixty-eight percent of respondents had a favorable impression of consolidation as sharing rather than merging services. In the Mid-Hudson region, 55% identify with government consolidation as the sharing of services, although a substantial number--37%--support merging services as well.

Of those who favor consolidation, 67% respondents statewide support consolidation of public libraries with neighboring towns or cities. Of those who are generally against consolidation, 43% support consolidation of public libraries.

Support for the "consolidation" of public libraries in the Mid-Hudson region was pretty high, however, at 59% of respondents. To the south, in Rockland and Westchester counties, the support for "consolidation" is even higher at 61%.

Those who support "consolidation" do so with an expectation that consolidation will decrease costs and improve efficiency. Unsurprisingly, those who do not support "consolidation" are concerned with a loss of community identity, that they will have less of a say in what happens locally, and that it might increase their costs but lower the costs of a neighboring community.

It is interesting that the survey found little political polarization around these issues and that demography was not a strong predictor either.

**Property Tax Cap and Mandate Relief**

The Mayoral Task Force of the New York State Conference of Mayors and Municipal Officials have published a summary of their proposals for mandate relief in a brochure entitled "You Can't Cap What You Can't Control." Directors might want to have some familiarity with these proposals, some of which are almost certain to be part of the discussion when the legislature takes up its property tax cap legislation. Libraries will not be disinterested bystanders in these discussions.

The current property tax cap legislation, approved by the New York State Senate, excludes capital expenses from the proposed cap. But there is widespread interest among municipal administrators for other costs to be excluded, such as pension and health insurance costs, and for a number of reforms.

Some of the Task Force's recommendations are easier to understand and support than others. It would be easy (for me) to advocate changing civil service law to allow the "Rule of Three" to be replaced by "Rule of Ten."

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Also, exempting public works projects under \$35,000 from prevailing wage requirements, which is the threshold for placing these projects out for bid, could provide relief to Mid-Hudson as well as some of our libraries.

Requiring minimum contributions by employees for health insurance of 10% for individual coverage and 25% for family coverage do not seem unreasonable given the state's continuing financial crisis. Mid-Hudson already meets or exceeds these minimums. Given the rising costs of health care and health insurance, there's some justification to the argument everyone needs "some skin in the game." But I can see no reason why retirees should be expected to pay 25% for individual or family coverage.

Declaring a state of financial emergency and imposing a one-year wage freeze for all state, local and school district employees also has considerable political appeal. This would save money and help save jobs. But this is already in effect at Mid-Hudson and I would be concerned that our staff could be trapped in a wage freeze for multiple years.

I would not want to switch from a defined benefit plan to a defined contribution plan for new hires, however. I don't like the idea of having employees with radically different benefits. Moreover with adequate support and oversight, a defined benefit plan is far preferable to defined contribution plan for most people.

Also, reinstating a 3% contribution by Tier 3 and 4 members of the Employees' Retirement System and continuing it even after vesting seems needed at the moment. But will it be needed when the fund recovers from the current economic down-turn?

Support for some of the recommendations are more of a challenge, such as repealing the Triborough Amendment. This is complicated by the Taylor Law's prohibition against public employee strikes. And while I understand to some extent the need to consider reforms around compulsory arbitration and disability payments for public safety employees, and making the decision to transfer work of unionized employees a non-mandatory subject of negotiation, these are more complicated issues.

**Additional topics to be briefly shared at the meeting**

- Museum passes go virtual
- Compilations of the 2010 annual report data become available
- Why it's (maybe) good that we're not in Kansas
- Why mystery readers are a mystery themselves