



THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT / THE UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK / ALBANY, NY 12234

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The Honorable Betsy DeVos
Secretary of Education
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Secretary DeVos,

Thank you for taking the time to reach out to the Department to discuss New York State's needs as we work to support the many areas, beyond P-12, that we oversee during unprecedented closures as a result of the COVID-19 emergency. As a follow up to our conversation, I am writing to request your support as we advocate Congress for additional federal funding to meet not only our current needs but also anticipated needs over the summer and into the fall as highlighted below.

As you know, New York State, and in particular New York City, has been the epicenter of the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States. Released on April 25, 2020, New York's updated financial plan projects a \$13.3 billion deficit for our fiscal year that began on April 1, and calls for billions of dollars in reduced aid to localities spending and an across the board 10 percent reduction in agency operations expenditures. A reduction in our Department's operational budget will impede our ability to provide needed assistance to teachers and school leaders as they rise to the challenge of continued learning during this time; support our institutions of higher education in a rapidly changing landscape; provide critical vocational rehabilitation services to individuals with disabilities; support and connect adult students and their families; and ensure the continuation of New York State's important public broadcasting stations, museums and libraries.

Below, please find the areas of need we have identified. We ask that potential reductions to existing federal funding be reconsidered and that additional funding be provided to State Educational Agencies and, as appropriate, to the below institutions in a flexible manner to assist the important and varied constituencies that we either partner with or serve directly.

Higher Education

New York's public, private, and independent institutions of higher education (IHE) are experiencing unprecedented challenges due to COVID-19, and many have expressed concerns about operational and financial stability. They have relied on NYSED to provide guidance and coordinated regulatory and policy solutions for remote/virtual instruction, alternative methods/resources for meeting student teaching and other clinical/field experience requirements, and campus re-opening plans and protocols. NYSED anticipates the need for additional staff and technology to implement these statewide solutions, and to help IHEs navigate through the

processes related to mergers or possibly even closures, which involves coordinating custodial records, teach-out plans, and regulatory actions.

Even as our educators throughout the state work diligently to overcome challenges presented by the COVID-19 crisis, particularly amidst unprecedented school closures, their local educational agencies (LEAs) continue to evaluate and support their professional staff. Despite this, many students may still fall behind, and starting in the 2020-2021 school year, may be at a disadvantage. NYSED's responsibility as a state educational agency (SEA) to provide guidance and feedback to teachers and school leaders has never been more critical. Additional Title II funding under ESSA to both the SEA and LEAs to assist with this challenge can help to ensure that educators receive the supports they desperately need. At the State level, this would include additional staff and programs that enable educators to adjust their current practices to provide continued, high-quality learning opportunities for students, as well as guide focus areas for future growth once students and teachers return to their physical classrooms. LEA-level funding would provide district leaders with resources that can be used to ensure their educators have the necessary tools, feedback, and opportunities for professional growth to develop new and innovative ways to meet student needs.

The current pandemic has also exacerbated LEAs' strain to find highly qualified classroom teachers at a time when teaching candidates are struggling to obtain certain certificates and extensions due to limited test center availability. In response, NYSED has committed to create an Emergency COVID-19 certificate. We anticipate a high volume of new applications, phone calls, and emails related to this new emergency certificate while our staff are already taxed processing the current backlog of existing certificate applications. We request funding for additional staff and technology resources to process these emergency certificate applications quickly enough for applicants to be certified for the upcoming 2020-21 academic year.

Vocational Rehabilitation

The expectation is that there will be an increase in vocational rehabilitation applications as individuals with disabilities lose employment due to the impact of COVID-19. In addition, people who previously did not have a disability but now have compromised health as a result of COVID-19 illnesses will likely be applying for ACCES-VR services for the first time. To ensure that increasing caseloads do not reach unsustainable levels, additional support for staffing and resources to serve and support this vulnerable population is needed. Additional funding is also required to address the following issues:

- Colleges and vocational training programs have shifted to on-line learning, ACCES-VR participants are in need of various types of equipment, technology and services (laptops, internet access, readers/note takers, smart pens, etc.) to assist them in fully engaging in on-line learning.
- Vendors of vocational rehabilitation services (vocational training schools, supported employment providers, vehicle modifiers, interpreters, psychologists, etc.) have experienced a significant decrease in revenue as a result of COVID-19 and as a result many of these vendors have had to institute staff layoffs. Their ability to rehire staff or even remain open is currently in jeopardy.
- As people with disabilities become unemployed, the options for immediate job development and placement are challenging because many businesses are closed. Individuals with disabilities need assistance navigating the application process for unemployment, workers compensation, and other services. Community rehabilitation

providers are well positioned to provide these supports but to successfully do so they will need additional funding.

Adult Education

New York State operates 172 adult education programs which have been almost exclusively been providing in-person instruction. Since March, our Adult Career and Continuing Education Services (ACCES) staff have approved steps to convert these programs to remote learning/distance education for literacy, English as a Second Language, and High School Equivalency instruction by training over 1,800 teachers and 850 case managers. This experience has further reinforced the need for digital literacy, broadband and technology, and enhanced training for case managers to support and connect adult students and their families with critical information and resources directly related to COVID-19: applying for unemployment insurance, obtaining school lunches, and teaching health and digital literacy.

It is critical that additional funding be allocated to increase access to adult education and literacy programs for low-income, low-literacy adults, with funding reserved for adult education and literacy activities in correctional facilities, to support moving education and services online, increasing digital literacy training, and encouraging providers to partner more closely with workforce development systems.

Public Broadcasting, Museums & Libraries

Public broadcasting stations derive funding support through various avenues, but local fundraising is a chief revenue stream. Station underwriting support is shrinking and membership drives have been cancelled due to COVID-19. These stations have taken on extra costs to be a reliable educational partner in New York State during the COVID-19 pandemic and federal funding is needed to pay for this important work they have already engaged in as well as increased funding so that they can assist in enhancing equity in education moving forward. In response to the school closures in New York State, public broadcasting stations have taken the following actions:

- Public television stations throughout the state have changed their daytime television schedules to become trusted home classrooms, especially for those without broadband access.
- Television schedules are carefully designed to align with state learning standards and include weekly schedules that link to online enrichment resources for teachers and parents.
- For students without computers, stations have partnered with local school districts to provide printed packets for parents to take home. These are distributed through the schools, food pantries and other community avenues.
- The use of station online resources on PBSLearningMedia.org by New Yorkers is up 489% as PBS is relied on for Learn-at-Home content. Staff are constantly updating and adding content in response to feedback from districts, teachers and parents.
- Districts and teachers are using NY public television's broadcasts, taped by the Syracuse public television station (WCNY) in response to the needs of the Syracuse CSD and with city teachers, to teach all grade levels, discipline areas, including STEM, music, the arts and physical education. Broadcasts are shared with all NY stations.

New York's 1,500+ chartered museums have all had to close for months because of the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure proper social distancing and public safety measures. As a result, museums across New York have collectively lost tens of millions of dollars in revenue due to

having to close their doors to visitors and scheduled special events, as well as normal fundraising efforts. It is estimated that 50% of the staff of New York State's museums have been laid off or furloughed and as many as 30% may not be able to reopen due to their budgets being devastated by the pandemic. Even those that can reopen face a protracted struggle because of social distancing guidelines that will be in place for the foreseeable future and funding is needed to ensure that these important cultural institutions can continue and will be able to reopen.

All chartered museums in New York State are recognized as non-profit educational organizations by the Board of Regents and function as a vital supplemental educational network in partnership with the state's schools. Despite these buildings being closed to the public due to the pandemic, New York's museums continue to respond to the educational needs of New York's students, teachers, schools, and parents during the COVID-19 pandemic in the following ways:

- Museums throughout the state have augmented existing online and virtual offerings to include virtual fieldtrips and tours, podcasts, special websites and other ways to remotely access their unique content.
- Museum educational content is carefully designed to align with state learning standards. Museums that once played host to millions of student field trips are now attempting to do so digitally.
- Museums continue to partner with schools, teachers and parents to provide access to online content for students without access to their own computers.
- Schools, teachers, students and adults are using the online resources provided by museums across New York State at unprecedented levels to teach and learn at all grade levels and discipline areas, including STEM, history, music, the arts and physical education.

Library funding in New York is complex, with public funding coming from state, county, and local levels. Due to the spread of COVID-19, New York's library community is projecting hundreds of millions of dollars in losses to libraries. Without an immediate infusion of federal support, libraries will be forced to make massive cuts, both in terms of staffing and purchases and many rural libraries will likely close. Furloughs and layoffs of library staff have already begun and some municipalities, especially in rural and economically distressed regions, are already making plans to shutter libraries on a temporary or permanent basis. These library cuts will have a ripple effect throughout our communities, affecting support for education, workforce recovery, and access to computers and the Internet. These drastic cuts are occurring while libraries are making new investments in technology, taking on new solutions to solve the digital divide, and serving the new influx of unemployed community members.

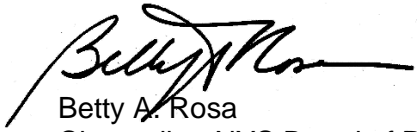
Libraries are community centers with vital resources, ensuring that every New Yorker has access to lifelong learning opportunities:

- The resources libraries provide make them critical to community recovery efforts. Despite being closed to the public due to restrictions imposed by the pandemic, they are still helping students engage in distance learning, New Yorkers who are now teleworking, and vulnerable adults and seniors who are homebound and need a lifeline to health information, government services, reading and entertainment, and other daily necessities, such as social interaction.
- Libraries are leveraging their community connections to implement emergency response plans and serving as distribution points for food, medical supplies, student laptops, books, and hotspots. They are lending and using their 3D printers to print face-shields and related items for health workers.

- This crisis has made clear that free, public broadband access is a critical tool for community resiliency. For many low-income New Yorkers and New Yorkers living in communities, public libraries are the only source for free Internet access.

Thank you for your consideration of our requests. We look forward to your support as we advocate for additional needed funding to during this unprecedented public health crisis.

Sincerely,



Betty A. Rosa
Chancellor, NYS Board of Regents



Shannon Tahoe
Interim Commissioner, State Education Dept.

cc: New York State Congressional Delegation