THE 3 R’S: READING, WRITING, & ARITHMETIC OR, REDESIGN, REINVENT & RESTRUCTURE IN NY

by Jeff Wise, President & CEO

When it comes to fundamental education, there has long been a debate over whether “the three R’s” are enough to school and inform younger generations.

That debate continues, of course. But it is now joined by a new version of “the three R’s” that accompanies most of the discussion regarding how to move forward in New York State when it comes to budgeting, policy and regulation.

Governor Andrew Cuomo, faced with a budget deficit that most put at about $10 billion for the upcoming fiscal year, led off the discussion in his State of the State speech on January 5. The new Governor’s themes were unmistakable: Redesign. Reinvent. Restructure. (We could mention a fourth “R,” one that arrived with former Governor Spitzer, who often mentioned “rationalizing” government in his comments on what New York needs.)

Given the harsh conditions of the moment, the year-over-year deficits that have been mounting – not just in New York, but all over the nation – it is difficult to take issue with the Governor. Reform (there’s that letter again) seems all but assured as New York’s Legislature and Executive get the 2011 legislative session under way.

But, while it’s hard to counter the assertions that reform must be addressed in virtually all areas of government, there is much that can be said about the types of reform that must take place.

Leaders are understandably shying away from talk of tax increases for New York. There is some economic evidence, and a greater amount of political evidence, that raising taxes is a strategy to avoid. But the alternative, cutting spending by considerable amounts, isn’t exactly attractive, either.

This is undoubtedly the reason Governor Cuomo emphasized in his State of the State that the discussion is not about merely cutting spending. It is also about “redesign” of systems – fundamental changes in the way all sorts of entities do business.

It would seem that this approach is inevitable. Change is most definitely gaining momentum. The sentiment for the status quo in Albany, and in state-funded systems, services and programs, is waning.

NYSRA has not shied away from the possibility that change must occur. We cannot, however, lose touch with the fundamental reasons that government funds services for people with special needs. We cannot allow erosion of support to mean the loss of these services for individuals who rely on them.
We believe much can be done to cut costs to the state without diminishing services to people with disabilities. Shortly after Election Day, NYSRA was in touch with transition team staff and others to communicate savings ideas and cautions on moving too fast.

An over-arching caution to policymakers is to avoid the temptation to do simple, across-the-board, cuts to state spending. This approach can do great damage. Every budget, whether a household’s, a business’, or a state government spending plan, includes spending that is more important in some areas than in others. We have been reminding policymakers that the state funds many good things, but there are some that are essential than others. Services for people with disabilities most certainly fall in the category of “essential” and not just “desirable” or “important.”

But the alternative, cutting spending by considerable amounts, isn’t exactly attractive, either.

To find savings, we have asked them to look at privatizing services – moving people from the more costly state-operated services to the more efficient community service sector. We also have asked, once again, for a genuine look at regulatory reform, so as to shed regulations that do very little, if anything, but add costs to the delivery of quality services.

We think NYSRA and its members should pursue these avenues, and others that we are studying, with legislators and the Governor. It is unrealistic to think that cuts are not coming, and that cuts are not necessary. But it would be unacceptable in our view to cut spending without serious thought to be given to where the cutting can have the greatest impact on the bottom line and the least impact on assisting people with needs.

Toward that end, we need our members to take up the call. Visit and communicate with your legislators to warn them against across-the-board cutting. Tell them to look at privatization and regulatory reform. Ask them to approach the “redesign” of Medicaid in New York with an eye not just for savings, but for preserving services that deserve to be kept in place.

We hope you will join us, too, on February 7 and 8 in Albany for our annual Legislative Forum. Demonstrating our concern and bring our message directly to state policymakers has not been this important in a very long time. Reinventing, redesigning, restructuring our system should not happen without all of us expressing where things should go.

National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Awards
The President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities recognizes the accomplishments of exceptional arts and humanities out-of-school programs across the country. Twelve award-winning programs will receive $10,000 and the chance to accept their award from Honorary Chairman First Lady Michelle Obama. Deadline: January 31, 2011.
http://www.nahyp.org/

Wish you Well Foundation
The Wish You Well Foundation is committed to supporting family and adult literacy in the United States by fostering and promoting the development and expansion of new and existing literacy and educational programs. Grants ranging from approximately $200-$10,000 are made quarterly.
http://www.wishyouwellfoundation.org/apply/

Charting the Course: Supporting the Career Development of Youth with Learning Disabilities
National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth: This publication aims to assist youth service professionals as they help young people with learning disabilities in their transition from adolescence to adulthood.
http://www.ncwd-youth.info/id-guide

Medicaid Redesign
The State website serves as a hub for information on the work of the Medicaid Redesign team in NYS. A presentation regarding the current state of New York’s Medicaid system including quality measures and expenditures was made to the Medicaid Redesign work group on January 13th. It is posted at:
http://www.health.ny.gov/health_care/medicaid/redesign/

The State Senate Committee on Health held a Medicaid Redesign Roundtable on January 18, 2011. You can view this roundtable discussion at:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EIU0S7GoddU

Written reports discussed as part of the above Roundtable can be found at:

Proposed amendment of sections 200.1 & 200.4 of the Regulations of the Commissioner of Education would replace references to *mental retardation* with *intellectual disability,* and replace references to *Commissioner of the Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities* with *Commissioner of the Office of People With Developmental Disabilities* in order to ensure consistency with recent changes to the terminology used in federal and State statutes. Written comments on the proposed amendment must be received by February 7, 2011. Please see http://www.p12.nysed.gov/specialed/policy/announce-comment-sect2001.htm
MARCH 8-9, 2011
GENETIC DISEASES OF CHILDREN
ADVANCING RESEARCH & CARE
CONFERENCE

Sponsored by the NYS Dept. of Health along with other partners this conference will be held at the Sheraton New York Hotel & Towers in New York City. There are more than 85 speakers with Jim Kelly, President & Co-Founder of Hunter’s Hope Foundation being the featured speaker. Conference information available at: http://www.wadsworth.org/events/genetics/speakers.php

APRIL 8, 2011 - SAVE THE DATE
THE SPECIAL EDUCATION TASKFORCE ANNUAL CONFERENCE - more details to come.

JUNE 23-25, 2011 - GENETIC ALLIANCE ANNUAL CONFERENCE
A celebration of innovations in genetics and health. Conference information available at: www.geneticalliance.org/conference2011
NYSRA Legislative Forum Registration Form: Fax this form back to NYSRA by January 28th. Checks can be made payable to NYSRA. For your convenience, we also accept credit card payments. Contact Stacie Muscolino-Benfer with any questions and to pay via credit card.

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<th>Registration Part 1</th>
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<td>I will be attending: (please check the appropriate box)</td>
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<td>□ Day 1 - Monday Feb. 7 only</td>
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<td>□ Day 1 &amp; 2 - Monday, Feb. 7 &amp; Tuesday, Feb. 8</td>
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<th>Registration Part 2—Feb. 8</th>
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<td>NYSRA’s plan has been to encourage members to schedule meetings with their own legislators for that day. As well, NYSRA has meetings that will be arranged for Legislative leadership from 9am – 2pm that day.</td>
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We are interested in knowing the following -

1. Have you set up meetings with our own legislators?
   - Yes or No

   If yes with whom: ____________________________

2. Are you interested in joining NYSRA’s Legislative leaders in scheduled meetings?
   - Yes or No

   If yes my availability is: ____________________________

(CANCELLATION POLICY: A $30.00 processing fee will be held for each cancelled registrant. Registrants wishing to cancel must inform NYSRA in writing by January 21, 2010 to avoid liability for the entire registration fee. Substitutions will be accepted by, please notify NYSRA by January 31, 2010.

LEGISLATIVE FORUM PARKING INFORMATION:

February 7th:
NYSRA has reserved a limited number of parking spaces at the Empire State Plaza in the Visitor Parking lot (V lot) for your convenience. Parking at the Empire State Plaza is on a FEE basis of $20 per spot. If you would like to reserve a parking space, please indicate the name of each driver and mail this form along with payment to NYSRA by January 28th. Parking spaces will be released by the close of business that day.

Driver’s Legal Name(s): As shown on ID

Agency: ____________________________

February 8th:
NYSRA reserved parking spaces are not available at the Empire State Plaza on February 8th. Please call NYSRA at (518) 449-2976 for alternate parking lot information. Thank you.