



**A PRIORITY FOR LIBRARY ADVOCATES: SUPPORTING SCHOOL LIBRARIES**

Do K-12 schools need libraries? Library lovers never doubt it. Jefferson said it: "An educated citizenry is a vital requisite for our survival as a free people." Citizens educated for the 21st century need information literacy to cope with a rapidly changing world. We want our children to be able to locate information, evaluate it, and integrate it into their dynamic understanding of issues and events.

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*A school library with books, digital resources, and an involved librarian.*

But support for Rhode Island's school libraries is eroding. Is it because of the RI Department of Education's Basic Education Plan (BEP)? Sarah Morenon discusses the possibility in this issue.

Morenon represents the School Librarians of Rhode Island (SLRI) on COLA's board. As head of COLA's new Ad Hoc Committee on Support for School Libraries she will work with SLRI's Advocacy Committee.

Can you illustrate the benefits of school libraries? Do you have stories and ideas for us? Contact us at [cola.rhodeisland@gmail.com](mailto:cola.rhodeisland@gmail.com) or at [www.colari.org](http://www.colari.org). Also, please recruit your friends to COLA. Join the fight for RI school libraries!

**CORNERSTONES OF DEMOCRACY: LIBRARIES, INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM AND PRIVACY**

Trustees! Directors! Citizens! Join us for a discussion of policy, privacy and intellectual freedom.

Speaker: Nancy C. Kranich, Ph.D., past president of ALA (the American Library Association)

When: Thursday, November 12, 2015 from 5:30 to 8:30 PM

Where: Cumberland Public Library (Exit 9 from Rte. 295 to Rte. 114)

A light supper will be provided. Please register (free!) at <http://www.olis.ri.gov/services/ce/individual.php?code=corn1112>.



## SCHOOL LIBRARIES IN CRISIS

Rhode Island's school libraries are in crisis. The School Librarians of Rhode Island (SLRI) Advocacy Committee is collecting data, and the trends are alarming; critical resources are disappearing. For instance:

- A school library needs a collection. Everything from books to online databases costs money, yet budgets are being cut—halved in one community, eliminated completely in half a dozen.
- A school library needs a librarian. But many districts have eliminated some or all of their elementary- and secondary-school librarians. Those who remain are assigned to multiple schools, tech support duties, and up to nine lunch periods a week. Core library needs go unmet.
- A school library needs a space. But library services have been closed down for weeks at a time in some districts as the space is commandeered for other purposes, such as statewide testing.

Result? Rhode Island's children do not have equal access to quality libraries and library services. All too many are deprived of opportunities for enriched learning.



*Students at the Nathanael Greene Middle School library engage in hands-on learning.*

**Standards:** Why is this happening? One factor is the state's Basic Education Plan (BEP). The 1986 BEP required at least minimum levels for the staffing, budgets, resources, collection sizes, and facilities of elementary and secondary libraries. In 2009—in the throes of economic crisis and outcries about unfunded mandates—the RI Department of Education issued a new BEP.

The action was overdue, but the new BEP did not just update the standards; it eviscerated them. The current text licenses flexibility: "Though each Local Education Agency (LEA) may offer additional options to its students, each student must be provided equal access to at least the services that are described in these regulations. It is not required that every school offer every service detailed in the BEP, but it is required that LEAs ensure equal access to mandated services for each and every student." Does that mean libraries are "additional options"? School districts are beginning to interpret the regulations that way.

Without the old minimum standards, really, nothing is left. Providence Mayor Elorza ran on a platform of even more decentralization so that principals can “create their own culture.” While it’s unclear what that may mean in practice, libraries have proven to be an easy target.

**Technology:** Another factor is technology in the 21st century library. While librarians set about balancing new resources (including pricey full-text databases) with print collections, some administrators may see the Internet as a cost-free alternative to books, CDs, and other expensive items. Professionally, school librarians have touted their technological skills, ability to teach information seeking skills, and aid in improving test scores. No need for book budgets, I can hear principals saying to themselves.

**What do we need to do?** First, school librarians must provide evidence of the value of a school library, and not simply because of our technology skills. We are uniquely placed to promote reading and also teach information skills. Second, we need a new BEP to support school libraries. It needs to specify basic mandates and expectations, and it needs to be passed. COLA should help rally advocates—parents, children, and librarians. We need supporters among the Board of Regents, school administrators, and teachers. More negative changes are proposed for the next school year and we need to get this issue on the radar right now.

*Sarah Morenon*, Chair, Ad Hoc Committee on Support for School Libraries; with Gale Eaton

## From the Membership Committee

Thanks to all who responded to our call to help Mobile Beacon and Mobile Citizen maintain Internet service to their clients—a service which Sprint plans to limit, starting November 6. The two companies are considered Educational Broadband Service (EBS) providers, and they support access to underserved populations nationwide: 429 Schools, 61 libraries, 1,820 nonprofits, and over 300,000 vulnerable people in all. This great community had its origins right here in Rhode Island and is very dear to Rhode Island libraries. The first public library member was the Cranston Public Library, which worked with the Office of Library and Information Services in the developmental stages of the Mobile Beacon/Mobile Citizen service model. The Providence Community Library, Providence Public Library, East Greenwich Public Library, Johnson and Wales University, and the Providence Housing Authority also benefit from the threatened services. If you have not already done so, please consider signing this letter to the CEO of Sprint: [www2.mobilebeacon.org/sprint-sign-on](http://www2.mobilebeacon.org/sprint-sign-on). For more explanation of the issues, see [arstechnica.com/business/2015/10/nonprofit-groups-say-sprint-will-unfairly-throttle-data-after-wimax-shutdown/](http://arstechnica.com/business/2015/10/nonprofit-groups-say-sprint-will-unfairly-throttle-data-after-wimax-shutdown/).

I write here about the Mobile Beacon effort because it is why being a COLA member matters; indeed, why we need an active COLA. We read in this issue of the newsletter about the crisis facing RI school libraries. Other libraries face crises on a smaller scale. The librarian’s position at the Landmark Hospital is vacant, and word is that it may not be filled, or may be filled by someone not trained as a librarian. Other situations crop up not infrequently in the world of libraries. We cannot predict when and cannot predict how quickly action will be needed – or whether it would be better not to act. The voices of those who are not in the thick of a situation are often more significant than the voices of those who are.

Those voices are you – the COLA membership – and you – the library lover who has yet to join COLA. Help COLA grow the best possible advocacy network for libraries in Rhode Island. *The best network is the one that includes you.*

Join or rejoin. The form is at <http://colari.org>. Tell your friends about library advocacy and about COLA. Read this Newsletter when it arrives and spread the word. Not only among people of power; acting together, we are all people of power.

*Howard Boksenbaum*, Chair, Membership committee

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## FROM THE CHAIR

Congratulations to COLA Chair Emerita Joan Ress Reeves! The Rhode Island General Assembly has requested that she be made the first *Member Emeritus to the Library Board of Rhode Island*. You can link to the joint House/Senate proclamation, and to more on Joan's advocacy career, from <http://colari.org>.



This latest honor adds the Library Board of Rhode Island to other boards that won't let Joan go: COLA, the RI School of Design (where she is an Honorary Trustee), and the Miriam Hospital Women's Association (which made her an Honorary Vice-President for Life). Her terms never really end. Joan Ress Reeves has staying power.

We value her wisdom, energy, and wit, and we are inspired by her vision. Joan helped found COLA as a citizen group—grassroots support for libraries—the very agencies that support freedom of thought and active citizenship. Please join us!

If you've renewed your membership for 2015, thank you. If not, thank you for renewing now, by mail or online at <http://colari.org>. We look forward to your help and support.

*Gale Eaton*, Chair