



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Catharine Young

Access to Educational Materials A Central Discussion During State Budget Hearing

CATHARINE YOUNG January 27, 2016

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ALBANY – Online and blended learning courses, that would dramatically enhance educational opportunities for students, received attention during today’s state budget hearing regarding education.

Senator Catharine Young (R,C,I- 57th District), who last year authored a new law that established the Online Learning Advisory Council, used Commissioner MaryEllen Elia’s testimony as an opportunity to get an update on the steps the State Education Department (SED) has now taken to enhance the availability of online and blended learning services for school districts across the state.

Earlier this year, the Online Learning Advisory Council released a series of recommendations on ways to improve the availability of these learning systems. Among the recommendations from the Council were: implementing professional development programs to expand instructional skills; providing certain waivers of regulations that will reduce the risk for teachers and schools as they implement new online learning programs; establishing a team of leaders at the SED specifically dedicated to online education and educational technology; and incorporating online and blended learning training within pre-service teacher curricula.

The Council is co-chaired by Dr. David O'Rourke, Erie 2-Chautauqua-Cattaraugus BOCES superintendent.

"Dr. O'Rourke has done a fantastic job in leading this effort, and has been able to incorporate some of the innovative best practices already being used to help area students," said Senator Young.

"I represent 46 school districts, including a couple of small city school districts, but across the board my districts are rural and all districts across the state need to have access to more online learning opportunities because it's very difficult to bring these opportunities otherwise, especially in poor rural areas. Every child can have their world opened up and new opportunities through [online learning]," Senator Young said.

Commissioner Elia detailed to Senator Young that the Regents have requested \$50 million to open online learning opportunities for students across the state. She also indicated that additional training and support will be available for teachers who will be providing online classes and the department will soon be moving forward with placing additional curriculum online.

Senator Young also inquired about SED's staffing availability to administer the online programming.

Senator Young noted that, "We studied other states that have successfully done major online learning programs and one of the things they've done is that they have dedicated staff, and also leadership level staff, in order for the program to be successful."

Commissioner Elia indicated that SED's budget request does include additional funding specifically tied to programs that will connect with online learning.

After the hearing, Senator Young again highlighted how online learning can open new opportunities for students.

“Online and blended learning systems provide school districts, teachers, and students with cutting-edge approaches to education. Schools that have incorporated online learning have seen that they provide tremendous opportunities by enhancing teaching methods and improving educational experiences for students. The program provides student the ability to interact directly with subject-matter experts from thousands of miles away, as well as access to college preparatory and career-specific courses that were not previously available, opportunities they would not have under traditional education methods,” Senator Young said.

“I look forward to continuing to work with the Online Learning Advisory Council and Commissioner Elia to provide our students with industry leading educational opportunities,” she said.

The full exchange between Senator Young and Commissioner Elia can be viewed at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SIJHfP73XLQ>.

Additional details about Senator Young’s work with the Online Learning Advisory Council, including a copy of its report, can be found by visiting:

<http://www.nysenate.gov/newsroom/articles/catharine-young/online-learning-advisory-council-issues-final-report>.