

Public Libraries

Update to 2010 Evaluation Report

Problems Identified

- **State Role Often Criticized.** The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE), the state's lead library agency, plays an important but not highly visible role in library services. By law, MDE focuses on providing programs and assistance to regional public library systems rather than individual libraries. Its goal is to ensure that residents statewide have reasonable—not equal—access to services. Many in the library community, though, have been critical of MDE and want it to be more active.
- **Wide Variation in Payment Rates.** Local governments are primarily responsible for funding and administering public libraries. State law makes counties responsible for ensuring that their residents have access to public library services. However, cities that choose to operate public libraries have spent substantially more on average for library services than counties, even though county residents often use city-operated libraries.
- **Unclear Purpose for Multitype Systems.** The 1979 Legislature created seven multitype library cooperation systems to provide opportunities for all types of libraries (academic, public, school, and special) to work together. The multitype systems, though, have had little positive effect on public libraries, and multitype activities often overlap with the activities of regional public library systems and state agencies.

Changes Implemented

- **Improved Verification of Maintenance of Effort Spending.** The Department of Education has begun using the best available data from the State Auditor's Office to help verify spending on public libraries (as reported by local governments), which enables the department to determine maintenance of effort (MOE) requirements. The department also compares the data it uses to set MOE requirements with spending reported in the department's annual public library survey.
- **Collecting Data for a Library Report.** Our report recommended that the Legislature require MDE to issue a comprehensive "State of the State for Public Libraries Report" to the appropriate legislative committees by January 1 of each odd-numbered year. The department intends to use the planning process for its next five-year federal plan (2013-2018) to gather data for its first "State of the State Report."

Action Needed

- **Merge Multitype Systems into the Regional Public Library Systems.** To reduce duplication and enhance coordination, the Legislature should eliminate multitype library cooperation systems as separate entities and move their function and funding to the public library systems. Two multitype systems have already unofficially "merged" with their respective regional library systems; such movement should be encouraged.