



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Catharine Young

Monthly Column by Senator Young

CATHARINE YOUNG March 10, 2006

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The magic of reading was celebrated on Dr. Suess's birthday last week. School children across my Senate district took part in reading the author's famous and beloved works by participating in Read Across America Day. Implemented by the National Education Association, this day is a vehicle to promote reading. While the target may be for children, the principle applies to us all.

In light of Read Across America Day, it is important for us to acknowledge and support educational programs that help our families -- adults and children -- acquire the literacy practices and skills they need to function more effectively in their daily lives.

Literacy skills are among the most important abilities needed to function in today's society. Without the basic understanding of reading and comprehension, how would a mother know how much medicine to give her child, or the young man understand the signs for safety at his job?

These days, our world revolves around literacy. Even the most basic knowledge allows one to elevate his or her own literacy to the next level. Literacy skill levels can affect one's economic status and employment.

Without basic literacy skills, an individual would not last long trying to get by, much less be successful, in today's world. Literacy is the key that opens many doors. Both children and adult illiteracy, while tragic and prevalent, can likewise be addressed. Many libraries offer some form of literacy training or tutoring, as well as groups such as Literacy Volunteers.

Recognizing the crucial role of literacy in all our lives, I am a longtime advocate of literacy and quality education in general. I understand the importance of educational programs that assist children and adults with learning to read. Much akin to learning to walk, all it takes is those first few steps to develop into a lifetime of walking. That is why I was pleased to obtain funding for a number of literacy based programs and institutions all across the district. These libraries, and the Literacy Volunteers program, provide invaluable services to our communities.

As we move forward into the future, higher levels of literacy become more and more important to our individual levels of success. The ability to exchange and receive information progresses at a rapid rate, and we must do all we can to keep up. For those struggling with literacy, deciphering written instructions can be an impossible task. Literacy is essential. To truly make the most of our lives, literacy is key. Our society will continue to reward skilled individuals and place those who are not at a disadvantage.

We have the resources at our disposal; we just need to put them to good use. I urge all my constituents to support their local libraries. Donate books or consider volunteering to teach adult literacy. And, perhaps most importantly, encourage your children to read.