

New York State Reading Association – OUR HISTORY

Nearly six decades ago, educators from various geographic areas around New York State came together in an attempt to form a coordinating agency for local councils. The eleven councils that attended this initial meeting hoped to build stronger programs through collaboration and the sharing of ideas. Although the first attempt to become a state organization was not successful, many leaders from the local councils were not ready to abandon the idea and continued to organize meetings to discuss this possibility.

The New York State Reading Association officially originated in May 1965. Prior to this date, two attempts were made by International Reading Association (IRA)-chartered councils in New York State to form a state council. The 11 interested groups attempted to organize without success. Finally, in May 1965, representatives from the 11 councils met at the International Reading Convention in Detroit to found the New York State Reading Council. (NYSRC) It was chartered by IRA in October 1966.

NYSRC utilized the State University of New York (SUNY) Albany campus for its meetings and official home. The first issue of News Highlights (later renamed The Empire State Reading Scene) was published and circulated to the growing council. NYSRC was then 28 councils strong.

At the first Annual Assembly held in April 1967, the treasury indicated receipts of \$323.44, with annual expenses of \$35.66. A resolution on Reading Teacher Certification in New York State was drafted at this time. In June of 1967, the 35 councils of NYSRC were divided into eight zones.

NYSRC began working closely with the Bureau of Reading in the State Education Department in many cooperative ventures. NYSRC co-sponsored the Statewide Reading Conference at Grossinger's in April 1970.

The professional organization became known as the New York State Reading Association. The Concord Hotel in Kiamesha Lake became the site of NYSRA Conferences. In 1972, every local council became a member of NYSRA.

NYSRA's legislative bill passed in the State Assembly and Reading Certification in New York State became a reality. The reorganization of NYSRA expanded the Board of Directors to include Regional Directors, allowing grassroots input. The NYSRA Express rapid-update newsletter was established. Summer institutes were conducted in the 70s and 80s in West Point, Cooperstown, Alexandria Bay, Chautauqua and in the Finger Lakes area. NYSRA members also attended educational seminars as they cruised to Nassau and Bermuda.

The 1980s also brought exciting and innovative programs including: NYSRA's joint sponsorship with SED of Teleconferences on Newspaper in Education Week, Books for Babies Pilot Projects in Long Island and in Buffalo, a Literacy Outreach Program, Parents and Reading Programs, and Children's Choices in New York State. Regional representatives were selected as Turnkey Trainers for Newspaper in Education Week in New York State through grants from the News York Newspaper Publishers Association.

The direction of education in New York State shifted focus in the 1990s. The development of the New York State Frameworks at the beginning of the decade formed the basis for implementing the new standards and assessment pieces. NYSRA played an active role working with the New York State Education Department on the development and response to the new frameworks.

As an organization, NYSRA began to restructure itself to meet the needs of its membership. The Assembly of Delegates continued to serve as a forum for conducting formal business with professional and leadership development becoming integral components of the weekend's activities. Members were kept updated on the new standards and assessments, legislative initiatives, and certification from the key people working on the pieces. Legislation at both the state and federal levels prompted the need for professional action. NYSRA Boards through the 1990s focused on ways to speak to the legislation in a professional manner.

As NYSRA entered the 21st century, some significant changes took place. The Board of Directors was reconfigured and long-range planning was actively pursued. With the closing of the Concord Hotel in Kiamesha Lake, NYSRA's Board elected to take the annual conference to different locations throughout the state. Since 1998, conferences have been held in Saratoga Springs, Syracuse, New York City, Rochester, Rye Brook and Albany. At the request of our membership, we continue moving the conference to various areas of the state.

NYSRA'S Executive Committee and Board of Directors continue to work on meeting the emerging needs of its members: setting future direction through retreats, providing staff development through the annual conference, meshing research with day-to-day practice, reviewing and recognizing outstanding children's literature, supporting the formation of sister councils locally and internationally, disseminating current information through NYSRA'S publications (journals and newsletters), and reaching out to support local councils.

At this time, NYSRA includes 18 affiliate councils and an individual membership of nearly 1,000. NYSRA's membership and programming efforts have been recognized through the winning the International Literacy Association (ILA and formerly IRA) Award of Excellence. For more than 50 years, educators from all over the State of New York have contributed to the growth and development of local reading councils. They have supported, stimulated and inspired activities concerned with the improvement of reading programs, professional development of teachers, and the general promotion of literacy.

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