June 7, 2018

Dear PLSR Steering Committee and Core Recommendation Collaborators,

First, thank you for your hard work on this difficult and complicated project. I appreciate your commitment to doing what is best for libraries and library systems in Wisconsin. Because I also want what is best for libraries and library systems in our state, I must share my concerns regarding the current state of PLSR.

As I read Models X, Y, and Z, I was surprised and alarmed at:

- How little transparency there is regarding who created Models X, Y, and Z. Those of us outside the PLSR process do not know who created Models X, Y, and Z. The PLSR website says, “The (PLSR) process relies on transparency and communication.” I hope Steering will demonstrate commitment to transparency as the PLSR process continues.
- On a related note, it seems that the meetings in which Models X, Y, and Z were created were not properly noticed public meetings. This is different from the rest of the PLSR committee work. Perhaps there is a reason for this, and if so please let me know.
- I find it frustrating that many of us around the state devoted a substantial amount of time to provide feedback on over 300 pages of workgroup reports, and Models X, Y, and Z (with very few exceptions) seem not to be based on the workgroup reports. I understand that the next step is for the Summit participants to determine how to make the workgroup recommendations fit into Models X, Y, and/or Z. Perhaps it would be best to reconsider this plan, and create three models using the workgroup recommendations, instead of trying to make the workgroup report findings fit into three models that don’t seem to be based on the work done thus far in the PLSR process.
- How the CRCs had just one hour to read, review, and give feedback on Models X, Y, and Z at the meeting on May 18.
- How the models do not define what problems exist, nor how the models solve any of those problems.
- How the models do not identify what works really well with our current library systems, and how these models could preserve and protect that.
- One of the questions posed of the CRCs was “which (stakeholders) are likely to be resistant?” The choice to use the word “resistant” was unfortunate. A more accurate way to word the question would have been, “which stakeholders will be hurt by this model?” or “which stakeholders will suffer or lose funding and services in this model?” Using the word “resistant” fails to recognize that stakeholders’ concerns are based in real fear that this project will hurt our libraries and patrons.
• How each of the three models would hurt my library and library system. In each of the models, my system is one of the stakeholders “likely to be resistant,” because we are in each of the following categories: “southeast Wisconsin,” “well-funded systems,” and “well-functioning systems.” Repeatedly throughout PLSR, Steering has assured us that healthy systems will not have to sacrifice in order for struggling systems to succeed. Models X, Y, and Z run counter to that assurance.

• How the models don’t seem to improve things for systems that are struggling, and create hardship for systems that are succeeding.

• How some of the models and feedback make claims that are not backed up by evidence or specific examples. Examples of this are claims that the models will produce economies of scale, and the assumption that having fewer systems is better than keeping the current number or adding more systems. The PLSR site says, “One of the main principles of the PLSR project is that information and data should be the bedrock of the process.” Making claims with no evidence is counter to that principle.

• I can’t seem to understand the tables included in each model summary. I hope someone can clarify these for me.

• The way this critical point in the PLSR process falls right as summer reading is starting. Library staff will not have the time to provide the meaningful, thoughtful feedback Steering will need at this important part of the process.

• The word “silo” comes up in a few places in the Model Review materials. If there are silos, we can fix that without restructuring library systems. There is nothing keeping us, legally, from breaking out of a silo and sharing expertise and information. We don’t need to restructure library systems to accomplish this.

In addition to the concerns listed above, I have the following questions:

• Are our patrons receiving less-than-optimal service because of the current state of library systems? If so, how do these models solve that problem?

• Are there other ways to solve problems without abolishing the current system?

• Are there some great ideas from the workgroups (such as CE/Consulting) that we could implement without having to do any major restructuring of library systems?

Thank you for your time and attention. I hope you will take my feedback for what it is: Legitimate concerns from a library director who wants every library to be as satisfied with their library system as I am with mine.

Sincerely,

Betsy Bleck
Library Director