Direct Access Plan 2027-2031

I. Introduction

The Southern Adirondack Library System (SALS) serves the counties of Hamilton, Saratoga, Warren, and Washington Counties. It has a service population of 322,443 in a geographic area of 4,238 square miles. SALS is a cooperative library system consisting of thirty-four member libraries and one branch. Every member library makes resources available to its residents through onsite use and through direct access in accordance with the New York State Commissioner of Education's Regulations 90.3.

II. CR 90.3.(a) Definitions

Public Library System means a library established by one or more counties, a group of libraries serving an area including one of more counties in whole or in part, a library of a city containing one or more counties, or a cooperative library system established pursuant to the provisions of section 255 of the Education Law.

Approved plan of service means a plan of library service submitted by a public library system board of trustees in accordance with section 272 of the Education Law that has been approved by the Commissioner pursuant to the provisions of this section. The plan of service defines the mutual commitments, responsibilities and obligations of the public library system and its members in meeting the service needs of the area served and statewide library service goals.

Direct Access means the ability of an individual, who resides within the boundaries of a public library system and who has a valid borrower's card issued by the system or any member library in the system, to borrow materials for home use directly from the premises of any library that is a member of the public library system on the same basis as that specified for cardholders in each individual library.

Chartered service area means the geographic area served by a library as stated in charter documents as approved by the Board of Regents and on file with the department. For purposes of this section, the phrase "and its environs" or its equivalent, as contained in any charter document will not be recognized by the commissioner as a valid part of the library's chartered service area.

For purposes of this section, the commissioner will not recognize areas served by the library under contract as a valid part of a library's chartered service area.

Resident borrower means an individual who resides within the boundaries of the chartered service area of a public or association or Indian library as defined in section 253 of the Education Law and who is a library cardholder at that library.

Non-resident borrower means an individual who resides outside the boundaries of the chartered service area of a public or association or Indian library as defined in section 253 of the Education Law and who is a library cardholder at that library or at another member library of the public library system who is a system cardholder.

Library resources mean the print and non-print materials owned by the library and any other services provided by the library to the resident borrowers of the library's chartered service area.

Local income means funds supplied by local taxing agencies which may be municipalities, school districts or special districts. These funds may be from the library's sponsoring municipality or from a non-sponsoring municipality in payment for library services.

On-site use means the ability of an individual to use library resources on the premises of a library.

Serious inequities and hardships mean those conditions which adversely affect resident borrowers or member libraries. Such conditions are defined in accordance with the free direct access provisions contained in each system's approved plan of service and may include, but are not limited to, a definition of what constitutes excessive borrowing of a library's resources by non-resident borrowers.

Unserved means those individuals residing in geographic areas that are within the boundaries of a public library system but outside the boundaries of chartered service area of a library which is a member of that system.

Underserved means those individuals residing in geographic areas that are within the chartered service area of a member library and which the public library system had identified as having an inadequate level of local income to support the delivery of acceptable library services.

III. The Plan

1. Describe how all individuals residing within the boundaries of the System but outside a member library's chartered service area will receive library services.
    a. Individuals residing within the boundaries of the system (SALS) but outside a member library's chartered to serve area will receive library services via:
        - Free direct and on-site access at any member library
        - Central Library Services provided by the Crandall Public Library
        - The SALS website and online catalog
        - A system-wide library card
    b. Member libraries meeting criteria described elsewhere in this Plan may restrict direct access as permitted under CR 90.3.

2. Describe how the system will assure that those persons living within the system boundaries in an area where a member library chooses to withdraw from the system, or where a chartered and registered library was never a member of the system, will be served by the system.
    a. In the event that a library withdraws from SALS, residents of the library's chartered service area will continue to be entitled to on-site access as specified in #1 above.
    b. Residents served by a newly chartered and registered library, which has not joined the System, will be entitled to on-site access as specified in #1 above.

3. Describe what the System considers "serious inequities and hardships" and the criteria used by the system to make the determination.
    a. SALS considers "serious inequities and hardships" to be when the circulation of materials to non-resident borrowers is excessive and significantly deprives residents of borrowing materials in a reasonable time period.

4. Describe what constitutes excessive out-of-chartered service area borrowing in the System.
    a. Excessive out-of-chartered service area borrowing occurs in a member library when:
        - 20% of total materials circulated from the collection of a member library are to residents outside a library's chartered service area, and/or
        - 10% of total materials circulated from the collection of a member library are residents of a single community outside a library's chartered to serve area, and/or
        - An unserved community has a population over 10,000 and no fair and equitable contract for library services.

5. Analyze the library resources available to unserved and underserved population residing within the system's boundaries. Such analysis should include, but should not be limited to:
    a. Describe the unserved and underserved populations within the System.
        i. Currently, there are 48,621 unserved (NY State Education Department) people residing in the system service area. The unserved areas may be seen on the Division of Library Development's website.
        ii. At the time of drafting this plan, the Fort Edward Free Library and the Waterford Public Library districts are underserved based on the criteria described in 5.b below.
    b. Describe any deficiencies in library resources currently available to individuals residing within the system's boundaries.
        i. The SALS criteria for determining deficiencies in library resources, is the member library's ability to comply with the minimum standards for public libraries as described in New York State education law and New York State Commissioner's Regulations. Each member library reports on their compliance with the NYS minimum standards in their Annual Report for Public and Association Libraries to the State of New York. If the library is in compliance with the minimum standards, or if the Commissioner of Education has granted a waiver from one or more of the standards, the library is deemed to have an adequate level of support.
    c. Describe the actions the system will take to expand the availability of library services to unserved and underserved individuals residing within the boundaries of the system.
        i. SALS will provide consulting and continuing education opportunities to help member library staff and trustees gain the skills needed to solicit additional funding from their municipalities, and to make informed decisions when considering becoming self-taxing districts. System staff and trustees will continue to work with member library staff and trustees to advocate for adequate local, state and federal funding levels necessary to provide library services in our region.
        ii. SALS will provide consulting and assistance to member libraries to aid them in meeting the minimum standards for public libraries.
    d. Provide a timeline for such activities.
        ii. These activities are ongoing.
    e. Identify who will be responsible for carrying out these actions.
        i. SALS and its member library staff and trustees will be responsible for carrying out these actions.

6. Describe the conditions under which such modifications to the free direct access plan can be made:
    a. Without prior approval of the Commissioner of Education on the recommendation of the SALS Board of Trustees and after approval of a majority of the member libraries of this plan and after approval of that plan by the Commissioner:
        i. When a library can document to the satisfaction of the system that 20% of total materials circulated from the collection of a member library are to residents of communities outside a library's charter to serve area and/or
        ii. When a library can document that an unserved community has a population over 10,000 and has no fair and equitable contract for library services that library may restrict the following materials:
            - Nonprint materials and equipment
            - Printed materials that are less than one year old from acquisition date (fiction, nonfiction books and periodicals)
            - Attendance at library programs may be restricted to local residents first.
            - These restricted programs and materials must be supported entirely from local funds.
        iii. If a single unserved community is over 10,000, and a library proves hardship, the library may choose to restrict all but on-site use of library materials.
        iv. A library choosing to restrict must notify the system in writing. The system will immediately notify the other libraries of such restrictions.
    b. With prior approval of the Commissioner of Education:
        i. A library may request a waiver for restrictions beyond those mentioned in the plan if a majority of the other member libraries agree to support such a waiver. This appeal will be in writing and include the following:
            - Documentation of the serious inequities and hardships affecting the resident borrowers of the member library making the request.
            - The proposed modifications to unrestricted direct access that will be implemented and a description of the anticipated impact on resident and non-resident borrowers.
            - Recommendations for remedying the underlying inequity with a proposed timetable for action.

7. Describe how the system will assure that member libraries are complying with the system free direct access plan approved by a majority of member libraries. Describe how the system obtained member library input to the plan for free direct access.
    a. An annual review of member libraries' compliance, and monthly review of the borrower reports generated by the system-wide Integrated Library System ILS).
    b. SALS' Assistant Director, Executive Director, and the Executive Director of the Crandall Public Library, SALS' Central Library, drafted a plan that was reviewed and approved by the directors of SALS' member libraries as well as SALS' Library Services Committee, consisting of SALS' President and three other board members. SALS' Assistant Director discussed the plan at the September 1, 2026 Directors Council meeting and again during the November 17, 2026 Directors Council meeting.

Shared and approved by the:

SALS Member Library Directors on [date]

Member Library Boards [Name of Library and date]

SALS Board of Trustees on [date]