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**Testimony on the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and
NJ Department of Education's ESSA Implementation Plan
Lisa Bakanas, President-Elect
New Jersey Association of School Librarians
January 4, 2017**

Good morning, President Mark Biedron and Members of the State Board of Education. My name is Lisa Bakanas, President-Elect of the New Jersey Association of School Librarians (NJASL). This testimony is on behalf of the 900 members of NJASL, the professional organization of school librarians in our state and the 1.37 million students in New Jersey Public Schools who deserve to have access to state-of-the-art school libraries staffed by highly trained, state certified school librarians.

NJASL urges that state certified school library media specialists and school library programs be included as components of the New Jersey ESSA Implementation Plan. In late 2015 the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was passed by Congress and approved by President Obama. This act updates the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) that was last reauthorized in 2001 under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). The New Jersey Department of Education is working to create a state plan for implementation of ESSA.

Research on the Effectiveness of School Libraries

The New Jersey Study of School Libraries "One Common Goal - Student Learning" concluded that school librarians and thriving school library programs contributed to improvements in test scores, development of inquiry based learning, increased interest in reading, and an increase in discriminating reading. It showed that school libraries functioning as centralized learning centers connected to classroom instruction produce literate and informed learners who can thrive in a digital, knowledge-based world, provide an understanding of the information and technology students will confront as digital citizens, and set the stage for student-initiated inquiry.

New Jersey's school librarians contribute to student learning outcomes through an instructional program that includes the mastery of content and curriculum standards. They also address outcomes related to the development of reading through school library services that increase interest in reading, increase participation in reading, expand reading interests, and help students to become more discriminating readers. (Kachel 2013)

School libraries are transforming education and lifelong learning, as students build their digital literacy and critical thinking skills using a variety of technology platforms. Students are experiencing a shift from reciting what they have learned to creating new ideas from multiple digital and print sources. School libraries are providing opportunities for extended inquiry, both for class assignments and topics of their own choosing.

Students are developing a sense of what it means to engage ethically and competently in today's information society. Under the guidance of a certified school librarian, students are cultivating literacy skills in various formats. Empowering them to thrive and contribute to their communities locally and globally.

ESSA and School Libraries

ESSA includes school librarians and school library programs as an essential component in education and lists specific references to “effective school library programs” and “school librarians.” The legislation provides resources to:

- Develop effective school library programs to provide students an opportunity to develop digital literacy skills and improve academic achievement.
- Provide professional development to support instructional services provided by effective school library programs and develop, administer, and evaluate high-quality comprehensive literacy instruction initiatives.
- Provide time for teachers (and other literacy staff, as appropriate, such as school librarians or specialized support personnel) to meet to plan comprehensive literacy instruction
- Promote literacy programs in low income communities. May include providing professional development for school librarians, books and up-to-date materials to high need schools
- Block grants can be made available to increase “access to school libraries” and provide training to “use technology effectively, including effective integration of technology, to improve instruction and student achievement (American Library Association, 2015)

Status of School Library Media Specialists and School Libraries in New Jersey

While school library media services are required in N.J.A.C. 6A:13-2.1(h) under Standards Based Instruction, some schools do not even have a school librarian to provide that program. In an effort to determine the current status of School Library Media Specialists (SLMS), School Libraries, and funding for School Library programs in New Jersey, the New Jersey Association of School Librarians (NJASL) and The New Jersey Library Association (NJLA) collaborated on a census of certified School Library Media Specialists as well as a survey to determine how New Jersey School Library Programs are being implemented.

Survey results found that 89% of school libraries are receiving flat, decreased, or no funding for their school library programs. The census and survey both show a reduction in SLMS positions as well as a reduction in the support staff for school libraries. In some districts this situation is complicated by SLMS having to cover multiple schools or numerous other non-traditional SLMS

roles. For example, in one school district, the high school and middle school share one librarian serving 5500 students, spending 2 days in the middle school and 3 days in the high school per week.

Results also determined that SLMSs spend 40% of their time performing non-traditional duties. Some of these duties include art teacher, basic skills instructor, electives teacher, locker room monitor, administrative assistant, and substitute teacher. In addition, 71% indicated they “never” or “rarely” have time to collaborate with teachers to promote library resources. The survey results confirm that if SLMSs are provided with more support and funding that they can provide greater opportunity for New Jersey school students.

Survey respondents repeatedly voiced concerns that a result of eliminating certified SLMSs would lead to curricula becoming unsupported, test scores decreasing, and students being unprepared for higher education. Schools will “lack a professional guide to credible, relevant, and high-quality resources which is vital to the development of information literacy.”

Key findings from the NJASL and NJLA survey:

- There are approximately 20% fewer School Library Media Specialists(SLMS) in New Jersey than there were in 2007-2008
- Over 20% of High Schools have no certified School Library Media Specialist available to students. • Over 150 School Library Media Specialists cover more than one school. One SLMS covers 7 schools in one district.
- 91 School Districts have no School Library Media Specialists (Not including charter schools)
- 33 districts have no School Library Media Specialists at the Elementary Level
- Over 280 Elementary Level schools are without certified School Library Media Specialists
- In the nearly 100 charter schools, there are fewer than 10 School Library Media Specialists.

The 2015-2016 School Library Census revealed that support for school library programs from New Jersey school districts has decreased dramatically. Some districts had eliminated all elementary level SLMS, while others had eliminated their high school level SLMS, while others continue to support fully staffed school library programs. Based on the survey results, NJASL and NJLA believe ESSA presents a critical opportunity to reinvest in school library programs, to unlock the potential in New Jersey students and prepare them for college and beyond. This survey led to NJASL partnering with Library Link NJ, NJLA and ISTE to examine the school library provisions in ESSA and to develop a joint position statement in support of NJ’s school library programs.

Recommendations from summary and ESSA implications for school library programs:

- Title 1, Part A - Improving Basic Programs Operated by State and Local Education Agencies

Under this provision of ESSA, NJDOE and local school districts will develop plans to implement

federally-funded educational activities. ESSA includes that states and local school districts must develop their plans with timely and meaningful consultation with teachers, principals and other stakeholders, including “specialized instructional support personnel” which is defined under ESSA as specifically including school librarians. ESSA authorizes school districts to include in their plans how they will develop effective school library programs to provide students an opportunity to improve digital literacy skills and improve academic achievement.

NJASL is asking that the NJ Department of Education encourage districts to include in their local plans the importance of implementing, developing and maintaining effective school library programs that empower the development of digital literacy skills and academic achievement.

- Title II, Part A - Supporting Effective Instruction

ESSA includes new provisions that authorize states and districts to use grant and subgrant funds to support instructional services provided by school library programs.

NJASL is asking that the NJ Department of Education inform school districts that Title II funds may now be used for professional development for school librarians.

- Title II, Part B, Subpart 2 - Literacy Education for All, Results for the Nation (LEARN)

This is a new program under ESSA that provides support to states to develop, revise, or update comprehensive literacy instruction plans. States award competitive subgrants to districts for activities that focus on K-5 and 6-12. ESSA specifically authorizes school librarians to participate in required grant activities for both K-5 and 6-12. Local grants can be used to provide high quality professional development opportunities for school staff, as appropriate, including school librarians and to allocate time for teachers, school librarians, and other literacy staff to meet to plan comprehensive literacy instruction

NJASL is asking the NJ Department of Education to ensure librarians, administrators, instructional support professionals, and teachers, are aware of these grants for comprehensive literacy instruction and to support, encourage, and provide technical assistance to districts and school personnel in applying for grants and subgrants.

- Title II, Part B, Subpart 2, Section 2226 - Innovative Approaches to Literacy (IAL)

ESSA specifically authorizes funds to be used for implementing, developing and enhancing effective school library programs including professional development for school librarians, books, and up-to-date materials for high needs students.

NJASL is asking the NJ Department of Education to ensure librarians, administrators, instructional support professionals, and teachers are aware of these grants for low income communities to support high needs students in literacy instruction and to support, encourage, and provide technical assistances to districts and school personnel in applying for grants and subgrants.

- Title IV, Part A - Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants (Block Grants)

ESSA authorizes a new program to provide Student Support and Academic Enrichment activities (commonly referred to as the “Block Grant” under ESSA) to help States and school districts target federal resources on locally-designed priorities.

ESSA authorizes states to use funds to assist school districts in providing school librarians and other school personnel with the knowledge and skills to use technology effectively, including effective integration of technology, to improve instruction and student achievement. ESSA requires that school districts conduct a “needs assessment” prior to receiving funds from the State (conducted every 3 years). The needs assessment should include access to personalized learning experiences which may include access to school libraries.

ESSA and School Library Funding

Children in New Jersey deserve access to an effective school library program and up-to-date resources leading to increased academic achievement and literacy and digital literacy skills giving students the 21st century competencies and flexibility needed to be successful in future career and higher education endeavors. The Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA) can make this a reality for New Jersey school districts with its provisions for highly effective school library programs as essential elements in the education of New Jersey’s children. The ESSA legislation and the New Jersey ESSA implementation plan offer a unique opportunity for all stakeholders to work together to create vibrant, forward-thinking and valued school library programs in all New Jersey schools to increase literacy levels, critical thinking, and information literacy and research skills. It is time to reinvest in our school library programs to advance instructional services with ESSA related-funding and support to provide New Jersey students with strong literacy and information literacy skills.

NJASL is asking the NJ Department of Education to inform and encourage local school districts to target these funds to support student access to school libraries staffed by certified School Library Media Specialist in every school. NJASL looks forward to working with the New Jersey State Board of Education and the New Jersey Department of Education to make this opportunity a reality for all of New Jersey’s students.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of the members of the New Jersey Association of School Librarians and the students of New Jersey. Please contact me if I can offer additional information or answer any questions.

Respectfully submitted,
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2016 New Jersey School Library Media Specialist (SLMS) Census Results

There are approximately 20% fewer School Library Media Specialists (SLMSs) in New Jersey than there were in 2007-2008



Additional Data:

- Over 20% of High Schools have no Certified School Library Media Specialist available to students.
- Over 150 School Library Media Specialists cover more than one school. One SLMS covers 7 schools in one district.
- In the nearly 100 charter schools, there are less than 10 School Library Media Specialists.

SLMS Math

91 School Districts have no School Library Media Specialists *

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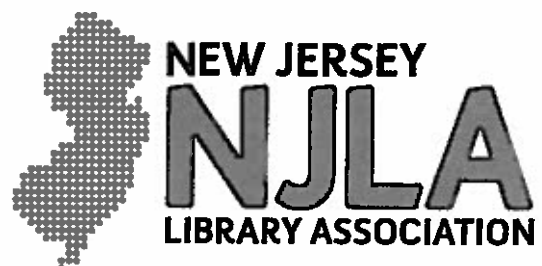
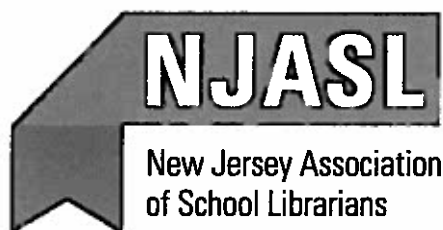
33 districts have no School Library Media Specialists at the Elementary Level

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Over 280 Elementary Level schools without School Library Media Specialists



* does not include Charter School Districts



**The Role of Effective School Library Programs in
The Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015
A Position Statement from
New Jersey Association of School Librarians,
New Jersey Library Association, and LibraryLinkNJ**

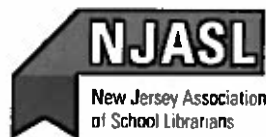
August 2016

The New Jersey Association of School Librarians (NJASL), New Jersey Library Association (NJLA), LibraryLinkNJ, and local school librarians are united in our commitment that all New Jersey students have access to an effective school library program to ensure increased academic achievement, literacy and information literacy skills, and preparation for higher education. The *Every Student Succeeds Act* of 2015 (ESSA) provides an opportunity for New Jersey school districts to make this a reality. This new federal law provides for highly effective school library programs as essential elements in the education of our nation's children.

Effective school library programs as defined by the American Association of School Libraries meet the following criteria:

- the school library is staffed by a state certified school librarian;
- has up-to-date resources that include technology and broadband access; and
- includes collaboration between content teachers and school librarians concerning school reform.

We, as a coalition, urge the Department of Education set the above definition as the appropriate standard for all New Jersey schools.



Summary of ESSA, Implications for New Jersey, and Recommendations

Title I, Part A - Improving Basic Programs Operated by State and Local Education Agencies

Under this provision of ESSA, NJDOE and local school districts will develop plans to implement federally-funded educational activities.

ESSA includes that states and local school districts must develop their plans with timely and meaningful consultation with teachers, principals and other stakeholders, including "*specialized instructional support personnel*" which is defined under ESSA as specifically including school librarians.

ESSA authorizes school districts to include in their plans how they will develop effective school library programs to provide students an opportunity to improve digital literacy skills and improve academic achievement.

Recommendations for the Department of Education:

1. Collaborate with NJASL, NJLA, the New Jersey State Library and partners to ensure school librarians have a place in statewide planning sessions dedicated to implementing federally-funded activities.
2. Strongly encourage districts to include in their local plans the importance of implementing, developing and maintaining effective school library programs that empower the development of digital literacy skills and academic achievement.

Title II, Part A – Supporting Effective Instruction

ESSA includes new provisions that authorize states and districts to use grant and subgrant funds to support instructional services provided by school library programs.

Recommendation for the Department of Education:

3. Inform school districts that Title II funds may now be used for professional development for school librarians.

Rational:

Under No Child Left Behind, Title II funds were to be used primarily for classroom teachers to participate in professional development activities. ESSA specifically authorizes funds to be used to support instructional services provided by effective school library programs. School librarians collaborate with classroom teachers to design curriculum, instruct and engage students. Therefore, both classroom teachers and school librarians must have high quality professional development on effective instruction and collaboration.

Title II, Part B, Subpart 2 – Literacy Education for All, Results for the Nation (LEARN)

This is a new program under ESSA that provides support to states to develop, revise, or update comprehensive literacy instruction plans. States award competitive subgrants to districts for activities that focus on K-5 and 6-12. ESSA specifically authorizes school librarians to participate in required grant activities for both K-5 and 6-12. Local grants can be used to:

- provide high quality professional development opportunities for school staff, as appropriate, including school librarians;
- allocate time for teachers, school librarians, and other literacy staff to meet to plan comprehensive literacy instruction

Recommendations for the Department of Education:

4. Ensure librarians, administrators, instructional support professionals, and teachers, are aware of these grants for comprehensive literacy instruction
5. Support, encourage, and provide technical assistance to districts and school personnel in applying for grants and subgrants.

Title II, Part B, Subpart 2, Section 2226 – Innovative Approaches to Literacy (IAL)

ESSA specifically authorizes funds to be used for implementing, developing and enhancing effective school library programs including professional development for school librarians, books, and up-to-date materials for high needs students.

Recommendations for the Department of Education:

6. Ensure librarians, administrators, instructional support professionals, and teachers are aware of these grants for low income communities to support high needs students in literacy instruction.
7. Support, encourage, and provide technical assistances to districts and school personnel in applying for grants and subgrants.

Rationale:

Those students in the most need often have the fewest school library resources to draw on. An examination of the school library access gap (Pribesh, Gavigan, & Dickinson, 2011) looked at the differences in school library characteristics (staffing, books added to the collection, schedule, and number of days closed) in schools with various concentrations of students living in poverty. Findings suggest that if we hope to close achievement gaps between high and low socioeconomic groups, we must attend to the access gap in school libraries in high and low poverty schools.

Title IV, Part A – Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants (Block Grant)

ESSA authorizes a new program to provide Student Support and Academic Enrichment activities (commonly referred to as the “Block Grant” under ESSA) to help States and school districts target federal resources on locally-designed priorities.

ESSA authorizes states to use funds to assist school districts in providing school librarians and other school personnel with the knowledge and skills to use technology effectively, including effective integration of technology, to improve instruction and student achievement.

ESSA requires that school districts conduct a “needs assessment” prior to receiving funds from the State (conducted every 3 years). The needs assessment should include access to personalized learning experiences which may include access to school libraries

Recommendation for the Department of Education:

8. Inform and encourage local school districts to target these funds to support student access to school libraries staffed by certified School Library Media Specialist in every school.

Rationale:

An educated, information-literate citizenry is the foundation of our democratic society, and outcomes from multi-state research studies, brought together by the 2016 edition of Scholastic’s publication *School Libraries Work!* (Scholastic), indicate several positive impacts on student learning as a result of having a full-time certified school librarian, such as:

- scores on standardized achievement tests improve in schools
- librarians collaborate with teachers and lead students to develop 21st century learning skills
- resources are varied and are more likely to have electronic connections to other school collections and the public library,
- secure more federal funding, provide more frequent instruction in the use of electronic resources, and maintain a website linking to current and relevant academic and professional resources.

Conclusion

On June 24, 2016 the Alliance for Excellent Education and the U.S. Department of Education announced Future Ready Librarians as part of the Future Ready Schools Initiative.

“Acknowledging that the current state of school libraries and librarians ranges widely from state to state and even from school to school, these principles are predicated on a core belief that in a Future Ready school, all students have equitable access to qualified librarians, digital tools, resources and books.” (Future Ready Librarians Fact Sheet, 2016)

NJASL and our partners believe that ESSA provides a critical opportunity to create a framework for Future Ready Schools with effective school library programs across New Jersey. We look forward to working with the NJDOE to make this opportunity a reality for all of New Jersey’s students.

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