

April 18, 2016

To: South Orange Maplewood School District  
Dr. Ramos, SOMSD Superintendent of Schools  
Elizabeth Baker, Board President  
Stephanie Lawson - Muhammad, 1st Vice President  
Madhu Pai, 2nd Vice President  
Elizabeth Doherty, Board Member  
Maureen Jones, Board Member  
Annemarie Maini, Board Member  
Chris Sabin, Board Member  
Donna Smith, Board Member  
Johanna Wright, Board Member  
Nina Kambili, Board Member  
Filip Saulean, Board Member

From: Marci Merola, MLIS, and Director of Library Advocacy, American Library Association  
Sylvia Knight Norton, Executive Director of American Association of School Libraries  
Leslie Preddy, President of American Association of School Libraries  
Megan Cusick, MLIS, Grassroots Specialist, American Library Association  
Pat Tumulty, MLS, Executive Director of New Jersey Librarians Association  
James Keebler, MLS, President of New Jersey Librarians Association  
Janet Clark, SLMS, President of New Jersey Association of School Librarians (NJASL)  
Pat Massey, SLMS, NJASL Public Relations Committee Chair  
Dr. Joyce Valenza, MLIS, Assistant Prof., Rutgers University, SC&I  
Dr. Ellen Pozzi, MLIS, Assistant Professor, Director, SLMS , Program, William  
Paterson University  
Elissa Malespina , SLMS, Community member

Re: SOMSD Removal of SLMS And District Strategic Plan

Superintendent Ramos,

We are in receipt of an email from Board President Elizabeth Baker stating that SOMSD values its school libraries and is currently engaged in a strategic planning process that would be aided by best practice resources and other expertise that NJASL can provide to assist SOMSD in creating a vision and plan for their school libraries. This document is therefore a resource to help you in that worthy goal. We are all thankful for the opportunity to help you in your efforts to promote literacy and learning and, most of all, equity and access for all students in SOMSD.

In order to support learning and equity for all students, it is essential that each school has the expertise of a State certified School Library Media Specialist as titled in New Jersey and also known as school librarians or teacher librarians. In so many ways, school librarians are the best bargain in a school district.

1. [Dr. Joyce Valenza – Rutger’s University](#)

In so many ways, school librarians are the best bargain in a school district. We provide school-wide ROI. We provide access. We provide equity. Our mission is to transform teaching and learning. As professionals, we continue to evolve as the tools of the information landscape emerge and evolve.

An antidote to the often narrowed curricula we see in modern school culture, school librarians introduce young people to a rich world of books and literature, options they can select themselves. We lead in building a school’s reading culture, acknowledging whatever containers stories may take.

School librarians scout and evaluate emerging technologies and introduce them to the entire learning culture, often leading a school’s professional development efforts.

In the largest classrooms in our schools, we work with teachers to develop both traditional and emerging literacies. With our classroom teacher partners, we build instruction; we build projects and assessments that focus on creativity and meaning using the information tools and strategies of our time.

School librarians build collections to support formal and informal learning across grade levels and disciplines, curating tools for information discovery, organization, synthesis and creative communication. These new collections support new literacies and leverage the new bounty of open educational resources (OER) supported by the White House’s #GoOpen initiative, as well as streamed media, and software for creating and sharing powerful, effectively, ethically produced digital stories. These new collections also involve developing connections and opening our libraries to web-based experiences with experts and authors and classrooms that live outside the walls of our schools.

School librarians curate collections of quality content, as well as the tools learners need to effectively and ethically create and tell their stories. They also ensure ROI on purchased curricular content and the wealth of curricular resources invested in by our state through

JerseyClicks. Without this access, students ignore thousands of dollars of content their parents' tax dollars support. Without physical and intellectual access to these resources, students will not be prepared for the similar high quality academic content they will encounter at the university.

We curate new forms of digital texts. When schools introduce their 1:1, BYOD, Chromebook or iPad roll-outs, it is the librarian who is best positioned to ensure that quality resources and apps are curated on those screens.

School librarians encourage learners to explore their interests and to ask meaningful questions. Through our makerspaces, we engage learners in creative, collaborative STEAM activities, coding, problem solving and the design process, that research tells us will be valued in the workplace.

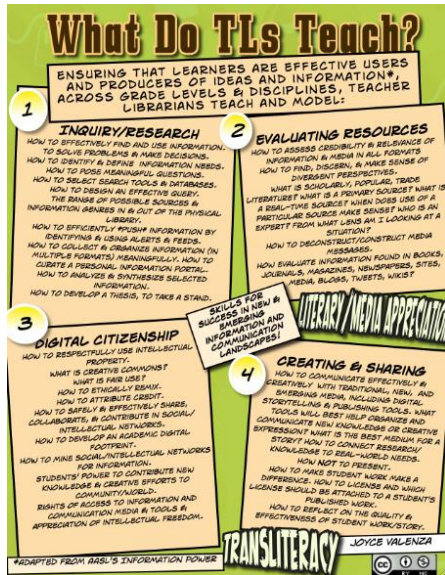
We guide learners in inquiry. We ensure that when they ask questions, they exploit rich search toolkits that include high quality databases and ebooks and can evaluate sources that include blogs and tweets and magazines and newspapers and wikis, as well as scholarly journals and primary sources and media of all sorts.

As it continues to shift, school librarians organize and model strategies for organizing new strategies for workflow and the larger information world of a school. Through our websites and guides, school libraries help learners question and critically evaluate, to triangulate the authority of information and media in all formats.

We guide our communities in understanding the growing Creative Commons movement and how to attribute Creative Commons licenses to their own work. We know the rights and the limits of Fair Use. We guide learners in understanding how to attribute credit, how to cite, how and when to quote.

Teacher librarians are often the only professionals in the building who address the development of proud digital citizens and leaders. We teach them to be kind bloggers and tweeters and networkers, to understand their digital footprints, to build academic digital footprints and to respect the intellectual property of others when they remix and engage in new forms of communication and storytelling. We move learners from digital citizenship to digital leadership-to participation, ethics, agency

Library is not merely a place to *get* stuff. It is a place to invent, to create, to make stuff, to collaborate on stuff, and to share stuff. It is more kitchen than grocery store. More transformational than transactional.



We know and support the whole child, his/her interests and needs that reach beyond solving for X. We offer safe haven when school is a hard place to be.

School librarians ensure that our kids become information and media literate citizens. School libraries are growing, vibrant, central elements of a school's learning culture.

While research shows correlation between school library programs and student achievement, well beyond the kind of intellectual activity measured on high stakes tests, school librarians guide students. We help students build knowledge from the information they gather, analyze and synthesize. We help learners use information to solve problems and make decisions and communicate and collaborate using the tools of their time. We help them become writers and producers and storytellers and networkers and sharers of new knowledge. We help them discover that what they create should have meaning and audience. That it should make a difference.

School libraries ensure learners have the tools they need to learn, create, think, and share. School librarians ensure that all students have equitable access to these tools. Access to these tools is an intellectual freedom issue. Every child deserves a robust school library program led by a professional, credentialed school libraria

## **2. AASL.org and ALA.org**

First and foremost, equity depends on each SOMSD student's access to a robust school library program led by a professional, credentialed, full-time school library media specialist (SLMS). Please refer to the attached "Position Statement on Appropriate Staffing for School Libraries" from American Association of School Librarians (AASL) for additional staffing recommendations.

The SLMS works with colleagues across the district to ensure that students have an articulated, cohesive information literacy curriculum that scaffolds skills from emergent literacy to advanced inquiry. As SOMSD codifies its strategic plan, it is important to recognize the role of the SLMS in realizing the school's mission and achieving its stated goals. The SLMS aligns the curriculum with state standards as well as AASL's Standards for 21st Century Learners (attached), which reflect the skills and dispositions of students who are prepared to be lifelong learners and engaged global citizens.

Just as the library media center is the hub of a school, the SLMS is the hub of a professional learning community. SOMSD's Strategic Directions document reveals an alignment between the district's goals and what the SLMS is professionally trained to do: identify and meet the individual needs of students; develop relevant curriculum; integrate technology meaningfully across the curriculum; and build partnerships that create opportunities and extend student learning. Moreover, the SLMS nurtures a community of readers and lifelong learners, and curates a collection of print, digital and external resources that build the capacities of all members of the learning community.

## **3. NJLA.org**

## NJASL Infographic:

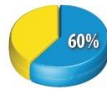
Check out the full Infographic [HERE](#)

# School Libraries: A Lesson in Student Success

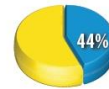
**Contrary to popular belief**, students do not instinctively know how to navigate the abundance of information available to them through traditional and digital resources.  
**In fact a recent survey of first-year college students found that....**



**75% have no idea**  
how to locate articles and resources they need for their research.



**60% don't verify**  
the accuracy or reliability of the information they find.



**44% do not know**  
how to integrate knowledge from different sources.

**Well-funded school libraries, staffed by certified school library media specialists, are transforming into digital learning centers that equip students with the skills they need to succeed.**

## School and Public Libraries- Both Necessary for Student Achievement

To ensure that students have the necessary educational foundation to succeed in the competitive global economy, they will need the services of both school and public libraries in their academic careers.

Schools and public libraries in the same community share many common goals. They work cooperatively in many areas to serve the needs of the residents of their communities. Schools libraries and public libraries, however, are fundamentally different. They play unique roles in a life of a student and one is not simply interchangeable for another.

The New Jersey Association of School Librarians and the New Jersey Library Association have collaborated on a Fact Sheet About Public and School Libraries. This document is included in this report. The document provides a detailed chart which outlines the differences between the

two types of libraries. These differences include: mission, users, focus of the collection, primary services, hours, and educational certification is another key difference between school and public librarians.

School librarians are also certified as teachers and receive training in education pedagogy which permits them to partner with other school professionals in the design and execution of student assignments. This educational expertise is extremely important now with information literacy standards playing such a key role in student assessment. A school media specialist is needed in each grade level to ensure that students receive proper instruction in the use of both print and electronic resources. A successful school media program provides a strong educational program focusing on information literacy skills appropriate for learning goals in each grade.

Public librarians are also certified the State of New Jersey but their academic instruction and classroom training often focuses on other areas of librarianship such as administration, digitalization and outreach. There are obviously many areas where school and public librarians do cooperate by sharing resources and expertise. All libraries in New Jersey are members of the NJ Library Network. The Network provides many services including shared purchase of electronic resources, interlibrary loan services among all libraries, and joint professional development activities.

Many school and public librarians in a district also meet regularly to discuss mutually areas of interest. A prime example of this shared cooperation was the recent NJ Makers Day in NJ where over 200 sites participated including many school and public libraries. In addition, local public libraries sponsor summer reading programs which are instrumental in assuring students are ready for the next academic year and don't suffer from the "summer slide" when school libraries are closed.

Successful school library and public library programs complement each other by jointly providing a strong educational foundation for each student in a community.

#### **4. NJASL.org**

Dr. Ramos

Superintendent to South Orange Maplewood School Board and Board Members,

We understand the hard task you have ahead in creating a coherent and cohesive strategic plan for the district. One that still has a place for school librarians as a part of the school community. I have had some conversation with a few of the people that are involved and here are some suggestions:

1. The creation of supervisor for SLMS or at least one assigned to library staff that has some experience as to what a media literacy program and curriculum does. This is important because if there is a supervisor as an advocate for the program, that at least supports school libraries and not just on paper, then libraries are on a sustainable path for the program to continue. If that person does not see the importance of reading for pleasure as well as academics and what children have shown in study after study about why and what child read, then the rest will continue to decline. In Marilyn Nipold's study of middle school students she states " Given the importance of reading to lexical development in school-age children and adolescents, reading should be promoted as a leisure activity during these years." Of course she was speaking as a Speech Language pathologist but, the connection to reading and SOMSD students with special needs is worthy of our attention as well.

2. A Media literacy curriculum for K - 12

My understanding is that there is not a finalized media literacy program for grades 6 to 12 for SOMSD. In an article found in the *Journal of Alcohol and Drug Education* Truman State educators found that " Youth need assistance, in analyzing and evaluating media (Higgins & Begoray, 2012). Formally educating youth to become critical thinkers when it comes to their media consumption is the focus of media literacy education" In order for staff and students to thrive, a vision and plan for the media literacy program needs to be enacted. A curriculum gives staff a direction, expectations for academic rigor and professional evaluation of educators. When we as educators consider backward modeling as a best practice ("Begin with the end in mind") there is no better way to assure success than to have a plan in place for learning.

3. A practice of having mentorship for SLMS in the district



The efficacy of mentorship is very important. NJASL.org has been enabled by the state DOE to provide mentorship to SLMS. Two of the staff that are being removed are not involved in a mentorship program. Sometimes personnel issues can be remediated when the understanding of what the expectations of the role of a SLMS are. Also the benefit of sharing plans and teaching strategies with a vetted professional in the field has been accepted by the NJ DOE of education as a best practice.

#### 4. A PLN (Professional Learning Network) for their SLMS

The situation in SOMSD could be improved if a Professional Learning Network was implemented for SLMS for the district. This does not necessarily require meeting face to face meetings every time. Because so many times the SLMS is the only SLMS in the building, which could mean the closing of the library at inopportune times for the entire school a PLN would allow professionals to share and learn district wide best practice procedures, develop and actualize plans for the entire school community and increase the efficacy of the media literacy program real time.

#### 5. A connection to the public libraries at the school and district level

The connection to the public libraries is a vital link to the school community. Summer reading lists, library cards and evening and weekend literacy programs can be enhanced and supported. Families can be aware of programs that can only be found at the public library. So many times it is our public counterparts that are the summer educators our students rely on. They can be an integral part to stop the infamous “summer slide” if they made a part of the larger school community. While one can never replace the other, we share a very healthy symbiotic link to students and families.

In closing we as educators and professionals all agree that school libraries require certified SLMS as necessary staff. That the goal is not to merely have a kiosk for book check out but, to have a certified staff member there capable and trained by the higher education system to support

in K-12 learning and reading in a public school environment. The path to access to knowledge and a student's ability to further their skills is very dependent on the professional in the library. Study after study is showing that students stand a better chance at college and beyond when they have a certified SLMS. Districts that have made a concerted investment and have a viable mission and strategic plan targeted to fulfill that goal will gain academic success. Those communities also include a certified SLMS, a fully implemented media literacy curriculum, professional learning communities with mentoring opportunities for SLMS staff, a dedicated supervisor to monitor policy and best professional, district wide and school wide best practices and a linkage to the public libraries in the community as part of their strategic plan. Beyond smoke and mirrors there is no short cut to this goal. Those places making the commitment show the most robust and promising of communities. Those invested communities have students that can take the college entrance exam and not have to enroll in remedial courses as freshmen. They finish college with a degree.

Our hope is that the SOMSD's new strategic plan will include these items for all of its schools if the library for your schools and community are to have a better future.

Respectfully Yours,

The undersigned