



Testimony by Fran King, NJASL President

Certified School Library Media Specialist

Lincoln Middle School, Passaic, NJ

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Good morning Chairman Prieto and Members of the Assembly Budget Committee. I am Fran King, President of the New Jersey Association of School Librarians (NJASL), representing over 900 members of the professional organization of school librarians in our state. I am a School Library Media Specialist at Lincoln Middle School in Passaic New Jersey. I also speak on behalf of the 1.37 million students in New Jersey Public Schools.

The reason for my testimony is to focus on the value of 21st century school library media programs and the need for state funding for these programs. Students need resource-rich school libraries that are staffed by state certified school library media specialists to achieve the skills necessary to become college and career ready. In this time of economic challenges, school libraries and the certified school library staff provide a cost effective, equal opportunity for all students to succeed. New Jersey is a leader in public education. Our schools are at the top of most rankings, and so we continue to strive to keep our achievement high and school libraries are key to helping every student learn and achieve their potential. As New Jersey's schools refine the curriculum to help students achieve higher standards, a dynamic school library media program is an essential means to prepare students to become reflective learners who are capable of locating, evaluating, and creating knowledge from information found in a variety of formats.

School Library Programs Promote Learning

School libraries support the priority of early literacy by promoting a love of reading, the foundation of all learning. A love of reading and literature will serve our students well throughout their lives. As students progress to higher grade levels, the school library program

helps the students develop essential information literacy skills. These skills are so critical today when the perception is that Google can provide all the information that students need and that students have innate searching talents. The reality is that while students can initiate a search using Google, they may not be searching effectively. Most school librarians can tell the story of the student who searches and finds information that is not related at all to what he needs. As experts in technology and information literacy, using a variety of tools, the school librarian teaches students how to access relevant and credible information.

The Research is Clear

Since 1999, 22 different states have conducted empirical studies documenting the positive impact school libraries have upon student learning and achievement. The results of these studies are summarized by Mansfield University in the booklet *School Library Research Summarized: A Graduate Class Project*, Spring 2011 and on the website <http://library.mansfield.edu/impact.asp> Attached for your review is the brief summary of the research. This work complements and updates the Scholastic Booklet, *"School Libraries Work."* When the 22 studies are examined, the findings confirm that schools with full-time certified librarians and library support staff have a direct positive impact on student learning. "In fact, quality school library programs may play an even greater role in providing academic support to those students who come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds." The research is clear, school library programs and school librarians are actively engaged in preparing students with the 21st century skills they need to succeed.

New Jersey Study of School Libraries

In 2011, Rutgers University released New Jersey's Study, *One Common Goal: Student Learning*. Phase 1 of the study examined NJ School Libraries in terms of staffing, resources, instruction, and budgets while Phase 2 followed a sample of effective school libraries selected from Phase 1 to determine what it is that makes them successful. The findings indicate that an effective school library:

- Is a learning center linked to classroom instruction;
- Supports the school's mission to produce literate and informed learners who can thrive in a digital, knowledge-based world;
- Is a 21st century classroom that provides and understanding of the information and technology that students will confront as digital citizens;
- Sets the stage for student initiated inquiry; and
- The school librarian is a co-teacher who takes and active role in engaging in shared instruction.

The school library program is a cost effective and essential program that creates 21st century learners who can effectively locate and evaluate information from a variety of sources and create knowledge from those sources. As stated by a NJ principal, “We’re still in a time where (the public) doesn’t believe that our information centers (libraries) are as powerful as our educators believe. Our librarian is a powerful educator.”

[http://cisrl.rutgers.edu/images/stories/docs/njasl_phase%20 2 final.pdf](http://cisrl.rutgers.edu/images/stories/docs/njasl_phase%202_final.pdf)

Funding for School Library Programs and Staff

Like the Legislature, school boards must make very difficult choices in order to address their own budget deficits. Unfortunately, some districts are choosing to reduce spending for school library media programs and staff. During the past three years over 100 library programs were adversely affected because of extensive staffing and funding cuts. Woodbridge, Atlantic Highlands, Fair Lawn, Paterson and Haddon Township eliminated all or most of their library programs to name a few. While cutting library programs does not make sense educationally, there is nothing in state law or regulation to prevent a school district from reducing school library programs, services or staff even though the state’s school funding model includes school librarians in the staff funding assumptions as well as library programs. This is a deficiency in law that must be addressed.

As you review the Governor’s proposed budget, NJASL urges the legislature to include school library programs staffed by certified school librarians as part of the basic education funding in the FY 2013 Budget. This will ensure that today’s students have access to quality school library programs that will help them become responsible, ethical users of information and are prepared to meet the challenges of higher education and the workplace. Please contact me if I can offer additional information or answer any questions.

Fran King, President NJASL

fr.fran@gmail.com

973-652-3746