

Summit on School Libraries in Pennsylvania: A PA PTA and PSLA Dialog

Date: Saturday, May 22, 2010 Place: Scranton Hilton Hotel Time: 8:00am – 2:30pm

Presented by the PSLA Legislation Committee, Deb Kachel, Chairperson

Participants: 24 - 11 representing PTAs; 13 school librarians

After introduction and an ice breaker with books donated by Scholastic (which participants kept), a powerpoint was shared by Deb Kachel which presented:

- The role of the school library & librarian today
- The school library curriculum and what the school librarian teaches
- Research on the contributions of school library programs to learning (everyone received a copy of *School Libraries Work!* and the Lance PA Findings)
- The status of school libraries today, including state-funded projects, staffing, age of collections; inequalities; HR 720

Focusing on how PSLA and PTA could work together to improve funding and library services for children and teens, participants developed a list of major topics (see below). Throughout all five topics are the major strands of education, communication, and advocacy (political activism). The attendees were then divided into five smaller breakout groups representing both librarians and parents to brainstorm action ideas for each of the five topics. A person from each group later presented their group's ideas on large poster paper. See below.

After all the groups presented, I asked attendees to place an X on one idea on the poster pages that they felt was doable and the most important first step our two organizations could accomplish in order to improve school library services for kids. The red arrows below had at least one vote. The number of X's are in red parentheses at the end of the idea.

GROUP 1: Establishing and Working with PTAs

Michele Morrow explained the difference between a PTO (parent group that serves only the school in which they are organized) and a PTA (Nation's largest child advocacy association that works on behalf of all children with grassroots local units, focuses on more than fundraisers; anyone can form/join a PTA including teachers, school librarians, or concerned citizens. Members do not have to have children in the school).

- Educate librarians on how PTAs can be formed and the benefits of being part of association

- At PTA meetings spend a few minutes updating members on legislative topics related to education and libraries
- Have a school librarian representative/member to share info about school library programs (ACCESS PA, new Guidelines, etc.)
- Seek wide-based membership-school board members, business people, diversity, etc.

GROUP 2: Educating Parents with Resources/Tools about School Library Programs

- Administrators need to know about the reduced school library presence at PDE
- How to reestablish a school library presence at state level
- Hold a “summit” with parents, administrators, school board members, and state legislators similar to this event telling them the status of school libraries
- Librarians need to copy administrators when providing teacher support
- Librarians need to educate parents and teachers about library resources & services **(3)**
- Direct parents to PA School Library Guidelines on the Internet (http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/library_resources/8722)
- Get PTA to invite librarian to PTA meeting
- Show parents the school library curriculum and what the librarian teaches

GROUP 3: Collaborate with College & Businesses to Create Advocates

- Publicize: develop a flyer/brochure, email blasts, web page **(2)**
- Conduct a survey of college librarians and/or business people to find out what skills they want high school graduates to have or are lacking
- Form a joint committee with PSLA and Pa PTA to work with the business community
- Research and share info about the K-16 Initiative (<http://www.sheeo.org/k16/bsks-home.htm>) as it can be applied to improved school library programs
- Collaborate with the Education Law Center (ELC) to write a grant to be able to implement some of these ideas
- Work with the Chamber of Commerce (nat’l - <http://www.uschamber.com/default> and PA - <http://www.pachamber.org/>)
- Create a Speakers Bureau to speak at events educating audiences about school library programs and needs
- Work with PSEA and PSBA **(1)**
- Offer a pre-conference breakfast meeting at both PaPTA and PSLA’s annual conferences for college and business representatives **(1)**

GROUP 4: Work with PDE and the State Board of Education

- Update PA school library guidelines (underway in June 2010) and change them to standards within state law
- Draft a bill to change the regulatory code of the School Code to reflect school library requirements, working with ELC and EPLC (Education Policy & Leadership Center) **(1)**
- Find a primary and co-sponsors for above
- Work with sponsors to educate other legislators
- Gain grassroots support through collaboration (PaPTA, PSLA, PSEA, AFT, Keystone Reading Assn., etc.)
- Pressure legislators to pass the bill **(2)**

GROUP 5: Collaboration/ Resolutions among Associations to increase Public Awareness

- Educate everyone for school library services & programs- parents, teachers, legislators, administrators, public **(12)**
- Conduct public forums-PTA meets with school staff
- Create and use email listservs to share info
- Librarians should educate parents at “Back to School” night **(2)**
- Invite legislators to your school (PSLA Legislator@Your Library Campaign - <http://www.psla.org/index.php/legislation/legislator-your-library-campaign>)
- Include public librarians

Evaluation: Every participant agreed that this program should be repeated regionally across Pennsylvania, according to the 23 completed evaluation forms. The evaluations showed that both librarians and parents learned a great deal about each other’s organization and how we might work together. It was generally agreed, which also was clearly articulated in the group presentations, that this program or similar one needs to be heard by more stakeholder groups to include teachers, administrators, parents, legislators, and business/community groups. Wanda Mendez, a PTA President from East Stroudsburg, remarked that she was unaware of the status of school libraries and what they contribute to education. However, after attending this summit she stated that now she was educated and would share this information with her PTA and at her school. To me, this demonstrated the success of this program.

Dates mentioned for future planning: Michele Morrow would like to replicate this program in the Lehigh area sometime in fall. A similar, shortened session can be planned for the annual PTA Conference, April 8-10, 2011, and the PSLA Conference, April 28-30, 2011.

Special thanks to Doug Francis, President Elect, PSLA, Michele Morrow, Pa PTA President, Debbie Dunstone, President of Scranton Region, PTA (recruited parents), Donna Zaleski, PSLA member and SCRANTON ACCESS PA Regional Leader (recruited librarians), and Ken Morrow for providing the audio recordings of the breakout groups for transcription.