Pennsylvania Candidates Support School Libraries

October 25, 2020

Reported by Debra E. Kachel, Co-Chair of the PSLA Advocacy Committee

The Pennsylvania School Librarians Association, with the assistance of EveryLibrary, recently conducted a survey of candidates running for seats in the Pennsylvania General Assembly to gauge their support for school library programs. Overwhelmingly, candidates expressed their support of school libraries and certified librarians, including funding and regulations for all schools to have school librarians for K-12 students. Almost 20% of candidates responded (N= 62) as of October 23, 2020.

Rep. Mark Gillen (incumbent District 128, parts of Berks and Lancaster Counties) strongly disagreed that school librarians are needed (Q3) and that legislation is not needed to ensure certified school librarians (Q5). Only 3 candidates negatively responded to establishing a budget line item for school libraries: Tim Bonner (District 8, Grove City), Bob Brooks (District 54, Murrysville), and Tim Twardzik (District 123, Frackville). Brooks also responded negatively to Q 15; Twardzik also responded negatively to Q11.

Here are the collective responses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Response</th>
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<td>Q2 How important is it that all K-12 schools provide a school library for their students?</td>
<td>100% Very Important or Essential</td>
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<td>Q3 Do you believe that all K-12 schools should have a school librarian to guide the reading interests and abilities of students and teach students research and other information and technology skills?</td>
<td>97% Strongly Agree</td>
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<td>Q4 Have you visited a school library in the past three years?</td>
<td>85% Yes</td>
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<td>Q5 In Pennsylvania, there is no requirement that public schools have school libraries. However, there are state requirements for juvenile facilities and prisons, hospitals, and barber and cosmetology schools to have libraries. Would you support legislation to ensure that every public school has a school library for their students and teachers?</td>
<td>94% Strongly Agree</td>
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<td>Q6 Do you agree that this lack of resources by some schools causes inequities of educational opportunities for K-12 students?</td>
<td>98% Agree or Strongly Agree</td>
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<td>Q7 How important is it that all students and teachers have access to vetted, educational print and digital resources to learn?</td>
<td>100% Very Important or Essential</td>
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<td>Q8 Would you favor a line item in the state’s budget for school library resources as is done in several other states?</td>
<td>95% Yes</td>
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<td>Q9 Do you believe that students and teachers need school library services and related educational resources in order to meet Pennsylvania academic standards for research and learning in core academic subjects?</td>
<td>100% Yes</td>
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<td>Q10 The PDE Library Model Curriculum Standards include competencies such as evaluating diverse media, drawing evidence from sources, determining the authenticity of information, and differentiating facts from opinion and fake news. How important do you think these skills are for students to learn?</td>
<td>100% Very Important or Essential</td>
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<td>Q11 Do you think state-certified school librarians should be employed to teach the Model Library Curriculum that PDE has endorsed?</td>
<td>98% Yes</td>
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Q12 The Pennsylvania Parent Teacher Association (PaPTA) has endorsed a position statement that reads “All Pennsylvania’s public schools should have a viable school library, including impoverished, rural and urban communities which service a larger number of at-risk children.” The Resolution further states that the PaPTA “advocates for policy and regulatory reform that sets standards for public school library programs.” (Page 38 of https://bit.ly/pslasurvey1). Do you agree that there should be policy and regulatory reform that sets standards for public school library programs?

95% Agree or Strongly Agree

Q13 PDE has a Certification Staffing Policy Guideline (CSPG) #48 (see https://bit.ly/pslasurvey2) that lists the appropriate certification for staffing school library positions in public schools. It states that educators holding a K-12 Library Science certificate may teach library science at the elementary, middle, or secondary level and that “the local education agency (LEA) must employ at least one (1) certified Library Science educator when providing a school library program.” Do you support this Certification Staffing Policy Guideline 48?

98% Yes

Q14 Thirty percent of the 500 Pennsylvania school districts has only one school librarian per district, many of those are only part-time, or less. Twenty-nine districts have no school librarians and this number is growing. Do you believe that a school librarian is necessary to have an effective school library and a strong educational program for a school’s students and teachers?

100% Yes

Q15 If passed, HB 1355 and SB 752 of the 2019-2020 legislative session would have required “each public school in this Commonwealth shall employ at least one professional librarian who is certified.” Have you cosponsored this legislation?

56% Yes

Q16 If these bills are reintroduced in the upcoming legislative session, will you co-sponsor this legislation if the language remains the same?

98% Yes

Comments:

“Many children still don't have broadband access, so school libraries are essential!” Tay Waltenbaugh (Candidate for Senate District 39, Greensburg)

“The skills of information evaluation and location are more crucial than ever. Librarians are the professionals for that job.” (Matt Ferrence District 6, Meadville)

In response to Q5: “That's unbelievable! Public schools should have a library and a librarian who can teach them research basics and the fundamentals of resource evaluation. Access to books, videos, and music help children who may not otherwise have access to resources or the internet.” (Tara Zrinski District 138, Bethlehem)

“I visit many schools and have seen firsthand the importance of a school librarian in every school.” (Judy Schwank District 11, Fleetwood)

“A certified school librarian on site is the only way to ensure equity in learning.” (Carolyn Comitta District 19, West Chester)

In response to Q8: “Again, I represent one of the poorest S.D.s in PA. This inequity is a social rights & justice cause as much as an educational one.” (Peter Schweyer District 22, Allentown)
“Your zip code should not determine if your school has a librarian, the state needs to fund this.” (Shaun Dougherty District 35, Johnstown)

“A library without a librarian is like a garage without a mechanic. You can only do so much on your own. Assistance is required to help you do more and do it correctly.” (Dennis Semsick District 62, Penn Run)

In response to Q5: “This should not be an unfunded mandate - state funds should come with this requirement and be allocated in a way that addresses longstanding funding inequities.” (Lissa Geiger Shulman District 30, Allison Park)

“Librarians are essential to schools and provide students opportunities to enhance their learning. We must ensure that all students and teachers have access to school libraries.” (Janet Diaz District 13, Lancaster)

“Yes. When a student graduates from high school, the seal on their diploma certifies that they have achieved the educational benchmarks set for all students by the state. How can we say that is true if a child's school lack trained librarians and essential resources?” (Michelle Siegel District 27, Selingsgrove)

“Too often we've seen education funding cut during the budget process. A line item would be an important step to ensuring our school libraries get the funding they need.” (Jenn O'Mara District 165, Springfield)

Here is the complete list of respondents as of October 23, 2020:

Andrew, Anton
Barli, Randy J.
Bashir, Aaron
Blichar, Michael
Bonner, Tim
Brooks, Bob
Carroll, Mike
Ciamacca, Deb
Clements, Calvin
Comitta, Carolyn
Costa, Jay
Danielson, Shanna
DeLuca, Anthony
Dennin, Jill
Diaz, Janet
DiSanto, John
Dougherty, Shaun
Duvall, Matthew
Eachus, Todd
Elmore, Rico
Ferrence, Matt
Fisher, Ellen
Friebel, Lisa

Gillen, Mark M.
Guenst, Nancy
Harkins, Pat
Knoll, Michele
Langerholc, Wayne
Longietti, Mark
Malagari, Steve
Mastriano, Doug
Mazza, Beth Ann Bittner
Murray, Drew
O’Mara, Jennifer
Otten, Danielle Friel
Pennycuick, Tracy
Petrarca, Joseph
Prah, Robert
Ross, Doug
Rozzi, Mark
Sanchez, Ben
Schwank, Judy
Schweyer, Peter
Semsick, Dennis
Shulman, Lissa Geiger
Shusterman, Melissa

Siegel, Michelle
Solsmski, Julie
Stambaugh, Perry
Stephens, Todd
Stromyer, Shelbie
Toohil, Tarah
Troutman, Bill
Twardzik, Tim
Waltenbaugh, Tay
Waltz, Joe
Warren, Perry
Waugh, John
Webster, Joe
Williams, Bob
Williams, Craig
Young, Regina
Zrinski, Tara