



Pennsylvania School Librarians Association

October 4, 2011

Mr. Larry Wittig, Chairperson
State Board of Education
333 Market Street, 1st Floor
Harrisburg, PA 17126

RE: Pennsylvania School Library Study

Dear Mr. Wittig:

The Pennsylvania School Librarians Association (PSLA) wishes to commend the State Board of Education for implementing the Pennsylvania School Library Study and for holding three public round tables. The Association of over 1,000 members appreciates the diligence, leadership, and professionalism with which the State Board executed HR 987.

The 73% response by school officials and school librarians is an indication of their belief of just how important school libraries are to student achievement. In 22 states over the past 25 years, research studies confirm that effective school library programs directly impact student achievement. Students in schools with certified school librarians and quality school library programs learn more, earn better grades, and score as much as 22% higher on standardized tests than their peers. To review this research in further detail please visit <http://library.mansfield.edu/impact.asp>

Despite this research, there is growing evidence throughout the state that students are being affected by the reduction of school library services. PSLA's survey of its members found more than 12 percent of school districts have reduced school library staffing through furloughs, demotions, and attrition since June 30, 2011. This results in huge inequities in terms of access to library resources and learning opportunities for students throughout the Commonwealth.

Currently no regulations or requirements for school library programs exist in Pennsylvania. Without state intervention, school districts will continue to eliminate or reduce school library staffing and collections in order to balance local school budgets.

PSLA concurs with the "Draft Recommendations" but wishes to make additional comments:

PSLA strongly endorses the following:

- **The restoration of the Division of School Library Services in the Office of Commonwealth Libraries.**

It is clear from the report that supervision, annual collection of data about school library programs, coordination of statewide online resources, and ongoing professional development for school librarians are needed. A division of the

Pennsylvania Department of Education needs to be created and charged with these responsibilities.

- **The creation of a model information literacy curriculum incorporating digital literacy, media literacy, digital citizenship and strategies for supporting reading instruction within the school library program.**
PSLA supports the position that school librarians teach 21st century information and technology skills in collaboration with classroom teachers.

PSLA requests strengthening the following recommendations:

- **The assessment of the currency, usefulness, and scope of the total collection of resources for all students.**
Commonwealth Libraries' *Guidelines for Pennsylvania School Library Programs* provides the baseline for evaluation. **PSLA further requests** that school districts be required to submit a three-year plan identifying how they will address gaps and collection weaknesses in order to improve resources for all students. Results of the study show that 61% of the libraries in the survey lacked adequate resources to meet the needs of English language learners, a growing percentage of Pennsylvania's student population. Further, 73% of the libraries in the survey lacked adequate resources to meet the needs of students with visual disabilities.
- **The assessment of school library programs on an annual basis.**
PSLA further requests basic data about school library staffing, collections, technology, and instruction be annually reported to PIMS (Pennsylvania Information Management System).

The AASL survey-*School Libraries Count!* incorporates data submitted by school librarians. The survey is not likely to be completed for schools without library services and will not reflect the impact on schools in Pennsylvania with reduced library staffing.

PSLA strongly urges adding the following recommendations to the report:

- **The restoration and strengthening of state-provided online resources.**
ACCESS PA and POWER Library are models of how online resources can be delivered equitably and economically to schools, students, and teachers. 606 Pennsylvania public schools depend on these POWER Library resources as their only online databases for students. Statewide bidding of electronic resources drives pricing down saving money for individual school districts and their taxpayers. The professional development provided to librarians for these projects ensures that these resources are taught, used, and managed efficiently.
- **The staffing of every school with a full-time, certified school librarian.**
A 2011 research report found that reductions in school library programs are creating an "access gap" between schools in wealthier communities versus those where there are high levels of poverty. In effect, students who **need the most support** for success in school had **school libraries with the least amount** of staff, resources, and access to a school library (Pribesh, Gavigan, and Dickinson

2011).¹ PSLA, the American Association of School Librarians, the National Council of Teachers of English and the Pennsylvania PTA endorse this critical recommendation. The *Guidelines for Pennsylvania School Library Programs* (c2011) published by Commonwealth Libraries provides specific staffing levels for school libraries.

PSLA calls upon the State Board to strengthen the recommendations in this report to ensure that **all** students receive equitable access to library resources and services. Thank you for your time and serious consideration of these comments and requests.

Sincerely,

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cc: Ronald Tomalis, Secretary of Education
Karen Molchanow, Acting Executive Director, State Board of Education
Mollie O'Connell Phillips, Chairperson, Ad Hoc Committee on School Libraries
Members of the State Board of Education

¹ Pribesh, Shana, Karen Gavigan, and Gail Dickinson. "The Access Gap: Poverty and Characteristics of School Library Media Centers." *Library Quarterly* 81. 2 (April 2011):143-160.