

The Role of Effective School Library Programs in The Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 A Position Statement from New Jersey Association of School Librarians, New Jersey Library Association, and LibraryLinkNJ

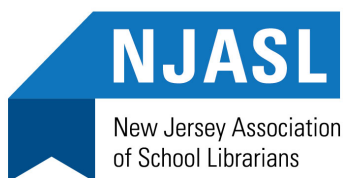
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The New Jersey Association of School Librarians (NJASL), New Jersey Library Association (NJLA), LibraryLinkNJ, and local school librarians are united in our commitment that all New Jersey students have access to an effective school library program to ensure increased academic achievement, literacy and information literacy skills, and preparation for higher education. The *Every Student Succeeds Act* of 2015 (ESSA) provides an opportunity for New Jersey school districts to make this a reality. This new federal law provides for highly effective school library programs as essential elements in the education of our nation's children.

Effective school library programs as defined by the American Association of School Libraries meet the following criteria:

- the school library is staffed by a state certified school librarian;
- has up-to-date resources that include technology and broadband access; and
- includes collaboration between content teachers and school librarians concerning school reform.

We, as a coalition, urge the Department of Education set the above definition as the appropriate standard for all New Jersey schools.



Summary of ESSA, Implications for New Jersey, and Recommendations

Title I, Part A - Improving Basic Programs Operated by State and Local Education Agencies

Under this provision of ESSA, NJDOE and local school districts will develop plans to implement federally-funded educational activities.

ESSA includes that states and local school districts must develop their plans with timely and meaningful consultation with teachers, principals and other stakeholders, including "*specialized instructional support personnel*" which is defined under ESSA as specifically including school librarians.

ESSA authorizes school districts to include in their plans how they will develop effective school library programs to provide students an opportunity to improve digital literacy skills and improve academic achievement.

Recommendations for the Department of Education:

1. Collaborate with NJASL, NJLA, the New Jersey State Library and partners to ensure school librarians have a place in statewide planning sessions dedicated to implementing federally-funded activities.
2. Strongly encourage districts to include in their local plans the importance of implementing, developing and maintaining effective school library programs that empower the development of digital literacy skills and academic achievement.

Title II, Part A – Supporting Effective Instruction

ESSA includes new provisions that authorize states and districts to use grant and subgrant funds to support instructional services provided by school library programs.

Recommendation for the Department of Education:

3. Inform school districts that Title II funds may now be used for professional development for school librarians.

Rationale:

Under No Child Left Behind, Title II funds were to be used primarily for classroom teachers to participate in professional development activities. ESSA specifically authorizes funds to be used to support instructional services provided by effective school library programs. School librarians collaborate with classroom teachers to design curriculum, instruct and engage students. Therefore, both classroom teachers and school librarians must have high quality professional development on effective instruction and collaboration.

Title II, Part B, Subpart 2 – Literacy Education for All, Results for the Nation (LEARN)

This is a new program under ESSA that provides support to states to develop, revise, or update comprehensive literacy instruction plans. States award competitive subgrants to districts for activities that focus on K-5 and 6-12. ESSA specifically authorizes school librarians to participate in required grant activities for both K-5 and 6-12. Local grants can be used to:

- provide high quality professional development opportunities for school staff, as appropriate, including school librarians;
- allocate time for teachers, school librarians, and other literacy staff to meet to plan comprehensive literacy instruction

Recommendations for the Department of Education:

4. Ensure librarians, administrators, instructional support professionals, and teachers, are aware of these grants for comprehensive literacy instruction
5. Support, encourage, and provide technical assistance to districts and school personnel in applying for grants and subgrants.

Title II, Part B, Subpart 2, Section 2226 – Innovative Approaches to Literacy (IAL)

ESSA specifically authorizes funds to be used for implementing, developing and enhancing effective school library programs including professional development for school librarians, books, and up-to-date materials for high needs students.

Recommendations for the Department of Education:

6. Ensure librarians, administrators, instructional support professionals, and teachers are aware of these grants for low income communities to support high needs students in literacy instruction.
7. Support, encourage, and provide technical assistances to districts and school personnel in applying for grants and subgrants.

Rationale:

Those students in the most need often have the fewest school library resources to draw on. An examination of the school library access gap (Pribesh, Gavigan, & Dickinson, 2011) looked at the differences in school library characteristics (staffing, books added to the collection, schedule, and number of days closed) in schools with various concentrations of students living in poverty. Findings suggest that if we hope to close achievement gaps between high and low socioeconomic groups, we must attend to the access gap in school libraries in high and low poverty schools.

Title IV, Part A – Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants (Block Grant)

ESSA authorizes a new program to provide Student Support and Academic Enrichment activities (commonly referred to as the “Block Grant” under ESSA) to help States and school districts target federal resources on locally-designed priorities.

ESSA authorizes states to use funds to assist school districts in providing school librarians and other school personnel with the knowledge and skills to use technology effectively, including effective integration of technology, to improve instruction and student achievement.

ESSA requires that school districts conduct a “needs assessment” prior to receiving funds from the State (conducted every 3 years). The needs assessment should include access to personalized learning experiences which may include access to school libraries

Recommendation for the Department of Education:

8. Inform and encourage local school districts to target these funds to support student access to school libraries staffed by certified School Library Media Specialist in every school.

Rationale:

An educated, information-literate citizenry is the foundation of our democratic society, and outcomes from multi-state research studies, brought together by the 2016 edition of Scholastic’s publication *School Libraries Work!* (Scholastic), indicate several positive impacts on student learning as a result of having a full-time certified school librarian, such as:

- scores on standardized achievement tests improve in schools
- librarians collaborate with teachers and lead students to develop 21st century learning skills
- resources are varied and are more likely to have electronic connections to other school collections and the public library,
- secure more federal funding, provide more frequent instruction in the use of electronic resources, and maintain a website linking to current and relevant academic and professional resources.

Conclusion

On June 24, 2016 the Alliance for Excellent Education and the U.S. Department of Education announced Future Ready Librarians as part of the Future Ready Schools Initiative.

“Acknowledging that the current state of school libraries and librarians ranges widely from state to state and even from school to school, these principles are predicated on a core belief that in a Future Ready school, all students have equitable access to qualified librarians, digital tools, resources and books.” (Future Ready Librarians Fact Sheet, 2016)

NJASL and our partners believe that ESSA provides a critical opportunity to create a framework for Future Ready Schools with effective school library programs across New Jersey. We look forward to working with the NJDOE to make this opportunity a reality for all of New Jersey’s students.

References and Sources

Summary of legislation from Congress.gov: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/senate-bill/1177>

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