May 25, 2016

The Honorable John B. King, Jr.
Secretary
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202

Submitted to: ESSA.guidance@ed.gov

Dear Secretary King:

On behalf of the American Library Association (ALA) and its division, the American Association of School Librarians (AASL), I am pleased to have this opportunity to respond to your request for input on areas of the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) in which the U.S. Department of Education could provide non-regulatory guidance to help states, districts and other grantees to understand and implement the new law.

We strongly urge the Department to specifically highlight and promote in such guidance, those provisions included under ESSA and advocated by ALA, which support inclusion of school libraries and librarians. Specifically:

Title I, Part A – Basic Programs

- ESSA includes <u>new provisions</u> that authorize – but do not require – school districts to include in their local plans how they will assist schools in developing effective school library programs to provide students an opportunity to develop digital literacy skills and improve academic achievement.

   As part of non-regulatory guidance, we request that the Department strongly encourage districts to include this critical information as part of their local plans and highlight the importance of developing and maintaining effective school library programs.

   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.

   A K-12 school librarian in the Payson, Illinois schools says, "In my school library program, digital learning looks like students creating prezis, using edmodo and biblionasium, designing glosters, learning about social media, and creating animoto videos. Students use

multiple resources to share ideas, a love of learning and books, and present their research. This allows students to learn digital skills in a safe and monitored environment while also finding a way to express themselves online."

Title II, Part A – Supporting Effective Programs

- *ESSA includes new provisions that authorize States, as well as school districts, to use grant and subgrant funds under Title II for "supporting the instructional services provided by effective school library programs."*

   As part of non-regulatory guidance, we request the Department to highlight these provisions to make sure that school districts and personnel who develop and implement professional development activities are aware of the new uses of funds as they relate to libraries.

   An effective school library program is multi-age, multi-disciplinary, and encompassing of the variety of learning styles. School librarians collaborate with classroom teachers to design curriculum, instruct, and engage the learner with resources.

   School leadership for professional development is the mainstay of a successful, long standing 1:1 computing initiative in Maine. A middle school librarian in Falmouth says the three school librarians in her district have regularly held "professional development sessions for technology help with teachers" through collaborative workshops and focused lessons. A high school librarian in Amarillo, Texas says, "I curate online content for teachers. I am currently working to build a database of OERs and links on the library website that teachers can easily access when they are searching for curriculum online. I regularly send out emails and links to departments and individual teachers when I find lessons and informational content that may be relevant."

Title IV, Part A – Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants

- *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.*

   As part of non-regulatory guidance, we request the Department highlight the ability for States to use these funds to support programs and activities that increase access to personalized learning experiences, which may include professional development for school librarians and better access to school libraries for students.

   A four year study (Dow, Lakin & Court, 2012) of 2.5 million individual assessment results found the staffing levels of school libraries were critical with respect to meeting Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). The AYP data revealed higher proficiency rates in schools that maintained higher or more stable levels in school libraries staffing by certified school librarians.

A high school librarian in Bountiful, Utah "instructs teachers and works with teachers "on research, censorship, copyright and plagiarism" and teaching students about "various forms of media…used for various projects and purposes''. She "conducts action research to see how students who have had the lessons perform as opposed to others who did not have the lesson".

An elementary school librarian in Wakefield, Rhode Island uses spreadsheets and bar graphs with students to track their reading throughout the year. She says "it familiarizes students with spreadsheets and introduces them to spreadhseet formulas, as well as requires them to be thoughtful about what genres they are reading (sometimes genres can be trickly to identify) and also encourages them to be self-analytical. Also encourages them to make decisions about what to read in the future based on data about what they have read in the past (with an eye toward reading across many genres)."

School libraries contribute to a student's well-rounded education. A high school librarian in Spring Valley, California writes, "Our library boasts one of the most active clubs on campus, the Monte Vista Reader's Society…they meet daily to socialize and read. Our library also hosts our school-to-career program…We are also in the planning stages of creating a Makerspace with video and audio equipment so our game design pathway students can create original digital characters and record original music, collaborating with the band and choir.

All students and teachers should have equitable access to an effective school library program for teaching and learning.

Again, thank you for this opportunity to submit comments on areas in which to issue non-regulatory guidance. On behalf of ALA, I would welcome the opportunity to discuss these issues in further detail should you have any questions.

Sincerely,

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References

Dow, M. J., Lakin, J. M. & Court, S. C. (2012). School librarian staffing levels and student achievement as represented in 2006-2009 Kansas Annual Yearly Progress Data. *School Library Research,* 15. Retrieved from http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ994364.pdf

Pribesh, S., Gavigan, K. & Dickinson, G. (2011). The Access Gap: Poverty and characteristics of school library media centers. *Library Quarterly, 81 (2),* 143-160.