

ALA American Library Association

February 10, 2015

The Honorable John Kline
Chairman
Committee on Education and the Workforce
2181 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Robert C. "Bobby" Scott
Ranking Member
Committee on Education and the Workforce
2101 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Kline and Ranking Member Scott:

On behalf of the American Library Association (ALA), I am writing to provide comments on H.R. 5, the Student Success Act to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). We are pleased that the Committee is working to update this critical legislation and are optimistic that improvements to ESEA will help ensure that all students graduating from America's schools will be adequately prepared for college and success in the workforce.

As poverty rates across America remain high, our schools must serve as an "equalizer" that provides all students with access to the resources and instruction they need to succeed academically and become productive and engaged citizens. Effective school library programs are a wise investment, but in too many schools across the nation, school library budgets and school librarian positions are being cut. This puts our children's education and workforce readiness at peril.

P.L. 89-10, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (original legislation) recognized the correlation between effective school library programs and student success by authorizing \$100 million for the "School Library Resources, Textbooks, and Other Instructional Materials" program under Title II, but as time passed, federal funding was eliminated, state and local support has diminished, and too many students across the nation are finding themselves in schools without the books, technology, and instruction that can only be obtained through effective school library programs.

Recent data¹ available from the Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) highlights the lack of support for too many of our students in thousands of schools across the country. NCES data reveals that approximately 8,830 public schools across the nation do not have a school library and for those schools that do have a library, nearly 17,000 schools do not have a full or part-time state-certified school librarian on staff.

ALA is disheartened by this lack of support for effective school library programs and comprehensive literacy instruction at the federal, state, and local levels because **schools with an effective school library program – which includes a state certified school librarian – ensure their students have the best chance to succeed.**

¹ For additional information on NCES 2011-2012 data, see http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sass/tables_list.asp#2012.

State-certified school librarians make the whole school more effective. They work with every student in the school, teaching them to think critically, providing the resources and support they need in school and beyond, and nurturing their creativity. They are an essential partner for all classroom teachers, providing print and digital materials that meet diverse needs and collaborating to deepen student learning and drive success. State-certified librarians are leaders in the school, helping to develop curriculum and connecting other educators to current trends and resources for teaching and learning.

Multiple studies² over the years clearly demonstrate that effective school library programs help all students do better academically, even when other school variables are considered. Effective school library programs also foster critical thinking, providing students with the skills they need to analyze and create new ideas in compelling ways.

School libraries are places of opportunity. They foster a safe and nurturing climate during the day and before and after school and serve as critical learning hubs where students use technology and the latest information resources, preparing them to succeed in school and our ever-evolving workforce.

Therefore, ALA asks that you include the following recommendations – that are included under S. 312, the Strengthening Kids’ Interest in Learning and Libraries Act, introduced by Senators Reed (D-RI) and Cochran (R-MS) on January 29, 2015 – to support effective school library programs as part of the Student Success Act (new language in **bold**):

SEC. 1111. STATE PLANS – Add the following to section 1111:

An assurance that the State educational agency will assist local educational agencies in developing effective school library programs to provide students an opportunity to develop digital literacy skills and the knowledge and skills described in the academic content standards adopted by the State.

SEC. 1112. LOCAL EDUCATIONAL AGENCY PLANS – Add the following to section 1112:

Assist each school served by the agency and assisted under this part in developing effective school library programs consistent with section 1111 [State Plans].

SEC. 2123. LOCAL USE OF FUNDS (Title II – Teacher Preparation and Effectiveness) – Add the following to section 2123:

Providing appropriate professional development for school librarians, particularly related to skills necessary to assist students to improve the students' academic achievement, including digital literacy skills and preparation for higher education and careers.

IMPROVING LITERACY AND COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS THROUGH EFFECTIVE SCHOOL LIBRARY PROGRAMS – Include a stand alone authorization to support effective school library programs consistent with S. 312, the Strengthening Kids’ Interest in Learning and Libraries Act, that would provide dedicated funding to support effective school library programs that:

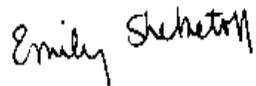
- **Are staffed by a state-certified or licensed school librarian;**

² For additional information on school library impact studies see: <http://keithcurrylance.com/school-library-impact-studies>.

- **Have up-to-date books, materials, equipment and technology (including broadband);**
- **Include regular collaboration between classroom teachers and school librarians to assist with development and implementation of the curriculum and other school reform efforts; and**
- **Support the development of digital literacy skills.**

We appreciate your consideration of our recommendations for the Student Success Act and look forward to working with you and other Committee Members as you continue your efforts to reauthorize ESEA.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Emily Sheketoff".

Emily Sheketoff, Executive Director
Washington Office, American Library Association