

# ALA American Library Association

January 27, 2015

The Honorable Lamar Alexander  
Chairman, Committee on Health, Education, Labor  
and Pensions  
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Ranking Member, Committee on Health, Education,  
Labor and Pensions  
154 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Alexander and Ranking Member Murray:

On behalf of the American Library Association (ALA), I am writing to thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the discussion draft 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/or 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 data<sup>1</sup> 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.**

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<sup>1</sup> For additional information on NCES 2011-2012 data, see [http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sass/tables\\_list.asp#2012](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 studies<sup>2</sup> 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 were included as part of S. 1094, the Strengthening America’s Schools Act and S. 1127, the Strengthening Kids’ Interest in Learning and Libraries Act last Congress – to support effective school library programs as part of the Every Child Ready for College or Career Act of 2015 (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 challenging 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].**

TITLE II, PART A – FUND FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF TEACHING AND LEARNING – Amend section 2103(b)(3)(G) [Local Uses of Funds] to read as follows:

(G)(i) providing students with increased access to up-to-date school library materials, **through a well-equipped, technologically advanced effective school library media-center program,** ~~and well-trained, professionally-certified school library media specialists;~~

**(ii) Developing and implementing strategies to assist in recruiting and retaining state-certified school librarians; and**

**(iii) 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.**

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

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. 1094, the Strengthening America’s Schools Act and S. 1127, 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;**
- **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.**

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on the discussion draft of the Every Child Ready for College or Career Act of 2015. We appreciate your consideration of our recommendations and look forward to working with you and other Committee Members as you continue your efforts to reauthorize ESEA.

Sincerely,



Emily Sheketoff, Executive Director  
Washington Office, American Library Association