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ALA American Library Association

April 16, 2021

Secretary Miguel Cardona
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Secretary Cardona,

The American Library Association was thrilled with the inclusion of \$122 billion in the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) for PreK-12 funding. We acknowledge and support the Department's priorities of safely reopening school buildings, mitigating learning loss, and promoting access, equity, and inclusion. School libraries and school librarians have been responsive to these essential needs as district and school leaders and will continue to be instrumental in shaping the pandemic recovery and addressing learning loss at this critical time and in the years to come. For this reason, we ask for your support in funding and investing in school library programs and school librarians across the country, as you have previously done in Connecticut. In addition, we urge the Department to include the school library and school librarians in all guidance related to implementing the ARPA funding.

As students, teachers, staff, and families return to in-person schooling in communities across the country, district leaders must ensure the safety and success of these efforts. School libraries can provide thoughtfully designed learning spaces with appropriate distancing, technology, and PPE to promote safety and learning. The physical space of school libraries is an asset to a learning community and must be invested in.

Beyond the physical space, school librarians play an essential role in school learning –as part of the core academic curriculum as well as with enrichment and remediation activities, student-directed learning and inquiry, and social-emotional learning. School librarians are district and school leaders, instructional coaches, co-teachers, and technology experts. They are champions of access and equity in the classroom – equipping students and families with resources and support to learn at home and in-person. [Education Week recently highlighted](#) a pandemic-related study of student learning loss, finding 40 percent of 1st graders began the school year significantly behind in early literacy skills. This is a need school librarians are working to address.. This is a need school librarians are working to address.

We commend American Rescue Plan funding to be used for funding and securing positions for certified school librarians and support staff in all schools. These critical positions will ensure access for students and families during the school day and beyond.

School libraries will continue to be part of creative solutions going forward to mitigate and reverse learning loss. School librarians are prepared to offer summer and extended day enrichment programs, take home learning kits and equipment, and other resources to promote literacy, learning gains, and social-emotional development at all levels—in fact, many are already doing so, but much more can be done with supplemental funding from ARPA. As school districts plan for summer learning and enrichment, partnering with school libraries is an ideal solution to ensure engagement, inquiry, and project-based learning.

School libraries continue to provide WiFi hotspots and devices for students without connectivity for remote learning. They also support educators in the effective use of technology and best practices for distance and hybrid learning models. These resources are essential to recovery as schools and districts carefully and thoughtfully bring students back into the school building and address crises such as learning loss that disproportionately impacts low-income students and students of color.

The ARPA funding is an invigorating investment in education and our collective future. School libraries are prepared to respond to the priorities of this challenging time and offer solutions for safely reopening schools, promoting access and equity, and enriching students' academic and social-emotional learning, ultimately promoting student achievement and success.

Thank you for your support of school libraries. We look forward to working together for the benefit of America's students. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss these issues with your staff in the coming weeks.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kathi Kromer". The ink is dark and the signature is fluid and legible.

Kathi Kromer
Associate Executive Director, Public Policy & Advocacy
American Library Association