



Dave Hespe, Chief of Staff
New Jersey Department of Education
100 River View Plaza
P.O. Box 500
Trenton, NJ 08625

December 14, 2011

Dear Mr. Hespe,

I am writing on behalf of the New Jersey Association of School Librarians (NJASL) to respond to the request of the College and Career Task Force for public input on educating students for college and career readiness. Unfortunately, I cannot appear at the scheduled hearings in person; therefore, I am submitting these comments to you in writing for the Task Force.

Today's high-tech information driven economy creates both challenges and opportunities for students and schools. As New Jersey moves forward with the Common Core Standards initiative and schools refine local curricula to help students achieve at higher levels, an effective school library is critical to student success and college and career readiness in the 21st century.

School Library Media Programs Promote Learning

School libraries support early literacy, a priority of New Jersey, by promoting a love of reading, the foundation of all learning, which will serve our students throughout their lives. As students progress through school, the school library media program helps them develop essential information literacy skills necessary for success in college and in the workplace. Information literacy skills include finding, evaluating, understanding and interacting with information from a variety of print and electronic sources to build knowledge.

As information specialists, school librarians are among the most important technological leaders in schools. They are uniquely educated to instruct students and school staff in the use of technology for information retrieval as well as organization, knowledge creation, and

communication. They build school library collections to support content standards and the school district's curriculum, and include a variety of materials, in different formats, to insure that students have access to high quality resources that reflect diverse viewpoints, as well as the most authoritative information available. Students need these kinds of resources to help them verify the accuracy of the web-based information from which they learn.

In the months ahead, classroom teachers and school librarians will need to collaborate to integrate the Common Core Standards into the instructional program at all grade levels. School librarians will be valuable and essential partners to insure that students can master several of the learning outcomes embedded in the standards. For example, in the English Language Arts standards, school librarians and classroom teachers must collaborate for students to:

- Build strong content knowledge;
- Comprehend and critique what a writer or speaker says;
- Value and use relevant evidence; and
- Use technology and digital media strategically and capably.

These are just four of the capacities described in the introduction to the English Language Arts Standards to paint a portrait of students who are college and career ready in reading, writing, speaking, listening and language. School librarians are uniquely prepared to assist students and scaffold their learning as they gain independence in applying these skills.

Research Demonstrates: School Library Media Programs Have a Positive Impact on Student Achievement

Since 1999, 16 different states have conducted empirical studies documenting the positive impact school libraries have upon student learning and achievement. The results of the studies conducted through 2008 are summarized in a publication entitled "*School Libraries Work!*" is available at http://www2.scholastic.com/content/collateral_resources/pdf/s/slw3_2008.pdf.

The studies show that a resource-rich school library that includes adequate print and technological resources and is staffed by at least one certified school library media specialist has a direct positive impact on student learning and achievement on standardized tests.

The New Jersey Study of School Libraries: One Common Goal—Student Learning

completed in 2011, confirms that school libraries staffed by state certified school librarians who collaborate with content area teachers have a positive impact on student learning and achievement in New Jersey's public schools. The study was conducted by the Center for

International Scholarship in School Libraries (CISSL) and a research center at Rutgers University. The lead researcher in the study, Dr. Ross Todd reported to NJASL “the findings showed that New Jersey school libraries and school librarians contribute in rich and diverse ways to the intellectual life of a school, and to the development of students who can function in a complex and increasingly digital information environment.”

Six key outcomes were identified during the study of New Jersey’s school library programs when staffed by certified school librarians. They are:

- Contribution to development of curriculum standards;
- Contribution to test score achievement;
- Mastery of a diverse range of information literacy competencies;
- Development of Research processes and learning management competencies;
- Development of thinking-based competencies in using information, development of positive and ethical values in relation to the use of information; and
- Increased interest in reading, increased participation in reading, the development of wider reading interests, and becoming readers that are more discriminating.

The research is clear. Resource-rich school libraries, staffed by state certified school library media specialists, equal high student achievement, and academic success. A quality school library media center is much more than a collection of books. It is a unique learning space where students establish a love of reading and learn to become effective users of information, ideas, and resources. A dynamic school library program is a cost effective and essential means to prepare students to become reflective learners who are capable of locating, evaluating, and creating knowledge from information found in a variety of formats. These are priceless outcomes every student needs to succeed in college and in the workplace.

Without effective school libraries staffed by certified school librarians, New Jersey’s students will not be fully prepared to meet the challenges of today’s high tech information driven economy and therefore will not be ready for college or the workplace when they graduate from a New Jersey high school.

As you construct your recommendations on educating students for college and career readiness, I urge you to recognize the value of school library programs in educating students by including the following statement as a recommendation in your report.

“All school districts shall provide a comprehensive school library media program that enables students to meet the state’s required curriculum standards, and that is

connected to classroom studies in each school building. The program shall include access to computers, district-approved instructional software, appropriate books including novels, anthologies, reference materials, and supplemental materials that motivate students to read in and out of school and to conduct research. All students, teachers, and administrators in each school building in New Jersey at all grade levels shall have access to a library media program provided by one or more certified school library media specialists working full time in the school library media center.”

This recommendation will help school districts in their efforts to improve learning for all students, advance student achievement, and graduate students who are prepared to embrace the challenges of college and the workplace. .

On behalf of the New Jersey Association of School Librarians, I appreciate the opportunity to present information to you on the importance of resource-rich and properly staffed school libraries for all students and staff in New Jersey’s public schools. If you should require additional information or would like to discuss NJASL’s recommendation, please contact me.

Yours truly,

Peg Lawlor

NJASL Government Relations Consultant

PegL812@verizon.net

215-321-3758

Sources:

- Common Core Standards www.corestandards.org
- *School Libraries Work!*
http://www2.scholastic.com/content/collateral_resources/pdf/s/slw3_2008.pdf.
- NJ Study phase 1 - http://cisssl.rutgers.edu/docs/NJASL_Phase_1.pdf
- NJ Study Phase 2 - <http://cisssl.rutgers.edu/docs/NJASLPhase2Final.pdf>
- *School Libraries, Now More than Ever.* - A position paper by CISSL
http://cisssl.rutgers.edu/CISSL_POSITION_PAPER_revised.doc