

Funding for School Libraries on the Chopping Block – Questions for State Lawmakers

- I recognize that the state faces another budget crisis this year, and the Legislature and Governor have to make difficult decisions about how to address the current shortfall. Like the Legislature, school boards must make very difficult choices in order to plug their own budget holes. Unfortunately, some districts are choosing to reduce spending for school library media programs. ***What can you do to ensure that school librarians and library programs are funded in the budget and not cut by local school districts?***
- Would it surprise you to learn that New Jersey does not require every school to have a library media center or a certified school librarian? While cutting library programs does not make sense educationally, there is nothing in state law or regulation to prevent a school district from reducing school library programs, services or staff even though the state's new school funding model includes school librarians in the staffing assumptions as well as library programs. This is a deficiency in law that we must address over the long term. ***What can you do to ensure that school librarians and library programs are funded in the budget and not cut by local school districts?***
- One DOE priority is for students to become critical thinkers and to develop skills that will lead to students becoming successful citizens in the 21st century. School library media specialists are teachers best suited to not only instruct students but also to provide assistance to other teachers with information literacy and critical thinking skills. However, school librarians are often not seen as essential and their positions are eliminated. Last year several school districts closed their elementary and middle school libraries and a few districts completely eliminated their school library programs. ***What can be done to save and rebuild school library media programs?***
- When school librarians and library programs are cut from local budgets it is the students who suffer. How can we expect to boost early literacy without supporting libraries as the primary resource for books and literature? How can we emphasize technological literacy without providing qualified school librarians to hone students' technology skills and teach them how to acquire, organize, evaluate, and disseminate information? ***What can you do to ensure that school librarians and library programs are funded in the budget and not cut by local school districts?***
- School library programs are not excess "fat" that school districts can afford to trim. Eliminating library jobs, books and media resources will slow our progress in information literacy and student achievement, and it will hurt students and the State now and for years to come. ***What can you do to ensure that school librarians and library programs are funded in the budget and not cut by local school districts?***

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- Given the economic challenges facing our nation and our state, today's poor economic climate creates both challenges and opportunities for students and schools. As New Jersey raises the academic bar and schools refine the curriculum to help students achieve higher standards, an effective school library is a cost effective and critical tool to support student learning and achievement, and school success. ***What can you do to ensure that school librarians and library programs are funded in the budget and not cut by local school districts?***

Other Supportive Statements

- The school library supports early literacy, a priority of our state, by promoting a love for books and reading that will serve children throughout their lives. As they progress through elementary school, the school library media program helps students develop key information literacy skills.
- The school librarian teaches students how to use technology to access information, and how to evaluate and incorporate it into research and further learning. In addition to providing direct instruction to classes and individual students, the school librarian also collaborates with classroom teachers to help them include information skills in the curriculum.
- Several scholarly studies document the positive impact school libraries have upon student learning and achievement. The studies show that a school library staffed by a certified school library media specialist and provided with adequate print and technological resources has a direct positive impact on student test scores.
- The Center for International Scholarship in School Libraries at Rutgers University has published findings from Phase 1 of its study *One Common Goal: Student Learning* which shows New Jersey school library programs staffed by certified school library media specialists are cost-effective in helping students achieve higher standards and critical for the intellectual, social, and cultural development of students.