



INSPIRING EXCELLENCE
IN LIBRARIANSHIP
IN LEARNING

**Testimony on the Proposed State Budget
New Jersey Association of School Librarians (NJASL)**

March 21, 2022

Good afternoon, Assembly Budget Chair Pintor-Marin, and Members of the Assembly Budget Committee. My name is Ewa Dziedzic-Elliott, I am the President-Elect of the New Jersey Association of School Librarians (NJASL), the only professional organization of school librarians in our state and as a school library media specialist (SLMS) at Lawrence High School in Lawrence Township Public Schools, I present this testimony on behalf of 1.37 million students in New Jersey Public Schools who deserve to have access to state-of-the-art school libraries staffed by highly trained, state-certified School Library Media Specialists (SLMS).

This testimony is to urge the state to fulfill its obligation to fund schools at the full rate as required by the School Funding Reform Act (SFRA) which would include sufficient funding for school library programs staffed by state certified SLMSs in the state budget. Unfortunately, specific funding for school library programs is noticeably missing from the Governor's proposed budget. SLMSs are the champions of technology, information, access, and equity. We work tirelessly to prepare students to become informed and literate global citizens. NJ can become a leader in information literacy and in teaching students how to navigate the world of technology and misinformation. SLMSs are ready to lead the New Jersey students on the "path to a fairer, stronger, more equitable and more prosperous future", as it was stated in the Governor's budget address.

Status of NJ School Library Media Specialists and School Libraries

The consequences of the lack of full SFRA funding have been disastrous for school libraries and for the students of New Jersey. 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 school funding model for School Funding Reform Act (SFRA) includes school librarians in the staff funding assumptions as well as library programs (Education Funding Report, p. 78).

A recent report published from the School Librarian Investigation: Decline or Evolution? (SLIDE), a research project through Antioch University Seattle and funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services, highlights an ongoing decline in the number of districts in New Jersey with school librarians. According to the findings which are based on National Center for Education Statistics data, approximately one-fifth of school districts in New Jersey do not have certified SLMSs (Kachel, Lance). These statistics are supported by data from the NJ School Performance Report cards. Additionally, the statistics from the NJ School Performance Report Cards show a ratio of a declining number of SLMSs to students from 2016-2017 to the latest report card, 2019-2020 (**Appendix A**).

The most recent NJ School Performance Report for Camden City School District shows that there are no SLMSs for their 7000 students. Other districts with only one SLMS per district include: Woodbridge Township which has a ratio of students 13838 to 1 library media specialist

and Freehold Regional Twp which has a ratio of 10450 students to 1 library specialist. Viewing all the other ratios, the number of students to SLMSs is significantly higher than any other category of school staff.

School districts have also been eliminating the dedicated space for a school library. Parents are contacting NJASL to ask for assistance so that their children can have access to certified SLMSs and to quality school library resources. They are finding that classroom teachers do not have the expertise in information literacy nor the certification to teach their children how to critically evaluate information, a necessary skill for navigating the world of misinformation, disinformation and malinformation that exists in this era of “fake news.” Additionally, classroom collections cannot replace the curated resources selected by a certified librarian that are available to all students in a school library.

Studies on the Effectiveness of School Libraries

[School Libraries Are The Only Thing That Matters](#) - Recap of Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), a [longitudinal literacy study](#)

- School libraries had consistently more positive effect on reading than reading instruction ● Results matched other school library studies: quality of a school library was a clear indicator of reading achievement. [School Library Impact Studies](#)

[The New Jersey Study of School Libraries](#) “One Common Goal - Student Learning” ●

- Contribute to students’ positive and ethical values in use of information and technology. ● Contribute to discriminating readers.

Bridging Learning Loss and Social and Emotional Learning

The world has been forever changed by COVID-19 and the pandemic. No longer can schools and students ignore current events and their impact on the global community. School libraries and certified SLMSs are more relevant than ever before. SLMSs are the appropriate certified staff to teach students to be critical thinkers and discerning consumers of information in today’s digital world, thus preparing them to become informed participants in a democratic society. Furthermore, school libraries provide a safe place for students to not only learn academics but learn how to deal with the impact of the events of the past few years. From literacy, to social and emotional learning, to inquiry-based research experiences, SLMSs support the education and development of the whole child (Thomas). Contributions of SLMSs to bridging learning loss as well as social and emotional learning include:

- **Educate the whole student** through academic, social, and emotional learning that lead to meaningful conversations and lessons that foster a love of literacy and contribute to student success.
- **Provide access to information** - and guidance for how to research it, understand it, and apply it, which are all skills necessary for lifelong learning.
- **Teach** students to take responsibility for seeking multiple points of view and a global perspective by **providing a diverse collection of resources**.
- **Help students develop information and media literacy skills**, which are critical for analyzing content for misinformation, disinformation and malinformation.
- **Bridge** achievement gaps and strengthen learning culture (**Appendix B**)

Funding for School Library Programs and Staff

As you consider the Governor’s proposed budget, NJASL urges you to include school library programs staffed by certified SLMSs as part of the basic education funding in the FY 2023 Budget.

Additionally, please work with Acting Commissioner Dr. Allen-McMillan to include SLMSs and school library programs as an eligible program listed as appropriate for funding under Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The opportunity for New Jersey to receive federal funding for school library programs, library resources including technology, and training for school librarians matches ESSA goals to provide all students with access to a well-rounded education, to improve conditions for student learning, and to improve the use of technology in order to increase the academic achievement and digital literacy of all students.

Including funding for school library programs in the FY2023 budget will help to ensure that New Jersey truly is on “a path to a fairer, stronger, more equitable and more prosperous future.” School libraries and certified SLMSs are an investment in the tools NJ students need not only for a 21st-century education but for postsecondary success. The information literacy skills taught by certified SLMSs are essential life skills that students will use as adults in the workforce; the information they select online as adults will determine critical financial, social, medical, and career decisions. Requiring certified SLMSs is truly a return on investment that can be qualified and is a school district’s best bargain (**Appendix C**).

Please contact me if I can offer additional information or answer any questions.

Respectfully submitted,

Ewa Elliott, President-Elect,

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Resources:

- Education Funding Report (2012). New Jersey Department of Education.
<https://www.nj.gov/education/stateaid/1213/report.pdf>. Accessed 2/17/2022.
- Kachel, D. E. & Lance, K C. (2021). ***The Status of state support of school library programs.*** *Teacher Librarian*, 48(5), 8-13.
- Kimmelman, Arlen. Certified School Librarians: A District’s Best Bargain. 2021.
- Lance, Keith Curry. School Library Impact Studies.
<http://keithcurrylance.com/school-library-impact-studies/>. Accessed 3/10/2022.
- School Librarians at the Center of School Renewal and Transformation Infographic by Allison Mackley, courtesy of EveryLibrary Institute’s “School Librarians and the COVID Slide” report. 2021.
<https://s3.amazonaws.com/WebVault/SLJ/2009-Together-Infographic-Chrastka-1200.jpg>
Accessed 3/17/2021.

- “School Libraries are the Only Thing that Matters”. EveryLibrary. June 2021, <https://medium.com/everylibrary/school-libraries-are-the-only-thing-that-matters-bbef39f73727>. Accessed 3/10/2022.
- Thomas, Beth. (2021). Well-staffed school libraries can help students recover from their pandemic year. NJ Spotlight. July 16, 2021. <https://www.njspotlightnews.org/2021/07/school-libraries-school-library-media-specialist-recovery-k-12-students-learning-loss-reading-information-literacy/>. Accessed 3/17/2021.
- Todd, Ross, et.al “Executive Summary of Findings and Recommendations of the New Jersey School Library Survey Phase 2” ONE COMMON GOAL: STUDENT LEARNING July 2010, http://www.njasl.info/wp-content/NJ_study/Phase2_ExecSum.pdf.

Appendix A

NJ School Performance Report Cards - School Library Statistics

These statistics from the NJ School Performance Report Cards show a ratio of a declining number of school library media specialists to students from 2016-2017 to latest statistics in 2019-2020. Additionally, viewing all the other ratios, the number of students to school library media specialists is significantly higher than any other category of school staff. Even though, the research is clear on the impact on student achievement related to the presence of school library media specialists. "Students in schools with effective school library programs learn more, get better grades, and score higher on standardized tests than their peers in schools without comparable resources" (Scholastic).

Scholastic, Inc. (2015) School Libraries Work! A Compendium of Research Supporting the Effectiveness of School Libraries (2016 Edition).

2016-2017 Statistics

Ratio of Librarians/Media Specialists to Students: 911:1

[Link for Source](#) (page 49)

2017-2018 Statistics

Ratio of Librarians/Media Specialists to Students: 1030:1

[Link for Source](#) (page 51)

2018-2019 Statistics

Ratio of Librarians/Media Specialists to Students: 1062:1

Click on [Link for Source](#) (page 56)

2019-2020 Statistics

Ratio of Librarians/Media Specialists to Students: 1113:1

[Link for Source](#)

Student and Staff Ratios

This table shows ratios of students and staff members in the state.

Ratio	State Ratio
Students to Teachers	12:1
Students to Administrators	148:1
Teachers to Administrators	12:1
Students to Librarians/Media Specialists	1113:1
Students to Nurses	519:1
Students to Counselors	351:1
Students to Child Study Team Members	240:1

Appendix B

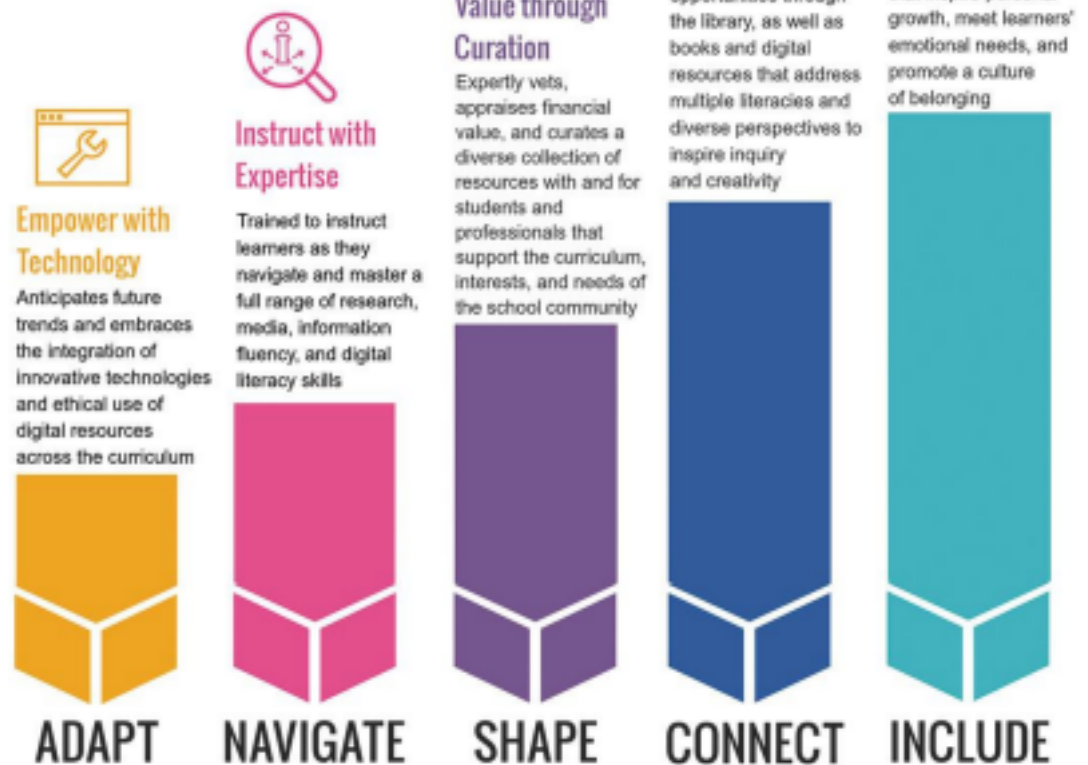
SCHOOL LIBRARIANS

at the center of

School Renewal & Transformation

School librarians embrace curiosity and work effectively in a climate of ambiguity and changing priorities.

Whether within the traditional walls of the school library or across a virtual environment, school librarians offer students, parents, faculty, and administration resources and tools at their point of need to bridge achievement gaps, develop agency, and strengthen the learning culture.



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