

Testimony on the Proposed State Budget
New Jersey Association of School Librarians (NJASL)
April 25, 2023

Good morning, Senate Budget Chair Sarlo, and Members of the Senate Budget Committee. My name is Ewa Dziedzic-Elliott, I am the President of the New Jersey Association of School Librarians (NJASL), the only professional organization of school librarians in our state and I present this testimony on behalf of 1.4 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. This is especially important this year as the Governor signed S588 into law which would require an information literacy standard be created and instruction in information literacy occur for all students in grades K-12. Funding for school libraries would help to provide a pathway to make the incorporation of this standard move more quickly and provide the appropriate teacher to provide that instruction. SLMSs main function as described in their Department of Education certification is in the instruction of information literacy. SLMSs are ready to lead the New Jersey students in the "Next New Jersey" as Governor Murphy stated in his 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 or economically, 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 ([Educational Adequacy Report](#), p. 16, 22). There are too many schools that have no school library media specialists at all or so few that they are totally ineffective.

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 (**Appendix A**). 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 which show a ratio of a declining number of SLMSs to students from 2016-2017 to the latest report card, 2020-21. There are a total of only 1212 SLMSs for the 1,400,737 NJ students (**Appendix B**).

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 13712 to 1 library media specialist and Freehold Regional Twp which has a ratio of 10262 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. School libraries are the most cost effective way to provide reading materials for students. Classroom collections cannot replace the curated resources selected by a certified librarian that are available to all students in a school. We have heard stories about school districts that are throwing away their library collections.

“Learning to read without books is like learning to play soccer without a ball, impossible but relevant for many South African kids who are expected to become literate without access to books” (Colin Bloom, [Libraries for Literacy](#)). Unfortunately, this is becoming the reality for some NJ students. For example, students in Freehold Regional HS District do not have access to databases or library books. They are told to use their local public library which may be a transportation issue for some students. Additionally, some students have limited public library access because they do not live in a community that participates in the Monmouth County Library system. Where is the equity for library resources for those students within that one school district?

Bridging Learning Loss and Literacy Link to School Libraries

The world has been forever changed by COVID-19 and the pandemic. School libraries and certified SLMSs are more relevant than ever before. The link between literacy and school libraries is clear. Multiple studies have found that not only did reading and writing scores improve with access to a robust school library with a full-time librarian, but so did math scores ([Rea](#)). SLMSs are also the appropriate certified staff to teach students to be critical thinkers and discerning consumers of information in today’s digital world. 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. School library media specialists provide one of the best returns on investment (**Appendix C**).

Contributions of SLMSs to bridging learning loss and contributions to literacy include:

- **Help** students close personal “learning loss” by providing additional literacy support as well as maintaining a curated collection of resources and materials relevant to students.
- **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 by **providing a diverse collection of resources**.
- **Assist students to develop information and media literacy skills**, which are critical for the mass of information that they face on a daily basis.
- **Bridge** achievement gaps and strengthen learning culture
- **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.

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 2024 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 FY2024 budget will help to ensure that students are prepared for the "Next New Jersey." 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 D)**.

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

Respectfully submitted,

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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”

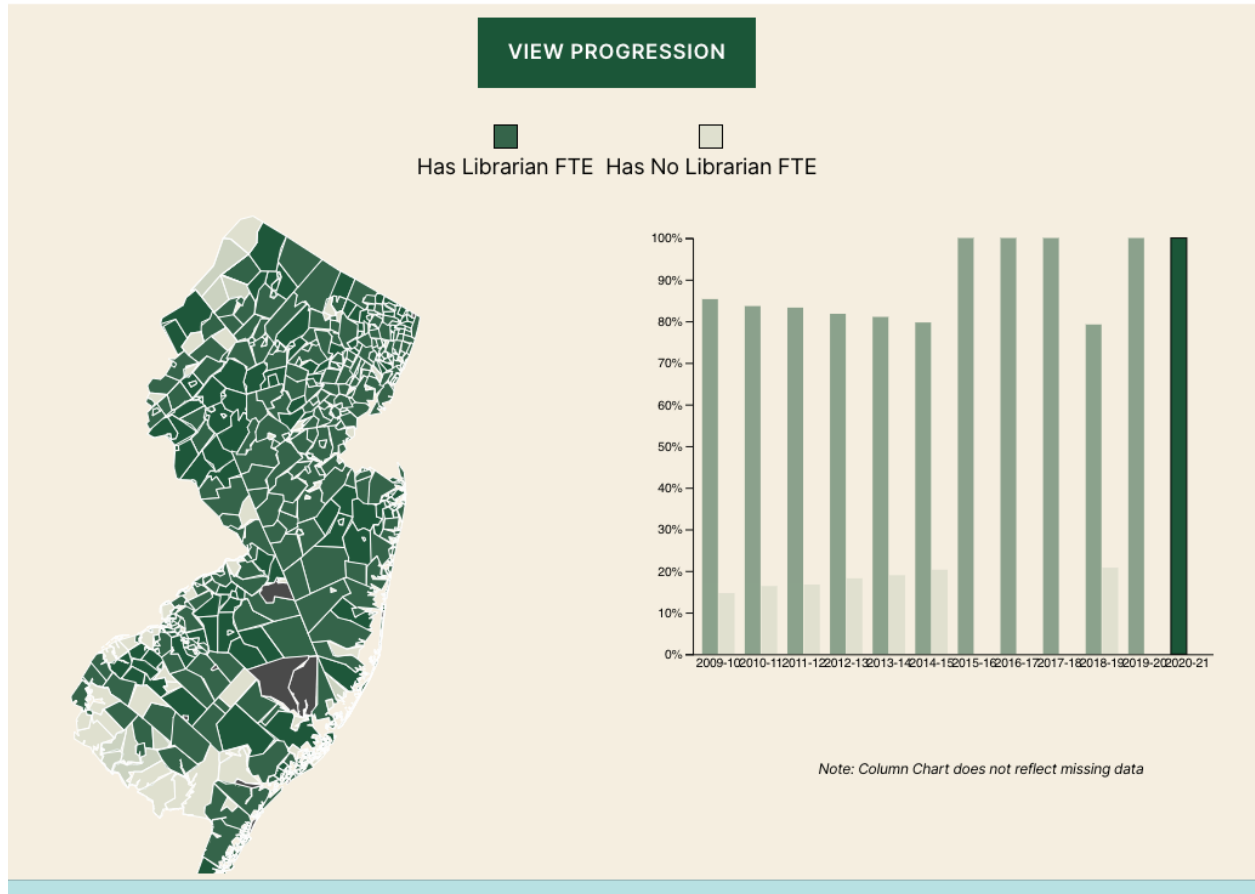
- Contribute to students’ positive and ethical values in use of information and technology.
- Contribute to discriminating readers.

References:

- Educational Adequacy Report (2023). New Jersey Department of Education. <https://www.nj.gov/education/stateaid/2223/EAR2023.pdf>. Accessed 4/20/2023.
- 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. 2022.
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- Rea, Amy. “School Libraries: Critical to Student Success.” EveryLibrary. <https://medium.com/everylibrary/school-libraries-critical-to-student-success-8476ce3dd72d>. Accessed 4/21/2023.
- 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

SLIDE DATA for New Jersey: See School Library Deserts in South Jersey



Appendix B

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 2020-21. 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](#) (page49)

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 [Link for Source](#) (p 56)

2019-2020 Statistics

Ratio of Librarians/Media Specialists to Students: 1113:1 [Link for Source](#)

2020-21 Statistics

Ratio of Librarians/Media Specialists to Students 1128:1

Statewide Totals: 1215 SLMS for a total of 1,370,832 students [Link for Source](#)

2021-22 Statistics

Ratio of Librarians/Media Specialists to Students 1157: 1 [Link for Source](#)

Statewide Totals: 1212 SLMS for a total of 1,400,737 students

Staff Counts: Table shows number of staff members in the state across staff categories.

Staff Category State: Total Staff Members

Teachers 118,773

Administrators 9,578

Librarians/Media Specialists 1,212

Nurses 2,911

School Counselors 4,324

Child Study Team Members 9,115

School Psychologists 2,159

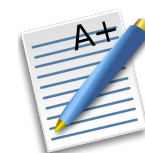
School Social Workers 2,487

Student Assistance Coordinators 372

School Safety Specialists 694

Appendix C School Library Media Specialists' Best Return on Investment

School Librarians help increase your students' scores?



- ["Want better reading scores? Hire a full-time librarian"](#) (2012) Klenke, A
- ["The Correlation Between Libraries and Literacy"](#) (2019) Hatchett Book Group
- ["Full-time school librarians linked to higher student reading scores"](#) (2012) Barack, L.
- ["Change in school librarian staffing linked with change in CSAP reading performance, 2005 to 2011"](#) (2012) Lance, K. C., & Hofschire, L.
- ["Increased library staff links to higher CSAP scores"](#) (2010) Lance, K. C.
- ["Ten ways teacher librarians improve literacy in schools"](#) (2019) The Conversation
- ["What Happens to Literacy Rates as Librarians Disappear?"](#) (2015) Center for Digital Education / Charlotte Observer
- ["Why School Librarians Are the Literacy Leaders We Need"](#) (2018) Education Week
- ["Library Media Specialists and Michigan's Literacy Plan"](#) (2019) Michigan Association for Media in Education (MAME)
- "[S]tudents who most need access to materials and equity of service - particularly students from economically-disadvantaged families - have markedly better scholastic outcomes when they have access to a school library with certified staff ([Coker 2015](#); [Horrigan 2016](#))."



School Librarians Help Meet NJ State Standards

The (2020) Standard 9.4 ("Life Literacies and Key Skills") calls for students to have instruction in key skills and areas that will prepare them for participation in a global digital society: Creativity and Innovation; Critical Thinking and Problem-solving; Digital Citizenship; Global and Cultural Awareness; Information and Media Literacy; and Technology Literacy

That's what School Librarians are specifically trained to do for students!

- ["The School Librarian: Your Ultimate Digital Resource"](#) (2019) ASCD
- ["Roles of the School Librarian: Empowering Student Learning and Success"](#) (2019) Northeast Comprehensive Center, New York State Education Department
- ["Certified Teacher-Librarians, Library Quality and Student Achievement in Washington State Public Schools: The Washington State School Library Impact Study"](#) (2015) Washington Library Media Association
- ["Strong School Libraries Build Strong Students"](#) (2013) American Association of School Librarians (AASL)
- ["Why school librarians matter: What years of research tell us"](#) (2018) Phi Beta Kappan
- ["Device & Conquer: SLJ's 2013 Tech Survey"](#) (2013) School Library Journal
- ["The New Jersey Study of School Libraries: One Common Goal – Student Learning"](#) (2011) New Jersey Association of School Librarians
- ["Creating 21st Century Learners: A Report on Pennsylvania's School Libraries"](#) (2012) Pennsylvania School Library Project

Other Ways Best Return on Investment Provided

- Provides learning opportunities for every student as well as supports every curriculum!
- Enables and encourages inquiry learning for every student and staff member!
- Help students close personal “learning loss” by providing lessons on how to locate digital and physical information, as well as maintaining a curated collection of resources and materials relevant to students.
- Work with teachers to extend and support lessons, increasing learning opportunities.
- Provide students and teachers support with an array of educational technologies.
- Help students and staff locate and utilize digital resources, such as NJClicks, a collection of databases available for free use to NJ residents, as well as school-purchased electronic resources.
- School librarians help reduce stress on classroom teachers by helping to integrate important learning topics such as digital citizenship, information literacy, research, and other important learning mandates across the already jam-packed curricula.
- Trained to consider ways to monitor and improve circulation of school library materials.

School Librarians help schools meet NJ State mandates!

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) [A4454](#); Social Justice [A4545](#); LGBTQ+; Social-Emotional Learning (SEL); Gifted and Talented; and Holocaust education - certified School Librarians can provide resources for both staff and students!

- School librarians are trained in curating physical and digital collections that meet the needs of students, staff, and schools.
- Engaged school librarians seek input and suggestions from students and staff about what materials they want to see in the school library collection.
- Reading fiction increases student empathy.

A School Library Better Return on Investment than classroom libraries!

- School library collections increase equity - a school library serves the entire school population, not a single room of students. A well-maintained school library collection offers recent, relevant materials to every student and staff member
- Certified school librarians have the space, training, and time to create displays to increase book circulation; “if educators are not trained in the display and use of books, students received significantly less benefit (McGill-Franzen et al 1999).”
- Research has found that certified school librarians are more likely to select materials that support the general curriculum (Small, Snyder & Parker 2009a; 2009b) - something classroom teachers are less likely to do.
- As a school library collection’s size increases, so too do students’ learning outcomes (Lance et al [1994](#), [2000](#), [2001](#)).
- School librarians catalogue the school library collection, providing students and staff with the ability to search for materials, unlike most classroom libraries, which are limited to physical, visual searches.

Appendix D

Certified School Library Media Specialist: A School District's Biggest Bargain

