

Basic Education Funding Commission

Lancaster, December 10, 2014

Testimony of Michael Nailor, President of the Pennsylvania School Librarians Association (PSLA)

Good afternoon, my name is Michael Nailor. I am a former school librarian now a member of the Education Department faculty of Susquehanna University. I am also the President of PSLA, the Pennsylvania School Librarians Association (<http://psla.org>), a not-for-profit organization of more than 900 school librarians and library educators from universities within the Commonwealth that offer bachelors and/or master degrees in school librarianship.

I would like to thank the members of the Basic Education Funding Commission for this opportunity to speak today on behalf of PSLA and the public school students our state's school librarians teach. Since the task of this Commission is to develop a new formula for funding education that addresses economic and geographical differences of school districts, please let me share with you the issues related to providing equitable school library programs in our state.

First, there is no direct funding of school libraries. There is a budget line item for the Public Library Subsidy in the state Education Budget, but nothing for school libraries.

There are NO requirements for school libraries or librarians in Pennsylvania's public schools. However, there are requirements for both librarians and collections in nursing programs, barber and cosmetology schools and juvenile correctional facilities. Adult prisons are required to have full-time professional librarians and collections of a required size (Zelno, p. 4).

Each school district, and in some districts, each building principal, decides whether students will be provided with the resources of a school library program and the instruction of a certified school librarian.

Particularly over the past several years with no requirements and complete autonomy for providing school library programs, Pennsylvania has developed an unfair and unjust learning environment for most of our school children.

According to the *Guidelines for Pennsylvania School Library Programs*, revised in 2011 by Commonwealth Libraries, students should have access to a school library program with at least the following:

A Library - A safe and inviting place for students to think, create and produce information and to complete school projects with assistance.

Resources - A collection of resources to include at least 15 to 20 books per students, magazines, digital resources such as e-books, and a minimum of 35 Internet-connected computers per library for student use.

Librarian - A full-time certified librarian per school building who plans, teaches and assesses student learning about safe and ethical use of information they find on the Internet, who teaches students to find and think critically about ideas, who guides their habit of reading, who provides access to emerging technologies.

Unfortunately, few of our Pennsylvania schools can meet even these three basic components necessary for academic achievement. As the result of a unanimous House Resolution in 2010, the Pennsylvania State Board of Education's *School Library Study* provided a "snapshot" of school library programs in 2010-11. 78 percent of public schools participated. Here were some of the key findings:

Librarians – Slightly more than half of the 1.8 million students (55%) in PA publicly-funded schools do not have access to a full-time librarian at their schools (*Pennsylvania School Library Study*, p. 20).

Funding – Only 3% of schools provided funding for school library resources at the state recommended "standard" level (*Pennsylvania School Library Study*, p. 24). Most schools reported between \$1 and \$10 per student. *The Pennsylvania School Library Guidelines* of 2011 recommend a minimum of \$37 per student (Appendix B).

Age of Resources – Book collections have become dated due to a lack of ongoing support. More than 75% of libraries reported book collections with an average age of materials over 25 years old. (*Pennsylvania School Library Study*, p.4)

PSLA, as requested by the State Board after the 2010 study, has been conducting annual staffing surveys as these data are not collected by PDE. While the State Board study uncovered huge inequities among various districts, PSLA staffing surveys show a continual decline in school library programs for our students and in certified school librarians teaching information usage skills to students.

Over the past four school years, 10% of school librarians have been cut impacting thousands of students statewide.

34,488 Pennsylvania students in 19 school districts now have no school librarians in any of their district schools.

92, 375 Pennsylvania students in 78 districts have only 1 certified librarian for their entire district.

In some districts, a school librarian teaches and directs library programs in as many as 13 buildings.

These cuts no longer just impact the poorest urban and rural schools but have been impacting all schools in all Intermediate Units, throughout the state. For example, suburban school districts here in Lancaster County have shown large reductions in library staffing over the past four years.

Figure 1. Trends in number of school librarians by type of school district

Types	Districts	Bldgs	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2105
Urban	11	458	152	133	101.5	100.5
Suburban	116	924	768.5	733	726	724
Rural	371	1,421	1034.4	976	938.5	926.5

In tandem with a Pennsylvania State Board Study, PSLA was fortunate to receive a federally-funded grant to study the impact of school library programs and certified librarians on student achievement, using the 2011 PSSA Reading and Writing tests. This study was one of the first of its kind to examine test scores of the tested sub-groups of students.

Significant Findings:

Students who are poor, black, Hispanic, and disabled (those with IEPs) benefit proportionally more where school libraries have certified librarians, larger collections, increased access to technology and electronic resources, and more access to the library itself (Kachel and Lance).

Students with access to well-resourced libraries are two to five times more likely to score “Advanced” in writing than students without such libraries (Kachel and Lance).

On average and factoring out economic differences, almost nine percent more students score “Advanced” in reading where students have a full-time, certified librarian with support staff than where they have a full-time, certified librarian alone. Further, almost eight percent more students score “Advanced” in reading where students have a full-time, certified librarian than where they do not (Kachel and Lance).

On average, the percentage of students scoring “Advanced” in writing is two and a half times higher for schools with a full-time, certified librarian than those without one. Similarly, the average percentage of students scoring “Advanced” in writing is almost twice as high for schools with a full-time, certified librarian with support staff as for those with only a full-time

certified librarian (Kachel and Lance).

Although the findings from the Pennsylvania study clearly indicate that strong school library programs with certified librarians improve student achievement, Pennsylvania has NO requirements for school library programs. While school administrators look to expensive reading programs and interventions provided from commercial companies for the “silver bullet” to improved test scores, they might be more effective by funding school library programs with a school librarian who teaches and guides students and integrates resources with teachers.

Recommendations and Conclusion

Through research and study we have ascertained that:

Pennsylvania’s provision of school library programs to its public school students is inequitable and continuing to decline not just in poor schools but across all communities.

There is a close tie between quality school library programs and student achievement as represented in Reading and Writing test scores.

Students who are the most at-risk—those in poverty, English language learners, those with disabilities, and those struggling academically—benefit the most by certified librarians and strong school library programs.

School libraries are great equalizers in equitable access to resources.

Therefore, PSLA recommends that to provide a fair and equitable system of learning resources to public school students:

1. All schools be required to have a school library and a certified school librarian since they are essential components for learning.
2. A budget line item for School Library Resources be created that directly provides a dollar amount per pupil to each school library. This is currently done in several states including New York.
3. At minimum the shared electronic resources provided for schools be increased. The POWER Library program can be expanded to focus more on K-12 e-books and digital resources that meet current academic standards and be shared economically statewide.

These three steps would provide equitable provision of teaching and learning resources to all schools and all Pennsylvania’s students, regardless of their geographic location or economic wealth. Effective school library programs can be an important equalizer in Pennsylvania education.

Thank you.

Sources:

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http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/research_reports_and_studies/19722/school_library_study/941391

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Survey of Library Staffing in PA Public School Districts, 2014-2015

Results as of December 1, 2014

Conducted by Pennsylvania School Librarians Association

99% of 500 School Districts Responded: 2,803 buildings in 499 school districts

Professional Staffing

Professional Staffing (Certified School Librarians) in 499 School Districts

Years	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-1015
Positions	1,962	1,841	1,770.5	1,751

Professional Staffing Reductions Year to Year

Years	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-1015
Positions Eliminated	126.5	88	45.25
Districts	89 (18%)	47 (9%)	46 (9%)

Professional Staffing Gains Year to Year

Years	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-1015
Positions Gained	6.5	12	25.75
Districts	7 (1%)	12 (2%)	29 (6%)

Professional Staffing Changes Year to Year

Years	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-1015
Net Positions Lost	-120	-76	-19.5
Percentage	-6%	-4%	-1%

Professional Staffing Profile

No Certified School Librarian

Years	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-1015
Districts	11 (2%)	15 (3%)	19 (4%)
Number students affected	12,198	16,366	34,488

One Certified Librarian Serving Part-time as the School Librarian for the Entire District

Years	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-1015
Districts	2 (0.5%)	4 (0.8%)	3 (0.6%)
Number students affected	2,519	6,097	3,082

One Full-time Certified Librarian Serving the Entire District

Years	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-1015
Districts	68 (14%)	71 (14%)	75 (15%)

Enrollment Breakdown for District With One Certified School Librarian Serving Entire District

District Enrollment	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-1015
< 500	6	5	7
500-1,000	31	29	26
1,001-1,500	19	17	24
1,501-2,000	5	7	6
2,001-3,000	6	10	9
> 3,000	1	3	3

One Librarian Serving More than One Building With The District

Years	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-1015
Districts	311 (62%)	322 (64%)	335 (67%)

Certified School Librarian for Every Building

Years	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-1015
Districts	174 (34%)	161 (32%)	145 (29%)

Breakdown by School District Classification

Types	Districts	Bldgs	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2105
Urban	11	458	152	133	101.5	100.5
Suburban	116	924	768.5	733	726	724
Rural	371	1,421	1034.4	976	938.5	926.5

Paraprofessional Staffing

Paraprofessional Staffing in 499 School Districts

Years	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-1015
Positions	1,398	1,324	1,255	1,247.25

Paraprofessional Staffing Changes Year to Year

Positions Eliminated

Years	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-1015
Positions Eliminated	106	92.5	38.5
Districts	91 (18%)	44 (9%)	28 (8%)

Positions Gained

Years	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-1015
Positions Gained	0	23.5	30.75
Districts	0	22 (4%)	23 (5%)

Paraprofessional Staffing Profile

Years	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-1015
No Paraprofessional Staff	150 (30%)	167 (33%)	170 (34%)
One Paraprofessional Staff for Entire District	189 (18%)	98 (20%)	100 (20%)
Paraprofessional serving more than one building	222 (45%)	248 (50%)	232 (46%)
Paraprofessional for every building	115 (23%)	85 (17%)	298 (20%)

Independent School Professional and Paraprofessional Staffing

Staffing in 38 Independent Schools

- 65.5 professional librarians serving 55 libraries
- 25 paraprofessionals serving 55 libraries