

# ALA American Library Association

August 28, 2009

The Honorable Arne Duncan  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Education  
400 Maryland Avenue, SW.  
Washington, DC 20202

## **Race to the Top Fund (Docket ID: ED-2009-OESE-0006)**

Dear Secretary Duncan:

21<sup>st</sup> century school library programs provide students with more than just books selected to hone readers' developing skills and to instill a love of reading. While reading and books are a mainstay of the school library program, today's school libraries are also sophisticated learning environments that provide the skills necessary to succeed in the workplace - but only when staffed by qualified professionals trained to collaborate with teachers and engage students meaningfully with information that matters to them both in the classroom and in the real world.

Many state-licensed school librarians are teachers first with a teaching degree in one or more content areas such as reading, mathematics, science, or social studies. In addition, all have graduate education in the knowledge of human development, the psychology of learning and information seeking, print and online resources, children's and young adult literature, library and collection management, instructional strategies and classroom management, and instructional technology. It is the school librarian teaching students the skills necessary to locate, evaluate and synthesize information which we know is so important for a 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce.

As instructional leaders in their schools, school librarians teach the use of computer-technology skills to find, use, share and create information, emphasizing their role in training students and teachers in the use of these tools to communicate more effectively, conduct research more efficiently, and increase productivity. They also provide instruction in the ethical and legal tenets of intellectual freedom, confidentiality, intellectual property, fair use, and copyright regulations.

School librarians know the school's curriculum and effective techniques necessary to cross disciplines and integrate information and technology literacy. They have collaboration skills for effective participation in the school improvement process through involvement in curriculum development, as well as implementation and evaluation with individual educators and

departmental committees, and are well-positioned to participate in the improvement of data-based assessment systems.

Research repeatedly shows that a well-funded and fully staffed school library program with a state-licensed school librarian is an integral component of a student's education. Across the United States, studies have demonstrated that students in schools with strong school libraries learn more, get better grades, and score higher on standardized test scores than their peers in schools without such resources:

### MASSACHUSETTS

- **At each grade level, schools with library programs have higher Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) scores.**
- At the elementary and middle/junior high school levels, students score higher on the MCAS test when there is a school library program.

*Baughman, James. (2002). School Libraries and MCAS Scores, (Preliminary Edition). A Paper Presented at a Symposium Sponsored by the Graduate School of Library and Information Science, Simmons College. Boston, MA.*

### MINNESOTA

- **Student reading achievement in elementary and secondary schools is related to increases in school library program spending.**
- In Minnesota schools with above-average student scores on the grade 3, 5, and 8 reading tests, 66.8 percent were schools where the library media specialist worked full-time.

*Baxter, Susan J. and Ann Walker Smalley. (2003). Check It Out! The Results of the School Library Media Program Census, Final Report. St. Paul, MN: Metronet.*

### MISSOURI

- **The weighted average index scores from the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) rose with the availability of school library program services.**

*Quantitative Resources, LLC. (2003). Show-Me Connection: How School Library Media Center Services Impact Student Achievement, 2002–2003. Jefferson City, MO: Missouri State Library.*

### NEW MEXICO

- **New Mexico achievement test scores rise with the development of school library programs.**

*Lance, Keith Curry, Marcia J. Rodney, and Christine Hamilton-Pennell. (2002). How School Librarians Improve Outcomes for Children: The New Mexico Study. Sante Fe, NM: New Mexico State Library.*

## NORTH CAROLINA

- **School library programs in North Carolina elementary, middle, and high schools have a significant impact on student achievement – as measured by scores on standardized reading and English tests.**
- **Scores on standardized reading and English tests in the schools included in this study tended to increase when libraries in the schools had newer books, and were open and staffed more hours during the school week.**

*Burgin, Robert and Pauletta Brown Bracy. (2003). An Essential Connection: How Quality School Library Media Programs Improve Student Achievement in North Carolina. Spring, TX: Hi Willow Research and Publishing.*

## OHIO

- **The study shows that an effective school library, led by a credentialed library media specialist, plays a critical role in facilitating student learning for building knowledge.**

*Todd, Ross J., Carol C. Kuhlthau, and OELMA. (2004). Student Learning through Ohio School Libraries: The Ohio Research Study. Columbus, OH: Ohio Educational Library Media Association.*

## PENNSYLVANIA

- **Pennsylvania middle schools with the best PSSA reading scores spend twice as much on their school libraries as the lowest scoring schools.**
- The success of any school library program in promoting high academic achievement depends fundamentally on the presence of adequate staffing – specifically each library should have at least one full-time certified library media specialist with at least one full-time aide or support staff member. For all three tested grades, the relationship between such staffing and Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) reading scores is both positive and statistically significant.

*Lance, Keith Curry, Marcia J. Rodney, and Christine Hamilton-Pennell. (2000). Measuring Up to Standards: The Impact of School Library Programs & Information Literacy in Pennsylvania Schools. Greensburg, PA: Pennsylvania Citizens for Better Libraries.*

School libraries are some of the most underfunded classrooms in America today and only approximately 60 percent of our school libraries have a full-time, state-licensed school librarian on staff. With limited funding, administrators are trying to stretch dollars and cut funds across

various programs to ensure that maximum resources are dedicated to improving student academic achievement. But because federal legislation does not highlight the direct correlation between competent librarians and increased student academic achievement, library resource budgets are increasingly being used to mitigate the effects of budgetary shortfalls.

When you were at the Fanwood Public Library in New Jersey on June 22, 2009, you met with a number of New Jersey school librarians who spoke about the problems in our nation's schools with the elimination of school librarian positions due to budget issues.

The American Library Association (ALA) believes that taking action to fund school library programs with state-licensed school librarians is imperative. Research and experience points out that doing so leads to improved results for students, long-term gains in school and school system capacity, and increased productivity and effectiveness. In order for states to articulate an innovative, comprehensive, coordinated commitment to reform, they must invest in school library programs headed by state-licensed school librarians.

The American Association of School Librarians has articulated a model for school library programs based on a large body of quantitative research and best practices that can be implemented nationally.

Accordingly, ALA requests that you, as the federal leader of the U.S. education policy, strongly encourage states to invest in their schools' libraries and follow Ohio Governor Strickland's goal for a school library in every school, and requiring at least one state-certified school librarian in those 21<sup>st</sup> century school library programs.

ALA requests that you include the following comments in the final Race to the Top application to help ensure states adequately consider how school libraries can help improve student academic achievement and turn around struggling schools.

### **ALA Comments**

#### **I. Clarify that improved school library programs can help to turn around struggling schools.**

Recommendation: ALA believes it is necessary for the Department to point out that improved school library programs can help to turn around struggling schools. Accordingly, ALA recommends that language under Reform Plan Criteria (D)(3) be amended to encourage LEAs to improve school library programs and hire state-licensed school librarians as part of their strategy to turn around struggling schools.

#### **Recommended Changes to Reform Plan Criteria (D)(3):**

(D)(3) *Turning around struggling schools:* The extent to which the state has a high-quality plan and ambitious yet achievable annual targets to (i) identify at least the lowest-achieving five percent of the persistently lowest-performing schools (as defined in this notice) or the lowest-achieving five schools, whichever is larger; and (ii) support its LEAs in turning around these schools by –

- Putting in place new leadership and a majority of new staff, new governance, and improved instructional programs, and providing the school with flexibilities such as the ability to select staff, control its budget, **improve school library programs**, and expand student learning time; or
- Converting them to charter schools or contracting with an education management organization (EMO); or
- Closing the school and placing the school’s students in high-performing schools; or
- To the extent that these strategies are not possible, implementing a school transformation model that includes: hiring a new principal, **hiring a state-licensed school librarian**, measuring teacher and principal effectiveness, rewarding effective teachers and principals, and improving strategies for recruitment, retention and professional development; implementing comprehensive instructional reform, including an improved instructional program and differentiated instruction; and extending learning time and community-oriented supports, including more time for students to learn and for teachers to collaborate, more time for enrichment activities, **expanded library programs**, and on-going mechanisms for family and community engagement.

**II. Increase the number of school libraries served by a state-licensed school librarian.**

Recommendation: ALA believes it is necessary for the Department to highlight the importance of school libraries staffed by state-licensed school librarians. Accordingly, ALA recommends that language under State Reform Conditions Criteria (E)(1) be amended to encourage states to demonstrate significant progress in increasing the number of school libraries served by a state-licensed school librarian.

Recommended Changes to Reform State Reform Conditions Criteria (E)(1):

E. Overall Selection Criteria

*State Reform Conditions Criteria*


(E)(1) Demonstrating significant progress, that is, the extent to which the state has over the past several years:

- Made progress to date in each of the four education reform areas;
- Used ARRA and other federal and state funding to pursue reforms in these areas;
- Created, through law or policy, conditions favorable to education reform and innovation; and

- Increased student achievement and decreased the achievement gap, as reported on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) since 2003; and increased graduation rates; **and**
- **Increased the number of school libraries served by a state-licensed school librarian.**

Thank you for your consideration of our recommended changes to the Race to the Top application. The American Library Association and the American Association of School Librarians look forward to working with you to improve academic achievement for every student in this country.

Sincerely,



Emily Sheketoff  
Executive Director  
ALA Washington Office