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Topic: School Library Media Specialists

Good afternoon. My name is Allen McGinley and I am Director of the Teaneck Public Library in Bergen County and Co-Chair of the New Jersey Library Association's Joint Task Force on School Libraries. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to you today about the need for certified school library media specialists in New Jersey public schools.

School libraries with certified School Library Media Specialists have a measurable effect on the reading scores of students across the country.

They prepare students for success in college and careers by teaching the research, information, media, and digital literacy skills required for 21st century achievement.

Certified School Library Media Specialists lead and support technology integration, and have demonstrated success with introducing cutting edge technologies and practices into their schools, including coding, robotics, 3D printing, and gamification.

They are trained to develop current and diverse collections of print and digital materials that address a range of ability levels. And certified School Library Media Specialists create spaces within the school that are safe for all students and provide materials and activities to support social and emotional learning.

According to a 2015 study by Elizabeth Coker¹, students who attend schools with certified school library media specialists and quality school library facilities "perform better on standardized tests and are more likely to graduate, even after controlling for school size and student income level".

School library media specialists also promote literacy and inspire a lifelong love of reading, and connect teachers and students with materials in a variety of formats that encourage growth and knowledge. The result is that certified school library media specialists have a measurable impact on reading scores and overall student success.

¹ Coker, Elizabeth. *Certified Teacher-Librarians, Library Quality and Student Achievement in Washington State Public Schools*. Washington Library Media Association, 2015, https://wala.memberclicks.net/assets/WLMA/Advocacy/wslitreport_final%20revised7_14_15.pdf

Despite this demonstrated need and impact, some school districts in New Jersey have eliminated certified school library media specialist positions resulting in districts where school library media specialists are responsible for teaching research and information literacy to thousands of students spread across different schools. And some districts, like Camden City School District, with a total student enrollment of more than 9,000, reported in March 2019² that **they have no school library media specialist at all.**

Unfortunately, this trend is continuing throughout the state. In March 2019, Newark Public School District in Essex County and Freehold Regional School District in Monmouth County reported student to school library media specialist ratios of more than 3,000:1.

And it gets worse. **Woodbridge Township School District in Middlesex County and Union City Public School District in Hudson County reported ratios of more than 13,000:1.**

The result is that students in these schools **do not have access** to the same tools and resources as students in nearby (typically more affluent) school districts, and face reduced opportunities for future success.

This is an equity issue.

According to the Coker study³, “students who are least likely to have access to a quality library are disproportionately more likely to face poverty and other risk factors known to adversely impact student achievement.”

In July 2016, several prominent groups of college and university librarians released a joint statement⁴ saying, “access to a quality school library/media center staffed by a certified school media specialist is a necessary part of every student’s education.”

They go on to note that many incoming freshman are arriving on college campuses **unprepared** to perform college level research, requiring professors and librarians to spend more time than they should covering these *basic* research skills, because these students **did not have K-12 access** to a certified school library media specialist.

The lack of certified school library media specialists and an information literacy curriculum in New Jersey public schools has reached such a critical point, that the New Jersey legislature has started to take action.

² *NJ School Performance Report, 2017-2018* (reported March 2019), <https://rc.doe.state.nj.us/SearchForSchool.aspx>.

³ Coker, Elizabeth. *Certified Teacher-Librarians, Library Quality and Student Achievement in Washington State Public Schools*. Washington Library Media Association, 2015, https://wala.memberclicks.net/assets/WLMA/Advocacy/wslitreport_final%20revised7_14_15.pdf

⁴ *The Value and Importance of Highly Effective School Library Programs*, July 2016, <http://unlockstudentpotential.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/The-Value-and-Importance-of-Highly-Effective-School-Library-Programs.pdf>

Two bills have been introduced in both the Senate and the Assembly that would work in tandem to ensure that all students have **equal access** to a certified school library media specialist, and the opportunity to develop critical information literacy skills.

A132 / S2933 requires instruction on information literacy in curriculum of students in grades kindergarten through 12.

A1995 / S2394 requires a specific ratio of certified school library media specialists to students in New Jersey public schools.

These bills were introduced in the 2018-2019 legislative year, and gained broad support and sponsorship. We're currently waiting for these bills to be reintroduced in the new legislative session that is beginning now. The New Jersey legislature is taking action on this critical issue.

But the New Jersey legislature shouldn't have to legally mandate what we already know every student deserves.

The reason I'm here today is to ask the State Board of Education to review and strengthen the administrative code and QSAC guidelines so that all New Jersey public school students are ensured equal access to school library services.

While the administrative code and QSAC guidelines require that school districts provide school library services in each school building, they do not require that each school building have a certified school library media specialist.

Please consider changes to this language that would require an information literacy curriculum, taught by a certified school library media specialist in each school building.