



**Testimony by Pat Massey, NJASL President
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Good morning Chairman Greenwald and Members of the Assembly Budget Committee. I am Pat Massey, President of the New Jersey Association of School Librarians, representing over 1,100 members of the professional organization of school librarians in our state. I am a School Library Media Specialist at South Plainfield High School in Middlesex County and a trustee of the South Plainfield Public Library. I also speak on behalf of the 1.37 million students in New Jersey Public Schools.

School Library Media Programs: Value for All Students

The reason for my testimony is to highlight the value of school library media programs in this digital age and clarify why students need resource-rich school libraries that are staffed by state certified school librarians to achieve their full potential as 21st century learners. Given the economic challenges facing our nation and our state, the current economic climate creates both challenges and opportunities for students and schools. Yet, New Jersey must maintain its standing as a leader in public education. As New Jersey schools refine the curriculum to help students achieve higher standards, a dynamic school library media program is a cost effective and essential means to prepare students to become reflective learners who are capable of locating, evaluating, and creating knowledge from information found in a variety of formats.

School Library Media Programs Promote Learning

The school library supports early literacy, a priority of our state, by promoting a love of reading, a foundation of all learning, which will serve children throughout their lives. As they progress through elementary school, the school library media program helps students develop essential information literacy skills that are especially critical when the perception is that Google can provide all information and students have innate searching talents. Through a variety of tools, the school librarian teaches students how

to access and evaluate widely available information, and become proficient in using information ethically and appropriately. In addition to providing direct instruction to classes and individual students, the school librarian also collaborates with classroom teachers to create inquiry based projects that promote critical thinking and life-long learning skills.

Research Demonstrates: School Library Media Programs Have a Positive Impact on Student Achievement

Since 1999, 14 different states have conducted empirical studies documenting the positive impact school libraries have upon student learning and achievement. The results of these studies are summarized in a publication entitled “School Libraries Work!” that is included with this testimony and can also be reviewed at http://www2.scholastic.com/content/collateral_resources/pdf/s/slw3_2008.pdf. The studies show that a resource-rich school library that includes adequate print and technological resources and is staffed by a certified school library media specialist has a direct positive impact on student learning. The early findings of the most recent New Jersey study in 2009, conducted by the Center for International Scholarship in School Libraries at Rutgers University, confirm that school libraries staffed by state certified school librarians who collaborate with content area teachers have a positive impact on student learning and achievement in New Jersey’s public schools.

The NJ Association of School Librarians recognizes that the state faces a monumental budget crisis this year, and the Legislature and Governor have to make extremely difficult decisions about how to address the current shortfall. School libraries are cost effective. Every resource in a school library that includes books, media, computers, and other learning tools is available to every student and teacher in the school. Proposed cuts to the State Library budget will have a direct negative impact on all public, academic and school libraries if approved, since access to shared online databases and services through the NJ State Library and our Regional Library Cooperatives will be eliminated.

Strengthen Legislation: A School Library Program in Every School

Like the Legislature, school boards must make very difficult choices in order to address their own budget deficits. Unfortunately, some districts are choosing to reduce spending for school library media programs and staff because New Jersey does not

require every school to have a library media center or a certified school librarian. 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 new school funding model includes school librarians in the staffing assumptions as well as library programs. This is a deficiency in law that we must address over the long term.

Invest in School Libraries to Support Student Achievement

The research is clear. Resource-rich school libraries, staffed by state certified school library media specialists, equal high student achievement and academic success. A quality school library media center is much more than a collection of books. It is a unique learning space where students establish a love of reading and learn to become effective users of information, ideas, and resources. These are priceless outcomes that must not be sacrificed to temporary budget constraints. Unfortunately, one of our biggest challenges is that current decision-makers have no first hand experience of excellent 21st century school library programs and are too quick to slash what they assume to be a non-essential program. Please read the enclosed article on "The Changing Library" by Melonie Menefee, published in *American School Board Journal* in August 2009. I also invite you to contact me at president@njasl.org to arrange to visit a 21st century school library and see first-hand its impact on student learning.

In closing, we know it is not the Legislature's intent to reduce support for school library programs. But, with so many mandated and fixed costs in their budgets, many school districts are forced to cut programs and services that impact directly on students. School library programs are not excess "fat" that school districts can afford to trim. Eliminating library jobs and resources will slow our progress in childhood literacy and student achievement, and it will hurt students and the State now and for years to come. On behalf of the New Jersey Association of School Librarians, I appreciate the opportunity to present information to you on the importance of resource-rich and properly staffed school libraries to all students and staff in New Jersey public schools.