



December 17, 2015

Dear Superintendent:

As you are aware, last week S. 1177 was passed and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was signed into law on December 10. This Act is the first piece of legislation in over fifty years to provide revenue to enhance school library services, programs, and resources. Specifically, the Act includes “School Librarians” in the definition of specialized instructional support personnel. ESSA also devolves authority to the states and Local Educational Agencies (LEA) on how the funding is set. As the decision-maker for your county, I wanted to reiterate the points in ESSA that affect school librarians and school library programs and inform you of the impact that a quality school library program has on our students on behalf of the Florida Association for Media in Education (FAME).

- ESSA includes new provisions that authorize local plans to include a description of how the LEA will assist schools in developing effective school library programs to provide students an opportunity to develop digital literacy skills and improve academic achievement. (Title I)
- States are now authorized to use funds to support the instructional services provided by effective school library programs. (Title II, Part A)
- LEAs are authorized to use funds to support the instructional services provided by effective school library programs. (Title II, Part A)
- ESSA requires local grants that focus on children in K – 5 to provide high-quality professional development opportunities for specialized instructional support personnel, school librarians, paraprofessionals, and other program staff. (Title II, Part B, Subpart 2)
- ESSA requires local grants that focus on children in grades 6 – 12 to provide training for school librarians and other school district personnel to support, develop, administer, and evaluate high-quality comprehensive literacy instruction initiatives. (Title II, Part B, Subpart 2)
- ESSA authorizes all local grants for K-5 or 6-12 to provide time for literacy staff such as school librarians or specialized instructional support personnel to meet to plan comprehensive literacy instruction. (Title II, Part B, Subpart 2)
- Funds to develop and enhance effective school library programs are specifically authorized by ESSA. These may include providing professional development for school librarians, books, and up-to-date materials to high need schools. (Title II, Part B, Subpart 2, Section 2226)
- Libraries are defined as eligible entities with demonstrated expertise in historical methodology or the teaching of American history and civics. (Title II, Part B, Subpart 2, Section 2232)
- States are authorized to use funds to assist LEAs with identifying and addressing technology readiness needs, including Internet connectivity and access to school libraries. (Title IV, Part A)
- States are authorized to use funds to assist LEAs in providing school librarians and media personnel with the knowledge and skills to use technology effectively, including effective integration of technology, to improve instruction and student achievement. (Title IV, Part A)
- Grants, as in NCLB, can be used to support expanded library service hours. (Title IV, Part B) (everylibrary.org)

I believe that school librarians and school library programs have been specifically included in ESSA because of the important role school librarians have in ensuring our students are future ready. The job description of today's school librarian has been redefined. School librarians are now the specialists that both train our teachers and instruct our students how to master a global digital world. Today, it is not enough for teachers to simply teach content and standards, but we must prepare students to have high skill levels as well. Higher-order questioning to analyze and evaluate, interactive collaboration to proficiently work with virtual and real groups, creative problem-solving to discover and design, intuitive interpretation to apply and assess information, reading advocacy to develop empathy- these are future-ready skills that are taught by today's school librarians at all grade levels.

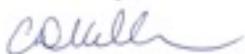
Today's learner is a connected learner, with an infinite amount of information at his disposal. Thus the evaluation of information is now a crucial aspect of information literacy today. As the shift in education moves toward self-directed learning, it is critical that our students know how to ask good questions in order to get good answers, how to access information from a variety of formats, how to evaluate information with an understanding of bias, how to create new knowledge from information by turning raw data into usable knowledge, and how to apply this knowledge within a real-world problem. Students develop these skills when the school librarian is an instructional partner involved in the planning, design, implementation, assessment, and evaluation of lessons and projects with the classroom teacher. The classroom teacher specializes in content knowledge. The school librarian specializes in the learning and research process.

A McREL study has shown that student learning in the classroom reflects the two lowest levels in Bloom's taxonomy: remembering (25 percent) and understanding (32 percent), and not the higher-order thinking skills of analysis (9 percent), evaluation (3 percent), and creation (4 percent)(Goodwin, Brian. *Simply Better*, 2011). From research projects to problem-based learning and Makerspaces, the school librarian focuses on the latter three levels as the instructional support personnel responsible for teaching the whole learning and design process.

A school librarian is also the school's reading specialist. In the National Endowment for the Arts' comprehensive 2007 survey of American reading, "To Read or Not to Read," researchers found that a "calamitous, universal falling off of reading" occurs for many students at around age 13 and often continues through the rest of these students' lives. As students' academic reading increases, their recreational reading decreases. It is imperative that students maintain the habit of reading as it is one of the few ways for a student to learn empathy and a variety of perspectives- critical skills in a global climate. With an increase in funds for school library collections, school librarians will now be able to provide the resources, digital and print, that not only support the curriculum, but support the goal of developing readers for life.

As you are developing your budgets under this new significant Act, please remember the importance of funding a certificated school librarian in each and every school in addition to funds to enhance collections with current, quality materials and resources. A school librarian's business has always been helping students learn how to learn; thank you for realizing this importance and for investing in providing for a whole education, not just content knowledge for testing.

Sincerely,



Lucretia D. Miller

President, Florida Association for Media in Education (FAME)