



TO: Alaska Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Program Coordinator
CC: Commissioner, Alaska Department of Education and Early Development
ESSA Advisory Committee
DATE: September 3, 2016
RE: Policy Recommendations regarding School Library Programs

On behalf of the Alaska Association of School Librarians and our over 100 members from across the state, we are writing to make policy recommendations on how to include effective school library programs and the work that school librarians do in Alaska's ESSA Implementation Plan. As the only statewide association for school librarians, we believe that our understanding of how effective school libraries positively influence student achievement is a vital area for your policy review. Thank you for the opportunity to engage as educational stakeholders in this process.

The Alaska Association of School Librarians strongly supports all the American Association of School Librarian's position statements, especially the *Instructional Role of the Librarian* and the *Definition for Effective School Library Program*. Each of these position statements reflects the necessity for information literacy instruction based on current, up-to-date standards.

Research clearly shows the critical role of a fully staffed and funded school library cannot be ignored in the efforts to achieve school improvement.

1. The 2016 Edition of *School Libraries Work! A compendium of research supporting the effectiveness of school libraries* compiles over 25 studies that conclude "A credentialed school librarian, collaboration and co-teaching, technology access, and collection size all elevate student learning" (pg 1). School librarians and support staff form a team which develops successful 21st century literacy skills in students (Kachel, 2011).
2. Highlighted in the 2016 edition of *School Libraries Work!* is the 2000 Alaska study by Lance, Hamilton-Pennell & Rodney which concluded "Students in Alaska's secondary schools with full time teacher-librarians were almost twice as likely as those without teacher-librarians to score average or above average on the California Achievement Test (CAT)" and "the more often students receive library information / literacy instruction from the library media specialist the higher their test scores." (pg 16). Student improvement in testing scores, when teaching librarians and their support staff are present in schools, demonstrate improvement "ranges from eight percent in high schools to 35 percent for elementary schools" (Rodney, Lance, & Hamilton-Pennell, 2003).
3. In addition, a School Library Journal analysis of the *School Libraries Work!* data found that "states that gained school librarian positions between 2005 and 2009 experienced larger increases and no decreases in National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading scores for 4th grade, while states that lost school librarians experienced small increases or decreases in reading scores." <http://goo.gl/2zJP4g>

4. Furthermore, research examining first-year college assignments by Donham (2014) demonstrated that college students with exposure to consistent and quality information literacy instruction in their high school years are more likely to be prepared for college level course work. First-year college assignments reflect the expectation that students have developed information literacy skills and dispositions, such as problem solving, curiosity, ability to synthesize information, and effective communication; skills and dispositions also favored by employers.

Therefore, the Alaska Association of School Librarians recommends that the Alaska Department of Education include in their ESSA plan the following provisions related to effective school library programs as they relate to ESSA priorities:

- Standards & Assessment:
 - Adoption of the most recent standards set forth by the American Association of School Librarians (2007) and adopt updated standards as they are released (2017).
 - Recommendations and assistance to local educational agencies (LEAs) in developing effective school library programs, in order to provide all students an opportunity to develop digital literacy skills and improve academic achievement.
- Accountability:
 - Addition of “effective school library programs,” as defined by the American Association of School Librarians to the Framework of activities, strategies and interventions (ASI’s) as part of planning for ESSA implementation in the state of Alaska.
- School Support & Improvement:
 - Encourage the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development to apply for UDOE funding under the Innovative Approaches to Literacy program to improve school library services in eligible schools across the state.
 - Authorization of state and local uses of funds under Title II, Part A (Supporting Effective Instruction) for “supporting the instructional services provided by effective school library programs” and Title II, Part B, Subpart 2, section 226 to include professional development for school librarians, books, and up-to-date materials to high need schools.

As ALA wrote in their letter to the US Department of Education dated January 21, 2016, “Schools with effective school library programs ensure their students have the best chance to succeed. As the Department considers recommendations for implementing programs under Title I, Part A, the American Library Association [and Alaska Association of School Librarians] respectfully asks that you include a focus on the importance of effective school library programs and ensure that any regulations proposed for Title I, Part A encourage LEAs to assist schools in developing effective school library programs as authorized under section 1112(b)(13)(B) of ESSA.” The Alaska Association of School Librarians, representing over 120 professional members across the state, fully supports these recommendations.

Sincerely,

The Alaska Association of School Librarians Executive Board

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