



The Value and Importance of Highly Effective School Library Programs

VALE and ACRL-NJ/NJLA-CUS¹, New Jersey's academic library associations, concur with the New Jersey Library Association and the New Jersey Association of School Librarians in acknowledging the value and importance of highly effective school library programs. We, too, hold that "access to a quality school library/media center staffed by a certified school media specialist is a necessary part of every student's education", and further agree that the 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) provides the necessary legislative and financial support needed to "help schools achieve vibrant literacy, information literacy and school library media programs for our state's students."²

Academic librarians—most of whom are parents—pay attention to K-12 programs. We have witnessed schools and districts face difficult fiscal decisions in which school libraries and school media specialists are sacrificed to make ends meet. We also see that many college freshmen are poorly prepared to conduct college-level research, requiring professors and librarians to spend more time than they should on basic skills. We live with this cause and effect, frustrated in knowing that many of these students could hit the college ground running with proper training beforehand. All educators comprise a continuum of intervention necessary to help students gain essential career skills. School media specialists have a well-regarded place on this continuum.

NJ Colleges & Universities seek accreditation by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE). MSCHE requires that students demonstrate information literacy skills. This demand in part is a response to the information explosion of the last couple of decades, which has increased the need for students to develop research skills. We know that employers demand that new-hires have the ability to find and analyze information within a growing universe of data, and have complained that "once on the job, these educated young workers seemed tethered to their computers. They failed to incorporate more fundamental, low-tech research methods that are as essential as ever in the contemporary workplace."³ We further understand that information literate students—those with strong analytical, critical thinking and problem-solving skills—are more attractive job candidates.

Becoming a strong job candidate means learning how to learn, a process that starts when students are young and is nurtured year after year. Some of this nurturing comes from the unique expertise offered by School Media Specialists and the resources they steward in school libraries. Research collected by the American Library Association⁴ reveals that School Media Specialists and school libraries have strong and positive impacts on teacher effectiveness and student growth, especially in information literacy and technological skills. School Media Specialists are information literacy experts, uniquely trained and skilled to help all students develop reading and research skills. School libraries provide equitable access to information and technological resources that lead to increased student motivation, better comprehension,

higher assessment scores, and higher graduation rates. We think that these experts and the libraries they run are a crucial part of the educational process.

Adopted by The Executive Board of the Virtual Academic Library Association and the Executive Board of the Association of College & Research Libraries – New Jersey Chapter and the New Jersey Library Association – College & University Section July 2016.

¹ The Virtual Academic Library Association of NJ, The Association of College & Research Libraries – New Jersey Chapter, and the New Jersey Library Association – College & University Section.

² New Jersey Library Association. (21 June 2016). New Jersey Library Association (NJLA) Calls on New Jersey to Support Highly Effective School Library Programs. Retrieved from <http://njla.org/content/new-jersey-library-association-njla-calls-new-jersey-support-highly-effective-school-library>

³ Head, A. J. (2012). Learning curve: How college graduates solve information problems once they join the workplace. (Project Information Literacy Research Report). Retrieved from http://projectinfolit.org/images/pdfs/pil_fall2012_workplacestudy_fullreport_revised.pdf

⁴ Available at American Library Association (2016). Libraries Matter: Impact Research. Retrieved from <http://www.ala.org/research/librariesmatter/>