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Legislation Introduced to Ensure Essential Library Resources, Support for 21st Century Education

Bi-partisan legislation introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives and U.S. Senate today is an essential step forward in ensuring that students across America have the library resources and support they need for a Twenty-First Century education, according to Leslie Burger, President of the American Library Association.

The Strengthening Kids' Interest in Learning and Libraries or SKILLs Act guarantees that students across America will be served by highly qualified, state-certified school library media specialists and will have the library resources they need to succeed.

The SKILLs Act is sponsored by Senators Jack Reed (RI) and Thad Cochran (MI) and by Representatives Raul Grijalva (AZ) and Vernon Ehlers (MI).

"Study after study proves that students in schools with well-stocked libraries and highly qualified, state-certified school librarians learn more, get better grades and score higher on standardized tests than students who do not have the same benefits," Burger said. "Today, only 60 percent of school libraries have full-time, state-certified school library media specialists on staff. With limited resources, school administrators are struggling to stretch dollars, and library resource budgets are increasingly being used to make up for shortfalls in other areas."

The SKILLs Act ensures that library funds will be available to serve students in elementary, middle and high schools throughout the nation; that appropriate books and materials will be available for students at all grade levels, including those with special learning needs and those learning English as a second language; and that highly qualified school library media specialists will be available to assist and support all students with their learning needs.

"We know that school libraries are a critical component in improving student literacy skills and academic achievement. This legislation recognizes what makes this success possible: highly-trained librarians," said Senator Jack Reed. "As technology rapidly changes the way our children learn, it is imperative that we have experienced librarians who can help kids harness these new technologies and access the information they need. The SKILLs

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Act underscores the value of school libraries by encouraging the hiring of highly-qualified school library media specialists in our nation's school libraries.”

Senator Cochran added, “School librarians play an important role in the lives of students of all ages. The ability to foster confidence in a student to research a topic about which he or she wants to learn is a unique gift. A child who understands and is comfortable with information technology is a child who will grow up with the ability to learn throughout his or her lifetime. The SKILLS Act will provide federal support and incentives to strengthen our school libraries, which I hope will improve education in America.”

Rep. Grijalva stated, "School libraries often serve as a second classroom and the school librarian as an adjunct teacher. Our children are losing out on qualified professionals trained to collaborate with teachers and engage students meaningfully with information that matters to them both in the classroom and in the real world. This legislation would bridge that gap and ensure a highly qualified librarian for every school.”

Rep. Ehlers added a personal note. “I know personally how important reading is to a child's learning process,” he said. “Frequent illness from asthma caused me to adopt reading as my favorite hobby as a child, which helped spark my interest in a number of things, including my passion for science. All children should be encouraged to have the same appetite for reading as I had as a child, and one of the main keys to that are school libraries.”

The SKILLS Act reauthorizes and strengthens the Improving Literacy through School Library Program of the No Child Left Behind Act.



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