

American Library Association

Washington Office Newsline

ALAWON
Volume 16, Number 083
August 8, 2007

You Can Make a Difference Over the August Recess

Congress has adjourned for a month long recess. There will be a flurry of activity when Congress returns on September 4. We anticipate when Congress returns, the Senate will consider the Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies FY 2008 appropriations bill that includes funding levels for several library programs, and the House will begin work on No Child Left Behind reauthorization.

Your Member of Congress will be in the district during the month of August. Members of Congress need to hear about important library issues over the recess. Members want to meet with constituents. Simply call the district office to either make an appointment or to learn the schedule of town hall meetings. Also invite your Member of Congress to tour your library to see for themselves the positive contributions federal dollars make to libraries in their communities. Please talk to your Senators and Representatives about the following three issues. Every Member of Congress needs to hear from a librarian about these three issues over the August recess.

Messages

SKILLS Act

In June, the SKILLS Act was introduced by Senators Jack Reed (D-RI) and Thad Cochran (R-MI) and by Representatives Raul Grijalva (D-AZ) and Vernon Ehlers (R-MI). This legislation is critical to the future of school library media specialists. To get the SKILLS Act language into the No Child Left Behind reauthorization bill, we need more co-sponsors immediately! Please contact your Representative and Senators and ask them to co-sponsor the SKILLS Act. The House bill is H.R. 2864 and the Senate bill is S. 1699.

On Thursday, August 2, Representatives Raul Grijalva (D-AZ) and Vernon Ehlers (R-MI) sent a Dear Colleague letter asking Representatives to co-sponsor H.R. 2864.

Talking Points

- Only about 60 percent of our school libraries have a full-time, state certified school library media specialist on staff.

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- With limited funding and an increased focus on school performance, administrators are trying to stretch dollars and cut funds across various programs to ensure that maximum resources are dedicated to improving student academic achievement.
- Because NCLB does not highlight the direct correlation between competent school library media specialists and increased student academic achievement, library resource budgets are increasingly being used to mitigate the effects of budgetary shortfalls.
- Multiple studies have affirmed that there is a clear link between school library media programs that are staffed by an experienced school library media specialist and student academic achievement.

Summary: Strengthening Kids' Interest in Learning and Libraries (SKILLs) Act

Elevates the Qualifications of School Library Media Specialists

- Defines highly qualified school library media specialists as those who have a bachelor's degree and obtained full state certification as a school library media specialist or passed the State teacher licensing examination, with state certification in library media in such State.

Encourages the Hiring of Highly Qualified School Library Media Specialists in Our Nation's School Libraries

- Requires school districts, to the extent feasible, to ensure that every school within the district employs at least one highly qualified school library media specialist; and
- Establishes as a state goal that there be at least one highly qualified school library media specialist in every public school no later than the beginning of the 2010-2011 school year.

Amends Title II of the No Child Left Behind Act to Include School Library Media Specialists

- Broadens the focus of training, professional development, and recruitment activities to include school library media specialists; and
- Enhances the skills, including those related to information literacy, of school library media specialists to improve their student academic achievement.

Reauthorizes and Strengthens the Improving Literacy through School Library program of the No Child Left Behind Act

- Ensures that funds will serve elementary, middle, and high school

students;

- Requires books and materials to be appropriate for and engage the interest of students in all grade levels and students with special learning needs, including English language learners; and
- Expands professional development to include information literacy instruction appropriate for all grade levels, an assessment of student literacy needs, the coordination of reading and writing instruction across content areas, and training in literacy strategies in all content areas.

Arguments For SKILLS Act

- Across the United States, research has shown that students in schools with good school libraries learn more, get better grades, and score higher on standardized test scores than their peers in schools without libraries.
- Long regarded as the cornerstone of the school community, school libraries are no longer just for books. Instead, they have become sophisticated 21st century learning environments offering a full range of print and electronic resources that provide equal learning opportunities to all students, regardless of the socio-economic or education levels of the community – but only when they are staffed by 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.
- A substantial body of research since 1990 shows a positive relationship between school libraries and student achievement. The research studies show that school libraries can have a positive impact on student achievement – whether such achievement is measured in terms of reading scores, literacy, or learning more generally.
- A school library program that is adequately staffed, resourced, and funded can lead to higher student achievement regardless of the socio-economic or educational levels of the community.

Appropriations

- If you see your legislator this recess, tell them how important LSTA and Improving Literacy Through School Libraries is to your library patrons and the students in your school. LSTA and the Improving Literacy Through School Libraries program provide critical funding for libraries of all kinds nationwide. Only by including \$226.18 million for LSTA and \$100 million for the Improving Literacy Through School Libraries program in the Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations bill will we ensure that library patrons of all ages have sufficient access to library and information services, support recruiting and educating the next generation of librarians, and provide libraries

the resources they need to improve literacy skills and academic achievement.

- In April, 44 Senators signed on to a letter to the Senate Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee supporting \$226.18 million for LSTA and \$100 million for the Improving Literacy Through School Libraries program. If your Senator signed the letter please thank them for their efforts. Signers included Reed, Collins, Whitehouse, Mikulski, Feingold, Rockefeller, Baucus, Durbin, Menendez, Kohl, Feinstein, Akaka, Schumer, Stabenow, Kennedy, Cantwell, Sanders, Wyden, Lincoln, Boxer, Pryor, Bayh, Snowe, Clinton, Leahy, Dodd, Smith, Kerry, Tester, Lieberman, Brown, Levin, Klobuchar, Biden, Burr, Bingaman, Bill Nelson, Obama, Cardin, Sununu, Casey, Carper, McCaskill, and Landrieu.
- If you don't have a chance to see your legislator, have a letter waiting for them when they return to Washington, DC on September 4.

Loan Forgiveness for Librarians

In July, Congress passed FY 2008 budget reconciliation legislation that would cut subsidies for student loan lenders and use the savings to increase grants to low income students. The difference between the bills (H.R 2669 and S.1762) must be worked out by a conference committee of members from both chambers before the start of the new federal fiscal year on October 1.

Contact your Senators and Representative to tell them you support the House language. The legislation pays for itself by reducing federal subsidies paid to lenders in the college loan industry by \$19 billion. It also includes \$750 million in federal budget deficit reduction. The bill would provide up to \$5,000 in loan forgiveness for those serving the country in critical areas. Qualifying areas of employment would include librarians.



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