

ALA American Library Association

January 21, 2016

Ms. Deborah Spitz
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue SW, Room 3E306
Washington, DC 20202

Docket ID: ED-2015-OESE-0130

Dear Ms. Spitz:

On behalf of the American Library Association (ALA), thank you for the opportunity to provide recommendations on implementing programs under Title I of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

The mission of ALA, the oldest and largest library association in the world, is “to provide leadership for the development, promotion and improvement of library and information services and the profession of librarianship in order to enhance learning and ensure access to information for all.” The mission of the ALA division focused on school libraries, the American Association of School Librarians, is “to empower leaders to transform teaching and learning”.

School libraries are a safe learning environment where all students have equal and equitable access to learning, support, and information for personal and educational purposes. As poverty rates across America remain high, our schools must serve as an “equalizer” to provide all students with equal and equitable access to the resources, support and instruction necessary to succeed academically and become productive and engaged citizens in a democratic society. Research confirms that effective school library programs are a wise investment for our children’s education and workforce readiness.

ALA has been disheartened by a lack of support for effective school library programs and comprehensive literacy instruction at the federal, state, and local levels over the years. Data¹ available from the Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) highlights the lack of support for too many of our students in thousands of schools across the country. NCES data reveals that approximately 8,830 public schools across the nation do not have a school library and for those schools that do have a library, nearly 17,000 schools do not have a full or part-time state-certified school librarian on staff.

ALA was pleased to support the bipartisan conference agreement on S. 1177, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), and we are encouraged that the new law (P.L. 114-95) recognizes the key role effective school library programs play in improving student academic achievement and ensuring that students are adequately prepared for college and success in the workforce. ALA worked in a bipartisan manner with Members on both sides of the aisle, and in both chambers, during the authorization process to include provisions under ESSA in support of effective school library programs. ALA is proud of the fact that many of the provisions related to effective school

¹ For additional information on NCES 2011-2012 data, see http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sass/tables_list.asp#2012.

library programs were added through an amendment offered by Senators Reed (D-RI) and Cochran (R-MS), which was adopted by a unanimous vote of 98-0 in the Senate. ESSA includes the following provisions related to effective school library programs:

- Title I LEA Plan includes new provisions related to 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.
- Authorizes 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.”
- Uses of funds under Title II, Part B, Subpart 2 (Literacy Education for All, Results for the Nation) include coordination with, and professional development for school librarians.
- Title II, Part B, Subpart 2, Section 2226 continues activities currently implemented through appropriations legislation and authorizes Innovative Approaches to Literacy (IAL) that would promote literacy programs in low income communities. Funds are authorized for the development and enhancement of effective school library programs, which may include providing professional development for school librarians, books, and up-to-date materials to high need schools.
- Eligible entities under Title II, Part B, Subpart 2, Section 2232 (Presidential and Congressional Academies for American History and Civics) include libraries.
- Authorizes states to use funds to assist LEAs with identifying and addressing technology readiness needs, including Internet connectivity and access to school libraries under Title IV, Part A (Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants).

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, ALA 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) [LEA Plan Provisions] of ESSA.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide recommendations; please do not hesitate to contact me at (202) 628-8410, if there is anything ALA can do to assist with implementation of ESSA.

Sincerely,



Executive Director of the Washington Office
American Library Association