

March 6, 2015

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
154 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Re: Building Effective School Libraries into the Elementary and Secondary Education Act

Dear Ranking Member Murray:

The undersigned are united in our dedication to giving every American school child every possible advantage to compete successfully in our global economy. We also believe strongly that that goal cannot be met without providing our children access to effective school library programs. Accordingly, we are writing to respectfully request that you incorporate the Strengthening Kids' Interest in Learning and Libraries (or "SKILLS") Act, currently Section 1251 of S. 312, into legislation before your Committee to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

For our society and our economy to succeed, our schools must serve as "equalizers" that provide all students with access to the resources and instruction they need to thrive academically and to become productive and engaged citizens. That goal cannot be met without strong, professionally staffed school libraries. In too many schools across the nation, however, school library budgets and school librarian positions are being cut. Including the SKILLS Act in ESEA will meaningfully contribute to reversing that crippling counterproductive trend.

Recent data available from the Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)¹ highlights the breadth and depth of the problem, and by extension how many millions of students are being disadvantaged. Specifically, NCES data reveals that approximately 8,830 public schools across the nation do not have a school library and, among those that do, nearly 17,000 additional schools do not have a full or part-time state-certified school librarian on staff.

Accordingly, we strongly support the bipartisan SKILLS Act (S. 312) – which was introduced by Senators Reed (D-RI), Cochran (R-MS), and Whitehouse (D-RI) on January 29, 2015 – to help ensure that all students graduating from America's schools will be adequately prepared for college and success in the workforce. Specifically, we ask that you include Section 1251 (Improving Literacy and College and Career Readiness through Effective School Library Programs) of the SKILLS Act in your ESEA reauthorization bill to provide dedicated funding for:

- Staffing of all school libraries with state-certified or licensed school librarians;
- Up-to-date books, materials, equipment and technology (including broadband);
- The development of information, digital and research literacy;

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

- Professional development in the acquisition of digital literacy skills and literacy instruction that is appropriate for all grades;
- Activities that foster increased collaboration among school librarians, teachers and administrators; and
- Providing students access to school libraries during non-school hours, including the hours before and after school, on weekends and during vacation periods.

We stand ready to assist you and your staffs, and the Committee, to achieve these critical objectives. Please do not hesitate to contact Emily Sheketoff, Executive Director of the American Library Association's Washington Office (esheketoff@alawash.org or 202-628-8410), if you have any questions or need any additional information.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

American Association of School Librarians

Magnet Schools of America

American Library Association

National Alliance of Black School Educators

American Federation of Teachers

National Coalition for Literacy

Council for Opportunity in Education

National Education Association

Education Industry Association

National Superintendents Roundtable

FED ED

School Social Work Association of America

Learning Disabilities Association of America