

**Testimony to the New Jersey State Board of Education
On Amendments to N.J.A.C. 6A:8, Standards and Assessment
Presented by Christina Cucci, NJASL President-Elect
Certified School Library Media Specialist
Reynolds School, Upper Saddle River, NJ
August 1, 2018**

Good afternoon, President Arcelio Aponte and Members of the State Board of Education. My name is Christina Cucci, President-Elect of the New Jersey Association of School Librarians (NJASL). This testimony is on behalf of the 1000 members of NJASL, the professional organization of school librarians in our state and the 1.37 million students in New Jersey Public Schools who deserve to have access to state-of-the-art school libraries staffed by highly trained school library media specialists.

NJASL is happy to see the proposed amendments to N.J.A.C. 6A:8, Standards and Assessment and feel that those changes will benefit students and staff. Our organization participated in one of the Statewide Assessment Listening Tours and we were happy to provide input and thank the NJ Department of Education for hearing the specific concerns of school library media specialists. Due to the length of testing times, as well as the the school library being used as a testing site, the school library is often closed to students and staff during the entire testing period. One of our members commented, “I feel that this test takes time away from actual learning. I am an examiner and spend the testing time away from my job. The Media Center is used as a testing center and for testing and makeups, so students are not be able to use the media center during those times.”

The NJ Department of Education’s recommendations, including shorter testing times for all tests, and fewer required high school tests, are considerate to the needs of students, and show concern for parents, teachers, school library media specialists, school administrators, staff and other community members. The NJ Department of Education staff who organized these events, presented at the events and then compiled the data were thorough and efficient in their approach. It truly was a yeoman’s task and they rose to the occasion.

There are a number of benefits for students resulting from these recommended changes. Due to the shorter testing times and fewer HS tests, school libraries will be open and available for students. Certified school library media specialists contribute to the academic learning of students in many ways including teaching students how to learn, to think critically, nurturing creativity and providing the resources and support to succeed. Additionally, SLMS work with every student in the building as well as providing support to teachers. Numerous research studies have confirmed that school library programs, staffed by qualified school librarians, have a positive impact on student academic achievement (Student Success).

During the July 11 State Board of Education meeting, the NJ Commissioner of Education spoke of how the changes would reduce unnecessary burdens and disruption to the educational process

and provide authentic learning opportunities for students to be college and career ready. School library media specialists have the expertise and credentials to help prepare students with those college and career readiness skills. In a statement from New Jersey's academic library association, "*We [college and university librarians] 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*" (*College/Career Prep*). Less testing time and fewer HS tests will provide for more academic research. Additionally, this was also evidenced by one of the comments from an NJASL member, "No one is doing research or independent reading because they are busy preparing or taking these tests".

NJASL surveyed its members to learn the impact of statewide assessment testing on school libraries and their students. Member comments are listed in Appendix A. One student, a transfer student asked his SLMS if book checkout was another test.

"I had a transfer student ask me on their first day of book checkout whether this was another test. They had had so many computer assessments in the first week of school that he just assumed this was another test. The student was completely serious. It was a fifth grader."

Other comments lamented the amount of time that the library is closed due to testing as well as how students miss library time.

They miss the opportunity for independent reading and research.

What is the purpose of testing? To provide authentic opportunities for learning? How much more authentic learning is the opportunity for students to be able to select books for independent reading and research?

NJASL is excited to have the opportunity to showcase how school libraries provide the ultimate connection between the academic disciplines represented in the school curriculum and the instructional program. The recommended changes to statewide assessment as listed in Amendments to N.J.A.C. 6A:8, Standards and Assessment will be a benefit to the students of New Jersey and allow school library media specialists to meet the mission of the New Jersey Association of School Librarians:

Every student in every school in New Jersey is served by a certified full time school library media specialist and has access to the technology and other resources needed. All students are empowered to achieve success through inquiry-based, collaborative school library programs led by credentialed school library media specialists. These professionals are recognized as educational leaders and indispensable resources in their school communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on this important topic.

Respectfully submitted,

Christina Cucci, President-Elect

New Jersey Association of School Librarians

presidentelect@njasl.org

(973)865-0094

Appendix A Comments on current assessment, PARCC from NJASL members:

I have less money to purchase learning resources for school community, because testing is a required, but unfunded, expense. I have less time with students to teach them the information skills (related to research, communication, digital citizenship, privacy...) they will need throughout their lives, because teachers are afraid that if their students are not well prepared to take the test, their own evaluations will suffer, so it seems that the students spend more time on assessments and less time learning. All of the students' assessments seem to be set up to provide practice with PARCC-like testing - both in content and in assessment methods. And they have required Benchmark tests, SGO tests, midterm and final exams, and weeks of PARCC.

I feel that it does not leave enough room for important information literacy skills to be taught and practiced. I also see that it takes away from students' library time.

Students miss the use of the library

In my position, I am left without technology for a few weeks due to testing. Since the majority of Middle School students that I teach have ongoing projects on Google Classroom or through other programs, we have to halt plans for a few weeks or I have to shuffle to find computers or chromebooks to borrow. Also, from student feedback, students feel there are very few questions that measure their academic progress.

My space and devices are commandeered for almost two weeks, making the resources and infolit lessons unavailable to students and staff the entire time. For weeks leading up to the test I teach parcc prep. I help teachers learn the accessnext system, and then administer the test, as well. All this takes away time & energy at one of the busiest times of the school year, when classes should be learning research skills.

I am not able to be in the Library Media Center when testing is in progress. This means I must move all resources, prepare lessons, materials and everything needed for at least three weeks to another location in the building. I am not able to service our students and staff. All duties must be done before or after school. This is an extremely busy time of year as well as preparing SGOs, and other requirements for the state. Overall, our every aspect and duty of the role of the Library Media Specialist is affected during this testing period. Students are suffering the most!

I had a transfer student ask me on their first day of book checkout whether this was another test. They had had so many computer assessments in the first week of school that he just assumed this was another test. The student was completely serious. It was a fifth grader.

I have to have a substitute teach my library classes and my library has to be closed to accommodate test takers.

Children are drained after testing and not able to complete normal activities.

Because I am used as a test administrator, the library media center is either locked or staffed by a sub and used as a holding tank for displaced classes during testing.

Appendix B References

“College/Career Prep”, New Jersey Library Association,
<http://unlockstudentpotential.org/index.php/college-prep/>. Accessed 7/24/2018.

“Student Success.” American Library Association.
<http://ilovelibraries.org/school-libraries/school-libraries-and-student-success>, Accessed 7/24/2018.