

Testimony to State Board of Education
Presented by Christina Cucci, SLMS
NJASL President
Reynolds School, Upper Saddle River, NJ
Sept. 12, 2018

Good afternoon, President Aponte and Members of the State Board of Education. My name is Christina Cucci, and I am the proud President of the New Jersey Association of School Librarians. This testimony is on behalf of the 1,000 professional members in our state, and the 1.37 million students in New Jersey schools. NJASL is thankful for the opportunity to present to the state board of education in this open testimony format.

The theme of my testimony today is that all americans need libraries, and to bring this to a more local level, we believe all NJ schools need a certified school library media specialist.

A school library media specialist is like the heartbeat of the school. School librarians create a learning space where students develop critical thinking. School librarians establish strong relationships with other teachers so that learning extends beyond the classroom. School librarians create a culture of reading, and foster a love of literacy, so that students become lifelong empowered learners. We are visionary instructional leaders who seek to open equitable resources in a safe and stimulating environment. A certified school librarian transforms learning.

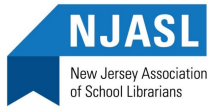
According to the current NJ administrative code:

N.J.A.C. 6A:13-2.1(h) Standards Based Instruction

(h) All school districts shall provide library-media services that are connected to classroom studies in each school building, including access to computers, district-approved instructional software, appropriate books including novels, anthologies and other reference materials, and supplemental materials that motivate students to read in and out of school and to conduct research. **Each school district shall provide these library-media services under the direction of a certified school library media specialist.**

Unfortunately, many NJ schools do not have a Certified School Library Media Specialist on staff. NJASL is concerned about an alarming trend happening in many schools across the state. Many districts are not hiring a school library media specialist to manage library programs. In the last year, NJASL has been notified of school library positions being filled by: technology coaches, classroom teachers, Language Arts teachers, substitute teachers, STEM teachers, basic skills teachers, among other professional who lack a certificate to be a School Library Media Specialist. This is like trying to fit a square peg in a round hole. These staff members don't have the specialized training and certification to be a school library media specialist.

SLMS complete rigorous specialized training in literacy and media literacy skills. We have the expertise to curate and filter digital resources for students, which is critical with the availability of raw information at your fingertips. Additionally, we prepare students to achieve academic

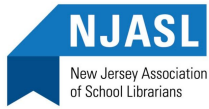


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success post-graduation by shaping them into successful lifelong learners. These competencies can not be supported by someone who doesn't have our certification. This would be like asking the new Giants head coach, Pat Shurmur, to run a few plays for quarterback Eli Manning, in Sunday's game versus the Cowboys.

NJASL has developed an action plan to try to avert this practice. Our organization has found strategic partners to coordinate our future advocacy efforts. We are working closely with the New Jersey Library Association and have found sponsors for several pieces of legislation. For example, A132 would require an Information Literacy curriculum for students in grades K-12. In fact, I'd like to include a letter from both the American Library Association and the American Association of School Librarians, as an [addendum to this testimony](#). This letter, extends support from our national organizations, asking the Board of Education to include information literacy skills in its academic standards. All of these efforts help to inform stakeholders of the value that a Certified School Library Media Specialist adds to every school.

In conclusion, I'd like to share a quote from Caroline Kennedy, author, attorney, and current US Ambassador to Japan. She is also an advocate for both school libraries and librarians. "A great school library becomes the heart of the school and the center of the larger community. A great school librarian understands that kids can't succeed without the support of parents, teachers, business partners, and 21st-century research and writing skills."



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Morehart, Phil. "An Interview with Caroline Kennedy." *American Libraries Magazine*, 11 Oct. 2016, americanlibrariesmagazine.org/2013/03/01/an-interview-with-caroline-kennedy/.

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September 12, 2018

Lamont Repollet, Ph.D., Commissioner
Board of Education Members
New Jersey Department of Education
P.O. Box 500
Trenton, NJ 08625

Dear Commissioner Repollet, President Aponte, and Members of the Board:

Students today must skillfully navigate a complex information landscape to succeed in school, in the workplace, and in society. To ensure that all of New Jersey's students have equitable opportunities to develop those critical skills, we ask the Board of Education to include information literacy in its academic standards.

New Jersey's administrative code requires that students receive library media services, and that same code calls for standards-based instruction.¹ In addition, it identifies information literacy instruction as one of the key responsibilities of certified school librarians,² also known in New Jersey as school library media specialists. As the schools' only certified information professionals, school librarians are uniquely qualified to lead implementation of a statewide information literacy standard.

The good news is that many schools in New Jersey already have exemplary school libraries led by librarians who deliver standards-based instruction via evidenced-based best practices. Further, the New Jersey Association of School Librarians is your state-based professional organization that supports school librarians in identifying and sharing those best practices.

*National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries*³ provide the framework upon which those librarians offer equitable access to resources and embed information literacy across the curriculum for authentic, inquiry-based, personalized learning experiences. The framework aligns with content area and technology standards and facilitates students' examination of diverse perspectives and experiences; collaboration towards individual and common goals; curation of resources for personal and academic growth; reflective practices that nurture exploration and innovation; and capable and ethical use of information technologies.

By adding information literacy to New Jersey's state standards, you are making a commitment to equity for all students, where exemplary practices become the norm. Consider a recent Stanford University study in which more than 80% of middle school students and nearly 80% of high school students struggle to verify the credibility of sources.⁴ This and other studies underscore the fact that digital natives do not develop information literacy without focused instruction and practice.

¹ <https://www.state.nj.us/education/code/current/title6a/chap13.pdf>

² <https://www.state.nj.us/education/educators/license/endorsements/2855CE.pdf>

³ <https://standards.aasl.org/>

⁴ <https://stacks.stanford.edu/file/druid:fv751yt5934/SHEG%20Evaluating%20Information%20Online.pdf>

Equally important, a commitment to information literacy is a commitment to New Jersey's educational, economic, and civic future: one where residents have the skills and dispositions necessary to continue learning, independently and collaboratively; to be adaptable, capable and ethical curators of information; and to be engaged and informed community members. We applaud the Board of Education's promise to graduate New Jersey students who are prepared for 21st century life and careers. Your school librarians are vital partners in that effort. We urge you to adopt an information literacy standard so that the promise of a New Jersey education can be fully realized.

Sincerely,



Loida Garcia-Febo, President
American Library Association



Kathryn Roots Lewis, President
American Association of School Librarians

cc: Christina Cucci, President, New Jersey Association of School Librarians
Leah Wagner, President, New Jersey Library Association