



August 29, 2017

Mike Morath
Commissioner of Education
Texas Education Agency
1701 N. Congress Avenue
Austin, Texas, 78701

Dear Commissioner Morath,

The Texas Library Association's (TLA) almost 7,000 members, including the 4,000 members of our EC-12 school library division, the Texas Association of School Librarians (TASL), share your commitment to improving outcomes for all Texas students.

ESSA implementation is an opportunity to leverage the benefits and resources of the largest classroom on campus, the school library, and the expertise of school librarians to support TEA's strategic priorities and strengthen the academic outcomes for more than five million Texas public school students.

Certified librarians are highly qualified, experienced educators. They must have a master's degree, be certified teachers with at least two years of teaching experience, and pass a state examination on school library and information content areas to obtain a School Librarian certificate. While many times individuals assigned to work in libraries are referred to as "librarians", only an individual who meets these qualifications is a certified librarian with the expertise and experience to positively impact student achievement and campus performance.

These valuable educators not only provide individual and classroom instruction to students at all grade levels, and to parents and other community members - they support and partner with classroom teachers and administrators on curriculum development, professional development, and literacy initiatives. Librarians are critical partners in the integration of technology as a tool to enhance instruction and engage students. Additionally, school librarians are experts in information, and in the curation and appropriate use of open educational resources.

ESSA specifically recognizes the key role effective school library programs play in improving student academic achievement and ensuring students are prepared for college and workforce success. However, the draft ESSA state plan does not include or reference school libraries at all.

We respectfully request that TEA specifically mention and include school libraries and librarians in the following sections of the draft consolidated plan for ESSA implementation in Texas:

A. Title I Part A: Improving Basic Programs Operated by Local Education Agencies

ESSA authorizes school districts to include in their plans how they will develop effective school library programs to provide students an opportunity to improve digital literacy skills and improve academic achievement.

viii (d) Resource Allocation Review

Include librarians in the planning process for Title I funding to ensure every student has access to effective school library programs, which have been proven to have positive impacts on student achievement, digital literacy skills, college and career readiness, and campus climate and culture.



Recommendation:

- TEA review process should include whether or not the Local Education Agency (LEA) included development of an effective school library program in their plans for improvement
- Encourage districts to expand campus planning teams to include librarians

viii (e) Technical Assistance

Effective school library programs and librarians educate students and teachers from all grade levels and all content areas on a campus. They have unique and valuable insights into campus performance, talent needs, and areas for improvement.

Recommendation:

- TEA support and assistance to LEA's and campuses to help them evaluate campus performance and make strategic decisions about improvement (resource library, toolkits etc.) should include published research and information on the value of school libraries and librarians, and how to leverage the library program for improvement.
- Encourage districts to evaluate the contribution of their library programs as part of a schoolwide needs assessment.

viii (g) School Improvement Resources

The majority of Texas' public schools have a valuable resource right on their campus, the school library and librarian.

Recommendation:

- Include how schools will leverage their school library programs to improve campus performance as criteria for awarding formula and competitive grants for school improvement to LEAs with comprehensive support schools.

D. Title II, Part A: Supporting Effective Instruction

ESSA includes provisions that authorize states and districts to use grant and sub-grant funds to support instructional services provided by school library programs under Title II.

4. Improving Skills of Educators

School librarians are especially suited to attend conferences and workshops off campus and bring their learning back to other professionals. School librarians are also experienced professional development providers for their campuses, and are best equipped to see the benefits of new techniques, strategies, and technologies potentially applied to entire campuses, versus one department, grade level, or classroom.

Recommendation:

- Specify that Title II funds may be used for professional development for school librarians, in addition to teachers, principals, and school leaders.

F. Title IV, Part A: Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants

ESSA authorizes states to use funds to assist school districts in providing school librarians and other school personnel with the knowledge and skills to use technology effectively, including effective integration of technology, to improve instruction and student achievement.



2. Awarding Subgrants

School librarians, with intimate knowledge of the entire campus, are uniquely positioned to assist in determining local needs for block grants, and for seeing where departments, grade levels, and other divisions within a school or district can leverage partnerships to have an increased impact on instruction and student achievement.

Recommendation:

- As part of the grant process, educate local school districts that these funds may be used to support student access to school libraries that are staffed by a certified school library media specialist.

In conclusion, ESSA recognizes the key role effective school library programs play in improving student academic achievement. These programs, led by school librarians, provide essential and equitable learning opportunities for all students; play a crucial role in bridging digital and socioeconomic divides; and offer an approachable personalized learning environment necessary to prepare every child for success in college, a career or the military.

The current draft consolidated state plan does not address or mention school library programs or school librarians. Therefore, we request that school library programs and school librarians be intentionally embedded in the state plan along with teachers, principals and other school leaders.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ling Hwey Jeng".

Ling Hwey Jeng
President, Texas Library Association

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Pat Smith".

Patricia Smith
Executive Director, Texas Library Association