



illinois school library media association

P.O. Box 1326
Galesburg, IL 61402-1326
Phone: 309-341-1099
Fax: 309-341-2070
Email:
execsecretary@islma.org

August 15, 2016

Illinois State Board of Education
James T. Meeks, Chairman
Tony Smith, Ph.D., Superintendent
100 N. 1st Street
Springfield, IL 62777

Re: Key Findings for ESSA

Dear Chairman Meeks and Superintendent Smith:

On behalf of the Illinois School Library Media Association (ISLMA), thank you for the opportunity to comment on ISBE *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) Listening Tour Report. The newly formed ISLMA ESSA Task Force Committee is writing this letter to alert the Illinois State Board of Education that the ESSA Key Findings document of June 16, 2016, failed to include the importance of effective school library programs to student success in Illinois. In advance of ISBE's Statewide Listening Tour Two, we want to share our observations and recommendations.

School libraries are unique spaces within every learning community that provide equitable access to resources for all students. School libraries in Illinois provide essential access to print and digital resources. Instruction provided by certified school librarians throughout Illinois results in students who read, analyze and are able to navigate information for lifelong learning. From digital literacy and citizenship, to instilling a love and comprehension of literature and nonfiction text; school libraries reach all students and staff in a school community. Therefore, adding provisions to ensure the success of Illinois school library programs is crucial.

Effective school libraries have proven to boost student achievement. The 2003 Illinois study, "Powerful Libraries Make Powerful Learners," states that school libraries that have larger, more current collections show a 11-13% increase in student test scores. All students in Illinois should have access to current, high-quality print and digital resources appropriate to their reading level. Provisions to Title I of ESSA should include effective school library programs to ensure access to these essential resources, especially in schools of high-need. School libraries provide personalized learning support that leads to increased student engagement and achievement.

School librarians are licensed educators leading in print and digital literacy instruction, the latest technology instructional practices, and each buildings' curriculum. School librarians use Student Learning Objectives to show student growth and partner with teachers to provide targeted instruction.

Moreover, school libraries, led with the expertise of a school library professional, increase access to personalized, rigorous, technology-based learning experiences. Not only do school librarians provide this environment and instruction during the day, but could also provide specialized library programs after school hours. Expanding library access in any capacity has shown to impact student academic achievement as shown in the Illinois Study. School libraries would benefit from funding for this type of student enrichment through Title IV through Part A. The 21st century school library reaches students in a 24/7 atmosphere through technology and innovative programming.

Schools that have fully staffed, effective library programs critically support student achievement in Illinois. The Illinois School Library Media Association strongly urges that ISBE use ESSA Implementation to strengthen school libraries across Illinois. Please consider adding these school library and school librarian-focused policy recommendations to the final Illinois ESSA Implementation Plan:

1. Endorse adequately staffed libraries, including a state-certified school librarian who is an instructional leader and teacher;
 - a. Supports the development of digital learning, participatory learning, inquiry learning, technology literacies, and information literacy;
 - b. Supports, supplements, and elevates the literacy experience through guidance and motivational reading initiatives;
 - c. Has up-to-date digital and print materials and technology, including curation of openly licensed educational resources; and
 - d. Provides regular professional development and collaboration between classroom teachers and school librarians.

2. Maximize use of federal funding through grant programs like Innovative Approaches to Literacy (IAL), LEARN Act funding, and the Block Grant to create, enhance, and maintain effective school library programs, and provide robust professional development opportunities to school librarians across our state.

Thank you for the opportunity to make our recommendations concerning this important legislation. You can contact the Illinois School Library Media Association at:

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Galesburg, IL 61402-1326
Telephone: 309-341-1099 Fax: 309-341-2070
Email: execsecretary@islma.org

Sincerely,

Patti Fleser, ISLMA President, and
The ISLMA ESSA Task Force

CC: Illinois Library Association; Reaching Across Illinois Libraries System (RAILS), Heartland Library System, Illinois State Library