



illinois school library media association

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Dear Superintendent Smith, Chairman Meeks and Members of the Illinois State Board of Education,

The Illinois School Library Media Association (ISLMA) is writing on behalf of our 785 members, representing school librarians all across Illinois and from every type of K-12 institution. We are pleased to offer the following recommendations to ISBE concerning the ESSA Draft Plan #1 (dated 25 August 2016), and in response to questions distributed at Stakeholder Listening Tour sites between September 6 and October 5, 2016. Thank you for soliciting stakeholder feedback to both specific questions and inviting comment on the draft policy points generally.

ISLMA publishes “Linking for Learning”, recognized by the Illinois State Library and the General Assembly as the definitive standards for school library media centers across the state. Throughout ISBE’s stakeholder engagement process, ISLMA members have reviewed the stated goals and proposed strategies for ESSA Implementation in our state and have returned comments on key action areas and the funding formula. Like all educators in Illinois, school librarians are concerned with the development of the Whole Child. As ISBE considers policies and funding formulas across the wide spectrum of ESSA Implementation, we’d like to highlight that:

- School Libraries promote and encourage well-rounded, collaborative, lifelong learners.
- The Library is the largest classroom in the school allowing children to explore interests, problem solve, and build information literacy skills.
- Licensed School Librarians provide a wide variety of programs for students to participate.
- Licensed School Librarians are trained to select high-quality materials and literature that support student interests as well as Common Core.
- Librarians are equipped to help students navigate digital media and become socially responsible users of information in our fast-paced world.
- Licensed school librarians help foster an appreciation of literature and a love of reading in our students.

Section 3 - ACCOUNTABILITY, SUPPORT, AND IMPROVEMENT FOR SCHOOLS

As ISBE considers ways to implement an accountability system that acknowledges meaningful differences between schools and addresses the success of all students as well as sub-groups of students, we encourage you to adopt accountability policies and processes that utilize effective school library programs and school librarians as drivers for success. An effective

school library program provides instruction designed to maximize student growth and progress, student academic achievement, and student progress in English language proficiency. Effective school library programs help close student performance gaps and increase post-secondary readiness. ISBE's goals of increasing graduation rates by providing comprehensive and rigorous instructional support across all grade levels and content areas should acknowledge and integrate school libraries and licensed librarians for their significant and sustained work supporting in student achievement.

3.1 School Accountability Measures

"Academic Indicators and School Climate"

An effective school library program provides instruction designed to maximize student growth and progress, student academic achievement, and student progress in English language proficiency. Effective school library programs help close student performance gaps and increase post-secondary readiness. ISBE's goals of increasing graduation rates by providing comprehensive and rigorous instructional support across all grade levels and content areas should acknowledge and integrate school libraries and librarians for their significant and sustained work in supporting student achievement.

Likewise, effective school library programs materially contribute to a welcoming, productive, supportive school climate; the school library is never just an empty room. Effective school library programs are under-recognized ways to address "school climate". They provide a safe haven for students with different learning styles and modalities. The school, with a library at its core, will help ISBE achieve its accountability goals. The school library program is an integral piece of the entire student experience: student behavior, social/emotional learning, school culture, and academic success.

At its most basic, ISLMA believes and understands that an effective school library program is more than just the room, and that a school climate that encourages the development of the whole child needs to have the right number of school librarians on staff and engaged as holistically across the curriculum and able to focus on all students and student groups. We believe that particular focus should be paid in the accountability system on an appropriate student to librarian ratio to fulfill this outcome. Furthermore, we believe in the equity of access and opportunity for each and every child in Illinois to be served by a licensed Library Information Specialist.

3.2 A Comprehensive Support and School Improvement

"Uniform statewide exit criteria"

An additional exit criteria for the statewide multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) that Illinois should look at is an evaluation of the Library Media program in ISLMA's "Linking for Learning" guidelines. First passed by the General Assembly in 1993 and updated every 5 years, these guidelines include the current and robust standards by which all Illinois school libraries can and should measure themselves. Colorado State Library and RSL Research Group fellow Keith Curry Lance has studied in numerous states, including Illinois, Colorado, and South Carolina and found that effective library media programs make powerful learners. ISLMA is in the process of conducting our next scheduled comprehensive review and update of "Linking for

Learning” to be published in 2017. We encourage ISBE to integrate these standards for school libraries into the MTSS approach.

3.3 A Allocation of School Improvement Resources

“Statewide Support Liaison”

ISLMA recommends that ISBE, as a component of its MTSS approach, dedicate a “statewide support liaison” who is specifically focused on identifying and applying for grant programs that improve, enhance, or extend effective school library programs, and likewise focus on identifying and applying for grant opportunities that empower school librarians with professional development and continuing education to better serve students, other faculty and staff, and school leadership.

“School Review Team”

ISLMA’s commitment to the integrity and outcomes of the school improvement process extends to our willingness to act as qualified and recognized library experts on school review teams. ISLMA thanks ISBE for considering an approach that integrates peer-to-peer support and looks forward to participating in this “Networked set of educators from peer schools and districts” for future success.

“Develop the state funding formula ... for comprehensive or targeted supports”

ISLMA recommends that ISBE utilize and implement the student support services provided by effective school library programs across all schools and districts, but with particular attention to underperforming schools. ISLMA knows from our evidence-based program guidelines and standards-based rubrics in “Linking for Learning” that school libraries help students become effective and efficient lifelong users and creators of ideas and information.

ISLMA recommends that the state formula for allotment of funds to schools identified for comprehensive support and correction include effective school libraries, and that ISBE specifically seek to access and utilize federal funds to support student achievement through provision in IAL (Innovative Approaches to Literacy) and LEARN that improve staffing, programs, collections, and instructional support services in those schools.

3.3 D Periodic Resource Allocation Review

As a component of ISBE’s multi-tiered system of support, ISLMA recommends that in the ‘planning year’, one of the audit criteria be based on our “Linking for Learning” guidelines to evaluate the effectiveness of school library programs.

ISBE’s “periodic resource allocation review” should include a specific review of grant funding sources that support and encourage effective school library programs and the instructional support services provided by school librarians.

ISBE should be aware now and in the future that school library programs are uniquely eligible for grant funding through multiple channels to address various gaps in literacy, technology, college and career readiness, and teacher quality.

Additional Comments on Section 3

As ISBE considers strategies for school improvement, the school librarian community wants to highlight a 2013 report from the National Center for Literacy Education (NCLE) which shows that when school librarians are highly involved leaders, they play a critical role in their schools through consistent and sustained collaboration with other educators. Significant new Title funding is becoming available through ESSA that would, if applied for and put to work by ISBE and LEAs, allow licensed librarians to focus on school improvement not only through direct student contact but also through professional development for all faculty members on information literacy and resources, instructional technology, and more. Collaboration among faculty and high quality professional development both play vital roles in the school improvement process. We recommend that ISBE adopt school improvement policies that recognize and support school librarians in our roles as teachers, co-teachers, and providers of instructional support for content area teachers.

Section 4 - SUPPORTING EXCELLENT EDUCATORS

In Section 4 of the Draft Plan, ISBE asked stakeholder for “Additional suggestions for ways Title II funds may be used in order to improve the skills of teachers, principals, or other school leaders in identifying students with specific learning needs.”

School librarians across the state ask that ISBE looks at new and extended sources of federal money - in addition to state and local funds - to help our school librarians realize the goal of supporting and improving educator effectiveness. In particular, we encourage ISBE to bundle up and apply for federal programs like Innovative Approaches to Literacy for high needs schools. New Title II monies are available for library programs, and our ESSA Plan should specifically encourage investments in academic and technology programs and services through effective school library programs.

The daily work of school librarians places them at the forefront of providing professional development to their educator colleagues. School librarians are professional development leaders within their buildings and communities. School librarians not only teach and develop students on a daily basis, but they also lead educators, administrators, and parents to new educational technology, new digital tools, and new digital resources. As a part of their role as professional development leaders, school librarians provide focused training and support of new school initiatives that incorporate new educational technology and digital resources. Being highly effective in the role of professional development leaders within schools requires funding for certified school librarians to continue with their own professional development endeavors.

ISBE is now authorized by ESSA to use funds to support the instructional services provided by “effective school library programs” (Title II, Part A). LEAs are authorized to use funds to support the instructional services provided by “effective school library programs” (Title II, Part A). ESSA requires local LEARN grants to provide high-quality professional development opportunities for specialized instructional support personnel, school librarians, paraprofessionals, and other program staff (Title II, Part B, Subpart 2). ESSA also authorizes all local grants for K-5 or 6-12 to provide time for literacy staff such as school librarians or specialized instructional support personnel to meet to plan comprehensive literacy instruction (Title II, Part B, Subpart 2).

ESSA now includes a new authorization of the Innovative Approaches to Literacy (IAL) program that provides dedicated funding to promote literacy programs in low-income communities. ESSA authorizes funds to be used for developing and enhancing effective school library programs, which may include providing professional development for school librarians, books, and up-to-date materials to high need schools. IAL is a Title II program and is focused on High Needs schools. Fundable projects may include providing professional development for school librarians, books, and up-to-date materials to high need schools.

ISLMA recommends that ISBE fully utilize federal grant sources like Innovative Approaches to Literacy and within LEARN Act grants. ISLMA encourages ISBE to fund literacy, ELL, digital literacy, and technology programs through the school library and with a school librarian as an effective way to directly address the achievement gap. New Title monies are also available for school librarians for Continuing Education and Professional Development. Please know that the school librarian community is an interested, invested, and eager partner in this project for years to come.

Section 5 - SUPPORTING ALL STUDENTS

In Section 5 of the draft ESSA Implementation Plan, ISBE asked stakeholders to provide “Additional suggestions for ways ISBE can use Title IV, Part A funds.”

ISLMA recommends that ISBE fully access and utilize Title IV, Part A funding available to effective school library programs through the Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants Program (SSAEG), the new flexible block grant program established in ESSA designed to allocate funding to nearly all school districts. SSAEG now allows ISBE to invest in academic and technology programs and services through effective school library programs. As a non-competitive grant program, SSAEG funding could kick-start library programs in otherwise at-risk schools.

Through ESSA, states are authorized to use funds to assist LEAs with identifying and addressing technology readiness needs, including Internet connectivity and access to school libraries. (Title IV, Part A) States are also authorized to use funds to assist LEAs in providing school librarians and media personnel with the knowledge and skills to use technology effectively, including effective integration of technology, to improve instruction and student achievement. (Title IV, Part A)

Licensed school librarians are in the ideal position to:

- 1) Provide all students with access to a well-rounded education;
- 2) Improve school conditions for student learning; and
- 3) Improve the use of technology in order to improve the academic achievement and digital literacy of all students.

As the Association of College and Research Libraries transitions to the Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education, it is the K-12 school library programs, directed by trained licensed librarians, that will prepare students to meet the information literacy standards

as college freshmen. The importance of digital and information literacy in preparation for post secondary is further illustrated by the multiple Common Core's College and Career Anchor standards that integrate digital and information literacy components. The licensed school librarian's collaborations across the curriculum bridge multiple literacies and impact multiple standards, including the Next Generation Science Standards and the International Society for Technology in Education.

With regard to the Illinois College and Career Ready Indicator Framework, the curricular requirements for successful Advanced Placement and Dual Credit courses require curricular partnerships with the school librarian whose specialized training in collating authoritative and pertinent resources is unmatched by any other professional in the school.

It should be noted that Innovative Approaches to Literacy (IAL) funding is currently underutilized by schools and districts across Illinois. LEARN Act and Block Grant (SSAEG) monies contain new federal program funds that libraries and librarians could access under ESSA. This further underscores the need for a library-specific statewide liaison for grant making as a component of MTSS.

ISLMA appreciates the opportunity to make these recommendations regarding the ESSA Draft Plan #1 (dated 25 August 2016), and in response to questions distributed at Stakeholder Listening Tour sites between September 6 and October 5, 2016. We encourage ISBE to include the Illinois School Library Media Associations "Linking for Learning" standards in our state ESSA Plan. "Linking for Learning" was first passed by the General Assembly in 1993 and is updated every 5 years. These guidelines include the current and robust standards by which all Illinois school libraries can and should measure themselves. ISLMA is in the process of conducting our next scheduled comprehensive review and update of "Linking for Learning" to be published in 2017. We encourage ISBE to integrate these standards for school libraries into the MTSS approach.

Our community of school librarians is invested in the future of education across our state. We share common goals with other educators, parents, and stakeholders wanting to address the academic and socio-emotional life of the child. We look forward to advancing those goals together.

Sincerely,

Patti Fleser
President, Illinois School Library Media Association.