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CONTACT: Jill D'Amico
347-200-7135
pr@njlamembers.org

PRESS RELEASE

NJLA LAUNCHES CAMPAIGN TO CALL FOR HIGHLY EFFECTIVE SCHOOL LIBRARY PROGRAMS

Study finds lack of investment in school libraries and librarians, directly impacting student achievement

The New Jersey Library Association (NJLA) has launched a campaign - [Unlock Student Potential](#) - bolstered by a groundbreaking study and statement, calling on New Jersey to support highly effective school library programs.

The study, which included a census of New Jersey School Library Media Specialists (SLMSs), was developed to coincide with the signing of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which cites School Librarians and school library programs as an essential component in education. SLMSs have completed training and certification requirements in both library science and education established by the NJ State Board of Education.

The report details recent research on the positive impact of certified teacher-librarians in school settings, including increased graduation and literacy rates, higher standardized test scores, and greater proficiency in subject areas.

"New Jersey has seen a frightening decline in certified school librarians," said Pat Tumulty, executive director of NJLA, "especially where students need them most."

According to the study, there are approximately 20% fewer SLMSs in New Jersey than there were in 2007-2008, and over 20% of high schools have no certified SLMS available to students. An overwhelming majority - 89% of respondents - cite Flat, Decreased or No Funding for their school libraries. This divestment directly impacts the potential for students to gain ground in information literacy, technology and critical thinking - the skills touted as necessary for success in college and beyond.

The study also reveals particularly dire situations for school libraries in major urban areas in New Jersey, where literacy rates are among the lowest and school reorganizations are common.

Based on survey results, NJLA, the New Jersey Association of School Librarians (NJASL) and VALE/New Jersey Chapter of the Association of College and Research Libraries as well as the College and University Section for NJLA (ACRL-NJ/NJLA-CUS) believe ESSA presents a critical opportunity to reinvest in school library programs, providing equity of access to information and resources.

"School librarians play a vital role in education to help students develop skills that will serve them throughout school, college and beyond," said James Keebler, co-author of the report and chair of the NJLA task force on Highly Effective School Library Programs. "In the Information Age, how can we not make dedicating resources for school library programs and information literacy a priority? Being able to find, evaluate and utilize information is at the very foundation of opportunity; an opportunity all New Jersey students should have regardless of their zip code."

SLMSs are a vital part of any successful school and are students' professional guides to credible, relevant, and high-quality resources vital to the development of information literacy and critical thinking.

VALE and ACRL-NJ/NJLA-CUS [released a statement](#) in support of the campaign this month, citing experience with incoming students who are unprepared for college-level research. The strain on information literacy resources creates a cause and effect that reaches well into adult life.

"All educators comprise a continuum of intervention necessary to help students gain essential career skills," reads the statement. "School media specialists have a well-regarded place on this continuum."

Recent education reform in New Jersey and changes in performance measures have made collaborative planning between SLMSs and subject teachers on information literacy instruction more difficult, and the impact has been far-reaching. According to NJASL, 49% of teachers report that student's access to technology is one of the "biggest barriers to incorporating technology into their teaching" because the students are "often not digitally literate enough."

A 2015 NJASL study found that 75% of students "have no idea how to locate articles and resources they need for their research," 60% "don't verify the accuracy or reliability of the information they find," and 44% "do not know how to integrate knowledge from different sources."

The full report can be viewed [online](#).

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About NJLA

Established in 1890, the NJLA is the oldest and largest library organization in New Jersey. It advocates for the advancement of library services for the residents of New Jersey, provides continuing education & networking opportunities for librarians and supports the principles of intellectual freedom & promotes access to library materials for all. Our office in Trenton, NJ provides services to over 1,700 members. For more information, go to www.njla.org.