

ALA American Library Association

November 19, 2009

The Honorable Dale Kildee
Chairman
Subcommittee on Early Childhood,
Elementary and Secondary Education
Committee on Education and Labor
2181 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Michael N. Castle
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Early Childhood,
Elementary and Secondary Education
Committee on Education and Labor
2101 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives Kildee and Castle:

On behalf of the American Library Association (ALA), I am writing in support of your efforts to improve literacy skills and respectfully ask that you include this letter as part of the official record for the Subcommittee's November 19, 2009, hearing to highlight the contributions of librarians and library programs in improving the literacy skills of children and young adults.

In general, librarians are professionally trained information experts who help improve the literacy skills of children and young adults. They regularly aid teachers in building students' research and information literacy skills; they possess deep knowledge of adolescent literacy development; and they are the absolute best resource for ensuring that schools have a wide variety of reading materials that students both need and want to read.

The public library is the community's center for early literacy coaching for parents and child-care providers. As you know, a child's brain develops at an incredible rate during the first three years of life. A child's early experiences with language contribute to healthy brain development.

The 1998 publication *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* was a landmark report that clearly established the link between providing a rich early literacy environment in the preschool years and later success in school. After this publication, public librarians developed a program to develop children's reading skills based on six key pre-reading skills that children must have before they can learn to read: narrative skills, print motivation, vocabulary, phonological awareness, letter knowledge and print awareness. This model of service focuses on teaching the parents and caregivers how to foster early learning skills. This model of library service should be available to every community in a public library with a comprehensive materials collection.

Public librarians provide many other types of resources that support early childhood literacy: children's books that are suited to various ages and interests, story-time, parenting books that provide specific information and techniques for effective parenting skills, the latest research about brain development and learning; and trained librarians who can teach parents and caregivers the most effective ways to read to children.

Public librarians have embraced their responsibility to be the first literacy coach for parents and caregivers of all children, especially children in low-income families. Some services provided to these families include bookmobile and storytelling mobiles, story-time kits, early literacy classes for childcare providers, Head Start staff and parents. Bringing books to neighborhoods in communities without many books available is an important task for bookmobiles.

School librarians are the central teachers who know the school's curriculum and effective techniques necessary to cross disciplines and integrate information and technology literacy. They have collaboration skills for effective participation in the school improvement process through involvement in curriculum development, implementation and evaluation with individual educators and departmental committees, and are well-positioned to participate in the improvement of data-based assessment systems. Every school that hires a state-certified school library media specialist employs a staff member who possesses an advanced degree or state-level certification and experience in both reading and literacy, which is ideal for complementing the learning taking place in classrooms.

In schools, libraries are both the physical and virtual hubs of learning. They provide access to a wide variety of reading materials, as well as a real and virtual space for learning and exploration, to every student and faculty member in the building. Libraries are cost effective in that they are the single place that maintains a collection of a broad-range of reading material and learning resources. We know that children will learn to love reading if they have a wide selection of materials to choose from.

It's no wonder that research repeatedly shows that a well-funded and fully staffed school library with a state-licensed school librarian is an integral component of a student's education. Across the United States, studies have demonstrated that students in schools with good school libraries learn more, get better grades, and score higher on standardized tests than their peers in schools without such resources.

Accordingly, ALA is pleased that both the House and Senate versions of the LEARN Act (Literacy Education for All, Results for the Nation) contain various provisions to support libraries in the development and implementation of early learning through grade 12 literacy programs.

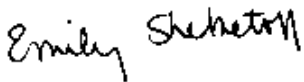
Specifically, we applaud provisions included in both bills that would:

- Improve reading, writing, and academic achievement for children and students by strengthening coordination among various programs and entities including public libraries;
- Authorize funds to be used to promote reading, library, and writing programs that provide access to engaging reading material in school and at home;
- Define an eligible entity to include a public library program;
- Define instructional staff to include librarians and library school media specialists; and
- Include a library media specialist on the State Literacy Team.

As the Congress moves forward in advocating for improved literacy among our children and young adults, ALA asks that you continue to recognize the integral role libraries and librarians play in achieving this goal.

Again, thank you for your focus on improving literacy skills, we look forward to working with you in completing this effort and successfully implementing the LEARN Act.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Emily Sheketoff". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Emily Sheketoff
Executive Director, ALA Washington Office