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On behalf of the Ohio Educational Library Media Association (OELMA) and our 440 members, I write in response to the Ohio Department of Education's request for stakeholders to comment on the development of our state ESSA Implementation Plan. Thank you for conducting a process that is inclusive of many voices and perspectives on the future of education policy in our state. OELMA's members work in every type of K-12 school and our recommendations come from our experience as educators in what is the largest classroom in any school building - the library.

The Ohio ESSA implementation priorities set by the Department of Education are clearly focused on student success, college and career readiness, and continuous improvement of our schools and districts. Ohio's school library media specialists affect student learning and success. Our work as school library media specialists in effective school library programs supports our state's key ESSA areas:

***Standards and Assessments***

In their instructional role, school library media specialists and their teaching counterparts collaborate to design and implement instruction using evidence-based curricula. Library media specialists are involved with classroom teachers in multiple ways to demonstrate student learning, including but not limited to: developing critical thinking skills; encouraging innovation and creativity; and promoting digital citizenship throughout the curriculum of the school or district. School library media specialists are an essential component in student readiness for college and career.

OELMA is undertaking a review of our "Library Content Guidelines" to ensure that they model the best practices of school librarianship as reflected in our national standards (American Association of School Libraries). We are focused on creating strong evidenced-based and outcomes-based school library standards in statute. The standards must reflect what students should know and be able to do in the current and future digital environment. We are engaged in this voluntarily. OELMA recommends that the Ohio Department of Education support this review and adopt OELMA's standards for effective school library programs.

Research done by *Project Information Literacy* reveals that 70 percent of first-year college students use *Wikipedia* to do research and 84 percent of them have difficulty in getting started with their research (Head, "Learning the Ropes: How Freshmen Conduct Course Research Once They Are in College"). These statistics suggest that high school graduates must have access to high quality instruction and resources to prepare for the rigors of research for college and career. School library media specialists empower students as creators while encouraging students' digital literacy skill development and improving their critical learning

skills. Information literacy - teaching students to recognize when information is needed as well as how to locate, evaluate, and use the needed information effectively, efficiently, and ethically are at the core of the school library instructional program.

## **Accountability**

An accountability system acknowledges meaningful differences between schools and addresses the success of all students as well as sub-groups of students. OELMA encourages the adoption of accountability policies and processes that use effective school library programs and school library media specialists as drivers of 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 (*School Libraries Work* available at <http://www.scholastic.com/slw2016>).

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 school library media specialists for their sustained work in support of student achievement.

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## **Educator Effectiveness**

School library media specialists promote personalized professional learning to support colleagues in their understanding of authentic instructional resources (e.g., databases) and the digital skills needed by students to be future-ready learners.

OELMA supports a comprehensive evaluation system that focuses on the personal and professional growth of all educators for the purpose of improved performance. Four years ago, OELMA undertook a systematic approach to developing the *Ohio SLMS/Teacher Librarian Evaluation Rubric* (<http://www.oelma.org/career-resources/ohio-slms-evaluation-rubric>) to meet the unique instructional and administrative roles of the school library media specialist. OELMA believes that Ohio, like Pennsylvania, should support its educators through the development of evaluation rubrics for all educational service personnel positions (e.g., school nurses, school social workers, etc.). If our goal as educators is to educate the whole child to ensure that every child succeeds then every educator must be given the opportunity to grow personally and professionally to improve their performance.

Ohio's school library media specialists ask that the Department of Education looks at new and extended sources of federal money, in addition to state and local funds, to help our school library media specialists realize the goal of supporting and improving educator effectiveness. In particular, we encourage the Ohio Department of Education to review, evaluate, and apply for federal programs such as Innovative Approaches to Literacy for high-needs schools.

In addition, 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 and 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 for the purpose of planning comprehensive literacy instruction (Title II, Part B, Subpart 2).

## **School Improvement**

As the Ohio Department of Education considers strategies for school improvement, the school library media specialist community would like to highlight a *2013 National Center for*

*Literacy Education* (NCLE) report. It 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. New Title funding through ESSA would allow licensed school library media specialists to focus on school improvement in two ways: 1) direct student contact; and 2) professional development for educators on informational literacy, instructional technology, and high-quality resources such as those provided by INFOhio. Educator collaboration and high-quality professional development are critical to the school improvement process. School improvement policies that recognize and support school library media specialists in our roles as teachers, co-teachers, and providers of instructional support for content-area teachers are recommended.

At the school and district level, the school library media specialist community strongly believes that equitable access to a highly effective school library program is vital to school improvement. Students need a library that contains resources that are current and relevant to Ohio's Learning Standards in a variety of formats, equipment, and technology, including broadband internet. To promote student inquiry, the library must provide space that encourages collaboration and creativity. To serve student learning, dedicated and sufficient annual funding is essential to support acquisition of materials, equipment, and professional development of the school library media specialists. Equitable access to a highly effective school library program is also afforded through a strong INFOhio network infrastructure that provides a high-quality digital library of resources that supports equity of access and deeper learning for all Ohio students.

### ***Student Supports***

Effective school library programs materially contribute to a welcoming, productive, and supportive school climate. The school library provides a safe haven for students with different learning styles and modalities. With a school library media specialist at the helm, the school library sits at the intersection of student behavior, social/emotional learning, school culture, and academic success.

An effective school library program provides an equitable learning environment for a diverse population of learners. With 24/7 access to technology and resources, the school library with a licensed school library media specialist at its core, provides a safe, inclusive, and respectful space for students to grow socially and intellectually.

Students benefit from trained support staff so that the school library media specialist can focus on the instruction and coaching of learners to provide equitable access at point of need. Flexible scheduling enables optimal collaboration and access for students and teachers. With the school library media specialist's expertise in information, media, and technology literacies, his instructional role can focus on coaching students on digital citizenship (including cyberbullying) and helping educators integrate digital citizenship strategies into their instruction and thereby improve school climate.

### ***Funding Formula***

Funds to develop and enhance effective school library programs are specifically authorized by ESSA. These may include providing professional development for school librarians, books, and up-to-date materials to high need schools. (Title II, Part B, Subpart 2, Section 2226). The Innovative Approaches to Literacy federal grant program supports high-quality programs designed to develop and improve literacy skills for children and students from birth through 12th grade in high-need local educational agencies (high-need LEAs, as defined in the Notice Inviting Applications (NIA)) and schools. As the Ohio Department of Education considers ways to supplement resources for Title I eligible schools, the school library media specialists community encourages you to apply for and use the IAL and related federal grants that support innovative programs that promote early literacy for young children, motivate older children to read, and

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increase student achievement by using school libraries as partners to improve literacy.

In addition, the LEARN Act and Student Support and Academic Enhancement Grants (Block Grant provides funding for K-12 literacy instruction (Title II, Part B, Subpart 2)) provide 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 )

As the Ohio Department of Education evaluates ways to add capacity for continuous improvement, the school library media specialist community recommends dedicating a portion of Title IV, Part A grant monies to fund a "School Library Consultant" FTE at ODE to support districts in implementation of effective school library programs, including using federal grant monies included in ESSA to provide effective school libraries with licensed staff.

The Ohio Educational Library Media Association appreciates the opportunity to make these recommendations regarding our state ESSA priorities. Our community of school library media specialists is invested in the future of education across our state. We share common goals with other educators, parents, and stakeholders who wish to address the academic and socio-emotional life of the child. We look forward to advancing those goals together.

If you need clarification or have questions, please direct them to OELMA President Liz Deskins at [liz.library@gmail.com](mailto:liz.library@gmail.com).

Sincerely,

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