

Jenifer Arnold, Denice Buchanan, Christine Santimaw

Dr. Thomas H. Martin

IST 618 – Summer 09

August 6, 2009

Potential Additions to the No Child Left Behind Act: SKILLs

Background

In 2001, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was instated to reform the nation's schools. The Act required a state certified teacher to be in every classroom and for states to set higher standards for their students, and, in turn, to be accountable for the students who did not meet these standards. Only 60% of school libraries have a full-time school library media specialist on staff who is state-certified. Yet, school librarians have the knowledge and abilities to help improve information literacy skills of students, thus helping them to succeed academically.

Today, more than ever, students need to be able to understand how information and resources are organized, how to locate and evaluate the information they find, learn how to complete effective research, and how to communicate their ideas in many formats, both verbally and electronically. Students are also expected to become independent learners, readers and listeners, and need to comprehend ethical, legal and social behaviors of their school and community. School library media specialist have the tools to aid and collaborate with classroom teachers so that students proficiency of these skills grow, in turn, helping schools to meet their states curriculum and testing standards as a whole.

During the first session of the 110th Congress, both the House and Senate took the beginning steps to ensure that all students have access to a certified school librarian. The Strengthening Kids' Interest in Learning and Libraries, or SKILLs Act (Sponsored by Senators Jack Reed (D-RI) and Thad Cochran (R-MS) and by Representatives Raul Grijalva (D-AZ) and Vernon Ehlers (R-MI)), proposed to do just that, but unfortunately did not pass.

As a whole, NCLB is an ambitious objective. However, the state certification requirement should not stop at the traditional classroom teacher, but should extend to school library media specialists. Congress recognized the increasingly important role that school librarians play in improving literacy skills and providing students with the skills necessary to succeed when the Improving Literacy Through School Libraries program was created as part of the NCLB (Title 1, Part B, Subpart 4, Sec. 1251.). This program provides funding for the improvement of school libraries by giving schools funds to purchase newer materials, integrate technology into instruction, and provide professional development opportunities for school library media specialists (U.S. Department of Education).

Perspective

This analysis is written from the perspective of three future school librarians. While the passing of the SKILLS Act would certainly benefit school librarians, it has the potential to benefit students more. As future educators, we hope to illustrate the unique ways certified school libraries can improve student learning and persuade legislators to reconsider the SKILLS Act.

Issue Questions

This paper will address the following three issues:

1. How will having a certified school librarian in all schools affect student performance and learning?
2. Should school librarians receive the same funding as their traditional classroom counterparts?
3. The act states that all libraries will include materials that are "appropriate for students."
What will the process be for determining appropriateness?

How will having a certified school librarian in all schools affect student performance and learning?

Certified librarians have the ability to enrich students' educational experience in many ways. First, their presence in a school has shown to increase student scores and achievement on state assessments. Certified librarians are also trained to collaborate with teachers and students in order to enhance students' classroom experiences. Finally, certified librarians are also teachers

that can guide students through the ever-changing landscape of information and technology.

Several recent studies have shown that there is a link between student performance on state exams and the presence of a certified school librarian. In the schools with certified librarians, students are able to achieve higher scores. In a survey of schools in Texas results showed that “at all educational levels over 10 percent more students in schools with librarians than in schools without librarians met minimum TAAS (Texas Assessment of Academic Skills) expectations in reading” (Smith, 14). Even more dramatic results can be seen in a study of Alaskan students. “Students in Alaska’s secondary schools with full-time teacher-librarians were almost twice as likely as those without teacher-librarians to score average or above-average on California Achievement Tests” (Scholastic, 10). In fact, the “School Libraries Work!” report cites 20 studies that show a clear correlation between student achievement and the presence of a certified school librarian. (Scholastic, 10).

Certified librarians are also in a position to collaborate with teachers in order to increase student knowledge and performance. In elementary schools especially, librarians have scheduled time to meet with students each week. Qualified librarians have the skills to design instruction that reinforces skills being taught in the classroom. “Teacher-librarians can help classroom teachers meet their need to improve student achievement in reading by co-teaching reading comprehension strategies” (Moreillon, 28). Certified librarians can use their expertise in lesson planning and modeling strategies to provide an additional aspect of support to struggling students. When libraries are staffed “by qualified professionals trained to collaborate with teachers and engage students meaningfully with information that matters in the real world, school libraries become sophisticated 21st-century learning environments that offer equal opportunities for achievement to all students” (Scholastic, 1).

In order for libraries to become the “sophisticated 21st century learning environments” mentioned above, students must be able to master information literacy skills that help them get the most out of what the library has to offer. There is no one in the K-12 environment better suited to teaching information literacy skills than a certified school librarian.

While classroom teachers are certified to teach lesson plans covered by subject areas such as math and social studies, librarians are certified to teach students how to find and evaluate

information related to any subject. As the amount of information available seems to increase exponentially, students need guidance. “The quantity of information available today holds the promise of increasing knowledge, but to untrained minds, the information landscape lacks distinction. The librarian sees the contours” (Robins, 18). Certified librarians can show students how to determine whether a source is reliable, how to construct a search strategy when looking for information and how to properly follow rules regarding intellectual property and copyright. Trained librarians are best equipped to arm students with the skills they will need when faced with the infinite possibilities offered by today’s information landscape.

Should libraries receive the same funding as their traditional classroom counterparts?

On average, a librarian’s schedule is such that she sees almost all students in any building, whether secondary or elementary. The school library is generally full of students and staff and is the “go to” area of the whole building. Undeniably, the library should receive more funding than classrooms. “Way too many students arrive at colleges and universities ill-equipped to conduct college level research because they graduated from high schools without receiving lifelong learning skills, such as research and information literacy” (Library,1). A librarian’s responsibilities have greatly increased. Looking at the scope of what is expected of a librarian, it becomes clear that libraries deserve funding that is at least equal, if not greater than, that which is received by their classroom counterparts.

This discussion of library funding is in no way meant to demean the importance of a teacher’s duties or responsibilities. It does mean to point out the myriad duties and responsibilities of the librarian and the fact that she must accommodate for the whole building- not only students, but teachers and other staff as well. This alone creates a need for greater funds.

Acceptance of the SKILLs Act would enable schools to have a certified teacher/librarian in every school library. This would benefit schools, as the title of librarian comes with great responsibility. The librarian today is a tool for the building's students and staff to access at almost anytime during the day. The demands and requests from the technology-stocked school

are much different than years prior. Librarians are called to troubleshoot issues with computers, AV equipment, and other technology throughout the building.

In addition to their “media” duties, librarians can be called to collaborate on projects with administrators, to assist teachers with lesson plans, and to work with students on research projects. Librarians also still promote the love of reading and lifelong learning. On top of these responsibilities, librarians must also attend to the business of ordering resources and managing their budget. With the small amount of money they are given, librarians must purchase database subscriptions, books, and new technology.

The SKILLs Act would also help to provide equality to all districts, not just the ones that have the "extra money" for a certified librarian. "Students in affluent communities have access to full-time professional teacher-librarians and current, high-quality school library resources, including technology. Less-privileged students often lack these necessities." (Skills, 1) Having a skilled, certified teacher-librarian would benefit any district's student population.

Currently, librarians are coping with excessive demands and small amounts of money. They buy paperbacks instead of hardbound books, write grants, hold book fairs, utilize inter-library loans, and collaborate with the rest of their district to buy supplies in "bulk". Librarians have to carefully prioritize their spending. Providing books and other quality resources for all different age levels as well as all different subject areas can add up fast. It has been proven that having a certified librarian equals higher student scores on state tests. Treating the library as a valuable resource and providing proper funding, well above a classroom allowance, is imperative to student learning and professional development.

***The act states that all libraries will include materials that are "appropriate for students."
What will the process be for determining appropriateness?***

The central feature of any library is its collection. The materials in this collection, which consists of books, magazines, newspapers, CDs, DVDs, computer software and electronic databases, is specifically chosen by a highly trained librarian or team of librarians. In the school, materials are selected because of their support for the curriculum, their ability to educate the students and to raise the students' level of literary appreciation (Stephens, 75). The SKILLs Act

states that books and other materials that are selected for the collection are appropriate for students in all grade levels, and that there are materials for students with special needs or who speak limited English. In this setting, the question of appropriateness comes into play as the patrons are all under the guidance of their parents and guardians.

Students, like all readers, are at many different reading levels, and have very different points of view. The school librarian has the difficult challenge of providing students with materials that show many sides of what may be controversial issues. The materials also need to appropriately represent many different cultural and ethnic groups. There is also the challenge of not only supporting the curriculum, informational, and instructional needs of the students, but their recreational needs as well (Lukenbill, 17).

Since the library does not promote any particular beliefs or views, the selection of materials is really a subjective matter. To assist school librarians in the process of selection is the development of an official collection development policy. This policy is a set of rules and directions for selection that reflects the goals and philosophies of the school and district as a whole. The policy also provides an explanation for the community regarding why materials are chosen and others are not (Adams, 28). The policy is produced in a collaborative manner and approved by the school administration, the board, superintendents and the principal. Librarians work with the administration and teachers to understand the needs of the student body, their diversity, social and ethnic makeup, and the values of the community (Hoffmann, 2). The groups' support of the collection development policy is of utmost importance when there is a question by parents of appropriateness.

When creating the collection development policy, the standards set in place by the American Library Association aid the librarian and school district. The library and school supports and protects the students' intellectual freedom and their right to read. Freedom to Read protects the library and the collection that provides many diverse views and opinions, even those that are unpopular or not liked (Hoffman, 178). The Library Bill of Rights opposes censorship of any type and upholds the value of students First Amendment rights (Adams, 28). Free Access to Libraries for Minors, an interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights, states that children and young adults have the rights to access information in the library, and the librarians cannot

assume the role of parents when restricting materials from students (American Library Association).

When it comes to selecting materials, the librarian cannot possibly read everything that they wish to choose. With the help of current reviewing media, such as *School Library Journal*, *Booklist*, and *The Horn Book Magazine*, librarians can view book descriptions, the intended audience, the scope, tone and style, any strengths and weaknesses, and comments relating to any controversies that may arise before selecting materials.

In terms of what is appropriate for students, the responsibility lies with the parents, although no parents can choose what a student other than their own reads (Hoffmann, 9). There is a desire, and rightly so, of parents and adults to protect children from what they deem as harmful, such as images and text describing sex and violence (Lukenbill, 71). The most important Supreme Court case involving the removal of books from the school library is *Board of Education, Island Trees School District v. Pico*. The court determined that the school district could not remove books from the library without violating students First Amendment rights, unless they were “pervasively vulgar” or not suitable for the educational mission of the school (457 US 853, June 25, 1982). This decision provides the basis for current book challenges and the rights of the school board to determine what is suitable for their students.

In the end, it is impossible to place a definition on what is appropriate for the school library. The term changes on a case-by-case, school-by-school basis. If the SKILLs Act is ever reintroduced, as we hope it is, the lawmakers should have an understanding of the process of collection development.

Conclusion

Because school library media specialists are licensed, trained as classroom teachers, and have a specialty in information literacy, we feel the SKILLs Act is important legislation and that it should be included in the No Child Left Behind Act. School librarians teach students the information and technology skills they need to be successful in today’s society. The link between the success of a student and their access to a certified school library media specialist is proven (Kaplan). Legislation has acknowledged the role that school library media specialists play, and hope that the eventual reintroduction and passing of the act will help schools fund and

support this very important member of the school community. It is essential that all students have access to a trained professional and to up-to-date materials when needed. The demands and expectations of students are changing in today's world and they need the best foundation they can have to further their education and be leaders of our world. We need to carry the traditional state certified teacher requirement to the state certified library media specialists in school libraries.

Works Cited

Adams, Helen R. "The Materials Selection Policy: Defense against Censorship." School Library Media Activities Monthly 24.7 (2008): 28. Research Library. Proquest. Syracuse University. 29 July 2009 <<http://proquest.umi.com.libezproxy2.syr.edu>>.

Board of Education, Island Trees School District v. Pico, 457 US 853, 1982.

Hoffmann, Frank W., and Richard J. Wood. Library Collection Development Policies; School Libraries and Learning Resource Centers. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, Inc, 2007.

"Improving Literacy Through School Libraries." ED.gov. 23 June 2009. U.S. Department of Education. 30 July 2009 <http://www.ed.gov/programs/lsl/index.htm>

Kaplan, Allison G. "Is Your School Librarian 'Highly Qualified'?" Phi Delta Kappan 89.4 (2007): 300-04. Research Library. Proquest. Syracuse University. 26 July 2009 <<http://proquest.umi.com.libezproxy2.syr.edu>>

Library Advocate. June 30, 2007 July 24, 2008
<<http://advocate4libraries.blogspot.com/2007/06/skills-act-s1699-and-hr-2864.html>>.

Lukenbill, W. Bernard. Collection Development for a New Century in the School Library Media Center. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002.

Moreillon, Judy. (2008). "Positioning Yourself at the Center: Co-Teaching Reading Comprehension Strategies." *Teacher Librarian*, 35 (5). Retrieved 30 July 2009 from HW Wilson Web.

Robins, J. (2008). "What can Teacher-Librarians do to Promote their Work and the School Library Media Program?" *Teacher Librarian*, 36 (2). Retrieved 3 August 2009 from HWWilson Web.

Scholastic Research and Results. (2008). "School Libraries Work!" Retrieved 27 July 2009 from http://www2.scholastic.com/content/collateral_resources/pdf/s/slw3_2008.pdf

Skills Act: S. 1699 and H.R. 2864. August 14, 2008 July 24, 2009
<http://www.storytrail.com/TLD/skills_act.htm>.

Smith, E. G. (2001). "Texas School Libraries: Standards, Resources, Services and Students' Performance." Retrieved 28 July 2009 from
<http://www.tsl.state.tx.us/ld/pubs/schlibsurvey/survey.pdf>

Stephens, Claire Gatrell, and Patricia Franklin. Library 101: A Handbook for the School Library Media Specialist. Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited, 2007.