

# How Do School Libraries Help Pennsylvania Students Achieve Academic Success?

*What School Library Advocates Need to Know*



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## Introduction

This booklet:

- Explains why school library programs are essential to student academic success;
- Presents an overview of recent research that demonstrates how students and teachers benefit from school libraries;
- Outlines the state of public school libraries in Pennsylvania based on a 2011 study conducted by the State Board of Education; and
- Recommends steps school library advocates can take to assure that all elementary and secondary students in Pennsylvania have access to a library in their schools.



# PA SCHOOL LIBRARY PROJECT

*Learn. Explore. Excel.*

Cover photo: Penn Wynne Elementary School Librarian Brahin Tabb gives pointers to a pair of fourth-grade students.

*-Stuart Goldenberg*

# What skills do 21st-century learners need to succeed academically?

## Students must be able to:

- Inquire, think critically and gain knowledge;
- Draw conclusions, make informed decisions, apply knowledge to new situations and create new knowledge;
- Share knowledge and participate ethically and productively as members of our democratic society; and
- Pursue personal and aesthetic growth. *(American Association of School Librarians, 2007.)*

## Why do students need a school library program to achieve academic success?

Students at every grade level who have access to a school library and a school librarian achieve greater academic success than students who don't have such access. Over the past 20 years, nationally-known researchers have conducted surveys and studied standardized test results in 22 states, including Pennsylvania, and these researchers have demonstrated conclusively that effective school library programs contribute to the academic success of elementary and secondary students.

*In the 21<sup>st</sup> century with information available in many formats, students must also be transliterate—able to understand text in picture, video, and digital formats across multiple platforms.*

In 2012, Dr. Keith Curry Lance and the RSL Research Group conducted a second research study in Pennsylvania (the first was in 2000) and produced substantial supporting evidence that an effective school library program helps Pennsylvania students achieve academic success.



Wayne Elementary School Librarian Sue Dahlstrom leads a first-grade student through a research assignment.

*-Stuart Goldenberg*

These researchers compared how well students scored on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment Reading and Writing Tests in the 2010-2011 school year with the quality of the school libraries to which the students had access.

Reading and writing are the foundational skills students need to achieve academic success in every subject area. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century with information available in many formats, students must also be *transliterate*—able to understand text in picture, video, and digital formats across multiple platforms. Access to an effective school library helps students achieve these needed multiple literacies.

## How do students benefit from a 21<sup>st</sup>-century school library program?

The mission of the school library is to ensure that students and staff are effective users of ideas and information. The focus of the school library program is on the student rather than on the dissemination of information. (AASL, 2007.)

### School librarians empower students to be:

- Critical thinkers,
- Enthusiastic readers,
- Skillful researchers and
- Ethical users of information. (AASL, 2009.)

### School librarians help students to:

- Achieve academic success in all subjects and at every grade level by building and developing their information literacy skills;
- Embody the values of digital citizenship;
- Foster an enthusiasm for independent reading; and
- Value life-long learning. (AASL, 2007.)

Librarians are certified teachers who are highly skilled in using the latest information technologies and in teaching teachers how to integrate these technologies into their teaching/learning process. Librarians are also specialists in educational resources, who plan with teachers collaboratively to integrate the most appropriate resources and the teaching of related information literacy skills into instructional units.

Information literacy skills focus on helping students “inquire, think critically and gain knowledge; draw conclusions, make informed decisions, apply knowledge to new situations and create new knowledge; and share knowledge and participate ethically and productively as members of our democratic society.” (AASL, 2007.)

Students who are information literate recognize when they need information and know how to access, evaluate, and use information effectively. School librarians instruct students in these skills and assess their learning in collaboration with teachers in each subject area.

## What components does a 21<sup>st</sup>-century school library program need to play an active and integral part in student learning?

A school library program needs a physical library, but the school library is much more than a room with resources.



Palisades High School Librarian Karen Hornberger works with senior Anneli Jennings on a podcast project.

-Stuart Goldernberg

Students and their teachers need these specific components or program building blocks for their teaching and learning success:

- A full-time, certified librarian and library support staff;
- A PK-12 information literacy curriculum integrated with all academic subjects and *PA Common Core Standards*;
- A program of activities that encourages students to be independent readers;
- A collection of current print and electronic resources;
- Networked and up-to-date information technologies for teaching and learning that are accessible in the library, and the school, and at home;
- Access to the library and its resources and to the librarian throughout the school day and beyond; and
- Adequate funding to update library resources and technology annually.

Each of these building blocks contributes to the success of the library program, but the foundation block is a full-time, certified school librarian.

### **What the Research Shows:**

- In all the research conducted across 22 states, the presence of each of these components shows a positive effect on student scores on standardized reading and writing tests. (*School Libraries Work!*, 2008.)

### **Status in 2011 PA School Libraries:**

- Almost all public school district schools in PA had a library (94%). The School District of Philadelphia had the greatest number of schools that did not have a library; at least 103 of 254 schools (more than 40%) had no school library.

## **Why is a full-time, certified school librarian so important to student learning and academic achievement?**

The school librarian's most important responsibility is to collaborate with teachers in the teaching-learning process so that all students can learn and achieve academic success. Librarians collaborate with teachers by integrating the teaching of related information literacy skills with the curriculum of each academic subject and with the *PA Common Core Standards*.

To accomplish this collaboration, the school librarian must work closely each day with teachers in planning instruction across the curriculum, teaching information literacy skills to students and assessing how well the students are learning.

For the sake of student learning, it is important for school districts to employ a Library Science K-12-certified school



Hempfield School District Library Department Supervisor Cathi Furman works with Social Studies teacher Doug Webb and ninth-grade students at Hempfield High School.

-Stuart Goldenberg

librarian for each school. In schools where the librarian is available only part-time during the school day or on only certain days of the school week, the librarians aren't able to spend enough time in each school to know the teachers or the students or what teaching and learning is happening in the classrooms. These part-time librarians, often at the elementary level, may serve from two schools to as many as ten schools.

### **What the Research Shows:**

- Across multiple research studies, results demonstrate that having certified school librarians and aides emerged as the most critical component of the library program at all levels. (*School Libraries Work!*, 2008.)
- In schools where students have access to a full-time, certified librarian who collaborates with teachers and integrates the teaching of information literacy into the curriculum and the *PA Common Core Standards*, students score higher on standardized PSSA Reading and Writing Tests. (*Lance*, 2012.)

### **Status in 2011 PA Schools:** Full-time, Library Science K-12 Certified Librarians

- 89% of schools employed Library Science K-12-certified school librarians; but only 44% of these librarians were full time (i.e., working at least 35 hours per week in one library).
- Some school districts in Pennsylvania employed teachers who had not successfully completed specialized coursework and supervised field experience in a school library to work in district libraries.

## **What are the most important responsibilities of a school librarian to help students achieve academic success?**

For school library programs to be successful in helping students achieve academic success, the information literacy curriculum that the librarian teaches must be an integral part of the curriculum and the teaching of each subject at each grade level in alignment with the *PA Common Core Standards*.

School librarians are teachers with Pennsylvania certification in Library Science, K-12. They actively serve as technology leaders in their schools and teach emerging instructional technologies and Web-based tools to both students and teachers. School librarians also lead the school in encouraging students to read.

### **What the Research Shows:**

- The more often students receive instruction in information literacy from their librarians, the higher their test scores in reading and writing. (*School Libraries Work!*, 2008.)
- School librarians play a leading role in encouraging students to read independently for information and pleasure and to develop a habit of independent reading. Both administrators and teachers value this role highly. (*Lance*, 2012.)



Garnet Valley Elementary School fifth-grader Nick Gabos shares a magazine with his classmate in the school's library.

-Stuart Goldenberg

### Status in 2011 PA School Libraries:

- Two-thirds of PA school librarians did not have a designated time to meet with teachers to collaborate on teaching.
- Only half of school libraries had a Board-approved, K-12 information literacy curriculum that is less than five years old.

## Why is a library aide so important to student academic success?

In a busy school library, many routine tasks must be accomplished each school day—circulating books and other resources, re-shelving books, refilling printers with paper, scheduling classes, and checking attendance. If the librarian spends time each day on these routine, but necessary tasks, there is very little time for collaborating with teachers, teaching teachers and students how to use information technology, and encouraging independent reading. A librarian who has the assistance of an aide can concentrate on the daily collaborative planning, teaching and assessment activities with teachers and students that lead to student academic success.

### What the Research Shows:

- The more time a librarian spends collaborating with teachers and teaching information literacy skills to students, the better those students perform on standardized reading and writing tests. (*Lance, 2012.*)

### Status in 2011 PA School Libraries:

- Almost 70% of school libraries had at least some hours of an aide's time; but 30% of school libraries had no library aide.

## Why is administrative support for the school library program so important for student academic achievement?

The superintendent and the building principal are decision makers and can support critical components of the library program and initiate change, such as flexible scheduling at the elementary level so that the librarian has the opportunity to collaborate with teachers and to encourage independent reading.

### What the Research Shows:

- Students performed better on reading and writing tests in schools where the principal placed high value on the librarian collaborating with teachers in planning and teaching and providing in-service education to teachers, met regularly with the librarian, and appointed the librarian to serve on key school committees. (*Lance, 2012.*)



New Hope-Solebury High School Librarian Mary Schwander (right) reviews the day's schedule with Library Assistant Lisa Maldzin.

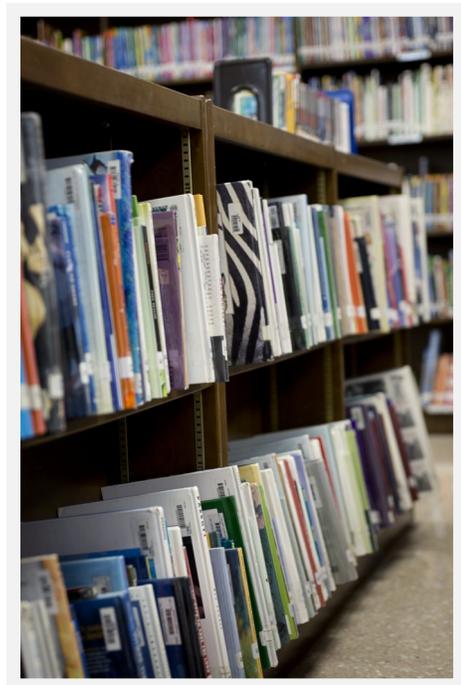
-Stuart Goldenberg

### **Status in 2011 PA School Libraries:**

- In almost two-thirds of schools, the librarian was not allocated time during the school day to meet with teachers; and spent less than one hour a day planning with teachers.
- More than half of librarians were assigned two hours or fewer per week in non-library duties; only one-fifth had no other duties.
- Only 40% of school librarians served on grade level or departmental committees; only one-quarter served on technology committees.

## **Why is a large collection of current books important for student academic achievement?**

Students need large collections of current and relevant books and magazines to encourage them to read independently. The size of the collection, however, is not the only consideration; the currency of these resources is equally important. Out-of-date books cannot provide students with timely and accurate information they need for their learning, and students won't choose to read worn and dated books that have no appeal.



Phoenixville Area Middle School maintains an extensive print collection.

-Stuart Goldenberg

### **What the Research Shows:**

- Students perform better on the PSSA Reading and Writing Tests in schools where the library collection is larger and includes more current resources. (*Lance, 2012.*)

### **Status in 2011 PA School Libraries:**

- The size of almost two-thirds of school library collections is between 5,000 and 15,000 volumes.
- Almost 40% of libraries have collections that are between 16 and 25 print books per student. The 2011 publication *Guidelines for Pennsylvania School Library Programs* recommends a minimum of 20 volumes per student at the elementary level, 25 volumes as a standard and 30 volumes as exemplary. At the middle and high school levels, 15 volumes are recommended as a minimum, 20 volumes as a standard and 25 volumes as exemplary.

## **Why is information technology that supports teaching and learning important for student academic achievement?**

Students must have continuous access to the library's online catalog and other related electronic and digital resources and licensed data bases within the school and remotely from home. Students need to learn to use information technology beginning in the primary grades; access to information technology, however, is not equal across schools and school districts. The digital divide is a factor between the "have" students and the "have-not" students who have limited access to information technology and have scant and outdated computing equipment.

Information technology infrastructure includes:

- Networking infrastructure and networked computers;
- Online catalog of resources and digital resources;
- Adaptive technologies for students with special physical and learning needs; and
- One-to-one laptop programs for students.

The most important component of integrating information technology successfully into teaching and learning is for the librarian to teach teachers and students to use existing and emerging information technologies and Web 2.0 tools on a regular basis to correlate with curriculum content at each grade level.

### **What the research shows:**

- At every grade level, students in schools with more library computers averaged higher test scores in reading and writing on the American College Test. (*School Libraries Work!, 2008.*)
- Where networked computers linked school libraries with classrooms, labs and other instructional sites, students earned higher PSSA Reading Test scores. (*Lance, 2012.*)

### **Status in 2011 PA School Libraries:**

- All 500 school districts were members of state-funded Access PA and POWER Library and had access to its licensed databases and encyclopedias.
- Students in half the schools had access to an additional 1-5 databases beyond what was offered in POWER Library, but students in more than a quarter of school libraries did not have access to any additional databases.
- More than 75% of schools did not provide eBooks in their on-site collections.
- More than 90% of schools provided access to an online catalog in the library and in the school, but only 70% provided access remotely from home.



Garnet Valley Elementary School Librarian Tracy Nelson reviews database searches with a pair of fifth-grade students.

-Stuart Goldenberg

## **Why is it important to student academic success for students and teachers to have access to the school library and the school librarian throughout the school day?**

Students benefit academically from access to the library and the librarian throughout the school day and before and after the student school day.

Most high schools and middle schools have flexible scheduling so that teachers can schedule their classes into the library when it is most beneficial to the students based on their units of study. At the elementary level, however, many libraries use a “fixed” schedule, and each teacher’s class is scheduled for a period in the library each week. Often the teacher does not accompany the class to the library because of a contractual arrangement to provide each

classroom teacher with a planning period. The teacher and the librarian are unable to collaborate in this arrangement.

Many elementary school libraries have only enough seating for one class at a time. Therefore, a teacher whose class could make best use of the library during a specific period based on what is being taught may not use it because another teacher and class is scheduled into the library for that period. Students who do not have access to a full-time librarian may not be permitted to use the library when the librarian is not present or may be permitted to use the library only to circulate books with an aide present.

### **What the research shows:**

- Students who had greater access to the library in total number of hours achieved higher reading scores. (*Lance, 2012.*)
- Students in elementary schools that used flexible scheduling for library access achieved higher scores than those students in schools that used fixed library schedules. (*School Libraries Work!, 2008.*)

### **Status in 2011 PA School Libraries:**

- Only 28% of libraries offer flexible scheduling; most teachers don't accompany their students to the library so the teacher and librarian are not able to collaborate.
- Half of PA school libraries are not open beyond the school day for students; more than one-third are open only 1-4 hours beyond the student school day per week.



Upper Merion High School Librarian Sharon Nardelli has opened her library to students during their lunch period.

-Stuart Goldenberg

## **Why is adequate funding for library resources important for student academic achievement?**

School libraries represent sizeable investments made by school districts over multiple years—the facility itself, staff, resources and equipment, technology support and networking fees. An adequate annual budget is necessary to purchase new resources during each school year and to lease equipment, licensed databases and other electronic resources. Consistent annual funding assures that the collection and the information technology infrastructure will remain current and useful.

The 2011 *Guidelines for Pennsylvania School Libraries* recommended that elementary schools allocate \$41 per student, middle schools allocate \$45 per student and high schools allocate \$50 per student for library resources. Unfortunately, over a ten-year period, library budgets have decreased in purchasing power because of the increased cost of resources and licensing during this period.

### **What the Research Shows:**

- Students in schools that spent more money—twice as much or more—on their school libraries were associated with higher student scores on the PSSA Reading Test. (*School Libraries Work!, 2008.*)
- Students in elementary and middle schools that spent more on library resources had higher writing scores than students in schools where lower amounts were spent. (*Lance, 2012.*)

### **Status in 2011 PA School Libraries:**

- Nearly two-thirds of PA districts allocated between \$1 and \$15 per student on library resources. (Almost 40% of districts allocated between \$1 and \$10; 21% allocated between \$11 and \$15.)
- The number of school districts that allocated no funds for library resources increased each year since 2000-2001.
- Most school libraries don't receive any outside funding from grants, fundraising, or contributions from school or community groups.

## **Is there a state that is taking action to assure strong school library programs for its PK-12 students?**

In 2012, the New York State Board of Regents accepted a 2020 Vision and Plan for Library Services that:

- Adopts and implements a statewide information fluency curriculum that is aligned with the New York State P-12 Common Core Learning Standards;
- Requires an elementary school librarian in every school to strengthen instructional leadership;
- Creates incentives to encourage districts to expand and promote access to the school library collection
- Creates incentives to encourage districts to adopt flexible scheduling. (*New York Board of Regents, 2012.*)

## **How can school library advocates help students benefit from a good school library program?**

**School library advocates can:**

**Assess the adequacy of financial support** provided by their districts to school library programs for professional and support staffing, collections of resources, and technology infrastructure and computing equipment in the library.

**Encourage administrators to develop and implement a written, K-12 sequenced information literacy curriculum** that is aligned with K-12 subject area curricula and with the *PA Common Core Standards* and that is approved by the school's local governing board. Just as each subject area has a sequential, vertical curriculum for grades K-12, so too should the library program have such an information literacy curriculum that correlates with subject area curricula and academic standards and is integrated into subject learning activities.

**Discuss with administrators the advantages of a move to a flexible schedule** for libraries in elementary schools to allow for the all-important time needed for teachers and school librarians to plan together and to teach and assess student learning collaboratively.

**Assess the currency, usefulness and scope of the total collection** of resources, including current books magazines and newspapers in print and electronic formats, available to students, especially those with special needs who must have adaptive technologies and those who are English Language Learners.

**Encourage administrators to make portable eReaders and eBooks** available to students through open-source access tools such as the International Children’s Digital Library.

**Investigate sources of grant funding** from community groups and outside agencies and work with librarians to apply for applicable grants.

**Address the need for adequate public funds** to sustain quality school library programs by speaking with elected officials at the state and local level. Do this in tandem with grant applications and activities such as book fairs.

**Plan school-wide activities that encourage students to read** throughout the school year. Reading competitions among grades, book clubs, author visits, book fairs, using Web 2.0 tools to create book review podcasts and “drop everything and read” campaigns are examples of such activities.

**Develop a comprehensive plan** for engaging parents and community members in student learning, with the school library as the centerpiece.

All stakeholders, decision makers and policy makers have a responsibility to work together to provide effective school library programs for every student in every publicly-funded school in Pennsylvania so that all students can meet academic standards and achieve success.

## A Snapshot of Public Education in Pennsylvania

**PIMS\* data for 2011-12 school year, Pennsylvania Department of Education**

Demographics	2011-12 Figures
Number of Students, PK-12	1,781,206** students
Number of School Districts	500 school districts
Number of Schools in School Districts	2,929 schools
Number of Comprehensive Career & Technical Centers (CCTC)	12 CCTCs
Number of Charter Schools	161 charter schools

\*Pennsylvania Information Management System

\*\*Includes enrolled students in school districts, charter schools, state juvenile correction institutions and comprehensive career and technical centers.

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Dr. Keith Curry Lance and the RSL Research Group, Colorado, with assistance from Dr. Mary K. Biagini, Associate Professor and Director, School Library Certification Program in the School of Information Sciences at the University of Pittsburgh, analyzed data and conducted the research.

All findings and related qualitative surveys of school administrators, teachers, and librarians can be found at the project website:  
<http://paschoollibraryproject.org>

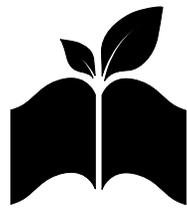
If you would like more information about the 2011 *Pennsylvania School Library Study*, please consult the PA State Board of Education website:  
[http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/research\\_reports\\_and\\_studies/19722/school\\_library\\_study/941391](http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/research_reports_and_studies/19722/school_library_study/941391)

The project partners are: The Pennsylvania School Librarians Association represented by Debra Kachel; Health Sciences Library Consortium represented by Joseph Scorza; and the Education Law Center of Pennsylvania represented by Sandra Zelno.

Quantitative findings have been reinforced by the results by qualitative surveys of the perceptions of school librarians, teachers, and school administrators that were collected via electronic surveys conducted in spring 2012. Project staff also gathered perceptions from a professional judgment panel and from other education stakeholders, such as parents and community leaders, through four regional focus groups held in March and April 2012.



*Although this project is funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services, any views, findings, conclusions or recommendations expressed on this website do not necessarily represent those of the Institute of Museum and Library Services.*



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