



Testimony to the Assembly Standing Committee on Libraries and Educational Technology
November 19, 2020

Good morning. My name is Sue LeBlanc; I'm the School Library System Director at Madison-Oneida BOCES. I'd like to thank you, Chairman Ryan and members of this Committee, for the opportunity to speak with you today about school libraries in New York State.

In addition to my role as School Library System Director, I also have the privilege of serving as the Vice-President for Advocacy for the School Library System Association of NY State. I am here today along with the president of that organization, Kerrie Burch, as well as our colleague from the Rochester City District School Library System, Colleen Sadowski.

You'll hear me use the term "school libraries," which I'd like to qualify. A fully-realized school library program can only be manifested through the expertise of a certified school librarian, who teaches inquiry through information literacy skills, manages and administers the library program, collection, and space, and enhances and deepens students' learning experiences across the entire curriculum. It has been said that a school library without a certified school librarian is merely a room with books, and I would agree.

Today, I'm pleased to have this opportunity to provide you with a glimpse into how school libraries have been functioning since COVID-related closures in March:

- **In their teaching role, certified school librarians have pivoted to continue to teach inquiry and information literacy skills in the hybrid and virtual environments.** Similar to other K-12 educators, school librarians' scheduled classes may be shorter, smaller; larger or longer; remote, hybrid, in-person, or any combination of those. Collaborative research and inquiry projects with teachers may be continuing virtually, or may be on hold, due to trimmed specials schedules and content area prioritizations. School librarians have joined as collaborators in their teachers' virtual classrooms, and offer daily support through email, virtual office hours, web guides, and other means.
- **Certified school librarians continue to provide digital equity to their students and school community.** They are focused on continuity of access for students and teachers to the high quality, age-appropriate information and ideas contained in books, articles in databases, such as the ones available through NOVEL NY, and other library resources, as well as digital access to the educational experience itself.



As you might have guessed, school librarians have been responsible for facilitating New York state students' sudden shift to widespread eBooks use, while still filling demand for physical books, with new safety procedures in place.

- **Certified New York State school librarians continue to develop our students' reading fluency and reading identities, fundamental parts of the literacy equation, while recognizing the power of books to support social-emotional needs.**
 - New York State school librarians continue the important work of making the library a place of connection and community: for example, facilitating programs such as virtual book clubs or community bookmobiles, and developing social media presences and points of instant communication for students and families in their districts.
 - Our certified school librarians have worked to shift this multi-faceted process of Readers Advisory services to the virtual environment, continuing to help students work through the complex process of identifying books that they might like, such as through curating book bags to send to remote students, and creating digital supports such as hyper slides, reading adventures, book trailer videos, surveys, and virtual office hours for individual consultations.

- **Certified School Librarians have been, and continue to be, leaders in the implementation of instructional technology in their schools.** They have developed teachers', students', and families' knowledge and skills regarding instructional technology and digital resources in a variety of ways, including through recording and sharing video tutorials, creating guides and support materials, developing technology curricula, and running daily virtual help desks, to name a few. In the stress of this transitional period, students, parents, and teachers alike have been relying on their school librarians for consistent, competent support.

- **Certified school librarians have been instructional leaders in teaching critical digital and media literacies.** The sudden shift to online and hybrid teaching and living has shed new light on a disturbing reality: the vast majority of the information encountered on the internet is not only incorrect, but is eroding our ability to engage civically in productive and meaningful ways. Even before the COVID crisis, our certified school librarians were taking the lead in teaching what we call "media literacy" and "digital literacy" skills, which empower our students as savvy information consumers. The Empire State Information Fluency Continuum, the instructional framework used by New York state school librarians' for information



literacy curriculum development, addresses media literacy skills through its Multiple Literacies Anchor Strand, and civic literacy skills through the Social and Civic Responsibility Anchor Strand.

For additional, specific examples of outstanding school library programming in NY State since COVID closures, I would urge this committee to see the 11-18-20 video recording for yesterday's Regents Advisory Council on Libraries presentation, which will be posted to this website: <http://www.nysl.nysed.gov/libdev/rac/school-librarians.htm>.

Moving forward, I would like to urge the members of this committee to:

- Support legislative initiatives for digital and media literacy that recognize certified school librarians as uniquely qualified instructional leaders who will lead implementation in every district, for students and teachers alike. As New York State moves forward in addressing digital citizenship and media literacy education, such as through the pending Computer Science and Digital Fluency Standards, it would be an efficient and cost-effective strategy to leverage our certified school librarians, who are also information science professionals, as key players for such implementation.
- And, in this year of severe COVID-related budget cuts, please support legislative initiatives to preserve our K-12 public schools budgets. It won't be until this spring, 2021, and beyond, that the final chapters will be written about school libraries and the COVID crisis. The severity of the cuts to public school funding will likely correlate directly to the number of school library positions that are lost, as districts make difficult decisions in an attempt to balance their budgets. Let us aim to maintain these critically important positions through adequate public school funding in the immediate future, as we keep our sights on our longer term push to provide the equity that all New York State K-12 students so rightly deserve: access to certified school librarians, and the corresponding literacy and critical thinking skills development that are foundational to achievement and success, both in school and in life.

Thank you, to the members of this committee, for your continued support and efforts on behalf of school libraries, and all types of libraries and systems in New York State.

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