



November 19, 2020

Good morning/afternoon. Thank you Assemblyman Ryan and the members of the committee for your continued interest in libraries and the effects COVID-19 has had on them in New York State. The invitation to speak with you today on this subject is appreciated.

My name is Kerrie Burch and I am the School Library System, Model Schools, and Arts Director at Questar III BOCES which serves Rensselaer, Columbia, and Greene Counties in New York State. I am also the current President of the New York State School Library Systems Association (SLSA) which consists of 40 school library systems based in “the Big Five” city school districts and the Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES). With state aid funding for libraries and library systems, school library systems are able to provide continuous learning opportunities, innovation, leadership, equity, and more to over 4,800 public and non-public schools across the state. This ultimately increases student achievement across the state. Our mission is to strengthen, support, and advocate for our members as they foster quality school library programs.-

When COVID-19 compelled schools to shift to online learning in March 2020, school librarians and school library systems pivoted quickly to meet the needs of teachers and students within the districts. My colleague, Sue LeBlanc, will be focusing/focused on how school librarians and school libraries were affected, whereas my colleague, Colleen Sadowski, will focus/focused on the experiences of the Big Five cities. The focus for my testimony today will be the effects of COVID-19 on school library systems. While these times have been challenging for all, you will see that in the face of adversity, school library systems did not pause during NY on Pause, instead they switched gears to ensure as seamless a transition to remote learning as possible.

School library systems prepare leaders. Under normal circumstances, the school library system increases the capacity of school librarians to be leaders within their districts through mentoring and leadership training. During school closures beginning in March, this leadership proved to be essential. School librarians were seen as experts:

- in instructional technology integration, an essential component of remote learning
- as resource specialists, curating targeted resources for specific learning needs
- as supporters of students’ social and emotional needs through various outlets

School library systems helped school librarians navigate this role through mentoring, purposeful resource sharing, and professional learning opportunities.

School library systems provide professional learning opportunities. The school library system ensures that school librarians are well versed in all areas of curriculum and pedagogy due

to the collaborative nature of their positions. The Re-Imagined Empire State Information Fluency Continuum (ESIFC) was introduced to school librarians during the summer and fall of 2019 and is the skills based curriculum used by school librarians. This document:

- encourages inquiry based learning
- is aligned to Next Generation content area standards, New York State social and emotional learning benchmarks, the International Society of Technology Educators (ISTE) standards, and the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) National Standards
- provides a path for learning that is conducive to remote and hybrid learning

When COVID-19 closed schools in March, most educators were propelled into a situation for which they were not prepared. School Library Systems scrambled to address the new and varied needs of librarians and other educators and ultimately provided sustained professional learning opportunities that were aligned with standards and prepared them for teaching in a remote and hybrid learning environment. In addition, school library systems helped school librarians meet the social and emotional needs of students and families during these challenging times. School librarians across the state attended virtual professional learning workshops created by school library systems including in the areas of:

- instructional technology integration, such as leveraging Google Classroom as a communication tool with students, teachers, and families
- digital literacy using the Developing Digital Citizens document created by DemocracyReady NY
- translating in-person practices into online practices by utilizing the New York City Translation of Practice document
- electronic resources provided by the school library system such as online databases, streaming video, and eBooks.

School library systems also provided learning opportunities and resources for families on topics such as navigating learning management systems, using school library system provided resources, and managing the stress of online learning.

School library systems promote digital equity. According to the Digital Equity survey conducted in June by the New York State Department of Education Office of Instructional Support, the biggest barrier for districts in providing equity during remote learning was cost. Districts do not have the financial resources to provide equitable access of information. In spite of these challenges, school library systems strive to be the great equalizer in terms of providing access to resources to all students in New York State.

The pandemic has highlighted an increased reliance on the resources provided by school library systems that promote research, inquiry, and reading and literacy. For example, using state aid funding for libraries and library systems, school library systems provide access to resources such as eBooks and audiobooks via OverDrive's Sora platform. In a neighboring BOCES, Sora usage almost doubled when schools transitioned to remote learning and they are on track to double that again this year. My own region saw an 80% increase in usage in the last year. All of this is

attributed to the need for online resources in the remote and hybrid learning environment. Numerous school library systems have the ability to purchase content for use by all students. Most recently, subscribing school library systems have the ability to connect students through Sora to the content of public library systems giving students, teachers, and families expanded access to materials.

Furthermore, statewide consortium pricing allows school library systems and school districts within a BOCES to purchase online resources at discounted rates and with product support from the school library system. This pricing available through the BOCES allows school library systems to partner with school districts to bring them the best value for their money, and ultimately the best resources for their students. In my region for example, I am able to provide access to resources that promote ethical research practices, focus on multiple areas of science, and give students access to the daily local newspaper as well as historical newspapers from multiple sources, and more.

School library systems collaborate. It is often said that there is power in collaborating with others. School library systems often collaborate with each other, with public library systems and regional library councils, and other groups in order to enhance student learning and help librarians grow in their profession. During COVID-19 closures, this became a necessity rather than a nicety. For example, in collaboration with three other BOCES in my region, we were able to pool our resources to work with Dr. Barbara Stripling and Dr. Jennifer Cannell to assist us in creating sustained professional learning that supported our school librarians during school closures. The focus of these weekly workshops varied based on the needs of the school librarians, but included:

- using the ESIFC to collaborate with teachers and help them find ways to transition into the online learning environment.
- supporting families and students
- empowering students to learn through reading and literacy

Another example of collaboration includes bringing together public and school librarians to discuss how to help promote the summer reading program in an online environment. This happened as a result of two school library systems collaborating with a public library system, and proved beneficial in making connections between school and public libraries to enhance student learning and promoting a love of reading.

As you can see, through the work they do and the resources they provide, school library systems provide an essential service to all students in all schools in New York State, even more so in spite of the COVID-19 pandemic. Systems, including school library systems, are essential now more than ever because the work that needs to be done to support librarians, other educators, and families is remarkably more than can be done individually. That service is made possible as a result of state aid funding to library systems. With that said, school library systems are faced with a 22.06% reduction in that aid funding in this current budget year. While some school library systems may be able to continue to provide the same level of support and resources, many will not be able to and may even be faced with very difficult decisions regarding staffing as a result of this reduction in funding.

With the adequate funding, school library systems could:

- continue to provide digital equity to all students in New York State
- ensure that school librarians continue to be prepared for teaching in the online or hybrid environment
- promote digital literacy among all students and educators
- meet the new and future needs of school librarians and other educators through valuable collaborations

Given the challenges we have all faced this year, I am very proud of the work school library systems have been able to accomplish and the ultimate benefits that work has on students achievement, and I am confident that school library systems will continue to provide excellent service to all.

Thank you to the committee for your time today. I appreciate your continued support of school libraries and school library systems.

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