

This testimony of Carol Heinsdorf, member of APPS (Alliance for Philadelphia Public Schools) and the PSLA (Pennsylvania School Librarians Association) Legislation Committee, has been accepted as written testimony in the Basic Education Funding Commission hearings. This is a strong advocacy plea for improved school library programs with certified school librarians for the School District of Philadelphia. SDP is the 8th largest school district in the nation with 214 schools and this school year, 2014-2015, has only 11 remaining school librarians. Many of the talking points and cited research can be used in other school settings. This document has also been posted on [SchoolLibraryAdvocacy.org](http://SchoolLibraryAdvocacy.org).

## **Basic Education Funding Commission Testimony**

Philadelphia, November 18/19, 2014

Testimony of Carol Heinsdorf, representing  
Alliance for Philadelphia Public Schools (APPS)

My name is Carol Heinsdorf. I am a retired certified librarian having been employed by the School District of Philadelphia for 26 years. I hold a Master's degree from Drexel University and am a Nationally-Board Certified Librarian (<http://www.nbpts.org/library-media-ecya>). Today I am representing a grassroots organization called Alliance for Philadelphia Public Schools (APPS) of which I am a member serving on its Research Committee.

APPS (<http://appsphilly.wikispaces.com>) is an organization of parents, community members, and school staff—including teachers, school nurses, certified librarians, counselors and safety staff—dedicated to the preservation of public schools. APPS supports full and equitable funding that provides students with the high-quality education to which they are entitled. APPS believes that public schools are the foundation of a democratic society.

As a school librarian, I witnessed the gradual erosion and deprivation of educational opportunities for students of the School District of Philadelphia (SDP), the eighth largest school district in our nation. In 1991, there were 176 certified librarians serving students in SDP schools. Today is a different story.

A recent online article appeared about Houston Elementary, an SDP school in the Northwest part of the city. There had been a clerk in the library as late as 2004, but more recently, there had been no library activity for at least the last two years. A small group of retired parents began accepting donations to try to reopen the school library last year. It's open for three half-days throughout the week with volunteers checking out books to students. However, there is no heat, so when it is too cold, the library is closed.

Community member and library volunteer Elayne Blender stated in the article, "I feel embarrassed that our kids have to get second-hand things, but at least they are getting them. We cannot take the place of a trained librarian who knows what they are doing. We are just trying to be a Band-Aid. (Roshania)"

Is this what we really want for our children? When did we become a Third World country dependent on donations, hand-me-downs, out-of-date information, and lacking basic conditions like heat?

This erosion of school library programs has dramatically increased over recent years.

- During research for a Pennsylvania State Board of Education study in 2011, it was discovered that 128 schools in Pennsylvania did not have a school library, representing 6% of all school buildings in the state. Of those 128 schools, 103 or over 80% were in one district—the School District of Philadelphia. Most of those libraries had been closed for three or more years, due to staffing and budget cuts and the need to use the library space for other purposes. (*PA School Library Study*, p. 2)
- In 2012, there were 43 certified librarians in SDP serving students in only 17% of its schools.
- This school year, 2014-15, there are only 11 certified librarians left in SDP--4 of whom are known to be teaching in their school libraries. Even if all 11 certified librarians were teaching in school library programs, they would still only be serving 5% of SDP schools and its students.

Why is this loss of school library programs so devastating to students in SDP? In recent years we have learned a great deal about the impact of school library programs on student learning and standardized test scores. In 2012, a Pennsylvania research study was released that examined the scores of the PSSA Reading and Writing tests on the availability of school library programs and certified school librarians. Here are some relevant findings.

- Students perform better in both Reading and Writing PSSA tests when their schools have full-time certified librarians—specifically, students are more likely to have Advanced scores and less likely to have Below Basic scores than students in schools without librarians.
- The PA study was the first study of its type to examine test scores of sub-groups of students. The 2012 study found that school library programs with certified librarians have an even greater impact on students who are economically disadvantaged, Black, Hispanic, and students with disabilities. Although both Reading and Writing scores are better for all students at all the tested grade levels in schools with a school library and

certified librarian, the tested sub-groups of students benefit more proportionally than the general school population. For example,

- African American students in schools with certified librarians are two times as likely to earn Advanced Writing scores as those in schools without librarians (Lance and Schwarz, p. 15).

Almost 60% of SDP students are African-American and multi-racial and could benefit from school library programs.

- Hispanic students in schools with certified librarians are three times as likely to earn Advanced Writing scores as those in schools without librarians (Lance and Schwarz, p. 15).

Nearly 20% of SDP students are Hispanic and multi-racial and could benefit from school library programs.

The Pennsylvania study was not the only study of the impact of school libraries on student learning. Statewide studies in 24 states have verified that school libraries staffed with a trained librarian who teaches students and works with teachers to develop information and research skills have a steady and consistent effect on student learning and achievement regardless of demographic and economic differences among students (Kachel).

Despite all this research, Pennsylvania has NO requirements for either certified librarians or school libraries for its public school students. Whether a school provides these basic educational necessities is entirely dependent on each school district and sometimes, as in SDP, dependent upon each building's principal to fund them. Yet, nursing programs, barber and cosmetology schools, and juvenile facilities and adult prisons are required to have full-time professional librarians and collections of a required size. (Zelno, p. 4)

How could certified librarians and well-stocked school libraries with access to the Internet and computers improve student achievement among SDP students?

- 87 percent of SDP students are considered economically disadvantaged. Students living in poverty have less access to books and other reading materials in the home and less access to public libraries. Yet, research tells us that access to books is as strong a factor in school success as poverty (Krashen, *Free Voluntary Reading*, p. 7). The more students read, the better they will perform in reading comprehension, writing style, vocabulary, spelling, and grammar (Krashen, *The Power of Reading*, p.17). School libraries provide a wide range of reading resources to match students' reading abilities and interests.

- Over half (55%) of 3rd graders in SDP are not proficient in Reading according to the 2012 PSSA tests (*2011-2012 PSSA*). Research tells us that students who don't read at grade level by the end of third grade are four times more likely to leave high school without a diploma than students who are proficient readers (*Double Jeopardy*). Certified librarians guide and inspire students to read and help students to develop a habit of reading and inquiry.
- 9 percent of SDP students are English language learners. Students who are learning English have special requirements for reading materials in native and English languages, high/low reading materials, and materials that reflect their cultures; certified librarians are specifically trained to address these specialized needs.
- Despite public perception, not all students have smartphones or up-to-date computers, access to the Internet, and know how to navigate the Internet safely. According to a 2013 U.S. Department of Commerce report, 46% of households with reported incomes of \$25,000 or less cannot afford home Internet service (*Exploring the Digital Nation*, p. 20) and 53% of urban households in that same income group do not own a functional computer (*Exploring the Digital Nation*, p. 27). School libraries provide these necessary technologies with a supportive guide in the certified librarian to teach and assist students.

Some people expect the Free Library of Philadelphia to fill the gap left by the loss of certified librarians and school libraries in SDP. And, while some valiant attempts have been made, regularly scheduled trips to a public library are problematic on many levels, including travel time and distance, safety, availability of public library staff, and the loss of instructional time if scheduled during the school day, which also requires permission slips and chaperones. In an informal survey conducted several years ago, it was determined that only 12% of public school students visited the local public libraries in Philadelphia for afternoon programming (Malloy). The fact is that certified librarians are trained and tasked with educating and teaching students to meet academic standards and educational competencies; public librarians are not. Certified librarians are educators with a specialization in instructional resources and technologies, and work with teachers to ensure that students achieve academic targets.

In conclusion:

The bottom line is that school library programs and certified librarians positively impact student achievement. The research is clear and compelling. The highest achieving students come from schools with certified librarians and well-resourced school library programs. And students who are the most at-risk—those in poverty, English language learners, those with disabilities, and

those struggling academically—benefit the most by certified librarians and strong school library programs. School libraries are the great equalizers in providing print and technology tools with a trained professional, the certified librarian, to guide and teach students.

All students deserve an equal opportunity to learn and have the resources to do so. To deny our students access to quality school library programs, which can only be implemented by qualified, certified school librarians, is to force our young people to incur a deficit in learning opportunities--a hardship and disadvantage that could position them behind millions of their school-aged peers throughout not just Pennsylvania, but globally.

It is my hope that you will seriously consider requiring all schools to have a well-resourced school library and a certified school librarian for all students as essential components for learning. Thank you.

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