

Good morning (afternoon). My name is J'aimé Pfeiffer, and I'm the School Library System Director for Capital Region BOCES here in Albany. First I want to thank you for holding this hearing to listen to concerns, and also for increasing the state aid for School Library Systems for this school year. As you will hear, this funding is extremely important for us to support our school librarians in a number of ways.

In order to give you a better picture of what School Library Systems do, and how we prioritize the spending of funds, I think it's important for you to have an understanding of the people we support, school librarians. If you haven't been in a school, or a school library, in the past 10 – 15 years, you might not recognize what goes on there. School librarians do so much more than read and recommend books, and check them in and out! They are first and foremost teachers of information literacy. We are in an era where we have a foot in two worlds – print and technology, and it is important to teach our students how to access the information they need from both. On any given day, you'll find school librarians teaching classes, collaborating with teachers on lessons, recommending books, websites and databases, balancing budgets to give their students the best resources for the least amount of money and, yes, checking books in and out and re-shelving them before the next class comes in. School librarians have the responsibility to serve all the students and staff in a school. This means that they must be familiar with all curricular areas, state and Common Core standards, and what teachers are covering at any given time to help them find the right resources, and make sure the students have the information literacy skills to meet those standards. They do all of these things with limited resources, shrinking staffs and all too often in more than one building. With the introduction of the Common Core State Standards, school librarians have the opportunity to do what they do best – teach information skills in an environment of inquiry – guiding students to ask their own questions and develop curiosity while helping them find the resources that will answer those questions.

Unfortunately, all of this has come about at the same time the economy has taken a serious hit, especially in education. Because school librarians are not mandated in NY State for grades K-6, many districts have made the decision to downsize or eliminate those positions at a time when Common Core is demanding that those information skills be taught. Examples here in the Capital District are districts that have one librarian covering both a secondary and an elementary building; in reality the librarian has to spend most of the time in one building, leaving the other building to be run by a clerk-typist. We have a district with three elementary buildings, none of which have a certified librarian. We have a high school with over 2300 students run by one librarian, three aides who serve primarily as "crowd control" and a clerk-typist who is there only 3 half-days per week. Other districts have librarians going between two or three buildings every week. Who then is working with teachers to select good resources for students when Common Core is demanding more reading from informational texts? How are materials selected for purchases for print and technology? Are outdated materials being left on the shelves for students to find incorrect information to use in their research?

If librarians themselves are not reduced, their support staff is, taking valuable time from their schedules to do administrative tasks rather than teaching, collaborating, and collection development, all of which are the most valuable things they can do for students. More than 20 states, including New York, have done extensive studies that show how having a quality school library with a certified librarian increases overall test scores for all students in all curricular areas. By reducing or eliminating those positions, we are putting our students at risk for not being able to meet the Common Core State Standards because many of those skills are taught by school librarians. As part of the recently adopted 2020 Vision and Plan for Library Services, one of the recommendations from the New York State Regents Advisory Council on Libraries to the New York State Board of Regents is to "Expand the existing Commissioner's Regulations (91.2) to require an elementary school librarian in every school to strengthen instructional leadership in meeting the P-12 Common Core Learning Standards, and enforce library staffing regulations in all public schools." As a representative of School Library System Administrators, I would ask that you endorse and support this extension of the mandate that is already in place for secondary buildings.

In addition to staff reductions, school libraries receive materials aid at a rate of \$6.25 per student. This figure hasn't changed in over 25 years, whereas the cost of books now average between \$25 - \$30 each, and databases can run between \$50 and \$1500. Many of our school libraries are given only that money with which to purchase materials. For a school with 500 students, that amounts to just over \$3000 which could buy maybe a hundred books in one year. One book for every 5 students does not build a quality library. While there are "free" internet sites where students can get information, they cannot replace quality print and e-resources, even assuming there is a librarian in every school to teach them how to "mine" those resources. Fortunately we have some databases that are free to all residents of New York through the NOVEL databases because, again, for many of our schools those are the only e-resources that they can provide for our students.

So that leads us to School Library Systems, and what we do to help our school librarians, both financially and professionally. While every system receives a different amount of money based on square miles and student populations, we have common goals to offer our librarians the best pricing we can find for print and e-resources, and to give them low- or no-cost professional development training. In addition, School Library System Administrators have worked together across several projects and will continue to do even more collaborating in the future.

Perhaps the best example of this is the Information Fluency Continuum which has been several years in the making, and in fact meets the first recommendation for School Libraries in the 2020 Vision for Libraries. Barbara Stripling, former School Library System Director, and the School Library System Coordinators in New York City initially developed and shared a detailed Inquiry-Based Curriculum of library and information skills for 21st Century Learners. She shared her work with others, and as a result, Capital Region BOCES School Library System, in conjunction with other regional BOCES, provided training documentation for school librarians and teachers. As a result of Barbara Stripling's work and the documentation, training for hundreds of librarians and teachers has been offered by School Library Systems in the last eight years. This led Questar III to provide an annual Inquiry Forum that invited librarian/teacher teams and their administrators from all regional BOCES to present on the success they had with students when using Inquiry-Based Curriculum, which in turn lead to more training with very positive results in our region and throughout the state.

Barbara Stripling and her team continued their work by creating an Information Fluency Continuum guide that included inquiry and information fluency skills, as well as benchmark assessments for those skills at each grade level. When the Common Core State Standards were adopted, the New York City team went to work again, aligning each of the standards with the skills needed to meet those standards. The New York City School Library System has been extremely generous in sharing all of their work with the rest of the state. The Information Fluency Continuum has recently been revised and re-branded and is now the Empire State Information Fluency Continuum. School Library Councils across the state have adopted, or are in the process of adopting, this Empire State IFC as the standards for our school librarians. Much of this work has been funded by the state aid for our library systems and/or by LSTA grant funding. None of these things could have happened without cooperation, sharing, and state funding.

School Library Systems have proven the power of consortium purchasing. In the past few years, we've had a committee that has worked diligently on getting all database purchases from almost all BOCES into a centralized system that offers information and pricing from vendors. By working with someone who negotiates pricing for all of us, prices for a large number of popular databases used in our libraries has been significantly reduced. This has enabled many of our schools to either save hundreds of dollars or, in some cases, be able to purchase additional databases with money that has been saved, giving their students more resources over and above the NOVEL databases. This 2012-2013 school year, School Library Systems have reported approximately \$4.5 million dollars in database purchases through this consortium, and we are working on adding more vendors for price reductions. In the Capital Region, all of our districts who purchase databases come through us because of the savings we can offer them through this consortium pricing.

Purchasing of databases through BOCES has recently been opened up to other library systems; if they come into the consortium as well, pricing can be reduced even further.

Other examples of using state aid and grants are in the area of professional development for school librarians. Last summer, three BOCES School Library Systems combined to provide a comprehensive, 3-day training on the new Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) for school librarians. Held here in the Capital Region, school librarians and SLS Directors from across the state came for the training. At the end of the three days, and continuing still, is the collection of SLOs on the School Library System Association website for all librarians to share and use as needed. We are currently in the process of going through all of the SLOs to find exemplary samples for our own website, and to share on the Engage NY website.

This is the second year that School Library Systems are offering an online “Cool Tools for Schools” professional development training that includes lessons and sharing out of technology tools such as blogs and wikis, online communities and social media, photo sharing, and other skills that can be used to teach students and teachers to become savvy users of 21st century technology. Through this program eight BOCES School Library Systems have provided professional development training for over 200 librarians and teachers, at no cost to them, in a way that they can learn on their own time and at their own pace.

As for more specific spending in individual School Library Systems, I can only speak for Capital Region, though I know similar things are being done across the state. We use state aid to purchase databases so that all of our schools have access at no cost. We currently offer TeachingBooks.net, a collection of essays, audio and video presentations on books and authors, and Noodle Tools, an online bibliography and note-taking database that helps students organize all of their notes for research. Most recently, we are offering Overdrive, a virtual library where students and teachers can “check out” e-books and audio books and download them on to almost any platform – computers, e-readers, i-pads, smart phones. In addition to our offering all of these products, we provide training at our site or in districts, and purchase marketing materials so librarians can share “how to” get access to all of these programs with their students and staff. For the last three summers we have sent any librarian who has applied to the School Librarian Leadership Conference sponsored by the New York Library Association’s Section of School Librarians and held at Cornell University. There librarians have been immersed in training on topics such as teacher evaluations, student learning objectives and, most recently, Common Core State Standards and the Information Fluency Continuum. We do a number of other things as well, but these are just a few examples.

I have spent almost my entire adult life in public service, first serving in the United States Navy, then in public education as a teacher, a school librarian and now as a School Library System Director. And I have to say in all honesty that the proudest moment in those 25 years was when a Holocaust survivor came to Queensbury High School where I was the librarian, and spoke to a group of students about her experience immigrating to America. She said she was in the grocery store, buying “those Little Golden Books” for her children, when a friend approached her and told her about this place where she could go and by signing up for a card, she could take out all the books she wanted for free. “For free?” she asked in amazement. And when she went there and got her card, and checked out books that otherwise would have cost her precious pennies, the only thing that she could say was “America – what a country!” Our democracy thrives because of educated citizens, and because we have these wonderful buildings we call libraries, where people can go and learn about anything they want. I believe it’s a small price to pay for giving everyone – our students included, and maybe especially – such a tremendous opportunity. Thank you.