



Pennsylvania School Librarians Association

Hello, my name is Dr. Laura Ward. I am the librarian at Fox Chapel Area High School, I am also a past president of the Pennsylvania School Librarians Association, PSLA, with whom I am still the communications committee co-chair. I am thrilled to have the opportunity to share with you some highlights about my profession. Becoming a school librarian has been a dream come true for me. I have been the high school librarian for the last 11 years and completed my doctoral dissertation on the impact school librarians had on student reading test scores in my home state of West Virginia. I am passionate about the impact school librarians have on students and not just on student test scores, but on students' lives.

Recognizing librarians as a critical piece in every school is vital to student success, both academically and also socially and emotionally. Ensuring every school across the commonwealth is fully, fairly, and equitably funded is crucial to the future of our state. During the 2017-2018 school year, the PSLA reported there were 1,686 school librarians in the state of Pennsylvania. In the 2021-2022 school year, only 1,538 school librarians were reported during the annual staffing survey. Yes, this decrease is in part due to the pandemic, but it is also due to failing to replace school librarians when a retirement occurs and is also due to reassigning school librarians to the classroom instead of the library. In the 2021-2022 school year, the PSLA found that 52 school districts, which is 10% of school districts across the commonwealth, did not have a school librarian assigned to the library. Another reason school districts do not have library programs is illustrated with the Aliquippa School District in Beaver County, a Title I district. When I spoke with someone about the Aliquippa School District, I was told they felt they didn't need a school librarian since they have a great public library. I'm thrilled when I hear that students live in a community with a good public library. However, having a public library is not enough. Students must have easy access to the library, and libraries in schools provide this opportunity. It is not a guarantee that every child will live near a public library or will have access to visit the public library regularly. However, all children are provided transportation to their school. It is important to remember that one type of library is not a replacement for the other. Public and school libraries are not mutually exclusive.

I want to point out that having a great relationship with the local public library is encouraged for school librarians. In an effort to support each other and help both the community library and the school district achieve the goal of supporting the same people, Fox Chapel Area School District works with the Cooper-Siegel Community Library to ensure every student in the district receives a library card. This has opened the door for students to have access to so many more resources at no cost to them.

Over the years, the PSLA has worked with legislators who saw the impact school librarians have on students' lives. These legislators were willing to circulate memos trying to mandate that every school district in Pennsylvania enforce the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) guidelines CSPG 48, which requires that an education agency must employ at least one certified library science educator when providing a school library program. Some legislators even introduced recent bills to require a certified school librarian be employed in every public school building in the state. Currently, SB 610, introduced by Senator Schwank, and supported by Senators Costa, Haywooe, Collett, Brooks, Fontana, Hughes, Flynn, Kane, Brewster, Street, Cappelletti, Comitta, L. Williams, and Muth states "each public school in this Commonwealth shall employ at least one professional librarian who is certified under 24 Pa.C.S. relating to certification of library personnel." HB 640, introduced by Representatives Ciresi, R. Mackenzie, Guent, Waxman, Rabb, Freeman, Isaacson, M. Mackenzie, James, Khan, Hanbidge, Burgos, Probst, Kinsey, Madden, Sanchez, Delloso, Shusterman, Warren, N. Nelson, Neilson, Otten, Green and Malagari, is the companion bill currently circulating in the Pennsylvania House. Historically, these bills have many co-sponsors; however, they failed to gain traction. Similar bills have been introduced over many years, and all failed to go further, yet PDE mandates that schools have a librarian if they have a school library program. This equates to an unfunded mandate.

One reason it is so easy to dismiss the school librarian is the lack of consistency in the position title. The American Association of School Libraries (AASL) recommends the term "school librarian," however it is not required. Right here in Allegheny County, I am a school librarian within the Fox Chapel Area School District, but over in Blackhawk School District in Beaver County, they have teacher librarians. In Westmoreland County at Penn-Trafford High School, they don't have a "library," instead they have a "media center" with a media specialist at the helm. In an effort to clarify the role of a school librarian, the AASL identified six common beliefs central to the profession. These beliefs were created using the AASL official position statement and reflect the Every Student Succeeds Act definition on school libraries. The second of these beliefs is that a qualified school librarian should lead school libraries. Meaning, this belief is "qualified school librarians have been educated and certified to perform interlinked, interdisciplinary, and cross-cutting roles as instructional leaders, program administrators, educators, collaborative partners and information specialists." If a school removes their traditional school library for a media center, do you need a librarian, or can a classroom teacher with a free period in their schedule oversee the media center?

The PSLA revised the association's strategic priorities in 2022 to better reflect the goals of our members and the association as a whole. One goal is to communicate, through various methods, the impact of appropriately staffed school library programs on academic achievement to stakeholder groups, such as teachers, administrators, board members, parents/guardians, community members, and legislators. The outcome of this goal would be the increase in stakeholders' understanding of the critical importance of school libraries and the impact that certified school librarians have on children.

Through another goal of the association's strategic priorities, the PSLA will continue to provide varied professional learning opportunities for school librarians and other educational partners to develop and implement best practices that impact academic achievement of learners and the needs of our members

recognizing and highlighting members who demonstrate, employ, and/or share innovative school library practices that can be replicated through the system. This goal goes hand and hand with another strategic priority for the association; “Foster a culture that values diverse and inclusive school library programs, inquiry-based learning, ethical and effective information literacy, the love of reading, and the commitment to lifelong learning to prepare learners for college, career, and life.” By addressing this critical issue, the PSLA will be proactive in response to shifts in education and the school library profession (please see “Strategic Priorities” attached). This includes providing resources and support when facing challenges to a school library’s collection. Over the last three years, the PSLA has seen a drastic increase in book challenges by community members seeking to remove books they feel are inappropriate. The association has provided numerous workshops and webinars for its members to learn how best to defend their school library’s collection in these situations. The Advocacy Committee created an Intellectual Freedom Task Group (<https://sites.google.com/view/pslaiftg/home>) complete with a Rapid Response Team to support any school librarian in Pennsylvania, not just PSLA members, during this stressful time.

I hope this gave you a better understanding of the importance of accessible school libraries, as well as the importance of school librarians. It is also my hope that you can see that all Pennsylvania schools need to be funded fully, fairly, and equitably in order for the school library to function to its fullest potential providing all students with the highest level of success. School librarians are impacting students each and every day, and not simply through circulating books. Their impact goes far beyond that. Our librarians are making a difference for our students, not just academically, but by helping them acquire social and emotional skills as well and making a difference in their lives.

Resources

American Association of School Librarians (2018). *National school library standards for learners, school librarians, and school libraries*. Chicago: ALA Editions.



Pennsylvania School Librarians Association Strategic Priorities 2022-2025

Professional Learning and Leadership Development

Critical Issue: Leadership Development

How can PSLA develop effective leaders?

Goal One

Refine clear pathways, such as the leadership academies, committee involvement, task force coordination, board participation, and open lines of communication that help members set and meet leadership goals

Goal Two

Enhance new leaders through better onboarding and a more helpful transition of power and knowledge from the past leadership team

Outcome: PSLA will increase interest in and develop skills and dispositions necessary for serving in a leadership position, such as safe, small groups with feedback loops. PSLA will work to retain leaders with strong voices that are heard throughout PSLA programming

Critical Issue: Professional Learning

How can PSLA develop an inclusive culture that encourages continuous learning and supports professional learning goals?

Goal One

Provide varied professional learning opportunities for school librarians and other educational partners to develop and implement best practices that impact academic achievement of learners and the needs of our members

Goal Two

Recognize and highlight members who demonstrate, employ, and/or share innovative school library practices that can be replicated through the system

Outcome: PSLA will provide multiple pathways for professional learning, leading, and sharing for librarians across the state in an equitable, inclusive, and diverse manner.

Communication and Organizational Excellence

Critical Issue: Association Relevance

How can PSLA be proactive to ensure that school librarians are essential partners in the success of learners?

Goal One

Advocate for the implementation of best practices for school librarianship with stakeholders and enhance collaboration between school librarians and partners of learning in our communities

Goal Two

Foster a culture that values diverse and inclusive school library programs, inquiry-based learning, ethical and effective information literacy, the love of reading, and the commitment to lifelong learning to prepare learners for college, career, and life

Goal Three

Continue to be an agent that advocates for the school library profession and for all Pennsylvania students

Outcome: By addressing this critical issue, PSLA will be proactive in response to shifts in education and the school library profession

Critical Issue: Membership Development and Retention

How can PSLA grow and strengthen its community?

Goal One

Demonstrate the value of membership in PSLA as an inclusive, effective, and responsive organization

Goal Two

Retain current members by providing opportunities accessible to and representative of all members

Outcome: By capitalizing on the expertise of the membership, PSLA will engage members and market the value of membership in the organization to potential members, including those with diverse professional backgrounds, to build a larger learning community

Critical Issue: Internal and External Communication

How can PSLA strengthen and expand our communication network?

Goal One

Continue to refine an effective infrastructure that facilitates communication and allows for feedback within the PSLA organization

Goal Two

Develop new partnerships and strengthen existing partnerships with professional organizations

Goal Three

Seek opportunities to include the diverse voices of our membership in order to further the organization and to affect organizational change

Outcome: By supporting a communication network, maintaining partnerships with other professional organizations, and valuing diverse perspectives, the reach of PSLA will continue to grow

Advocacy for Libraries and the Profession

Critical Issue: Public Perception of School Libraries

How can PSLA foster a wide understanding of the critical relationship between learner success and quality school library programs?

Goal One

In collaboration with the Office of Commonwealth Libraries, utilize the *Guidelines for Pennsylvania School Library Programs* as a framework and share information annually with all stakeholders*

Goal Two

Communicate the impact of appropriately staffed school library programs on academic achievement to all stakeholders*

Outcome: PSLA will increase stakeholders' awareness of the critical importance of school libraries and certified school librarians

Critical Issue: Integrated Advocacy

How can PSLA increase support for school libraries?

Goal One

Build positive relationships with all stakeholders* to increase support for school library programs and to communicate the critical impact of the certified school librarian in each school

Goal Two

Strengthen relationships with PA Department of Education to identify school library staffing across the state

Goal Three

Support Pennsylvania school librarians to amplify their voices with their school community

Outcome: PSLA will be a strong advocate for school libraries and librarians across the state

*Stakeholders: pre-service and practicing librarians and teachers, school library education programs, administrators, board members, learners/parents/guardians, community members, and legislators.



Survey of Library Staffing in PA Public School Districts, 2021-2022
 Results as of March 4, 2022
 Conducted by Pennsylvania School Librarians Association

100% of 500 School Districts Responded: 2,640 schools in 500 school districts
 NOTE: Staffing data was affected for the 2020-2021 collection year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Data was adjusted based on this year's survey results.

Professional Staff: Certified School Librarians

Professional Staffing (Certified School Librarians) in 500 School Districts

Years	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022
Positions	1,686	1,640	1,629.05	1,544.8	1,537.94

Professional Staffing Reductions Year to Year

Years	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022
Positions Eliminated	31.5	58	34.95	93.05	90.56
Districts	45 (9%)	40 (8%)	33 (7%)	55 (11%)	88 (17.6%)

Professional Staffing Gains Year to Year

Years	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022
Positions Gained	35.75	16	15.5	17	82.7
Districts	23 (4.6%)	16 (3.2%)	15 (3%)	8 (1.6%)	65 (13%)

Professional Staffing Changes Year to Year

Years	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022
Net Positions Lost	-4.25	-42	-19.45	-76.05	-7.86

Professional Staffing Profile

- No Certified School Librarian

Years	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022
Districts	22 (4.4%)	23 (4.6%)	29 (5.8%)	48 (9.6%)	52 (10%)
Number students affected	40,932	52,633	59,634	86,745	99,685

- One Part-timed Certified Librarian Serving Entire District

Years	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022
Districts	0 (0%)	2 (0.4%)	1 (.2%)	9 (1.8%)	10 (2.0%)
Number students affected	0	1,269	579	8,878	11,958

- One Full-time Certified Librarian Serving Entire District

Years	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022
Districts	115 (23%)	118 (23.6%)	120 (24%)	123 (24%)	118 (23.6%)

- Enrollment Breakdown for District With One Certified School Librarian Serving Entire District

District Enrollment	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022
< 500	10	12	14	11	8
500-1,000	45	37	44	48	41
1,001-1,500	37	37	32	37	34
1,501-2,000	5	13	11	20	14
2,001-3,000	14	15	13	10	7
> 3,000	4	4	6	6	10

- Districts with at Least One Librarian Serving Multiple Buildings

Years	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022
Districts	252 (50%)	327 (65%)	321 (64%)	320 (64%)	303 (61%)

- Districts with One Certified School Librarian for Each Building

Years	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022
Districts	131 (26%)	148 (30%)	150 (30%)	132 (26%)	130 (26%)

- Number of Certified Librarians by Type of District. Data based on PDE urban-centric and metro-centric locale codes.

Type of District	Districts	2021-2022 Librarians	Total Students	Students per Librarian
City-Large	2	43	135,350	3,148
City-mid-size/small	18	101	143,418	1,420
Suburban	237	930.24	852,174	916.1
Town	76	146.7	134,783	919
Rural	167	309	259,155	838.7

NOTE: "No Certified Librarian" + "One Librarian Serving Multiple Buildings" + "One Librarian For Each Building" = 500 school districts

Paraprofessional Staffing

Paraprofessional Staffing in 500 School Districts (In 2021-2022, only 234 school districts reported data about their paraprofessional staff; year-to-year totals may differ due to varying districts responding)

Years	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022
Positions	1,223	1,185	1,194	1,040.15	443.2

Paraprofessional Staffing Changes Year to Year (In 2021-2022, only 234 school districts reported data about their paraprofessional staff; year-to-year totals may differ due to varying districts responding)

- Positions Eliminated **(Based on 234 school districts' reporting data)**

Years	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022
Positions Eliminated	54.5	56	60.25	153.85	35.55
Districts	42 (8.6%)	40 (8%)	44 (9%)	86 (17%)	26 (11%)

- Positions Gained **(Based on 234 school districts' reporting data)**

Years	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022
Positions Gained	26	24.75	12.5	8.7	25
Districts	20 (3%)	22 (4%)	10 (2%)	10 (2%)	12 (5.1%)

Paraprofessional Staffing Profile **(Based on 234 school districts' reporting data)**

Years	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022
No Paraprofessional Staff	158 (32%)	159 (32%)	168 (34%)	199 (39.8%)	99 (42%)
One Paraprofessional Staff for Entire District	105 (21%)	95 (19%)	84 (17%)	91 (18%)	40 (17%)
Part-time Paraprofessional Staff for Entire District	no data	10 (2%)	15(3%)	8 (1.6%)	7 (3%)
Paraprofessional serving multiple buildings	139 (28%)	232 (48%)	121 (25%)		
Paraprofessional for each building	93 (19%)	100 (20%)	102 (21%)	46 (9%)	31 (13.%)

Independent Schools Data

Years	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022
Schools Responded	37	33	49	32	30
Number of Libraries	68	47	74	48	35
Professional Librarians	65.5	48.5	68	43	27
Paraprofessional Staff	33.5	16.25	34	19.5	15.5

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

SENATE BILL

No. 610 Session of
2023

INTRODUCED BY SCHWANK, COSTA, HAYWOOD, COLLETT, BROOKS, FONTANA,
HUGHES, FLYNN, KANE, BREWSTER, STREET, CAPPELLETTI, COMMITTA,
L. WILLIAMS AND MUTH, APRIL 17, 2023

REFERRED TO EDUCATION, APRIL 17, 2023

AN ACT

1 Amending the act of March 10, 1949 (P.L.30, No.14), entitled "An
2 act relating to the public school system, including certain
3 provisions applicable as well to private and parochial
4 schools; amending, revising, consolidating and changing the
5 laws relating thereto," in professional employees, providing
6 for professional librarian.

7 The General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
8 hereby enacts as follows:

9 Section 1. The act of March 10, 1949 (P.L.30, No.14), known
10 as the Public School Code of 1949, is amended by adding a
11 section to read:

12 Section 1116. Professional Librarian.--Each public school in
13 this Commonwealth shall employ at least one professional
14 librarian who is certified under 24 Pa.C.S. § 9319 (relating to
15 certification of library personnel).

16 Section 2. This act shall take effect in 60 days.

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

HOUSE BILL

No. 640 Session of
2023

INTRODUCED BY CIRESI, R. MACKENZIE, GUENST, WAXMAN, RABB,
FREEMAN, ISAACSON, M. MACKENZIE, JAMES, KHAN, HANBIDGE,
BURGOS, PROBST, KINSEY, MADDEN, SANCHEZ, DELLOSO, SHUSTERMAN,
WARREN, N. NELSON, NEILSON, OTTEN, GREEN AND MALAGARI,
MARCH 21, 2023

REFERRED TO COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, MARCH 21, 2023

AN ACT

1 Amending the act of March 10, 1949 (P.L.30, No.14), entitled "An
2 act relating to the public school system, including certain
3 provisions applicable as well to private and parochial
4 schools; amending, revising, consolidating and changing the
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Professional Development Opportunities

Create Community

One Book, One Association
Book Club
Yoga for School Librarians
Sit & Stitch crochet event
Meet & Greet with the Board
Author Lit Duo presentation

Connect

PSLA creates 9 Issues of the News for PA School Librarians to share with librarians statewide. This online newsletter offers teaching tips, current events, and the latest in professional development tools.

Communicate

Exploring the Work that Matters
4-part Workshop
School Library Journal Session on Collection Development
Managing Difficult Conversations
Annual Pre-conference sessions on AASL Standards, facing book challenges, and the Model Curriculum

CHALLENGES to Pennsylvania SCHOOL LIBRARIES

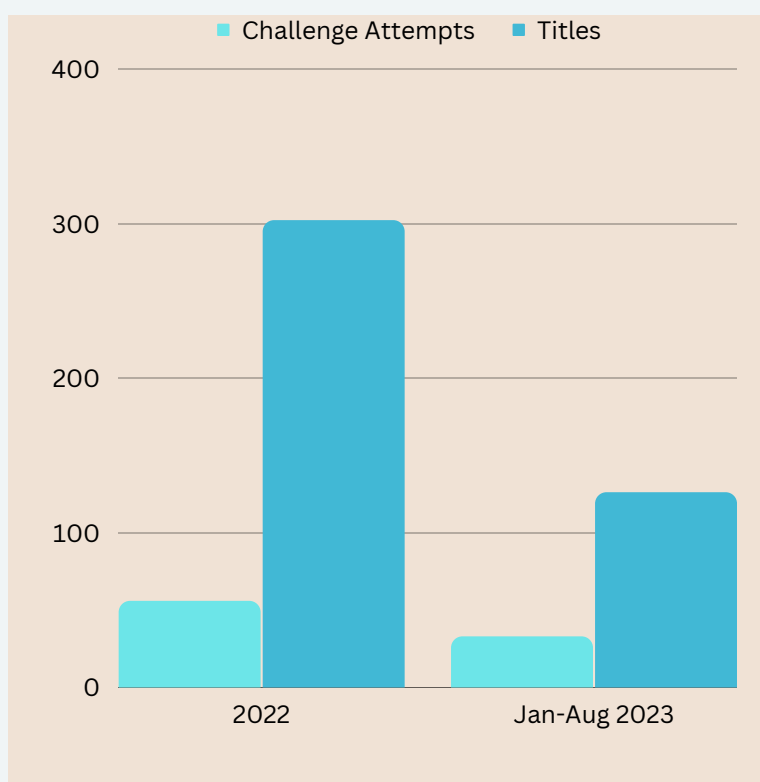
**2022
Pennsylvania**

Attempts to restrict book access:

56

Number of titles challenged:

302



**2023
Pennsylvania**

Attempts to restrict book access:

33

Number of titles challenged:

126

January-August
2023

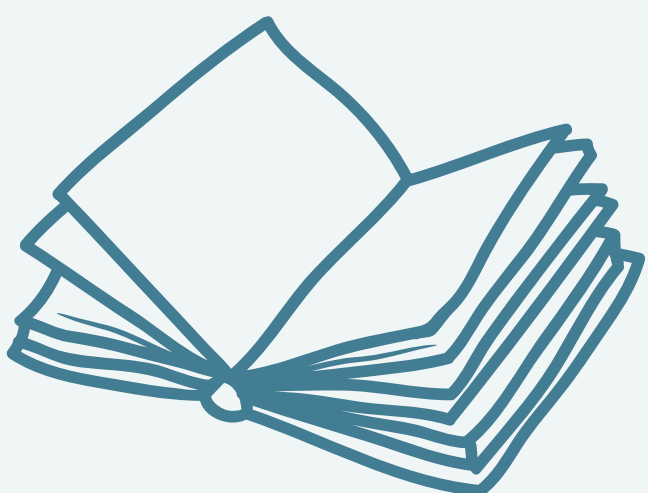
**2022
National**

Attempts to restrict book access:

695

Unnique Titles Challenged

1915



Over **100** Challenges In 2023

Colorado

Ohio

Connecticut

Pennsylvania

Florida

Idaho

Tennessee

Missouri

Texas

North Carolina

Virginia