

Pennsylvania Candidates Support School Libraries

October 25, 2020

Reported by Debra E. Kachel, Co-Chair of the PSLA Advocacy Committee

The Pennsylvania School Librarians Association, with the assistance of EveryLibrary, recently conducted a survey of candidates running for seats in the Pennsylvania General Assembly to gage their support for school library programs. Overwhelmingly, candidates expressed their support of school libraries and certified librarians, including funding and regulations for all schools to have school librarians for K-12 students. Almost 20% of candidates responded (N= 62) as of October 23, 2020.

Rep. Mark Gillen (incumbent District 128, parts of Berks and Lancaster Counties) strongly disagreed that school librarians are needed (Q3) and that legislation is not needed to ensure certified school librarians (Q5). Only 3 candidates negatively responded to establishing a budget line item for school libraries: Tim Bonner (District 8, Grove City), Bob Brooks (District 54, Murrysville), and Tim Twardzik (District 123, Frackville). Brooks also responded negatively to Q 15; Twardzik also responded negatively to Q11.

Here are the collective responses.

Q2 How important is it that all K-12 schools provide a school library for their students?	100% Very Important or Essential
Q3 Do you believe that all K- 12 schools should have a school librarian to guide the reading interests and abilities of students and teach students research and other information and technology skills?	97% Strongly Agree
Q4 Have you visited a school library in the past three years?	85% Yes
Q5 In Pennsylvania, there is no requirement that public schools have school libraries. However, there are state requirements for juvenile facilities and prisons, hospitals, and barber and cosmetology schools to have libraries. Would you support legislation to ensure that every public school has a school library for their students and teachers?	94% Strongly Agree
Q6 Do you agree that this lack of resources by some schools causes inequities of educational opportunities for K-12 students?	98% Agree or Strongly Agree
Q7 How important is it that all students and teachers have access to vetted, educational print and digital resources to learn?	100% Very Important or Essential
Q8 Would you favor a line item in the state’s budget for school library resources as is done in several other states?	95% Yes
Q9 Do you believe that students and teachers need school library services and related educational resources in order to meet Pennsylvania academic standards for research and learning in core academic subjects?	100% Yes
Q10 The PDE Library Model Curriculum Standards include competencies such as evaluating diverse media, drawing evidence from sources, determining the authenticity of information, and differentiating facts from opinion and fake news. How important do you think these skills are for students to learn?	100% Very Important or Essential
Q11 Do you think state-certified school librarians should be employed to teach the Model Library Curriculum that PDE has endorsed?	98% Yes

Q12 The Pennsylvania Parent Teacher Association (PaPTA) has endorsed a position statement that reads “All Pennsylvania’s public schools should have a viable school library, including impoverished, rural and urban communities which service a larger number of at-risk children.” The Resolution further states that the PaPTA “advocates for policy and regulatory reform that sets standards for public school library programs.” (Page 38 of https://bit.ly/pslasurvey1). Do you agree that there should be policy and regulatory reform that sets standards for public school library programs?	95% Agree or Strongly Agree
Q13 PDE has a Certification Staffing Policy Guideline (CSPG) #48 (see https://bit.ly/pslasurvey2) that lists the appropriate certification for staffing school library positions in public schools. It states that educators holding a K-12 Library Science certificate may teach library science at the elementary, middle, or secondary level and that “the local education agency (LEA) must employ at least one (1) certified Library Science educator when providing a school library program.” Do you support this Certification Staffing Policy Guideline 48?	98% Yes
Q14 Thirty percent of the 500 Pennsylvania school districts has only one school librarian per district, many of those are only part-time, or less. Twenty-nine districts have no school librarians and this number is growing. Do you believe that a school librarian is necessary to have an effective school library and a strong educational program for a school’s students and teachers?	100% Yes
Q15 If passed, HB 1355 and SB 752 of the 2019-2020 legislative session would have required “each public school in this Commonwealth shall employ at least one professional librarian who is certified.” Have you cosponsored this legislation?	56% Yes
Q16 If these bills are reintroduced in the upcoming legislative session, will you co-sponsor this legislation if the language remains the same?	98% Yes

Comments:

“Many children still don’t have broadband access, so school libraries are essential!” Tay Waltenbaugh (Candidate for Senate District 39, Greensburg)

“The skills of information evaluation and location are more crucial than ever. Librarians are the professionals for that job.” (Matt Ferrence District 6, Meadville)

In response to Q5: “That’s unbelievable! Public schools should have a library and a librarian who can teach them research basics and the fundamentals of resource evaluation. Access to books, videos, and music help children who may not otherwise have access to resources or the internet.” (Tara Zrinski District 138, Bethlehem)

“I visit many schools and have seen firsthand the importance of a school librarian in every school.” (Judy Schwank District 11, Fleetwood)

“A certified school librarian on site is the only way to ensure equity in learning.” (Carolyn Comitta District 19, West Chester)

In response to Q8: “Again, I represent one of the poorest S.D.s in PA. This inequity is a social rights & justice cause as much as an educational one.” (Peter Schweyer District 22, Allentown)

“Your zip code should not determine if your school has a librarian, the state needs to fund this.” (Shaun Dougherty District 35, Johnstown)

“A library without a librarian is like a garage without a mechanic. You can only do so much on your own. Assistance is required to help you do more and do it correctly.” (Dennis Semsick District 62, Penn Run)

In response to Q5: “This should not be an unfunded mandate - state funds should come with this requirement and be allocated in a way that addresses longstanding funding inequities.” (Lissa Geiger Shulman District 30, Allison Park)

“Librarians are essential to schools and provide students opportunities to enhance their learning. We must ensure that all students and teachers have access to school libraries.” (Janet Diaz District 13, Lancaster)

“Yes. When a student graduates from high school, the seal on their diploma certifies that they have achieved the educational benchmarks set for all students by the state. How can we say that is true if a child's school lack trained librarians and essential resources?” (Michelle Siegel District 27, Selingsgrove)

“Too often we've seen education funding cut during the budget process. A line item would be an important step to ensuring our school libraries get the funding they need.” (Jenn O'Mara District 165, Springfield)

Here is the complete list of respondents as of October 23, 2020:

Andrew, Anton	Gillen, Mark M.	Siegel, Michelle
Barli, Randy J.	Guenst, Nancy	Slomski, Julie
Bashir, Aaron	Harkins, Pat	Stambaugh, Perry
Blichar, Michael	Knoll, Michele	Stephens, Todd
Bonner, Tim	Langerholz, Wayne	Stromyer, Shelbie
Brooks, Bob	Longiotti, Mark	Toohil, Tarah
Carroll, Mike	Malagari, Steve	Troutman, Bill
Ciamacca, Deb	Mastriano, Doug	Twardzik, Tim
Clements, Calvin	Mazza, Beth Ann Bittner	Waltenbaugh, Tay
Comitta, Carolyn	Murray, Drew	Waltz, Joe
Costa, Jay	O'Mara, Jennifer	Warren, Perry
Danielson, Shanna	Otten, Danielle Friel	Waugh, John
DeLuca, Anthony	Pennycuick, Tracy	Webster, Joe
Dennin, Jill	Petrarca, Joseph	Williams, Bob
Diaz, Janet	Prah, Robert	Williams, Craig
DiSanto, John	Ross, Doug	Young, Regina
Dougherty, Shaun	Rozzi, Mark	Zrinski, Tara
Duvall, Matthew	Sanchez, Ben	
Eachus, Todd	Schwank, Judy	
Elmore, Rico	Schweyer, Peter	
Ferrence, Matt	Semsick, Dennis	
Fisher, Ellen	Shulman, Lissa Geiger	
Friebel, Lisa	Shusterman, Melissa	