

Dear HISD Board President Rodriguez and Board Members Adams, Davila, Eastman, Skillern-Jones, Jones, Lunceford, Meyers, Moore, and Superintendent Grier,

I am writing on behalf of the Texas Library Association, which counts among its membership thousands of school librarians and parents. We understand the Board is considering staffing issues, the critical need for school librarians and other professionals on every campus, and budget savings measures at its upcoming meeting. This discussion comes at a time when the public has taken increasing notice that not all Houston ISD schools benefit from the learning support of a certified school librarian. Fox News recently reported that only 35% of Houston ISD schools have a certified school librarian in charge of the library.

We fully recognize the budget exigencies that frame district operations. However, we believe it is crucial for HISD to increase its capacity to deliver instructional support through school library programs. School libraries – and the professional librarians who run them – bring great power to the learning experience. In fact, the newly reauthorized federal education statute – *The Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015* – has included provisions specific to support for school library programs and school librarians, and the role they play in literacy, digital literacy, and academic achievement.

The importance of school librarians has been noted by the Texas and National PTA organizations which have adopted formal positions in support of school librarians. Additionally, the Texas Education Agency and the Texas State Library and Archives Commission have noted the importance of school librarians. According to the Texas Education Agency/ Texas State Library and Archives Commission's *Report on the Needs of Public School Libraries*, "The findings show that adequate funding, resources, and recognition of the vital role the school library program and school librarian play in student success are needed."

We would also like to take this opportunity to share with you some of the critical research into the impact of quality school library programs (administered by full-time certified librarians) on student achievement. "Students in better-staffed programs scored as much as 22 percent higher on standardized English tests and as much as 17 percent higher on standardized reading tests compared to students in schools where library programs had less staff and fewer hours."¹ Additionally, according to education researchers Keith Curry Lance and colleagues, "School libraries can be a very effective tool in closing the achievement gap. Although all students can benefit from effective libraries, students who suffer most because of the achievement gap benefit the most from the resources and services offered by libraries and librarians."²

We realize districts must maximize budgeting strategies, and we know that strong school libraries are effective and efficient use of public funding. We urge you strongly to maintain your professional library and ensure that certified school librarians be one every campus. We do so for this simple reason: certified school librarians and media specialists are central to our children's educational experiences—and librarians play a fundamental role in preparing students for college and the workplace. Countless national studies (including one conducted here in Texas) show that certified school librarians help raise student achievement at all levels.

To deny some students of Houston ISD access to quality school library programs, which can only be implemented by qualified full-time school librarians, is to force these young people to incur a deficit in learning resources and instruction--one that could position them behind millions of their school-aged peers throughout the state. Please consider the long-term cost of withdrawing tangible (and proven) instructional support that helps students learn and readies them for meeting state requirements throughout their K-12 experience.

The fundamental concern we all share is to provide students with the best and most successful learning experience possible. Strong school libraries and school librarians are essential to this process. The instruction of research, reading, and information literacy skills that librarians provide is a needed extension of classroom instruction. Furthermore, librarians (as credentialed teachers themselves) collaborate with teachers to support curriculum standards and teach (from the earliest ages) reading and critical thinking skills. Librarians are passionate educators who are committed to their schools and students. They are talented professionals who contribute to learning at your district. They form an

irreplaceable pillar of the experience you offer students. Please do not minimize kids' access to the support and instruction delivered by Houston ISD librarians.

We thank you for your careful consideration of these issues. We are here to help you in whatever way possible. Please let us know if you have any questions we might answer.

Most Respectfully,
Gloria Meraz

NOTES

1 Source: Smith, Ester G. 2006. Student Learning Through Wisconsin School Library Media Centers: Library Media Specialist Survey Report. Austin, TX: EGS Research and Consulting.

<www.dpi.wi.gov/imt/pdf/finallmssurvey06.pdf>

2 Source: Francis, Briana Hovendick, Keith Curry Lance, and Zeth Lietzau. 2010. School Librarians Continue to Help Students Achieve Standards: The Third Colorado Study(2010). Denver, CO: Colorado State Library, Library Research Service.

<www.lrs.org/documents/closer_look/CO3_2010_Closer_Look_Report.pdf>

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