

To: House Education Committee
From: Kathleen Odean
Support of School Libraries Act H7417
Date: March 10, 2026

Dear Education Committee members,

My name is Kathleen Odean, and I am in support of School Libraries Act H7417. I support it because of the following strong research from the most respected experts on the impact of school libraries, Keith Curry Lance and Debra Kachel, as explained in their article, *"Why School Librarians Matter: What Years of Research Tell Us"* by April 2018. *Phi Delta Kappan* 99(7):15-20. As you can see below, students benefit enormously from having school librarians.

"Since 1992, a growing body of research known as the school library impact studies has consistently shown positive correlations between high-quality library programs and student achievement (Gretes, 2013; Scholastic, 2016). Data from more than 34 statewide studies suggest that students tend to earn better standardized test scores in schools that have strong library programs.

Skeptics might assume that these benefits are associated mainly with wealthier schools, where well-resourced libraries serve affluent students. However, researchers have been careful to control for school and community socioeconomic factors, and they have found that these correlations cannot be explained away by student demographics, school funding levels, teacher-pupil ratios, or teacher qualifications. In fact, they have often found that the benefits associated with good library programs are strongest for the most vulnerable and at-risk learners, including students of color, low-income students, and students with disabilities.

In these statewide studies, the most substantial and consistent finding is a positive relationship between full-time, qualified school librarians and scores on standards-based language arts, reading, and writing tests, regardless of student demographics and school characteristics...**Reading and writing scores tend to be higher for all students who have a full-time certified librarian**, and when it comes to reading, students in at-risk subgroups tend to benefit more than all students combined...

Given the emphasis on literacy and reading in many libraries, it makes intuitive sense that students' reading and writing scores would be better in schools with a strong library program. What may be more surprising is that, in a 2015 Washington state study, the presence of a certified school librarian was also a predictor of higher elementary and middle school math scores. The study ranked school library programs based on certified staffing, library accessibility, resources, and technology and found that "the one key factor distinguishing high-performing high-poverty schools from low-performing high-poverty schools is a quality library program" (Coker, 2015, p. 25). Graduation rates and test scores in reading and math were significantly higher in schools with high-quality libraries and certified librarians, even after controlling for school size and poverty."

The article attests to the positive impact of school libraries and librarians on test scores. My own 40 years in the school library world attest how much school libraries and librarians inspire students' enthusiasm for reading. Librarians' recommendations, attractive book displays, lists of recommended books, library book clubs, library social media sites that highlight books: these inspire students to read. Without a school librarian and a strong school library, these are unlikely to happen, leaving most students to read less and learn less. Please pass this bill for the sake of Rhode Island's students!

Thank you for your consideration.
Kathleen Odean, North Kingstown