

Informational Brief: Impact of School Libraries on Student Achievement

Executive Summary

New York Comprehensive Center

As more and more schools and districts are confronted with difficult fiscal decisions, school libraries are often one of the first line items to be sacrificed. However, extensive research shows that schools that have relied on their libraries to support student growth, specifically in the areas of literacy, information literacy, technological skills, and access to resources and equipment, have seen increased motivation, higher assessment scores, and ultimately higher graduation rates.

To demonstrate the positive impact of school libraries on the implementation of the Regents Reform Agenda in New York, the New York Comprehensive Center (NYCC) was asked in the Spring of 2011 to prepare a brief which highlights specific examples of programs in states that have had success utilizing school libraries to improve student achievement. These successes align with five key elements of the Regents Reform Agenda in the following ways:

- 1. Teacher/School Leader Preparation and Effectiveness:** Through collaboration with meaningful goals, and by providing students with access to technology (coupled with technology instruction), school libraries have helped improve teacher effectiveness. Schools and districts may be more reluctant to cut school library spending if they understand the positive impact libraries have on teacher and leader effectiveness, and, in turn, student growth.
- 2. Early Childhood Learning Opportunities:** When early learners have greater access to the books, literary materials, literacy supports, and technological instruction that school libraries and school librarians provide, there is a greater likelihood that they will develop into accomplished readers. Students who demonstrate on-grade literacy levels by the third grade perform better on standardized assessments and in classrooms throughout elementary and secondary school years, tending to save schools and districts money through reductions in remedial and special education placements.
- 3. Raise Graduation Rates for At-Risk Students:** School libraries and school librarians support at-risk students through personalized instruction, networks of support, and access to 21st century technology and technological skills. Schools with effective library programs have seen increases in graduation rates and higher performance levels beginning earlier in students' academic careers. Increased infrastructure, access, and staffing for school libraries can potentially increase graduation rates and narrow the achievement gap.

4. **Curriculum and Professional Development:** There is evidence of increased student achievement as well as more active teacher leadership in school environments where school libraries assist in the alignment of curriculum to state standards and in school-wide professional development activities. These functions are all the more critical with the shift to the Common Core Standards and the attendant focus on 21st century skills.
5. **Assessment:** An increase of librarians in school libraries tends to correlate with higher school assessment results. Schools and districts that provide resources and place a priority on the establishment of effective school library programs can see direct returns on their investments through such increases in assessment scores.

Based on the conclusions from the research cited in the brief, it is clear that school libraries play an important role in student achievement, curriculum development, and instruction. Through political and fiscal state support, effective school library programs can serve as consistent drivers for student achievement in times of constant change and churning educational reform. To read the comprehensive brief, visit:

http://nycomprehensivecenter.org/initiatives/inits_elearn/resources

The brief was prepared by the New York Comprehensive Center (NYCC), one of 16 regional comprehensive centers funded by the U.S. Department of Education, which supports education leaders in our state as they strive to meet the goals of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and improve achievement outcomes for all students.

The mission of the NYCC is to develop the capacity of the New York State Education Department (NYSED) and its networks and agencies to assist districts and schools in improving achievement outcomes for all students. In doing so, we strive to engage with state education leaders in:

Thinking systemically about the relationships among all elements to create coherence and articulate a common purpose;

Using research-based findings and rigorous evidence to evaluate impact, refine practices, seek new solutions, and meet learners' needs;

Acting strategically to maximize opportunities and make the best use of available resources; and

Working collaboratively across leadership levels and organizations to leverage resources and overcome barriers.



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