

# ALA American Library Association

## A “HIGHLY QUALIFIED” LIBRARIAN IN EVERY SCHOOL LIBRARY

Two years ago, with strong bipartisan support, the nation embarked on an ambitious school reform plan entitled the *No Child Left Behind Act* (P.L. 107-110). Among other things, the Act requires states to set high standards for all students and holds schools accountable for the results. Further, it requires that there be a “highly qualified” teacher in every classroom. The American Library Association (ALA) applauds those objectives, but believes the same standards being applied in our classrooms should be extended to our nation’s school libraries – that every school library should be staffed by a highly qualified, certified library media specialist.

Sec. 1119 of the *No Child Left Behind Act* outlines the minimum qualifications needed by teachers and paraprofessionals who work on any facet of classroom instruction. It requires that states develop plans to achieve the goal that all teachers of core academic subjects be highly qualified by the end of the 2005–06 school year. *No Child Left Behind* also requires each state to measure every public school student's progress in reading and math in each of grades 3 through 8 and at least once during grades 10 through 12.

Yet, despite the vital role school libraries play in helping meet those requirements, *No Child Left Behind* is silent when it comes to the qualifications of those individuals in charge of our school libraries. School librarians fill multiple roles - teacher, instructional partner, information specialist and program administrator -- ensuring that students and staff are effective users of information and ideas.

School libraries are critical partners in ensuring that states and school districts alike meet the reading requirements that are part of *No Child Left Behind*, as well as President Bush's unequivocal commitment to ensuring that every child can read by the end of third grade. President Bush and the Congress recognized the important role school libraries play in increasing literacy and reading skills when they created the Improving Literacy Through School Library program as part of the *No Child Left Behind Act* (Title I, Part B, Subpart 4, Sec.1251).

Multiple studies have affirmed that there is a clear link between school library media programs, staffed by an experienced school library media specialist, and student academic achievement. In states as dissimilar as Alaska, Pennsylvania, and Colorado, three recent statewide studies show that a strong library media program helps students learn more and score higher on standardized achievement tests than their peers in library-impooverished schools. In Pennsylvania, schools with adequately staffed libraries (at least one full-time, certified library specialist and one full-time support staff member), had test scores in grades 5, 8 and 11 increase by four percent, five percent, and eight percent, respectively.

When it comes to our children’s education, we must ensure that they receive the best instruction possible from competent, qualified instructors. This is true in the classroom and should be true in our school libraries. Education is not exclusive to the classroom; it extends into school libraries and so should the qualifications we demand from our school librarians. To be a critical part of a comprehensive and renewed strategy to ensure that students learn to read and to read well, every school library should be staffed by a highly qualified, certified library media specialist.