

MSLA Forum

5 August 2007

Senator Edward M. Kennedy
317 Russell Senate Office Building

Washington DC 20510

RE: In Support of Senator Reed's SKILLS ACT Bill S.1699

Dear Senator Kennedy:

As a member of the Massachusetts School Library Association, and retired school library teacher in June of this year, I am writing in support of Member Judi Paradis's July letter to urge your support of Senator Jack Reed's SKILLS ACT S. 1699, and to share with you the brief introduction I wrote in the "handbook" I left for my successor, a paraprofessional library assistant who will be supervised by a curriculum media coordinator. To date neither the paraprofessional or the curriculum coordinator are certified in the field. This introduction illustrates one reason why this bill's passage is so important. I firmly believe its passage would be the way to encourage states and their respective school systems and Departments of Education to step up and finally acknowledge the importance of having certified school librarians in all schools. Too, I feel its passage would be a wakeup call to school systems such as mine who have adopted the mistaken notion that the salary I received could be better spent elsewhere, and that the library isn't important enough to warrant a highly qualified and certified individual in the field of library science. Judy has given permission for anyone in MSLA to quote her letter. The handbook's introduction is at the end of the letter.

"Massachusetts is similar to many other states in failing to adequately define the parameters for a high-quality school library program. Yet, multiple studies demonstrate that students in schools with good school libraries learn more, get better grades, and score higher on standardized test scores than their peers in schools without libraries. A study conducted at Simmons College by Professor James Baughman in 2002 demonstrated a clear correlation between properly staffed and funded school library programs and higher MCAS scores. School library programs not only increase student literacy, but provide a significant contribution in closing the technology gap between students who come from technology-rich households and those who do not. Furthermore, school library teachers provide training in how to best evaluate and use information from all sources—both electronic and print—a key skill for 21st century students.

The SKILLS Act recognizes that school library programs were not addressed in the original NCLB legislation. This oversight means that many administrators are now trying to stretch dollars by using library resource budgets to mitigate the effects of budgetary shortfalls. When library budgets are cut, students suffer. The SKILLS Act specifically:

- Requires school districts, to the extent feasible, ensure that every school within the district employs at least one highly qualified school library media specialist in each school library;
- Defines highly qualified school library media specialists as those who have a bachelor's degree and have obtained full state certification as a school library media specialist or passed the state teacher licensing examination, with state certification in library media in such state;
- Establishes as a state goal that there be at least one highly qualified school library media specialist in every public school no later than the beginning of the 2010-2011 school year
- Broadens the focus of training, professional development, and recruitment activities to include school library media specialists
- Ensures that funds will serve elementary, middle, and high school students; and
- Requires books and materials to be appropriate for and engage the interest of students in all grade levels and students with special learning needs, including English language learners.

Handbook Introduction: "The time has come the walrus said to speak of many things, of shoes and ships and ceiling wax, and cabbages, and kings." (Lewis Carroll). As I prepare to leave, the changes I've made, and those that are coming in the fall make the above quotation most apropos. The professional job description and duties of a library media specialist have en-

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compassed many areas over the years at SVAHS. The major change for next year at SVAHS is that this position will be filled by two paraprofessionals who will be referred to as a library assistant, and a media assistant. The supervisor for the individuals hired for both positions will be the school's curriculum coordinator. As an attempt at making a smooth transition for whoever takes my place, subsequent paragraphs of this document will provide information on the job as it pertains to this library.

In accordance with the above quote, the space can be considered as the ship, the conveyer of supplies and information to the entire campus, and the librarian can be considered as the ceiling wax that holds everything together. The librarian is also the ship's captain who authorizes purchases, supervises the students, and along with the teachers, the crew, assists the students and the crew in their projects.... Materials can be referred to as shoes as they are here to assist students in their research, and their information can be copied and cited, checked out, reserved, and printed. The shoes consist of the following: on line subscription data bases, both free and purchased, on line digital books, magazines, audio tapes, videos, DVDs, CDRoms, equipment, an on line card catalog, the Internet, as well as hard copy magazines, newspapers, and books.

In closing, I'd like to reiterate that the position of curriculum coordinator has been filled by a classroom teacher who took a leave of absence from the classroom for a year to "try out" the position, and the media assistant position is yet to be hired while the library assistant position has been filled by a substitute teacher whom I trained and who was assigned to cover the library when I could not be there, or to cover my assigned prep period if she was not needed elsewhere. Too, I'm told that the administration sees the positions as evolving. No one is sure what to expect and no one is highly qualified or certified in the field of library science at this point. Further, the curriculum coordinator has no "on the job" library experience. Having served on New England Association for Secondary Schools Evaluation Teams and chaired some teams for Media Services, I do not feel that the school's move is the best one, nor do I feel that the new MASS DOE requirements for school librarianship are in the students' or the prospective librarians' best interests. It seems that a masters in library science is no longer required.

I hope that the thoughts and information expressed above can be added to your thoughts as you decide whether to vote yeah or neigh on this important bill, and strive to improve the education of all students within the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Thank you for your attention and consideration.

Respectfully,

Janice K. Koleszar
Retired Library Media Specialist
Smith Vocational and Agricultural High School
Northampton, MA.

Legislative Day March 2007

(Reprinted from Forum, Spring, 2007)

By Bob Roth and Judi Paradis

Co-chairs, MSLA Legislation Committee

Legislators and others roaming the State House on March 8th found it hard to miss the impact that school libraries have on students. Giant blowups of bookmarks on display at the bottom of the Grand Staircase announced that books “take you to new heights,” help you “experience the world,” and allow kids to “get lost in your own fairy tale.” Nearby exhibits showcased some of the best practices at school

spoke in a brief, insightful and inspiring comment about authors, readers and libraries. Representative Frank Smizik who is sponsoring House Bill 564 on behalf of MSLA addressed the winning students and their families. H564 seeks to include libraries in Chapter 70 of the Education Title of Massachusetts law. Representative Smizik also presented the award to each student recipient.



Following the awards ceremony, MSLA members and some parent supporters formed teams of about 3 to 5 people each. The teams visited approximately 40 legislators—including every member of the Joint Committee on Education, the com-

libraries in various cities and towns around Massachusetts. Legislators listened as MSLA gathered at the State House for our third annual Legislative Day.

The day began at the Grand Staircase of the State House, with a continental breakfast and the opportunity for informal conversation and for looking at the bookmark contest display and the school library best practices display. Almost 20 library teachers prepared the best practices displays showing some of what they contribute to their school's culture and their students' learning.

The formal presentations began with a new event. MSLA held an awards presentation for the winners of the annual bookmark contest. Twelve of the fourteen award recipients traveled to Boston with their library teachers and families to accept their awards. MSLA President Kathy Lowe served as Master of Ceremonies. Author and illustrator Mary Newell DePalma



mittee that will vote on H564. During the visits, many legislators reported hearing about the MSLA Legislative Day in advance from library teachers across the state who sent postcards and e-mails.

The day was productive. We discovered strong support from several members of the House, including members of the Education Committee. We also learned that an opportunity to strengthen support for school libraries may come from a restructuring of the Board of Education, which oversees the Department of

Education in Massachusetts. Newly-elected Governor Deval Patrick and some members of the legislature are considering the creation of a Department of Education to be headed by a cabinet-level Secretary. It was suggested that MSLA become involved now to be a prominent voice as this restructuring takes place.

As our Legislative Day concluded, members gathered to share the information gathered during office visits, and to offer suggestions for improvement. Several people spoke of the impact that parents made this year, and we are hoping that more parents who support school libraries will join us next year.

Overall, this year seemed a great success. Please watch the MSLA list-serve for messages asking our members to provide support as we attempt to move our legislative agenda forward.

The 2007 Bookmark Contest: the Adventure Beyond Information

(Reprinted from Forum, Spring, 2007)

By Gerri Fegan, West Middle School, Andover

Cameras flashed, banners were unfurled, and the audience broke into wild applause. This wasn't a scene in a movie – it was the award ceremony for the third Annual MSLA Bookmark Contest, and all those smiling faces on the Grand Staircase at the State House were the winning participants. It was an incredible moment for twelve students from all over Massachusetts but what brought them together happened four weeks earlier.

The judging for the third annual MSLA Bookmark Contest took place on February 8th, 2007 at the Plympton School in Waltham. There were almost 300 entries from across the Commonwealth of Massachusetts from students in grades K-8, and once again local authors and illustrators, as well as members of the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners experienced the joys and agonies of selecting division winners and awards of honorable mention. This was an exceptional year because the awards were going to be presented at the State House as part of MSLA Legislation Day in March, so judges were particularly careful to choose the best bookmark designs in each of four divisions. Our panel consisted of Kathy Lowe, President of MSLA; Stephen Krensky, Mary Newell DePalma, Brian Lies and David Biedrzycki, authors and illustrators; and Em Claire Knowles and Vicky Kaufman, MBLC.

Round one's judges were full of enthusiasm as they compared all the student artistry that captured the theme of the contest, "Adventures in Information." Students of all ages used a variety of media and techniques to demonstrate their enthusiasm for school library programs – crayons, watercolors, pastels, glow-in-the-dark paint and collage. There was animated discussion about the choice of colors and the faithfulness to the theme. Slowly, the entries that were not chosen for the second round were gently removed and placed on a separate table. The judges took a break for refreshments and discussed all the news about legislation. Over soft drinks, cookies, and specially-wrapped candy, we discussed the future of school library pro-

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It was difficult to tell who was having a better time: the children, their parents, the librarians, or the officials who admired their artwork.



grams in Massachusetts and the positive steps that MSLA is taking toward bringing attention to our legislative efforts. It seemed fitting that we were surrounded by mountains of bookmarks that celebrate all the diverse aspects of school librarianship.

The judges carefully evaluated the next round with care, and finally the winners were chosen: In Division One, grades K-1: winner Giselle Pilette, Fitzgerald School, Waltham (MSLA member Kathleen Finnerty); honorable mentions Emily Jackson, Bancroft School, Andover (MSLA member Nancy Snow); and Leora Levitt, South Area Solomon Schechter Day School, Stoughton (MSLA member Carol Fanger Bell). In Division Two, grades 2-3: winner Lindsey Elliott, Great Oak School, Danvers, (MSLA member Lorraine Miller); honorable mentions: Francesca Smigliani, Cedar School, Hanover, (MSLA member Susanne McHugh); Taylor O'Brien, Marsh Grammar School, Methuen (MSLA member Ken Hoffman); Maddie Harrington, Lt. Job Lane Elementary, Bedford (MSLA member Linda Coviello); and Claire Glover, Bancroft School, Andover (MSLA member Nancy Snow). In Division Three, grades 4-6: winner Emma Wang, Overlook Middle School, Ashburnham (MSLA member Eileen Barnacoat); honorable mentions Maggie Rubin, Lt. Job Lane Elementary,

Bedford (MSLA member Linda Coviello); and Lily Lu, Field School, Weston (MSLA member Lorraine Sousa). In Division Four, grades 7-12: winner Alexandra Seager, Amherst Regional High School, Amherst (MSLA member Leslie Lomasson); Dylan Young, Belchertown High School, Belchertown (MSLA member Marianne O'Brien); and Melanie Dauphinais, Overlook Middle School, Ashburnham (MSLA member Eileen Barnacoat).

Thus it was on a sunny March 8, 2007, these honorees and their families smiled for the cameras, shook the hands of their state representatives, and received commendations from state legislators. The librarians shared their contest experiences and looked forward to the prizes that were donated by vendors who have generously supported MSLA. With certificates, bookmarks, and prizes in hand, they were all together to receive recognition for their bookmarks that will be distributed at schools, conventions, and events. It was difficult to tell who was having a better time: the children, their parents, the librarians, or the officials who admired their artwork. Representative Smizik handed out the framed certificates and reminded parents to keep supporting school library programs, especially in the face of financial cutbacks. Rep. Barbara L'Italien gave a group of guests a tour of the House of Representatives and wisely told students that their libraries held the keys to leadership. For everyone involved in the 2007 Bookmark Contest, it was indeed a day of "adventures in information!" Wouldn't you like to have your school represented next year? Hopefully this article has inspired you to want to participate in the 2008 Bookmark contest. This is one of many venues where we can share and learn from one another and have fun at the same time.

Vision Summit Report

(Reprinted from Forum, Winter 2007)

By Valerie Diggs

Chelmsford Public Schools

Destination: Chicago's Crowne Plaza Hotel, adjacent to the O'Hare Airport

Dates: Saturday, Dec. 2nd and Sunday, Dec.3rd

Traveling companions:

Susan Ballard representing the *New England Educators of Media Association*

Diane Beaman representing the *New Hampshire Media Association*

Valerie Diggs representing the *Massachusetts School Library Association*

Our tickets said Friday morning, Dec. 1st, an 8:30am flight to Chicago for this exciting adventure! It was not to be so. Thursday night before departure we were listening to the weather announcers calling for a major snowstorm for the Chicago area. Will we get on the 8:21am flight Friday morning?? No luck; our flight is canceled. Will we be able to get out on the 11:22am flight? Still no luck! There are no flights leaving for Chicago today. The best we can do is to take a 6:48am Saturday morning flight to Chicago – and arrive an hour and a half late for our Saturday session. After calls to AASLs headquarters in Chicago, we are told that due to the snow an travel conditions, the Vision Summit will not begin until Saturday morning, and we are asked to PLEASE come, despite the slightly late arrival and snowy conditions.

So, déjà vu, and all that, back we go to the airport Saturday morning. Our plane leaves on time, and actually lands 10 minutes ahead of schedule. The runways are covered with snow and ice, and we are greeted with 16-degree temperatures on the ground. Bundled up, we trudge off of the plane and onto a shuttle to the hotel. Our minds are racing with thoughts of what we will be asked to produce, and how we will possibly envision the future of our profession.

Shouts of hurrah and welcome greet us at the seminar room door. Executive Director of the American Association of School Librarians (AASL), Julie Walker, shepherds us in, and

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Deputy Executive Director, Beverley Becker, gives our badges and workshop material. We are immediately instructed to join a group of our colleagues gathered around large round tables. Present are school library teachers from across our great country: from Alaska to Florida to Maine to Hawaii and every state in-between! The room was abuzz with excitement and anticipation.

Our first task is to look at the history of school libraries. This became an interesting exercise, as the "younger" members of our group relied heavily on older members for accurate historical landmarks in the history of school libraries in public education. A list of Key Milestones was created, and is as follows (in no particular order):

- Integration: Cultural/Ethnic in the 1960's
- External Media in the 1960's
- Library Standards in the 1960's
- ESEA of the 1960's – then loss of funding in the 1970's
- The inception of Library Automation in the 1980's
- The publication of Information Power 1 & 2
- Google/Search Engines
- 24/7 Self Service
- Impact Studies
- NCLB/Accountability
- RSS/Democratization of Information/participatory cultures

What will change? How will trends affect current conditions? How will the situation change politically for School Library Programs and staff? These are just a few of the questions we were confronted with after lunch on Saturday.



After much discussion in groups, a preliminary list of what attendees consider their "Primary Roles" as Library Teachers today was developed. This list is as follows (again, in no particular order):

- **Leader:** being a leader both in your school and within your profession; encompasses everything; the creation of new partners with other professional organizations
- **Teacher:** of Information Literacy Skills
- **Transmedia Navigator:** i.e. Information Manager, Information Specialists
- **Program Manager:** administrator, staff supervisor, collection developer, budget developer
- **Reading Advocate**
- **Instructional Partner**
- **Technology Integrator**
- **Research Advisor**
- **Collaborator:** helping teachers teach process within content areas; facilitate interdisciplinary units of study
- **Facilitator of Media/Technology:** production and communication
- **Community Liaison**
- **Professional Developer:** and learner