

Advocacy, Making Every Voice Count

By Sandy Kelly, MSLA President

Over the past summer I met with our MSLA Legislative Chairs, Bob Roth and Judi Paradis, along with Kathy Lowe twice to discuss our lobbying efforts for H564. Passage of this bill would correct an oversight to the Chapter 70 laws by simply adding the words "school libraries" to the education reform laws. It appears that school libraries were never deleted from the original Chapter 15, with the intention that school libraries were still an important part of this legislation to maintain. However, as we have seen, since the passage of Chapter 70 school libraries have become the chopping block for district budgets throughout the Commonwealth. As a result, Massachusetts school libraries continue to rank near the bottom of the fifty states for quality school libraries with school library certified staffing.

On September 12th a group of us, along with supporters went to testify at the State House in Boston before the Education Committee in support of H564. This was the first day the Education Committee had convened to hear testimony on issues related to Chapter 70. The morning brought many speakers and listeners on behalf of the need to have an "Adequacy Study" done to assess how well Massachusetts budgets for the mandates of Chapter 70. Speakers from the MTA, Superintendent's Association, School Committees, administrators and educators from across the state spoke eloquently about the lack of funds and the resulting cuts to school programs resulting from an Ed Reform law that was written before the state mandates for MCAS testing, frameworks, and curriculum alignments. Many speakers mentioned the cuts to their school libraries and the need to have them staffed by qualified personnel.

Accompanying me in testimony were Maureen Ambrosino from the Central Region Library System, Donna Guerin speaking as past MSLA



MSLA President Sandy Kelly and Executive Director Kathy Lowe sign in at the State House to give testimony in support of H564.

President and a consultant to school libraries in other states and a parent from Winchester, Susan Verdicchio. All speakers addressed our need to clarify the inequities in school libraries by adding the words "school libraries" to the Chapter 70 laws. We tried to stress that we are not asking for money but to be recognized as an important part of our students' education. In addition, I mentioned the acceptance of Massachusetts as the fourth Partnership for 21st Century Skills State. The global 21st century skills and critical thinking abilities that are required of our students have their foundation and building blocks in the school libraries that we provide. I reinforced the need to improve our school library programs by including the words "school libraries" in the law so administrators will understand that the monies they have under Chapter 70 can be spent on school library resources and professional staff.

At the conclusion of our group's presentation for H564, Education Co Chair Patricia Haddad commended us for the support we generated through our membership. She stated that as of that morning the committee had received over 100 pieces of testimony in support of H564, clearly implying that this was impressive communication on our behalf. When asked to participate in our efforts to contact your legislators, this was clear proof that every voice does count. We cannot depend on the one or two people that speak the loudest, there is, once again power in information and numbers. Keep up the great work contacting your representatives and senators asking for their support of this timely bit of legislation. And, remember, when called to speak up...every voice counts, including yours!

MSLA Forum

September 12, 2007

Dear Representative Haddad and Members of The Education Committee:

As President of the Massachusetts School Library Association I am writing on behalf of over 600 members to request your immediate attention and passage of H.564. Passing this amendment to Chapter 70 would add the words "school libraries" and make explicit the intention already stated in Chapter 15 §1R and implied in Chapter 70, that books and equipment noted in Chapter 70 §2 include books and equipment for "school libraries." Our research shows that "school libraries" were intentionally left in the original Chapter 15 guidelines but were omitted from Chapter 70. Due to this omission our Massachusetts Department of Education and school districts frequently overlook the important need to fund, staff and maintain quality school library programs. Inequities in resources and staffing are evident all across the Commonwealth's schools and often these inequities are even evident among schools within the same district.

School libraries provide the foundation and building blocks for student literacy, research and critical thinking skills. As the fourth state in the nation to join forces with the Partnership for 21st Century Skills school libraries are vital to our students' attainment of the Information Communications and Technology (ICT) skills required of those entering today's global marketplace. Current research proves in numerous studies that students who attend schools with quality school libraries show higher academic achievement across all socioeconomic levels.

Furthering this agenda on the national level, our legislature is presently discussing the No Child Left Behind Act and are considering bi-partisan legislation sponsored by Senators Jack Reed (RI) and Thad Cochran (MI). This bill called the Strengthening Kids' Interest in Learning and Libraries or SKILLS Act would guarantee that students across America will be served by highly qualified, state-certified school library media specialists and will have the library resources they need to succeed. It calls for highly qualified school library teacher to be placed in all our schools by the year 2010.

Your passage of H564 will help us stand poised to ask our Department of Education to place a qualified school library teacher to establish the standards and long range plans for quality school library programs in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Respectfully,

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Advocacy and Alliances: The Art of Shameless Self-Promotion

(Reprinted from Forum, Spring, 2007)

By Kathy Lowe, MSLA Past-President & Executive Director

We've been brought up not to brag about ourselves. We've been told it makes us appear arrogant and self-serving. We have to get over it. It's really not true at all when it pertains to school librarians advocating for their own programs. Our very existence depends on learning how to blow our own horns. And not just when we're facing a crisis, like an impending staff reduction due to lack of funds. By then it's too late. We have to continually remind our administrators, fellow teachers, students and their parents in a myriad of ways that what we do matters.

This year I've had the honor of serving on the committee that decides which school library programs in the United States will win the prestigious AASL School Library Media Program of the Year Award. One of the finalists said it best in her application: "We realize that shameless self-promotion is a necessity, and are confident that our efforts will help us to continue increasing our program's visibility throughout our learning community." The fact that this school library program is a finalist for a national award is not an accident. This librarian has worked for years to so imbue the library program into the fabric of her school that they cannot conceive of operating that building without it. How did she do this? Obviously her program is great. Her staff is exceptional, the library collection first-rate. Students feel welcome and get the help and instruction they need to be successful, as I am sure they do in countless other school libraries – even many whose existence is now in jeopardy right here in Massachusetts. The difference is that this librarian, and others like her whose programs have thrived and won recognition and prestige, has not been shy about spreading the good news about the priceless contribution her library program makes to her school at every possible opportunity. And better yet, she has so infected those around her with regard for her program that they too sing its praises far and wide. And THAT'S what makes the difference. She has cultivated alliances that have turned her stakeholders into advocates and solidified the library program's status at her school.

Increasing your program's visibility in your learning community should be right up there at the top of your job description. This is the time of year when the sad news of impending cuts in school library positions looms over us all. I feel miserable each time I hear from a colleague who is about to lose his job or from a parent concerned that her child's district is planning to eliminate its library teachers, because there is honestly very little that MSLA can do to help by the time an administrator or school committee has arrived at this sorry decision.

That doesn't mean that we won't try. Your MSLA Executive Board members:

- lobby legislators in person at the State House and through email messages and phone calls
- write letters to public officials, like the Governor, his Education Task Force, and members of the DOE
- speak at meetings and conferences about teacher/librarian collaboration and its positive impact on student achievement
- connect with other organizations, like MLA, MTA, AFT Massachusetts, MBLC, the Regional Library Systems and MassCUE and serve on their committees to represent the interests of school libraries
- seek opportunities to work with groups like the Partnership for 21st Century Skills to advance the status of school libraries in Massachusetts
- develop program standards, evaluation rubrics, information fluency standards, position statements, and a whole cache of documents confirming the value of school libraries
- attend national library conferences to find out what works in other states and funnel information to you through the MSLA Forum, our email list, and the speakers we bring to our annual conference
- provide advocacy resources on our web site
- disseminate widely our Advocacy Packet

full of MSLA documents and others, such as Scholastic's School Libraries Work that underscore the impact of good school libraries on student achievement and justify staffing school libraries with professionals

We do all of these things routinely, and step up our efforts anytime we hear about threats to school library programs or positions, but at the same time, we lament the fact that the value of those programs hadn't already been established. So, while all the members of your Executive Board continue to do everything we can to form alliances with individuals and organizations that can help us establish the unquestionable value of school libraries, and while we will ceaselessly advocate for you and your programs, we challenge each of you to embrace shameless self-promotion. If you – in your own building – make advocacy a priority, you will form among your colleagues, your administrators, and your students' parents, strong and lasting alliances that can pay off when times get tough.

Here are some things you can do to garner critical support for your program:

- volunteer to serve on the curriculum committee, school site council, or other policy-making committees in your school
- speak to parent groups about what you teach in the library, emphasizing projects collaboratively planned with classroom teachers
- buy Massachusetts Power: A Parents Guide to School Libraries for the president of your PTA/PTO (see <http://maschoolibraries.org/content/view/69/119/> for details)
- run a workshop for teachers on how to use blogs, pod casts or other Web 2.0 tools with students
- start a book discussion blog and invite parents and teachers, along with students, to post comments
- develop a long-range plan for your library, with a yearly action plan, and share your goals not only with your principal, but with your faculty and parents

Getting On Board With 21st Century Skills...

By Sandy Kelly, MSLA President

- use the MSLA model program rubrics to have teachers evaluate your program
- form a library advisory board of teachers and students and ask them to help you develop goals to address perceived weaknesses in your program
- write a regular column, with photos, for parent newsletters and local newspapers
- attend a Legislative Breakfast in your region – or better yet, host one – and bring along some students to speak about the value of school libraries
- use your library web page (a must-have) to promote reading, program features and online resources
- appropriate a bulletin board in a prominent location to showcase your program
- sponsor events that bring in parents, like book fairs, author visits, and reading celebrations
- develop a parent collection in your library and promote it through your PTO/PTA and at parent conferences and open houses

Most likely, you are the only library teacher in your building and it is probable that you have no district wide administrator for the library program. You may be alone, with no one else to advocate for you. If you don't actively promote your program, who will? I am convinced that our profession will only survive and thrive through small, but constant, acts of advocacy, one school at a time. And if I am right, this means that it is up to you to advocate at every opportunity. As your Executive Director and advocate, I will continue to shamelessly promote YOU and all you do for years to come.

This is my last message to you as president of MSLA. I will enthusiastically pass the torch to Sandy Kelly in June, but you haven't heard the last from me. As your Executive Director and advocate, I will continue to shamelessly promote YOU and all you do for years to come. Thank you for the support and inspiration you have given me over the years. I am very proud to be counted among the members of MSLA and treasure my alliances with you.

MSLA has been working diligently to move forward with the relevance and importance of school libraries to our students' education and academic achievement. Toward this end, executive board members have been implicit in the need to include the skills we teach into Massachusetts' schools. Sandy Kelly and Kathy Lowe have visited with staff at the office of Dr. Dana Mohler-Faria, the Governor's Special Advisor on Education. We have shared our members' interest to assist and participate with the Governor's transition teams working to implement the new initiatives of the Partnership for 21st Century Skills and the Governor's Early Readiness Project.

On Sept 25th Kathy and I will return to Boston to work with the Partnership for 21st Skill's Charles Fadel to help to identify the particular P21 skills that Massachusetts should ultimately include in the State's Frameworks. In the meantime, I will take a closer look at the Partnership for 21st century skills literacy maps. I will share them with the curriculum coordinators in my district and will try to identify curriculum examples that already demonstrate my library's involvement in the Learning Skills for Information, Communication and Media Literacy under the strands of:

- Information and Media Literacy
- Communication Skills
- Critical Thinking and Systems Thinking
- Problem Identification, Formulation and Solution
- Creativity and Intellectual Curiosity
- Interpersonal and Collaborative Skills
- Self-Direction
- Accountability and Adaptability
- Social Responsibility



These skills are identified in each of the core areas, Geography, Science, Math and English. Do they sound familiar? Take a look at the maps and let me know what you think.

In addition, we have nominated a member to participate in the future review of the ELA State Frameworks. Although we were disappointed to learn we were not included in the Governor's Readiness Project committees, we will continue to remain visible by identifying the committee members we know and developing contacts and communication with them. You too can and should be a participant in these initiatives, even if it is just reading, writing letters or emails, staying informed and communicating new information and ideas to our board so we can act on them.

And finally, Walter McKenzie, President of MassCUE and I are very proud to present the first joint statement of the Massachusetts School Library Association and the Massachusetts Computer Using Educators approved by both of our executive boards last June. Be sure to read it and share it with your administrators, superintendents and school boards. Also, be sure to let us know how you have used it in your school, your district or just in general for your work.



MSLA Forum

School Library and Technology Services for Schools in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts

A Joint Statement of the Massachusetts School Library Association & Massachusetts Computer Using Educators

A Common Vision

MassCUE and MSLA encourage cooperation, promote resource sharing, and support one another in working towards equitable and effective school library and technology programs that provide children with a wide array of materials and services necessary for them to develop to their fullest potential as lifelong learners. To this end, school districts must provide library and technology programs with adequate funding, licensed professionals and support staff necessary to be successful.

Our Common Goals:

- Developing life long learners with 21st century information and technology skills
- Encouraging children to develop to their fullest potential
- Teaching students, teachers and administrators to use technology for learning, critical thinking, creativity and productivity
- Fostering of digital, media and information literacy
- Developing capable, ethical users of technology and information.
- Curriculum planning & development for staff
- Supporting standards based units of study
- Team teaching

An effective school technology program with technology certified staffing provides:

- A coordinated plan for deploying, supporting and maintaining technology resources
- Integration of technology into the total school program
- Implementation of national and state technology standards
- Staff and student training in use of technology for learning and productivity
- Modeling of effective uses of technology
- Instruction in safe and ethical use of technology
- Management of school data and information systems
- Maintenance and support of technology infrastructure
- Assessment of technology skills

An effective school library program with school library certified staffing provides:

- Implementation of national and state information literacy and school library program standards
- Access to books, periodicals, informational technologies, interlibrary loan and community networking which support the curriculum frameworks.
- Administration of the school library including resource review, budget and ordering, maintenance of online collections, circulation, federated searching, research pathfinders and library web pages.
- Guidance and instruction to students and staff in selecting and using appropriate resources both online and in print that are current and reliable
- Instruction in effective information search techniques, navigation of the vast bank of online search results, evaluation and synthesis of online and print documents including indexed databases, bibliographies and primary source materials that are appropriate to students' developmental levels
- Cross-referencing of online results to nonfiction library and reference information resources.
- Free access to statewide databases, for member school districts, providing high quality reviewed and edited informational resources
- Instruction on appropriate citation and bibliographic techniques to avoid plagiarism and infringement of copyright laws.
- Assessment of research and information literacy skills

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