What components does a 21st-century school library program need to improve student learning and academic achievement?

- A full-time, certified librarian and support staff;
- A current collection of books, digital resources and electronic databases;
- Internet-accessible, up-to-date computers and information technologies;
- Access to the library and its resources, including the librarian, throughout the school day and beyond; and
- Adequate funding to update library resources and technology annually.

Students who have access to a quality school library program as described above have an academic advantage which cannot be explained away by socio-economic, racial/ethnic, or disability status.

- Investments in library staff benefit all students. Full-time, certified librarians are associated with better PSSA Reading and Writing scores.
- For both Reading and Writing test scores, students who are Economically Disadvantaged, Black, Hispanic, and have IEPs (i.e., students with disabilities) benefit proportionally more than students generally when their schools have full-time librarians.
- The impact of quality school library programs with these components is even stronger on Writing scores than Reading scores.
- All students—both high-achievers and low-achievers—benefit, and schools that leverage school library programs can narrow achievement gaps among their students.
- Generally, the combined impact of these components—staffing, resources, technology, access to the library, and funding—has a steady and consistent effect on student learning and achievement regardless of demographic and economic differences among students.

What is the single-most important factor in improving student achievement through school library programs?

Across multiple research studies conducted in 22 states since 2000, including this one, the overriding factor in a quality school library program’s contribution to student achievement is the presence of a full-time, certified school librarian who collaborates with teachers and teaches information literacy skills across the curriculum to meet academic standards. In Pennsylvania, an investment of about one half of one percent of the state’s annual education budget would enable every public school to have a full-time, certified school librarian.
About this project

The 2011-12 PA School Library Project is a National Leadership research grant project funded by the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS.) The project utilized data from the 2011 Pennsylvania School Library Study conducted by the Pennsylvania State Board of Education and the 2011 Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) Reading and Writing test scores.

Dr. Keith Curry Lance and the RSL Research Group, Colorado, with assistance from Dr. Mary K. Biagini, Associate Professor and Director, School Library Certification Program in the School of Information Sciences at the University of Pittsburgh, analyzed data and conducted the research. Project partners include the Pennsylvania School Librarians Association, the Education Law Center of Pennsylvania, and the Health Sciences Libraries Consortium. The full research report by Lance and Schwarz called How Pennsylvania School Libraries Pay Off: Investments in Student Achievement and Academic Standards and further details can be found at the project website: http://paschoollibraryproject.org

This project is made possible by a grant from the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services.