Some teachers worry that the common standards’ emphasis on reading informational text, and on writing that’s grounded in evidence from that text, could leave little place for reading literature and for the kinds of personal, creative writing that can unleash students’ passions.

Advocates of the informational-text approach argue that it is a powerful equalizer in building content knowledge for disadvantaged children, and that it’s crucial in building the skills most needed in good jobs and in college. Still others argue that nonfiction can engage some students in ways that fiction can’t and that devoting more time to it needn’t displace creative writing and literature.

Some reading experts are frustrated with what they see as an unnecessarily polarized debate about the standards. It’s a false choice, they argue, to say that students can’t write about things they’re interested in and still learn to base their ideas solidly on what they’ve read about those topics.

It’s also a false choice, those experts say, to argue that creative writing has to atrophy if expository writing expands. Or that reading great works of literature has to dwindle if students read more original historical documents. Blending all those literacy experiences into students’ lives, they argue, is important for building flexible, strong minds.

How will that blend be achieved without sacrificing bulwarks of the discipline? An increasingly common element in answers: more reading.

“We have to dramatically increase the volume of reading kids are doing in English class and beyond,” said Penny Kittle, an English/language arts teacher at Kennett High School in North Conway, N.H.

Where will the time come from for that additional reading?

“Time will always be something we have to wrestle with,” said Dwight Davis, who is weaving more nonfiction texts, and more challenging books overall, into the poetry and novels he assigns his 5th grade students at the Wheatley Education Campus in the District of Columbia. “Do we have enough time to get it all in?”

Time isn't the only resource in scarce supply as educators put the standards into practice. There is the issue of money, as well. How will districts and states pay for the professional development teachers need to adapt their instruction to the new expectations? And will all teachers get the support they require to provide the right kinds of help to the students with the shakiest skills?

Will schools have the funding to buy instructional materials that encompass a wider variety of text types? And even if the training, materials, and pedagogy come together well, will they indeed produce the college and career readiness that the standards promise?

In the new common-core era, question marks appear to be a key feature of the landscape.


(Full article: http://tinyurl.com/cnctklo )

Supporting the Infrastructure Needs of 21st Century School Library Programs

By Sandra L. Zelno
School Reform Associate, Education Law Center

“Supporting the Infrastructure Needs of 21st Century School Library Programs” is an Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) grant-funded research project awarded in Pennsylvania. The project partners are: The Pennsylvania School Librarians Association (PSLA) represented by Deb Kachel; Health Sciences Library Consortium (HSLC) represented by Joe Scorza; and The Education Law Center (ELC) represented by Sandy Zelno. Dr. Diane Kirk, Director of the Tri-State Area School Study Council, serves as an advisory board member for the school library project.

The new research was conducted by Dr. Keith Curry Lance, primary investigator, RSL Research Group, Louisville, CO. Dr. Mary Kay Biagini, Associate Professor, School of Information Sciences, University of Pittsburgh, assisted with the research which provides new information on the impact of Pennsylvania school library programs on student learning. The researchers examined the 2010-11 Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) tests in Reading and Writing for students in grades three through 11, and tracked outcomes for students based on five factors: staffing, collections, digital resources and technology infrastructure, library access, and funding. This was the first comprehensive school library research conducted in Pennsylvania in more than a decade, and the first time student writing tests have been examined.

Overall, the greatest impact on student test scores was seen from having a full-time, certified librarian.

• Students who have access to a full-time, certified librarian scored higher on the PSSA Reading Test than those students who do not have such access. This finding is true for all students, regardless of their socio-economic, racial/ethnic, and/or disability status.

• For several student groups that tend to experience achievement gaps—economically disadvantaged, Hispanic, Black, and those with IEPs (Individualized Education Programs)—Reading and Writing results are markedly better when those students attend a school with

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a librarian and library support staff, according to the research. In fact, they benefit more proportionally than the general student population.

Access to a full-time, certified librarian dramatically impacted student scores on the PSSA Writing Tests, particularly for high school students.

- Nearly twice as many high school students who have access to a full-time, certified librarian scored Advanced on the PSSA Writing test as those students without access to a full-time, certified librarian, according to the report.
- Considering all students, those students with access to a full-time, certified librarian are almost three times as likely to have “Advanced” scores on the PSSA Writing Test as those students without access to a full-time, certified librarian.

“This research shows us how crucial a well-resourced school library and a full-time, certified school librarian are to achievement for the most vulnerable students,” said Sandra Zelno, Education Law Center School Reform Associate. “In Pennsylvania, we require libraries for schools of cosmetology, barber schools, private schools, institutions, and prisons—but not for our public schools.”

The school library project is a follow-up to a recent PA School Library Study done by the Pennsylvania State Board of Education and published in September 2011. The Pennsylvania House Education Committee, under the direction of Rep. Paul Clymer, held a hearing on school libraries in August 2012 to review the State Board of Education study. “This study clearly illustrates that we need to look more closely at this issue and make sure that our school libraries are being used in a way that most benefits the students,” said Clymer following the hearing.

Complete findings and more information on the project can be found at the project website: paschoollibraryproject.org. Publications may be downloaded and distributed.

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Executive Committee Meetings

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Monday, June 17, 2013

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