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The Members of the U.S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (NCLIS) are excited and encouraged by the enactment of Goals 2000: Educate America Act. This landmark legislation defines Federal roles and responsibilities for school reform to ensure every student a world-class education. Goals 2000 aims to prepare the Nation for the 21st century.

America's children and youth must have library resources and services that respond to their needs if we are to implement the systemic changes required to achieve the National Education Goals. However, to realize the Goals 2000 vision of educational excellence and equity, our elementary and secondary school libraries must improve. The National Commission is concerned that our Nation's school libraries are not well prepared to provide the resources and support needed to reconnect our young people to learning.

In sharing some of the results of our recent studies and findings, the Commission is providing background for Congressional reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). This five-year reauthorization of ESEA must help libraries in elementary and secondary schools to meet the high performance standards set by Goals 2000: Educate America Act. To achieve the National Education Goals, ESEA must include the Library Media Program included in H.R. 6 Title II, Part C as part of the reauthorization. Proposals for establishing instructional innovation and for classroom technology programs, along with targeted assistance for school library media center resources and services included in S.266, should be incorporated into the reauthorized ESEA.

Since the 1991 White House Conference on Library and Information Services (WHCLIS) focused attention on children and youth literacy, the National Commission has learned some disturbing realities about school libraries. Our findings about the condition of libraries serving children and youth have a direct relation to legislation defining the Federal role in support of elementary and secondary education.
The Commission has found that libraries are not prepared to support a transition from "A Nation at Risk" to a nation of learners. Librarians from public and school libraries are working closely together in response to recommendations from the 1991 WHCLIS and from the 1984 Alliance for Excellence: Librarians Respond to A Nation at Risk. They are sharing resources and linking school and public libraries. But their success is limited by lack of support. Libraries and educational programs must be integrated if we are to prepare all children to participate fully as workers, parents, and citizens. However, Federal leadership, support, and assistance are essential if these efforts are to be successful.

If libraries serving elementary and secondary school students and teachers fail to receive Federal assistance under ESEA, then the disturbing reality of current conditions will block achievement of high-quality educational standards. In a 12-state survey of libraries in elementary and secondary schools performed in late 1993, the Commission found that:

- many school libraries are poorly equipped to support instruction
- ½ of elementary school libraries buy less than one book/student/year
- ½ of secondary school libraries buy less than .33 book/student/year
- almost no school libraries have access to the Internet computer network
- there is wide variance in average annual funding for school libraries
  - elementary school libraries receive $15 to $58,874 per year
  - secondary school libraries receive $155 to $100,810 per year

In addition to these disturbing findings, the National Commission has also listened to students, teachers, librarians, and other concerned citizens from around the country. A total of 77 concerned individuals representing 17 states provided oral or written comments to the Commission in the last year. At Commission-sponsored forums on library and information services for children and youth in Boston, Massachusetts, Des Moines, Iowa, and Sacramento, California conducted during 1993, the Commission heard the following themes:
• Libraries connect youth to lifelong learning

"To prepare our students for life in a future characterized by change, we must teach them to become better observers, applicers, and evaluators of ideas and information. A key to what schools must be doing is to help students learn to use their minds well. Research shows that students involved in their own learning, being active participants in the learning process, learn more and retain more than passive learners. So information literacy is a means of personal empowerment."

-- Karlene Garn, Ames (Iowa) High School

• Libraries connect education to technology

"Libraries, both public and school, are the gateways through which children from all walks of life can learn the technologies and techniques that will be as important to them as reading books has been to us and our parents."

-- Marshall Keys, Executive Director
New England Library Network (NELINET), Inc.

• Libraries connect families to learning

"When we talk about serving preschool children, we have to think about where the children are. Preschool children aren't able to get out and come to the library on their own. They depend on adults. So, we need to think about those adults, those parents and caregivers."

-- Carol Elbert, Ames (Iowa) Public Library

"On the issue of youth in crisis. While a library wrestles with an agenda of budget cuts, the shelf life of our children and the families who must support them is expiring."

-- Shelly Quezada, Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners

• Libraries connect all aspects of our communities

"...I go to 37 different child-care centers in the space of a month. I visit each of these child-care centers biweekly and I present programs at these centers....The centers include day-cares, preschoolers, and Headstarts....Youth are truly the future of our country and it is essential that at the earliest age we instill in them a love of libraries and reading."

-- David Ashcraft, Des Moines (Iowa) Public Library

"Public libraries should not have to compete with school libraries for the same dollar. Rather, there needs to be enough money allocated so that both the public library and the school library have adequate moneys to purchase materials to answer their patrons' questions."

-- Bonnie O'Brien, President, Massachusetts Library Association
"I am here to speak to you on behalf of all children who need a library to study. I have used Del Paso Heights Library since I was in preschool, six years ago, because I don't have a place to study at home. I use the library to do my research paper, reading and learning with the computer. I have found that the library is a great help for my education, but there are many things that are still missing for us children. The children's library is in need of improvement; that means we need more children's resource books, more space, more hours and more help in the library. I feel upset, poor and lost when I cannot find a book that I needed to read for my school work. I cannot get somebody to help me read. The library has to be closed sometimes because no money to open it...please help our library as to help us children learn, grow and become a beautiful American. Please tell our President for us. I will be waiting to hear from him."

---Lomholhn Vue, Fourth-grade Student
North Avenue School, Sacramento, CA

Thank you for your attention to these concerns. The Commission will be publishing a full report of findings from the recent survey of public school library media centers in 12 states later this spring. I would like to hand-deliver the report to you.

Sincerely,

Jeanne H. Simon
Chairperson