

2025 -- H 5488

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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2025

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A N A C T

RELATING TO EDUCATION -- THE SCHOOL LIBRARIES ACT

Introduced By: Representatives Kislak, Morales, Speakman, Boylan, Fogarty, Potter,
Tanzi, J. Lombardi, and Cruz

Date Introduced: February 13, 2025

Referred To: House Education

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Title 16 of the General Laws entitled "EDUCATION" is hereby amended by
2 adding thereto the following chapter:

3 CHAPTER 117

4 THE SCHOOL LIBRARIES ACT

5 **16-117-1. Short title.**

6 This chapter shall be known and may be cited as the "The School Libraries Act".

7 **16-117-2. Statement of policy.**

8 (a) The general assembly hereby declares the following to be the policy of this state:

9 (1) School libraries, with well-funded programs, are essential to schools as research
10 consistently shows that students become better readers and read more when they are provided with
11 a wide variety of reading materials from which they can select to read. School librarians are trained
12 experts and are highly qualified to provide dynamic book collections meeting all reading levels and
13 spanning a variety of interests that allow students to choose their reading materials. School libraries
14 and school librarians foster a love of reading and a love of learning that enables students to become
15 life-long learners.

16 (2) School libraries and school librarians are essential in the instruction of information
17 literacy and media literacy in the age of limitless information sources, social media, misinformation
18 and disinformation. School librarians teach students to identify, evaluate and use information in
19 order to become competent researchers and ethical consumers and users of information.

1 (3) In order to be college and career ready in the twenty first century, students shall have
2 access to and be able to use information resources including books, digital media, web resources,
3 databases, and technology vetted by school librarians. Library programs provide equitable
4 opportunity for all students to be able to read, locate, evaluate and interpret information accurately
5 for academic and professional success.

6 (4) Research consistently demonstrates that in schools with well-equipped and well-
7 stocked school libraries staffed by certified school librarians, students achieve higher scores on
8 standardized reading tests, have higher graduation rates, and enjoy learning more even when taking
9 demographics into consideration.

10 **16-117-3. Definitions.**

11 As used in this chapter, the following terms shall have the following meanings unless a
12 different meaning is clearly indicated by the context:

13 (1) "Commissioner" means the commissioner of elementary and secondary education.

14 (2) "Information literacy" means a set of abilities requiring individuals to recognize when
15 information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed
16 information.

17 (3) "Media literacy" means the ability to critically analyze stories presented in the mass
18 media and to determine their accuracy or credibility.

19 (4) "Public schools" means all public schools of any city or town in the state. This term
20 also includes all charter public schools, including district charter schools, independent charter
21 schools, and mayoral academies, and vocational schools.

22 (5) "School librarian" means a teaching professional who is certified by the department of
23 elementary and secondary education as an all grades library media teacher who is hired to run a
24 school library. This position may also be known as a school library media specialist.

25 (6) "School library" means a permanent facility in a public school that is available to the
26 entire school community and that contains learning and information resources and reading
27 materials in print and non-print media that is maintained and supervised by a certified school
28 librarian. This facility may also be known as a school library media center or library commons.

29 **16-117-4. A school library in each public school.**

30 (a) Pursuant to §16-1-5(7), the commissioner shall ensure that every public school in Rhode
31 Island has a school library in a permanent and dedicated space.

32 (b) A school library shall include the following essential elements, as determined by
33 professional standards:

34 (1) A collection of books and reading materials that is adequate in size for the student

1 population of the school in order that every student is offered a range of choices to meet their
2 reading interests and reading level and that also supports the teaching and learning priorities of the
3 school;

4 (2) Appropriate space for students to read and study comfortably and for instruction to
5 occur;

6 (3) Adequate technology for students to utilize to access information resources, complete
7 school assignments and produce original work;

8 (4) An automated system for the management of the library collection; and

9 (5) An adequate budget for library materials in order that they are kept up to date and in
10 good condition.

11 **16-117-5. A certified school librarian assigned to every public school.**

12 (a) Pursuant to §16-1-5(7), the commissioner shall ensure that every public school in Rhode
13 Island has a certified school librarian to manage and maintain the library, provide information
14 resources to students and staff, promote reading and teach information literacy skills.

15 (b) All public schools in Rhode Island with populations of two hundred fifty (250) students
16 or more shall have at least one full-time certified school librarian who is dedicated to administering
17 and supervising the school library. Public schools with fewer than two hundred fifty (250) students
18 shall have at least a half-time certified school librarian who is dedicated to administering and
19 supervising the school library.

20 (c) The requirements of this section shall be phased in as follows:

21 (1) By the 2026-27 school year: All high schools shall have at least one full-time, certified
22 school librarian;

23 (2) By the 2028-29 school year: All high schools and middle schools shall have at least one
24 full-time, certified school librarian; and

25 (3) By the 2030-2031 school year: All schools kindergarten through grade twelve (K-12),
26 shall have at least one full-time, certified school librarian.

27 **16-117-6. Student access to the school library and its resources.**

28 (a) Pursuant to §16-1-5(7), the commissioner shall ensure that public schools shall provide
29 students with access to the school library on a daily basis in order that students are aware of when
30 and how they are allowed to go to the library for book selection, reading, independent work, and
31 related activities.

32 (b) The provision set forth in subsection (a) of this section shall be required for all levels,
33 kindergarten through grade twelve (K-12), and shall include time other than “library class” time or
34 scheduled research class time.

1 (c) School librarians shall be available during this open library time.

2 (d) Secondary schools shall provide access to students beyond the school day. This access
3 may include before-school, after-school and/or Saturday hours.

4 SECTION 2. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF
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RELATING TO EDUCATION -- THE SCHOOL LIBRARIES ACT

1 This act would direct the commissioner of elementary and secondary education to ensure
2 that every public school has a school library in a permanent and dedicated space. This act would
3 also direct the commissioner to ensure that every public school has a certified school librarian to
4 manage and maintain the library.

5 This act would take effect upon passage.

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