



Illinois Heartland Library System

To: Illinois Heartland Library System Board of Directors

From: Leah Gregory, Director of Membership & Outreach

Date: February 16, 2026

RE: School Library Advocacy

IHLS School Advocacy has taken a bit of a detour as we dealt with the failure of HB 2685, the Association of Illinois School Library Educators' effort to ask legislators to investigate why and how to get a licensed school librarian in every school. As we spoke with various stakeholders in the process, we realized there is a significant lack of understanding among both educators and lawmakers in Illinois about the roles and responsibilities of school librarians.

Where we are: The Illinois Administrative Code requires schools in Illinois to have a school library program and a licensed school librarian. This is an educator who holds a Professional Educator's License with a school library endorsement (18 hours of additional instruction, a passing content-area test, and no MSLIS required). Despite it being an Illinois Statute, the Illinois School Code weakens this requirement considerably by defining a librarian as anyone who oversees the school library program and offering workarounds to the school librarian requirement such as allowing paraprofessionals to serve as the school librarian if they attend some form of school library professional development, or allowing schools to use public libraries to oversee their school library program. However, many schools have no school library, no program, and no staff, and this is just currently not enforced by the Illinois Department of Education.

Our Goal: Every child in Illinois has access to a well-supplied school library with a licensed librarian.

The Reality:

- 53% of school districts in Illinois do not have even one licensed librarian.
- The exceptions have become the rule.
- 1 in 3 fourth-grade students demonstrated proficiency on reading standardized tests. This includes a 3% decrease from 2022 to 2024.
- School librarians are proven to improve test scores for both reading and math.
- ISBE says that no requirements can be enforced without legislative intervention.

IMAGINING TOMORROW ~ DELIVERING POSSIBILITIES TODAY!

What's Next: We aren't giving up! We are focusing on what we are good at: making connections and sharing information. We are expanding our audience to reach more stakeholders with our message.

- The Libraries + Education Town Hall was targeted to school administrators and school board members. More than 70 people attended. RAILS has 2, and IHLS has 1 new potential member from that event.
- Attendance at the IASB conference – we spoke to more than 400 school board members and school administrators.
- RAILS and IHLS are planning outreach to the Regional Superintendents.
- AISLE is still working with state legislators.
- IHLS is developing and growing relationships with ISBE leaders.
- IHLS and RAILS are working together to get more participation in the school library census to have a complete understanding of the school library landscape.

The Good News: Everything we do is advocacy!

- New Members
- Outreach
 - Can't Shelve This podcast
 - Town Halls
 - site visits
 - virtual networking
- Collaboration
 - working with school library staff
 - presenting for county in-service days
 - public & school library partnerships
 - academic & school librarian mixers
- Resources
 - SLATE Data Dashboard
 - school library and school librarian one-pagers
 - ISBE has created a new webpage highlighting the one-pagers, listing available grants, and creating a "Pathways to School Librarianship" guidance on their webpage – all due to our advocacy efforts

The IHLS school library advocacy is moving forward with new efforts every day to get the state of Illinois to recognize the importance of school libraries. Luckily, we have great partners to work with on this endeavor.