

**Statement from the Tennessee Association of School Librarians
On the position of Basic Education Funding for School Library Media Centers**

The school library media program provides essential support to the curriculum by providing resources and incorporating teaching strategies to address the diverse learning abilities of students. Through collaboratively planned units of instruction with classroom teachers, school librarians, and other education professionals, students develop information skills that are crucial to academic success. The library becomes an extension of the classroom and an important arena in the education process.

The school library media program is one of the few programs within a school that must interact with all students on a daily basis. In order to be an effective program, the resources and facility of the school library must be broad enough to meet the demanding educational needs of a varied population. The library collection must reflect diverse viewpoints on current and historical issues, so that students will have adequate opportunities to locate, analyze, evaluate, interpret, and communicate ideas in an informed manner. Materials must be available that will enhance and increase the abilities of students to evolve into critical thinkers and productive members of society.

The success of a school library media program is dependent upon a number of factors, an important one of which is adequate funding. In 1992, the Basic Education Program was enacted, and since then billions of state tax dollars have been allocated to school systems across the state. Presently, spending for elementary and secondary schools is the most expensive item in the state budget, which is approximately 45 percent of the annual budget or a 2.5 billion yearly expenditure.

The classroom components within BEP include the following line items: classroom materials and supplies, textbooks, instructional equipment, and technology. Missing from the list is a line item for school library media center materials. The omission of this line item hampers the efforts of a school library media program to be an essential element within a school.

As the governing and policy making body for the Tennessee system of public elementary and secondary education, the State Board of Education is the state agency responsible for the review and allocation of funds for BEP. In the board's quest to provide a quality education for all Tennesseans, the board should reexamine its stance on a line item within BEP for school library materials, especially in light of national reports and studies on the impact of school libraries on academic achievement. The Tennessee Association of School Librarians strongly encourages the board to create a line item for school library materials, so that a sufficient level of quality within library collections could be achieved within the state. A key predictor to students' academic achievement is the presence of a rich collection of print and electronic information resources within school libraries.