What is The Special Commission on School Library Services in Massachusetts?

This Commission, charged by the Joint Legislative Committee on Education in 2014, set out to use a specific set of measures to determine if school library services and resources were equitable for all students in Massachusetts public schools. The Commission worked with researchers from the Center for International Scholarship in School Libraries (CISSL) at Rutgers University to conduct a rigorous study to assess equity of access in public schools, and was comprised of:

- **Legislators**: Co-sponsors Representative Sean Garballey and Senator Kenneth Donnelly; Representative David Vieira, Senator Donald F. Humason, Jr.
- **Library community members** from the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners, Massachusetts Library System, Massachusetts Library Association, Massachusetts School Library Association
- **Education community members** including, Charter School representation, the American Federation of Teachers, Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Massachusetts Teachers Association, Massachusetts Association of School Committees
- **Broader community members**: Boston Business Roundtable

The study, and the Commission’s recommendations based on its findings, was published as The Massachusetts School Library Study: Equity and Access for Students in the Commonwealth, and was provided to the Legislature in February 2018.

**Key Findings:**

Data collected by the Commission demonstrate that Massachusetts students do not have equitable access to school library programs:

- **Equity of access to professional staff**
  - 20% of schools have no librarian
  - 61% have no library support staff—librarians are often relegated to clerical duties (half of all librarians report performing non-instructional activities daily)
  - Only 43% of schools have a library or technology director to oversee their programs, and urban school libraries are significantly less likely to have this position

- **Equity of access to the school library**
  - Libraries in urban and rural school districts are closed significantly more often than libraries in suburban districts –most often for testing or due to lack of adequate staffing

- **Equity of access to authoritative digital resources and access to information technology**
  - 40% of students have poor internet access in school libraries, and this is a significant difference in urban and rural districts compared to suburban districts
  - Many schools have limited access to computers in the library
  - Significantly fewer urban school libraries have access to information technology

- **Equity of access to funding and subsidized resources**
  - Budgets for school library programs vary widely, but overall funding for library resources is not adequate to provide newer materials or technology in most districts
  - Many districts use antiquated audiovisual materials, have limited technology, and outdated print materials
  - Two-thirds of Massachusetts School Libraries do not participate in interlibrary loan programs
Only 66% of school library programs report using state-funded electronic resources available through the partnership of the Massachusetts Library System and the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners.

20% of school libraries don’t belong to the Massachusetts Library System

71% of school libraries don’t participate in Commonwealth e-book collections

**Equity of access to library instruction and help**

Instruction in school library programs is not consistent across schools with wide variation in the ability of school librarians to collaborate with teachers, the number of classes taught, and grade levels that receive instruction.

Only 64% of students have regular and consistent access to school library programs and resources.

Librarians report issues with inadequate time to teach all students; access to classes, and access to space.

**Recommendations of the Commission:**

**Recommendation 1.0. Improve Access to School Libraries and School Librarians**

- **Recommendation 1A.** Every public school in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts has a school library and a certified school librarian.
- **Recommendation 1B.** Establish the position and responsibilities of the School Library Curriculum Specialist at the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.
- **Recommendation 1C.** Support a culture of inquiry in schools that sustains inquiry and resource-based learning, collaborative teaching, and the integration of digital technology to improve access for all students.

**Recommendation 2.0. Improve Access to Information Resources in School Libraries:**

Information Resources are highly dependent on digital Information Technology that facilitates access. Without adequate infrastructure and devices students cannot access the information and support they need to develop digital literacy, ethics, and safety.

- **Recommendation 2A.** Increase access to print resources in school libraries.
- **Recommendation 2B.** Increase access to electronic resources in school libraries, (potentially in collaboration with the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners).

**Recommendation 3.0. Improve Access to Information Technology:**

Professional Development for the licensed school librarians emerged as a strong trend in the data. It is critical that licensed librarians are hired to manage the Commonwealth's school libraries. Since the library and information science field is dynamic, school librarians need continuing and high quality professional development to deliver high quality, relevant instruction and help to students and ongoing, just-enough-just-in-time training for teachers and administrators.

- **Recommendation 3A.** Improve access to internet and digital devices in school libraries.
- **Recommendation 3B.** Increase access to Information Technology through staffing.

**Recommendation 4.0. Improve Access to Library Instruction and Help**

- **Recommendation 4A.** Promote best instructional practices in the school library.

**Recommendation 5.0. Improve Access to Funding:**

Funding cuts across all the dimensions of school librarianship. Guidelines for Budget Allocation and Expenditure should be developed to support Recommendations 1.0, 2.0, 3.0, and 4.0.