IMLS LB21 Planning Grant Full Proposal: Urban School Library Restoration Project (USLR)

<u>**Introduction:**</u>

The School District of Philadelphia (SDP), the lead applicant, partnering with the <u>Philadelphia Alliance to Restore School Librarians</u> (PARSL), a local, grassroots advocacy group with 900+ supporters, submits this planning proposal for $150,000 to structure the process to examine and propose a model plan to address the lack of certified school librarians in urban school districts that primarily serve students of color in low-income communities. The **Urban School Library Restoration Project** (**USLR**) will be organized into three USLR project objectives:

> 1) Gather and publish strategies from urban school districts that successfully restored librarian positions;
> 2) Investigate and publish options for recruiting a diverse pool of school librarian candidates; and
> 3) Create a replicable plan using SDP as a model to restore effective school libraries with certified librarians.

Philadelphia is an ideal setting to design a model School Library Restoration plan as the district has the equivalent of two full-time librarians (NCES, 2022-23) for 218 schools and 118,000+ students of whom 86% are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and 100% are economically-disadvantaged (School District of Philadelphia, 2024).

The major **IMLS Goal and Objective** to be addressed in this proposal are "**Goal 1:** Recruit, train, develop, and retain a diverse workforce of library and archives professionals" and "**Objective 1.1**: Develop programs encouraging diverse students to pursue careers in library and information science."

Results from this project will include the publication of **three major reports**, as a capstone for each USLR objective:

> 1) "Restoring Urban School Libraries: Challenges and Strategies," guidance from library leaders in districts that added librarians;
> 2) "The Plan for Preparation of Philadelphia School Librarians," with an adaptable RFP calling for university training options to address the pipeline of candidates; and
> 3) A strategic, five-year "Philadelphia Model School Librarian Restoration Plan" with a robust, replicable communications plan.

Reports and the three collections of project findings will be widely disseminated via conference presentations, articles, videos, and a project website that will be publicly accessible.

<u>**Project Justification**</u>:

Not since 2011 when AASL convened the *Urban Schools Task Force Survey* has there been a major effort to gather input on the unique issues large urban schools face in offering and maintaining effective library programs with certified librarians. While the trend has been for urban districts to lose librarians over the past decade, recently some districts are reversing this trend and reinstating school librarians and libraries, including Boston (Bauld, 2022), Charlotte-Mecklenburg (Touchette, 2024), Chicago (New iSchool, 2023), D.C. (Grablick, 2021), Los Angeles (Stokes 2021), Minneapolis (Klecker, 2023), New York City (Bauld, 2023), and Oakland, CA (Power, 2023). Strategies and successes to reestablish school library programs need to be documented and widely shared, plus district reasoning why adding librarians became a priority. Tools to determine a school's "readiness" to reestablish a school library program are currently not available. Replicable ideas, plans, and assessment tools are needed by the entire school librarian profession to ensure sustainability of school library programs. Beneficiaries of these resources will not only be leaders in large, urban districts that are struggling to reinstate school library programs, but also rural and suburban districts. The resulting reports, lessons learned, resources, and tools posted on the project's website and disseminated via library networks, articles, and conferences will serve as a body of work to address a current and ongoing issue that up to now has not been investigated and shared.

Highlighted in IMLS Goal 1, finding, recruiting, and training school librarians who reflect the diversity of students they teach has long been a challenge for our profession. Yet, research consistently underscores the positive impact of a diverse library workforce on student achievement, engagement, and overall school climate. The American Library

Association (n.d.) asserts, "By assembling the perspectives and experiences of multiple diversities—age, gender, ethnicity, physical ability, sexuality, and more—libraries can continue to innovate and improve services and respond to the needs of the nation's changing communities." While no recent data exists about ethnicity or race, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that 86% of all types of librarians are white; 8% Latinx; 5.1% Asian; and only 4.3% Black (2023, Table 8). Two models have addressed increasing diversity among urban school librarians: Wayne State University's Restoring Urban School Libraries Project and the New York City Teacher2Librarian project, with which PARSL-leader Barbara Stripling is involved. Those program's leaders will be contacted for "lessons learned" to include in this project.

Statistics on Urban School Districts

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2022-2023), there are 203 U.S. public school districts, not including charters, classified as "City-Large" (CCD, n.d.). Those 203 districts enroll 6.6+ million students and 62 or 31% have no librarians in their entire school district. After a national analysis of school librarians in the IMLS-funded SLIDE (The School Librarian Investigation: Decline or Evolution?) project, Lance, Kachel, and Gerrity (2023, p. 94-95) concluded:

> *"Districts employ school librarians to help students develop a habit of reading and to teach them invaluable lifelong information-literacy skills. Concerningly, having a school librarian is becoming a privilege reserved for some students. Access to school librarians is strongly related to both race and ethnicity and either persists or is exacerbated when selected district characteristics—specifically poverty, locale, and enrollment—are considered."*

The lack of school libraries and certified school librarians in urban school districts that largely serve low-income communities and a majority of BIPOC students has been well documented and continues to worsen. In 2018-2019, a national study by Lance and Kachel (2021, p. 44-48) found that:

- 81% of school districts with 75% or more low-income students (according to the federal lunch eligibility program) had only one part-time librarian or no librarian.
- 68% of city school districts had fewer than one librarian; 26% of them had no librarian.
- 57% of school districts with a majority of Hispanic students had no librarian and 38% of districts with a majority of Black or African American students had no librarian.
- 52% of districts with 25,000+ students had fewer than one librarian; 10% of them had no librarian.

Despite the heightened need for student and teacher access to curated, reputable digital resources during the COVID-19 pandemic and distance learning, large urban districts saw further reductions in school library staff. Between 2018-19 and 2020-21, losses of school librarians continued in almost 46% of majority Latinx districts, 42% of city school districts, 31% of majority BIPOC districts, and 28% of districts with 75% or more economically disadvantaged students (Lance & Kachel, 2022). Not surprisingly, reading scores in city schools continue to worsen. When comparing 2019 and 2022 NAEP reading achievement of the 26 participating city districts, no districts gained in 4th grade reading scores and only one gained in 8th grade reading scores. 35% of districts (9) had lower 4th grade reading scores than in 2019 (NAEP Report Card, 2023).

The Contributions of School Library Programs

Yet, multiple research studies have found that certified school librarians and well-resourced libraries increase literacy, student achievement, graduation rates, and college and career readiness by teaching literacy knowledge (e.g., print concepts, genres) and skills in critical thinking, multi-literacy, research, and digital citizenship (Lance & Kachel, 2018; Valenza et al., 2022). In a Pennsylvania study, Black students and Latinx students were found to have on average better academic gains than all students combined in schools with librarians (Lance & Schwarz, 2012, p. 8-9). Specifically, where schools had more library staff, larger library collections, and greater access to school libraries, Black and Latinx students more than doubled their percentages of Advanced writing test scores and cut their Below Basic writing scores in half (p. 15). In that same study, access to an effective school library program with certified librarians showed a long-term, cumulative effect: the proportional difference in Advanced reading scores grew from elementary to middle to high

school (p.16). Librarians help students become stronger readers by addressing the habit of reading, reading to learn, deep reading, comprehension, and interpretation.

In a national study of 4th-grade NAEP reading scores (Lance & Hofschire, 2011), average reading scores for low-income students, Black students, and Latinx students improved more in states that gained librarians than in states that lost librarians between 2004-2005 and 2008-2009. In states that lost librarians, English Learners' scores dropped by almost 3%. Research from the SLIDE Project also found that once school librarian positions were cut, only 1 in 10 were reinstated within the four-year period studied (Lance & Kachel, 2021, p. 73).

Philadelphia Is Ideal for a Model Plan

SDP will serve as an optimal setting to develop a replicable model for reinstating school librarians that could be adapted by school districts nationally. The district's student demographics reflect great racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity with many marginalized K-12 learners needing support. In addition, Philadelphia is still the nation's poorest big city (Orso & Duchneskie, 2023) and the sixth largest U.S. city (Castronuovo, 2021). It is also important to note that only 15% of Philadelphia's 4th graders demonstrate proficiency in reading, along with 17% of 8th graders, although efforts are underway to improve reading achievement (NAEP Report Card: Philadelphia profile). SDP students' low scores on national and state standardized tests present a tremendous opportunity to demonstrate academic gains. Additionally, since 2022, PARSL (the Philadelphia Alliance to Restore School Librarians), an all-volunteer grassroots school library advocacy group with 900+ members, has been educating key Philadelphia stakeholders about the need to reinstate school librarians. As published in PARSL's white paper (Kachel & Stripling, 2023, p.2), two decades ago SDP employed 176 school librarians and over time this number has diminished to the equivalent of two full-time librarians (NCES, Philadelphia, 2022-23). Due to PARSL's outreach efforts via its white paper, School Board testimonies, and in-person or virtual engagements with administrators, legislators, parents, the teacher's union, and community groups, the Philadelphia community is realizing the need and promising possibility of recreating strong school library programs.

Project Work Plan

First Half Year 1: August 2024-January 2025

Team Formation: Three key teams will be created to carry out planning grant work: a **Project Leadership Team (PLT)**, an **Advisory Council (AC)**, and a **Library Restoration Work Group (LRWG)**. The LRWG will be created in the second half of Year 1. The **Project Leadership Team** will be led by USLR Project Director and SDP's Coordinator of School Library Services, Lisa Mesi, and include PARSL's Core members and representatives from relevant SDP Offices. The PLT will be responsible for overall project management and direction, including fiscal oversight, exploration of potential funding streams, tracking the work of teams and timely completion of deliverables, and sharing project work with communities. The PLT will meet monthly or as needed.

The PLT will recruit and form an **Advisory Council (AC)** of 20 members to engage diverse school and community stakeholders and ensure that local needs are factored into the library restoration plan. The AC will be led by Project Director Mesi and will include PARSL's Core members, principals, a current or retired SDP librarian, a teacher's union representative, a university representative, parents, Philadelphia residents currently in library science programs, a representative from The Fund for the School District of Philadelphia (non-profit), and representatives from SDP Offices of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion; Multilingual; Diverse Learners (Special Education); Communications; and Educational Technology. The Advisory Council will be provided with curated resources of research and professional practice by the Research Lead to inspire visionary thinking. Its main purpose will be to bring diverse perspectives and community priorities to the planning conversations. The AC will meet quarterly or as needed to review research and USLR reports, ask critical questions, establish priorities that meet community needs, and discuss drafted planning documents.

Peer Learning: The major work during this time period will be learning and publishing successful **strategies from urban school districts that restored librarian positions**. Six Zoom sessions will be held at which two school library leaders will

share their district's challenges, strategies, and solutions in adding school librarian positions. Organized and led by Debra Kachel, the Research Lead, eleven leaders have already agreed to participate (see Supporting Doc 2). The participating districts were identified from recent news and library media sources, such as the ALA Connect and AASL's Educators of School Librarians Section (ESLS). Discussion questions will be shared in advance; potential questions are listed below.

Potential Discussion Questions	
Barriers and Solutions	● What barriers existed to adding school librarians and how were these mitigated/ removed?
Stakeholders	● Who were the key influencers who you reached out to? (unions, city governments, school boards, school administrators, etc.) ● Which groups of stakeholders were the most helpful?
Candidates	● Was it difficult to find credentialed librarians (pipeline issues)? ● How did you attract and hire qualified candidates?
Advocacy	● What resources were used to advocate for more librarians? (social media, handouts, websites, presentations, etc.) ● Which advocacy tools had the most impact?
Support	● How did you build support within the district and in the community?
Funding	● How were new positions funded? What funding streams were tapped? (grants, local government, district, etc.)

Strategy Synthesis: The Zoom meetings will be recorded, transcribed, and analyzed for useful key ideas, themes, solutions, and lessons learned. Two recent MLIS graduates or students in the Philadelphia area will be recruited to assist in transcribing, gathering participant data, and report writing. The draft report, **"Restoring Urban School Libraries: Challenges and Strategies,"** will be validated for accuracy and analysis during two additional Zoom sessions with all the school library leaders who presented during the initial sessions. The report will be finalized in January 2025.

Visits & Literature Review: During Fall 2024, a delegation made up of a subgroup of the Project Leadership Team will visit New York City and Washington, D.C., along with 10 SDP representatives, including at least half high school students serving as project advisory board members. The delegation will meet with school library supervisors and newly hired school librarians. These **two in-person visits** will enable project leaders to deepen their understanding of the challenges and opportunities of urban school library restoration. The visits will offer a critical opportunity for SDP high schoolers, staff, and administrators to experience and explore fully staffed school libraries operating with best practices. Following months of student learning, preparation, and engagement before the visits, plus follow-up activity after the delegation returns, this delegation will increase SDP's collective ability to identify, adapt, and apply elements of other districts' efforts. A review of the literature on recruiting for diversity in school library programs will also be provided by the Research Lead to the project teams to inform potential usable strategies.

Publishing Project Work: In addition to regular meetings of the Project Leadership Team, Zoom conversations with urban district representatives, site visits to two city districts, and a project website will be created. The **USLR Project website**, designed and launched with support from the SDP Communications Office, will feature the "Restoring" report, as well as relevant articles and resources that have been gathered from participating school library leaders and curated by Kachel.

Second Half Year 1: February 2025-August 2025

Deliverable Quality & Reach: The Advisory Council will begin meeting every other month or as needed (including the two urban school site visits), to review project activities and the new website, and to offer feedback and questions. They will also review and discuss dissemination of the "Restoring" report based on the zooms with city school library leaders.

How to Build a Librarian Pipeline: Beginning February 2025, Project Director Mesi, with assistance from SDP's Talent Office and the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, will focus on USLR Objective 2 – to investigate related initiatives and to publish options for recruiting a pool of school library candidates who are diverse in their cultural backgrounds, prior education, experience, and personal characteristics. Findings from the investigation will be detailed in a report and

toolkit titled, **"Plan for Preparation of Philadelphia School Librarians."** The deliverable will include the following sections: 1) articulated objectives with a timeline, 2) potential recruitment strategies to cultivate diversity, 3) candidate selection criteria with a rubric, and 4) education pathways to school librarianship with an adaptable RFP for universities.

Future Librarian Criteria: **Candidate selection criteria** outlining important characteristics of potential candidates will be developed, plus multiple possible certification pathways. Selection criteria will incorporate SDP's priorities for diversity, inclusion, and equity and the lessons learned from the "Restoring" report and from other districts. The criteria may include candidates' previous education, experience and competencies in working with K-12 students, motivation to become a school librarian, meeting professional standards, and a pledge to stay with the district for a minimum of three years after earning school librarian certification. By early spring, draft criteria will be established with consensus from the Leadership Team, SDP administration, Office of Talent, the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, and union leadership.

Scaffolding from Recent Work: Clear and accessible **pathways to librarianship** will address the pressing need for librarians and diversity within schools. Research consistently underscores the positive impact of a diverse library workforce on student achievement, engagement, and overall school climate. Two models that have aimed to increase diversity among urban school librarians will be studied through interviews –Wayne State University's [Restoring Urban School Libraries (RUSL) Project](#) and the [New York City Teacher2Librarian project](#). Project leaders of these two programs will be interviewed to learn "what worked" in their communities, in recruiting diverse candidates.

Identifying Pathways: At least two initial pathways will be explored for two target groups - certified teachers who want to pursue school library certification and paraprofessionals who seek to attain both teaching credentials and school library certification. Additionally, within SDP schools, educators who already hold the necessary library certification may be interested in applying for a reopened school librarian job. For example, there are 24 SDP classroom teachers and one paraprofessional with current school library certifications, who are not working in a library (SDP, 2023, September 18).

Pool of Teacher-Candidates: One expedient pathway to fill school librarian positions could be to offer **options for certified teachers** to earn school library certification. In SDP there are 9,349 certified teachers (SDP, 2023, October 31). Both in-state and out-of-state hybrid and online options will be explored, as many universities have closed school library certification programs in the last decade. Currently in Pennsylvania, only two universities offer such certification (Kachel & Lance, 2021, p. 9-10). Criteria for consideration will be identified including responsive curriculum, online availability, and time requirements, as well as costs and out-of-state certification issues. It is worth noting that states have various levels of teacher certification and professional development requirements to maintain a teaching certificate. Ideally, as in Pennsylvania, Level 1 certified teachers could incorporate school library coursework in their continuing education plan to transition to Level 2. This could be an attractive recruitment strategy for new and early-career teachers.

Certifying Paraprofessionals: School staff in large urban districts include many **instructional aides or paraprofessionals**, many of whom are neighbors and family members of students, a well-integrated school audience from which to recruit. For example, SDP employs 2,539 instructional aides according to 2022-2023 NCES data. Such individuals would first need to earn a teaching certificate as required by the Pennsylvania Department of Education and most states, and then add a school librarian certification. Although Pennsylvania has teacher certification reciprocity with most states, certification will be a significant component when developing school librarian preparation tracks. A Para-to-Teacher program would mirror a successful, similar SDP pipeline program called Para-to-Special Education Teachers. It is an on-the-job, "learning while working," accelerated cohort program with reduced costs that cater to the needs of urban school paras.

Developing the Restoration Plan: In February 2025, as Mesi is leading work on the education plan for preparing candidates, the Leadership Team will form the **Library Restoration Work Group (LRWG).** Relevant SDP staff, under the guidance of Mesi, may be tapped to support the work of drafting the five-year **"Philadelphia Model School Librarian Restoration Plan"** with a communications plan. The LRWG will include the appointed coordinator, Project Director Mesi, PARSL's Core members (5), other PARSL members (4), and volunteers from library science programs in the Philadelphia community (2). Other members will be recruited whose expertise is required to craft specific parts of the Restoration

Plan. The Restoration Plan will address: 1) a summary of the Philadelphia context, 2) readiness assessment surveys and tools that identify schools for library implementation, 3) guidelines and recommendations for a five-year phase-in, 4) a communications plan to educate and engage key stakeholder groups, and 5) a dissemination plan to share tools, strategies, lessons learned, and the model plan for SDP and other districts pursuing School Library Restoration projects.

The LRWG will begin by gathering SDP school and community information to develop the **context of school libraries in SDP**. Previous PARSL work will contribute to understanding, such as PARSL's white paper: *Ensuring Equity and Access to School Librarians and School Library Services in the School District of Philadelphia* (Kachel & Stripling, 2023) which summarizes the lack of school librarians, the research, what students are missing, and suggests solutions. Building on this work, the LRWG will refine purpose and goals, focusing on why adding school librarians is essential to the needs of urban youth and student learning, and the district conditions contributing to the decline of library programs. Potentially, additional surveys, created with assistance from SDP's ORE, may need to be administered to gather information from SDP school leaders and parent groups.

To build awareness and buy-in, both locally and nationally, the Leadership Team will submit a proposal to present the **"Restoring Urban School Libraries: Challenges and Strategies"** report at the ALA Annual Conference (Summer 2025, Philadelphia). Additionally, a short video and PowerPoint presentation will be shared with key stakeholders, including the SDP School Board, City Council, and Philadelphia Federation of Teachers. These resources will be disseminated within the Philadelphia community, posted on the website, and shared widely for other school districts to consider in beginning to address school library equity for their students.

First Half Year 2: September 2025-January 2026

RFP for University Partners: Early in the fall of 2025, the Leadership Team will review the possible pathways for librarian certification uncovered during the spring 2025 explorations and select options to pursue with more targeted information gathering and negotiation. A **Request for Proposal (RFP) will be drafted** to solicit university partners willing to tailor cohort-based, customized, accelerated programs for candidates needing to become certified school librarians. Several education tracks will be requested for qualified candidates without any college education, for paraprofessionals with partial college education, and certified teachers needing only school library certification. The RFP will be drafted by Mesi and the SDP Office of Talent and reviewed by the Project Leadership Team. Criteria to be considered will include:

- *Curriculum analysis-* Aligns with state and national certification standards; offers a robust and adaptable curriculum designed for needs of urban schools and the diversity of candidates
- *Delivery methods-* Proposes a residency-based, on-the-job cohort program with accelerated pathways; provides supervision of candidates; offers feasible online and hybrid learning options; adapts to the diverse schedules of candidates; offers synchronous and/or asynchronous formats, plus evening or weekend classes to accommodate working professionals
- *Instructor quality-* Has highly qualified instructors that ideally have experience in urban school settings; includes supervisors for student teaching experiences
- *Certification issues-* Proactively addresses potential certification challenges, analyzing reciprocity agreements between states, proposing solutions to navigate potential hurdles, and emphasizing the importance of alignment with regulatory requirements
- *Reduced tuition costs-* Offers cohort options; reduced tuition and waives additional fees for both undergraduate teacher education and school library certification programs with accelerated pathways to certification

RFP Process: After review by the project leaders and SDP officials, the RFP will be posted and sent to potential universities that may be able to customize affordable programs needed to meet Philadelphia's need to educate a diverse group of school librarians. RFP responses will inform decisions about options for building a pathway to certification.

Sustainable Funding: Once the RFP has been issued, the Library Restoration Work Group will begin exploring how the revival of school library programs in SDP could be funded. "Braided" funding streams will be explored, combining federal grant funding, state budgetary support, City Council/Mayoral support, school district budgetary and special project funds, and philanthropic/non-profit donations. University and association scholarships, as well as professional development supports will be researched for school library candidates. Attaining the education needed to become school librarians, even with reduced university costs, is expensive and often out of reach for paraprofessionals; therefore, a plan to provide funding and scholarship support will be investigated at the same time the RFP process is underway. The LRWG will research federal, state, and local grants, as well as philanthropic community support (see Letter of Support).

Structural Funding: Several promising aspects of the Philadelphia environment suggest possibilities for future funding. As a result of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court ruling that the state's system of funding public education was unconstitutional, it is expected that state public school funding will be dramatically increased and changed to better support high poverty districts with large numbers of struggling learners with poor academic gains (Mezzacappa, 2024); Philadelphia's new mayor, Cherelle Parker, expressed support for school libraries during her campaign (Sitrin & Mezzacappa, 2023); and Philadelphia has 5,883 foundations and grantmaking organizations that can be explored, according to *Cause IQ* (Directory, n.d.), including several that are already funding citywide and district-wide efforts to improve childhood literacy.

Development of Librarian Preparation Plan: Based on the RFP responses and exploratory research about funding, Mesi and the Leadership Team will develop an adaptable **"Plan for Preparation of Philadelphia School Librarians"** with the following components, as well as others that may emerge through this process:

- specific candidate eligibility criteria with an evaluative rubric;
- strategies to recruit for diversity:
- university training options for candidates with varying educational backgrounds;
- projected 5-year plan estimating cohort size with a suggested funding structure;
- a tiered scholarship plan based on financial need and academic performance, ensuring equitable program access;
- identification of potential community sponsors and partners, highlighting the mutual benefits and positive impact on the community;
- the tested RPF that can be adapted by other districts
- a mentorship or sustained support component.

Librarian Support & Retention: Another important aspect of the pathway plan involves provisions for sustained support for librarian candidates during their years of schooling and once they have attained a library position. The plan will include a recommendation for a strong mentorship program for all candidates in training and in their first year or two as new librarians. The Pennsylvania School Librarians Association will partner with SDP to provide an experienced, practicing school librarian to mentor each participating candidate and provide continuing support through professional development opportunities with membership and conference options (see Supporting Doc 3). SDP will arrange for student teaching placements where needed. Additionally, candidates will be supported with practical, on-the-job training opportunities with our community partners, local non-profits that set up and manage volunteer elementary libraries in some 25 SDP schools, including the West Philadelphia Alliance for Children (WePAC) and Historic Fair Hill.

Creation of Readiness Tools & Surveys: Also in Fall 2025, the Library Restoration Work Group (LRWG) will complete and share the summary of the SDP context and begin to assess district readiness by creating readiness surveys and tools, working closely with SDP Offices as appropriate, analyzing available data, and scheduling multiple Zoom sessions as needed. Both the Advisory Council and the Project Leadership Team will be informed throughout the process.

Readiness Instruments, designed by the LRWG and the Office of Research and Evaluation (ORE) will assess a school's readiness to support an effective school library program with an instructional school librarian. These instruments are an important component of the planning process and fill a critical gap in tools not currently available to districts and schools

planning to revitalize school libraries. The assessment will include the following readiness criteria, although other criteria may be added: availability of facilities and staffing; current status of library service; school equity factors, including the socioeconomic level of the school community and demographics of the school (with priority given to schools with a higher percentage of BIPOC students, English Learners, and students with disabilities); enrollment projections; and alignment with district overall strategic planning.

One data source that will inform SDP readiness tools is a recent library survey completed by principals (SDP, 2023, September). The results revealed the status of school libraries: whether there is a "library," availability of space, utilization by students and staff, and level and type of staffing including volunteers. Responses were received from 178 schools (82% response rate), showing possibilities for a library restoration effort. A designated space was available in 69% of elementary and middle schools and in 59% of high schools. Although principals reported employing 6 elementary and 2 high school librarians, they were generally not full time in the library. 2022-2023 data from the NCES indicate that the actual number of school librarians was 2 FTEs for the entire district. However, certification records indicate that SDP employs 28 educators who hold school library certification, with 24 serving in non-librarian roles (SDP, 2023, October).

Additional surveys will be created for key stakeholder groups to gather relevant and attitudinal data from school administrators, classroom teachers, and school staff (including paraprofessionals), students, and community members. The surveys will gather data in the following areas:

- Staff input, understanding, and receptiveness to adding a library and an instructional school librarian
- Special learning and academic performance needs of students
- Attitudes of students
- Anticipated level of ongoing principal support (establishing library budget, enabling collaboration between the librarian and teachers, and including the librarian in curriculum, technology, and leadership planning)
- Parent and community attitudes

Some surveys can be based on surveys previously created for an assessment of the Paraprofessional to Special Education Teacher pipeline work. The readiness tools will be created with district leadership input and reviewed by SDP offices including Academics; Diverse Learners; and Diversity, Equity & Inclusion. The Leadership Team and Advisory Council will review the final instruments to ensure broad collaboration, consensus, and shared leadership.

Forums for Stakeholders: Once the school-based readiness tools and other stakeholder surveys have been reviewed, the USLR Project Director will hold forums for school administrators and parent and community groups. She will relate the background of the USLR Project, share the plan to recruit and educate prospective school librarians and how schools can be phased into the five-year strategic plan. Readiness assessment tools will be explained and where appropriate, principals, staff, and possibly randomly selected students from each school will complete them. This will provide not only useful information for restoring school library programs, but also pretest the instruments, allowing the project teams to revise as needed.

Dissemination of Interim Results: In the fall of 2025, the USLR project will pursue several opportunities to communicate and disseminate interim project results, including the **"Restoring Urban School Libraries: Challenges and Strategies"** report. Presentation proposals will be submitted for conferences including: the ALA Summit (Summer 2025), Council of the Great City Schools (October 2025, Chicago), AASL Conference (October 2025, St. Louis, MO), and the PSLA Conference (Harrisburg). Conference PowerPoints, articles, handouts and other project work will be added to the website. The Advisory Council will continue to meet quarterly, reviewing and providing input on deliverables, and informing overall library restoration efforts and dissemination of project work.

Second Half Year 2: February 2026-August 2026

In early February, the LRWG will compile the first two sections of the **"Philadelphia Model School Library Restoration Plan" –** the Philadelphia **context summary** and the **readiness instruments**. Starting in mid-February, the LRWG will

review the results from completed readiness instruments and develop the third section of the model plan: **guidelines and recommendations for phasing in school librarians over five years.** The LRWG will base the guidelines on the completed reports, **"Restoring Urban School Libraries: Challenges and Strategies"** and **"Plan for Preparation of Philadelphia School Librarians,"** the results from the readiness assessments, and possible funding strategies. The guidelines and recommendations will be developed through an iterative process of feedback from key stakeholders (Advisory Council) and SDP offices and administrators, revision, additional feedback, and completion of the finalized deliverables and plan.

Communication and Dissemination

The Restoration Plan will include two additional sections – a **communications plan** to educate and engage key stakeholder groups and a **dissemination plan** to share the model with other districts and school library leaders.

Engaging Wider Communities: In creating the "Philadelphia Model School Library Restoration Plan," a comprehensive **communications plan** will be needed to inform and build support among all key stakeholders. In Fall 2024, the USLR Community Liaison, with Leadership Team, will create an informational/promotional video designed to communicate the project's intent, the potential impact on students, and the commitment of the school system to develop a workable plan. In order to inform and collect input from multiple audiences, the video will be widely shared via the project website and SDP social media. It will be integrated into advocacy presentations to administrators and teachers interested in restoring school libraries in their schools, the School Board, the teacher's union, the Home and School Association (parent group) leaders, community literacy organizations, such as Read by 4th (see Letter of Support) and added to the SDP [Office of Family and Community Engagement](#) (FACE) resources. FACE will assist in identifying community groups for dissemination of this plan and offer face-to-face or online informational sessions as requested. Importantly, these conversations with diverse stakeholders will support planning and establishing critical partnerships with Philadelphia educators, community organizations, parents, teachers' union, government officials, and others, who will be involved in future implementation activity related to SDP library restoration and school librarian restoration.

In Year 2, the Project Director, Leadership Team, and LRWG will shift communications from generating awareness and buy-in, to disseminating lessons learned, reasons behind strategic decisions, and newly created tools and resources. All tools and resources will be carefully piloted and revised before they are published on the website and shared publicly. A short video, PowerPoint presentation, and written reports will be shared widely with the SDP School Board, City Council, and Philadelphia Federation of Teachers. Conference presentations, PowerPoint decks, videos, written reports, articles, handouts, other project work, plus the finalized **"Philadelphia Model School Library Restoration Plan"** will be added to the website, submitted to ERIC, and shared widely via library and education networks and news media, to serve as models for other districts and schools to adopt or adapt. The Advisory Council will continue to meet quarterly, reviewing and providing input on deliverables, and informing overall library restoration efforts and dissemination of project work.

Diversity Plan:

The USLR project will contribute to DEI practices by intentionally researching, developing, and publicly sharing strategies, models, and resources to help districts improve diversity in school library staffing and provide more equitable library services to all students. First, project reports and plans will be informed by advice and strategies from school library leaders representing urban districts that serve primarily students of color in low income communities and have successfully reinstated school librarians and libraries. Second, a preparation plan to recruit and train school librarians, addressing a critical pipeline concern, will prioritize diversity of race, ethnicity, and cultures among potential candidates. Universities will be encouraged to meet criteria to fulfill education requirements in an affordable, timely fashion to meet the needs of working candidates; scholarships will be investigated to support candidates of color. School readiness surveys and tools will consider student demographics, community poverty, and other diversity factors in site selections for phasing in school library programs. Finally, SDP is an obvious choice to create an urban School Library Restoration model plan due to its size, student demographics, and long history of a lack of school librarians.

This project will also be informed by many stakeholder groups representing diversity of thought, culture, and race. PARSL, a diverse, grassroots group, has spent the past two years building partnerships and organizing city residents invested in the return of fully staffed, well-resourced school libraries. PARSL'S publications, zoom meetings, testimonies at board meetings, tables at street fairs, and web and social media presence continue to increase community and school support for effective school library programs with certified librarians. Select support letters from unions, library organizations, literacy organizations and philanthropic foundations are included in this proposal, but more could have been included.

If funded, diversity will be well represented on the Leadership Team, Advisory Council, and Library Restoration Work Group to ensure input and ideas for all stakeholders—universities, administrators, teachers, students, community, and library candidates. A representative delegation that includes a student advisory board of high schoolers will participate in the on-site visits to D.C. and New York City to learn about their library programs and recruitment for diversity efforts.

Project Results:

The USLR project has a far-reaching impact for large urban districts and others, to visualize a pathway to revitalize library programs with certified librarians who better represent the backgrounds and cultures of their students. The SLIDE IMLS project revealed a 20% loss of school librarians nationally, but most dramatic in districts with majorities of BIPOC students and poor students (Lance & Kachel, 2021, vii). In 2021-2022, 7.1 million U.S. students were in districts that had no school librarians—that is 35% of all public school districts with 57% of those districts being majority-minority districts (Kachel, 2023). Yet an abundance of research highlights the impact of school librarians and effective libraries on student learning, especially among the most vulnerable learners. The U.S. Dept. of Education's mission is "to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access" (n.d.). To realize this, all students need access and the opportunity to learn through school libraries with certified school librarians.

Scant research about reestablishing libraries with school librarians exists, yet today many urban districts are adding them. A major project component will investigate, summarize, and share successful strategies from districts that have reinstated librarians. School leaders and education advocates will gain best practices on what works, saving districts time and money to conduct independent research on adding school librarians. The three major reports include 1) "Restoring Urban School Libraries: Challenges and Strategies," strategies from library leaders in schools that added librarians; 2) "The Plan for Preparation of Philadelphia School Librarians," a model focused on diversity recruitment with an adaptable RFP calling for university training options for candidates with various educational backgrounds; and 3) "Philadelphia Model School Librarian Restoration Plan," a strategic, five-year plan with a communications and dissemination plan to garner support from key stakeholders. A toolkit with usable stakeholder surveys, building readiness and assessment tools, strategies for working with university partners, and other resources will also be published on the project website. Conference presentations, articles, and videos will widely disseminate the project's work. Post project, the website will be maintained by SDP with resources added by PARSL and others on how districts are restoring school library programs.

Multiple stakeholders will benefit from the work of this project including 1) districts and schools wanting to recreate strong school libraries with certified staff, 2) state departments of education examining the credentialing process for school librarians and dealing with teacher shortages, 3) LIS universities expanding enrollment and diversity recruitment of school library candidates, and 4) library associations partnering with districts to mentor and provide professional development to new school librarians. Whether large or small, rural, suburban or urban, all districts can benefit from the project's findings and adaptable tools and resources. The USLR planning grant will also lay the groundwork for implementation in Philadelphia—a district that has not had functioning library programs in decades for most of its students. This project will serve as a model and be useful to other school and library leaders recognizing the need to reinstate certified school librarians and effective libraries as a school improvement strategy for their K-12 students.

YEAR 1 SCHEDULE OF COMPLETION - SDP Urban School Library Restoration Project

Objective 1: Research Other Urban Districts	Responsibility	Aug-Sep 2024	Oct-Nov 2024	Dec 2024-Jan 2025	Feb-Mar 2025	Apr-May 2025	June-July 2025
Recruit school library leaders	Kachel	▓					
Hold Zooms; on-site district visits	Kachel, Schl Library Leaders	▓	▓				
Gather & validate strategies	Kachel, Schl Library Leaders, Advisory Panel		▓	▓			
Advisory Council forms and meets	Mesi, Project Leadership Team						▓
Write & publish "Restoring" report	Kachel				▓	▓	▓
Disseminate "Restoring" report	Kachel, Schl Library Leaders					▓	▓
Create website & add content	Kachel, SDP Communications	▓					

Objective 2: Recruit for Diversity	Responsibility	Aug-Sep 2024	Oct-Nov 2024	Dec 2024-Jan 2025	Feb-Mar 2025	Apr-May 2025	June-July 2025
Set initial goals to implement the pipeline	Mesi, Project Leadership Team	▓					
Identify university partners	Mesi, Talent					▓	
Assess which SDP departments need to be involved in pipeline	Mesi, Project Leadership Team	▓	▓				
Identify SDP Talent person	Deputy Superintendent of Talent	▓	▓				
Identify funding sources	Team (including Grants, Fund for SDP, Advisory Council)	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	

Objective 3: Plan the Philadelphia Model	Responsibility	Aug-Sep 2024	Oct-Nov 2024	Dec 2024-Jan 2025	Feb-Mar 2025	Apr-May 2025	June-July 2025
Establish Library Restoration Work Group	Stripling, Mesi			▓			
Share research and context data with LRWG to develop consensus on goals priorities	Stripling, Library Restoration Work Group				▓		
Create readiness tools	Stripling, Library Restoration Work Group					▓	

YEAR 2 SCHEDULE OF COMPLETION - SDP Urban School Library Restoration Project

Objective 1: Research Other Urban Districts	Responsibility	Aug-Sep 2025	Oct-Nov 2025	Dec 2025-Jan 2026	Feb-Mar 2026	Apr-May 2026	June-July 2026
Disseminate report & survey for use	Kachel, Sch Lib leaders	▓	▓				
Advisory Council meets	Mesi, Advisory Council	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓

Objective 2: Recruit for Diversity	Responsibility	Aug-Sep 2025	Oct-Nov 2025	Dec 2025-Jan 2026	Feb-Mar 2026	Apr-May 2026	June-July 2026
Identify potential candidate groups	Mesi, Talent Partner	▓	▓	▓			
Create application and timelines	Mesi, Talent Partner	▓	▓	▓			
Develop recruitment strategies	Mesi, Talent Partner		▓	▓			
Create candidate criteria	Mesi, Talent Partner		▓	▓			
Design a rubric for review of applications	Mesi, Talent Partner	▓					
Develop data collection, reflection, and continuous improvement of the implementation process	Mesi, Talent Partner			▓	▓	▓	▓
Develop a plan for regularly and clearly communicating to each stakeholder group	Mesi, Lowman	▓					

Objective 3: Plan the Philadelphia Model	Responsibility	Aug-Sep 2025	Oct-Nov 2025	Dec 2025-Jan 2026	Feb-Mar 2026	Apr-May 2026	June-July 2026
Hold awareness & readiness forums for administrators & key stakeholders	Lowman	▓					
Disseminate readiness surveys to schools	Mesi		▓				
Assess schools' readiness and establish priorities for library restoration	Mesi			▓			
Investigate funding possibilities	Team (including Grants, The Fund for SDP)			▓			
Develop draft model plan - get broad feedback - finalize	Stripling, Mesi				▓		
Develop communication plan and tools	Stripling, Mesi					▓	
Disseminate model plan widely	Stripling, Mesi					▓	▓
Present at conferences	Kachel, Mesi, Stripling	▓	▓				

Digital Products Plan

IMLS LB21 Planning Grant Full Proposal: Urban School Library Restoration Project (USLR)

Aligning with the goals of the Laura Bush 21st Century Library grant and IMLS's commitment to expand public access to digital products, the School District of Philadelphia will create a diverse range of digital products.

1. TYPE

Various products include but are not limited to digital collections of educational resources, including plans, multimedia materials, and activities pertaining to the Planning Grant. These materials will include downloadable Word, PDF, Powerpoint documents, and Google Suite products. File formats will include .docx, .pdf, .pptx, and .jpg.

● Released items will include captured moments throughout the Planning Grant including meeting outcomes, vignettes, student/staff/community perspectives, etc. These will include downloadable Word, PDF, videos, images, and Google Suite products.

● Materials produced and curated for the planning grant's implementation will be a major part of our collection- email templates, probing questions, District/Partner expectations, qualifiers and rubric for program participation, an overview of our higher education partners' curriculum and learning modules, etc.

The Urban School Library Restoration Project (USLR) will produce 3 major reports:

"Restoring Urban School Libraries: Challenges and Strategies," a report summarizing guidance from interviews with library leaders from school districts across the country that have successfully added school librarians;

"The Plan for Preparation of Philadelphia School Librarians," outlining a plan to address the pipeline of school librarian candidates that will be needed to staff all SDP school libraries with fully certified teaching librarians; this will include a toolkit and an adaptable RFP calling for university partners to provide training options for currently certified classroom teachers and for paraprofessionals to obtain teaching and librarian certifications.

A strategic, five-year *"Philadelphia Model School Librarian Restoration Plan"* outlining how SDP will re-open school libraries. This will include a robust, replicable communications plan. Sections include:

● A summary of the Philadelphia context,
● Readiness assessment surveys and tools that identify schools for library implementation
● Guidelines and recommendations for a five-year phase-in
● A communications plan to educate and engage key stakeholder groups
● A dissemination plan to share tools, strategies, lessons learned, and the model plan for SDP and other districts pursuing school library restoration projects.
● Creation of Readiness Tools & Surveys: In Fall 2025, the Library Restoration Work Group will complete and share the summary of the SDP context and begin to assess district readiness by creating readiness surveys and tools, working closely with SDP Offices as appropriate, analyzing available data, and scheduling multiple Zoom sessions as needed. Both the Advisory Council and the Project Leadership Team will be informed throughout the process.

These along with project findings will be widely disseminated via conference presentations, articles, videos, and a project website that will be publicly accessible.

2. AVAILABILITY

Our digital products will be made freely and readily available for use and re-use by schools, educators, students, and the public. To ensure broad accessibility, we will:

● Host our digital products on the District website that complies with standards for interoperability and long-term preservation. These include but are not limited to Grant updates, presentation materials- agenda, slides, notes, etc, and the 3 major major reports.

● Regularly assess and improve the accessibility of our digital products through user feedback, usability testing, and compliance with relevant accessibility standards.

To build awareness and buy-in, both locally and nationally, the Leadership Team will submit a proposal to present the *"Restoring Urban School Libraries: Challenges and Strategies"* report at the ALA Annual Conference (summer 2025, Philadelphia).

Publishing Project Work: the **USLR Project website**, designed and launched with assistance from the SDP Communications Office, will feature the "Restoring" report, as well as relevant articles and resources that have been gathered from participating school library leaders and curated by PARSL member Kachel.

3. ACCESS*

We are committed to maximizing access to our digital products for all users, regardless of geographic location, socio-economic status, or technological proficiency. Project Director, with support of the Community Liaison, will help launch of USLR Project website with support of the SDP Communications Office (to house finalized reports, conference presentations, PowerPoint decks, videos, articles, handouts, etc).Our strategies for ensuring equitable access include:

● Collaborating with community organizations, libraries, and schools to promote awareness of our digital resources and provide support for users with limited digital literacy or internet access.

● Using Wordpress, our website hardware, to implement responsive design principles to optimize the usability of our digital interfaces across a variety of devices and screen sizes.

● Exploring innovative technologies, such as assistive technology and voice interfaces, to enhance the accessibility and interactivity of our digital products for diverse audiences.

● Any new works must acknowledge the *Urban School Library Restoration Project* and funding by IMLS.

  All participants will have signed waivers for materials publicly shared, including photos, videos, quotes, etc.

4. SUSTAINABILITY

To ensure the long-term viability and impact of our digital products beyond the duration of the grant period, we will prioritize sustainability through:

● Cultivating partnerships with stakeholders, including government agencies, cultural institutions, and private sector organizations, to share resources, expertise, and funding opportunities.

● Incorporating scalable and modular design principles to facilitate future enhancements, expansions, and adaptations of our digital products in response to evolving user needs and technological advances.

● Conducting regular evaluations and assessments of the usage, impact, and cost-effectiveness of our digital products to inform strategic decision-making and resource allocation.

By following these guidelines and principles, the School District of Philadelphia is committed to creating and managing digital products that not only meet the requirements of the Laura Bush 21st Century Library grant but also advance the mission of providing equitable access to educational resources for all learners.