

April 22, 2019

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing on behalf of every public school student in the State of Oregon. In 2011, many of the Oregon public school districts eliminated licensed school librarians due to budget constraints. In so doing, what was lost was far-reaching. Not only did many excellent, qualified public school librarians lose their jobs, but our students lost the opportunity to better access their education.

In the past, school librarians were responsible for teaching a wide variety of skills to students at every educational level. They taught according to the Oregon School Library Standards, and these included Reading Engagement, Social Responsibility/Digital Citizenship, and Technology. These broad standards included learning library skills such as searching for information, selecting books appropriate to their reading levels, accessing and employing technology, researching different topics for presentations and writing assignments, and interacting with text that spanned a range of genres. Our licensed librarians targeted age-appropriate skills to expand the skill set of each student at every grade level. At present, students are not gaining these abilities because they are not receiving explicit instruction in these areas.

As a school-based speech language pathologist, I have watched many of my students who struggle not only with communication disorders but who also have learning disabilities no longer receive assistance in selecting books at their reading levels. Instead, they are perpetually choosing books to “look at” rather than to read. Previously, school librarians worked with each student to pick books that he/she could read. This seemingly simple act of selecting books emphasized choosing a book of interest, determining the purpose for reading it, ascertaining personal interest level, understanding the content, and having the ability to decode the majority of the words. Currently, students participate in checking out books without being provided guidance around choosing books that will develop literacy skills.

Furthermore, prior to the reduction of school librarians, all students had access to opportunities to learn technology skills from a trained professional. Some of the skills that were addressed in the media center included developing Powerpoint or other dynamic presentations, researching topics utilizing online resources, and vetting sources for appropriateness. Students were taught how to determine whether or not a website was an acceptable source for information and were responsible for learning how to accurately cite sources. Public school students’ access to learning research skills has been depleted and falls now to the classroom teacher whose abilities to teach these skills is limited both in time and scope. Moreover, in the general education classroom, students are learning how to be consumers of technology but are not learning how to be digital citizens. School librarians are licensed professionals who could explicitly teach students how to make responsible choices and could teach about topics that include cyberbullying. Additionally, with the advances in technology, which include coding and creating robots, students are missing out on opportunities to become creators, cultivating skills that could develop into job skills. Licensed school librarians taught and could teach all students these skills.

Perhaps what is saddest is the fact that EVERY student in public school sets foot in a library, at least one time each week in elementary school. When licensed, public school librarians were removed from schools, EVERY student lost the opportunity to learn skills that would have an impact on every subject area they learn in school. At the core of instruction and production at school are “library” skills. These

include but are not limited to learning to read for information, researching subject matter, using technology to create written work, and most importantly, developing an appreciation for reading. Licensed school librarians received their training in all of these areas, were beholden to clearly written standards, and supported all students in these endeavors. As a parent, I feel strongly about my children not having the opportunity to learn from a licensed professional the skills that will better prepare them for their careers as students in public schools and in universities thereafter.

Please carefully consider the broad impact school libraries have on each and every student, regardless of socioeconomic status, race, or disability. Please consider mandating funding for school librarians in order to better support our students' futures. Thank you for your time and attention in this matter.

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