

March 30, 2023

Senate Committee on Education  
900 Court St NE, HR B  
Salem, OR 97301

Chair Dembrow, Vice Chair Weber and Members of the Committee:

I am writing to support SB 1075.

I have witnessed the negative impacts of the removal of school librarians from school libraries as a parent of a student enrolled in the Salem Keizer School District at the time that this began to happen as well as a staff member and, later, as a library media assistant working in a Salem Keizer elementary school. My understanding of the effects of these drastic changes on the information literacy instruction and reading literacy support provided in schools is informed by my professional education as a librarian with a master's degree in library science (MLS).

During elementary school my son benefited from the active involvement of a school librarian and a library media assistant at his school. The school librarian has an in-depth knowledge of information literacy as well as education and training in teaching the skills that assist children in understanding how to access and use information. The library media assistant provides important support to the school librarian in being able to share this instruction with all the students and in managing classrooms in the library but is no substitute for what a school librarian has to offer, especially when assigned alone to a library as seems typical these days in Oregon schools. This is true for all levels of the K-12 education system.

When librarian positions were cut while my son was in middle school he experienced a noticeable decline in the assistance he was able to receive in finding library materials as well as the instruction in library use and research that was offered to his classes.

When I started working as an instructional assistant at Bush Elementary School in the Salem Keizer School District I was impressed by the quality of instruction the

library media assistant tried to provide the students. She had worked for years with the school librarian who had developed curriculum and activities for classes and was able to use that experience to provide similar instruction as best she could after school librarians had been cut. But being alone with students without any assistant herself she was limited in how well she could instruct by the need to manage the classroom alone. She shortly retired in large part because of how exhausting the work had become. Having a degree in Library Science I had a strong understanding of what information literacy skills were important to teach students for their school research as well as personal research and critical analysis of information in their individual lives that is so important in navigating our world as adults.

I worked for several years as an instructional assistant in the school and saw three different library media assistants (LMAs) come and go from the position at that school before deciding to apply for the position myself. While each of these LMAs had good intentions they had little understanding of what it took to run a library or teach library and information literacy skills to students. Sadly, their library time had become a time to play on computers receiving very little to no instruction or storytimes. Working in that position and getting to know other library media assistants at district library media meetings and trainings I became aware of a number of things:

1. Those LMAs who worked for a number of years under a school librarian or who had a background in library science (such as myself) were able to provide much better library media instruction as well as library reference services to students and teachers than those who only had experience as instructional assistants.
2. Schools varied in the time a LMA was given to work in the library depending on the school administration. Some LMAs spent all their hours working in the library and experience clear support from their principal. Others were given multiple assignments throughout the day outside of the library. Keep in mind, this was the only staff person working in the library. Personally, daily I had front porch duty in the morning, lunch or recess duty and bus duty at the end of the day as well as several in-class instructional assistant assignments over the week. When our school decided to have an incentives store where students could spend their "Tiger Bucks" they earned for positive behaviors I was assigned to order the items and run the store. I was shocked at how little an understanding our school principal had of

what it takes to operate a library and provide students with valuable assistance and instruction. I found myself having to advocate for the library and the importance of having time to tend to it with very little success.

3. LMAs were typically not given instructional assistants to provide support in behavior or classroom management. While I was very knowledgeable in the instruction that would be wonderful to provide our students I was left alone with classes of 25 to 30 students to manage on my own. I will be the first to admit that I was unprepared for this, having had no education in teaching nor experience managing classes on my own. I was also overwhelmed by the extreme difficult behaviors of some students that has been in the news so much in recent years.
4. I handled classrooms alone and yet was compensated at a wage that was just slightly more than a classroom instructional assistant.

Information literacy is key to being successful in school as well as in life. It helps one to think critically and identify ways to tell fact from fiction and be an informed consumer and citizen. School librarians also help students identify their reading interests and find materials that keep them engaged – helping students develop stronger reading and literacy skills and a love of reading. They also can provide help to teachers in instructing students in how to do research and use research tools.

The cutting of school librarians has been a huge disservice to the schools and students of Oregon. I believe funding a full-time FTE School Library Specialist at ODE would be a first step in rectifying this situation and would enhance the education our schools can provide.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I urge you to pass SB 1075.

Sincerely,

Beth Anne Huffine