

Good morning Representative Clymer and House Education Committee Members,

My name is Graig Henshaw. I am currently a K-8 librarian for three schools in the School District of the City of York. The 2012-2013 school year will be my seventh year with the district. I have seen the number of certified school librarians dwindle from a high of six to now just two. The School District of the City of York has had to make difficult decisions over the past two years due to the budget, and unfortunately, programs such as art, music, physical education, and library have suffered. Most of what I am about to say, I wrote as an email after reading an article about a school board that decided to cut unified programs because they felt that the unified arts teachers did not spend enough time instructing students.

I do not know how it is in other districts, but in the School District of the City of York, I receive a thirty minute lunch as required by contract. I do not receive a planning period during the instructional day. As you can imagine, I often had students come to the library during my lunch and even though my aide would say, "Don't answer the door," I couldn't resist. I have classes scheduled all day despite the fact that the Pennsylvania Guidelines for School Libraries state that a flexible schedule is the way to go.

I believe that most school boards are aware of the Pennsylvania Guidelines for School Libraries and the evidence provided by the Keith Curry Lance Studies. The problem is that for all their talk about improving test scores, they choose to overlook the studies. If a district wants unified arts teachers to teach more, administrators have the ability to schedule them to do so. However, booking the library without any flexibility leads to a lack of collaboration between librarians and classroom teachers and makes it more difficult to promote the library to the community. Scheduling the librarian all day leads to a reduction in time to process materials, order materials, weed and update the collection, stay abreast of the latest trends in technology, and makes it more difficult complete the tasks that a library media specialist has to complete.

The sad fact of the matter is that many school boards either do not understand or do not care about everything that goes into operating a library successfully. I think that it is worse to not care than it is to not understand. If a school board needs to understand what it takes to operate a library; all they have to do is ask.

My question for any school board that decides to cut libraries is this: if your main concern is making AYP in reading, why do you want to cut a program that promotes reading and exposes students to a variety of subjects? I remember when my district decided to cut elementary

librarians last school year. I told teachers and the union representatives, "They are going miss the guy who purposefully falls off a chair when reading *Library Lion*. They are going to miss being allowed to shout 'NO' at the top of their lungs during *Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus*. They will miss pretending that they are dogs and bears while doing choral reading of the *Dog and Bear* series by Laura Vaccaro Seeger. They will miss me demonstrating the difference between a saunter and a sashay while reading *Bad Boys* by Margie Palatini.

The wonderful thing about being a librarian (at any level) is the ability to target multiple subject areas and hit on vocabulary that students may rarely hear. I have the chance to teach and reinforce various literary concepts. Have you ever seen how a student who is afraid of spiders reacts when they see a picture from Nic Bishop's *Spiders* projected on a screen using a document camera? There are times I have seen something only to wake up in the middle of the night trying to figure out how to incorporate it into a lesson. Sure, I knew the lesson would have a chance of getting me into trouble, but I thought, "If I get in trouble, I get in trouble." I remember the first time that I lit a twenty dollar bill on fire using a combination of water and rubbing alcohol. As I flicked the lighter, I thought "I am going to hear about this." I did hear about it. I heard about how much students enjoyed the lesson. Don't even get me started on how they react when you mix Mentos and Diet Coke.

Do you know a single librarian who does not love to read? Students see me reading at the circulation desk before or after school. Just seeing an adult read encourages children to read. However, some school boards choose ignore studies that prove this to be true. Is it easy to make every book enjoyable? No. That's not our job. Our job is to do our best to find something for everyone. Yet school boards want to eliminate positions that actively encourage students to explore and read and discover.

I want to briefly mention that school librarians have to stay aware of current trends in technology. As a school library media specialist, it is important to be aware of the trends in social media, apps, eReaders, and systems such as Overdrive. However, by reducing our time to purely instructional, library media specialists do not have the time to operate a library to its greatest potential and efficiency.

I probably could have said this is a better way rather than just citing some examples, but Robert Frost, I am not. I love to read, I love to encourage others to read, I love listening to music and have incorporated music into lesson on similes and metaphors. I enjoy movies more than is healthy. I like ballroom dancing. I like kayaking and I just do what I can to be a positive role

model for students. Most school librarians I know are fascinating individuals who have a lot of interests, but more importantly, strive to be positive role models. This past school year, I taught roughly 700 students in a given eight day cycle. I have seen as many as 1,200 students in a week. I know names, I know personal interests, I hear arguments, I mediate, and I hear things that I don't want to hear, but it all comes with being a teacher.

As mentioned, school librarians do everything in their power to develop well-rounded collections. However, we can only take a collection as far as a budget will allow. It is amazing how a certain book can transport you to another place or bring back memories. Sometimes those memories are sweet, sometimes they are bitter, and sometimes they are bittersweet. Archibald MacLeish once said, "What is more important in a library than anything else – than everything else – is the fact that it exists." When you remove a qualified librarian from a library, I believe that the library begins to cease to exist. Literature gives us the chance to learn and Leonardo Da Vinci said, "Learning is the only thing the mind never exhausts, never fears, and never regrets."

I get frustrated every time I hear about school districts cutting librarians and other unified arts programs. I think it is wrong on many levels and for many reason, but what do I know? I'm just a librarian. Wait, I have my K-12 Principal Certification as well. I attended the University of Pittsburgh for my Master of Library and Information Science degree. I had tremendous professors including Dr. Mary Kay Biagini. Dr. Biagini exudes a love for libraries and it is the way that she taught about school libraries and library programs that constantly reminds me that libraries are and always will be something worth fighting for even if at great risk. I will finish with a quote from a character in one of the most successful book series of all time. Albus Dumbledore said, "It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities." Many teachers and librarians have the abilities to do other things, but every single one has chosen to be an educator.