

Testimony of
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Presented to
Pennsylvania House of Representatives
House Education Committee
on
School Libraries in Pennsylvania
August 22, 2012

How do High School Libraries prepare Students for College?

Hi everyone. My name is Kristy Oren. I attend Hamilton College in Clinton, New York, and this fall I'll be a junior. I want to begin this speech with a topic I'm sure we can all relate to, in light of the recent Olympics: sports. I, myself, am a pole vaulter. Now, when I first started on Hamilton's Track team, I was amazed at its state-of-the-art pole vaulting equipment. Not only did it have the same running surface that was used in the Beijing Olympics, but it had two runways for us, so we would never have to vault into the wind. Hamilton had hundreds of poles of different heights, bends and weights and landing mats that were perfectly cushioned. It had literally every resource for pole vaulting I could imagine. However, with all these resources, I needed a great deal of instruction to properly use them. Basically, I needed a coach. Yes, I had all the best pole vaulting equipment, but without a coach, I had no clue how to actually pole vault. Likewise, at college I was presented with a beautiful library, and a seemingly infinite amount of research resources, however, without my high school library experience, I would have had no clue how to actually use them.

First, my high school library taught me how to access credible resources. In the age of the internet, there are endless resources at my fingertips, almost too many. At this point, it becomes difficult to determine what sources are credible and useful for a research project. This is especially true at the collegiate level. Between the complete collections of magazines and newspapers, the endless rows of academic bookshelves, and the online libraries with countless databases, the abundance of information is truly overwhelming. Fortunately, my high school librarian taught me how to wade through the information to find important sources. He showed me that the gold mines of information can be found on special sites that the libraries buy specifically for student research. Some of these databases are provided through state funding, some are provided through local funding. These websites are designed to help students find credible information for every step of their research. For example, our Online Public Access

Catalog provides me with the locations of books in my library, POWER Library helps me access online journal articles, and Bibme assists me in proper citation for my research, to name a few. My favorite database is Facts on File, a site that provides extensive summaries of both sides of a controversial issue. Cuts in state funding to school libraries will prevent future students from having these important learning experiences.

Now, Hamilton College gave me a great orientation for the rest of its campus; it spent a week introducing me to all the buildings and dorms and students and dining halls. Yet, I didn't have a single hour of orientation for the library. When I stepped into the library to do my very first college research project, and got a view of the vast resources at my fingertips – without any prior orientation – that's when I realized how fortunate I was that my high school library had *already* provided me with the orientation I needed to make the most of these resources at college.

So yes, my high school library cultivated my research skills and taught me to determine reliable from unreliable information. However, with just this skill, I would be buried in information, with simply too many good resources to cram into one research project. Fortunately, my high school librarian taught me how to take important pieces of information and combine them to form an effective argument. I learned how to use evidence to prove a thesis, how to think creatively and from different perspectives when addressing an issue and how to counter the weaknesses of my argument directly in my project. My librarian taught me not only how to *access* good information, but also, how to use that information.

With the increasing cuts in the education sector, class sizes are also increasing. Teachers have less time to spend with each student, so it becomes the job of the librarian to cultivate the students' research skills, to teach them not only where to find credible resources, but how to use those resources to their advantage - how to think, analyze and structure a good argument. I can't remember all the books in a library, or even what I researched or learned from my high school library. However, I will always remember and be grateful to my high school librarian, who taught me everything I know about researching, and who put in the effort to ensure that I had the ability to investigate and analyze any issue I would be presented with in college. College libraries, like Hamilton pole-vaulting, can give me all the resources in the world, but without that high school librarian – a coach – I would never have been able to develop the skills that are necessary to meet the high bar that colleges set.

I am happy to answer any questions that you might have about my testimony now or after Sean speaks to you. Thank you for this opportunity to speak to you.