

April 1, 2023

Dear School Committee Members:

We ask you to reconsider the changes you are proposing to the school department's library programs in your 2023-2024 budget.

As you know, many school districts in Maine will be getting additional funding as a result of a miscalculation at the state level. Sanford alone is expecting to receive approximately \$547,000, a sum we hope you take into account as you finalize necessary changes in the budget.

Eliminating certified teachers in our library and media specialist positions will significantly and adversely affect the quality of our school system's library programs. Our librarians provide many services far beyond those that an Ed Tech III has the training, experience, and authority to perform.

While our library programs are tailored to the grade levels we serve, all librarians have professional training that ensures they are implemented by knowledgeable, professional staff.

We take master-level courses that are specific to the library-and-information field and teaching. Courses include, but are not limited to Collection Development and Management; Curriculum Frameworks; Instructional Strategies for Effective Teaching; Reference and Information Services; Principles of Management; Children and Young Adult Literature; Information Organization; Technology in the School Library Media Center; and Technology for Information Professionals.

This education prepares us to teach students important skills, collaborate and support teachers with curriculum and lessons, and manage all aspects of a successful library program.

Many of the tasks of managing a successful library take place behind the scenes and require time and expertise.

We create budgets. We select and order print and digital materials that best meet the needs of our students, teachers, and curriculum.

We process, organize and promote books and perform advisory services to students to ensure that they find titles that interest them. We create life-long readers.

We research and create resources for teachers to support their curriculum, provide professional development to our staff, and facilitate the Maker Spaces in our schools that offer STEM-related opportunities. Additionally, we teach research skills that are fundamental for all students to have as they progress from elementary school to college.

We teach students digital citizenship and media literacy, both of which are vital skills for the 21st Century. Our children are learning and using technology at quite a young age, so skills in digital citizenship are essential to helping them stay safe, respectful, and responsible when using technology and engaging with others online.

Elementary-school librarians also serve as specialists for multiple classes each week, which means we provide additional, direct instruction to students so that their teachers can receive their contracted “prep” period.

Next year, we are slated to officially add Pre-K to our list of “specials,” so eliminating our positions would impact our youngest students, as well.

As certified teachers with experience and training, we are well-equipped to work with large groups of students and have a variety of well-honed classroom management techniques to limit behaviors that could arise.

Finally, we serve as Enrichment Teachers for all students in our schools. In this role, we provide coverage for teachers, so they can attend Professional Learning Community meetings and take the opportunity to receive professional development during the school day. Also in this role, we offer unique, often STEM-related, experiences to all students.

Research shows that when each school library is staffed with a certified librarian, students have higher reading, writing, and information literacy scores on standardized tests. Students also have higher graduation rates. Title I students and English Language Learners make greater academic gains. Our most vulnerable and at-risk learners, including low-income students and students with disabilities, benefit the most from certified librarians in their schools.

Multiple studies have found that test scores tend to be even higher in schools where librarians spend more time instructing students, both independently and with classroom teachers. Such scores tend to be higher when school librarians collaborate and plan with teachers, provide them with professional development, and facilitate the use of technology for them and their students.

There are many more important aspects to what we do that should be considered before eliminating our positions and, as a result, decreasing what our schools are providing for our students.

We know it is challenging and difficult to craft a budget that considers the well-being of both our students and our local taxpayers. We greatly appreciate your efforts. At the same time, we respectfully ask that you consider what is best for our students as they discover a love of reading, improve their information literacy skills, and learn how to navigate our complex digital world. When it comes to our library programs and staff, anything less than what is currently in place can only have an unfortunate and regrettable impact on our students.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We welcome the opportunity to answer any questions that you may have.

Sincerely,

Jessi Allaire, Library Media Specialist, Margaret Chase Smith School

Valerie Sullivan, Library Media Specialist, Pride Elementary School

Sara Clinehens, Library Media Specialist, Carl J. Lamb School

Julie Williams, Library Media Specialist, Sanford Middle School

Jen Raymond, Library Media Specialist, Sanford High School