

April 2, 2023

Dear Superintendent Nelson, Assistant Superintendent Bussiere, and the members of the Sanford School Department School Committee:

I recently learned that you are considering the elimination of the school library media specialist positions at your elementary schools. I am writing to ask you to consider retaining these positions; I believe this would clearly be in the best interest of the students in your district. Certified librarians and fully-staffed libraries contribute to a vibrant learning environment and add value to your school district that far outweighs the financial expenditure required to maintain their positions.

A professional, certified librarian brings great benefits to your school and students. First, they provide students and staff with a carefully curated collection of learning materials, bringing their professional expertise to bear in carefully selecting materials that support learning and the school's curriculum. In today's climate of unprecedented numbers of challenges to school library materials, it is essential to employ a trained library professional who has used their skills to review materials and can defend their selection to detractors. A full-time certified school librarian is a children's literature expert that students and staff can consult to find high-quality, diverse, culturally relevant, and accessible materials that support teaching and learning. Moreover, a professional librarian is trained to provide instruction in a wide range of literacies that are central to a 21st-century education: information, media, technology, and of course, reading. Finally, a librarian with an 071 teaching certificate in the state of Maine is the only professional qualified to collaborate with your other teachers to develop instructional activities, assessments, and identify materials that support your curriculum in every content area.

Replacing your professional certified librarians with Ed Techs is inadequate and will put your students and staff at a great disadvantage. Ed Techs are a poor substitute for an 071 certified librarian because the job, if it is to be done well, requires that the librarian work beyond the school hours to maintain the collection, plan instruction, and develop programs to support the development of those essential literacies. While Ed Techs have certain abilities, they do not have the training to meet those essential requirements; substantial research supports this fact.

I urge you to consider the overwhelming evidence that strong school library programs led by a professional school librarian are essential to student learning. Here is a link to an article summarizing the findings of multiple school library impact studies conducted around the U.S.: [“Why School Libraries Matter: What Years of Research Tells Us”](#) by Keith Curry Lance and Debra E. Kachel. I have pulled out a few key excerpts for you to consider:

School library programs positively impact student learning:

Data from more than 34 statewide studies suggest that students tend to earn better standardized test scores in schools that have strong library programs. ... In addition, newer studies, conducted over the last several years, show that strong school libraries

are also linked to other important indicators of student success, including graduation rates and mastery of academic standards.

Building effective school library programs requires professionally trained school librarians:

In these statewide studies, the most substantial and consistent finding is a positive relationship between full-time, qualified school librarians and scores on standards-based language arts, reading, and writing tests, regardless of student demographics and school characteristics. ... [L]osses of librarians are associated with declines or inferior gains in reading scores, while gains of librarians are associated with improved scores.

Vibrant school library programs play a particularly critical role in ensuring success of the students who need support the most:

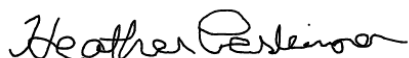
the benefits associated with good library programs are strongest for the most vulnerable and at-risk learners, including students of color, low-income students, and students with disabilities.

School librarians work directly with students in an instructional capacity. The NEASC accreditation requirements since 2020 have required that public schools have certified and licensed library personnel to fully support student learning who are available to students and staff before, during, and after school. An Ed Tech does not meet that standard. The [Maine Effective School Library Program Standards](#) also require, in order for a school library program to be considered “effective,” that it be staffed by a certified library media specialist. The American Association of School Librarians standards reiterate this recommendation in their [core beliefs](#). Furthermore, a school library program that is run by a professionally trained school librarian creates a learning environment that supports Maine’s Guiding Principles and the Learning Results.

A quality school library program provides a rigorous student-centered learning environment. Students from schools with strong library programs who go on to attend post secondary institutions are at a significant advantage because they have had access to quality research skills instruction including the use of databases and evaluating information. In short, when we invest in our school library programs and staff them with qualified librarians, our students achieve more and are better prepared to succeed in their futures. These investments pay substantial dividends far into the future.

I would be happy to speak further with you on this topic and how MASL can support your school library programs. My contact information is below.

Respectfully,



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