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**Testimony Before the New Jersey State Board of Education**

**Wednesday, January 8, 2020**

**By Joseph Meloche, EdD, Superintendent, Cherry Hill Public School District**

Mrs. Goldenberg and members of the State Board of Education, colleagues, and community members, my name is Joseph Meloche; I am honored to be the superintendent of the Cherry Hill Public School District in Camden County. Thank you to the members of the State Board of Education for allowing me time to make this statement today. I am grateful for this time to talk about unsung heroes in our educational system, folks who are true difference makers in the education of our children, one of the most important facets of our educational system, school library media specialists. School library media specialists are absolutely essential staff with the training, expertise, and New Jersey Department of Education certification, who have knowledge of effective teaching methods, child development and the ability to collaborate with classroom teachers to ensure that students meet NJ Student Learning Standards as well as individual school curricular goals. As the Department of Education promotes the key value of providing equity to students in New Jersey, school librarians are powerful partners to school districts in providing equitable experiences for all students through collaboration, instruction, open doors to access resources, as well as the actual physical hub of the library as the center of the school. Additionally, they work to provide an environment in the school library that meets students' educational needs as well their social and emotional learning needs.

In Cherry Hill, our libraries are vital to the success of our district. The libraries that we have in each one of our eighteen schools, which are staffed by a total of twenty amazingly talented, diverse, enthusiastic, and incredibly knowledgeable school librarians, are central to our ability to provide a thorough education to our students. The Cherry Hill School District is a wonderfully diverse tapestry of families of so many different cultural, familial, and religious backgrounds and economic means. Among our 11,000 children, more than 70 languages are spoken at home, more than 2,500 children are bilingual, 18% have an IEP, and in our six Title I schools, nearly 1 in 3 children are on Free or Reduced Lunch. The children whom we educate have varied backgrounds, come from diverse homes and many have developmental challenges that require specialized instruction and an adaptation of the process and approach for accessing the curricula. How we approach the education of all of our children, including those who have been identified as not typically developing, those who come to us with untold challenges and trauma in their lives, and those who are brand new to our community is a direct reflection upon our community and our educational system – at the local level and at the state level. While the physical structure of our facilities may not look dramatically different from when the newest school was opened in 1970, what goes on inside our walls, especially within our libraries has been revolutionized to meet children’s needs.

Here are some examples of the work in which our school library media specialists have been engaged:

- We just revamped our Talented and Gifted curriculum at the elementary level, which is instructed by the school library media specialist.
- Our school library media specialists are teaming with the district’s literacy specialists on literacy strategies with a “One Book, One Team” book study on: “Game Changer: Book Access for All Kids”

- We took our school library media specialists on a bus tour of every library in the district, so that they could share ideas, share successes, share challenges, and share inspiration.
- We have refined our database offerings and trained the school library media specialists with database-specific professional development.
- As a district, we are revamping the middle-level information literacy research projects, and the school library media specialists are taking the lead!
- We have school library media specialists as a part of all of our content area curriculum committees.
- School librarians serve an essential role in collaboration and working to help students reach their full potential:
  - Supporting ways to increase reading comprehension
  - Supporting teachers in meeting district curricular objectives.
  - Leading and supporting technology integration, they are instructional leaders who have introduced cutting-edge technologies and practices into their schools: coding, robotics, 3D printing, gamification, etc
  - Providing intellectual and physical access to materials in all formats.
- Trained in collection development to provide current and diverse collections of print and digital materials that address a range of ability levels
- School library media specialists create inclusive spaces that are safe for all students and provide materials and activities to support social and emotional learning.

So, as I am sure you can understand, school libraries are incredibly important to me because of the impact the school library media specialists have on children – how they embrace the capability of going beyond just leveling the field of opportunity for children and actually create situations when those who need more truly receive more. I ask of you, the New Jersey State Board of Education, to strengthen the administrative code and QSAC guidelines related to school library services so that ALL students have the opportunity for equitable experiences that are provided in school districts like Cherry Hill, where our libraries are fully staffed:

- Not all students are as lucky as my students and staff in the Cherry Hill School District to have access to full-time certified school library media specialists.

- The New Jersey Association of School Librarians and the New Jersey Library Association are concerned about the decline in the number of certified school library media specialists and have created a task force to look for ways to stop the decline. This task force is currently engaged in promoting legislation related to creating a separate information literacy curriculum and requiring a certain ratio of school library media specialists to students.
- The NJASL/NJLA Task Force is concerned with the fact that not all students are receiving the equitable access and equity opportunities to experience the life impacting benefits of having a school library media specialist.
- Academic and public librarians are seeing the results of the decline in school library media specialists as too many students are progressing through their K-12 educational experiences without developing the ability to navigate through a library to locate information and not having the ability to do college-level research.
- Parents are concerned about their children not having access to school library resources.
- It is within the purview of the State Board of Education to review and to strengthen the administrative code and QSAC regulations to require school library services for ALL students.

As a state, we must continue to be leaders in educating our children. School library media specialists are truly difference makers for the children of our state.

Esteemed members of the New Jersey State Board of Education, this critically important equity work has a home in our libraries.

Thank you for all of time that you volunteer on behalf of New Jersey's children.

*Joseph N. Meloche, Ed.D.*

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January 8, 2020

Date

