

Testimony given Tricina Beebe School Library Media Specialist

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of concerned BCS parents as well as SLMS in the educational field. I have four children, all who have attended Berlin Community School. Currently, my youngest is in the fifth grade at BCS. She sadly reported, on the first day of school, that Library was not one of her “specials” this year.

I am here today to discuss the appalling decision to cut our full-time librarian from her 14 year position due to Reduction-in-Forces (RIF). This teacher/librarian served more than 14 years at BCS as a certified school librarian and received a rice notice two days prior to a budget proposal meeting in which the BOE voted to diminish library services. The community was told that “students will still be able to check in and out books. That books would still be available.” As you can imagine there has been an outpouring of concerned and disappointed parents and educators in the community. Asking questions like:

- *Who will teach our students 21st Century Library Skills?*
- *How will our children be able to matriculate into HS without a continuity of Future Ready skill-set?*
- *Who will incorporate cataloging, database queries, citation assistance, information and digital literacy skills?*
- *Will the clerk, substitute or part-time librarian that is outsourced from a county agency be able to develop a rapport with students to locate books that will develop a zest for learning?*
- *Who will offer a rigorous approach to enhance learning?*
- *Who will match a student’s IEP, Lexile Reading level, associate a Fountas and Pinnell label, aid with common core standards and link students to 21st century initiatives?*

Checking in and out of books does not constitute library services. Parents were originally told that a “clerk” would be handling checking out material for a 10 grade level school system (Prek-8th grade). This school system serves almost 1000 students and feeds into Eastern Regional High School in Voorhees, NJ. Once word reached our community parents and staff were outraged. An online FB page was created and numerous people attended the next board meeting to find out why this decision was made. Administration and the Board of Ed. switched gears and now stated that a part-time librarian would be hired and outsourced from Camden County Educational Services. They would hire someone with no prior experience at BCS, a temporary staff member, someone with no benefits, in addition to limited time in the position and no experience with the collection or students for this part-time job role. To date, there is no one hired for the position. They are utilizing a substitute and alternating week on and week off for

library skills. It has been reported that this p/t person will be housed only three days a week and serve just grades 1st-5th. There are no planned collaborative efforts at the Middle School Level.

Our tenured “full-time” School Librarian offered continuity of library services. She was the face behind the book. Oftentimes, teachers would request her to teach different topics and aid in supporting their curriculum and standards. Her lessons were created to coordinate with specific classroom goals. She would order requested material for classrooms so that the library offered sources that would aid with the curriculum. As a SLMS, she catalogued material, created and labeled collections based on lexile ranges, fountas and pinnell common core and 21st century topics. She brought students to books, knowing their IEPs, 504 plans or special interests.

In fact, my daughter especially enjoyed the close of last year’s library unit on dragons. The librarian created a dragon unit on mythical creatures and real dragons. Her lesson tied in non-fiction and fiction discussion and students researched about realistic dragons like the komodo dragon. My daughter would not stop discussing this lesson, or maybe, I started to recognize that her love of learning revolved around the library. Libraries are the heart of schools, the staples of communities.

Lastly, I want to address one factor that has really been upsetting to me as a professional in the field. The lack of respect and understanding of our position. Originally, the RIF included depletion of library services and the cancellation of two sports programs, wrestling and cheerleading. Just last month the Board shared with the community they were happy to announce that they “found money” in the budget and made the decision to add back both sports programs. What a disservice to the field of Library Science. We are in a day and age where knowledge is power. Allowing two sports programs to supercede a library curriculum for students is for lack of a better term, disgraceful.

Libraries are transforming. Libraries connect information to all students. Libraries are bringing Makerspace concepts, STEAM initiatives, digital skills, literacy skills, digital citizenship platforms as well as a plethora of lessons that complement jobs and innovations of the future. Libraries are not limited to Gifted and Talented programs or students ‘selected’ for Engineering classes, we reach all students offering an overview of coding, 3D printing, robotics and more. We are certified ambassadors to teach, engage, enlighten and educate both staff and students.

NJ has seen a depletion of librarians. Please take a look over the data, the facts regarding the need for library services. I have attached a link to School Library Programs in New Jersey: Building Blocks for Realizing Student Potential with ESSA Legislation Opportunities.

<https://njla.org/sites/default/files/2016ESSAandNJSchoolLibraryPrograms.pdf>

This report was a collaborative effort created by NJASL and NJLA. The purpose of this study was to gain further insight into NJ School Library Programs. The data speaks... this report indicates that higher library staffing is linked to higher reading performances on all grade levels

K-12 (up to 13%). Additionally, writing performances is an even stronger increase, up to 18%. At the HS Level, schools with higher librarian staffing showed that their ACT scores were more than 5% higher compared to schools that were poorly staffed.

I stand before you with 10 years experience working in a public library setting and now 3 years working as a SLMS. It is disheartening to see that library positions are depleting without proper analysis of their worth. Please take a moment to go over the data, the facts, the truth of how vital librarians positions are for our future. Thank you.