

Attn: Montana Chapter 55 TF Committee and Negotiated Rule Making Committee May 4, 2022

Sidney Sheldon, a prolific writer once said- “Libraries store the energy that fuels the imagination. They open up windows to the world and inspire us to explore and achieve, and contribute to improving our quality of life.” ¹As a librarian and an educator, it is our mission to provide students with the best education that we can provide them, to promote their imagination, and we should go to great lengths to make that happen for every student. In the Army, one of the key sayings is “Mission first, people always.” Our mantra in education should be “excellence in education first, students always.”

I am writing again as I watch us continue to recommend that we reduce the number of librarians in our schools. How are we providing students with an excellent education when we are reducing librarians.? As noted in previous letters, we know that literacy increases when a school employs a qualified librarian. In fact, it is stated in the Montana Every Student Succeeds Act Plan: “specific strategies for school improvement will be drawn from the OPI’s experience in providing direct technical assistance and support to schools and districts” including “implementing systemic literacy and math improvements through specialized instructional personnel, including a variety of educators as well as library media and digital literacy and math specialists.” Will we put more schools at risk for ending up on an ESSA plan because we lack one of the key elements in a school of excellence- a qualified librarian?

In my opinion, it seems to me that the Task Force was steered to get rid of half-time librarians because some school districts have a critical shortage of librarians. However, does reducing the required number of librarians actually fix the problem? I think not. In fact, in some situations, qualified librarians will have their jobs eliminated. As result, we will have fewer librarians. Moreover, this solution does not change the fact that we have a recruiting and retention problem in the State of Montana for teacher- librarians. This solution provides district with the easy out, in order for them to retain accreditation. What is the impact? We will kick the can down the road; we will potentially drive more people out of our profession. And, who does that impact? The very students that we, as educators, are entrusted to provide that excellent education for so that they will have the skills to lead this great nation forward. We owe Montana students a better solution. I plead with that you reconsider retaining the number of required school librarians and not rob our buildings of qualified librarians. Montana students deserve better.

As I wrote previously, the bottom line is we need teacher-librarians in our schools. We need to maintain these numbers if we want schools of excellence. The studies support how effective teacher-librarians are at increasing test scores and literacy in our schools. I implore you not to lower our standards but seek solutions to attract the best in our communities.

Sincerely, Angela F. Archuleta, KW Vina Elementary, Browning School District 9

¹ Sheldon, Sidney. “Libraries Store the Energy That Fuels the Imagination ...” Best Quotes About Libraries Librarians and Library and Information Science, 27 July 2019, www.librarianshipstudies.com/2019/01/libraries-store-energy-that-fuels.html.