



2007 Montana Teacher of the Year

Howdy,

A few years after being selected as Montana's Teacher of the Year I was asked by Montana School Administrators to be part of a group. This group of administrators, teachers and specialists were brought together in Helena to examine what adequate staffing levels for providing a basic system of quality education should look like. Article X of our Montana State Constitution states that "The legislature shall provide a basic system of free quality public elementary and secondary schools." It was this "basic system of free quality" schools that we focused in on. There was a lawsuit about the state not adequately funding schools in providing a basic system of quality education. To determine if there was adequate funding there was a great deal of discussion about what the minimum staffing requirements could be. Once the staffing was determined the budget components could be examined and see if the legislature was providing for the minimum requirements.

Although I was a classroom teacher at the time I had the unique perspective of having been a part time library media specialist in a Class C school district as well as a full time Library Media in both AA and A school districts. My experience as a classroom teacher as well as a Library Media Specialist made it very easy to bring forward what minimal staffing requirements were needed for library media centers. Those minimum standards were written into Montana Code based upon years of research of library services. It was really a no brainer because those staffing requirements were minimums. The staffing numbers are not pie in the sky but rather a basic framework of what a school needs to deliver a quality education.

Much like a school counselor helps with the student's mental health so too does the library media specialist help students and schools academic health. I was dismayed when I saw the proposal for reducing the minimum requirements for staffing of school libraries and the number of librarian variances already allowed. Our kids deserve at the very least the minimum standards. Shame on OPI for not assisting these schools reach the

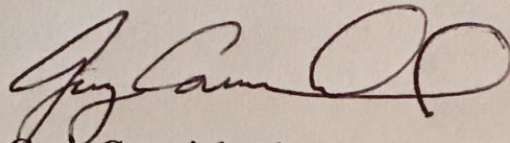
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Think **BIG...** Start *small*

proper library staffing. If the schools wanted to reach the proper staffing they could do so ... but it would seem they are being allowed to not meet the needs of their students. Effective administrators are known to grow staff in needed areas and this could also happen utilizing the programs already developed by units in the Montana University system. I urge you to reject the proposed erosion to library staffing and encourage schools' administrators and OPI to provide a quality education for our students, they deserve it.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Gary Carmichael", with a large, stylized loop at the end.

Gary Carmichael

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