



Kit Stephenson, President
Angela Archuleta, V.P., President-Elect
Kelly Reisig, Secretary-Treasurer
Gavin Woltjer, Past President

Kirk Vriesman, Executive Director
PO Box 823
Arlee, MT 59821
kirkv@mtlib.org
www.mtlib.org

March 31, 2022
Attn: Montana Chapter 55 Committee
From: Executive Board of the Montana Library Association

The American Association of School Library's current recommendations call for at least one certified librarian in every school "with additional librarians to be added as best fits the school's needs." This is, of course, in part what Montana already does, for the very good reason that it has a statistically proven positive effect on student achievement.

Years of research support this practice and the need for certified librarians in schools. Indeed, a 2018 *Phi Delta Kappan* review of the research on school library effectiveness found that strong school library programs overseen by certified librarians contribute to student achievement. What is more, studies have found benefits associated with library programs run by qualified professionals are most effective for "vulnerable and at-risk learners, including students of color, low-income students, and students with disabilities." Montana's commitment to school librarians is a commitment to the success of every student in our state (please see this [AASL document](#) for more information).

Montana school librarians appreciate the committee's commitment to exploring all opportunities to provide these important, evidence-based services to our students. It is also why we hope your future conversations will look more deeply into questions regarding variances in regards to the statement by Nathan Miller, the OPI Representative, that 34 of the 35 variances issued in our state are due to school librarian issues. The School Library Division of the Montana Library Association hopes you will investigate the following:

1. What specifically are these variances issued for (e.g. teachers completing an SLT certification program vs. a school utilizing paraprofessionals for partial-percentage positions)?
2. What do these schools have in common demographically (e.g. small size, partial-percentage positions, rural, etc)?
3. How long have these schools been utilizing variances for these positions, and is there a limit to how long they can use a variance for a specific reason?
4. Why are these positions not being filled (e.g. "lack of qualified applicants," partial-percentage positions, administrative misunderstanding of the library's vital role in learning, etc.)?

Until the specific nature of the “variance problem” is identified we urge the committee to preserve librarian staffing requirements as they currently appear in Chapter 55 to ensure we do not create yet another issue by attempting to fix the wrong problem or, at worst, remove protective and instructional academic supports from our students’ lives. School librarians are vital to fulfilling Article X of the Montana Constitution Education and Public Lands to “establish a system of education which will develop the full educational potential of each person” and we are doing our part to support this mission.

Sincerely,

The Montana Library Association

Kit Stephenson, President
Angela Archuleta, V.P., President-Elect
Kelly Reisig, Secretary-Treasurer
Gavin Woltjer, Past President
Kirk Vriesman, Executive Director

Vic Mortimer, Corvallis Middle School, Co-Chair- MLA School Library Division
Chani Craig, Whitefish School District, Co-Chair- MLA School Library Division