

Hello,

I am a 5th-8th grade school librarian working in a rural school district outside of Bozeman. According to OPI's school and district data, my district has 667 students, K-8. Under your proposed changes, my district would only need 1.3FTE. Currently, my district employs 2 librarians (one as a K-4 librarian and myself as the 5-8 librarian). The issues with the proposed changes are many and the consequences of these changes will be long lasting and detrimental to student, staff, and community wellbeing.

The primary concern I see is that, in a well-functioning school district, librarians serve not only as an aid to students, but to the staff, administration, and the community at large. I am currently 1FTE for 201 students and still do not have the time to adequately support staff and admin, nor to research upcoming books, technology, and resources to keep the library current with high quality materials. If I cannot manage to do my job to the appropriate degree at 40% of the capacity which you propose, how will I (or anyone else) manage with an increased caseload.

Second, librarians' time is also used as prep time for other teachers. By having librarians responsible for a greater student population, other classroom teachers will lose time to prepare for instruction. Under your proposed model, teachers will lose librarians as a resource because the librarians will be too busy managing an increased student load and all the responsibilities that come with it, and they will also lose time to help prepare lessons/projects and meet as teams to improve their teaching for the benefit of the student.

It may or may not be known by the committee, but librarians can also be tasked with being the technology educator, especially in smaller districts. In my situation, I teach each student 2.5 times per week (we alternate Friday schedules). One class is meant to take the place of a library class while the other is more technology focused. Of course, the standards are covered in each, but if I am forced to teach more students, which means seeing each student fewer times during the week, then they will lose not only access to the library as a place to check out books (because I will be always instructing a class), but they will also lose time to interact with technology and become better stewards and citizens of the digital world.

One of the reasons I initially moved to Montana to teach is because my home state (South Dakota) has an appalling lack of regard for the importance of public education. Their teachers are overworked, under compensated, and often burn out within 3 years or less because they can find a less taxing job that pays equal or better. Asking a single teacher to take on the standards and manage the education for the School Library Media Specialist of 500 students will burn librarians out and they will find other avenues of employment.

I find your proposed changes to be short sighted and reactive instead of proactive, which any educator will tell you is the wrong way to approach an issue. I would hope that the interests of the committee would be to see Montana continue to have a strong reputation for good and great public schools that are able to put the students' learning first. My hope would be that the committee would abandon the proposed changes and leave the policy alone until further research and discussion with school librarians can be completed

Thank you for your time and consideration,
Andrea

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