

Letter from a Teacher-Librarian

January 2008

Dear Early Learning and K-12 Education Committee Members,

Will you please support Senate Bill #6380? Every student deserves a full-time, highly qualified library teacher and a quality school library. The average publication date of our non-fiction collection is 1982! We need to purchase quality non-fiction, specifically new social studies books. Classroom based assessments will be required next year. CBAs are engaging research projects which require several current text and electronic sources. In addition to asking you to vote for this bill, I would like to share my story so that you have some insight into a typical school library that serves Washington students. After you read this letter, you will understand why I don't have extra time to raise money to buy books for my school library. Each year I spend at least 60 hours organizing two or three fundraising events because we currently do not have enough money to buy new books for the kids.

I teach in the library at Wilson Elementary in Spokane Wed. afternoons plus all day Thursdays and Fridays. While it is my choice to work part-time, the cuts have obviously adversely affected Wilson students and teachers. Four years ago this library teacher position was cut from full-time to part-time. In addition, the library assistant time was cut, also. (She lost \$5,000 yearly in pay after the district reclassified her position from "library assistant" to "clerk" - yet she does the same work). My library assistant time is each Monday, which is a day I don't work. She works at four other schools each week and only has time at each school to process books, not to do check-out or check-in.

Meanwhile, I am barely keeping my head above water. Managing the library, the 14 computers, the Accelerated Reader program, collection development, and the dozens of other management tasks is taking too much of my time. I am proud of the collaboration with classroom teachers and research projects I have completed in the past at other schools, but now it is nearly an inhumane challenge! Although my teaching contract specifies I work only 18.5 hours per week, I often work 10 hour days, three times per week just to keep up! My principal says I shouldn't need to put in all the extra time, but how else do **I fit a full-time job into part-time hours?** How else do I meet the vast and varied needs of the students and teachers? How else do I teach lessons directly connected to the GLEs and directly connected to projects students are working on in their classrooms?

This month my sixth graders are researching ancient China, the fifth graders are studying the American Revolution, the 4th graders Washington state geography, the third graders spiders...and so on. I LOVE to teach them the difference between paraphrasing and plagiarism, how to take notes, how to research on the Internet and so forth. Yet how can I accomplish this in a 30 minute library lesson each week? In the Central Valley School District (where I taught for 6 years) the library times are 60 minutes in length for the older students. Hour long classes in the Spokane School District are not possible anymore due to severe cuts. Wilson is one of 15 Spokane schools that have only a part-time library/media teacher.

In this age of information and technology with an emphasis on READING why are school libraries targeted for cuts? If it's because library is not a state requirement like PE and Music are, we need to change the state law! Some Spokane school libraries receive no book budget! (It depends on the principal). I'm a professional with 7 years of college and 12 years of teaching experience, yet I have to beg for new book money from PTG and promote Scholastic or Barnes and Noble Book Fairs. In December a group of parents and I spent hours of our Sunday passing out vouchers at the local Barnes and Noble Bookstore. We earned \$1,000 for our efforts, but why should we have to beg for book money in the first place? I am an energetic, hard-working teacher, but all this fundraising is torture.

Please help us properly fund our school libraries.

Sincerely,

[name omitted]