

April 21, 2019

Chair Doherty and Members of the House Education Committee:

My name is Peggy Christensen and I am writing as the current chair of the Oregon School Libraries Standards Committee, a former classroom teacher, a retired high school and district librarian, past president of the Oregon Association of School Libraries, and a very concerned grandparent of school-age children who attend school in this great state.

Here's my question: What can be done to get Oregon legislators to go beyond *listening* to our urgent request to reinvest in and strengthen Oregon school library programs and pass legislation that will actually make it happen? Active listening requires action. The two go together.

My granddaughter goes to a school that has a classified person working in the library. Although she is not certificated, the library clerk, staff, and students refer to her as "the librarian." She provides a worthy service to the school. But, she does not teach library skills because she is not a teacher.

My granddaughter's teacher has her write papers requiring research and sources, but my granddaughter has not been taught a research process, or how to vet sources. "Google" is her source of information. And as you have no doubt seen in social media postings or elsewhere, Google is there to make money, not to teach library skills. That's one of the jobs of a licensed librarian.

I'm not trying to build a case about how a person refers to herself. In many ways it doesn't matter. But, what does matter is if a school has a strong library program and employs a licensed librarian, then those students are being taught by an educator who is professionally bound to follow laws and guidelines set down by the legislature and TSPC; to teach skills based on state-adopted standards; and to evaluate the students' progress toward attaining those skills.

Strong school library programs matter to students who are English as a Second Language learners (ESL), or who are impoverished, or have chronic absences or other circumstances that impact their lives. The reason they are important is that licensed library professionals and trained assistants can reach out to these

students, not only across the grades but beyond the classroom. There are tools and resources that can help them better assimilate and understand their world.

The [data shows](#) that students have a harder time not only in K-12 schools where there are no licensed librarians and library instruction, but that their academic struggles follow them to college.

Academic librarians at Eastern Oregon College [reported on surveys](#) they conducted of incoming freshmen. They found that students have increasing deficiencies in information literacy competency when they start college. Students coming from rural areas showed a deficiency of around 50%.

This, despite the fact that Oregon School Library Standards were adopted by the Oregon State Board of Education in 2015. Students with these deficiencies have a higher learning curve to try and “catch up” to their counterparts competent library literacy skills

Professors expect their students to know how to locate reliable and vetted information and to conduct research. But, if these skills have not been taught, college success becomes more difficult. It is not due to lack of students’ intelligence, it is due, in part, to failure on the part of school districts to employ licensed librarians.

I mentioned in my opening statement the various positions I have had as a way of underscoring my commitment to trying to see that the school children of Oregon have access to library instruction.

The Oregon School Library standards that were adopted by the Oregon State Board of Education in 2015, reflect my work along with the rest of the committee who wrote them. The Grade Level Learning Goals that show the scaffolding of library instruction K1 – through grade 14, also reflect my work along with the rest of the committee who wrote them. These standards and grade level learning goals were written for all of Oregon’s students private or public. But, we need library programs in place and someone to teach literacy skills.

Many Oregon private college prep schools hire certified librarians to provide library instruction. That’s one of the reasons parents send their children to them. They want their children to be college-ready. But, library instruction should not

be a flip of the coin for the haves and have nots. Public students are less likely to have this instruction, which is unfortunate.

As for me, I haven't given up. I'm still working to see that students in public schools at least have a framework of literacy skills they need, and I continue to advocate for strong library programs that will allow it to happen. I served on the committee that wrote the original Strong School Library rubric. I have had face to face meetings with our legislators, attended the ESSA meetings, the meetings for the Joint Committee for Student Success, written to Dr. Salam Noor former Deputy Superintendent of Public Instruction, worked with people at ODE, gone before the Oregon State Board of Education, held sessions, and volunteered thousands of hours of my time to advocate for what I think our students need. All of them.

I personally have the skills to see my grandchildren through. But, I don't know what other people are going to do in terms of teaching library skills. If you have children that attend schools with no certificated teacher-librarian, what are you going to do to assure your child's library literacy? Children pay their entire life when adults fail them. It shameful to continue letting them down when we know there is a better way.

We need legislators who will do more than listen. Most, if not all, have listened. Most, if not all, are supportive of library programs and library instruction in their verbiage. But we need people who will pass legislation to see that all our kids get a fair deal; not just the lucky ones or the privileged ones. If not you and your colleagues, then who?

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Peggy Christensen". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

Peggy Christensen
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