

April 23, 2019

Hello Chair Doherty, Vice Chairs Alonso Leon and Helt, Members of the Committee,

For the record, my name is Corrina Hawkins. I am a parent and school volunteer at Battle Creek Elementary. I am here today in support of HB 3263 to reinvest in strong school libraries.

I started volunteering at the Battle Creek Elementary library a year ago, when I went in to talk to our Library Media Assistant about a lost book for my son. During our brief conversation, it quickly became apparent how much work she was managing and how much help she needed. It was so apparent that I signed up on the spot to volunteer weekly.

In the last year since I started volunteering, this is what I have observed. During the course of the week, our Library Media Assistant sees every single class at Battle Creek, which has 630 students. It is an absolute joy to see the kids excited to be at library and excited to read. I am sure that for many of them, this is their only library access and experience. Yet with the sheer volume of kids our Library Assistant is single-handedly seeing, and the limited time she has with each class, she only has time to briefly talk with each class and then check books out. I see eager students who are excited to read and learn, but due to our limited library staffing structure, can receive little guidance on what they might enjoy reading, where to find a book, or what is appropriate for their reading level. The students clearly need and crave more library assistance, instruction and guidance. Our Library Assistant just doesn't have enough time or support. Under the current model, we are shortchanging these students and missing the opportunity to help them develop their academic success and life-long love of reading.

On top of all of this, our Library Media Assistant is also simultaneously expected to manage all of the book check-ins, check-outs, overdue and lost books, damaged books, and book inventory. Yet throughout the day, she is pulled out of the library to assist with assemblies, recess, lunch and the pick-up and drop-off routine. On the days without her volunteers, or if we are not able to come in, books literally stack-up on her desk and carts without her being able to get to them. She relies heavily on her parent volunteers just to keep her head above water, which is a precarious and unsustainable model. Let me add that we are a school that benefits from strong volunteer support. I can't imagine how much worse it must be at other school libraries where volunteers are not available to help.

The bottom line is we are putting an unfair expectation on dedicated, hardworking library staff like our Library Media Assistant. And that unfair expectation comes at the cost of our students. Our students deserve access to a strong library program and access to both a certified librarian and a library assistant. I believe this is critical to developing the next generation of readers and learners, which is why I support HB 3263.

Thank you,

Corrina Hawkins