

Darn. I've put it at the end of this email hopefully that is ok, but I believe I'm too late anyway?

April 20, 2019

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

When you think of a library you likely think of a quiet place for reading, research, and the solemn gathering of knowledge. When you think of a school library you may think of eager eyed children listening to stories, searching for books, discovering NASA online, or perhaps doing a puzzle in the corner.

This is not the current state of elementary libraries.

I started my third year as a Media Assistant at Glenfair Elementary this fall. I did not finish the school year. It had nothing to do with the students and staff, I had a great deal of love and respect for them. It was like a family, but I could no longer take the stress. It was quite literally making me sick and negatively affecting my family.

As a Media Assistant I was assisting no one. In theory, there was a Teacher Librarian to support me, but with ten other elementary libraries to supervise on a part-time schedule, I rarely saw him. I was thrown in with no formal classroom management training and no formal training in how to run a library. My first year I saw five classes a day, ranging in size from 25-35, for 30 min each. This year my schedule was seven classes a day, plus I was constantly given more duties. It left almost no time in my six hours for paperwork, planning, emails, reshelving, cleaning, book repair, orders or helping teachers find books for their lessons. I frequently worked through breaks.

Glenfair is a high poverty school with a high transient rate, there is also a significant number of students who have experienced trauma. Children who have experienced domestic violence, gang violence and have fled war torn countries. In the three years I worked there I heard of more devastation than in my previous 30+ years of life. With too high classroom sizes and inadequate services for these struggling children, behavior was and is a constant problem in the school. It was often at it's worse in the library. For a year the library was crammed into half a portable and the amount of behavior issues that year was, quite frankly, dangerous at times. I was sent to Oregon Interventions Training by my principal, but even then expecting an 'assistant' to be able to handle and manage these kinds of situations was ludicrous. I saw veteran teachers lose their cool and have breakdowns under this pressure, but I was expected to handle their classes as an assistant getting a fraction of the pay they did.

Other elementary schools in higher income neighborhoods where parents have the time and energy to volunteer, in schools where children don't know poverty and trauma, perhaps a Media Assistant running things works fine. In schools like Glenfair the inequity couldn't be greater than what you see in the library: taped and retaped books, books fifty years old, a missing book in a series (a common issue), no crayons for coloring sheets because angry children throw them, broken blinds because traumatized kids try to get out windows...

The hardest decision of my life was to leave. Nothing was more rewarding than connecting with a child over a book that we both loved or seeing an English language learner finally be able to finish a book on their own. Under all the stress though, I found I could no longer serve the students well, let alone my own children at home. The current situation is grossly unfair for all

involved. The Media Assistants who work under this pressure, the students who deserve a properly trained and educated, full-time Media Specialist and the staff who also need expertise support on that front. I know we can do better.

Sincerely,

Tara Gilson Fraga
Instructional Assistant, David Douglas School District
Ex-Media Assistant, Reynolds School District