

## SB 552 (Media Literacy and Media Program Standards) Testimony in Support

To: Senate Education Committee, Chair Dembrow and Members

March 29, 2021

My name is Tricia Snyder-Neiwert, and I am the Library Media Specialist at Reynolds Middle School in Reynolds School District. I serve over 1,000 students and 100 staff members in a highly diverse and high-poverty school. I love where I work, but am reminded daily that my students and staff are not getting the strong school library program they deserve. This is an equity issue, and much research shows that strong school libraries make a positive impact in academic achievement.

I have been with my district for 21 years. I started as an elementary Library Media Specialist for the first ten years of my career. We had a strong school library program. We were fully staffed in all of our schools as recommended by the American Association of School Libraries: we had a team running the library with a full-time library media specialist (me) and a nearly full-time adult library assistant, and we had a district librarian to manage and supervise our program and district media support staff. With this model, I was able to focus on providing weekly library media instruction to every grade level and scaffold instruction each year so that by the time my students left to go to middle school they had a solid foundation to then be able to tackle with confidence the higher level work that would be required and expected.

In addition to providing instruction, I was able to plan and implement a rich school-wide library media program, develop an up-to-date library book collection, provide resources for staff for their instructional needs and projects, and offer tech support.

In 2009, my district cut all eleven of our elementary library media specialists and at the secondary level all library assistants were cut. I never imagined that this would happen as I thought a strong school library program was an essential service a school needed to provide. After working in the classroom for 6 years, I was able to return to the library world with my current position.

Going back I knew a generation of elementary students had gone through our system without library instruction and programming, but I was shocked to find just how much had been lost. The foundational skills for library use were vastly lacking. Even more heartbreaking, students seemed to have lost their love of reading, with few able to name an author or book they enjoyed. There was a significant lack of curiosity and inquiry.

In addition, it was clear that students strongly lacked information literacy or research skills. While they were able to use technology with ease, they didn't practice deeper thinking or put much thought into evaluating their information or they would just copy and paste images or text. They just didn't know. I had students later tell me, "this seems like something I should have

learned” and they were right. I would have to remediate what I could for these losses. Some students would never recover.

I still don't have an adult assistant to provide support for basic library maintenance and staffing. As a result it has been hard to find time to collaborate with staff to plan in depth for instruction, I can't process new books quickly, I have books I haven't been able to repair, I have to manage a 1:1 ipad program, and I can't offer as much programming as I would like. I feel like I am short-changing my students and staff.

My school library book budget is about \$3 per student, which is not enough to keep my library collection culturally responsive or up-to-date. When looking into library media program standards, this should be considered so districts can budget clearly and effectively.

Many don't see that our school libraries are in crisis or in a state of weakness as there is still someone in the library checking out books. A strong school library is much more than that. Strong school libraries provide equitable access to resources, consistent instruction, foster curiosity and inquiry, support social-emotional learning, a love of reading, a sense of belonging and community for everyone, and empowered users of libraries and information.

We have discovered an alarming trend of disinvestment in our school libraries in Oregon and a disconnect regarding compliance. We know the legislation in our state does provide the expectation that students do have strong school libraries and media instruction, but the lack of clear and transparent media program standards to evaluate and measure compliance have made it easier to lose this important piece of a child's education. Your support for SB 552 with a work session will create the ability and space to analyze this issue in more depth, look at the research and systems, and work towards a solution for the benefit of future generations who all deserve a strong school library program with media literacy instruction.

Thank you for your time and attention to this concern,

Tricia Snyder  
Reynolds Middle School Library Media Specialist  
Member of the Oregon Association of School Libraries Advocacy Committee