

Thank you for this opportunity to share our perspectives on the state of school library programs in Oregon, as they relate to SB 552. I am both the teacher-librarian at West Albany High School and the district librarian for my school district. I am currently the only licensed librarian in the district, serving over 9000 students and advising 19 other schools while also working full time in my own high school library.

While the other libraries in my district are run by solitary classified staff, who work very hard to get students access to books, my own school library operates under the recommended staffing model: I am fortunate to work with a full-time Library Assistant who is available to circulate books, keep the library organized, and track the condition of materials. This allows me to focus on the instructional aspects of the library program: assisting individual students with research, collaborating with teachers on instruction around finding and evaluating sources of information, developing the collection to ensure the availability of quality resources that support curriculum, and sharing those resources with both teachers and students.

Despite the adequate staffing levels in my library, my students are impacted by the lack of consistent prior instruction in quality resources and information literacy -- a common occurrence across the state. Currently, students may get occasional, disconnected lessons on evaluating information some time in the 9 years before they reach high school, but what they may or may not get is entirely up to chance. Teachers of other subjects and at other levels have their own content and their own expertise; they may or may not have the time or the knowledge to deliver a lesson on evaluating sources along the way.

Comfort level with technology is often seen as analogous to comprehension of the content that technology delivers, and so students who are skilled at operating the technology are often assumed to have a greater understanding of the underlying mechanisms than they actually do. They know how to make the device work, but they don't know how to evaluate the material.

Consequently, students reach high school with scattershot exposure to information literacy skills, and poor habits developed to fill in the gaps -- such as grabbing the first link Google suggests, or accepting YouTube videos as accurate without any analysis -- and high school instruction then must begin with the basics, rather than building on the foundation of strong K-8 library programs and information literacy curriculum.

We want our high school graduates to leave us with the skills necessary to navigate the information they will need to become well-informed citizens, capable of evaluating sources and drawing their own conclusions based on accurate evidence, but we are trying to compress 13 years of information literacy instruction into 4, and we are shortchanging our students in the process.

Because this impacts not only individual students but our society as a whole, I urge you to support this effort to address this issue and expand this conversation, so that lawmakers and community members can get a full and accurate picture of the state of library programs in Oregon, and of the media and information literacy instruction that is integral to those programs. Thank you.