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What do the data reveal about the state of our school libraries, staffing and materials?

When I started my library career in Corvallis 36 years ago, most schools had library programs. 800 certified teacher librarians taught in Oregon's K-12 schools. Today we number less than 150. What remains? Rooms of books, a few computers, and sometimes a librarian's assistant - but with no librarian to assist. In fact, today 200 Oregon schools have no library at all.

Odd, since Division 22 directs districts to report improvement toward strong library media programs. The rule states:

“Strong school library program” means a planned effort to ensure the instruction of students, school staff, and the broader learning community in library skills, information literacy, and educational technology; such a program promotes a rich array of literacy experiences supporting life-long reading; facilitates collaboration in lesson planning and instruction; ensures equitable access to library resources and licensed school librarians; and develops and manages current, plentiful, and diverse library collections of print and electronic resources that support classroom curricula and student interests.

(OAR 581-022-2250)

Districts have some flexibility to establish specific library program goals and to meet those goals with appropriate staffing and funding (OAR 581-022-2340). However, the intent is clear: Oregon schools need well-appointed libraries, healthy budgets for materials, certified instruction at every grade level, and assistants to provide services to all.

It follows then, that strong school libraries should bear some similarity from one community to another. Likewise, various schools within a district should offer similar library services and instruction. But, for many Oregon students, this is not the case. Decades of funding crises and self-regulation have left our “strong school library programs” in shambles.

Let's look at some data from the 2018-19 QEM Library Spending Report.

Bend-LaPine District Supports four high schools. The three largest are each staffed with a full-time teacher librarian and a library assistant. Supply budgets start with a base level of funding over \$6.00 per capita. The district's much smaller LaPine high school is staffed with a full-time library assistant, and funding over \$6.00 per student.

But, just 20 miles up the road from Bend things look very different.

Redmond has two high schools. Neither has a teacher librarian. One school has a library assistant with material funding of 5¢ per capita. (Imagine 1,000 students lined up eagerly waiting to see what \$50 buys). But, it's worse at the high school next door. That library doesn't even exist. A few years back, the principal announced students can find everything they need on the internet. But can they? How will they acquire the skills to do so? And is 'internet only' equal to "a rich array of literacy experiences"?

In the case of Bend-LaPine and Redmond, it's a tale of two cities - one supports school library programs and one lacks support. But, each district posted Division 22 assurances claiming they had strong school library programs.

This is not an isolated problem. The QEM report reveals enormous differences and deficits in schools across the state, where strong library programs may be claimed - even when none exists. Vast inequities are also seen within districts.

Take West Linn-Wilsonville, for instance. Once a well-funded school library program, West Linn-Wilsonville schools defunded their school libraries a couple of years ago. Today, students at one middle school library have no staffing, with material funding of 50¢ per capita. Another middle school also reports no staffing, but material funding is \$5.50 per capita. A third middle school hires a part time teacher librarian (no assistant) and funds materials at over \$8 per capita. The loss of a coordinated library program can quickly result in such inconsistent staffing and funding. Today, middle schoolers in this district have inequitable library experiences, not to mention inadequate library instruction, access, and services.

The QEM Library Spending Report tracks data for every school in Oregon, both staffing and funding. It's a powerful tool if we wish to ask data-based questions about actual compliance with Division 22.

All Oregon students deserve truly strong library programs. They need the information skills necessary for this Information Age. And restoring strong school library programs will give us the capacity to fulfill that commitment. I urge you to support SB 552.

Thank for your time and attention.

https://oregon.public.law/rules/oar_581-022-2340

https://oregon.public.law/rules/oar_581-022-2250 (section L)

To see the full 2018-19 QEM Oregon School Library spreadsheet, visit:

<https://www.oregon.gov/library/libraries/Pages/School-Staffing.aspx>

and click the “spreadsheet” link under Current staffing and Materials Expenditures