

Testimony on behalf of MCEMSA and MCPS SLMP, Wednesday, January 14, 2009

Good evening.

My name is Jennifer O'Halloran and I am speaking on behalf of the members of the Montgomery County Educational Media Specialist Association.

School Library Media Programs play a vital role in our education system and make many valuable contributions to student learning. Library Media staff provide curriculum support with appropriate instructional resources, including digital content, and instruction in how to navigate the vast resources available on the Internet. Library Media staff also promote reading achievement as proven in research studies that document increases from 10-18% on state assessments.

In order for our students to be college and work ready in today's high tech, information-rich environment, they need to know how to effectively access, evaluate, and use information. The primary point of access for students to learn and practice these skills is in our Library Media Centers. Students become information literate largely through lessons and experiences planned with and supported by Library Media Program staff.

Tonight I am urging you to reconsider the proposed position cuts that would affect our Library Media Programs. Cuts at the high school level include four Media Specialist positions as well as a Media Services Technician. Finally, Media Assistants would experience a drastic cut at both the elementary and high school levels.

We all recognize how hard these cuts would be for the individuals now holding these positions, and how challenging the economic situation currently is for our entire county. However, an important group of people who would be devastated by the staffing reductions must be addressed—our Media Center patrons. Students, staff, and community members would be negatively impacted by these cuts.

Under the proposed plan, our students' access to books and resources would be significantly cut as well, which would be a huge detriment to their learning.

Fewer staff in the Media Center results in fewer opportunities for books to get into the hands of students.

Fewer staff in the Media Center means fewer opportunities for teachers to collaborate with the Media Specialist and deliver valuable and necessary instruction.

Fewer staff in the Media Center means that many of the new technologies we have worked so hard to bring into the schools would not be serviced in as timely a manner and may sit unused for long periods of time.

Research and experience show that during difficult economic times, people eagerly turn to their publicly funded libraries in order to take advantage of library programs, resources, and services. According to a recent report by the American Library Association, the number of Americans visiting their libraries increased more than 10 percent compared to data from the last economic downturn in 2001.

For many of our students and parents, our school libraries ARE *their* public libraries. At a time when we know more people are turning to libraries, we should not be reducing staffing and therefore services. If we don't have an adequate number of library staff in our Media Centers, our students and parents will NOT be able to take advantage of our resources and services.

I urge you to please reconsider the proposed cuts to School Library Media Staff and Programs across the county. Your library patrons and staff members are counting on you. Thank you.

Submitted by:

Jennifer O'Halloran, Library Media Specialist
Strawberry Knoll Elementary
President – Montgomery County Educational Media Specialist Association (MCEMSA)