

Michelle Byholm

A little about myself. I am the newly hired HS teacher-librarian for the Chequamegon School District (recently consolidated districts of Park Falls and Glidden), previous school board member of same district and served on CESA12 Board of Control while on the board. Most recent experience K-12 teacher-librarian for the Mellen School District.

Most important things I want you to know about the state of school libraries today.

1) They are becoming extinct.

- Due to declining enrollment in many rural schools school boards are making tough decisions on staffing. One of the factors that influence decisions on staffing is what part of the district's report card will be affected by the cut. Another is how much student support for graduation is offered by the staff member.
- The district I was recently working in has taken a full time position and cut it down to one day (8 hrs) a week. This decision wasn't based on the need of the position, but the amount of salary and benefits the position would need. My schedule in my former school district allowed me to have students throughout the day, and schedule elementary students for a 45 min. once a week lesson. With the cut to the position, there are no weekly lessons, and even few check out moments.
- I am working with a small group in helping make "home grown" certified teacher-librarians more attainable. There is one district near mine that chose to have a "home grown" teacher-librarian. The teacher was previously the Technology Educator, or shop teacher, who decided to make the move into the library science part of education. He is working on his certification, but is finding it a difficult path. He was chosen over certified candidates because he was already a staff member of the district.

2) The multiple resource is for the entire district.

- The teacher-librarian is a resource for everyone. While in the Mellen School District, I was the only teacher-librarian for the entire PK - 12 school. I was also the Distance Ed. supervisor, 6th grade teacher, web site manager, IT when IT wasn't there, and professional development provider. I also did a variety of duties outside of the LMS. I knew that my position in a small rural PK - 12 school needed to be seen as critical to making the district move forward. I knew that I was also a supportive resource for the community members of the district. Many areas do not have the access to a public library and their school district's library is the only connection to those resources.

3) Funding

- The Common School Funds provide a variety of resources for teachers and students. Within the CESA12 IMC a consortium of databases is purchased by 4 districts. This opportunity allows smaller school districts to provide online resource that would otherwise not be accessible. Databases that are purchased through the consortium: TumbleBooks and The Salem History and Science Databases.

- The support of BadgerLink, Wisconsin Media Lab, and WISCAT also are invaluable resources for rural schools. I would have not been able to supply these types of resources in my school if they would have a cost. These resources are used in a variety of ways. BadgerLink broadens the databases students and staff have access to and are used almost hourly. WISCAT is a great networked way of getting more use out of the Common School Funds, as you are sharing resources purchased with those funds with other students and staff from around the state. It's a great way to create a statewide library collection.

As a teacher-librarian from a rural area, I believe so strongly in the importance of this position as what it means to the education of our rural area students. The people in this position provide strong resources and support to curriculums, technology, and community connections within a district. If you were to contact districts that have cut this position, whether in hours or completely, it would be interesting to know how the duties of this position were passed to another staff member or just aren't being done and what are the repercussions.

I work extremely hard to prove myself and the importance of my position everyday because I see the support it give the students, staff, and district every day.