



To: Members of the Speaker's Taskforce on Rural Schools

From: Sandra Heiden, WEMTA Past President

Date: December 17, 2013

Good Afternoon and thank you for this opportunity to share my knowledge, expertise, and most importantly my story. My name is Sandra Heiden and this is my 25th year teaching in the Seymour Community School District, 17 of those years have been as a Teacher Librarian or Library Media Specialist. Other roles I have performed through the years are Gifted & Talented Coordinator, Student Council Advisor, Forensics Coach, District Webmaster, and the School District Representative Trustee on the Muehl Public Library Board.

The Seymour Community School District was established in 1963 as a result of the consolidation of numerous rural schools. This was also the year the Kindergarten program began, and I was in that first class. The district encompasses 175 square miles just west of Green Bay and north of the Fox Cities, covering all or part of twelve municipalities. The total population is approximately 17,000, with the district's 4K - 12th grade student population at approximately 2,500, with just over 30% needing free or reduced lunch.

There are currently five schools that make up the Seymour School District; a Primary Center, an Intermediate Center, Seymour Middle School, and Seymour High School. These four schools are on one campus in the city of Seymour. The fifth school is a 4K-grade 8 school located in the village of Black Creek. My days are split with 50% at high school-middle school campus, and 50% at the outlying Black Creek School, where all of our internet access comes through one T1 line, which drastically reduces the performance of many of the online applications we try to utilize in our curriculums to create media and technology literate students. We adapt, but we also get frustrated by the limitations. I compare it to trying to suck a Culver's concrete milkshake through a straw! Many options have been looked at to get this school "up to speed", but all of them have been cost-prohibitive.

When I moved from the classroom into the library we had a full time Teacher Librarian in each building, as well as a full-time library aide for each. About 500 students per librarian. Through staff attrition we have been reduced to our current staffing level...2 teacher librarians, 3 part time library aides, and 1 full time library aide at the high school. Which averages out to about 1250 students per librarian. I will be retiring at the end of this school year with great hesitation, knowing I will be leaving one school librarian to manage the entire district. To fully understand this reduction, you must also understand what it is that a Teacher Librarian does and how vital the position is to a robust and successful library media program.

Carl Harvey, an Indiana Teacher Librarian and former (AASL) American Association of School Librarians President, created a comprehensive list: He says A School Librarian is a teacher, a resource locator, a collaborator, a communicator, a leader, an innovator, a life-long learner, a technology integrator, and a professional development provider. But most of all, the Teacher Librarian does not work alone. For a school to have a successful library media program it takes everyone working together for the benefit of the students.

I am currently the Past-President of WEMTA (the Wisconsin Educational Media and Technology Association). Through my term as President I had the opportunity to travel to several library and Educational Technology national conferences as an affiliate representative. The affiliates would meet together prior to the conference and discuss several common issues. Whenever I had the opportunity to share how the Board of Commissioners of Public Lands oversees the Common School Fund set up through our constitution, other affiliates would be in awe. The Common School Fund has been the backbone for the resources in our school libraries. Years ago my district provided funds to the libraries in addition to the Common School Funds, but today it is our **only** funding source for books, periodicals, streaming video, databases, and computers housed in the library. We rely heavily on Badgerlink and Wisconsin Media Lab as well. Thankfully my students regularly see new materials in their libraries available for them to take home. 80% of my students are bussed and don't have regular access to the public libraries in Seymour or Black Creek. For some families the books checked out and taken home, are the only books in their homes.

In the early 2000's, after we all survived the Y2K scare, our district had Teach funds to purchase several labs of computers across the district. Brave teachers signed up for the labs and moved their curriculums, activities, and resources online. Professional Development through EETT Grants (Enhancing Education Through Technology) moved teachers from entry level integrators to innovators. There was no turning back, but Teach and EETT are long gone and many districts have had to turn to the precarious option of referendums.

I am at the end of my career, but I have grandchildren who will soon be attending school in my district. I want them to have equitable access to high quality digital curriculum which will personalize their learning experience and lead them to college and career readiness. I want them to have greater access to broadband and a network to support a 1:1 learning device. I want them to have a Teacher Librarian who also provides a robust and successful library media program.