

My name is Jenny Fox, I am a public-school parent of two students. My sons attend the High School of Art and Design in Manhattan and MS 447 in Brooklyn and are alumni of PS 261 in Brooklyn, D15. I am also a founding member of Librarians Equal Literacy, a parent-led campaign for librarians and libraries in all NYC public schools. We feel strongly that Foundation Aid funding should cover these cornerstones of literacy in all of our schools.

I first became concerned about school librarian loss, when my sons' then elementary school lost its librarian. Despite still having the physical room full of books, the student's use of the library was effectively choked. The kids no longer visited the library. They stopped learning lessons in research and media literacy. The collection was tucked away behind tarps and shower curtains, so that the books weren't taken. As children's book author Jarrett Krosoczka puts it: "The library is the heart of a school, and without a librarian, it is but an empty shell."

Digging deeper, we learned that more than half of the schools in our district (D15 BK) didn't have certified librarians on staff. Many libraries had been shuttered and the physical spaces repurposed. Students' access to the books, skills, and services were cut off. We started reaching out and speaking out. We talked to CHALKBEAT reporter Julian Shen-Berro, who in May 2023 reported that in the City's system of 1,600 schools there are only around 260 certified school librarians staffed in schools' budgets. That averages a librarian in less than 1/6 of our public schools—including middle and high schools which are state-mandated to have them.

The *Chalkbeat* article also discovered that New York City schools are following the same disturbing national trend, whereby schools with more students experiencing poverty were less likely to have librarians on staff. In fact, "More than 81% of schools with poverty rates higher than 75% did not have a librarian staff member budgeted. That was roughly six percentage points higher than schools with lower poverty rates."

Librarian and library loss is pervasive in the NYC school system, and our most vulnerable and underserved students are being affected first and hardest.

So why does librarian and library loss in our schools matter?

### **Librarian loss is a Literacy Issue.**

Librarians create a school-wide culture of literacy, serving as reading leaders for both students and fellow teachers. Over sixty academic studies from thirty-four states, have shown that strong school libraries are linked to student success—including (but not limited to) mastery of academic standards, test scores, graduation rates, and college-preparedness—and that library programs had the biggest positive impact on historically-underserved students.

### **Librarian Loss is an Equity Issue**

Reading is a right, and ALL kids deserve equal access to books, information and media, and the skills needed to navigate them. The fact is many children do not come from homes filled with books and are not taken to public libraries. A school library is their best—sometimes only—chance to interact with a significant collection of free books and media under the guidance of a trained expert.

Certified Librarians are also often the only teachers in a building specifically trained to curate culturally-responsive media collections, representing the lives and experiences of the diverse body of students they serve—be it English Language Learners, budding female scientists, or LGBTQ+ kids.

When launching the NYC Reads literacy initiative in 2023, Mayor Adams declared that “The most basic thing we can do at our schools is ensure that all our students learn how to read and have the resources to thrive . . .” While Chancellor Banks claimed, “It is our collective responsibility to ensure every child has the tools, resources, and support needed to unlock their full potential and open every door of opportunity.” Yet, when we

have pressed the issue, we are repeatedly told that school libraries and librarians are essentially *nice-to-haves*, not necessities. This is simply bad logic and antithetical to the goals of literacy gains. Literacy is not simply a classroom curriculum. It requires a top-down, school-wide culture that values reading and research, as well as student access to a robust, representative collection, and the presence of a highly-trained educator to both curate the collection and guide the students' learning.

A library, staffed by a certified librarian, is a basic and critical literacy resource for any school—a culturally-responsive information hub brimming with opportunities for educational and social-emotional learning. If we don't prioritize funding for certified librarians—our school libraries cannot run. They cannot be run by well-meaning, unqualified parent volunteers or teachers without relevant degrees or training in school media. Librarians do much more than simply check out books, and the numerous benefits associated with library programs come precisely from having a certified librarian at the helm.

Literacy saves lives, representation matters, and equal access to information is a right. Librarians, freedom of information, and representation for marginalized student groups are all currently under attack. Now more than ever, we need school librarians wholly present in our schools to protect these skills, rights, and freedoms for all our students—and particularly our most vulnerable. Let's pledge that we will fund these invaluable resources for our students and not stand idly by as our school libraries continue to be turned into empty shells.

Sincerely,

Jenny Fox, D15 parent  
Librarians Equal Literacy, founder

SOURCES:

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