



Literacy and Libraries are Intertwined, so Why do Schools Keep Cutting Librarian Jobs Especially in Schools Where Students are of Mostly Color?

By Educator Barnes - February 17, 2019

I have five areas of certification on my teaching license, and one certification happens to be library/media. This school year, I transitioned into a new role as an elementary library/media specialist. Although I love my new role, I am fully aware this job is hard to obtain. According to the *Forbes* article, "[U.S. Public Schools Have Lost Nearly 20% Of Their Librarians Since 2000](#)":

The shortage in public school librarian employment – which saw the most dramatic drop following the Great Recession of 2008 and hasn't recovered since – has hit districts serving minorities the hardest. Among all the districts that have retained all their librarians since 2005, 75% are white, [Education Week reports](#). On the other end of the scale, student populations in the 20 districts that lost the most librarians in the same time comprised 78% students of color.

Previously, I worked for Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS) as both an elementary and high school literacy coach. During my last year in the district, more librarians lost their jobs. For example, the high school I worked in last school year not only cut the librarian role but cut the library in half to create computer labs. Other schools in the district shared a librarian or the role was replaced by a teaching assistant.

The elementary school where I worked at in IPS until my literacy coach role was cut had a library teaching assistant. The library was a special area class. Gym, music, and art were the other special area classes led by a certified staff member. The library teaching assistant was expected to lead the library special area class as the certified special area teaching staff, and the two library assistants that were hired and later quit were not equipped to carry out that job. After hiring two people who quit, the role was vacant for the remainder of the year. It is disappointing that some districts feel that it is acceptable to have an assistant do the work of a certified staff member. Yes, the person was supported by a certified school librarian, but this person had several schools to oversee and only visited the school a few times a month.

I assert these roles are being cut because people don't understand the value. I've heard from colleagues and nonteachers that I have a cake job, and I just give kids books. It is more than that. Until people understand the critical role librarians play in children loving books and improving literacy, this role will continue to be cut. What's worse is most of these roles are being cut in schools where most of the students are of color. Unfortunately, we know that many majority-minority schools are also failing schools. You would think that the librarian would play a critical role in helping improve literacy in those schools.

Eleven years of the thirteen years that I have been an educator, I have either taught English/Language Arts or been a literacy coach. Literacy is my love, and as a teacher, I have always unapologetically done my own thing which leads to judgment. As an introvert, I don't like the fact that the copy machine is in the media center as people feel like I want to talk to them all the time. I don't; it's exhausting. The other part is that people come to judge. This is where they remind me what the previous people in my role did, question why I made a change, or wonder why I am teaching literacy skills. I'm the only black librarian in my school district, and the content in my library is so white, old, and extremely unorganized, so yes, I'm making changes. You may not like my beliefs, and you may not like how I do what I do, but at least I'm there. Since I have been unapologetic in my actions in education for the majority of my career, I am unbothered by these judgments, but it is disappointing when people can't see the value or your work or role. So many schools have libraries that are collecting dust because there is not a school librarian.

One of the places where a love of literacy is grown is in the school library. If your school district wants to cut this role, it is a role worth putting up a fight. When I was in elementary school, I used to ask to go to the restroom, but in reality, I was sneaking into the library and reading. After months of this, I eventually got caught. Maybe your school librarian won't make kids sneak inside, but they add value to your school and support the work of other teachers, so we should support them.