

Good evening. My name is Jennifer Nicholson and I'm the president of the Montgomery County Educational Media Specialists Association, better known as MCEMSA. First, I would like to thank Dr. Starr for his proposed budget in which he has included over \$500,000 to restore school – level positions, particularly the media specialist positions that were previously reduced in smaller elementary schools. We all know that strong school libraries build strong students. It is so important for every school to be staffed by a certified, full time school library media specialist. MCEMSA is happy to see that a plan is in place to restore all positions in 3 years' time, but would be more pleased to see every school have a full time media specialist for the 2014-2015 school year. However, we understand that these restorations can take time and we appreciate the board's commitment to restore all positions to full time levels.

The media center is the hub and heart of the school for both staff and students. The media specialist and media assistant provide numerous services for everyone in the building. First and foremost, the media specialist is a teacher, developing important information literacy skills with both students and staff. With curriculum 2.0's emphasis on 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, information literacy instruction is crucial to our students. We are hopeful that Dr. Starr's proposed budget will be fully funded and every school will once again have a full time media specialist.

On the other hand, MCEMSA was disappointed to see that there was no mention of restoring cuts which were made to media assistant positions. Many of the small and mid-sized schools currently have a media assistant who only works 20 hours per week. Many of these schools also only employ a media specialist for the same number of hours. At these schools, decisions must be made whether to have a fully staffed media center half the time or a half staffed media center all the time. Neither one of these choices is appropriate for the information literacy objectives set forth in curriculum 2.0. The only option should be fully staffed media centers to provide the instruction, technology, and literary services for our MCPS students.

During the reductions a few years ago, the full time media assistant position for middle and elementary schools was reduced to 7 hours per day, instead of the full time 8 hours. So, for example, even though Gaithersburg Elementary is one of the largest Title I schools in the county, we would only have a media assistant for 7 hours a day. Well, we **would** only have her for 7 hours if it were not for my wonderful principal, Stephanie Brant, who found funding to support keeping my assistant for 8 hours per day. But what about all the other elementary and middle schools who are struggling with this problem?

Clearly, I am so fortunate to work at a school where the library is very highly valued by the administration, staff, students and community. Last year we circulated 64,000 books. That is well above average for most schools, but our community loves the library! Our community is very needy – over 80% of my students qualify for free and reduced meals, so I don't have parent volunteers lined up to help. That means that my assistant not only checked out, but shelved most of those 64,000 books.

Because the primary role of a media specialist is that of a teacher, that is how we spend the majority of our time. That's not to say that we don't have about a million other jobs that we are always trying to accomplish, but information literacy instruction is our primary focus. When we are teaching, we are obviously unable to check out books to students, so that is something that our assistants must do. If my assistant worked 7 hours or less, we definitely would not have been able to provide our students with the opportunity to read 64,000 books. In the "ideal" library, students can come and exchange books at any time during the day as well as before and after school. Students should not be barred from the school library if it is not their library day and time. Unfortunately, without a full time assistant, many libraries are closed for all or part of the day.

Circulation is often the media center "barometer" since there is available data, however there are many other tasks that must be completed or supported by media assistants, simply because media specialists are usually in the middle of instruction! Media assistants order supplies and books, receive items in FMS, process resources, complete interlibrary loans, troubleshoot technology and equipment, assist teachers and students in locating books, print, sort,

and deliver overdue notices, send items for repair, and of course, process, repair, and shelve books. Have you ever seen a teacher in the middle of a morning with an unresponsive Promethean Board? I'll spare you the details! Without a media assistant readily available, that teacher's stress levels would sky rocket.

ALL school libraries have a difficult time completing the many, many jobs assigned to us, but at schools without a full time media assistant, there is no chance of completing those jobs necessary to create a strong library, and support staff and students in their objectives to master Curriculum 2.0

Thank you for your time.