

Good morning. My name is Irene Allaire and I'm the president of the Montgomery County Educational Media Specialists Association, better known as MCEMSA. We are here before the Board of Education to express our deep concern for the reduction in media program staffing. We understand that these are difficult times with the shortfall in our budget and the need to make budget cuts, but we ask you to think about how reducing the hours of the media staff will affect our students' school day.

For an elementary school aged student, the media center is the most exciting place to be. Every day, we encounter students who are eager to get into the library to see what new books are available or to grab a book that was recommended by a friend. But when our students reach the library doors and see a CLOSED sign because the media specialist is pulling small groups for research in a classroom and the part time media assistant has already left for the day, that excitement for reading disappears. It is devastating. What about the student who is engaged in an inquiry project and is looking for additional resources to help her answer her research question. She heads to the library to get assistance but doesn't find any help because the media specialist is only part time and doesn't work on Tuesdays. Unfortunately, without a full time media specialist and full time media assistant, these scenarios are happening more often than not as many media centers are closed for all or part of the day.

Circulation statistics provide us with the data that supports these examples. Little Bennett and Wilson Wims Elementary are two schools with populations close to 700 students. Both media programs have an open book exchange policy that allows students to come to the media center anytime during the day to read or check out books. Less than a mile separates these schools yet one school circulated 49,000 books and the other school circulated 24,000. The difference? One school had a full time media assistant and the other school had a part time.

When we think about reducing the media staff hours in a middle or high school media center, we find the students are impacted a bit differently than those in elementary school. We find students who don't have access to resources from home or transportation to go the public library to work on school projects. This creates an equity issue as all students do not have access to books and resources.

Additionally, cutting hours to media staff affects all students who use the media center as their sanctuary - a place that they can go to study, a place to seek help with their homework, and safe place in which they can build long-lasting relationships with the media staff.

The vision of MCPS is, "***We inspire learning by providing the greatest public education to each and every student.***" Our students need full access to the media center and its resources more than ever, and cutting our media staff does not allow us to do this. Former First Lady (and librarian) Laura Bush once said, "Libraries allow children to ask questions about the world and find the answers. And the wonderful thing is that once a child learns to use a library, the doors to learning are always open." Let's not close the doors to our students - we want them to be wide open at all times during the school day with *trained* media staff available to help them learn. We in the School Library Media Program want to be able to help provide "the greatest public education to each and every student." Please help us do that.

Thank you for your time and consideration.