

NJ BOE Special Meeting Speech

Hammonton High School

Thursday, September 17, 2015

Bruce DuBoff, NJ Association of School Librarians

Good Evening Distinguished Department of Education Members:

My name is Bruce DuBoff and I am the President-Elect and 2015 Conference Chair for the New Jersey Association of School Librarians. I am the School Library Media Specialist at Pennsauken Intermediate School and Phifer Middle School in Pennsauken. I speak to you tonight representing NJASL's 1,000+ members and all of New Jersey's school library patrons, our students and educators.

Technology is a two-edged sword. When used well and appropriately, it sharpens our critical thinking skills through access to the world and hones our communication skills so that we can network and collaborate across our district, state, country, and globe. It offers online databases, virtual tours, teleconferencing, and video manuals on everything from aardvark care to Zoroastrianism. When used poorly and inappropriately, however, it becomes a Sword of Damocles hanging above our heads, always reminding us that the unfiltered world is full of pitfalls and dangers. Wikipedia, Ask.com, and millions of their clones claim to present research and valid information, only to be discredited and dismissed by the true experts our students should be reading.

Ladies and gentlemen, I assert that New Jersey's School Librarians are the conductors who can control, manage, and maintain the runaway train of technology that threatens our students' education. I assert that converting great New Jersey school libraries into PARCC testing centers has slowed our students' skills development and heightened their anxiety levels without palpable gain. I assert that replacing school librarians with technology coaches, technology leaders, or media specialists is hurting our students by denying them the right to read books, the very right that you found so important when you were in school. I assert that technology is not the panacea that will cure our ills but simply a tool to be used along with many others, including print-based tools like books, magazines, journals, pamphlets, and encyclopedias, as our standards indicate.

I am not a luddite, nor am I arguing that we reverse what is irreversible, the tide of technology that has already swept across our shores. I merely and humbly suggest that our ever-shrinking number of school librarians, now under 1,500 in New Jersey, may just be the answer to our problems. We are the professionals trained in the use and dissemination of information. We are the go-getters who find the answers everyone in our district needs. We are the webmasters, the online database trainers, and the collection and e-book managers. We are the literature experts so desperately needed in a world of intentionally manufactured and falsified Amazon.com reviews.

We are the teachers who collaborate with everyone at all times, not just those needing a computer cart or a SMARTBoard for that day's lesson. We are the support system that our teachers and administrators need to maintain their pace in an ever-accelerating world of mandates and requirements that detract from teaching time and staff management opportunities.

When I knew I would be representing NJASL here today, I asked my two principals if they had any message for you and if they minded if I mentioned their names. Both Ms. Chantell Green of Pennsauken Intermediate School and Mr. Thomas Honeyman of Phifer Middle School asked me to tell you the same thing in five words: More reading, less standardized testing. I do not imagine anyone in this room is surprised. School librarians in coordination with NJASL are best poised and prepared to lead our revolution back to books. We know what our students want to read and need to read. We know that digital content is only one medium to use for reading, but we know how to provide digital content when indicated. Please do not allow our libraries to deteriorate until all that is left is gum wrappers and Wimpy Kid bookmarks between the computers. There is an old joke about two elderly folks at a Catskills resort. One says to the other, "The food here is terrible," and the other one responds, "Yes, and such small portions." Please do not let our school libraries become obsolete; please do not let our books disappear until it is truly time to let them go. I fear that if we allow books to go fully digital before their time more of our students will not discover the joy of reading that propelled us to where we are today; instead, they will walk into the library and say the books are terrible and there are too few of them.

Let us strengthen our state's recognition of the importance of school librarians. Let us more stringently enforce the legislation mandating school librarians in every district, and let us further support that legislation by additionally requiring a school librarian in every building. Let us reclaim our libraries as learning and research centers, not testing centers. Let us prove to all of New Jersey and the world that we value literacy and learning by proving that we value our school librarians.

Thank you for your time and attention.

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