



**The New Jersey Library Association's Response to the Woodbridge Board of Education's
Unanimous Vote to Eliminate School Librarians
May 23rd, 2017**

On May 2nd, New Jersey Library Association President, Chris Carbone, presented a statement to the Woodbridge School Board strongly urging them to restore the school library media positions. In his statement, [available here](#), he explained that without school library media specialists, Woodbridge students would not be able to meet the challenging demands of the future for college and career.

Since this time, the Woodbridge Superintendent and School Board stood by their decision to eliminate the school librarians in the high school despite public outcry. The New Jersey Library Association would like to take this opportunity to reply to statements in the press regarding this issue, as well as share comments from the public from the Unlock Student Potential Website, <http://unlockstudentpotential.org>.

In a May 2nd Patch article, [available here](#), Woodbridge Superintendent Dr. Robert Zega states:

I recently went into the Woodbridge High School library. This was well into the school year and I saw that 50 books had been checked out so far this year - 50. In a school of 1,400 students," Zega said. "The job of a librarian is just not what it used to be."

In a May 10th Patch article, [available here](#), Woodbridge School Board President Daniel Harris states:

"[The school board] would certainly make the argument that the libraries are not being used the way they used to be," he said. "Right now students use the library to print their homework out before class, or hang out before and after school. Unfortunately it is the case that books are not being taken out. Students these days are more apt to read on their phones or tablets. Most of the info we get these days is from online."

Dr. Zega says, "The job of a librarian is just not what it used to be" and Mr. Harris's states: "Most of the info we get these days is from online." Members of the New Jersey Library Association couldn't agree more with these statements. Beyond promoting literacy on a daily basis, school librarians are teaching critical research skills, rules around plagiarism, creating an engaging safe space for students and enriching the curriculum by working alongside teachers. We live in the Information Age, but as anyone who has searched the Internet knows, getting search results is easy, but getting the right one, one based on research, is not.

Research demonstrates the deficiency in student research skills. The results of an American Association of School Librarians study states that Google and Wikipedia are the sources that students are most likely to use for a research assignment. The infographic also includes a selection from a *Today's Digital Technologies Teachers Report* which states that 83% of information available online is overwhelming for students and 60% believe digital technologies make it hard for students to find and use credible sources of information.

(Source:

http://www.ala.org/aasl/sites/ala.org.aasl/files/content/aaslissues/advocacy/AASL_Infographic_FINAL.pdf)

Without a school librarian Woodbridge Students will be at a major disadvantage when they reach college and need to research topics and create college-level papers and projects.

In a statement from the VALE Academic Librarians and NJLA College and University Librarians, the organizations make this issue clear:

"We also see that many college freshmen are poorly prepared to conduct college-level research, requiring professors and librarians to spend more time than they should on basic skills. We live with this cause and effect, frustrated in knowing that many of these students could hit the college ground running with proper training beforehand."

(Source: <http://unlockstudentpotential.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/The-Value-and-Importance-of-Highly-Effective-School-Library-Programs.pdf>)

Superintendent Zega:

"The proposed job cuts are not about cost savings, he said. Instead, this is part of a dramatic overhaul Zega is planning for the district's libraries. He envisions most of the district's libraries being converted into technology centers that resemble the Apple store."

If the cut is not about costs savings, then this is simply an unwise decision by the superintendent and school board to eliminate school library media specialists whom are valuable resources for Woodbridge students. And if the justification is simply "50 books had been checked out this year" then unfortunately the superintendent and the school board are failing to see the critical role school library media specialists can play for students, and as a result the teachers, parents and students all suffer for this failure. NJLA does not believe the effectiveness of a school library media specialist can be simply judged by the number of books that were checked out.

Superintendent Zega:

"We want to make it a place where the kids will go and sit and work collaboratively. There will be bar-level counters with computers and a couple couches," he said. "Ninety percent of what

happens in a high school library is Internet research. Very little with middle and high school libraries has to do with checking books out anymore."

Board President Harris:

"With the librarians gone, Woodbridge school libraries will be transitioned into "a more flexible space for the district," Harris said. "I don't want to use the word 'lounge,' but it will be a place where students can work on projects together. You'll see it look more like a college library, with couches and a coffee-shop style set-up."

The space Dr. Zega describes is exactly what a supported school library media center should be, but what is this space without a school library media specialist to guide the research of students? The blog at <http://unlockstudentpotential.org> has a number of examples of the dynamic spaces school library media centers can be with a supported school librarian. Mr. Harris actually states it will be more like a "college library." Our question is, without a librarian, how is it to be more like a college library? The New Jersey Administrative Code for Higher Education is clear about a college library:

9A:1-1.9 Library:

(a) At its most elementary level, the collegiate teaching and learning process cannot proceed effectively without the essential services, collections, computerized network access, and other resources that are provided and administered by an institution's library. For this reason, much emphasis is placed upon the adequacy of the library, its collections, and its staffing. In the 21st century, emphasis is also placed on information literacy for all students.

(b) Qualified library professionals, librarians, and support personnel in numbers sufficient to serve the needs of students and faculty shall staff the institution's library.

And as resident Woodbridge resident and parent, Jill D'Amico, stated:

"Yes, a lot of that information is available online, but how do you wade through it? How do you know what's accurate and what's not? How do you know what's reputable and what's fake news?" asked D'Amico, whose daughter will enter first grade in Woodbridge public schools in the fall.

"You can't have a Genius Bar without geniuses," she said.

Finally, from the May 10th article:

"I will candidly admit I did not anticipate how much backlash there would be on this," said school board president Daniel Harris.

However, Harris did concede that parents' concerns were "heard loud and clear. We get the message. We are going to look into and find a way to work with the Woodbridge public library, which has four branches in the Township."

He promised some sort of partnership with the public library system will be in place.

"You are going to see something," he said. "We should look to maximize what we have with the Woodbridge library system to make sure library services are still available to students."

The New Jersey Library Association is very interested in reviewing any plan that relies on the public library as a replacement for the terminated school librarians. The roles of a school library and the public library are markedly different. To demonstrate this point, the New Jersey Library Association and the New Jersey Association of School Librarians have produced this document to discuss many of the issues at the root of this "solution": <http://unlockstudentpotential.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/njpublicvsschoollibs.pdf>

Mission for a school library: To prepare students to become effective, efficient, and ethical users of information and ideas, capable of lifelong learning, problem solving, knowledge creation and communication.

Primary Services: Instruction in research skills and use of information and communication technologies, Curriculum planning and support, Guided selection of resources, Collaborative planning and teaching, Programming to promote reading for students/school community.

As one can see, the mission and primary services are very distinct. Furthermore, if the reductions are not budget based, then why put the burden on an already stretched out public library system? The education of the students in Woodbridge is the responsibility of the school board and the superintendent. The public library does not, and can not, teach children critical research skills in a classroom manner. A public librarian would also find it impossible to meet with teachers to plan lessons to include research skills and resources. It is also not the public librarian's responsibility to teach students about plagiarism. Information literacy is a critical skill for all of today's students to be prepared for college and career. How can these needs be possibly met by the public library?

Stakeholders have been clear on this issue. The following are selected comments shared on <http://unlockstudentpotential.org>. More comments are available on the Facebook page for the New Jersey Library Association, <https://www.facebook.com/njlibraryassociation/>.

Pam Chesky, Posted on Unlock Student Potential

May 2, 2017 at 7:45 pm

It breaks my heart to read this! Here's my disclosure...I retired from Woodbridge in 2005; my title was Supervisor of Media Centers and Technology. Our library program, and our partnership with the municipal Technology Department, was the envy of many districts in NJ. In fact, we were often invited

to present our program at national education conferences. 90% of our staff had a Masters in Library and Information services. Our curriculum was one of collaboration with all the education programs in our district.

The Woodbridge administration and School Board are not fulfilling their own strategic plan...you cannot develop students ready to take an effective part in society if you do not teach them to effectively access, analyze and synthesize the vast amount of information coming at them every day. This is an age where government speaks of alternative facts and fake news...how will these students ever learn to distinguish between real and fake? How will they learn to effectively vet the candidates they find on their ballots? How will they be prepared for research papers at the college level?

LaDawna Harrington

May 2, 2017 at 10:01 pm

I was one of those librarians that had the privilege of working under Pam Chesky at Avenel Middle School. While there my program was featured on classroom close-up. I willingly left a different, well funded, well staffed, school district just to be able to teach in a school district that had such high level teaching expectations for their school librarians that were at the hub of bringing their schools into the 21st century.

The district was a model of information literacy throughout the state and even nationally. The school librarians taught students while also providing professional development for classroom teachers and administrators. There was a lot of bang for your buck with the librarians in the district. I had to leave wonderful colleagues and a job I loved when Woodbridge decided to cut their library program in 2010. I landed ok because of the amazing program I had the privilege to teach in and the experience I had under my belt. I have always been sad about the decisions Woodbridge made 7 years ago.

Sad about the loss to the children. Sure you can Google anything, but that really doesn't matter if you don't know how to ask the question. In a world where so many are getting their news from Facebook and twitter how will your children compete in college or life against the students I am currently teaching that has a well funded library with a librarian in every school?

I recently had a prior student of mine who is currently a university student get in touch with me to thank me for the lessons he learned in the library. That he spends a great deal of time at his university library and that he could not possibly have written a 16 page paper for one of his classes had it not been for the things he learned while in high school.

Maybe you should do like Pam Chesky suggested and opt out of the district schools for Vocational or Technology Schools.

Ulana Prokopiak

May 2, 2017 at 2:18 am

Both my sons are graduates of the Woodbridge school system now, but I can say both most definitely did use the librarian as a resource MANY times throughout their school years. As a longtime Colonia resident, it shocks me to read that eliminating librarians is even being considered. In light of the high taxes we pay (& are told so often that it is primarily due to school budgets), how could there possibly be a financial reason for considering elimination of this important position? I sincerely hope that parents of children currently in the school system will make their voices & opinions heard in this important matter.

SPEAK UP, Woodbridge Township residents/parents!! Be an advocate for your child!!

Sheila Silagyi

May 11, 2017 at 7:36 pm

Most of Woodbridge Township was, and still is, considered “blue collar”. To take away more resources from these students who come from families that may not otherwise have resources at home, would be a great disadvantage.

Yes, school librarians are valuable resources, as well as printed books and non printed sources of information, computer databases and the internet, etc. They are the “human” resources that guide you through an ocean of information.

School librarians are the “captains” of their media centers. Without these valuable team players on a school staff, who would teach students and teachers how to navigate in the high technological world we live in? Without them and their treasured resources, a school is a sinking ship, destined to be lost at sea.

Yes, one might say, Woodbridge does have wonderful “Public Libraries”, but even they have had their share of major cut backs in the past. For example, my generation grew up with at least a dozen public libraries, the Main Branch being in Woodbridge Proper.

Up until the early 1990’s, each section of Woodbridge Township, had their own “neighborhood” library branch. Now we are down to 3 or 4, and most people need a car to get to them. In the old days, we could walk to our neighborhood schools and public libraries.

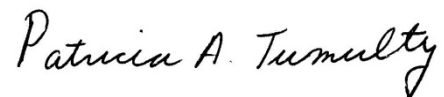
With the decline of test scores and failing grades in the Woodbridge Public School System, who will be moving out of Woodbridge for a better education, and what will happen to the value of our homes?

It is clear this is an issue that the community does not want to see dropped quietly. NJLA President Chris Carbone has offered to set up meetings with the Woodbridge School Board members and the Superintendent to show them how a supported school library program, like those in South Brunswick and East Brunswick, can enrich education for all students.

The New Jersey Library Association proposes the Woodbridge School Board appoint a special committee of school board members to study how school media services are being provided in other local school systems and the impact their programs have on the students. The committee should garner feedback from various stakeholder groups, including teachers, parents and students. The conclusion of the study would need to be available to the entire school board and community by February 2018 to provide a basis of knowledge for budget discussions around priorities for the following school year.

The parents in the Woodbridge community want and deserve the best for their children. The Woodbridge School Board and the Superintendent owe it to the community to learn about how their students would have a greater chance of success in college and career having graduated from a school system that supports a school library program. The New Jersey Library Association stands ready to assist the Woodbridge School Board and Superintendent in moving this discussion forward.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Patricia A. Tumulty".

Patricia A. Tumulty
Executive Director, New Jersey Library Association

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "James K. Keebler".

James K. Keebler
Chair of the New Jersey Library Association School Library Taskforce