

Testimony in support of H5488, School Libraries Act

I strongly support H5488 for many reasons which I'll list, below.

1. Kids need books that they can choose, which fit their age, interests and reading level. Where else but at a school library, with books selected by a professional librarian?
2. Reading has been proven to increase vocabulary, background information (even through fiction!), and their imagination. It makes them curious about the world and expands their knowledge base.
3. The covid pandemic was terrible for their reading skills. The children who were toddlers through grade 4, for almost five years they were not getting the exposure to great (and fun) literature that they needed for their reading development. The way to start fixing that is NOT by closing school libraries. The impact of those years will be felt for a long time.
4. Some people complain that, "Gosh darn! Books and Librarians cost money! We'd rather do X, Y or Z with our money!" This is a serious complaint. I say, of course they do cost money. Our society must take a stand on where we spend our money, absolutely. Libraries and books are crucial to child development, and these children will be adults on day. Do we want informed, well-read adults or people who are constantly fooled by misinformation? I want informed, well-read adults, please. The librarian at Nathanael Greene MS in Providence was recently laid off. There will be no librarian there next fall because the principal says the school can't afford to have a librarian. This is right after lots of ARPA funds were used to upgrade the library. Smart, huh?
5. The school librarian job description is totally 21st century. It's the mind-set of some administrators that is stuck in the 19th or 20th century. Yank them out of it! We teach Internet literacy in addition to the love of reading.
6. Extensive research supports my opinion pro-libraries. Here's a link to a short article in the Phi Beta Kappa magazine. It has been found that kids score better on standardized tests if they have a proper library. "Proper" means it has a dedicated space, a decent book budget, a librarian with a master's in library studies, and support from the school administration.

<https://kappanonline.org/lance-kachel-school-librarians-matter-years-research/>

Proper libraries are not optional.

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