

Heidi Blais

401-714-8832, hblais@gmail.com

Library Media Specialist, Cranston High School East
2024 School Librarian of the Year for Rhode Island
2013-14 Teacher of the Year, Cranston Public Schools
2014 Finalist for RI Teacher of the Year
2014 URI GSLIS Library of the Year

March 14, 2026

Honorable Members of the Rhode Island Senate,

I am writing in support of The School Libraries Act (S2078). I serve as the school librarian at Cranston High School East, a diverse high school of 1,500+ students and 150 educators. I have had the privilege of being a school librarian in RI for 29 years, holding a Master's Degree in Library and Information Science.

I am writing not only as an experienced librarian, but as an educator deeply committed to the success, safety, and well-being of every student. I urge you to support the inclusion of a full-time librarian in every Rhode Island school, ensuring that students across the state have the tools, resources, and guidance they need to succeed academically, emotionally, and socially.

Librarians are integral to fostering academic success. In the digital age, students must learn to navigate an overwhelming amount of information, much of it available online, and to discern what is credible and useful. Librarians are the gatekeepers of information and are essential guides in helping students develop research and critical thinking skills. At Cranston East, I collaborate with teachers to support the curriculum, instruct students in finding quality sources, and help them develop skills that extend far beyond the classroom. From guiding students through research projects to assisting them in using databases and scholarly resources, school librarians provide the critical literacy skills that empower students to succeed in their academic endeavors.

In my role, I help students conduct research for a wide range of subjects, whether it is an English paper focusing on literary analysis or a history project about the civil rights movement. I teach them not only the mechanics of research but also how to think critically about their sources, analyze biases, and use information responsibly. It is through these interactions that students become more independent and empowered learners, an outcome that is central to education.

As technology and online information continue to evolve, so does the need for instruction in digital citizenship. In my 29 years as a librarian, I have witnessed firsthand the changing landscape of information and the increasing challenges students face when navigating the digital world. Today's youth are constantly exposed to digital distractions and misinformation, making it imperative that they are equipped with the tools to critically assess what they encounter online.

I teach digital citizenship lessons in collaboration with classroom teachers, guiding students on how to protect their privacy, distinguish fact from fiction, and engage with digital content in a responsible way. For instance, I teach our students how to use reputable websites, search effectively, and recognize bias and misinformation in digital media. These lessons are vital not just for academic success, but for students' personal safety in the digital age.

One of the core tenets of a school librarian's work is providing students with access to diverse and inclusive materials. Our library collection is not just about meeting curriculum needs; it's about reflecting the rich, varied experiences of our student body and the world at large. It's about giving students books that reflect their identities, their cultures, and their aspirations, while also introducing them to new perspectives and viewpoints.

Whether students are seeking a book about current societal issues, looking for a novel written by an author of color, or exploring non-fiction materials about global concerns, the library is a space where every student can find themselves reflected in the stories they read. In a diverse school, this accessibility is crucial. The ability to see oneself in literature—whether fiction or nonfiction—builds confidence, fosters empathy, and creates a sense of belonging. This aligns with our larger goal of providing an equitable educational experience for all students, regardless of their income level, background, or identity.

More than just a repository for books, the school library serves as a sanctuary—a safe and welcoming space where all students can find a sense of belonging. The school library is where students come to read, study, collaborate, and even take a moment to relax or recharge. As the sole librarian at my school, I am able to foster a positive environment where students feel supported and understood, especially in a time when many youth experience anxiety, isolation, and other mental health challenges. For many students, the library is not just a space for academic work—it is a place where they can feel seen, heard, and valued.

I engage with students numerous times each day, providing a listening ear as they navigate social and emotional challenges. The library is a place where students can find themselves, read books that reflect their experiences, and engage in meaningful conversations. It's also a space where students of all backgrounds can come together, interact, and learn from one another.

As I staff the Cranston East Library singlehandedly, I am deeply aware of the challenges and limitations of trying to meet the needs of 1,500+ students and 150 teachers on my own. My role requires me to balance supporting classroom instruction, providing research guidance, promoting reading, curating an inclusive library collection, and offering emotional support to students—all while maintaining a welcoming, safe environment.

A full-time librarian in every school ensures that students receive the focused attention and support they deserve, and that the library remains a central, dynamic resource for learning and personal growth. It is vital that we recognize the role of librarians in developing information literacy, promoting digital citizenship, providing diverse resources, and creating a safe haven for all students.

I respectfully urge the Rhode Island Legislature to support the critical need for full-time school librarians in every school across the state. By ensuring that all students have access to a full-time librarian, we are investing in their future—helping them develop the skills they need to thrive in a complex, digital world and providing them with the support they need to succeed academically and personally.

Thank you for your time and attention to this important matter. I look forward to hearing from you, and if there is any way I can assist you with more information about the crucial role of school library media specialists, please reach out to me at any time.

Sincerely,
Heidi Blais
401-714-8832, hblais@gmail.com