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Oregon Library Association

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May 22, 2023

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Oregon's Libraries Need Funding from the Legislature

Salem, Oregon – The Oregon Library Association (OLA) is asking the legislature for funding to support broadband infrastructure upgrades and school libraries. Many public libraries do not have sufficient internet to offer and school libraries are facing a crisis as a lack of investment has continued to lead to cuts to staff and budgets.

Public libraries provide communities with a place to access the internet for free. This has become a growing service provided by local libraries, but many of Oregon libraries' broadband speeds are not enough to meet demand. Ten percent of Oregon's public libraries don't meet the Federal definition of broadband (25 megabits per second (Mbps) upload/3 Mbps down) and forty percent have speeds lower than 100/100 Mbps[1]. Many residents across the state do not or cannot have broadband directly at their home, libraries provide this resource helping individuals with the opportunity to apply for jobs benefits or do research.

Money is available for public libraries to update their broadband infrastructure through the Federal E-Rate program. Unfortunately, the utilization rate of the program by Oregon's libraries is less than 30%. The application and procurement process are extremely challenging. Many libraries are small, under-resourced, and lack staff capacity to apply for the E-Rate discount. Even those with the resources must hire specialized consultants to guide them through the E-Rate application process. That is why the Oregon Libraries Association is asking for a part time consultant to help libraries statewide apply for the Federal grants. They are also requesting \$750,000 to go into the Connecting Oregon Libraries Funds for state matching funds.

This consultant will be a resource for all the public libraries and will provide support to all that want to apply for the available grants. With this modest investment from the legislature, OLA believes libraries can better leverage millions from the Federal government to be directed to Oregon.

Just as there is a need to level the playing field so all of Oregon's public libraries have adequate broadband speeds, a similar investment is needed to strengthen the state's K-12 school libraries.

In today's Oregon K-12 schools, vast differences exist in the instructional staffing of school libraries statewide, some of which are overseen solely by volunteers or library assistants with no teaching credentials, no library credentials, and no formal information science and research training.

Between 1980 and 2022, the total number of licensed school librarians in Oregon has plummeted from 818 to 158[2]. With the severe decline in the number of licensed librarians, Oregon students are missing out on foundational information literacy instruction that provides students with the knowledge and skills to evaluate information for success in their personal, professional, and civic lives. The lack of those skills follows students into their post-secondary education and adulthood, to their detriment.

Research explicitly links a strong school library program with increased student achievement and graduation rates: In a 2015 Washington (state) study, high schools with licensed librarians saw graduation rates of 85% compared to 76% for high schools without licensed librarians[3]. The impact is further heightened among students in high-poverty schools where the graduation rate is 79% in schools with Certified Teacher Librarians (CTLs) versus 43% at those without[4].

In its position statement on "[Appropriate Staffing Levels for School Libraries](#)" the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) states, "A full-time certified school librarian, supported by dedicated technical and clerical staff, is crucial to an effective school library for a school's learning environment." Oregon's own [Quality Education Model](#) (QEM) also lists one licensed librarian and one support staff as best practice for all levels of K-12 school libraries.

Following part of Recommendation 2 from the [Budget Note for Media Program Standards Study Report](#), commissioned by the legislature and completed in December 2021, the OLA is asking for funding for a full-time FTE School Library Specialist at the Oregon Department of Education. This position will work to strengthen the media program standards, update terminology, provide professional learning and technical assistance, develop academic content standards through a process of statewide engagement, and provide technical assistance to districts to implement the standards.

Students in Oregon are being underserved compared to their counterparts nationally, and there is an equity issue facing students in the state, with 75% of school districts in Oregon without professionally licensed librarians[5]. Investment is critical to manage this disparity and put Oregon on the right track for its young learners. OLA believes this is an important first step towards rectifying the current crisis facing school libraries.

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[1] State Library of Oregon. Library Support and Development Division. (2023). *2021-22 Oregon Public Library Statistical Report Data*.

<https://www.oregon.gov/library/operations/Documents/FINAL-OregonPLStats-2021-22-v1.07.xlsx>

[2] State Library of Oregon. Library Support and Development Division. (2018). *Oregon School Library Staffing: 1980 – 2018*.

<https://www.oregon.gov/library/libraries/Documents/SchoolLibrary/History.Oregon.SchoolLibraryStaffing.1980.2018.pdf>

[3] Washington Library Media Association. (2015, April 1). *Certified Teacher-Librarians, Library Quality and Student Achievement in Washington State Public Schools*.

<https://fopsl.files.wordpress.com/2012/01/certified-teacher-librarians-library-quality-and-student-achievement-in-washington-state-public-schools.pdf>

[4] Higgins, M. (2015, June 3). *Study finds that high-poverty schools with a certified teacher librarian achieve a 5-year graduation rate of 79%*.

<https://www.irs.org/2015/06/03/study-finds-that-high-poverty-schools-with-a-certified-teacher-librarian-achieve-a-5-year-graduation-rate-of-79/>

[5] Kachel, D., & Lance, K. C. (2021). *Perspectives on School Librarian Employment in the United States, 2009-10 to 2018-19*. <https://libslide.org/pubs/Perspectives-Any-No-Librarians.pdf>