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My name is Judith Kaplan, and I have enjoyed multiple roles in my career as a school librarian during the past 50 years. I taught in Massachusetts and Vermont public schools for 35 plus years, and from 2007-until my retirement in August, 2002, in higher education as a library educator and the Coordinator/Program Lead for UVM School Library Studies Sequence. Libraries have always been my passion and sharing that passion with learners from pre K to high school, with my colleagues in school communities, and with undergraduates and graduate students has been an incredible pleasure and honor.

I have been invigorated by the challenges and changes that have emerged as the decades passed since I discovered that school libraries open doors for learners to explore themselves and worlds beyond school walls. I remember telling my students during the first few days of school each year-this is a candy store for your brain! Explore and choose lots of different ways to think about the world. Taste and savor new ideas. Become your new self!

During the arc of my career, I have invested in ways to improve my own learning. The Vermont educational and library communities have been essential venues for exploring innovations in improving my practice and understanding of learning and learners. Professional development opportunities crossed many boundaries-not just libraries and education. Many of these opportunities provided a gateway to take on leadership roles that allowed me to grow and learn from others, and to give back to my community.

My purpose in this testimony is to share thoughts about an example of a recent professional development opportunity sponsored for school librarians through the Vermont School Library Association and the Vermont NEA. [***Mentoring Matters for School Librarians***](#) is a grant funded program that meets many goals and targets for professional development in an organic and recursive environment to support the retention of novice school librarians through a roster of trained school librarian mentor/coaches who are matched with new hires in school districts statewide.

Overarching goals and targets in planning for professional development that have been addressed within the program include:

- To provide educational career pathways and support for educators and non-educators for attaining professional positions as certified school librarians in Vermont Schools.
- To provide opportunities for maintaining credential requirements that show evidence of new learning and advanced practice.
- To promote local, state, regional, and national conferences, online courses, webinars, and so on, designed to enhance knowledge of innovations and best practices for access to information, delivery of services, and teaching and learning that impact student success in Vermont educational communities.
- To collaborate with other organizations to provide support for school librarians and school patrons that offer expanded services and learning opportunities for students locally and statewide.

The Vermont School Library Association (VSLA), a volunteer-led organization of school librarians and other interested members, has been a source of support for librarians in practice in Vermont for more than 60 years. Periodic strategic planning by the VSLA Board identifies goals and targets for improving school libraries and enhancing the roles of school librarians to reflect changing educational initiatives and improved student learning in Vermont schools. A recent goal has been focused on developing a formal program for mentoring novice school librarians. Through persistent networking and problem solving, school librarian leaders took on the challenge of writing a grant to develop a pilot program that would establish goals for recruiting and training seasoned librarians who are committed to support the learning of new school librarians in Vermont.

And so, the mentoring stars aligned in Vermont in 2020 when The National Education Association (NEA) awarded a **Great Public Schools** grant submitted through a collaboration between the Vermont NEA and VSLA. The good news of receiving the \$157,000 three year award was tempered by the emergence of the Covid 19 epidemic, but the program adapted from a face to face format to a virtual format through Zoom. [Details about the goals and framework for the program are found here in the slides](#) used in a presentation Nancy Daigle, the MM Grant Coordinator, and I did at the National School Library Conference (AASL), in October 2021.

We are currently in the final year of the grant and we have trained three cohorts of seasoned school librarians and there are 46 mentor/coaches who have been working with 68 mentees during the past three years. In a survey of mentors from year two, they reported a retention rate for new hires as 95% of those in school library positions remained working in school libraries the following year.

We are able to track openings for new hires through a regional database network that generates a list of positions in school districts, so that information about the available mentors can be shared with administrators.

There has been interest in the program from as far away as Oklahoma, and Australia, as well as closer to home in Maine. We are also consulting with some folks from the Vermont Agency of Education who are looking to develop mentoring programs for other school specialists.

The grant advisory committee is currently exploring post grant options for continuing to grow the roster of mentor coaches, and to sustain the regional approach to identifying new hires and to encourage administrators to employ trained mentor/coaches with experience in all aspects of school librarianship. We are amazed and excited to be entering a new phase for providing support for a new generation of school librarians in Vermont.