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Working Group on the Status of Vermont Libraries Testimony on Collections in School Libraries

Library Name: Colchester Middle School Library

School Name: Colchester Middle School

Town or towns served: Colchester plus some kids from the Island towns (South Hero, Grand Isle, North Hero, Alburgh, Isle La Motte)

Person submitting this testimony and your job title: Rebecca Sofferman, School Librarian

Would you be willing to offer in-person testimony and answer questions during the public hearing on January 14, 2022? If you answer yes, we'll be in touch with more details. If you'd rather not testify in person, we will submit your testimony in written form for the Working Group members to read, and your written testimony will also be included as a part of the public record. YES _____ **NO** _____

Collection size (number of volumes): 11,923

Number of students at your school: 500

Please share any other statistics about your collection that might be helpful to the working group. Some examples could include the percentage of fiction versus nonfiction in your collection, the numbers of items you circulate per month or per school year, or anything else that helps us get insight into your collection and its use in your school.

Our collection is about evenly split between fiction and nonfiction. In recent years I've been purchasing more narrative nonfiction or other higher interest nonfiction as opposed to books that would formerly have been used for research. Most research is done via our school databases or the Web. I've increased our school's graphic novel collection and in particular our Manga collection as interest in that format has exploded since the pandemic. We subscribe to the VT Schools Shared Digital Collection (VSSDC) for eBooks and audiobooks. Our circulation has dropped in the last couple of years. For example, last year we averaged around 500 print books circulated per month whereas before the pandemic it was over 600. So far this year, however, our circulation has skyrocketed, which is fantastic!

What are the strengths of your current collection? I feel our curriculum strengths are a quality collection that includes an increasing percentage of titles with diverse characters and authors. It's extremely important that students have "windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors" in our collection, and all purchasing (as well as the books I choose to feature) takes that into consideration. I also feel that our collection is responsive not only to curricular needs but also student needs and requests.

What are the weaknesses of your current collection? I would like to offer more "DIY" books in our collection, as well as more current biographies. I also need more Manga, because students are so hungry for it! But, they are hard to find right now with supply chain issues.

Do you participate in resource sharing and interlibrary loan, either through Clover, between libraries in your school district, with your local public libraries, or through other resource sharing programs? Tell us about how resource sharing works for you and your students. We share resources between the schools in our district regularly, and we have a courier that goes between buildings on a daily basis. My school also participates in Clover (including when we need books from our public library), although this doesn't get heavy use. Any Clover books must be delivered through the US Mail. When we need books from our public library, we used to have a courier that delivered and picked up books, but that went away during COVID, so now our district librarians have to pick up and deliver books ourselves. I am a lot less likely to offer this to students than I was previously since I don't live near the library, but I will certainly make it happen if students need something.

Do you offer any special collections at your library? These could be a specific collection designed to support targeted learning programs at your school, a Vermont or local history collection, or other groupings designed to serve specific needs. Please tell us about these collections and the populations they serve. We have a small Vermont/local history collection, to support research projects. We also have a small collection of middle school books in Vietnamese and in French to support some of our New American students. Finally, we have a small collection of leveled readers that were purchased before I came. These get a fair amount of use to support students who are reading far below their grade level.

Do you offer ebooks and audiobooks in your collection? If so, how do you provide access to them? Through the Shared Schools Collection (Overdrive), Vermont Online Library, through another vendor, through direct access from your catalog, through physical devices such as Kindles or Playaways, or some other method? Are you happy with the balance of ebooks, audiobooks and print books in your collection? We have audiobooks available as playaways, and also through the VSSDC in Overdrive. eBooks are available primarily through the VSSDC as well, and through Mackin (that collection was started

before I came and I haven't added to it because I think it's easiest to teach students one platform and the VSSDC has more books available). Students can access the books via the catalog but I think most of them use the link on the library website. I sometimes add books for our school to the Overdrive collection, especially for our summer reading program. I am so fortunate to have the VSSC. It gets a fair amount of use at our school and we wouldn't be able to provide so many eBooks or audiobooks otherwise.

Do you catalog and circulate things besides books in your library? Some examples could include games and puzzles, maps and globes, learning tools or other physical items. I have games and puzzles and globes in the library and sometimes they are borrowed for other classes. However, I don't have them cataloged, I just have a sign-out sheet. I have a small makerspace and sometimes items from there are borrowed as well. Some tech equipment such as portable DVD players, cameras, and microphones sometimes are loaned. Finally, we do have a handful of DVDs but I don't really purchase new ones anymore. Our computers don't have DVD drives and we use the SWANK streaming service to show movies (or youtube).

What else would you like the working group to know about your school library collection? How has your collection changed over time? What changes do you hope to make in the future? What are the biggest challenges you anticipate, and how do you plan to solve them? As mentioned above, my print collection is mostly focused on interest/pleasure reading and student silent reading requirements, rather than research. Hardly any research takes place with print resources now in our school, with the occasional exception of biography projects. I maintain a really tiny reference section and I do have some nonfiction books on a wide variety of subjects because sometimes students are banned from their devices and need print resources. I maintain a picture book collection, even though we are middle school, because some students like them, sometimes they bring them home to read to younger siblings, and sometimes teachers like students to use them for literacy projects.

I am very fortunate at our school that our ELA teachers require students to do independent reading to meet their reading proficiencies, and they encourage students to come regularly to the library to choose books. My role has shifted a bit since the pandemic (I'm still doing less in-person teaching and more sending out video lessons to classes), and it's left me more time to conference with students about finding the ideal reading materials.

I am planning to do a bigger weed of the nonfiction section at some point in the very near future to free up more shelf space for the areas where I am doing more purchasing (especially graphic novels, manga, and other fiction). My fiction section is genrefied as well as my biography section. I may try to genrefy the nonfiction at some point too, to get away from the outdated and inequitable Dewey system.

My biggest challenge is that I don't have a library assistant and these types of projects just take so much time. I sometimes can get student assistants but they are easily bored with this work.

When there are only so many hours in a day, my priority is teaching and reader's advisory, not collection development and maintenance. I haven't been able to complete a library inventory in years. All libraries need assistants, or else the librarian just becomes a very overqualified library clerk!