

Library Working Group
Testimony from Vermont School Librarians on Technology
May 20, 2022

Common themes in the submitted testimony:

School librarians are interested in a single automation system for all school libraries, but only if migration is easy, resource sharing is less cumbersome and consortium buying helps to alleviate budget pressure on individual schools/districts

Equity is a common concern, reflected in device access, tech support staffing and access, broadband availability, budget inequities, technology support, training and PD for staff and students, and uneven tech deployment in elementary schools in the same district.

Librarians are asking for more state support for shared digital resources, especially ones that would complement Vermont Online Library and be more accessible to younger learners, students below grade level and ESL students, such as Brainpop, Scholastic Bookflix, PebbleGo, ProQuest, Ebsco, Britannica, ABC-Clio, Culturegrams and LibGuides. More access to digital audiobooks, especially titles that can be shared among users or that have multiple copies would be valuable. There's also concerns about the sustainability of limited use lending models regarding audiobook and ebook purchases. Several librarians suggested partnering with UVM or Vermont State University so that we could have access to their collections of high-quality digital resources (looking for things like JSTOR, Elsevier, Blooms).

Interlibrary Loan is challenging for school libraries. They are often single person libraries, and don't have the budget for mailing items back and forth. Access to the courier system could make participating in ILL cheaper for libraries who have the staff to support loaning and borrowing.

Deb Ehler-Hansen, Fair Haven UHS

I think we could use:

a single library automation system for all schools throughout Vermont
better access to the courier system so that we could participate in ILL more easily
more state support for shared digital tools/access
windows/PC computers that support programming and other STEM/STEAM related learning activities...the chromebook - in general - does not support these learning experiences

Abby Adams, Shoreham Elementary School

Bandwidth is still a huge problem in our schools. Some do not have enough internet capacity for a whole class to use it at the same time. (This is not a problem in my school, but I know it exists in several places.)

In our school, I would say that more state support for shared tools would be amazing. We use the Gale databases from the state, but our budget is such that we don't really have any other tools. There are better PK-5 research tools out there!

I also think that uneven technology support is an issue in our communities. In our rural school, we don't have anyone other than me who can troubleshoot our many devices (1 to 1 chromebooks) onsite, and I'm only there 2 days a week. The tech guys work in Middlebury,

which is 25 minutes away. It means that problems tend to sit for longer periods of time. If I didn't have that capability, we'd be in an even worse place.

Jen Wasyliko, Springfield High School

- a single (cloud-based) library automation system for all schools throughout Vermont - with consortium pricing & support for running parallel trials, testing, migration of records, etc...
- better access to the courier system so that we could participate in ILL more easily
- consortium pricing & state pricing for additional databases such as Jstor, Elsevier, Blooms, etc... OR - connectivity with available resources via Vermont State college libraries (not sure if this is possible)
- Re. cyber-security: Our district is severely understaffed in the IT area, and I'm sure we're not alone. We have K-12 filters applied to internet searching for students. Apparently, this is dictated by the constraints of our system. These overly strict filters effectively result in censorship at the high school level. Some gatekeepers have the ability to unblock sites for students re. popular research topics such as gun violence, social justice, lbgtq+, etc. - BUT it requires students ASKING for help. For those needing to conduct independent / personal research on sensitive topics, we may be unwittingly restricting their access to information. I'm not sure how this can be addressed at a state level - or if local districts would be willing or able to cede control, but I think this should be addressed.

Julie Goraj, Ludlow Elementary & Mount Holly Elementary

- a single library automation system: automation systems vary quite a bit by price which is why I use library world to meet the needs of my two less than 100 student elementary schools. Conversion to another system might be difficult, and time and cost could be substantial.
- more state support for shared digital tools/access: This could be great for some of the resources like Brainpop, Scholastic Bookflix, PebbleGo, etc... which are all too expensive for our smallest of schools. If they could be a part of the Vermont OnLine Library or something similar, it would be wonderful!

Jill Abair, U-32 Middle & High School

The biggest issue facing school libraries is equity in resources. As someone who works at a Middle & High School that serves multiple communities, we find that our students do not come with the same skill sets. Some students have had access, but not the right staff to support their usage and understanding of devices/resources. Some haven't even had access to the tools. Some students come with a great set of technology skills, in how to navigate the web, how to type, how to use google drive, how to code for robotics, etc, while others have barely had time on their computer. This sets our students apart from each other, and its impact is growing yearly. One thing that often escapes people when thinking about technology, is that it takes more than putting a device in someone's hands. We've seen many smart boards purchased and never used, because the teachers (professionals who strive to better themselves and their practices) don't have the right training. The same can be said for chromebooks and tablets in the hands of our students. As we are becoming more technology dependent, there is frighteningly no intentional training happening for students and staff. And while these advancements are beneficial and in many ways necessary, we cannot truly see the benefits until we can properly deploy it.

Alyson D. Mahony, Doty Library (Worcester) & Rumney Library (Middlesex)

I work in two small rural elementary school libraries and there are technology inequities. While we do have chromebooks for all students, we don't have daily technology support for our learning community. One school has a librarian / tech integrator 2 days a week and one school has it three days a week. This means that classroom teachers are on their own in terms of support and professional development. If a classroom teacher is teaching a technology rich lesson and has trouble with their devices or students' have trouble with their devices there is no one to call on in the moment of need. Digital citizenship skills are unevenly taught since these skills are not explicitly part of the standards we are reaching for. Ideally the librarian technology teacher would be teaming with classroom teachers to imbue these schools across the board but this is next to impossible for a part time librarian. The budget for software is unevenly applied in our district, high school students have much more access to databases, e and audio books than elementary students in the district. This might seem intuitive but these opportunities are necessary for teachers to reach a wide range of learning needs for our littlest learners to be successful. Instead of aiming for success early on we tend to wait and use a bandaid approach. I would like to see a full time librarian / tech integrator / steam teacher in every school no matter your address.

Meg Allison, U32 (Montpelier)

School libraries are hubs of technological innovation and connection. To continue to support our students' needs, school librarians need equitable access to more online research portals such as JSTOR and other online research hubs. It's not equitable that students from better funded districts get access to more resources. It would be wonderful to partner with the University of Vermont and our State College system to provide high school students with access to the online resources available in those library collections, especially considering that state funding and taxes support those institutions.

Many teacher-librarians have additional endorsements in educational technology and embed technology integration not just in their library classes, but in content-level and unified arts curriculum. Teacher-librarians are often the "go-to" staff in smaller schools to run SBAC testing and troubleshoot technology. Teacher-librarians have been on the frontier of innovative technologies, transforming spaces in their libraries into STEM-inspired Maker Spaces. Teacher-librarians design and teach about digital citizenship and online ethics. In this day and age of an increased need for critical literacy and digital skills to decipher mis- and dis-information, the work that teacher-librarians do is vital to our democracy and a well-informed citizenry.

Genevieve Gallagher, South Burlington HS

I'm embarrassed to admit that CLOVER has always seemed really clunky to me and SBHS hasn't participated very much since the community library separated from us and moved out. The few times I've participated (both as the sending and receiving library) books were lost and then there was confusion about paying for their replacement. I wonder if we were on the same catalog/automation system if that could be used instead and might be easier?

Greater state support for digital resources would be fantastic- it might be hard to agree on which resources we should all have, but I really appreciate the Gale access. The other big ones that come to mind are ProQuest, Ebsco, & Britannica (ABC-Clio is another that we really like).

Rebecca Sofferman, Colchester Middle School

As a Vermont public school librarian, I would love to see more support for school libraries in our state with respect to consortia pricing and support for technological resources. I began my career in New York State, where each region has a Board of Cooperative Education Services (BOCES), each of which includes a School Library System Director. This position is in charge of organizing consortium pricing for things like databases, Library Management Systems, and other technological resources. They also help to train and support new librarians, coordinate content-specific professional development, advocate for school librarians, apply for grants, and manage data collection and reporting with respect to the libraries in the region. It was an invaluable support service for me as a school librarian and I really miss it! Although we do have a state library program here in Vermont, it is strongly geared toward supporting public libraries. While I certainly think that is important and necessary, we have so many school librarians in the state that could use more support. Particularly those in rural areas without librarian peers in their districts, or those who don't have a lot of training as school librarians. I would strongly advocate for the creation of a librarian position at the state level in Vermont designated solely to support school librarians, in addition to the state librarian supporting public libraries.

Something else we could really use as school librarians in Vermont is better resource sharing. Having the Gale databases available to schools is SO helpful, and I think we could add more resources to our arsenals with consortium pricing and organization. Many schools struggle to afford things like quality Library Management Systems for managing their collections, additional databases, or technology tools. In addition, it would be so helpful to have access to a courier system for Inter-Library Loan. Many school libraries don't participate in that program because we can't afford the postage to mail books back and forth (plus the US mail is more unreliable these days).

Keeley Schell, St. Francis Xavier School, Williston

My #1 concern about technology is the cost of digital media that libraries don't own. Things like Libby and Sora take a huge chunk of our budgets and leave us with nothing after a year, or a certain # of checkouts. I can understand this for continually updated resources like online encyclopedias, but for things like novels it seems like an area where we are capitulating to sign all of our budget over to big tech. I would like to see Vermont libraries advocate for a more library- and user-oriented system of ownership of digital materials. (Good luck with that, of course...)

Stephanie Sherman, Middlebury High School

My name is Stephanie Sherman and I have been the school librarian at Middlebury High School for the past four years. Technology is a means of providing access to information and resources. School libraries strive to provide equitable access to information and resources for all Vermont students and staff. My testimony highlights current successes and future needs in technology to provide access to digital resource subscriptions, library catalog systems, interlibrary loan, and computers.

(1) Digital resource subscriptions Our high school subscribes to academic databases such as JSTOR, ScienceDirect, ABC-Clio and Blooms Literature. We also subscribe to video databases such as Infobase Classroom Video, and newspapers and magazines such as National Geographic, New York Times, Wall Street Journal, and Proquest Newspapers. We take full advantage of the two resources the VT Department of Libraries offers to Vermont schools- Gale's databases known as Vermont Online Library, and Swank Video streaming. These resources are highly used

at my school and we are thankful, however we need to organize more consortium purchasing for our schools to leverage our budget funds and create a statewide K-12 shared digital resource. Our school technology organization, VITA-Learn, now organizes statewide consortium purchases, however there is minimal librarian representation in this organization. Librarians are specialists in evaluating, selecting and managing digital resources, yet we are often not understood and seen as leaders in this important role. Our teachers and students also need more access to eBooks and audiobooks. They expect their school library to provide resources like Audible, or Amazon Prime or Netflix to support their curriculum, however these media organizations do not allow a license for schools and this has created barriers. It is up to our libraries to find and provide this access, as well as educate teachers about licensing and digital rights. We would also benefit from a statewide subscription to an application such as LibGuides from Springerink so that we have an efficient and intuitive way to organize and share technology resources. I am passionate about advocating for this need and would be willing to volunteer as a liaison between Vermont School Library Association and Vt Department of Libraries to organize more consortium purchasing and build a statewide school digital library.

(2) library catalog systems Our school currently uses OPALS library catalog and many VT high schools use Follett library catalog system. It would benefit all of our schools and especially our rural schools to have a consortium for a single school library catalog system. One of the newest and most intuitive and flexible systems available is Accessit Library. Coordinating a statewide school library system would take a lot of work, however it would be beneficial in training, managing, and promoting our library resources. It would increase access of library resources to all of our schools and consortium pricing would leverage our budgets.

(3) Interlibrary loan for schools The Vermont Library interlibrary loan CLOVER system is an amazing resource. We have a large library collection at our school and I am continually processing requests. I am fortunate to have an assistant to help manage interlibrary loan and I am permitted to use our school mail funds to mail books. I make many requests from Davis Family Library at Middlebury College and personally deliver and pick up interlibrary loan items. I am thankful and appreciate the access to digital articles that I request through CLOVER for many teachers. Many school librarians do not have an assistant to help manage requests and don't have access to postage funds so they do not participate. How can our school libraries be included in our statewide courier system to make this access equitable to everyone in our state, especially in our rural, small schools?

(4) Access to computers All students at my school have access to a chromebook, however many students bring their own laptops. Students who bring personal computers have the ability to install and run software programs and often their personal laptops are faster and more powerful and reliable than the Chromebooks the school loans. Many students can't afford a personal computer and rely on the library as a place to access reliable computers that run software such as the Adobe Suite programs. Libraries need to be supported so they may offer the most current technologies so that all students have opportunities to access and learn different types of technologies, software and learning applications.

Jess Wisloski, Sustainability Academy at Lawrence Barnes (Burlington)

I do not feel that there is equitable school library technology hardware provided across the school district I am in; I came into a school library that had no printers on the same floor as the library, and no expectations that students would ever have any need for printers, which

surprised me - and nobody in the IT department seems to think there's a way to create a print queue where I can approve print jobs. There was no book or document cam/projector, and the very old smartboard in the library is positioned 1. on top of a bulletin board, and 2. right underneath a skylight, and 3. in between two closets, one of which are accessed throughout the day for literacy materials. I wouldn't care if there was no smartboard at all, as long as we had a working document cam or projector, which everyone else has. The device I was given was a low-quality Chromebook, but I often use software that requires higher speed processing, so I need to always use my own macbook. I used to work in the 2nd-largest district in the state, and I used to report on the first-largest school district in the state, and I will tell you, the technology at those as well as a distant runner up that I interviewed at, is far superior the district I work in, the third-largest in the state. It is obvious our district money needs to go to more urgent/pressing needs, but all the more reason to make sure weighted funding is considered as UVM's report on school funding advised, not sticking to a rigid average that leaves high needs students and schools in situations where they are learning on 20-year-old technology or more.

Frances Binder, Colchester High School

Something that occurs to me regarding technology would be access to digital audiobooks. We of course have access to the Vermont Schools Shared Digital Collection which is great. I often add more to the collection for our school, and I am blessed with an adequate budget so I can generally swing adding titles on demand as well as supporting a small collection of playaways. The trick is that because these are all single-user (or the multi-user option is prohibitively expensive), we run into issues when we have a group of students who are all in need of the same audiobook for class (this happens quite often actually). I have created one solution which is to buy audiobooks through Libro.fm and put them on five little mp3 players that I check out...but when there's a need for more than five with a single title I start to feel like I'm skating pretty close to the edge where copyright/fair use are concerned. This is all a long way to say that perhaps some kind of statewide consortium arrangement with a service like Bookshare might be useful. Maybe also being able to work with the ABLE library...right now that's not something that is supported, at least not in all cases/with all kinds of resources.

Annette Goyne, Richford Junior/Senior High School

My school and district have made technology a priority for several years now, so I feel we have much in place. The one thing I would like to improve is replacement of some hardware that is now obsolete. I have a set of iPads that people want to use, but they are about 9 years old and we cannot add new apps or update the ones we have. I also have some ancient desktop PC's which would get used more if they were faster.

That said, Every student has a Chromebook, we have high-speed Internet, good printers, and the ILL Clover process is so much better!