

## **Testimony to Rural Task Force on Rural Schools**

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### Background:

I began my teaching career at Antigo High School in Antigo, WI in the Fall of 2008 for the Unified School District of Antigo. The USDA has about 2,500 students k-12 with 57% of those students receiving free or reduced lunch. I taught Psychology and American History. In 2011, our librarian was retiring so I applied, interviewed and accepted the job to become our high school's teacher-librarian and instructional technology coordinator. This meant I would coordinate the high school library and serve as a "coach" to district-wide staff members when it came to matters of technology and teaching teachers how to use programs like Infinite Campus (our grading and attendance software), Moodle (learning management software) and various web 2.0 tools. I did this during the 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 schools years. Also, at this time, there was one other teacher-librarian in our district. She coordinated our district's seven elementary libraries and our middle school library. At the end of the 2012-2013, our elementary/middle school teacher-librarian retired and the district decided not to fill her position as a cost-effective means. This decision then made me the district-wide teacher-librarian. I am one person who coordinates seven elementary libraries, one middle school library and one high school library.

### "Home grown" concept:

When I applied for this position in the Spring of 2011, the job description was rewritten with more of an emphasis on technology. When I was still in the classroom, I used technology a lot with my students and I am the kind of person that feels very comfortable with various mediums of technology. I also like to consider myself proficient when it comes to troubleshooting technology problems. Since the job title included "instructional technology coordinator," this made the position more desirable to apply for. I had several staff members and my principal and associate principal encouraging me to go for this position. I believed I had the rapport with students and staff and technology competency to serve as a "tech coach." After accepting this position, I immediately contacted Nancy Anderson, DPI School Library Media Consultant, to find out what steps I needed to take to gain licensure as a teacher-librarian. I learned that my district needed to request an emergency license for me and that I needed to apply to the University of Wisconsin System School Library Education Consortium (UWSSLEC) program for licensing. UWSSLEC requires 21 credits of coursework plus supervised practicum experiences. Courses are taken through UW Eau Claire, Oshkosh, Superior, or Whitewater, depending on which professor is teaching that semester's course offering. Just last week I finished my last class in the program and I'm currently working on my practicum. I did not finish my practicum experience this term because one of the requirements is that I have to complete 80 hours of observation outside of my district. With a full-time job and a family, this is proving to be a challenge for me, therefore, I had to take an incomplete. I hope to be

completely done in May 2014 and then apply for a Wisconsin Educator teacher-librarian license through DPI in June.

1 teacher-librarian, 9 libraries:

As I mentioned earlier, I am the one and only teacher-librarian in my district, which means I coordinate seven elementary libraries, one middle school library and one high school library, with no mentor. My number one priority in my job is to build relationships with students and to provide them with the tools and resources they need to be successful. I am struggling to build quality relationships with and to connect to students and staff, because of the fact I go between nine buildings. The Unified School District of Antigo covers 640 square miles. Four of our seven elementary buildings are in the country, while three elementary schools, the middle and high school are located in the city of Antigo. Currently, our district is in a battle over whether or not to close the seven elementary buildings and build one central elementary school in the city. This creates a problem because rural community members want to keep their “country schools” open. Our greatest need as a rural district is for broadband throughout the district, which we do not have. The inequality our inadequate access creates for kids in rural schools is disadvantageous to the futures of our 21st century learners. Many rural school districts across the country are adopting this trend of employing one teacher-librarian to service their entire k-12 libraries. This too is creating such a disservice to our students. For me, I feel like most of my job is consumed with the “office end” of library management. I travel to the elementary libraries as needed at the request of my elementary clerks. When I’m at the middle school, I do “book talks” with 6th grade English Language Arts students and try to incorporate technology and/or library lessons along the way. At the high school, I go into the English classrooms throughout the school year when an English teacher would like me to teach a lesson on research or locating and accessing resources. I help the 9th grade English classes quite a bit with a formal research paper they write during second semester. Throughout the district, I meet with teachers to collaborate and to come up with ideas for projects and how the library can be an instrumental tool for their students. One of the reasons our district is eliminating staff and why we only have one teacher-librarian is because of our community’s perception of professional staff. The community wants equitable technology and broadband for its students, but at the same time, they don’t want to have the licensed staff that is required to maintain and educate everyone on it. The school library is a pivotal place to house technology and where students can get their hands on it and learn how to use an iPad, for example. In our district, community members are willing to keep several buildings open across the 640 square mile district even if it means losing libraries. There is a disconnect here, and our community members, who outnumber professional staff, aren’t seeing this. The dynamics between the community and the Unified School District of Antigo are quite unique. We are a large rural district with a \$1.1 million deficit last year and a public that has a “they’re not one of us” attitude towards the district’s professional staff. The students lose out when community members don’t have a clear understanding of what we do.