



TESTIMONY OF AL MCARTHUR

Director of Digital Learning and Libraries, Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools

Introduction

Good morning, my name is Al McArthur. I am the Director of Digital Learning and Libraries for the Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools. I have served in this position since February 14, 2023. I started my education career as a technology education teacher in the Lee County and Wake County Schools, and then as an instructional technology facilitator in the Chapel-Hill Carrboro Schools. I earned my Master's Degree in Education with a concentration in Instructional Technology from East Carolina University in 2021, after which I accepted a position as an Instructional Technologist at the Elon University School of Law. I returned to public schools in 2023 when I started my current position with CHCCS.

As the Director of Digital Learning and Libraries, I oversee the integration of technology and library services to support teaching and learning across CHCCS. My work includes guiding the selection and use of instructional technology, ensuring access to digital and print resources, and supporting educators through professional learning and coaching. Some of my primary projects include the development of our district Digital Learning Plan, implementing measures to protect student data privacy, and providing training in the responsible use of Artificial Intelligence technology in schools.

In addition to my technology duties, I provide support to our district's school librarians and digital learning coaches. Digital Learning and Libraries sits within the Instructional Services Department and I am the only district-level staff member representing Digital Learning and Libraries. I do not directly supervise or evaluate the school librarians nor the digital learning coaches, but instead provide support and advocacy between their work at the schools and that of the district. My role with regard to librarians is to ensure they have the resources they need to purchase books and provide robust programming in their

libraries. The Digital learning coaches' role is to support teachers in strengthening instruction through the thoughtful, intentional and effective use of technology. This includes providing coaching, modeling instructional strategies, supporting lesson design, and helping teachers use digital tools in ways that enhance student learning. Digital learning coaches do not determine curriculum or select library materials; rather, they work alongside teachers and librarians to support the implementation of district curriculum and instructional goals.

I am not responsible for supervising school librarians; each librarian is supervised by their school's principal. My role with regard to librarians is to ensure they have the resources they need to purchase books and provide robust programming in their libraries.

Digital learning coaches are also located within the schools and are supervised by their principals. Their role is to support teachers in strengthening instruction through the thoughtful and effective use of technology. This includes providing coaching, modeling instructional strategies, supporting lesson design, and helping teachers use digital tools in ways that enhance student learning. Digital learning coaches do not determine curriculum or select library materials; rather, they work alongside teachers to support implementation of district curriculum and instructional goals.

School Library Collections

School library collections serve two main purposes. First, the libraries contain books and other resources that support or supplement the curriculum. In their professional learning meetings, our school librarians spend time reviewing the new North Carolina Literacy Instruction Standards and other state curriculum materials, so that they can work with teachers and administrators in their schools to provide resources that support those standards.

Second, our libraries contain many books and other resources that are not related to any particular curriculum, but are provided for independent reading. School libraries strive to instill a lifelong love of reading by allowing students to find books that support their interests and with which they can find personal connections. It is important for school libraries to provide a wide array of resources that allow students from all backgrounds to see themselves and their communities represented in books. It is also important to have a wide variety of resources available for students to learn about new topics in all areas: history, science, geography, religion, hobbies, arts, and much more. Students who find books that spark their curiosity, appeal to their personal interests, or represent their own

families and cultures spend more time reading. More time spent reading directly correlates to improved academic outcomes.

With its letter the Committee sent a list of approximately 150 titles held across school libraries. Many of the titles listed are repeated, but there appear to be 63 unique titles. To my knowledge, none of those books are part of any elementary school curriculum. They are available in our libraries for students who choose to check them out (unless prohibited by the student's parent). Our elementary libraries each contain an average of 10,000 physical books. The majority of those titles are not curriculum-related. For example, the Ephesus Elementary Library catalog contains four books about Michael Jordan, approximately twenty-six books about Lego bricks, and approximately thirty books about the Star Wars movies and characters. None of these topics are part of the CHCCS curriculum.

The importance of providing texts for independent reading is underscored by Standard 4(c) of the NC DPI School Library Media Coordinator Evaluation Rubric:

School library media coordinators promote reading as a foundational skill for learning. School library media coordinators champion reading for information, pleasure and lifelong learning. They build relationships with students to discover reading interests and assist in finding engaging and appropriate materials to encourage a love of reading. They partner with teachers in identifying the reading interests and needs of students and recommending appropriate resources.

All of our school librarians in CHCCS either have Master's degrees in library science, or are in the process of earning that degree. They are trained professional in their field and are responsible for selecting and curating titles for their school. All library purchases are approved by the school principal. No state funding is used to purchase library books; our library budgets come from local funds, occasionally supplemented by grants.

Parents are an important source of input for school librarians. School librarians frequently seek titles based on parent and student requests, and are always available to discuss with parents any questions or concerns they may have about the titles their child is reading. In addition, schools provide opportunities for families to engage directly with the library, such as during book fairs and evening events where parents can visit the library, explore available materials, and connect with library staff.

Compliance with the Parents Bill of Rights

Our school library catalogs have been available to parents online for many years. Parents have also had the ability to request a list of the books their child has checked out from the

library and block individual titles from being checked out by their child. These practices were in place in CHCCS well before they were made a statewide requirement by S.L. 2025-84. In addition, our digital and audio titles are provided through a program called Sora. Sora provides parental controls that allow parents to limit the titles their children can access.

When the Parents' Bill of Rights was enacted in North Carolina in 2023, our administrative team reviewed the law's provisions carefully. The legislation provided that parents had the right to review records of materials their child borrowed from the school library. Because this was already the practice in CHCCS, we did not have to make any changes in order to comply with the law. Our school librarians are also aware of the law's provision that "[i]nstruction on gender identity, sexual activity, or sexuality shall not be included in the curriculum provided in grades kindergarten through fourth grade." To my knowledge, instruction in these topics has never been part of the elementary school curriculum or library activities in CHCCS. We are committed to continued compliance with the law.