

Deborah Grill

I have a few questions and comments about resolution B-6 which concerns the \$1.5 million Innovative Approach to Literacy grant and the \$114,915 contract with the Free Library of Philadelphia.

I understand that you applied for this grant in order to pursue your goal of ensuring that every student read on grade level by age 8, and, as a librarian, I am delighted that you have recognized the role that libraries play in literacy achievement. I am curious as to why you chose partnering with the FLP to provide services instead of using the grant money to actually hire certified school librarians.

In the description of your objectives you refer to the loss of library staff in many of our schools. (Actually, that should read most of our schools. There are only 11 school librarians left in the district and it is unclear if they are actually staffing their libraries full time.)

You are contracting with the FLP to update and expand the school library collections for grades K-3. A school librarian who is familiar with the curriculum and the needs of the student body, teachers and parents, could do that more adequately. And, a full-time school librarian would service all of the students in the school, not just K-3.

You are purchasing computerized tablets so that students in grades K-3 can access the FLP extensive catalog online. A school librarian would teach them how to do that and be there to assist them, because K-3 students will need assistance.

Through this arrangement, students will have access to a certified librarian through bi-monthly visits to a neighborhood library, and a FLP librarian will visit once a week to help the teachers in the pilot program. A full-time school librarian is there every day to assist teachers and students.

Dr. Hite, you have stated that you want to use research-based proven strategies to increase student achievement, but in this case you are ignoring the research. Study after study over the past 20 years, in state after state, including Pennsylvania, has found

that students in schools with quality school libraries staffed by full-time certified school librarians score higher on the PSSA Reading test than students who do not have access. This is true regardless of socio-economic, racial/ethnic, and/or disability status.*

I understand that this grant is for innovative approaches to literacy. School librarians are capable of implementing innovative practices. Dr. Hite, in September of 2012 you brought 2 high school students with you to speak at the Education First Compact meeting. When asked what they missed the most due to the budget cuts, one replied that she missed the services of her school librarian the most. The other student said that she had never been in a school with a school librarian. In this resolution you describe fostering literacy through the “innovative utilization of historically overlooked physical library spaces within their struggling schools.” The use of the word historical implies disuse over a long period of time; so, I at this point, staffing these schools with certified school librarians would qualify as innovative.

So I ask again, why aren't you using the grant money to refurbish school libraries and staff them with certified school librarians?

* <http://paschoollibraryproject.org/home>

<http://sl-it.mansfield.edu/current-students/school-library-impact-studies-project.cfm>