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Libraries: friends of technology and education worldwide

An editorial celebrating National Library Week by Assistant State Superintendent Dr. Darrell Williams

Libraries and technologies are the heartbeat of our communities and schools, and the vessels by which students and adults gain access to the world; after all, as I love to say – “the library is the only place where you can go everywhere without having to go anywhere!”

Across the nation, libraries face many challenges, ranging from funding issues to book bans. However, our librarians have stood tall to keep our libraries open and their resources accessible while protecting our intellectual freedom. Therefore, during this National Library Week, we recognize, honor, and celebrate every school and public librarian for your dedication, devotion, commitment, and most of all, your courage. We applaud your consistent efforts to bring high-quality books and other materials to the library to foster a learning environment that feels safe, inclusive, and educationally encouraging. Your work ensures that students and adults in every community have a safe learning environment where their literacy skills, cultural awareness and overall knowledge can be enhanced as well as expanded.

As history has taught us, the road to achieve freedom and now intellectual freedom will have many twists and turns. But know you do not walk alone. We gain strength as we walk together...shoulder to shoulder... those of us who run libraries and those of us who use them! We affirm that while one may not read every book in the library, there should be a book for everyone in the library. The rich diversity that is our strength must be proudly reflected in our libraries for all Wisconsinites and for future generations. In essence, our libraries must be as rich and diverse as the people reflected across this great state and greater nation...as all our past and current struggles and contributions are woven into the fabric of America.

Libraries across Wisconsin and within our schools perform a tremendous role in increasing literacy for both students and adults. Even more, librarians provide activities to encourage our youth to be inquisitive, expand their reading interests, and be innovative in using all sorts of technology. Additionally, school librarians help their fellow teachers with research and collaborate with them to develop high-quality

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educational programs. And school librarians build a safe space for all our students to have access to accurate information from all points of view. The library is a critical resource, and its use is paramount to helping to close the academic, information and opportunities gap for all students.

As a child growing up in very rural Abbeville, Mississippi, there was no library available. To access the library, I had to catch a ride or walk to the library in Oxford several miles away. It was at the library where I discovered that I could travel the world through accessing the many books and using the resources available. This is why I say, "The library is the most important place in our communities and our schools...because you can go everywhere without having to go anywhere!" The library played a key role in my education and my overall development, as it does for the students and all residents of Wisconsin.

Therefore, as Assistant State Superintendent for the Division for Libraries and Technology, please join me in thanking our school library leaders, staff, and volunteers for your hard work and for standing on the frontlines of intellectual freedom while promoting lifelong learning for every student and every adult across Wisconsin. Although we honor you this week, I want you to know that everyday... not only do you make a difference, but you are the difference.

It is my honor to serve you and serve with you as we educate our students and adults across Wisconsin.

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