

Librarians Spend a Day Learning to Advocate for Funding

September 19, 2016

A small group of librarians and teachers from across the state of Michigan met on Saturday in Howell Township to talk about how they can affect new legislation. In 2015, Congress passed the Every Student Succeeds Act, replacing the No Child Left Behind Act. The school librarians and teachers participated in a workshop at the Livingston County EMS facility to learn how to advocate getting funding for school libraries, which have been suffering for the last decade and a half. Although the legislation has been signed into law at the federal level, states are coming up with their own plans, which are expected to be rolled out sometime next year. Kathy Lester is the past president of the Michigan Association for Media in Education, and says under No Child Left Behind, libraries were left out of funding. As a result many districts closed their libraries or asked teachers to pick up the responsibility. She says that has hurt the state because school libraries aren't supported in the state of Michigan. She says currently, only 8% of libraries have a full time certified librarian staffing them. She says the decline started in about 2003, and declining steadily since then. She says it has really hurt the state because Michigan currently ranks 41st in literacy and 47th in terms of funding for school libraries. Lester says Michigan ranks so low in its support of school libraries because the need for them hasn't been recognized. She says many districts have closed the libraries and some have distributed books to classroom teachers; over the years, the resources have been lost. The effect of closing the school libraries has far reaching effects. Lester says because students aren't learning how to use library resources, they get to college and don't know how to do research. It also affects public libraries in that a generation of young people may not understand the need for the library and support it in the future. Workshops are being held in some 30 states over the next several months to teach educators to advocate for school libraries, but Lester says it will be a long road back. The legislation is expected to be in place in Michigan sometime in 2017. (DS)

