



## Regional School Unit 63 Clifton, Eddington, and Holden

*RSU 63 engages all students in high quality academic and co-curricular programs in a safe and supportive learning environment so they may succeed in school and reach their fullest potential in life.*

### **PROJECT JUSTIFICATION**

One of the biggest challenges we face in our small, rural school district, is providing library services to our students. Our goal with this grant is to provide essential library services and programs to all of Regional School Unit 63's (RSU 63's) students and schools in collaborative, flexible, student-friendly, and inviting spaces where all aspects of literacy can be fostered, facilitated, and supported by a trained Library Media Specialist. The addition of a part-time library assistant would allow the trained librarian to teach library classes in all three of our schools. Currently, that only occurs at our middle school. In our "Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Comprehensive Needs Assessment and SAU Consolidated Plan" (doc. 1), it was identified that only "around 60% of our students are at or above grade level for reading as measured by the MEA and the NWEA" (p. 14). Some years, whole grades scored below the state and national averages for reading (p. 14). As educators, we understand students need a strong foundation in reading and literacy to be successful in their education and futures. Our district's goal is to reach 80% of all students performing at or above grade level in reading by the end of the 2022-2023 school year (p. 24). Our teaching experience and numerous studies available to the public have shown that having trained library staff and functioning libraries can help increase literacy skills for students. In "School Librarians Continue to Help Students Achieve Standards: *The Third Colorado Study (2010)*" (doc. 2), research shows that "stronger school library programs" are linked to better student scores for state assessments in reading, even helping to "close the achievement gap" for struggling students and students receiving unsatisfactory scores (p. ii, vi). "Stronger school library programs" include those that have full-time endorsed librarians; higher expenditures for library materials, programs, and services; and provide weekly library visits to students. Our challenges have been identified by test scores, students' comments and requests, conversations with teachers and parents, observations of

students during school hours as well as witnessing and experiencing these challenges as staff members (doc. 3, doc. 4).

RSU 63 falls into the ‘small’ library category as it currently only employs one trained library staff member at the middle school (Grades 5 through 8). RSU 63 serves the towns of Holden, Eddington, and Clifton, Maine. Holbrook Middle School has approximately 236 students. Holden Elementary School has 139 students in Grades 2 through 4. Eddington Elementary School serves 118 Pre-Kindergarten, Kindergarten, and Grade 1 students. The two elementary schools have never had trained, paid library staff. The school secretary at Eddington Elementary has been handling the library there for Pre-K through 1<sup>st</sup> grades. Holden Elementary has a few parent volunteers that have been helping provide basic library services to some 2<sup>nd</sup> through 4<sup>th</sup> grade classes. Our entire current operating budget for Library Services breaks down to \$28,678 for a Librarian - Ed Tech III’s wages and benefits and \$1,748 for technology and software. For library books and supplies, Holbrook Middle School’s budget is \$5,190, Holden Elementary is \$500, and Eddington Elementary is \$500, per operating year.

Approximately 34% of our PreK – 8<sup>th</sup> grade students are economically disadvantaged and qualify for free or reduced-price meals. Many do not have access to the internet or computers in their homes. Some parents lack adequate education and skills to support their families. Also, 21.4% of our students have special needs, causing an educational gap between them and their peers. The towns RSU 63 serves do not have any public libraries. This makes our school libraries and the services we provide that much more important to our families and our students’ success. For some students, our school libraries are the only place (other than their classrooms) where they can participate in additional literacy experiences.

Our students and staff will all benefit from this project. We have listened to their comments, concerns, and requests in putting together our proposal. The students will benefit the most through participation in library classes, becoming interested in literacy, increasing their literacy skills, developing a life-long love of reading and learning, collaborating with classmates and peers, and integrating and connecting what they are reading and learning with real-world experiences while participating in library programs. We will continue to listen and implement requested programming that will bring students into the library and engage them in the

components of literacy development. Teachers, staff members, and the librarian will continue to collaborate together and support one another, bridging the gap between classrooms and library services as well.

## **PROJECT WORK PLAN**

During Year One, our work plan includes hiring a Library Assistant to work two days per week to help the district-wide Library Media Specialist in overhauling the library spaces in all three schools, organizing and weeding the collections, establishing new library classes for all students, and assisting with every day maintenance of the libraries. The Library Media Specialist would begin teaching Library classes to all students (PreK to Grade 8) with instruction in library, literacy, and technology skills, as well as allowing time for book selection by students. The Library Media Specialist would collaborate with teachers to help with material selections and lessons being taught within their classrooms that could be connected to what is happening in library classes. The Library Media Specialist will plan, implement, and manage this project. School principals and the district superintendent will support, supervise, and provide input. All involved will make observations throughout the calendar year. A survey towards the end of Year One will go out to students, parents, and staff so we can evaluate our successes and weaknesses. This will help us to better plan programming and services for Year Two.

During Year Two, programs and clubs will be added based on student interests. Some suggestions have already been made – ideas such as Book Clubs, S.T.E.A.M. activities, Book Talks, Kids’ Choice Book Awards, Service Activities, and Summer Reading Programs. These additional activities will take place both during school hours and after school. A “late-bus” will be available to take students home. We will be able to use the activity materials purchased through the grant to help with programming. Those materials will be rotated and shared between all three schools. We will constantly be observing and evaluating during the year. A second survey of all involved at the end of Year Two will help determine strengths and weaknesses to make improvements for the coming school year.

The resources needed to implement this plan are: time and wages for a new part-time assistant position; time and additional wages for the Library Media Specialist (increased from an Ed Tech III level); new furnishings to make the library spaces more inviting, flexible for a multitude of uses, and student-friendly; as well as materials to help support the additional programming and clubs.

One risk is that it might be a slow process in seeing an increase in literacy skills and testing scores. It takes time to begin building a stronger foundation. Part of that could entail issues with program participation in the beginning. Based on students' and parents' comments, it is believed the additional library classes and programs/clubs will be well-received. For evaluation purposes, it will be hard to measure specifics, but we can make observations regarding participation numbers, level of interest from students while participating, knowledge gained and used with library classes and clubs, attitudes regarding reading and literacy, and eventually test scores. We will also be able to measure the number of library books circulated and the level of reading interest among the students. Improvements and increases in those categories, along with participation in new classes and programming, will classify this project as successful.

This grant will help fund the project initially and gives the RSU 63 Board of Directors time to phase funding into the district budget to maintain the program following the grant. It will also give the Board of Directors and community members time to see the difference the project makes in the education and lives of our students, helping them to see the importance of continuing to fund the library program and staff.

## **PROJECT OUTCOMES**

Students will be more engaged in building stronger foundations in literacy through library classes, learning library skills, participating in more literacy programs and developing a love for reading (doc. 5). Through this, our students will be able to apply literacy skills to the world around them and be better prepared for their futures. We can begin to bridge the gap between those receiving special services and their peers. We will also provide more literacy opportunities

for our economically disadvantaged students. As we do this, test scores will increase and help us reach our goal of 80% of our students “at or above the state and national average” in reading and comprehension.

Here in RSU 63, we fully agree with the New York Comprehensive Center when they state “extensive research shows that schools that have relied on their libraries to support student growth, specifically in the areas of literacy, information literacy, technological skills, and access to resources and equipment, have seen increased motivation, higher assessment scores, and ultimately higher graduation rates” (doc. 6, p. 3). We know this endeavor will greatly enhance our students’ learning and experiences while positively affecting their futures.



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### **SCHEDULE OF COMPLETION**

#### **YEAR 1: SEPTEMBER 2019 – AUGUST 2020**

##### **SEPTEMBER 2019**

- Purchase tables, chairs, bench, rugs, desk, white board, Epson Powerlite Projectors
- Install projectors/white board and set up/arrange new furniture
- Begin organizing collections in all three libraries
- Establish library class schedules for all schools and begin holding
- Hire and train library assistant
- Prepare and set-up laptops for student use in libraries

##### **OCTOBER 2019 – JUNE 2020**

- Implement teaching Library Skills to classes in elementary schools
- Continue with September goals as needed
- Market and advertise the libraries to the students
- Hold 2-3 Book Fairs per school
- Promote literacy through displays, class activities, and Community Read-a-Louds
- Observe students and staff - what works, what doesn't, and needs
- Begin planning for 2020 – 2021 school year additional programming/clubs

##### **MAY 2020**

- Survey students, staff, and parents - what worked, what didn't, and needs
- Evaluate Year 1- classes, building of literacy skills, and library skills, etc.

##### **MAY 2020 – AUGUST 2020**

- Determine new programs/clubs at the libraries during and after school
- Calendar new programming/clubs schedule for 2020 – 2021 school year at all three schools
- Plan objectives and activities/lessons for new programs
- Schedule 2020 – 2021 library classes for all schools

## **YEAR 2: SEPTEMBER 2020 – AUGUST 2021**

### JULY 2020

- Order supplies and equipment to be shared/rotated between schools

### SEPTEMBER 2020

- Begin sign-ups for new programs
- Begin holding scheduled library classes at all schools

### OCTOBER 2020 – MAY 2021

- Hold new programs and clubs
- Continue with all of Year 1's goals, classes, and collection development
- Hold 2-3 book fairs at each school
- Observe what worked, what didn't work, and needs
- Promote literacy

### MAY 2021

- Survey students, staff, and parents about what worked, what didn't, and needs
- Evaluate Year 2

### JUNE 2021 – AUGUST 2021

- Determine new programs/clubs at the libraries during and after school
- Calendar new programming/clubs schedule for 2021 – 2022 school year at all three schools
- Plan objectives and activities/lessons for new programs
- Schedule 2021 – 2022 library classes for all schools
- Schedule programming and clubs for 2021 – 2022 for all schools