



## NEWS RELEASE

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### **A CTU SPECIAL REPORT:**

# **Just two certified librarians left at virtually all African-American CPS high schools**

*By Chicago Teachers Union Researcher Pavlyn Jankov, with assistance from the CTU Librarians Committee*

**CHICAGO** - For the last several years the CTU and the CTU Librarians Committee have been documenting the loss of professionally staffed libraries from district schools. The district's failure to provide adequate funding has led to position closures, shifted librarians into classroom positions and left in disuse libraries that have been painstakingly built and supplied by their teachers. Constant funding precarity has also pushed out experienced and veteran librarians to seek other opportunities.

In 2012, 67 out of 97 schools had a dedicated certified teacher staffed as a librarian. After three years, half those high school librarians lost their positions or left their schools. This year, the proportion is reversed with just a third of all high schools having a librarian.

With the district's implementation of student-based budgeting alongside deep budget cuts, and its continued reckless expansion of charter schools, CPS' lack of support for neighborhood schools has led to enrollment losses and severe budget cuts across high schools. Segregated Black schools on the South and West sides have been hit especially hard, and when it comes to access to school libraries, the disparity has become startling.

The number of librarians staffed at high schools with a student population greater than 90% African American with a librarian on staff has dropped 84%, from 19 schools in 2012 to just 2 this year, at Chicago Vocational Career Academy, and Morgan Park High School. Across the 46 high schools with a majority African American student population, just 15% have librarians, and across the 28 high schools with an African American student population above 90%, just 7% do. In comparison, the dismal rate of librarian access across all CPS high schools is 32%. Such a deep disparity did not exist several years ago. In the 2012-2103 school year, 61% of high schools with a majority of African American students had a certified librarian on staff, compared to 69% across all district high schools.

## **LIBRARIANS RE-ASSIGNED TO FILL TEACHER SHORTAGE**

Some schools that have library rooms without librarians actually still have librarians – but they are assigned as full-time classroom teachers. In 2013, 58 librarians were shifted into non-librarian positions. A librarian at a southwest-side high school reports that while her school has had a vibrant and collaborative library program that circulated over 9,000 books to students last year, her duties now include teaching several English classes. However, she felt lucky, as she has had an assistant, and managed to keep the library going with funding and grants.

Librarians are indispensable to not just students, but to fellow educators. Coworkers of Ms. Tamela Chambers, a librarian at CVCA - one of the few remaining librarians in a south-side neighborhood high school, described how invaluable it is to work with her: “We continue to challenge each other with projects that stretch our creativity. Working with Ms. Chambers literally leaves me ‘jumping at the bit’. I can't wait to finish one project so that I can get into the next one.” At CVCA, they have collaborated over student projects for newscasts, documentaries presented at the Chicago Metro History Fair, service learning projects, children’s books on food deserts, collecting songs for use in AP U.S. History. Facilitating such projects are so important, Tamela said, because “libraries bridge the gap between academia and personal interests; a crucial connection that makes learning meaningful and relevant”.

Records indicate that CVCA has had a certified-librarian staffed for at least the last 15 years, a duration that many other south side high schools also shared until the last several years of budget cuts. This week, the librarian at DHW, housed at the DuSable school campus along with Bronzeville Scholastic Academy and the Dusable Leadership Academy, was notified that her position was closing. With the closure of the DuSable Library, a library that has been in continuous existence since the start of the historic DuSable school, the district shuts down the only functioning library staffed with a fully-certified librarian in a Bronzeville neighborhood high school. Sara Sayigh, the veteran librarian who received the layoff notice, explains the historic importance of school libraries: “Since 1936, DuSable has always had a librarian and during most of the time, more than one. This historic Black school is the alma mater of Harold Washington, Nat King Cole, Ella Jenkins, Timuel Black and many, many others. The library in this school always has given a sense of community to the building and it still does today. When you remove a librarian, you remove an entire service, and take something essential away from the whole building. At my school, it’s connected to the sense of the greater community.”

## **BY THE BOOK: CPS IS BROKE ON PURPOSE**

Total funding for libraries across district schools has shrunk again this year, down to just \$24 million, a cut of 20% from last year’s \$30 million. The precarity of the CPS budget constantly weighs on teachers. K.C. Boyd, a veteran and celebrated certified librarian formerly at Phillips Academy left CPS this past summer to run the libraries program across the East St Louis school district. In CPS she faced a situation familiar to many veteran educators of subjects that are not considered by central office as core curriculum with dedicated funding - annual uncertainty of a continued position. She said “I had experienced a position closing on me in 2009 and vowed that I would never go through that again... This was a painful decision because this was the first high school library I was assigned, I had re-built the library from scratch, developed an awesome collection through grants and donations and turned non-readers at Phillips into readers.”

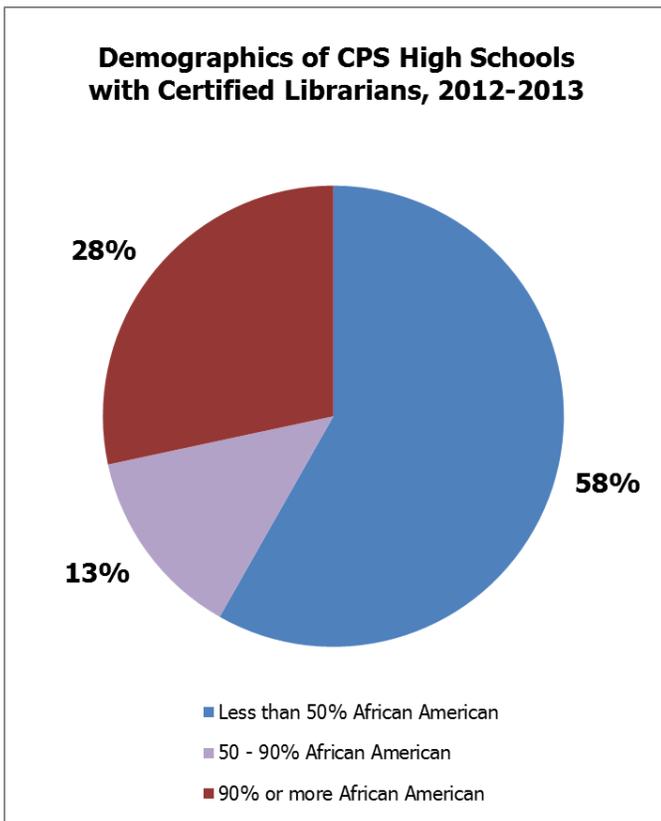
K.C. was one of several Chi School Librarians activists who met with former CPS CEO Barbara Byrd-Bennett last year to advocate for library funding and more teacher representation in curriculum development. She recounted how at the end of the meeting, it was apparent that CPS was not committed to their library programs: “Dr. Byrd-

Bennett said that the projected figures for next school year looked grim along with our positions. She paused and looked all of us sitting at the table in the eye when she said that. I caught that message loud and clear.”

K.C. is happy in her new role managing and re-building a library program for East St. Louis schools, and she expressed concern that CPS has not prioritized libraries, especially in communities that have suffered disinvestment: “I think it is appalling that the south side of Chicago, in particular greater Bronzeville, the home of the Black Migration from the South has so few sitting certified librarians.”

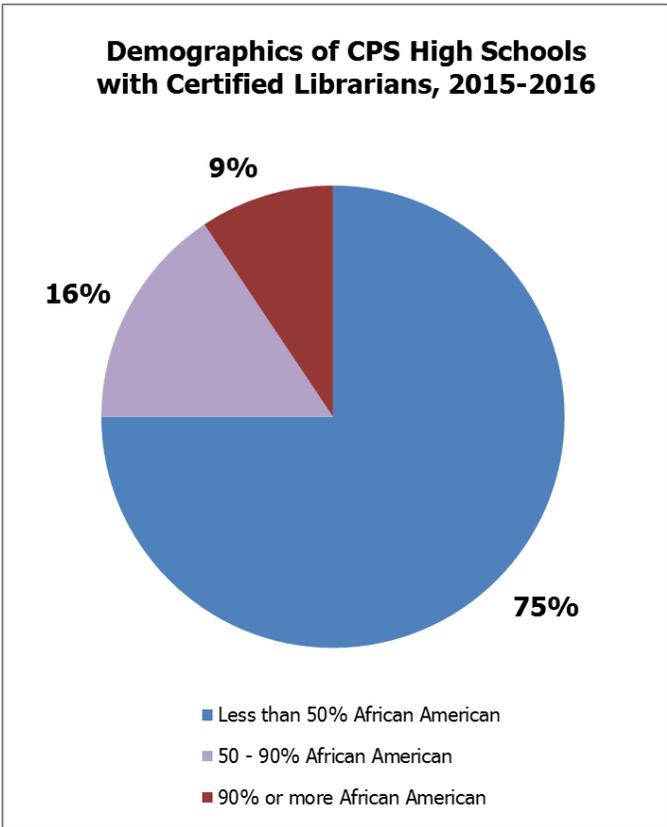
The Chicago Teachers Union is committed to fighting for sustainable resources for CPS, for the district to re-prioritize our neighborhood high schools, and for dedicated funding for a certified librarian at every school.

### ACCOMPANYING GRAPHICS BELOW:

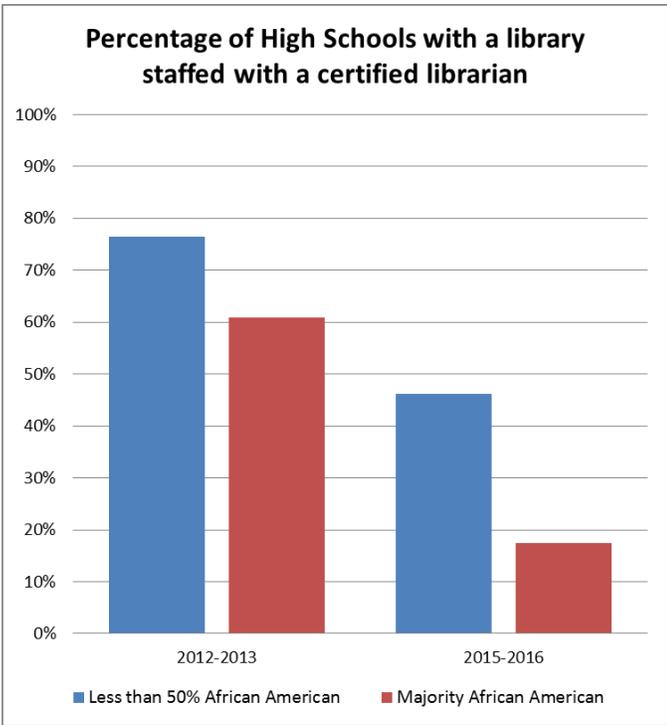


**Figure 1. In 2012, majority Black schools represented a little over 40% of schools staffed with librarians, a little less than their proportion across all schools, which was 47% in 2012.**

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**Figure 2.** In 2015, schools that were majority Black represented just 25% of schools that had a certified librarian on staff.



**Figure 3.** CPS High Schools have a had a steep decline in librarians, but especially at schools with a majority African American student population

# The State of CPS School Libraries

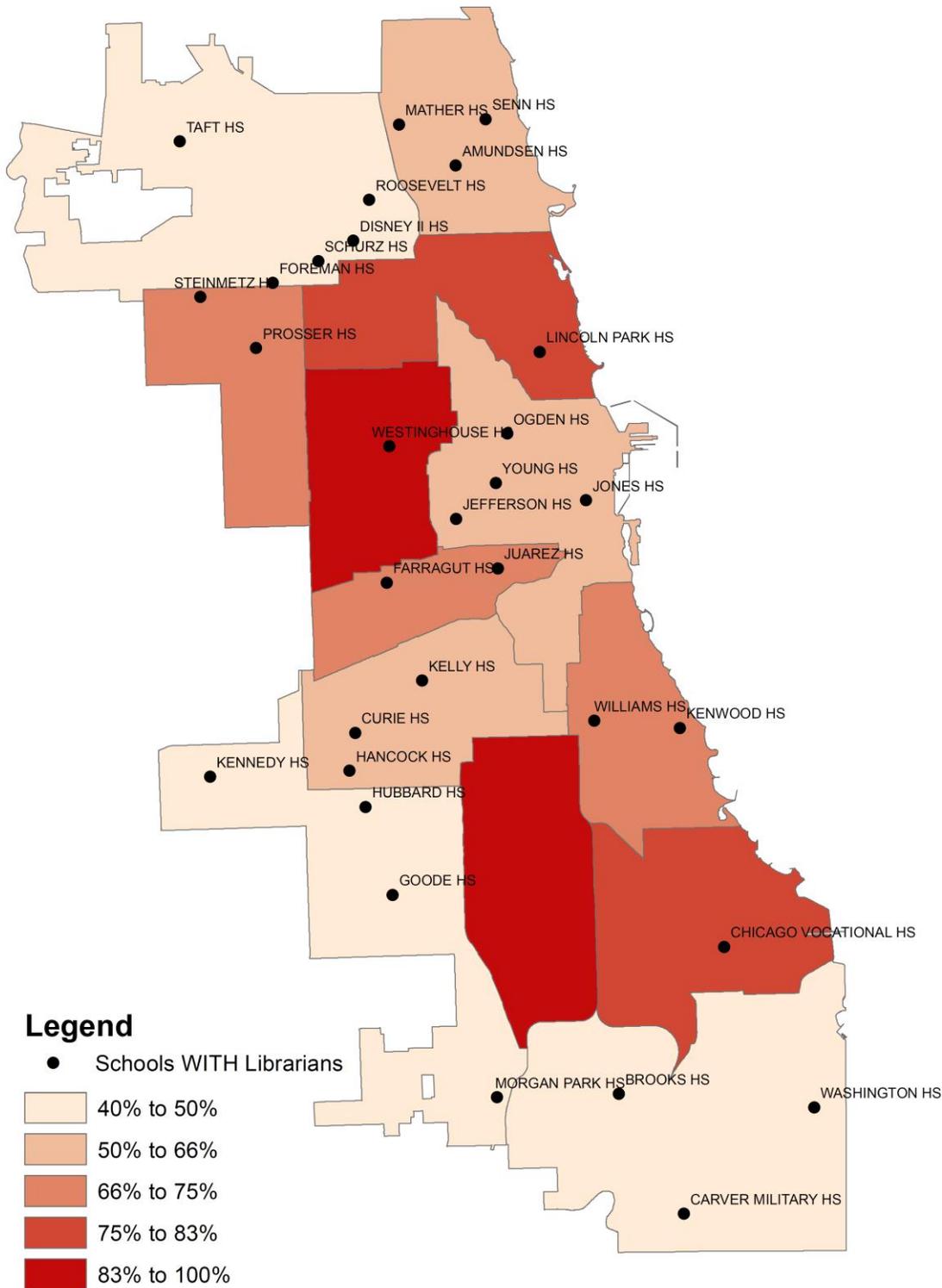


Figure 4. There are large pockets throughout Chicago lacking a high school with a staffed librarian, but the need is most dire in areas such as Englewood and on the West Side