

Dear Superintendent Balch,

I am writing to formally request a one-year, unpaid, leave of absence from my position as Library Media Specialist at Easthampton High School for the 2026-2027 school year.

After careful reflection, I have come to the difficult decision that stepping away for a period of time is necessary for my professional well-being and long-term effectiveness as an educator. While I remain deeply committed to the students and staff I serve, several ongoing challenges within the school environment have made it increasingly difficult to fulfill my job description in a way that provides purpose to my role and benefits the literacy needs of our students.

My most pressing concern is the absence of a clearly enforced and consistent bell-to-bell cell phone policy that doesn't fall on individual teacher enforcement. The library, by its nature, is intended to be a space for focused reading, research, and academic work. Without a structured policy that is applied uniformly across the building, maintaining that environment has become a significant and daily challenge. Students frequently use their phones to take photos of other students' work in order to complete their own, use AI providers to complete their work, engage in bullying and harassment of other students and communicate inappropriately with their peer network and various family members, oftentimes using FaceTime.

Additionally, the current block schedule has presented ongoing logistical difficulties. The extended class periods leave essentially no time for the library to be used on an inquisitive or teaching basis. Students have four 84 minute blocks of classes with 23 minutes allotted for lunch. This leaves no time for students to access the library for literacy in a self-determined way. Should we transition to a shorter block schedule or a flex block schedule, I would likely have the opportunity to teach a literacy block or to establish book groups and foster more independent reading.

I want to be clear that this request is not made out of a lack of dedication to Easthampton High School or its students. Rather, I hope that this leave will provide me the opportunity to rest, reflect, and return with renewed energy and perspective. I also hope that during this time, the district will be able to address the structural challenges I have outlined above.

I am happy to devote a portion of my leave time to collaborative planning with EHS staff and administration, as well as make site visits to comparable schools to see how they are navigating the challenges of running and maintaining high school libraries in our current educational environment. I strongly believe that there is a future for the EHS library to play a vital role in future generations rediscovering a love for reading and the community that it builds. I would like to be a part of that.

Thank you sincerely for your time and consideration. I welcome the opportunity to discuss this request at your earliest convenience.

Respectfully,
Nicholas Ames