

Penny MacCormack

"Information helps you to see that you're not alone. That there's somebody in Mississippi and somebody in Tokyo who all have wept, who've all longed and lost, who've all been happy. So the library helps you to see, not only that you are not alone, but that you're not really any different from everyone else."

— Maya Angelou

Often when I am asked to describe in words something I am passionate about, I look to Dr. Angelou for inspiration. Since reading this interview in a 2010 conversation with the New York Public Library, her words have stayed with me.

Libraries for me have always served as an anchor of stability in each of the communities where I have lived and a personal sanctuary where I can explore, learn and study without judgment and in peace.

Before becoming superintendent of schools in Montclair, I spent much time in Hartford, Connecticut, where I worked and completed my doctoral studies. As a colonial city, established in 1636, there are many amazing and historic structures and buildings to appreciate, such as the Wadsworth Athenaeum, which is the oldest operating art museum in the United States and the Connecticut Statehouse.

For me, the building that had a truly profound impact was the amazing Homer Babbidge Library at my alma mater, the University of Connecticut.

The moment you walk through the front door of the library, the environment and climate drives curiosity. I spent hours in that library getting ready for classes, searching for information, and through a diverse array of books explored new worlds and different ideas. The building's vast resources, which are available to everyone, are an example of the great importance of educational equity and the great learning that can be accomplished when everyone is provided with opportunity. Now, as a teacher and superintendent, I understand that Babbidge was more than just a place that helped my education, it has been a model for how we can build the most successful climates and environments for learning.

Coming to Montclair has provided me with an even deeper and more unique appreciation for libraries. Through my experience with parents, teachers and students, and integrating myself within the community, I have found the Montclair Public Library is a symbol of this town's commitment toward literacy and the importance of community engagement.

Both the Main Library and the Bellevue Library are more than just community institutions; they are focal points for all who work and reside here.

It would be hard to find a member of our community who does not have a deep appreciation and passion for our libraries. Like having a great teacher, our learning and social experiences in these two libraries, regardless of age, stay with us. It is something all deeply value and are proud to be a part of.

The thriving institutions of our libraries showcase how the activism of our parents and community leaders is what make Montclair especially unique. Beyond the resources and beauty, each of our libraries provides our community, each is a brick and mortar tribute to the passion of our community.

Penny MacCormack is the superintendent of schools in Montclair.