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*Learning through
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California School Library Media Programs: Does Your School Measure Up?

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S ince the beginning of 2000, more and more evidence continues to mount that a quality library media program does make a difference in academic achievement. Recently, full research projects have been published in Colorado, Alaska, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Oregon.[1] In the state of California, the three-year investment of $28 per student for library materials is starting to resurrect school library media collections and encourage more and more districts to have credentialed library media teachers on staff. These monies, coupled with other funds for classroom collections and for digital high schools, are making for exciting times. We are actually poised to emerge from below-third-world status to something comparable to other states in the United States. And if the political clout holds out, we may achieve exemplary status in school libraries — a position California last held in 1920!

In addition to more money to spend, there is a new crop of library media teachers being educated to replace the previous generation of professionals. These newbies come with a new vision of the library media program as a collaborative force in raising achievement through reading, enhanced learning through technology, and information literacy. We are poised in many districts to provide quality information resources, not just during the school day in one room of the school, but throughout the school and into the home 24 hours a day, seven days a week. We might call our library media programs a ubiquitous information system, a vital information portal, a high-tech teaching/learning partner.

Yet, there are many frontiers to conquer in a state like

ours. We must all push very hard to achieve a century's worth of progress in a decade. The biggest challenges are at the elementary level where resistance to change is the toughest and where the contribution of a professional library media teacher is relatively unknown. It is ironic that the most resistance exists at the level where achievement could be affected the most.

In a state as rich and multicultural as ours, there are gross inequities. These inequities must be addressed if we are to provide the kind of educational boost our own children need. Why should we import talent to the state when our own children deserve the best opportunities?

> *California's children rank last in the nation in opportunities to receive assistance from a school library media professional.*

The purpose of this article is to explore a number of important equity issues as they relate to technology and school library media programs. These issues are stated negatively since they are statewide; however, they may or may not be an issue in a local school. Thus, the author has provided the reader with a reflective checklist for the local school to make some judgments about the local conditions and to provide a springboard to local and statewide discussions.

Consider a few of the most alarming inequities as outlined on these pages.

California Discriminates by Age Level

Very few elementary schoolchildren have the support of a professional library media teacher as compared with mid-

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1. For summaries of all the studies plus continuous updating of the research, check *http://www.lrs.org*, the address for the Colorado State Library.

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dle school and high school students. California's children rank last in the nation in opportunities to receive assistance from a school library media professional. At the elementary level, library media teachers are a major shot in the arm to any reading program. They provide large collections, easy access, rotating classroom collections, encouragement for sustained silent reading (SSR) and reading aloud, and reading motivation as only one part of their role. At the very time when California youngsters need every literacy support they can get, the best we can do is provide untrained paraprofessionals, if there is anyone in the "library" at all. It's like trying to run a hospital with a nurse, a school with the school secretary, a football team with a volunteer parent. In none of the national research have programs with only paraprofessional staff been shown to make a difference in academic achievement!

Reflective checklist for your school:

✓ There is a full-time credentialed library media teacher in the library media center.
✓ Support personnel include paraprofessional and technical persons.
✓ One of the major programmatic thrusts of the elementary library media program is to build avid and capable readers. This focus continues into middle and high school years.

California Discriminates in Access to Reading Materials

Enough studies have been done in this state to show that thousands and thousands of children of poorer parents have very little or no reading materials in their homes. This means that the only hope a child from a poorer family has depends on the amount of reading material that can be had from the classroom and the school library media center. In richer homes, parents and grandparents buy lots of books so that the home is a print-rich environment. Yet in the poorer communities, children are lucky if they can check out a single book to take home once a week. The ocean of illiteracy is being fed with a teaspoon. It's a joke; an afront; a crime. When every child and teen in the school can have 15–20 books by his/her bedside table at one time, then perhaps, perhaps we can say we are really attacking the reading problems of this state. The $28 per child from the legislature is helping. It will have to help for a very long time if every child in this state can have all the exciting and enticing reading materials he/she can consume. It makes little difference to have the children of the state skilled and drilled and drilled and drilled if they have no books to read. Even with the growing collections funded by the state, children are no better off if they can't get them away from the clutches of adults who are guarding them.

Reflective checklist for your school:

✓ State monies are being used to buy reading materials young people actually want to read.
✓ The entire school is focused on literacy for every student.
✓ The school compensates for few reading materials in the home by providing unlimited amounts of books to create a print-rich environment.

✓ Rotating classroom collections from library media centers provide a constant supply of interesting reading materials at the student's elbow.
✓ Library media center policies allow unlimited access to reading materials
✓ SSR is a part of every student's day.
✓ All students are "read aloud to" every day.

The Digital Divide Is Alive and Well in California

■ *Lack of connections to information systems.* National goals have been in place for the past 10 years to connect every school and classroom to the Internet. Now, with the advent of wireless networks, every learner can be connected at almost any location throughout the school. If access is limited or nonexistent at home, then schools and public libraries have the responsibility of providing that access through extended hours or other programs designed to connect every child and teen. In a time of economic slowdown, it may be a perfect time to invest in our own industry to build, retool, and upgrade access.

Reflective checklist for your school:

✓ Each library media center contains numerous connections for students to the information networks or wireless access from any location within the center.
✓ Every classroom contains numerous connections for students to the information networks or wireless access from any spot within the classroom.
✓ Information systems of the library media center stream into the classrooms and into the home.
✓ Every year, the percentage of connectivity by students pushes toward 100 percent on a 24-hours-per-day, seven-days-a-week basis.

■ *Lack of connections to quality information on information networks.* We do no young person a favor by just connecting him/her to a billion Internet sites when 95 percent are useless. Library media teachers have been exercising their expertise to build smaller but high-quality information systems that support the curriculum of the school and the individual needs of young people. Using their state monies, some library media teachers already have their core of online databases, selected Internet sites, and targeted multimedia in place. There are a growing number of information portals being constructed by library media teachers that students value as "the first and best place to access for information needs." However, coverage in the state is spotty. Theoretically, the Library of California is attempting to provide every citizen of the state with a core of high-quality information via information networks. Many states already have these information cores funded by the state legislature for every citizen (Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, North Carolina, just to name a few). Must we always be last?

Reflective checklist for your school:

✓ The library media center has an information portal connecting young people to the highest-quality information sources.
✓ Online resources streaming from the library media center contain online databases, periodicals, reference sources, and selected high-quality Internet sites.

✓ Online information sources support the curriculum and student information needs.

The Gap between Information Literates and Overwhelmed Information Illiterates Is Alive and Well in California

■ *Those who do not know how to handle the information glut.* It is a simple matter to drown everyone in a glut of irrelevant and inappropriate information sources. For decades, library media teachers struggled to help young people locate any information on topics they were researching. Today, a simple query of a database might easily produce 30–50+ "hits." Thus concern for teaching information location has shifted to teaching information handling techniques. What constitutes quality information? How do I know when I have "enough" information I can trust? How can I evaluate, sort, and then use a variety of information sources to advantage? Too few California young people are being taught such vital skills.

> *If access is limited or nonexistent at home, then schools and public libraries have the responsibility of providing that access through extended hours or other programs to connect every child and teen.*

Reflective checklist for your school:

✓ Every young person knows how to access and locate topical information in various online information systems.
✓ Every young person is equipped with information-handling techniques to find "enough" quality information for the task at hand.
✓ Every young person knows how to use information sources to build a deep understanding of the topic at hand.
✓ Every young person can use a wide variety of technologies to communicate the results of his/her investigations to an appropriate audience.
✓ Every young person can successfully reflect on the process and the products he/she has created.

■ *Those who are not organized investigators.* The national guidelines for information literacy picture a young person who can take a topic, a question, or a problem and build a quest, locate quality information, understand and assimilate the information, organize it logically, communicate it effectively, and assess both the product and the process. A few of California's young people are learning these research skills; many are not. Survival in the world of information depends on sound inquiry skills. California's young people deserve a chance to compete with the rest of the nation's children.

Reflective checklist for your school:

✓ Every young person is equipped with an information literacy model that provides the structure for doing investigative work in an information-rich environment.
✓ Young people are encouraged to develop their own information literacy models that match their own learning styles.
✓ Each year, young researchers become more and more sophisticated as organized investigators.

■ *Those who are not good citizens in an information technology environment.* Part of enjoying the benefits of information technology is learning how to be a productive and ethical participant. Rules of conduct, like traffic rules, work to the benefit of all. Safety rules are particularly important as are the rules about intellectual property rights versus fair use. Too few of California's young people know the rules, let alone act like responsible online citizens.

Reflective checklist for your school:

✓ Every young person knows how to help keep the information system up and running 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
✓ Every young person understands the concept of intellectual property and plagiarism behaving appropriately.
✓ Every young person understands how to be safe in an online information environment and how to handle difficult situations.

■ *The use vs. abuse of technology in schools puts every school in a precarious position.* Ask young people what the most common use of computers in schools is and you are likely to hear "gaming" either as the top use or near the top. Chatting and e-mailing friends is often listed as a close second. A young person who knows little else about information technology is at risk.

Reflective checklist for your school:

✓ Every young person is so engaged in use of information for educational purposes, there is little time for gaming and chatting.
✓ If there is any time for gaming and chatting during school hours, every student understands how to participate safely. •