

School Library Journal's

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Q U A R T E R L Y

Assessment and Evaluation





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A True Assessment of Your Program's Value

In our lifetimes, school libraries have evolved from book collections to multimedia repositories to high-tech information centers operating 24 hours a day/7 days a week and reaching into every classroom, into the home, and now to students' personal digital assistants.

Research involving nearly 4,000 school libraries in 11 states confirms that dynamic library media programs make a significant difference in students' academic achievement. (For an in-depth look at the research, visit www.lmcsource.com.) However, school libraries run the risk of being perceived as irrelevant if they continue to be viewed as warehouses of outdated books and reference materials or temporary daycare centers for students whose teachers are busy planning lessons.

How do we support library media programs now that educators are being asked to prove the school library's relevance to student achievement? This edition of *Learning Quarterly* recommends that you base the success of your library media program on three sources of information:

- Organizational Level Data: measures library output (circulation, size of collection, etc.)
- Teaching Unit Level Data: demonstrates how your instructional lessons contribute to classroom learning
- Learner Level Data: measures the learning gains of individual students

Traditional reports that assess the library's impact on organizational objectives typically describe the size of the collection, the number of computers, the size of its network, and the number of staff members. While this is important information, it fails to provide a picture of how the program contributes to the school's overall learning goals. Measuring the impact of the library program on classroom units will show your administrators how teachers are beginning to incorporate technology and library information resources into their teaching units. Administrators will see how the library program, rich in information literacy and technology-laden, benefits stu-

dents and serves as a critical training ground for teaching faculty to utilize technology in their instruction.

Steven Montgomery, Nancy Magee, and Bonnie Lange (pp. 4-5) explain the positive impact that collaboration and assessment can have on teaching and instruction. This kind of information specifically distinguishes, for the principal, the relevance of the library media center to the school.

A third source of data, and arguably the most important, focuses on the student. The emphasis is on what the learner knows, as demonstrated through various assessment instruments. Librarians have overlooked such measures because they've focused their attention on making their collections open and accessible to the entire school. It's only when school librarians and teachers build learning experiences together that the amazing benefits of the library media program are fully realized.

Collecting data from all three sources—at the organizational, teaching, and student levels—contributes to a complete picture of the influence media centers have in schools. Armed with this data, we can see how school librarians affect the quality of teaching and its direct impact on learning. What is measured is valued, and data from the three levels will not only change our *view* of what is happening, but it will change what *is* happening. And we have more concrete evidence than ever before that the school library is, indeed, "the heart of the school."

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