

Principal Leadership

MIDDLE LEVEL EDITION

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Leading the Way

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NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SECONDARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

Creating a Digital-Age School Library

The advent of technology in schools has changed the mission of the school library from a central repository of materials to a rich information system that can successfully drive student achievement.

By **CONNIE CHAMPLIN, DAVID LOERTSCHER, AND B. J. EIB**



In a time when the pressure on school achievement is at an all-time high, administrators have realized that every component of the educational system must be reexamined to ensure that it is delivering at optimum levels. The advent of technology in schools has changed the mission of the school library from a central repository of materials to a rich information system that extends out into the classroom and into the homes of students and teachers.

Research from 15 states (for further information, see www.davidvl.org/research.html) indicates that a library media program can significantly push student achievement when certain components are in place. This article will spotlight the essential components that two exemplary high school library media centers (LMCs)—Springfield Township High School in

Erdenheim, PA, (Joe Roy, principal, and Joyce Valenza, library media specialist) and Hunderton Central Regional High School in Flemington, NJ, (Lisa Brady, principal, and Harlene Rosenberg, library media specialist)—have used to bring their libraries into the digital age.

Four Essential Components

Four essential elements have allowed the LMCs of Springfield Township and Hunderton Central Regional to drive student achievement: the digital school library, the library media specialist as an information coach, the library media specialist as a learning consultant, and the library media specialist as a reading guru.

The digital school library. A high-quality digital school library should be available to teachers and students on a 24-hour basis and include:

- Links to major research projects that the school is undertaking. This saves time by focusing on only the best information and meets the needs of students better than any textbook could.
- Electronic databases that provide high-quality information on almost any topic. Although these databases can be expensive, they are far superior to the morass of confusing information and misinformation on the Internet. Many states—such as Ohio (www.infohio.org/Educator/educator.html), New Jersey (www2.njstatelib.org/njlib/databases/index.htm), and Indiana (www.inspire.net)—provide schools with free access to electronic databases. If your state supplies electronic databases, include a link from your school's Web site to those resources.
- Access to the print and multimedia collection of the LMC catalog from the classroom or the home.
- Tutorials and tips for students and professional development for faculty members.
- Links to other libraries and information sources.

Connie Champlin, a former teacher and school library media specialist, is an author and library media technology consultant. David Loertscher is a professor of library and information science at San Jose State University. This article was edited by B. J. Eib (beib@indiana.edu), an independent consultant focused on leadership, professional development, and technology.

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The library media specialist as an information coach. The library media specialist acts as an information coach for students and faculty members by teaching them about such topics as searching for information the Internet; plagiarism; the ethical use of networks; and the use of popular information tools (e.g., search engines, spreadsheets, word processors, and graphing software). The role of information coach can be performed collaboratively with teachers to teach students key elements of the research process, such as finding, evaluating, and using information. The library media specialist also serves as an information coach by working with students and teachers through such popular activities as WebQuests (an inquiry-oriented activity that uses information drawn from the Internet), I-Search papers, inquiry projects, experiments, surveys, and real-world projects.

The library media specialist as learning consultant. Library media specialists serve as learning consultants who collaborate with teachers to build exciting, high-level learning experiences in an information- and technology-rich environment. This collaboration should include the following steps:

- Deciding on the state standards that are to be met
- Building assessments, such as rubrics, that measure student success
- Creating activities that will engage every student and take advantage of the technological resources of the LMC
- Team teaching the unit with the teacher
- Assessing student success for future collaboration activities.

The library media specialist as reading guru. Library media specialists still serve as reading gurus at the high school level and should serve the following functions:

- Encourage recreational reading, particularly for students whose first

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language is not English or those who are not reading at grade level

- Provide reading materials to students who can't read or understand textbooks
- Celebrate reading events and participate in reading initiatives or incentive programs
- Work to create a reading community where reading is viewed as "cool"
- Ensure that every teacher has a classroom collection of library materials that regularly rotates out of the LMC collection.

What About the Principal?

In both sample schools, the administrative team plays a significant role in financial support and leadership. In both schools, the administrative team believes in the power of a library media center program to boost student achievement, chooses the very best professionals to staff their center; sets high expectations for student

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achievement performance, provides the financial resources to build and maintain a high-quality information system, and monitors the LMC on a regular basis to ensure that faculty members and students are making the most of the LMC.

A digital-age LMC is quite different than its 20th century counterpart but every school can create one. Although financing is an essential ingredient, the dedication of the library media staff is equally important. Roy believes that the LMC

serves as the academic hub of his entire school and the one-on-one work the library media specialist performs with teachers and the school's support of inquiry-based research across the curriculum are major factors in the success of the LMC. Libraries are too expensive and important to have low-performing personnel.

According to Roy, "The media specialist is critical to the process and therefore must be knowledgeable about the research/information

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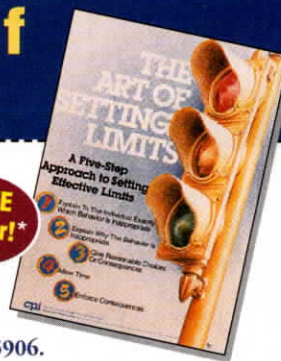
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literacy, the curriculum, and have strong collaborative skills.” If you have low-performing personnel in your LMC, we suggest enrolling your best teacher into a LMC educational program, installing that person in the LMC, supporting them, and watching the results roll in. A great professional in the LMC will affect every student and every teacher. Why settle for anything less? **PL**

Additional Resources

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