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THE JOURNAL FOR SCHOOL LIBRARY PROFESSIONALS

april 2014

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0 9 2 1915 *****FIRM 84103
29591 TLPB 42373
DAVID V LOERTSCHER
123 E 2ND AVE APT 1106
SALT LAKE CITY UT 84103-4763
DEC 14



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Ewa McGrail and Kevin Powell note the virtually endless amount and types of information available today, including such digital artifacts as texts, photographs, and video clips of tools and objets d'art of the past. Citing the need for curation, the authors offer high-quality websites with digitized artifacts online; recommend social bookmarking sites that can be used to curate online collections of artifacts; and recommend projects that can encourage authentic research and thinking about artifacts and connect their students to the historical fiction and nonfiction they read.

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ADVISORYBOARD

Susan D. Ballard
Simmons College, GSLIS, Boston, MA
susan.ballard@simmons.edu

Gail Bush
National-Louis University, Chicago, IL
gail.bush@nl.edu

Connie Champlin
Library Consultant
cchamp@iquest.net

Rosemary Chance
Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, TX
rx001@shsu.edu

Bill Derry
Assistant Director, Westport Library
bderry@westportlibrary.org

Ray Doiron
University of Prince Edward Island, PEI
raydoiron@upe.ca

Jean Donham
University of Northern Iowa
jean.donham@uni.edu

Rose Dotten
University of Toronto Schools, Toronto, ON

Michele Farquharson
Kerrisdale Elementary School, Vancouver, BC
mfarquhars@vsb.bc.ca

Carrie Gardner
Kutztown University, PA
carrie.gardner@gmail.com

Sara Kelly Johns
Lake Placid Middle/Senior High School, NY
johns@northnet.org

Doug Johnson
Mankato Area Public Schools, MN
djohns1@isd77.k12.mn.us

Liz Kerr
Ontario Library Association, Toronto, CA
lkerr@accessola.com

Erlene Bishop Killeen
Stoughton Area School District, WI
erlene.killeen@stoughton.k12.wi.us

Marcia Mardis
Florida State University, FL
mmardis@fsu.edu

Joy McGregor
Charles Sturt University, Australia
joymal@bigpond.net.au

Jo Ellen Misakian
Fresno Pacific University, CA
jmisakian@fresno.edu

Betty Morris
Jacksonville State University, AL
bmorris@jsu.edu

Barbara Weathers
Duchesne Academy, Houston, TX
Barbara.Weathers@duchesne.org

Ann Carlson Weeks
University of Maryland
acweeks@umd.edu

Nancy Zimmerman
University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC
npz@gwm.sc.edu

Feature articles are blind refereed by members of the Advisory Board.

Guidelines for authors available online at: www.teacherlibrarian.com

is committed to collaborative partnerships for improved student learning through thought-provoking and challenging feature articles, strategies for effective advocacy, regular review columns, and critical analyses of management and programming issues.

Founder Ken Haycock
Publisher Edward Kurdyla
Coeditor David Loertscher
Coeditor Elizabeth "Betty" Marcoux
editor@teacherlibrarian.com

COLUMNISTS

Reid Goldsborough, Sara Catherine Howard, Larry Johnson, Erlene Killeen, Annette Lamb, David Loertscher, Elizabeth "Betty" Marcoux, Kathleen Odean, Mark Ray, Joe Sutliff Sanders, Joanne Troutner, Betty Winslow

EDITORIAL OFFICES TEACHER LIBRARIAN

The Journal for School Library Professionals
Box 958

Bowie, MD 20718-0958

Phone: 301-805-2191

Fax: 301-805-2192

E-mail: editor@teacherlibrarian.com

Web site: www.teacherlibrarian.com

ADVERTISING REPRESENTATIVE

The YGS Group,
3650 West Market Street • York, PA 17404
717.505.9701
E-mail: info@theygsgroup.com

DESIGN AND LAYOUT

Enterline Design Services, LLC
www.enterlinedesign.com

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SUBSCRIPTIONS

\$60 per year. Bulk rates to one address available.

Subscriptions, Teacher Librarian

Box 958 • Bowie, MD 20718-0958

Phone: 301.805.2191 • Fax: 301.805.2192

Subscription inquiries e-mail:

subscriptions@teacherlibrarian.com

Or subscribe online at: www.teacherlibrarian.com

Teacher Librarian is owned by
E L Kurdyla Publishing LLC.

U.S. POSTMASTER: Teacher Librarian (ISSN 1481-1782 USPS #9-407) (Publications Mail Registration Number 40028609) is published bimonthly except July/August for \$60.00 per year by E L Kurdyla Publishing LLC, Box 958, Bowie, MD 20718-0958. Periodicals postage paid at Bowie, MD, and at additional mailing offices.

ADDRESS CORRECTIONS: Send address corrections (covers only) to Subscriptions, Teacher Librarian, Box 958, Bowie, MD 20718-0958.

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Excellence

David V. Loertscher and Elizabeth "Betty" Marcoux

This issue highlights many great educational opportunities for students today and illustrates how teacher librarians can make a difference in the quality of students' learning experiences.

This issue isn't about having a large budget or a large infrastructure—it is about what can be done in your particular situation. There are illustrations to help you decide what might work, as well as suggestions for how to improve education for students.

We hope you will take the time to read about the various award winners discussed in these articles and consider what part of their programs you might want to incorporate into yours. We show you how to start small and start friendly and include examples of what might happen if you do. We discuss individual school progress and exemplary programs, as well as district programs. We take you through all of the grades in schools today and even have examples of how things might look in both private and public education. These professionals are just like all of us—they work hard at what they do, and some even get recognized for that hard work. Many of us don't, but we still work hard.

Hunsaker and Haslam-Odoardi present us with an inquiry model that they use in their work with gifted and talented students. It is a model that works well with all students and the Common Core. The scenario they present involves concerted collaboration between the classroom and the school library. Davies takes the concepts of the virtual learning commons and the physical learning commons and meshes them together into one philosophical understanding. She shows us how to do this by sharing her successful experiences.

Bentheim has a well-illustrated article that is the next in her series of articles about her yearlong effort to transform her traditional library setting into a learning commons setting. She offers ideas about encouraging collaboration, participating in activities, and examining the curriculum in general.

Six teacher librarians from the Kettle Moraine School District in Wisconsin describe their district-wide effort to transform traditional school libraries/



"All respondents appear to be active, engaged professionals who have a passion for what they do."

The Badge of Excellence

What Are the Characteristics of Winners?

ELIZABETH "BETTY" MARCOUX AND DAVID V. LOERTSCHER

On a regular basis, lists of exemplary schools, teachers, and students cross our morning survey of what's happening.

Various organizations, groups, states, and even school districts are striving for excellence based on some criteria they are promoting. We often wonder if the library learning commons is part of excellence beyond what we ourselves recognize in our profession. So, as editors, we have often put out calls asking our own community if they even know that their school, teachers, or students are being recognized and what, if any, impact they have had on "pushing toward excellence." Sadly, we often get little or no response to such queries, and that leaves us puzzled: Do teacher librarians take note of and support local progress toward excellence? In our attendance at conferences other than library conferences, we often ask amazing speakers if they have the support from their school libraries and teacher librarians. We are amazed at the low level of recognition. So while that is a negative, we continue to search for and recognize teacher librarians who are at the center of teaching and learning in their schools and communities.

Recently, the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (<http://www.p21.org>) published a list of schools they considered exemplary. These schools were identified by their use of twenty-first-century educational practices and were able to demonstrate them. These schools provide educators and communities with a variety of models to replicate and offer policymakers and P21 State Partners local examples to encourage their support.

Many of these teacher librarians are pioneers, pushing for more and better engagement with learning in their schools. They find that much of the community is often quite traditional in thoughts about the school library and spend much time working toward a more updated concept of what a quality school library program can offer. From the transformation of a school library program or facility to their roles, they work on making what they and the program do relevant and meaningful to all learners. Yes, they find their work exhausting but also exhilarating, as it is so engaging and positively impacts the students. There is passion here.

We wondered what the teacher librarian's and school library program's contributions are in these schools. We also wondered if other schools should be on this list. So we asked the following questions and recommended that every teacher librarian ask the same of themselves:

1. Please describe the reason you believe your school was selected as a twenty-first-century exemplar program.
2. Were you involved in this work in any way?
3. What have you done to promote and support this recognition?
4. What would you consider your most significant contribution to teaching and learning in your school?
5. How has the rise of technology affected what you contribute to teaching and learning?
6. How would you like to see technology improve in your library?
7. Have you considered transforming your library into a learning commons?
8. Is there anything else you wish to tell us about your school library and school?

Before we begin with their comments, let's review a couple of things. We were quite hopeful about receiving responses to the initial query from teacher librarians at these schools. However, in the end, many didn't respond for a variety of reasons. In our opinion, the questions reflect many issues that suggest a kind of leadership totally possible in our profession. Some of the respondents are highly qualified, ranging from working concertedly in technology and training to having lots of background as well as current connections to

INTEL SCIENCE COMPETITORS AND THE LIBRARY

the field and what is happening today. All respondents appear to be active, engaged professionals who have a passion for what they do. Many are risk takers, exploring what will work not only in their schools but in the profession as well. We would also state that we personally know of many teacher librarians in schools that didn't receive this recognition. They are stellar professionals, recognized within the field but in need of recognition as an integral part of their schools.

The teacher librarians that responded saw their schools as committed to learning and exploring how to do this most effectively. For instance, Teresa Pfeifer stated, "Our school is deeply committed to the idea that your zip code doesn't determine your capacity for achievement." The schools they work at often embrace many different initiatives, from STEM to STEAM. Barry Hanrahan commented, "The library is the heart of the school, and my work in all subject areas reflects that vision." They saw their teachers as fellow educators involved in the learning and teaching of each student. Stephanie Griffith noted, "By working together, we are a stronger faculty." While some were more financially connected than others, they all believed in implementing strong learning programs for all kids, regardless of socioeconomic background.

The libraries in most of these schools are largely a part of why the distinguishing of the school for exemplary status was given. Griffith related, "We are trying to prepare our students for jobs that don't even exist right now." The fact that she saw the school library as part of the "we" is significant. Teacher librarians have direct and support roles in their schools, often being the center of much work. Supportive and engaged, as well as encouraging, administrators are often mentioned as vital to their work and connection to the schools. Pfeiffer stated, "We have a dynamic, inspiring principal." From QUEST (Question, Understand, Evidence, Synthesis, Tell) to CREW (a small group of students that meet daily for educational and social support), they work to involve themselves with the school's objectives. CREW, in Pfeiffer's own words, is "a family within the school." In promoting

Is the library learning commons touching the lives of students who are competing in national contests of any sort? We put a question out on AASL forum about the Intel Science Competition and received a prompt reply back from Lauri J. Vaughan, Upper School Campus Librarian, The Harker School, in San Jose, California. Here is her reply:

Harker had 10 Intel winners this year and 1 semi-finalist. We do not work directly with these kids in their specific research, but we do work indirectly with them.

Why we don't work directly:

In my opinion, we don't work with these kids directly because of the nature of their research. They are generally in labs, designing experiments and collecting original data. Consequently, the kind of research they are doing is less connected with digging into commentary and analysis about the field they are investigating than crunching results of experiments. At Harker, the most of these students are enrolled in a research class, designed specifically for the Intel and Siemens award competitions and taught by a science teacher. Because the nature of citation in the sciences is so varied (seems like every discipline and sub-discipline has its own citation style), we rarely help with that aspect either.

How we are indirectly involved:

It would be impossible to attend three years at Harker (or more if a student is enrolled from K or 6) and not enjoy participation in several classes that provide support for research in fine arts, history, and literature classes as well as a science. The levels of librarian involvement varies significantly from teacher to teacher, as well as department to department, but we are embedded enough that we touch every student often (regarding a plethora of info lit skills) during the three years of study before they would embark upon this kind of research.

Many of the students who submit research projects have also submitted short articles to *The Triple Helix*, an online magazine of science research pursued by undergraduates. Harker enjoys the only high school chapter of *The Triple Helix*, and I am embedded in this project. Every year, I direct kids to sources, training them to use Vancouver style citation and edit peer writing.

I doubt that most of the students who participate in the Intel competition or other national research would feel their work has not been supported by the information literacy skills they've learned along the way. Certainly, the science department is aware and grateful for this indirect support. Our department chair, Anita Chetty, frequently offers us her thanks both publicly and privately.

the recognition of their school, many have taken to various technology links to further this recognition. Griffith asserted, "We are trying to stay current and up to date on technological changes." The teacher librarians felt they were a part of this recognition and shared the award information with many in a variety of ways.

Many respondents felt that their most significant contribution to teaching and learning was designing a place and program that both welcomed and challenged kids and teachers. Pfeiffer saw her library as a "safe" space to use before, during, and after school. She uses the concept of a gal-

lery walk for students to formulate ideas. Hanrahan uses his library as a summer reading center for the whole school. There is no reading summer slump here! Between teaching students to be more effective researchers and designing anticyberbullying workshops for parents and students, they want all to know they care and are accessible. Collaboration between the library and the classroom is essential for these teacher librarians—and they see themselves as a vital part of the curriculum and learning process. Yes, they all teach both in the classroom and in the library; yes, they assess; yes, they plan with the classroom teacher;



ALL ABOARD!

Cooper, Elisha. **Train.** Orchard Books, 2013. 40 p. \$17.99. 9780545384957. Grades PreK-2. Several types of trains -- from commuter trains to freight trains to high speed trains -- are shown in their daily work. The delicate watercolor details for which this author-illustrator is famous includes loads of passengers, freight, and scenery all surrounding the trains in their various locals.

Crews, Donald. **Freight Train.** Harper Collins, 1996. 24p. Board book. \$7.99. 9780688149000. Preschool. This Caldecott Honor book from 1979 is still in print as a board book and has an accompanying sliding board book, **Inside Freight Train.** Intense graphics help teach basic color names and expanded railroad car names. The train travels across different terrain and is pleasing to children.

Eaton, Jason Carter. **How to Train a Train.** Illus. John Rocco. Candlewick Press, 2013. 48p. \$16.99. 978-0763663070. Grades PreK-2. Here is a guide to having a large locomotive as a pet. Fishing with your train, feeding your train, and teaching your train tricks are a few of the areas covered. Stylized trains of all shapes from the 20th Century are included in this attractive title.

Rinker, Sherri Duskey. **Steam Train, Dream Train.** Illus. Tom Lichtenheld. 40 p. Chronicle Books, 2013. \$16.99. 9781452109206. Grades PreK-1. Friendly, cheerful animals are the crew on this nightly journey. They load a freight full of childhood delights: ice cream, paints, balls, and race cars. Then everyone hops on board to travel through beautiful blue night skies, clouds of smoke, and gentle curves. Sweet dreams!

yes, they share their knowledge of the digital environment, etc. Above everything else, they insist on quality of information and practice, for themselves and others. As Hanrahan noted, "The library is a flexible, creative space that is responsive to all members of the learning community." He serves on the school's staff development leadership team and uses QUEST to create a quality research framework for interdisciplinary assignments.

Technology is a challenge for many. All respondents would love to see it grow and be used even more effectively in their schools. Specifically, they would like to explore the concepts of technology and learning when it comes to a 3-D printer. Griffith believed that her school was selected as an exemplar program "because of our commitment to technology." Hanrahan saw as an improvement being "able to display individually and in large groups . . . as well as having access to powering their own electronic device any time." From not having a technology professional in the building to knowing that the impact of technology in the school is huge, to keeping pace with the changes it brings, all of these teacher librarians find this a time consuming yet fascinating daily challenge. Pfeiffer stated, "I model and suggest web 2.0 tools that [teachers] can use in their classes and student can use to demonstrate their learning." These teacher librarians recognize the ability technology brings to collaboration. Students can create, share, read, and explore with technologies only recently available to them, but above all, the students are learning. The quality of exploratory learning is worked on concertedly by these teacher librarians, and they see technology as keeping them engaged and fresh to new ideas as well. All of them would like technology to increase student learning, but they all focus on the use of a tool called technology for learning. Many are frustrated with the slow pace a school often takes when involved with technology, but they persevere. The concept of being able to use the library outside its walls is both a challenge and intriguing to these teacher librarians.

Physical limitations and concerns about philosophy often impede the teacher librar-

ian when considering the concepts of the physical learning commons. Yet many are involved in facilitating much of the virtual learning commons philosophy. Makerspaces are evolving in these libraries; teacher librarians are exploring how to best use these concepts. Griffith believed that her move toward a learning commons may begin with her makerspace. With the arrival of new technologies in this area, it may make the concept even more appealing to both teacher librarians and schools, but for now some of the schools still have rigid scheduling and cross-professional use of the teacher librarian in other capacities unrelated to school library work. The interest in before- and afterschool times is growing, and there is outreach to bring the community into the school library even more. These teacher librarians look at various ideas and consider the blend of collaboration and learning that each brings to the library world.

Our hope is that these respondents inspire others to look at their programs and see how they can grow. Take a look at the questions asked of these award winners and see how you and your program can grow.

Those quoted in this article offer the following background information:

Stephanie Griffith is a fourth-year middle school teacher librarian. Before coming to Highlands Middle School, she was a teacher and secondary librarian at various other schools. She can be contacted at stephanie.griffith@fortthomas.kyschools.us.

Barry Hanrahan worked as a social studies teacher after receiving his first BA and MA. He received his library endorsement and a second MA (in library information science) and then became a school librarian. He has been at Wheeling High School as its teacher librarian for over three years. He can be contacted at barry.hanrahan@d214.org.

Teresa (Tess) Pfeifer has both an MFA in poetry and an MLIS. She has been at Springfield Renaissance School for several years after serving as an elementary teacher librarian. She noted that her school differs from many due to the library being shared by another school. She can be contacted at Pfeifert@sps.springfield.ma.us.