

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

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AASL President

A FAREWELL CHALLENGE

As my presidential year of AASL comes to a close, I appreciate all the people who have contributed to the success of AASL in any way: the Chicago staff (a special thanks to Ann Weeks who is leaving us), officers, chairs of our two great initiatives, members who have participated in our initiatives, committee members and chairs, affiliates and sections. I could elaborate, but I would like to leave you with a wish. I know that we are a profession in transition and in some places termination. We are evolving fast and those who have the vision to meet the challenges will survive.

During the next eighteen months, we will be discussing and publishing a new set of national guidelines. But more importantly, there are opportunities everywhere to discuss the new technologies and their impact on learning. My wish is that some form of the following presentation to an imaginary school board go in every school, every district, every state organization, every community. It is not just a pipe dream proposal. Fifteen years ago, I attended such an event sponsored by Retta Patrick, one of the former presidents of AASL, and witnessed the ground swell of parent and district support for library media programs. None of us was thinking about information technology infrastructures at the time, but we were thinking about the differences libraries made in the lives of young people.

An Invitation to the Information Technology Learning Fair

Last summer in a school board meeting, you asked the District Technology Committee to make a presentation concerning the impact that the district information infrastructure has had on students and student learning. As a committee, we took this charge very seriously, and we know you are being asked every day by parents and community leaders what difference it has made. We come to you this evening with a progress report and an invitation. First, our progress report.

Our district, like many others has spent an incredible sum creating equitable access to information technology. Now, our assumption that "more information access is better" may not hold up unless students learn to navigate this new world.

One of our library media specialists noted that five years ago in her school a typical student could find three to five articles on a given topic, but today, the same student could access over one hundred articles through the sophisticated information system in her library media center. This will be happening in each of our schools over the next five years. A typical student used to playing in a mud puddle of information suddenly will have an Olympic-sized swimming pool and is being pushed in the deep end. Facing information overload, our children might not

fare as well as we had hoped unless we provide well orchestrated swimming instructions.

When we began work as a committee, we asked a basic question that has guided our work: What kind of student can we expect to emerge from an information-rich environment? We have studied a number of models of information literacy created nationally and have internalized these for our district. We would expect each teaching staff in the district to go through the same process using the following model as a guide.

The Information Literate Student Is:

1. An Avid Reader
2. A Critical Thinker
3. A Creative Thinker
4. An Interested Learner
5. An Organized Investigator
6. An Effective Communicator
7. A Responsible Information User
8. A Skilled User of Technology Tools

Here is a capsule summary of what we have been doing to achieve the goal:

The Avid Reader. For over twenty years, the library media specialists of this district have supported the idea that every young person should be an avid reader. They feel that few, if any, young people can or will survive the information glut without strong reading abilities. Our continuing reading initiatives now in their tenth year are well known to this board and to the community.

The Critical Thinker. Library media specialists are re-orienting their old library skills programs to go beyond the location of information to use and communication of information. We feel that no student should believe everything they read, view, or hear; neither should they be cynics—believing nothing they encounter; rather, they should become healthy skeptics in the world of information technology. We have begun to notice that children are not only excited when they find a great deal of information on almost any topic, but they are beginning to evaluate carefully the information that they are being given from print sources and electronic networks.

The Creative Thinker. When children are allowed and encouraged to do more than just report what other people know and think about a topic, they are able to develop their own ideas and are able to defend their findings even when these ideas may be counter to the "expert" information sources they use.

The Interested Learner. Collaborating with teachers, library media specialists spend a great deal of time and effort supporting resource-based teaching and learning, the object of which is to use the vast resources of the LMC including the information infrastructure to deepen student learning. We have noticed that children subjected to quantities of resources on beyond the textbook become active rather than passive learners.

An Organized Investigator. Using the new district information literacy model adopted last year, we have begun to notice

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how students approach their research projects in a more systematic way that fits their own learning style. The focus has been on learning how to learn.

An Effective Communicator. Every LMC is now a high-tech laboratory that allows every student to communicate their projects via word processors, databases, spreadsheets, video, audio, digital photography, multimedia presentations, and web sites to name just a few. We are noticing that students who have the opportunity to express their ideas in more than just a written report are more creative, think more deeply about their ideas, and are more excited about sharing what they know.

A Responsible Information User. In addition to the school-wide contract that parents and students sign as new citizens in the world of the Internet, mini-lessons about information ethics are a part of most projects done in the LMC. We have begun to notice a community developing where children separate adventurous surfing on the Internet (an activity for home) and purposeful searching for educational information. We also note that students police each other as they cut, clip, and download information and then transform data into their projects.

A Skilled User of Technology Tools. Computer teachers, classroom teachers, and library media specialists have joined hands to ensure that every child in the district has the opportunity to learn technology skills. These skills are integrated into every project done in the LMC and in the classroom. We are starting to notice the self-esteem of the student who feels comfortable working and communicating in a world-wide information network.

All year long, we have inserviced, promoted, talked about, demonstrated, cajoled, urged, and inspired teachers to take advantage of the information infrastructure you financed. We tried to infuse the new technology into every curricular area. After a year's work, we know we are only beginning, but we would like you to see some of the fruits of our labors and ask your best advice as we continue to go forward.

On May 25, we are holding the Information Technology Learning Fair in our community's largest exhibit space. We have invited every teacher to showcase students who have worked with information technology. At the fair you may see students who have won the science fair, auto mechanics prizes, reading awards, or created individual student exhibitions or group projects. We anticipate three hundred exhibits from our K-12 students. We expect at least 1,200 parents and community lead-

ers to attend. We would like you, the Board, to serve as a few of the judges for the event. Just before the exhibit, we will provide each judge with a list of possible questions to ask as you visit the various table displays. Here is a sneak preview of those questions:

Are you an avid reader? I'm off to the bookstore tomorrow to purchase a gift for my (niece, nephew, grandchild, etc.). Could you recommend a couple of titles you have enjoyed reading lately?

Are you a critical thinker? Why do you think that? Who did you choose to believe? What evidence do you have for that? Why did you reject that idea? What information source was the best? What other evidence did you consult? What do you think about the information you found on the (Internet, CD-ROM databases, full-text periodical or newspaper sources, e-mail, etc.)

Are you a creative thinker? Which ideas in the project are you reporting are from information sources and which are your own? That is what others think; what do you think? Are you really the inventor of this? (or that idea?) If you were the (principal, boss, leader, president, etc.) what would you do? How would you handle that?

Are you an interested learner? Why did you choose that topic? What was the best part of doing your project? Did you have a chance to share your project with others? What do you feel you have learned by doing your project?

Are you an organized investigator? How did you put this project together? What steps helped you the most in arriving at your conclusion/finished project? How well did your group work to complete this project? If you were doing this project over, what would you do differently?

Are you a responsible information user? What is copyright? Show me something in your project you copied, something you summarized, and something that was your own idea. How would I know which information in your project you copied from somewhere and which you thought up yourself?

Are you a skilled user of technology tools? Tell me how you made this (video, word processor report, web page, digital photo, multimedia project, computer presentation, etc.). How did you learn to (e-mail, design web pages, etc.)?

As a technology committee, we have presented to you time and again research that supports the notion that what we are doing makes a difference in academic achievement. We would like you to judge for yourself. ▼