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Service and Information Skills in Oregon High School Library Media Centers

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Colleagues at public and academic libraries have often asked me about school library media centers. Here are some answers to their questions.

WHAT KINDS OF RESOURCES DO MOST HIGH SCHOOL LIBRARY MEDIA SPECIALISTS PROVIDE FOR THEIR STUDENTS AND STAFF?

PRINT RESOURCES

Encyclopedias, dictionaries, atlases and specialized reference works form the backbone of a high school print reference collection. Most high school library media centers are equipped with standard reference resources, depending upon the size of their student body, curriculum specialty areas and, of course, budgetary limitations. Currency is often an issue because of financial constraints. Often gaps in collections occur because of budget shortfalls or changes in priorities. Purchases of high cost reference materials may be deferred in place of electronic or online resources. This may result in a spotty reference collection quite difficult to reinstate. Vertical files are often an important part of the reference section.

Students are apt to use print encyclopedias, biographical dictionaries and atlases when large classes visit the library and electronic resources are limited. General reference materials in science, history, literature and art are used heavily for research papers. Specialized reference tools like "CQ Researcher" are helpful for current interest topics or for the student who needs suggestions for a paper concept. Students with specific research needs consult quotation books and poetry indexes in a limited way.

With CD-ROM and online periodical databases becoming more available to school library media centers, print indexes are purchased less often. A student may indeed graduate from high school without having used the *Readers Guide to Periodical Literature*, but instead should be familiar with EBSCO MAS, SIRS, INFOTRAC, UMI, or other electronic periodical indexes and databases.

ELECTRONIC RESOURCES

When made available, electronic resources become the tools of choice for the majority of high school researchers. Most students think of computers as accessible, fast, easy, and fun. That conclusion may be debated, but this youthful zeal for using technology can be channeled toward a viable and constructive research experience.

Many high school library media centers include CD-ROM resources for their students, either in a networked tower or at stand-alone workstations. Periodical indexes and databases, encyclopedias, and specialized subject-specific CDs are available for in-library use.

ONLINE CATALOGS

The majority of high school library media centers are equipped with online public catalogs to access collections supporting the curriculum and providing recreational reading for students. Some are centrally shared within school districts; others are independent. Library media specialists instruct students in accessing materials.

THE INTERNET

The Internet has dramatically opened research opportunities for high school students. No longer tied to in-house resources, they can access information from a myriad of sources on topics from tattoos to tornadoes. Students eagerly seek and find details of current events and hot topics, which makes the research process up to date and more meaningful for them.

Knit with the advantages of currency and high interest, however, are the triple concerns of accuracy, authority, and appropriateness. As students take in boatloads of information, they need to use critical thinking skills to sift and select. Acceptable Use Policies (AUP) have become an integral part of the library skills curriculum most high school library media specialists develop for their schools.

ONLINE PERIODICAL DATABASES/OSLIS

Student projects demand research from current periodicals in areas of interest for young people. Unfortunately, keeping large periodical collections has been an economic impossibility for most school library media centers. Kids too often are turned off by the fact that there just doesn't seem to be anything available on their topic in their school library media center.

With more schools logging on to the Internet, commercial online resources become more feasible as a realistic option for high school research. Not only can students access articles never before available, they can print them directly, save them to a disk, or e-mail the results to their home computer. Group purchases through projects like the LSTA-funded Oregon School Library Information System (<http://www.open.k12.or.us/oslis>) will make it pos-

sible for schools across the state to access cost-effective quality online resources.

WHAT SERVICES CAN STUDENTS EXPECT FROM THEIR HIGH SCHOOL LIBRARY MEDIA CENTER MEDIA SPECIALIST?

School library media specialists are first and foremost a critical part of the teaching team at their schools. Their role is to administer a program providing information resources, reader advising, curriculum support, and instruction in information retrieval and utilization for the students and staff of their schools.

As a part of the instructional team, they work in partnership with teachers across all curriculum areas to develop research-based lessons and projects that will help teach students active and practical application of the information they access. A library media specialist takes on a formalized instructional role when classes visit the library for book talking or instruction in use of specific research tools. The media specialist also provides point-of-use instruction to groups or individuals as they need assistance in using specialized print or electronic resources. Library media specialists often conduct formal or one-on-one lessons in critical thinking and evaluation of information sources. They produce and provide maps, signs, and pathfinders to help their students become independent researchers. They also set up scavenger hunts and treasure hunts to assist in orientation to specialized sections of the library media center. Some library media specialists compose online tutorials and Web pages for students to pursue on their own, in classrooms, or at home.

As students finalize their projects into research papers, multi-media productions, or graphic representations, they often call upon the expertise of the library media specialist to assist them in word processing, desktop publishing, or graphic arts. Knowledge of bibliographic formats, specialized software details, and individual teacher needs is fundamental for the library media specialist and the library staff.

WHAT GUIDELINES ARE USED BY SCHOOL LIBRARY MEDIA SPECIALISTS TO ESTABLISH QUALITY PROGRAMS?

INFORMATION POWER AND INFORMATION LITERACY

As school library media specialists work to incorporate critical thinking and information literacy into the curriculum of their schools, they have eagerly anticipated the arrival of "Information Power," a work recently published jointly by the American Association of School Librarians and the Association for Educational Communications and Technology. This book gives best practices in library programs and ways to support the curriculum. Most importantly, it sets the standards for information literacy in student learning.

The information literacy standards cover three major areas: information literacy, independent learning and social responsibility. Each standard includes several "success indicators" that confirm the standard has been met. "Levels of proficiency" for each indicator

help the educator determine a student's level of achievement.

INFORMATION LITERACY

- Standard 1: The student who is information literate accesses information efficiently and effectively.
- Standard 2: The student who is information literate evaluates information critically and competently.
- Standard 3: The student who is information literate uses information accurately and creatively.

INDEPENDENT LEARNING

- Standard 4: The student who is an independent learner is information literate and pursues information related to personal interests.
- Standard 5: The student who is an independent learner is information literate and appreciates literature and other creative expressions of information.
- Standard 6: The student who is an independent learner is information literate and strives for excellence in information seeking and knowledge generation.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

- Standard 7: The student who contributes positively to the learning community and to society is information literate and recognizes the importance of information to a democratic society.
- Standard 8: The student who contributes positively to the learning community and to society is information literate and practices ethical behavior in regard to information and information technology.
- Standard 9: The student who contributes positively to the learning community and to society is information literate and participates effectively in groups to pursue and generate information.

(This material has been excerpted from "Information Literacy Standards for Student Learning." It is available at the following URL: <http://www.ala.org/news/v3n24/v3n24d.html>.)

OREGON INFORMATION LITERACY GUIDELINES

Inspired by the national goals and standards promised by "Information Power," the Oregon Educational Media Association created a tool to assist our students in becoming better information consumers and library users. The statewide Information Literacy Guidelines directly relate to the Oregon Department of Education Standards and Benchmarks. Across all content and curriculum areas, these guidelines can be used to match the requirements of lessons and assessment areas to library media and information literacy solutions. Not only useful for school library media centers and teaching staff, these guidelines should also prove effective in both public and academic libraries. They are available online at <http://www.teleport.com/~oema/infolit.html>.

WHY IS IT SO CRUCIAL THAT SCHOOL LIBRARY MEDIA CENTERS PROVIDE PROGRAMS THAT ACCOMMODATE AND ENCOURAGE "PERFORMANCE-BASED" LEARNING? AND BY THE WAY, WHAT IS THE "CIM/CAM"?

A student graduating from an Oregon high school in 1999 is faced with many requirements in order to get that precious diploma. With the advent of our school reform legislation, state mandates must be met in multiple curriculum areas, as well as "seat hours" and credit accrual.

The Certificate of Initial Mastery, or CIM, will be awarded in English and mathematics in 1998-99. Standards in the other four areas (history, civics, geography, and economics) will be phased in over time. The Certificate of Initial Mastery in all six areas will be awarded in the 2002-03 school year.

The Certificate of Advanced Mastery (CAM) will be awarded to students who achieve grade 12 academic standards in English, mathematics, science, the social sciences (history, civics, geography and economics), the arts, and second languages; achieve grade 12 career-related standards in personal management, problem solving, teamwork, communication, workplace systems, career development and employment foundations; and focus on an area of career interest such as arts and communications, business and management, industrial and engineering systems, natural resource systems, human resources, or health services.

The CAM will be phased in at selected schools. It will be awarded in all schools to students in the 2004-05 school year. (For more information about Oregon School Reform and requirements see <http://www.ode.state.or.us/cifs/cimcam.htm>)


Many Oregon high school seniors are required to demonstrate through a performance-based "senior project" that they can research a topic, write an 8-12 page correctly formatted research paper, conduct personal interviews, work with a mentor, demonstrate practical work-related experience, and present the findings before a panel of experts.

A school with these kinds of projects underscores the value of a quality library media program. As students crush into the library with unmet needs for up-to-date, accurate, interesting, and easily accessible information, they place demands upon the collection, the staff, and the expertise of the library media specialist. A well-developed print collection, adequate electronic resources, and a history of library skills curriculum for students and staff is the best "defense" in preparation for these needs. On top of this, a network of external library and information resources is a necessity. Establishing communication and borrowing agreements with university, community college, public, and state libraries is crucial in filling student information needs when local resources are not enough.

HOW CAN SCHOOL, PUBLIC AND ACADEMIC LIBRARIES COLLABORATE?

School library media specialists must consider looking to the larger library community to share library skills curriculum expectations and collection devel-

opment experience. "Collaboration with public libraries, which share the school library media center media program's clientele, is especially valuable for encouraging student learning" ("Information Power," p. 124). Developing partnerships between schools and local public libraries will not only assist students who need resources for that term paper or senior project today, but will lay patterns of cooperation which will benefit programs in each of the libraries.

School library media specialists also look to colleges and universities to develop cooperative relationships. "Action-research partnerships between university faculty and practicing library media specialists can investigate the impact of school library media center media programs on students' development of information literacy" (Information Power 124). Following this article is a selected list of resources discussing collaborative programs with school and academic libraries and research discussing the concept of transferring library skills from high school to higher education. 

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