

History of Medford School District Library Media Centers

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School districts define the function of a library and the role of the library media specialist in a variety of ways. As a youngster growing up in Medford, Oregon, and graduating from its school system, I did not have an opportunity to meet a “real” librarian until entering junior high school in grade 7. In elementary school, classroom teachers filled the narrowly defined role of the librarian, which at the time was simply to assist students in checking out library books.

In 1985, after a 16 year absence, I returned to Medford and became superintendent of schools. At that time, I found that the function of the library had remained basically the same, that is, a warehouse of books, but support for those responsible to oversee it had deteriorated even more. Classroom teachers had minimal involvement in the library. Non-certified staff, with no formal training in instruction, no child development background, no knowledge of reading levels of students, and no course work in libraries were ordering library books and checking them out to students.

A concerted effort to place certified library media specialists in the district’s thirteen elementary schools, two middle schools, and two high schools began in 1986 and was completed in 1990. At the same time, the classified employees previously assigned to the library media center were retained and inserviced to support the program to ensure that the certified library media specialists had time to perform the duties for which they had been trained.

In 1992, the district’s certified library media specialists wrote the first library Media Guide which was adopted by the school board on March 16, 1993. In the guide, the media specialists wrote, “Effective library media programs are designed to help students find, use, and apply information which enables them to function successfully in the school program and to fulfill lifelong learning needs and reading enjoyment.” They went on to say, “A library information skills curriculum is not simply a course of study to be covered at one specific time in the K-12 curriculum. It is a set of clearly defined locational, inquiry and investigation, reporting, literature appreciation, and reading guidance skills, initiated with the student’s first introduction to the library media center and continued consistently through a sequential plan kindergarten through twelfth grade.” Regarding the relationship of the media specialist and the classroom teacher, the guide stated, “The teaching of library information skills should be a cooperative effort between the library media specialist and the classroom teacher.”

In 1995, patrons of Medford School District approved a bond issue to construct Abraham Lincoln Elementary School and totally renovate the two middle schools. This also included the design and development of model library media centers and adjacent

computer labs in the three schools. Additionally, the bond issue contained funds to remodel, expand, or build contemporary library media centers and computer labs at all other district schools.

Throughout the development of library media centers, programs, and selection of library media specialists, Medford School District relied heavily on research and literature that define roles and responsibilities for each. The sources and valuable information are listed below:

Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning, the American Association of School Libraries and Association for Educational Communications and Technology, 1998.

- The mission of the library media program is to ensure that students and staff are effective users of ideas and information.
- The goals of today's library media program point to the development of a community of learners that is centered on the student and sustained by a creative, energetic library media program. These goals include:
 1. To provide intellectual access to information through learning activities.
 2. To provide physical access to information through a carefully selected and systematically organized local collection of diverse learning resources.
 3. To provide learning experiences that encourage students and others to become discriminating consumers and skilled creators of information.
 4. To provide leadership, collaboration, and assistance to teachers.
 5. To provide resources and activities that contribute to lifelong learning.
 6. To provide a program that functions as the information center of the school.
 7. To provide resources and activities for learning that represent a diversity of experiences, opinions, and social and cultural perspectives.
- We must teach students to be learners because in their lifetimes so much new knowledge will be generated that they cannot expect to stop learning when they leave school.
- The responsibility of the library media specialist falls in four categories.
 1. *As teacher*, the library media specialist collaborates with students and other members of the learning community.
 2. *As instructional partner*, the library media specialist joins with teachers and others to identify links across student information needs, curricular content, learning outcomes, and a wide variety of print, nonprint, and electronic information resources.
 3. *As information specialists*, the library media specialist provides leadership and expertise in acquiring and evaluating information resources.
 4. *As program administrator*, the library media specialist works collaboratively with members of the learning community to define the policies of the library media program and to guide and direct all the activities related to it.
- The library media specialist takes a proactive role in promoting the use of technology by staff, in determining staff development needs, in facilitating staff learning explorations, and by serving as a leader in staff development activities.

Good Schools Have School Libraries; Oregon School Libraries Collaborate to Improve Academic Achievement, Keith Curry Lance, Marcia J. Rodney, and Christine Hamilton – Pennel, 2001.

- A strong library media program is one that is adequately staffed; stocked and funded; whose staff are actively involved leaders in their school's teaching and learning; whose staff have collegial, collaborative relationships with classroom teachers; and that embraces networked information technology.

National Board for Professional Teaching Standards: Library Media Standards, (for teachers of students ages 3-18+), 2001.

- Accomplished library media specialists:
 1. Have knowledge of learning styles and human growth and development.
 2. Know the principles of teaching and learning that contribute to the active learning environment.
 3. Know the principles of library and information studies needed to create effective, integrated library media programs.
 4. Integrate information literacy through collaboration, planning, implementation, and assessment of learning.
 5. Lead in providing equitable access to an effective use of technologies and innovations.
 6. Plan, develop, implement, manage, and evaluate library media programs to ensure that students and staff use ideas and information effectively.
 7. Engage in reflective practice to increase their effectiveness.
 8. Model a strong commitment to lifelong learning and to their profession.
 9. Uphold professional ethics and promote equity and diversity.
 10. Advocate for the library media program, involving the greater community.

School districts in Oregon are very fortunate to have organizations that provide direction and support for library media programs. At the forefront is the Oregon Educational Media Association. OEMA is Oregon's statewide association whose missions are to provide leadership to pursue excellence in school library media programs by:

- Advocating information literacy for all students.
- Supporting reading instruction and enjoyment of literature.
- Supporting the high levels of library media services in schools.
- Strengthening member professionalism through communications and educational opportunities.
- Promoting visibility in education, government and the community.

OMEA publishes a journal entitled Interchange three times each year providing information on topics related to library media.

There are several other state educational organizations supporting technology and library media that are used extensively in Medford School District. They are:

- Oregon School Library Information System (OSLIS) The mission of OSLIS is to help all K-12 students achieve Oregon's high standards including information literacy skills by creating, evaluating, and providing cost effective, curriculum based online information resources and by providing for classroom teachers, media specialists, and assistants the training needed to apply these resources in teaching and learning.
- Oregon Public Education Network (OPEN) The mission of OPEN is to enable all of Oregon's K-12 schools to participate in a coordinated information network; and to establish ongoing web-based curriculum development and professional development resources for teaching and learning through the OPEN web site.
- Oregon Educational Technology Consortium (OETC) OETC is dedicated to maximizing the value of educational technology to its members by working with software and hardware vendors to procure the most effective and appropriate technological resources at the lowest possible prices.
- Oregon Department of Education (ODE) Through the efforts of ODE, state assessment tests which determine how students are progressing on state standards are administered by elementary library media specialists online through Technology Enhanced State Assessment (TESA).
- Oregon State Library The Oregon State Library, under the direction of state librarian, Jim Scheppke, supports media programs by providing resources, information, and leadership.

What are the results of having such well defined library programs and certified library media specialists? *Students read more.* During the 2001-02 school year, the library book circulation at Abraham Lincoln Elementary School, with a population of 600 students, was 46,054. In order to provide a large enough inventory of library books to meet the needs and interests of all students, Medford School District doubles the normal annual budget allocation for the purchase of library books in the areas of general reading, research and accelerated reader. As a result, all school media centers exceed the minimum standard of 15 volumes per student established by the Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges. Elementary schools having a minimum requirement of 9,000 volumes, average 15,000 to 20,000. Middle schools and high schools exceed the minimum standard by 5,000 to 10,000 volumes. A well stocked media center adds to the enthusiasm of young readers. *Students learn more.* A statewide research report entitled Good Schools Have School Libraries: Oregon School Librarians Collaborate to Improve Academic Achievement, shows that school library media programs in Oregon schools exert a positive and statistically significant impact on student achievement. The conclusions of this study, which was commissioned by the Oregon Educational Media Association, are substantiated by assessment results and SAT test scores for students in Medford School District. With access to model library programs and certified media specialists, students in Medford Schools exceed state standards for reading proficiency in all grades 3, 5, 8, and 10. Furthermore, when student performance was reported by the Oregon Department of Education, four of the 18 schools were rated "exceptional," ten were marked "strong" and four "satisfactory." Finally, Oregon has ranked either first or second in the nation for several years in the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) for

graduating seniors for those states who test greater than 50% of their graduates. In comparison with national and state scores, Medford School District's graduating seniors exceed both the state and national averages.

Medford School District's library media centers are beautiful, vibrant places of learning. Students enter the areas with excitement and enthusiasm. While each elementary class has an hour per week of library instruction and computer lab experience, libraries in every school are open throughout the day for students to use as they wish.

The center is a beehive of activity as the library specialist teaches a lesson, reads a book, introduces a guest author who has come to speak, or helps students in research projects. Twice a year the elementary library media specialist can be found in the computer lab administering the electronic version of the state assessment tests, TESA. The assistant is either helping students in the media center or teaching a computer class in the lab next door.

Parents and community members are shelving books and performing other duties which frees up the specialist to do what he/she is trained to do best.

In one area of the media center is a bank of computers where students are taking Accelerated Reader tests after having read a library book. Sixth graders, at a nearby table, do research on their Autonomous Learner project in anticipation of the "Nights of the Notables," a program where students present a historical figure to their classmates.

Sitting on the soft couches and chairs in the reading area are students who have chosen their books and simply want some reading time. In another area of the media center, teachers look over materials in preparation for teaching their classes.

The library media centers are truly the "hub" of the school. It is the one place in school where all students go at some time and the "welcome mat" is always out.