

Librarians are Life Lines for Student Achievement: A case for flexible scheduling

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Rationale

School library media specialists are the forgotten education professionals at the school, district, county, and national levels. Although they contribute to both the quantitative and qualitative growth and development of their students, they often find themselves on the outside looking in on educational policy and reform. They endlessly fight a seemingly insurmountable battle to prove their relevancy in the Common Core era. This action research project seeks to dispel the misconceptions that many policy makers and reformers have of the vital services that school library media specialists provide through the lens of flexible scheduling. In fact, the scope of the work that school library media specialists do is directly aligned to the Common Core and can strengthen the change and reform that policy makers seek.

Literature Review

Not only does the literature but also the data on flexible scheduling assert the power of effective school library programs. For years many policy makers at the school, district, county, and national levels have failed to acknowledge that SLMS have a positive impact on the quantitative and qualitative growth of students. From summative to formative assessments as well as the personal growth and development of students their impact has been quantified.

The literature says:

Overall findings are consistent that libraries with flexible scheduling and qualified librarians can provide students with access to information and as well as the skills to evaluate and use information. These skills help translate to increased test scores and overall academic achievement. (Graham, 2005)

LeAnn Walker, a librarian at the University of New Mexico, "librarians offer solutions and provide the initiative and encouragement that many faculty need to confidently utilize technology in the classrooms." (Mersand, 2015)

Unless lawmakers can be made to understand the critical role these [librarians] and other educational professionals play in contributing to schools in which we can all be proud, then many of these positions will remain in jeopardy to the detriment of the students and communities they serve. (William, 2015)

School library media centers are the hub of technology literacy in the 21st century. They are the gateway to the vast quantity of new and ever changing information, data, news and resources. Professional school media specialists are the conductors for students and teachers through this gateway. (Moyer, 2006)

When school librarians demonstrate leadership in their daily activities, they can create an environment conducive to collaboration between themselves and classroom teachers. That, in turn, enables them to work with classroom teachers to instill a love of reading and information literacy skills in their students.

It is in these types of collaborations between librarians and teachers that are linked directly to higher reading scores. (Lance, 2002)

School libraries are a powerful force in the lives of America's children. The school library is one of the few factors whose contribution to academic achievement has been documented empirically, and it is a contribution that cannot be explained away by other powerful influences on student performance. (Lance, 2002)

Data/Tools/Process

I distributed fifty electronic surveys that include three administrator and forty-seven faculty (teachers and paraprofessionals) surveys. The administrator survey consisted of nine questions and the faculty survey consisted of seven questions. The survey was emailed to respondents, several verbal and electronic reminders were given. Administrators and faculty were explicitly told that no personally identifiable information would be collected. The data collection tools included Google Forms and Spreadsheets.

Data Analysis

Admin Respondents: 3 of 3

Faculty Respondents: 23 out of 47

The trends in the data showed that both the administrators and faculty valued the idea of collaboration between teachers and the school library media specialist. However the implementation of a flexible schedule that is a best practice of the profession and would allow for authentic collaboration is where the data gets interesting.

When faculty was asked: How do you feel about the current library schedule (each class has library for only 1 quarter per year)?

4.3% excellent (1 respondent)

8.7% good (2 respondents)

21.7 % fair (5 respondents)

56.5% poor (13 respondents)

8.7% don't know (2 respondents)

When faculty was asked: How do feel about having a flexible library schedule(teachers will collaborate with the SLMS on time frame/sessions to meet their instructional needs)?

30.4% excellent (7 respondents)

43.5% good (10 respondents)

13% fair (3 respondents)

13% don't know (3 respondents)

When admin was asked: How do you feel about having a flexible library schedule (teachers will collaborate with the SLMS on time frame/sessions to meet their instructional needs)?

33.3% good (1 respondent)

33.3% fair (1 respondent)

33.3% poor (1 respondent)

Recommendations

The Preamble of the collective bargaining agreement between the Washington Teacher's Union Local #6 of the American Federation of Teachers and the District of Columbia Public Schools October 1, 2007 – September 30, 2012 calls for enhanced student achievement based on high standards and expectations as well as the peeling away of bureaucratic impediments. This mutual Agreement has the overarching goal of increased student achievement for all children in the school system. Article 24 covers Auxiliary and Ancillary Services and more specifically, Article 24.1 focuses on Library Media Specialist.

The following articles speak directly to flexible scheduling:

24.1.6 When libraries are established, the standards of the American Library Association shall be considered.

24.1.7 Continuous access to the library collections and flexible scheduling may be components of the library media center. Flexible scheduling for the use of the library shall be developed and implemented when it is deemed appropriate for the instructional program of the school by the Supervisor after consultation with the Library Media Specialist.

24.1.8 School library Media Specialists shall arrange cooperative meetings and/or conferences with faculty Teachers during the employee's workday. These meetings and/or conferences shall be to discuss issues, books, materials and other business pertinent to professional Library Media Specialist's and Teacher's mission of providing the highest quality of education to DCPS students. The goal is to implement the most efficient and effective use of the library as a learning and resource center.

24.1.9 Library Media Specialist are integral Teachers of the teaching function in the DCPS. Library Media Specialists shall, in addition to the traditional functions, collaborate in the selection of all learning resources, work with teachers in the planning and or/implementation of curriculum, and offer instruction to both teachers and students on the use of library and media center resources and equipment, as well as reading, listening and viewing skills.

24.1.10 The Supervisor and Library Media Specialist (LMS) shall meet and jointly develop annually the library media program including a flexible scheduling model based on best on accordance with the standards of the American Library Association. Should the Supervisor and Library Media Specialist fail to

mutually agree on the library program, the Director of Library Services shall be available upon request from the Supervisor or Library Media Specialist to assist with the design and implementation of an effective library media program in accordance with best practices and standards of the profession.

Per this contract DCPS had agreed to follow the standards and best practices of the profession. The American Association of School Librarians (AASL) has updated their information literacy standards. The Standards for 21st Century Learners have four major components: 1. seek, locate, and critically think about information, 2. draw conclusions, make informed decisions, and build new knowledge, 3. share knowledge ethically and be productive members of our democratic society, 4. pursue personal and aesthetic growth. The goal of these standards are to ensure that students can not only locate but also analyze information, draw conclusions, and make informed decisions about new knowledge. They also see flexible scheduling for all school libraries as the best way to meet these standards. Other notable organizations assert that students should have mastery of similar skills to prepare them for college, career, and life to include: International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE), Partnership for 21st Century Skills (P21), Partnership for Assessment and Readiness for College and Career (PARCC), and Common Core States Standards Initiative (CCSS).

It is imperative that DCPS follows the guidelines that have been set forth in the collective bargaining agreement. The AASL, ISTE, P21, PARCC, and CCSS continue to make their case for the type of skills and learning that will adequately prepare students for the 21st century. No longer can "bureaucratic impediments" stand in the way of student achievement. All school library media specialist (SLMS) within DCPS should have flexible schedules. This will allow SLMS to truly do what they have been trained and certified in: program administrator, information specialist, instructional partner, school leader. Furthermore, the Impact Rubric that is currently be used to assess the professional responsibilities of SLMS (Instruction, Information Resources, Reading Advocacy, Library Environment, Program Administration) must be realigned to mirror best practices of the profession.

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