



Education Policy Brief

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Factors That Support Successful School Library Media Programs:

~ Professionally trained and certified school library media specialists who have the knowledge and enthusiasm to implement an effective school library media program.

~ Support from the state through sound state policies.

~ Adequate funding.

~ Administrative support.

~ Access to technology.

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Managing Information in 21st Century West Virginia

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In 2005, Governor Manchin signed a 21st Century Skills Partnership agreement to help better prepare students to be members of a global community. The 21st Century Framework for Learning emphasizes *Core Subjects and 21st Century Themes, Life and Career Skills, Learning and Innovation Skills, and Information, Media, and Technology Skills* (www.21stcenturyskills.org). West Virginia has integrated these skills into state curriculum as evidenced by their inclusion in newly revised Content standards and Objectives (CSOs).

At that same time in 2005, the school library division of the West Virginia Library Association proposed library media content standards and objectives for school library media programs. These library media CSOs, created to support the needs of a 21st century learning environment, were met with approval by Superintendent of Schools Steven L. Paine who noted that, "Libraries are the center of learning for a school. They support all that goes on in every classroom" (*American Libraries Online*, 2005). The United States National Commission on Libraries and Information Science also supports this notion that school libraries are more than just books, they are multi-media centers with qualified staff (<http://www.nclis.gov/>, 2007). With the 21st century partnership, West Virginia is in a position to comprehensively integrate technology and *information literacy* into the curriculum, spearheading the initiative for the entire nation.

REACHING DIGITAL NATIVES

In the early 1990's the Internet was a novelty used primarily at universities and other research institutions. Today, less than

twenty years later, the Internet is everywhere. Studies estimate that at least 88% of Americans age 12 to 18 regularly use the Internet (Lenhart, 2005). Not only are students accessing the Internet for school related research and recreational purposes, they are doing so from a variety of electronic sources. To these *digital natives*, cell phones, iPods, MP3 players, laptops, blackberries, and other electronic devices are the norm (Fox, 2006).

With the inexhaustible growth of information available to learners and educators, qualified school library media specialists are needed to help navigate through and process information resources. School library media specialists can provide the context for information queries regardless of the information format, and offer information seeking strategies and guidance. This type of guidance is not only necessary for successful information retrieval, but also for safe navigation in online environments. Ultimately, the efforts of a school library media specialist can help enable West Virginia's children to compete in a global workforce.

"Learning about online communication is now as important as learning about writing, reading and speaking, and is an important part of participating in the modern world. As such it needs to be integrated into the curriculum" (Jones, 2006).

WEST VIRGINIA CHALLENGES

Despite the fact that so many students in America now have high speed access to information, there remains a socio-economic gap in West Virginia that inhibits many students from becoming 21st century learners. With current census statistics showing that at least twenty percent of the residents in over half of the counties in West Virginia are

The Center for Education in Appalachia at Fairmont State University is committed to building bridges between problem-solving strategies and resources and the problems faced by local and state stakeholders seeking to better serve West Virginia's children, families, and their communities.



living below the poverty line, it is obvious that information is not yet everywhere in the Mountain State. In a May 31, 2007 article in the Charleston Daily Mail entitled “W. Va. Getting Up To Speed”, West Virginia’s Chief Technology Officer Kyle Schafer reported that 59% of West Virginia homes have computers as compared to the national average of 69%. This ranks West Virginia 45th in the nation. The article states:

77% of West Virginia households have access to high-speed Internet service although only 34.6% subscribe to broad band. In comparison, 86% of households in the country have access to broadband and 49.6% subscribe.

Although Governor Manchin wants all West Virginians to have access to high-speed Internet (Broadband) by 2010, the current presence of a digital divide within West Virginia communities and homes places greater responsibility upon local schools to make up for the disparity. In three of the state’s poorest counties, only one third of the schools have wireless connectivity. This situation is exacerbated when schools lack not only a school library program, but also a qualified school library media specialist.

THE 21st CENTURY “LIBRARIAN”

A key element in effective school library media programs is a qualified school library media specialist. Yet when most people think of a school librarian, images of a bookish lady with thick horned-rimmed glasses sitting behind a desk are some of the common thoughts. Unfortunately this stereotype could not be further from reality. In fact, the first school librarians were “enthusiastic” about their *teaching* responsibilities. Employed over one hundred years ago, the first school librarian was both a teacher and an information specialist, who taught classes, encouraged reading and intellectual growth, and maintained print collections (Woolls, 2004).

Today, school library media specialists have the same responsibilities, yet the kinds of materials maintained in the collections are expansive, including print, electronic, and audio resources. Classes are taught or co-taught using differentiated instructional strategies in the classroom, computer lab, and the school library media center

to ensure that different learning styles are experienced. School library media specialists promote reading and intellectual growth through new technologies in a boundless environment that cultivates learning and thinking skills. School library media specialists today are expected to meet high standards:

They know a wide range of source material and how to access it; they develop interdisciplinary collections to meet the demographic and cultural needs of the learning community; they partner with teachers to create exciting experiences in an information-rich environment. They understand the curriculum of the school thoroughly and serve as leaders in implementing quality teaching and learning. (<http://www.nbpts.org/>, 2007)

Already more than sixty studies from sixteen different states have identified strong correlations between school library programs and student achievement (Scholastic, 2006). These studies, compiled in *School Libraries Work!*, spotlight the significance of school library programs within the school community. According to the Illinois study, factors that influence the effectiveness of school library programs include:

- ◆ Flexible schedule for the school library;
- ◆ Fully staffed school library;
- ◆ Large, up-to-date collection;
- ◆ Widely available educational technology, including online resources;
- ◆ Adequate financial support; and,
- ◆ Student use encouraged on an individual and class basis

Likewise, the Ohio study found that, “an effective school library, led by a credentialed library media specialist who has a clearly defined role in information-centered pedagogy, plays a critical role in facilitating student learning for building knowledge” (p. 19). The same study acknowledged students’ support for school libraries, revealing that, “99.4% of students in grades 3-12 believe school libraries and their services help them become better learners” (p. 13).

The vision may be clear, but barriers exist. According to statistics made available by the United States Department of Education in 2006, only 49% of public schools in West Virginia have school libraries. Since that time, the number of school libraries has declined further. To date, West Virginia school libraries are the least funded of all school library programs across the nation. A lack of funding for these school libraries translates to ineffective, or in the worst cases, non-existent school libraries.

ADDRESSING THE PROBLEMS

Attempting to provide solutions, the West Virginia Office of Technology launched the Library Media Technology Integration Specialist Initiative to provide professional development in the area of instructional technology (<http://access.k12.wv.us/tis/index.htm>, 2007). Additionally, the West Virginia Department of Education is working to create new requirements in state preparation program curriculums for future school library media specialists. These requirements will ensure that school library media specialists have the skills to teach information and technology literacy. The school library media program, led by a qualified school library media specialist, is a necessary component in bridging 21st century skills and core subject knowledge.

“Preparing our children for a future that we cannot even describe requires of educators more than we have ever expected before” (Fisch, 2006).

Efforts at the local level are also occurring, with programs such as the one at Potomack Intermediate School in Berkeley County. Through collaborative partnerships with teachers, school library media specialist, Celeste Porturica targets both library media and core subject CSO’s. She describes the school library media center as the hub of information and technology literacy, “a central location and central gathering place for researching, leisure reading and perusal, socializing through puzzles or games, and connecting to the world through the Internet.”

A 21st century learning environment should provide students with a qualified school library media specialist who can provide access to information, experience with

technologies and guided searches. Using 21st Century partnership efforts, West Virginia is in a position to provide a vision of how schools can integrate technology into teaching and learning to better prepare students for the new global workforce. Adequately prepared school library media specialists working in up-to-date information centers can serve as guides to 21st century information management.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

ALA | American Association of School Librarians (AASL): <http://www.ala.org/ala/aasl/aas;omdex/htm>

AASL and AECT (1998). *Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning*. Chicago: American Library Association.

Partnership for 21st Century Skills: www.21stcenturyskills.org

School Library Impact Studies: <http://www.lrs.org/impact.asp>

School Libraries Work!: http://www.scholastic.com/librarians/printables/downloads/slw_2006.pdf

U.S. National Commission of Libraries and Information Science: <http://www.nclis.gov>

West Virginia Department of Education <http://wvde.state.wv.us/>

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“A multitude of evidence strongly supports the connection between student achievement and the presence of school libraries with qualified school library media specialists. When library media specialists work with teachers to support the learning opportunities with books, computer resources, and more, students learn more, get better grades, and score higher on standardized test scores than their peers in schools without good libraries” (School Libraries Work!, 2003).



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The Center for Education in Appalachia at Fairmont State University is committed to supporting public education that leads to economic opportunity in West Virginia and across Appalachia. Center goals focus on building networks and partnerships between people and organizations committed to education in West Virginia and the Appalachian region. The Center also serves as an informational resource to state education policy making efforts with a special focus on its unique rural, Appalachian context. We believe this can be accomplished by helping *push up* issues and working models from local communities and generate knowledge so that state and national initiatives will be effective when implemented within local communities. For more information visit: www.fairmontstate.edu/cea