Chapter 11

Envisioning Change and Extending Library Reach for Impact in Underserved School Communities

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ABSTRACT

This project aimed to improve and promote the school libraries in a K-12 district which serves primarily African American and Latino students. Surveys about the libraries were distributed to each teacher, student, and parents. Students independently and overwhelmingly reported that they enjoyed the author visits, the new books, and the library research projects which utilized them. Reactions to this district-wide library initiative contributed to the students’ positive reviews of these aspects of their school libraries in roughly equal parts; in other words, students don’t only appreciate the ability to surf the internet. Students in this underserved population mentioned that their class research projects turned out better, that they were able to find more information in books and online via new library computers, and that they found exciting new materials to read. Students, teachers, and parents consistently reported that they felt more interested and more successful in library research after their school library was updated and its resources were promoted.

INTRODUCTION

Many students from around the country, and from all socioeconomic and ethnic groups, are often under-prepared or unprepared to enter the workforce or succeed in professional careers. Neither a ban on new technologies for learning nor a free-for-all approach seems to produce the desired results of articulate, knowledgeable, skilled young adults. As educators create goals for information literate students, they are able to design and articulate a model of success which could serve as a replicable solution for the same types of problems many schools and employers around the country are experiencing today.

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School librarians, who are trained schoolteachers that possess expertise in teaching multiple subject areas, are valuable resources for students in underserved communities. These educators, with the proper resources, can instill in students a love for reading and a habit of mind which is predisposed to research in order to find answers to self-generated questions about academics and about life. Since everyone in our country will eventually acquire a job of some kind during their lifetime, students will need to learn a great many skills in order to succeed in their chosen careers.

Information, communication and technology (ICT) skills are those most frequently mentioned as job skills for a variety of fields; everyone from auto mechanics to accountants needs to master technology in order to succeed. Farmers now plan and operate computerized irrigation and crop rotation systems, using research and data analysis skills help them make decisions. Stockbrokers use online research and data-driven decision-making skills to find the optimal investment strategies. And auto mechanics use technology to diagnose car problems just as frequently as a pharmacist uses digital tools to understand potential drug interactions. These and many more jobs await our current school-age population upon graduation (United States Department of Labor, 2018).

Technology and research are important components of many careers, and formal schooling needs to do its part in helping prepare students to be productive citizens in an information age. In today’s global society, skilled workers who can fill technological, creative and scientific jobs are becoming the backbone of a knowledge society that will lead us through the next century (Donohue, 2017). Inevitably, we will need to train young people to work in more of these types of advanced professions, and even develop their research and information literacy skills for jobs that do not exist yet. Information access and analysis is not simply the way young people learn and communicate today; it also will be the currency of the future. Educators are responsible for preparing all students for the promising experiences, which await them in their future careers (Future Ready Schools, 2018).

BACKGROUND

School library media professionals are able to transfer an understanding of that real-world value to the needs of the classroom. They introduce students to various types of information on a daily basis. Specifically, they require students to understand, critique, and create new information to showcase their learning of information literacy concepts and skills. Strong school librarians are able to meet national standards of the American Association of School Librarians (2018) and the International Society for Technology in Education (2018).

The young people we educate in K-12 classrooms are the same young people who will enter college and the workforce in the near future. They will be our future healthcare workers, retail salespeople, and financial advisors, and ultimately move our society forward. In fact, today’s middle and high school students will be in their prime when we educators are old and need their help to fix our cars, to find cures for our diseases, and to negotiate our country’s diplomatic relations. All of these jobs are important. Therefore, we most certainly want our students to know what they are doing!

Teaching our young people to navigate a messy world, rather than providing them with a simpler or abstract version of that world, helps them get used to using authoritative and accurate information in searching for solutions. Many educators do not have any models of what future learning should look like in a school which prepares students for the complexity of the real world. And, since formal schooling