



# Piecing Administrators into the Collaboration Puzzle

By Stony Evans and Bruce Orr

*Creating and sustaining the conditions for a successful school library program require constant effort. There are many stakeholders who must be informed of the value the library offers to the learning community. School librarians share statistics, promotional materials, and frequent communications with all stakeholders, particularly administrators. Effective teacher librarians have the ability to project a growth mindset and innovation in the school culture. To exemplify this, Stony Evans, high school librarian, offers some best practices used to help stakeholders better understand the library program while Bruce Orr, Assistant Superintendent of Lakeside (AR) School District, provides a district-level perspective.*

## Stony Evans

### *Share Library Statistics: Transparency is Key*

I remember printing monthly circulation statistics at my first high school library job. I posted the reports outside the library door so patrons could easily see the numbers as they entered the facility. Students and teachers were the first to show an interest. They had no idea that so many books and materials were going in and

out of the library. It helped change their perspective of what I was doing. Since it worked so well, I decided to start sharing a monthly report with my administrators. This included circulations, titles added, and total library reservations for the month. Principals quickly noticed that our numbers were increasing. During my first year as a teacher librarian, I was invited to speak at a school board meeting to share statistics and photos of library activities. It was exciting to see that what had started as such a small effort had really helped change how the library was perceived.

### *Invite Administrators to Library Programming*

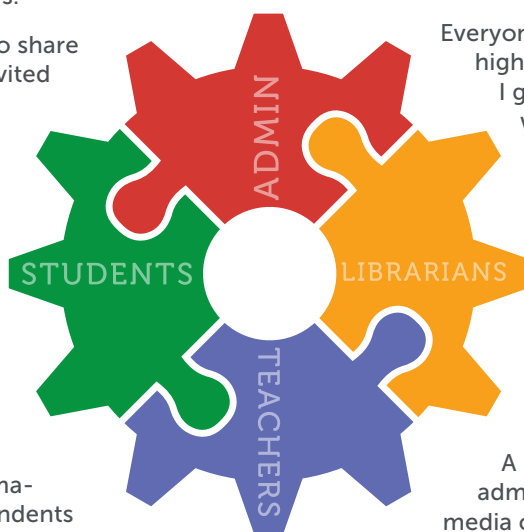
It is imperative that teacher librarians invite administrators to library programming. During my first years on the job, I invited our district superintendent and school board president to participate in a student book club. Now, I invite principals and superintendents to our collaborative events and lunch programs. This allows our stakeholders to get more than a “snapshot” of the library. We must remember that administrators are busy people being pulled in numerous directions who view everything through the lens of the entire school program. If we do not invite them to events,

administrators only get to see glimpses of what is actually happening in our facilities. Once they visit, I ask for feedback. They may have helpful advice to improve what we are doing. No matter what the task, the benefit of student learning is paramount, and there is always room for improvement.

### *Promote on Social Media & Invite Administrator Contributions*

There are often times that our administrators are unable to attend library activities. When this happens, I don't get discouraged because I know how unpredictable their schedules can be. This is when social media is our powerful ally. Our entire administrative team follows me on various social media. I make sure to promote and share our events through Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and my blog. The shared photos, videos, and text are essentially a window into the library. This has really made a difference to administrator involvement after school hours.

It is also important to invite administrators to share their voices whenever possible. I recently invited one of our assistant principals to co-write a blog post with me following a major change in faculty professional development this year. It was one of our most read blog articles during the fall semester (<http://librarymediatechtalk.blogspot.com/2016/08/breaking-out-of-normal-professional.html>). There are many other ways a teacher librarian can incorporate administrator voice. Invite them to make a video commentary on a library collaboration, or invite them to present a session for students in the library. Consider featuring a principal in library promotional materials. Many of our principals and superintendents have posed for our many different themed digital and print posters.



### *Seek the Vision Together*

To achieve excellence in serving our entire population of students, teachers, parents, and administrators, school librarians must build strong relations with the administrative team. Seek out their voices and watch what magic happens for your learners and the school library program.

#### **Bruce Orr**

I would like to begin by saying the success of the library "has all been a part of my master plan," but that's simply not true. Most successful programs in education all have one important element in common, the right person. I knew when we hired Stony Evans that we had selected the right person but did not fully understand the possibilities of the school librarian position.

### *Who Are You Building Your Program For?*

Everyone has a pretty good idea of the "traditional" high school media center and what it has to offer.

I grew up seeing this firsthand, as my mother was a high school media specialist for thirty-seven years. One of the first changes I saw in our new media center was the increase in students' participation and presence. We were working to build programs that would interest students and give them a place to belong, and we quickly noticed a group we had previously missed that was now engaged. Lunch was one of the busiest periods of the day. Before and after school were high traffic times as well.

A primary question to consider with your administrator is, "Are students coming into our media center?" In our school, we frequently hear Mr. Evans conversing with students about what they are interested in and how he can better serve them. This simple exchange is the foundation of what can be possible, a powerful leadership reminder that we all need to keep front and center in our planning. Your school belongs to your students, parents, and community. As administrators, we are here to be good stewards of this responsibility.

### *Getting Everyone on Board*

One of the most important indicators of a successful school is the ability to keep the staff in a growth mindset. This has a huge impact on the students' success and daily morale. Teachers who are actively seeking to try new things are excited and engaged in a reflective mode that is powerful for increasing student achievement. However, this is easier said than done. Many times school gets in the way of this goal. Changing standards, turning in grades, staff meetings, etc. can take all of the extra time from staff and leave them tired and struggling to make it through another week. The media center can be the one place in the building where those daily mundane parts of our profession can go away.

We started to see our collaborative events increasing in the media center in conjunction with our eighth grade classes. This in turn began to draw our staff to the media center during their conference period to brainstorm new ideas. The more they saw, the

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In 2014, we asked our administrators to arrange for us to present at a national conference breakout session. Mr. Orr introduced us for that session, and at the end of the session, I made sure to recognize all our administrators in the crowd for attending. We also applied for our high school principal to be considered for a state award through the Arkansas Association of Instructional Media. The year we did this, he was chosen for the award because of his unfailing support of our numerous collaboration programs and his plan for a library media center renovation at the high school.

more they wanted. Our media staff began to help facilitate growth conversations and were eager to help get new ideas off the ground. As the building principal at the time, I loved the passion and fun that staff and students were having on these projects. I saw that investing resources in the media center was paying huge dividends, so we continued to add and watch it grow. A media center can be a powerful professional learning center in your building.

Providing a safe area for students to challenge themselves is a powerful thing. This can take many forms, from students designing a Breakout EDU for your social studies staff, to simply coming in at lunch to have a brief book talk with one of your media staff. We have talked to many different schools that want to look at reinventing their media center, and a common question is, "how do we get started?" Our plan is very simple.

1. Find the right staff.
2. Give them a good area to build their dream. This might require knocking down an existing wall or maybe more!
3. Make this budget a priority.
4. Try to say "yes" as much as you can.
5. Be a cheerleader for your program!

Investing your time, resources, and passion into a media center can be a powerful change agent for our students.

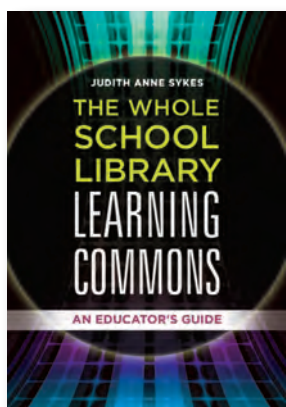


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*Bruce Orr, MEd, received his master's from Henderson State University. He has worked in education for the past 18 years in many capacities including teaching biology and coaching multiple sports. In 2011, he was named the MetLife/NASSP Arkansas Principal of the year. The same year, Lakeside was named "SREB Outstanding High School," one of thirteen named to the Outstanding High School list and the first Arkansas school to gain that distinction. Orr is currently the Assistant Superintendent at Lakeside and focuses on federal programs and serves as the district curriculum coordinator.*

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