

VIII. Advocacy

One can think of school library advocacy as an on-going process of building partnerships so that others will act for and with you, turning passive support into educated action for the library media program. (Source: AASL) It is essential that Library Media Specialists be prepared to speak out with confidence and “tell their story” in support of their programs. Use the resources the below to assist with advocating for your library.

School/District/Local

Garnering support for the school library program is an important aspect of the Library Media Specialist’s job. Patrons and other constituents must be kept aware of the library program’s services especially if threats of budget cuts are looming. These cuts could adversely affect the ability of the library media staff in providing an outstanding collection that will support the curriculum and leisure reading needs of students and staff. These cuts could also adversely affect the opportunities for teaching library information skills. A detailed marketing plan created by library staff with input from patrons is essential.

Advanced planning

- Review the history of advocacy efforts at your library.
- What “extras” do you provide – contests, clubs, library helpers, bulletin boards, newsletters, etc?
- Do you regularly update the administration with statistics?
- What have you done to attract support in the past? What worked? What didn’t work?
- Who uses the library now? Who doesn’t?
- Who were you trying to reach?

Before you begin attracting support

Look at your library as if you are a student or teacher entering it for the first time.

Ask yourself:

- Is it aesthetically pleasing?
- Does the schedule meet the patron needs?
- Is the staff friendly?
- Does the library encourage patron independence or does it encourage patrons to rely on the staff’s assistance to meet their needs?

Determine what issues concern faculty and administration in the school. Then, use the library program to work with them to solve the problem that is first and foremost on their minds. Examples: Is it low SAT scores or literacy rate of students. Once you know their concerns, market how the library program can be a solution to the problem.

Sample Plan from Jeannette Woodward

What kinds of support does the program receive now?

- Who supports the program?
- What do you receive for support?

Use tools of marketing

- Plan
- Implement
- Evaluate

Demographics

- Who are your current patrons?
- Who are your potential patrons?
- See NEASC demographics documentation of school district

Discover hidden constituencies

- Government officials/Town officials/State officials Who are they?
- Book club that meets in the library - who/when/where?
- Substitute teachers
- Public library staff
- Bookstores?

Develop plan

- Align the plan with the library's mission statement. If a mission statement doesn't exist, create one. Be sure it aligns with the school's mission statement.

Assess patron needs

- Surveys etc.
- Curriculum needs
- SAT Standards

Identify obstacles

- Schedule
- Teachers overloaded with content standards that do not include library

Primary/Secondary Markets

- Primary=Students/ Teachers/Administration/School board/Parents
- Secondary=Community leaders/Government officials/Public library

Focus the goal

- Add more scholarly students to the library who read/study/research

Identify competition

- Electronics
- Athletics
- Administrative meetings
- School work required of students that is not library related.

Establish marketing budget

When creating a budget, add funds to support the marketing plan.

Timeline

- Add long range plans for advocacy.
- Add short term plans for advocacy.

Leverage the impact of marketing plan

Identify people with power who may not be users of library.
Example: parents/school board/community members/nurse/kitchen staff/janitors
etc.

Schedule production of promotional materials

Examples:

- Four (4) newsletters a year that are distributed during parent nights.
- Three (3) articles per year published in school district's newspaper or other local papers.
- Schedule special programming for the year, so patrons can anticipate it
- Daily announcements of special programming
- School/school district webpage

Sample Marketing Techniques

- Library orientation class for students and new staff
- Information skills curriculum
- Special programming author visits, rewards, special events, poetry slam
- Displays
- Publications
- Newsletters
- Informational brochures, bookmarks etc.
- Participation on school committees
- Conduct in-service workshops/online tutorials/etc.
- Webpage
- Meeting space when library is closed: summer/weekends/evenings
- Letters to state representatives and local politicians.

Additional Resources

Woodward, Jeannette. Creating the Customer-Driven Library: Building on the Bookstore Model. Chicago: American Library Association

Sweeney, Georgina. A Passion for Marketing. 2008. 5 Dec. 2008
<passionformarketing@gmail.com>.



State/National

Advocacy for the library media program does not stop at the door of the Library Media Center or the door of the school. Issues and decisions that directly or indirectly affect the library media program and staff could arise at the state or national level. These issues could revolve around funding, regulations, certification requirements, accreditation, instructional requirements, access to records, etc. It is vital that the Library Media Specialist keep abreast of current issues and decisions and advocate on behalf of the library media program. Some general resources are listed below.

State

Maine Association of School Libraries www.maslibraries.org.

Maine Department of Education <http://www.maine.gov/education>

State representatives <http://www.maine.gov/legis/house/townlist.htm>

State senators <http://www.maine.gov/legis/senate/senators/index.htm>

National

American Library Association www.ala.org

ALA has a great toolkit for Advocacy. You may find it at http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/aasl/aaslproftools/toolkits/ALA_print_layout_1_520514_520514.cfm

American Association of School Libraries
<http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/aasl/aboutaasl/aboutaasl.cfm>

Department of Education www.ed.gov

Senators www.senate.gov

House of Representatives www.house.gov