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**

Gaining 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.

www.maslibraries.org
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

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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


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**


**National**

American Library Association [www.ala.org](http://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](http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/aasl/aaslproftools/toolkits/ALA_print_layout_1_520514_520514.cfm).


