**School Library Program Assessment**

“The future is something which everyone reaches at the rate of 60 minutes an hour, whatever he does, whoever he is.” – C. S. Lewis

Time. It is a fixed commodity. Strategic planning and prioritization are vital to the effectiveness of the school library media center and the school library media specialist. Evaluation tools, both those created by local districts and those created by national organizations, can assist the school library media specialist in setting goals for his or herself and his or her center.

**The Evaluative Tools**

**The *School Library Program Assessment Rubric for a Planning Guide for Empowering Learners*** contains “fifteen guidelines organized under four major school library program aspects: developing visions for learning; teaching for learning; building the learning environment; and empowering learners through leadership.” This rubric was created in 2010 by a taskforce of the American Association of School Librarians (AASL).

The rubric is comprehensive - eighteen pages long and the four program aspects each have subtopics, which in turn have multiple categories. I found the levels of measurement confusing at first because they have different labels. For example, under the aspect, “Teaching for Leading,” and its subtopic, “Collaboration,” there are two categories: “team roles” and “participation”. Team roles are measured by assessing if they are “defined,” “informal,” or “unassigned.” On the other hand, participation is measured by assessing if it is “integral,” “informal,” or “in-progress.” Each measurement, throughout the multiple categories, is labeled slightly differently. Yet the descriptions of each are comprehensive; they would be useful in planning areas of future growth by knowing what to strive for in each category.

**The *Learning 4 Life Sample School Librarian Performance and Evaluation System***is intended as “a continuous cycle of assessment and evaluation within four domains of teaching responsibility: planning and preparation; the library environment; instruction; and professional responsibilities.” This system was developed in 2009 by the Londonberry School District adapted from the work of Charlotte Danielson and is an initiative of the AASL.

This rubric is also comprehensive, but I found it easier to navigate. Within each domain there are five to nine components. Each component is measured by assessing if they are distinguished, proficient, basic, or unsatisfactory. As with the first rubric, the descriptions are comprehensive and therefore useful in creating future goals.

Because of the comprehensive descriptions for each area to be evaluated, each tool takes a while to go through. In my interview with a school library media specialist, every minute of the fifteen allotted per tool was valuable. Most of our time was spent discussing the area of Teaching for Learning and the domain of Planning and Preparation. I do understand the limited scope of the assignment and the value of the media specialist’s time, but I would have been interested in delving into the entirety of both rubrics. Later, I did go over each area in depth on my own and the media specialist was gracious enough to answer a follow-up email.

One downside to a national organization’s tool is that there are evaluated areas that are out of an individual school’s control depending on the policies, procedures, and budgeting of the local district. In those cases, these would not be applicable to an evaluation. However, the benefit to the national tool would be that the individual school could advocate for its needs based on national expectations.

**The School**

The school is a middle school of 615 students in the Carroll County Public School district. This is a traditionally rural farming county that is recently becoming more suburban. It is located approximately 30 miles northwest of the city of Baltimore, MD. The school demographics are 92% white, 3% black, and 3% Hispanic. 12.8% of the students are eligible for Free and Reduced Meals and 7.3% of the students receive Special Education services. The library is located just inside the front doors and is staffed by a full-time National Board Certified media specialist who received her Master of Science in School Librarianship from McDaniel (Western Maryland) College in 2000.

**The Library Program**

The *School Library Program Assessment Rubric for a Planning Guide for Empowering Learners* rubric highlighted many areas of strength in the program, yet also allowed us to identify areas that may need improvement.

The flexible schedule of the media center allows the specialist to schedule classes for inquiry-based projects as they occur in the curriculum; the program aspect of “Inquiry” is a strength. Because the school has a relatively small population, the media specialist can consistently collaborate for differentiation in both learning needs and learning modalities. Each student, mostly through their ELA and Social Studies classes, is taught the information search process using components of the “Big Six” research process. Most projects involve students accessing both print and electronic sources, and students present their projects using emerging technology. Assessment is shared between the media specialist and content teacher, with the media specialist focusing on the assessment of ethical use of information and the diversity of sources. Another strength is the learning space. Renovated in 1996, there are two classroom areas and a bank of thirty computers. The sight line from the circulation desk encompasses the entire L-shaped room. Access and function are high – three full classes could use the center at once and functions are varied. Later, I also viewed the library’s website which is extremely user-friendly and includes virtual access to subscription databases and pathfinders designed specifically for individual classes.

In the program aspect of Teaching for Learning, under the subtopic of Multiple Literacies, the media specialist feels she needs to spend more time on emerging technology and introducing these technologies to students and staff. Under the subtopic of Inquiry, she sees a need to prioritize an understanding of the Common Core State Standards and aligning these with her collection. In the program aspect of Building the Learning Environment, she would like to develop a position description for her volunteers and invest time in volunteer development.

**The Librarian**

The strengths of the school library media specialist align with those of the program. She is a positive force throughout the school. Her slogan is “It’s Always a Great Day to be in the Media Center!” and both students and staff clearly want to spend time in the media center. It was difficult for her to rate herself “distinguished” while we went through the rubric. I have spent a lot of time in this media center, however, and it is clear that her tendency to rate herself “proficient” is only because she is a reflective educator that is always looking to improve her practice. Her outlook was in searching for ways to strive to do better as opposed for looking for areas where goals felt complete. Her positive personality and engaging love of her career lead to Domain 2: The Library Environment being one of her main areas of strength. Relationship building with both students and staff while “establishing a culture for learning” and “managing library procedures…student behaviors…and space” are evident.

She is also skilled at “demonstrating knowledge and use of resources” (L4L, Component 1d). Having been at the school for twelve years, she knows her collection inside and out. She is knowledgeable about her subscription databases, current reliable websites, and collaborates closely with the public library, her fellow school library media specialists, and the community. Another of the media specialist’s strengths is “demonstrating a knowledge of literature and lifelong learning” (L4L, Component 1e). She conducts book clubs and assists students during their formal ELA book check-out times by giving them reader-interest surveys, teaching them how to use the OPAC effectively, maintaining a book blog that students use as well, and speaking in-depth with students during open library time.

As we examined the *Learning 4 Life Sample School Librarian Performance and Evaluation System,* we were able to find areas to create goals around. Once again, it is difficult to separate the media specialist from her center, so alignment is obvious with the areas of improvement I mentioned above in the library program analysis. As her school moves into adopting the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) the media specialist will work to improve her knowledge of the curriculum and align it to available resources. She would also like to improve her toolbox of Web2.0 and technology tools. She feels that while she uses a great deal of technology with students that she had become comfortable with, so many new technologies have emerged that it is an area she needs to focus time on. She would also like to prioritize expanding her repertoire of diverse strategies for increasing student learning.

**Reflection**

Examining these national rubrics with a practicing librarian has allowed me to gain an over-arching view of the many roles of the media specialist and an understanding of how the media center serves as the central learning hub of a school. The focus of this media specialist on both emerging technologies and the new curriculum being implemented around the Common Core highlight the fact that a media specialist and media center will constantly be evolving. Learning for Life takes on a dual meaning as my exciting new career continues to change, yet fundamentally remains firmly rooted in information literacy. The evaluation tools allow a media specialist to prioritize goals for upcoming years that best increase student achievement and staff development in efficient use of information.

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| **Action Plan for NCMS** | |
| **Goal #1** | The school library media specialist will research and learn emerging technology tools that support multiple literacies and introduce them to students. |
| **Objectives** | 1. The media specialist will find and follow blogs, twitter feeds, peer listservs, and other web resources that share emerging technologies.  2. The media specialist will review plans for upcoming student tasks and projects, as well as the curriculum, to develop ideas for authentic use of emerging technologies.  3. The media specialist will choose three-four new information technologies and/or presentation tools and develop quick-start guides for students. |
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| **Goal #2** | The school library media specialist will develop an understanding of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) and align the collection to include supporting resources. |
| **Objectives** | 1. The media specialist will attend county and state provided professional development sessions on CCSS and NGSS both face-to-face and online.  2. The media specialist will attending school level department planning meetings in August to discuss the intended implementation of the CCSS and NGSS at the local level.  3. Using the report capabilities of the OPAC, the media specialist will align subject topics in the collection – both print and multi-media resources – to the new topics in the curriculum. |
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| **Goal #3** | The school library media specialist will develop a position description for volunteers. |
| **Objectives** | 1. The media specialist will survey fellow county media specialists and her online personal learning network for sample volunteer position descriptions.  2. The media specialist and the media clerk will collaboratively list tasks currently performed by volunteers, as well as brainstorm tasks that may be able to shift to volunteers.  3. The media specialist will meet with current volunteers to receive their input into the draft description and solicit their ideas on recruitment of additional volunteers. |

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| **Action Plan for Amy Soldavini** | |
| The overarching goal of my professional development plan was to become knowledgeable about my new library media center and community.  Using the *Learning 4 Life Sample School Librarian Performance and Evaluation System,* I was able to align goals based on the components to my original PDP objectives. | |
| **Original PDP Objective** | Seek out an initial set of staff to collaboratively plan student learning and promote this collaboration throughout the building |
| **Aligned Goal #1** | Component 1f: Collaborating in the Design of Instructional Experiences: School Librarian collaborates with teachers in most disciplines in designing, planning, implementing, and assessing meaningful learning activities that integrate the use of multiple resources and the development of research skills and various literacies |
| **Objectives** | 1. The media specialist will attend team level planning meetings and find an initial group with whom to collaboratively plan, implement, and assess an inquiry-based learning activity.  2. The media specialist will promote and display the student products and share details of the success of the collaborative process to the rest of the staff.  3. The media specialist will continue to attend team level planning meetings, expanding the collaborative planning to other disciplines and team levels. |
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| **Original PDP Objective** | Increase the use of technology-based research skills and information processing by students |
| **Aligned Goal #2** | Component 3c: Engaging Students in Learning: School librarian recommends or guides students to resources that link well with the content learning goals, the students’ prior knowledge and life experiences. The resources engage students cognitively and serve to enhance the active construction of understanding. Most students respond to the high expectations of the teacher and the school librarian. |
| **Objectives** | 1. The media specialist will develop lessons that explicitly teach students the research process, AGOPPE, using authentic experiences that are engaging and relevant to their experiences.  2. The media specialist will find and follow blogs, twitter feeds, peer listservs, and other web resources that share emerging technologies.  3. The media specialist will develop guides, pathfinders, and resources to share these emerging technologies and presentation tools with students. |
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| **Original PDP Objective** | Plan and execute activities that occur at different times of the day to encourage community and parental involvement |
| **Aligned Goal #3** | Component 1e: Demonstrating a Knowledge of Literature and Lifelong Learning: School librarian has an extensive knowledge of current and classic literature of all genres and is extremely successful in working with groups and individuals to promote good books, reading for pleasure and love of learning. |
| **Objectives** | 1. The media specialist will plan and prepare three family events occurring at different times of day to encourage community and parental involvement.  2. The media specialist will assess through survey and exit slips the success of these reading promotion activities and solicit suggestions for improvement and for reaching more families.  3. The media specialist will reflect and revise plans for the following school year. |