The Principal and the School Librarian: Meeting the Challenges of NCLB as a Team
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As building leader, meeting the demanding requirements of No Child Left Behind falls most heavily on you, the principal. Are you aware that you have a powerful ally in your school librarian?

Well-supported library programs can specifically and effectively support your building's NCLB goals, including:

Helping ensure all students are literate by 2013.
Short-term fixes like adopting a new basal reading series, teaching students test-taking skills, giving practice tests, and making sure everyone is well-fed and rested on test day are popular. But smart schools are discovering that simply increasing standard reading instruction and "test prep" do not work with many children nor do they have a long-term impact, and they are looking for other strategies. Your library program can be a critical partner in implementing strategies that not only improve test scores, but actually increase the reading abilities of all students.

It's unarguable that children who like to read, who read willing and joyfully also tend to read better. (1) Good library programs bolster the efforts of the classroom teacher and reading teacher whose responsibility it is to teach students *how* to read by helping students *want* to read. Again, students who like to read, read better by practicing reading skills.

Classroom reading instruction often requires students to read fiction and narrative non-fiction. But many tests ask students to interpret factual exposition. Your library has a wealth of good materials that have interesting expository writing: newspapers, magazines, and interesting non-fiction books. Your librarian, as an expert in children's and young adult materials, knows the resources that are of high interest to reluctant readers. And the librarian is an expert in getting those materials into the hands of students through book talks, reading promotions, and collaborative projects with classroom teachers. The school librarian can design motivational reading programs and provide materials especially for the subgroups that may be causing a school to be identified as not making AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress).

Work with your librarian to make sure your school library program:
- Provides accessible reading materials for a wide range of interests on a wide range of topics.
- Promotes reading across the curriculum by providing teachers with bibliographies and classroom collections of exciting content area specific reading materials.
- Promotes reading through specially designed activities and programs. One electronic reading promotion, *Accelerated Reader*, has been shown specifically to increase student performance on standardized test scores. (2)

Helping ensure all students pass state tests.
All students, especially those living in poverty, need assignments that are relevant, applicable to everyday life, and personal. (3) A library program's well-designed research and information literacy projects meet the needs of those students.

Constructivists and project-based learning activists have long observed that actually applying skills leads to deep understandings that result in well-remembered learning. (4) Professor Royal Van Horn articulates what most of us have seen for ourselves:

"At first I was surprised to learn that the [Florida] Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills is precise enough to pick up marked differences in teaching styles, but I can always pick out the drill-and-practice teachers and those who use a more balanced approach that includes a lot of student writing and emphasizes children's literature. Guess what, the students who write a lot and read a lot do much better on the tests than those who do lots of dittos. (5)

Many state tests ask students to apply skills as well asking for simple recall of facts. Librarians, by designing teaching information literacy units tied to the classroom curriculum, help all students learn to not just memorize information, but to use it in meaningful and memorable ways. Which, of course, leads to higher test scores.

No one wants students to be content with reading for simple comprehension, knowing basic number facts, or being able to write a few complete sentences. We want to produce critical readers, real-world math users, and passionate, effective writers. State tests should only be a stopgap measure to help catch the very neediest of students – not a very low bar to which to hold all students. Project-based learning that is planned, co-taught and assessed by your school's librarian will always ask children to go beyond the minimum, and in doing so, have no difficulty in passing tests that measure just the minimum.

Work with your librarian to make sure your school library program:
- Has an articulated information literacy curriculum and grade-level benchmarks that include research and technology skills that are aligned to your state's standards.
- Teaches these skills in collaboration with the classroom teacher in projects tied to the content area curriculum

Helping ensure all students are technology literate.
The digital divide still exists. Students from less affluent families are much less likely to have home access to computers and the Internet. (6) Yet NCLB will soon require that all students be technology literate by the end of eighth grade. The library program can help your school meet this ambitious goal.

When technology skills are an integral part of the information literacy curriculum, librarians teach children how to use information technologies to answer questions and solve problems. (7) Teaching technology skills in isolation through "computer classes" leads to short recall of these skills. When computers are used only for drill and practice instruction on low level reading and math skills, students do not learn the powerful productivity and communications programs that they will use as "information age" workers.

The library also provides ready computer and Internet access to all students before, after and throughout the school day. The librarian offers computer-using students both training and supervision.

Work with your librarian to make sure your school library program:
- Provides ready access to computers and other information technologies for all students, especially those who may not have home access.
- Has integrated technology skills into its information literacy curriculum.
- Provides guidance to students using technology to complete school assignments and explore personal interests.

Helping ensure teachers have the resources and skills necessary to be deemed "highly qualified."
NCLB is creating a greater need for effective teacher staff development. Teachers may need additional formal instruction to receive the certification that makes them "highly qualified." Online courses often provide a convenient means for practicing teacher to obtain certification. The librarian can both provide information about such courses and help teachers master the technology skills needed to do the coursework.

When implementing new and more effective pedagogies, teachers seek out collaborative partners. The increased use of technology in schools for administrative purposes demands all teachers have computer skills as well as

their students. Again, the librarian is a willing partner in new approaches to instruction. The librarian also serves as the staff reference expert, helping teachers and administrators find the lesson plans, advice and fellow educators needed to make instruction change effect, thereby raising the achievement level of all students.

Work with your librarian to make sure your school library program:
- Serves as a resource for all staff development efforts.
- Finds sources of information about new instructional strategies.
- Teams with classroom teachers when moving to a more constructivist approach to teaching and learning.

Helping ensure schools remain committed to good educational practices that go beyond the minimal requirements of NCLB. One controversial aspect of NCLB is its over-reliance on standardized tests as a measurement of both student and school performance. Such tests often measure only a few basic skills and penalize students who are poor test-takers. Teaching strategies and assessment tools that assess higher level thinking skills and the application of skills are also necessary.

The librarian is an advocate for and creator of assessments that give parents and communities far more meaningful measures of abilities and efficacies. Library programs lead in the development of methods of measuring and reporting the mastery of many different kinds of learning assessments including critiqued portfolios of work that show growth, reports of abilities to work collaboratively, evidence of the skill of self-assessment of work, and use of skills to make a thoughtful difference in society. Donald Norman reminds us that "The danger is that things that cannot be measured play no role in scientific work and are judged to be of little importance." (8)

The library program can also contribute to an improved school climate. By providing a safe, nurturing, and productive space, the school experience for all students improves. A good school library is a quality many parents look for when choosing a school for their children. (9)

Work with your librarians to determine if they:
- Share their expertise in project-based learning and authentic assessment.
- Serve on building leadership teams, curriculum committees, and in other leadership functions.
- Communicate regularly with parents and the community about the library program and participates in the public relations efforts of the district.

Conclusion
A variety of credible studies prove that schools with good library programs have students who do better academically as measured by standardized test scores. (10) So does common sense. As administrators, we should not be asking ourselves if we should be devoting resources to improving test scores or to improving library programs. Improved library programs *do* equal improved test scores – and more.

We may never meet the ambitious NCLB literacy goal of 100% by 2013, but effective library programs will get us closer to that goal. It is in our professional and students' best interests if we look upon NCLB as a challenge and an impetus for positive changes. The school library program is your effective partner in helping create those changes.

Sources:

1. These writers emphasize the importance of practice reading:

- Krashen, Stephen D, *Every Person a Reader: An Alternative to the California Task Force Report on Reading.* Culver City, CA: Language Education Associates, 1996.
- Trelease, Jim *The Read-Aloud Handbook, 4th Edition*. New York: Penguin Books, 1995.

2. Paul, Terrance and others: *Impact of the Accelerated Reader Technology-Based Literacy Program on Overall Academic Achievement and School Attendance.* Madison, WI: Institute for Academic Excellence, Inc., 1996.

3. Ruby Payne makes this compelling argument in her important book *A Framework for Understanding Poverty* (aha!process, inc., 2003)

4. The Buck Institute for Education's Project Based Learning site at <http://www.bie.org/pbl/index.html> provides a good overview.

5. Van Horn, Royal. "Improving Standardized Test Scores," *Phi Delta Kappan*, Mar. 97, Vol. 78 Issue 7, p584

6. Kaiser Family Foundation "Children, the Digital Divide and Federal Policy" September 2004 <http://www.kff.org>

7. Eisenberg, Michael and Doug Johnson. "Learning and Teaching Information Technology -- Computer Skills in Context." September 2002 ERIC # ED465377

8. Norman, Donald. *Things That Make Us Smart.* Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1993.

9. SchoolMatch <http://www.schoolmatch.com/>

10. A compilation of these studies can be found in *Libraries Work* (2004) <http://www.scholasticlibrary.com/download/slw_04.pdf>