Whose goals are they anyway?

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You don't buy a quarter-inch drill bit because you want a drill bit. You buy one because you want a quarter-inch hole. (My dad)

Mankato, Minnesota, is a small town of not quite 50,000 people. It's a nice place to live. We have short lines at the movie theaters, no rush hour traffic, a part time accessible mayor, and neighborhoods where you actually talk to your neighbors. But Mankato has rapidly become a big city in one rather startling way: parents here now have a bigger choice of schools for their kids than they do of fast food restaurants.

If as a parent I am not happy with the education my son is receiving at the high school a block away from my home, I can:
- Send him to one of the other two public high schools in town.
- Send him to the just-opened, publicly-funded charter school in town.
- Send him to any of the neighboring district schools through open enrollment.
- Send him to any of the fine parochial schools in town. (Vouchers are not going away, like it or not.)
- Home school him (Yeah, right.)
- Enroll him in a virtual high school on the Internet

School officials here in Mankato and throughout the rest of the country are rapidly discovering that education has become a competitive commodity. And competition means marketing.

School media specialists and technology coordinators have a golden opportunity to increase their indispensability *if* they become a part of a district's marketing plan. Here are a few strategies to do just that:

1. **Remember that nobody really wants a good library/technology program.** Just like the drill bit quote my dad was fond of repeating, the brutal fact is that most people simply don't care if there is a good library or technology program in the school. What they *do* care about is whether their children are receiving an excellent education. As media specialists and technologists, we need to get our minds around that fact and make very sure that our program goals support our school goals, not just our personal goals. The sooner that our profession stops seeing itself as something holy and good in-and-of-itself, the better off we'll be.

2. **Tie your library and technology goals directly to district and building goals.** Do you know your school board's goals? Do you know your building's goals? What do your principal or superintendent want most to accomplish over the next few years? Each fall, I like to sit down with every media specialist and principal for a short meeting to talk about the building media program goals for the year. As the principal articulates his or her priorities and concerns, the media specialist and I start to formulate the goals for the media technology program. They tend to look like this:

Principal's Goals	Media Program Goals
Raising reading scores, especially with less able readers.	Increasing our reading promotion efforts and making sure teachers understand the importance of independent reading in improving reading skills.
Finding more enrichment opportunities our best students in science.	Developing faculty inservices on web-based resources for challenging science activities.
Engaging all students in higher order thinking skills.	Working with teachers to help modify their research units so students will be required to produce original, creative

	and supported solutions to genuine problems.

Building principals are currently being asked to bring about some huge improvements in both the scope and degree of educational effectiveness in their buildings. Believe me, they are looking for allies in these change efforts. We can be there for them.

3. **Make sure that school communication and marketing efforts include information about the media/technology program.** Imagine that you are a new resident of your community. How exactly would you as a consumer of educational services find information about schools for your children? How especially would you find information about the *quality* of instructional programs?

Our district, like most, produces a plethora of building and district newsletters, flyers, pamphlets, television public service announcements, and webpages. We try to have information about our excellent media technology programs in every communication. *Every* newsletter sent from your building to your parents should have something about the media program in it. Parents can and do support and save educational programs. Sometimes they are the only ones who can.

If you have a public relations director buy him or her lunch on a regular basis. These folks are always hungry for news, awards, and exciting programs to share with the public that makes the school look good. Not unlike principals, these folk have a challenging job and welcome allies.

In your PR efforts, try to work in both concrete examples of the cool things students are doing in the media program, as well as relevant studies about the overall effectiveness of library programs such as Keith Curry Lance's wonderful research at <www.lrs.org/>. Each kind of evidence will appeal to different types of parents and the combined effect can be very powerful.

Quality school library programs help create quality schools, just like quarter inch drill bits create quarter inch holes. No doubt about it. And school leaders are beginning to realize that it's not enough just to have great schools, we have to let an increasingly education-savvy public know it. When parents can choose their schools as easily as they can choose their burger joints, let's make sure they order (and we can offer) a double child centered, individualized experience with extra media and technology. And hold the pickles.