

Building Student Learning through School Libraries

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It is such a pleasure and honor for me to be here today. I am one of those people who loves books. I love the smell, the feel, the touch, and the wonderful images created by the interesting, descriptive words. I've always loved reading books and libraries from the time I was a little girl in North Dakota and took the bus to the public library every Saturday, as our elementary school did not have a library, to my high school days of hanging out in the library to check out the books and, of course, the boys, to college where I would sit by the hour in the stacks, actually any stack, and pull out books and learn about topics that were foreign to me, to my graduate school days of trying to figure out how to run the microfilm and microfiche machines, to today, where each day I try to walk through the Creek library/media center lined with books and filled with students. Read, read, read is the message we should be giving and increased academic achievement will be the result!

School library media centers in the 21st century can, and should be, hubs for increased student achievement and positive focused school reform. Student achievement involves skill development, knowledge acquisition, research analysis of ideas and results, and, of course, integration of concepts and resources. These "windows to the world" serve as points for our continual drive for rigorous scholarly work and increased achievement for each student. In order to succeed in high school, one must be able to read, write, and compete.

Presently I serve as principal of a large urban/suburban high school in Denver, Colorado, where the library media program is the center and focal point of the school, both literally and figuratively. It is located in the center of an 80-acre campus with classes housed in four buildings. Student's travel back and forth all day, and the library media center is the only facility on the second floor, where the students have fondly named the staircase "the stairway to knowledge." Academic achievement is the heart of the philosophy and the accompanying programs of the school with personalized individual achievement manifesting itself in the fact that it is cool to be smart at Cherry Creek High School. Raising student achievement takes focused, intense, continual efforts founded in research, supported by the entire learning community, and fostered through a climate conducive to inquiry, discovery, and challenge. It can be done!

A quick profile of student achievement at Cherry Creek High School for the past 10 years reveals data that may be interesting to you. This school of 3500 students has increased graduation rate by 5% to 96% of students, decreased the drop-out rate to .8%, 90% of the graduates attend college, and in the past 10 years the National Merit Finalists have increased in number from 8 to 32 with Hispanic scholars and African-American scholars also represented. There has been a 400% increase in AP tests administered from

381 to this year's number of 1,565. Next year there should be over 2,000. At the same time scores have increased from 81% receiving a 3 or higher on the AP test to over 93% receiving a 3 or higher. There has been a concurrent increase in ACT and SAT scores, and last year State testing was administered at the high school level for the first time, and Cherry Creek High School received an "excellent" rating. This school is a comprehensive one, as many of our high schools in this country are, offering 25 sports, over 90 clubs and a myriad of volunteer opportunities. CCHS is known as a "community of scholars" based upon Roland Barth's work on community of learners. With increasing issues and demands, I maintain that one of the most effective and efficient ways to increase student achievement and love of learning is to leverage the power that school libraries can have in this process. There are five essential elements of this power:

- 1) Advocacy - A commitment to information literacy must permeate the culture of the school. Upon entry to school at Creek, students receive a day-timer that is supported by the school and the PTCO organization and "Write-It" which is a guide to acceptable writing formats for research at the school. Expectations of the school are addressed by administrators and librarians who then introduce students to all of the services available through the library media center. The sessions are mandatory and a core part of the orientation of the school. At CCHS no man or woman is an island, and the connections with information and the people who can help the students in their quest for learning must be emphasized. Continual reminders are in place with celebrations of American Library Week, hosting authors, having speakers talk about their love of books, reading and research, showcasing student work through receptions and gallery exhibits, having available bookmarks which students have designed, and having fun and informative displays. An example is that when the summer reading list becomes available, summer lawn chairs pop up in the library, and free leis are given to students who check out books for the summer. So far this year over 5,000 leis have been given out. CCHS has a mandated summer reading program and it's important that everyone read in the school. Large posters with pictures of students, staff, and even the mascot, the "Bruin," reading his or her favorite books, are posted throughout the school and are changed on a regular basis. The screensavers for many of the thousand computers in the school are individual pictures of students and faculty members showing their favorite books. Recognition is given to outstanding teachers, volunteers, and visitors by permitting them to select a book of their choice to be placed in the library with a dedication page to them. Each year an additional amount of money is allocated to replace old titles and add to collection in a subject area – i.e., English one year, Social Studies the next, etc. In this way the 47,000 volume collection is replenished and freshened each year!! One of our goals is to have students carrying a reading book with them at all times – waiting for the bus, sitting in the cafeteria – Read.
- 2) Access - The library media center should serve as the physical and philosophical center of the school. I realize that there are constraints certainly with the physical location but I strongly believe that the outward representation of the importance

- of reaching higher and stretching past the four walls of the school are incredibly important to the internal importance placed on learning. The focus on knowledge acquisition should be represented with information at the core and access for all students at all times. If possible, library hours should be extended to afford students who are busy during the day opportunities to access services after school. Libraries should never be closed during the day for meetings or parties or other administrative types of functions. They should be available, warm, and welcoming places. At Creek we have been able to keep our library open three hours each day after school ends and one night a week even later with a program that was begun by the football coaches called "The Huddle." During The Huddle, students receive tutoring, small group instruction and have access to information. Sessions are supervised by coaches and volunteer teachers, and assistance for students is provided with any topic that is needed. Over 50% of our students use the library each day.
- 3) Data Driven - Library media centers must use data to assist with making decisions about resources whether it involves personnel or materials. Services and materials should reflect the learning community's needs and the instructional priorities of the school. The CCHS librarians keep data on the use of materials. They know what materials and sources are used, by which students, and for what purpose. An example is that a few years ago the librarians presented me with data that indicated a dramatic shift from student use of periodicals to use of on-line databases. We were able to, therefore, move our resources into an area that was leveraging student learning. At the same time keeping track of this kind of information gives one an overall picture of the curriculum and academic program. With the changes we have made we are able to offer databases to students that can be accessed at home as well as audio technological services not even thought of five years ago. Which brings me to the next step...
 - 4) Integration of Technology - Technology is a means to an end, not an end in itself, a tool not a product. It is marvelous and affords ease, expedience, and efficiency, but it must be integrated through strategic planning within the instructional program. Parameters must be established for use and teachers must be trained. In the past five years we have been able to construct a program with dual platforms where 154 networked computers are housed in the library media center, including two complete computer labs. Seventy computers are located in various areas of the facility to accommodate individual student and faculty needs ranging from searching the internet, using e-mail, and accessing purchase databases, to video editing and multi-media production. Nineteen computers are available in offices for direct use by teachers and support staff. We are no longer confined by the traditional boundaries limiting access and delivery of information. Library resources are available throughout our campus through a networked environment with more than 1,000 computers. A library resources web page allowing students, staff, and community members access from the school campus and home is located at Cherry Creek High School. Students are encouraged to use the school resources from home and are given the necessary passwords to access the web

page. The resource page has links to purchased on-line databases including thousands of full text magazines, newspapers, encyclopedia, and specialized subject area databases. They also include links to district on-line catalogues, district film library catalogues, and a myriad of lists of statewide periodicals, Colorado virtual library resources, web pages created for specific class projects and many other helpful sites. Furthermore, the students and teachers can use inter-library loan request systems to borrow resources from all district schools and the district professional libraries. This increased accessibility to in-depth material supports the content covered in the classroom and encourages discovery and inquiry. There are no games played in this area. Learning is serious; learning is joyful; and students understand the purpose of technology.

- 5) Connections between Teaching and Learning - The teaching/learning process must be emphasized through the model of a teaching library. Librarians must be viewed and behave as teachers – of teachers, of students, and the community. They must serve as leaders to form instructional teams and promote professional growth. Membership on important instructional leadership committees as well as offering direct services to staff and students is vital. A basic foundation of the school must be that information literacy has to be incorporated throughout the entire program. At CCHS when teachers design research assignments they do so in collaboration with a teaching librarian. At present we have 6 _ positions for teaching librarians. When teachers bring groups of students to a lab or to the library they do so in conjunction with work that has been planned with a librarian. When portable hubs of computers are taken to classrooms for student work, the lessons are planned with the librarians. Numbers and incidence of various kinds of research and lessons are kept on file to help others in the planning process. Examples of successful assignments are available at any time, and individual students often seek out librarians for assistance. Our data indicates that an average of 55 classes per month are held for purposes of research in the library. Another 120 classes per month are taught in the library using technology and over 50 students plan individually with librarians for research on a myriad of topics in all discipline areas. A Creek Technology Center has been funded through a program called “Bricks for Bruins,” where patrons purchase a brick to be placed in a prominent walkway and this funds the CTC. It is a multi-media program that will be expanded next year to include a full broadcast studio with two courses per day being offered to students.

At Cherry Creek High School our goal is that each graduate is a young independent thinker who is capable of academically competing with his or her worldwide counterparts and is a person who knows how to give back to the community. The school goal is entwined with the library media program of helping students gather the information to be lifelong learners and effective users and evaluators of ideas and information in both their academic and their personal lives. Our students are being faced with incredible ethical and moral decisions in a rapidly changing physical, political, economic, and social environment. They must be prepared to make these decisions and I believe very strongly that the only way they will be equipped is for schools to support

their library media programs and to totally integrate these programs into the learning process of the school. No longer can students just rely on textbooks for needed information; students must access new information on a daily basis and be taught to integrate that information into their existing framework. Through access for each student by having them be competent readers and providing them with books, coupled with instruction with high expectations and guided practice, the library media specialists can leverage their leadership to increase student achievement. Critical thinking and information literacy provide this framework. All students are active learners engaged in the research that is deliberately designed to give them the information literacy skills and experience needed to be successful citizens in an information based society. It's cool to be smart, it's cool to be a reader in this rigorous academic environment where the community of scholars continually collaborate to bring more and more information to students who are able to integrate and apply their knowledge to real world issues. Obviously, I am incredibly proud of the kinds of things that occur at Cherry Creek High School and I welcome any and all of you to come see us and share the ideas of a constantly changing program that is dedicated to offering the best program possible to each student.