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# School Media Programs: ... Where Are We? ... Where Are We Going?

Carol G. Lewis

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A recent study showing a strong correlation between school system expenditures on library media services and pupil performance on scholarship examinations has stirred a great deal of attention and prompted library professionals to bombard the independent Ohio organization<sup>1</sup> that conducted the study with requests for the supporting data. We in the profession have been convinced for years that good school libraries can and do make a difference in student achievement, but convincing school leaders to support school media programs from scarce resources has been an uphill battle. We all have seen the possibility of using data from this recent study to heighten interest in support of school library media programs; however, getting adequate funding remains a challenge for school media coordinators.

So where do we stand nationally, locally? Do we have the instructional resources in our school libraries to support the curriculum? Put these or any similar questions to several individuals, and you are likely to get widely different answers. Each person's perceptions affect her or his point of view and interactions with others. Perception could be the biggest roadblock to our success in gaining adequate support for strong school media programs.

## Major Concerns: A National Perspective

A review of the major areas of concern for school library media professionals in the next ten years, which have been defined by the National Association of State Educational Media Professionals (NASTEMP)<sup>2</sup> will put our efforts in North Carolina into a broader, national perspective. The identified areas of critical concern were: 1) the changing role of the public school library media specialist; 2) the assessment of the impact of technology on curriculum and instruction; 3) the

critical shortages of qualified personnel in the library media field; 4) evaluation of library media personnel; 5) the need for demonstration schools in each state; and 6) library media learner outcomes.

These concerns are the result of a Think Tank held in Minneapolis, Minnesota in September 1986 which was attended by state-level media professionals from across the United States. The major areas of concern were identified and submitted to the membership for input. Members ranked their priorities and the results were published in November 1987.

North Carolina has already taken action to address the major concerns and has initiated programs to provide leadership for newer technologies within the school community.

## Recent Efforts: A State Perspective

Leadership for school media programs in North Carolina has come from two primary sources—the Department of Public Instruction and the North Carolina Association of School Librarians. NCASL initiatives may be more evident to its active members, while efforts of SDPI may be more apparent statewide. Several organizational changes at the Department of Public Instruction reflect attempts to keep abreast of newer technologies, as well as to address areas of critical concern. A Division of Computer Services has been added, School Television has been expanded to become the Division of Telecommunications, and a telecommunications specialist position has been created to provide leadership in satellite installations and programming. The Division of School Media Programs expanded its services to school systems by assigning a media and technology coordinator to each of the state's eight regional education centers.

Within the last five years, Department initiatives have resulted in:

1. A Library Media and Computer Skills program defined as an integral part of the overall

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curriculum presented in the *Teacher Handbook*.<sup>3</sup>

2. Revised state guidelines for school media programs. *Media Program Recommendations*.<sup>4</sup>

3. A unique job description and performance appraisal instrument for media coordinators that embraces the expanded role of the media professional, assuring a fairer and more realistic evaluation.

4. Studies to determine the extent of need for school media coordinators by 1992 and involvement in initiatives to recruit potential candidates into the profession.

5. Legislative initiatives resulting in \$28.4 million for computer equipment, software, and staff development, and \$3 million for satellite technology.

6. An additional certification for Media Supervisor (078) and Instructional Technology Specialist—Computers (077).

### Individual Effort Necessary for Success

It is clear that North Carolina has made progress toward developing strong school media programs and addressing the concerns identified by NASTEMP. We are leaders nationally. However, we continue to be frustrated by the apparent apathy of many North Carolina teachers and school leaders. There is a general lack of understanding and enthusiasm for the valuable contribution an effective school media program can make in strengthening the school's instructional program.

This apathy can be attributed partly to the absence of a formal introduction in higher education's teacher/administrator training programs to the role of the media program in the instructional process. But a large portion of the responsibility rests with media professionals alone. That technological advancements have continually redefined the role of the school media coordinator over the years has not been self-evident to other educators. Media coordinators have failed to communicate these changes effectively. One of the most effective ways to change perceptions is for the media coordinator to establish collegial relationships with teachers and administrators, opening the door to successful interaction. As stated in *Media Program Recommendations*, "The image of the media program and staff can exert positive influence and gain support from the school board, superintendent, principal, school patrons, and the community."<sup>5</sup>

Two major areas where perceptions need to be changed are acceptance of the media coordinator as "teacher," and recognition of the need for additional allocations for collection development.

To be able to contribute to the improvement of the instructional program, media coordinators must be familiar with the school's curriculum and contemporary teaching techniques. Strategies include: attending grade-level and departmental meetings; becoming familiar with textbooks used in the school; discussing classroom assignments with teachers; and planning related, correlated, or integrated skills lessons for students.

To assure serious consideration of larger budget requests—necessary because of inflation, expensive new technology resources and aging collections—establish a collection development plan, involve teachers and students in the selection process, and support budget requests with data understood by administrators.

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## ... good school libraries can and do make a difference in student achievement.

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### Conclusion

The future looks bright. Many school media coordinators have established themselves as valuable members of the teaching team and, through active Media Advisory Committees, have heightened the awareness of teachers and principals regarding the need for strong media collections that reflect the curriculum of the school. These bright spots serve as models for those reluctant to broaden their horizons. The new Media Coordinator Performance Appraisal Instrument will serve as a guide to administrators who are unsure of reasonable expectations for the school media coordinator. State Instructional Materials and Supplies funding was increased by the legislature this year. If media professionals document budget needs, there is a greater likelihood that this funding will be directed to the media programs.

The challenge to all of us remains one of *individual* commitment to communicating our redefined role and to providing the vision so that other educators recognize the value of the school media program for what it can be.

### References

1. School Match, 5027 Pine Creek Drive, Westerville, Ohio 43081.
2. National Association of State Educational Media Professionals. *Goals and Objectives for the '90's: A Report of the NASTEMP Think Tank* (1987): I.
3. Area of Instructional Services, SDPI, *Teacher Handbook: North Carolina Competency-Based Curriculum, Library Media and Computer Skills, Grades K-12*. Raleigh: N.C. State Board of Education, 1985.
4. Educational Media and Technology Services, SDPI, *Media Program Recommendations: Individual School/Administrative Unit*. Raleigh: N.C. State Board of Education, 1986.
5. *Ibid*, I-8.