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## Evaluating Media Specialists and Media Programs

When I see the word “evaluation,” I think about value. What is the value of the media program and media specialist to the school community? How can we measure that value? How can we determine what the current value is and how to increase it? Obviously, no matter how “valuable” a program is, there always should be reflection or an accounting of what’s working and what more can be done. Not only does this help improve a current program, but it also can help other programs and media specialists hoping to improve their own libraries.

There are many different tools used to evaluate media programs. Some are nationally developed, while others are county-based. Some districts have highly-formalized evaluation programs, while others have none. The media specialist from Linganore High School in Fredrick County and I recently examined two evaluation rubrics created by the Association of American School Libraries. Later I also consulted Maryland’s state standards for media center programs. Each one was distinctively different, and each had their own positives and negatives.

### *A Planning Guide for Empowering Learners with School Library Program Assessment Rubric*

This rubric is massive and overwhelming. Covering multiple pages, it consists of four categories, and within each category, there are many detailed subtopics or subcategories to consider. With each subtopic, the user selects one of three achievement levels. This rubric attempts to cover every aspect of a media center program and media specialist’s job. Some areas seem to be under-valued, however, while others are emphasized. For example, the subcategory labeled “proactive” under budget demands that the school librarian proactively sees additional funding. The LHS media specialist questioned mandatory fundraising. Some additional concerns included:

- inclusion of categories in which the media specialist had no control, such as staffing, budgeting, technology infrastructure, etc.
- lack of attention to ADA compliance and accessibility based on language, abilities, etc.
- confusing use of criteria labels that change and are inconsistent (as if groups were assigned different categories, and they developed their own rubric language).

- poorly structured categories and subtopics that should be moved to other categories.
- possible disconnect from what really happens daily in a school library.
- lengthy and confusing, which may prevent other stakeholders from accurately interpreting or taking the time to thoroughly consider each category.

On the other hand, the highly descriptive categories provide explicit information and ideas that prevent ambiguity. The details included in the rubric also are beneficial for goal setting. Considering that this tool is meant to evaluate an entire program, perhaps its vastness is justified. By including as many things as possible, county decision makers can consider this a learning tool to determine what an ideal media center program should include. Unfortunately, the enormity and confusing nature of the document may be more prohibitive than productive as a primary evaluation piece. It fails to draw attention to more important issues, such as development appropriate signage to enable patrons to be independent users and how the collection is being developed, used, promoted, analyzed, etc.

### *L4L Sample School Librarian Performance and Evaluation System*

This system, modified from Charlotte Danielson's work, presents a more manageable evaluation tool. FCPS staff have been examining Danielson's work as we switch over to a new evaluation system. As soon as the media specialist began looking at this tool, she recognized the connection to Danielson's work. This familiarity may help the tool be more readily accepted by FCPS media specialists while also helping other teachers see that indeed everyone is being held accountable for their teaching.

Like the Empowering Learners' rubric, there are four categories or domains. Under each domain, several subtopics are listed. However, each subtopic contains a brief list of "elements" explaining what is incorporated into the subtopic, or component. Instead of breaking out each element and rating the specialist on each minitopic, the user makes a more holistic judgment. Another helpful difference is that the judging criteria is consistent throughout, which makes the document shorter and easier to use. The media specialist also pointed out that this tool makes specific reference to ensuring equal access for all users, including those with different abilities and special needs. The document also highlights the importance of helping patrons become independent, self-directed users by developing proper signage, policies and procedures. Finally, in some categories, the "unsatisfactory" descriptions include almost humorous details of what not do, interjecting a bit of levity in our discussion.

### *Analysis of the library program*

Using both rubrics, there were some clear indicators of what made the media center program strong.

The library has a very impressive collection that represents the interests of all stakeholders, is current, appealing and driven by the curriculum needs of the students and staff. This is a new collection recently developed as part of new school construction. Another area of strength is the use of space to support instructional goals. The media center is seen as an extension of the classroom in which students and teachers utilize both the space and the media specialist to meet curriculum goals. The media specialist closely monitors media center sign-ups and consults with teachers in a proactive manner before they visit the library with their classes. Finally, the school library program consistently relies on established routines, policies and procedures that help maintain a smoothly running media center. This consistency creates stability and certainty because everyone knows what to expect, how things work and can depend on the media center and librarian to perform at a high level.

When using the Empowering Learners' rubric, it was much easier to identify areas of weakness than when using the L4L rubric. However, there were some common threads. There is no vision for learning communicated to the school community. The mission statement and vision have not been developed or publicized. While there may be Frederick County and state mission and vision statements, the individual library does not have one. Also, the media center program could benefit from more community and stakeholder involvement. There is no advisory group or regularly scheduled meeting of invested people who develop the media center's vision and mission while also helping set future goals. Although there may be other areas of need, the most important goal tying these others together would be program planning and evaluation. Currently, there is no program plan or document outlining goals, short or long term. This makes evaluation and reflection more difficult, whether it is during the school year, at the end of the school year or even going back through the years to gain a comprehensive perspective of the program. It also prevents the media center program being seen as an integrated part of the school improvement plan. How can goals be aligned with the school's goals and SIP if there are no goals? In this precarious age of questioning the value of media centers, planning and evaluation are essential.

### *Analysis of the media specialist*

It is difficult to separate the person from the program. Obviously the media specialist helps drive the program. Several of the program strengths and weaknesses can be directly connected to the media specialist. To avoid repeating items already discussed, I identified issues related to the media specialist using AASL's L4L school librarian evaluation tool because it focuses directly on the individual teacher instead of the program. Linganore's media specialist is very strong in many areas. In the domain of planning and preparation, she is highly knowledgeable about the collection, resources and connection to curriculum,

although as she said, she has had to develop the collection twice in the past several years. Once for a new school and then for her school. Essentially, she reviewed every material at least twice. Because of the extensive work involved with building a collection from zero, she knows a lot about her resources. As time goes on, however, this will become more difficult, especially as weeding and upgrading occurs.

Another area of strength is in the domain of instruction. Many of her lessons and activities are designed to be embedded within classroom instruction, which she sees herself as an equal partner, from planning to grading or assessing. While she said she would like to improve in the areas of questioning and assessment, she remains a highly valuable tool when engaging students and helping them successfully complete their tasks. A third critical area that Linganore's media specialist excels in is a combination of professionalism and library environment. She maintains clear and consistent expectations and procedures while also creating a culture of respect and tolerance. Because of this, she has a stellar reputation at her school. She is friendly, yet firm, to all parties, whether students or staff, treating everyone equally. She is an excellent record keeper and very thorough with her knowledge of budgeting, ordering, etc. She has many strengths, which makes it difficult to narrow them down to just a few. Because building relationships is so important, her demeanor and sense of professionalism are valuable. She not only earns respect based on these characteristics, but also because she is a highly knowledgeable media specialist and instructional expert.

Despite these strengths, there are several areas of need. She said she would like to improve the organization of the physical space to encourage more self-directed use. Having lost her media aide, she knows that next year it will be more important than ever that patrons are able to locate what they need with limited assistance. She wants to further develop and increase the signage and other materials that can help direct people. Two other areas of weakness fall under the domain of professional responsibility. Reflecting on practice may be occurring naturally, but there is no written plan, set of goals, objectives, etc., upon which to map progress. By making reflection visible through a publicized action plan and evaluation tools, the media specialist clearly can demonstrate how valuable she is and easily set future goals. Connected to this is advocacy. There is little advocacy through communication, seeking input, working with stakeholders, etc. She is very independent and highly skilled, however, providing opportunities for all library users to be involved in the decision making will instill a sense of ownership and community. By communicating these efforts and sharing media center progress, more people will see the value in the program and support its continued growth.

## **Three program goals** *(taken primarily from the Empowering Learners' analysis)*

### **Media Center Goals and Objectives**

(While goal #1 is critical, it is dependent upon goals #2 and #3 being achieved as well.)

**Goal #1** *The media center program is driven by a strategic long-term plan that includes clearly defined objectives and evaluation steps and checks to monitor progress.*

<p><b>Objective #1</b></p>	<p>The media specialist will conduct a needs assessment of all stakeholders and compile information and data about the media center use, effective practices based on current research, the school improvement plan, etc. Before goals can be established, the current status of the media program must be established.</p> <p>For example, the media specialist will run circulation reports to determine how the collection is used, examine areas of strength and needs, average copyright dates, connection to curriculum, etc. The media specialist will review previous library calendars and schedules to compile a facilities use chart to determine how the media center currently is being used. This may include reviewing past yearly reports sent to the county and state offices. Another source of data may include past budgets and ordering records. She also will want to examine data used by the school improvement team to create the school improvement plan, which may include student demographic data and connection to student achievement, scores from required summative reading and writing assessments, drop-out and attendance rates, etc. Close attention should be paid to students in high-needs groups, such as those with disabilities, from low socio-economic backgrounds or high-risk populations. She also may review community census trends.</p>
<p><b>Objective #2</b></p>	<p>The media specialist will collect sample county, state and national plans and evaluation tools. Using this information, the media specialist will design an action-plan template on which goals and objectives can be outlined and monitored.</p>
<p><b>Objective #3</b></p>	<p>The media specialist will construct possible goals and objectives aligned with the school improvement plan, the library mission and vision statements, needs of the stakeholders, and data researched in objective #1.</p>
<p><b>Objective #4</b></p>	<p>The media specialist will share information and solicit feedback from stakeholders about possible goals and objectives, and steps to accomplish them. The stakeholders also will help construct progress checks and evaluation tools to help monitor goals and objectives, while also identifying data points and evidence to be collected.</p>
<p><b>Objective #5</b></p>	<p>Once a formal plan has been approved, the media specialist will publicize the goals and objectives.</p>
<p><b>Objective #6</b></p>	<p>Formal assessment data will be collected on a continuous and ongoing basis to set priorities and improve the library program. This data is shared and publicized. Data should include those</p>

	pieces mentioned in objective #1 to help measure the current program status.
<p><b>Goal #2 The media center has well-publicized mission and vision statements reflecting the needs school community needs, along with expectations that students and staff will be critical thinkers, effective and ethical users of ideas and information, enthusiastic readers and skillful researchers. (wording from the Empowering Learners rubric)</b></p>	
Objective #1	The media specialist will collect different mission and vision statements from national, state and local libraries/library agencies.
Objective #2	The media specialist will convene stakeholders to develop mission and vision statements aligned with those of the school, county, state, etc. If necessary, the media specialist will seek administrative and SIT approval.
Objective #3	The media specialist will publicize the mission and vision statements throughout the school, the library website, the parent newsletter, media center stationary, email signatures, etc.
Objective #4	The media specialist will collaborate with graphic design students to develop a logo symbolizing the mission.
Objective #5	The stakeholders and media specialist will reconvene to evaluate and consider the effectiveness of the mission and vision statements.
<p><b>Goal #3 The media center program includes the school community in its programming, use of space and decision-making process.</b></p>	
Objective #1	The media specialist will develop a roles and responsibilities document outlining the organization and purpose of a school-community library team.
Objective #2	The media specialist will actively recruit members from all stakeholder groups to form a school-community library team. The media specialist may consider forming both a student-only group and a mixed group.
Objective #3	The library team will convene on a regular schedule to consider goals and provide essential input that will help shape and expand the program.
Objective #4	The media specialist will celebrate, publicize and share this information with the school community and the School Improvement Team.

## Three personal goals for Shawn

### Using the L4L Performance and Evaluation System

**Goal #1 Collaboration in the design of instructional experiences: The specialist 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.**

<b>Objective #1</b>	The specialist will review data connected to student achievement, include data used to create the school improvement plan, high school assessment data, student subgroup testing and achievement data, etc. to identify content areas in which students are struggling. Close attention should be paid to students in high-needs groups, such as those with disabilities, from low socio-economic backgrounds or high-risk populations.
<b>Objective #2</b>	The specialist will examine the library media curriculum and content-area curriculum of concern to brainstorm ideas for possible integrations and resources to different instruction. Common Core could be a rich area for exploration.
<b>Objective #3</b>	The specialist will approach the department chair to seek guidance and advice. The specialist will attend a department meeting to seek support and volunteers.
<b>Objective #4</b>	The volunteer and specialist will meet to plan before/during/after instruction, including pre and post-assessments. Both will complete a collaborative teaching tracking sheet to help outline the lesson and responsibilities.
<b>Objective #5</b>	After the activity, the specialist and volunteer will compare strengths and weaknesses of the activity. They will reflect on the process and product, along with how well the objectives were mastered by the students. They will revise and finalize their activity/lesson plans.
<b>Objective #6</b>	The specialist will publicize and celebrate the collaborative team teaching. The specialist will seek new volunteers.

**Goal #2 Growing and developing professionally: The specialist seeks out opportunities for professional development and feedback. The specialist initiates activities such as teaching workshops, writing articles and presentations.**

<b>Objective #1</b>	The specialist will seek feedback about the professional development needs of the school community and how to best meet these needs.
<b>Objective #2</b>	The specialist, with the help of others, will prioritize the professional development needs and select the most important.
<b>Objective</b>	The specialist will develop and host a professional development workshop that targets the

#3	needs of the school community.
<b>Objective #4</b>	Participants will provide feedback and suggestions for follow-up. The specialist will review and share results to with staff, along with celebrating their participation.
<b>Objective #5</b>	The specialist will collect a list of at least 10 professional opportunities for the year that are outside of the building, from presenting workshops to publishing articles to writing grants.
<b>Objective #6</b>	The specialist will brainstorm and examine possible ideas and relevant topics for presentations and publishing. The specialist will develop a list of 5 topics with which the specialist has some knowledge and expertise.
<b>Objective #7</b>	The specialist will create at least one proposal each semester, whether it's for a workshop, article, presentation, etc. These proposals may include collaborating with others.
<b>Objective #8</b>	The media specialist will reflect on effort, and publicize and celebrate any success. The specialist will then set new goals.

***Goal #3 Communicating with school staff and community: The specialist effectively and consistently communicates with school staff and community to keep them informed and employs evidence to promote effective instructional practices. The specialist solicits feedback and input to improve instruction, programs and service.***

<b>Objective #1</b>	The specialist will design a survey to seek input and advice about ways to communicate and share information with the school community. Also, suggestions for what type of information will be most beneficial to different audience members will be collected.
<b>Objective #2</b>	Using data from school community surveys, the specialist will create a list of possible tools that the school community would use to learn information: websites, twitter, findoutfirst, email, newsletters, department meetings, etc.
<b>Objective #3</b>	The specialist will select four topics to be discussed between August and the end of first semester. Four new topics will be selected for second semester. The specialist may select one consistent tool or try a variety of tools.
<b>Objective #4</b>	The specialist will establish a "publishing" calendar with the dates and topics. Stakeholders will be given the opportunity to review and provide suggestions throughout the process.
<b>Objective #5</b>	The specialist will create a school library team to help direct and provide feedback to improve programming and service.