

# Transitions to



*Students from Huntsville City (Ala.) Schools study in the cyber cafe, formerly the library, as part of a districtwide shift to digital learning in partnership with Pearson. This overhaul in the way students are taught boosted enrollment and has shown marked improvement in student engagement.*

## DIGITAL MEDIA

### Are school libraries on the way out?

By Susan McLester

If your school librarians are feeling beleaguered these days, well, they have good reason. Consider:

- The ranks of certified school librarians have been decimated in recent years by districts struggling to balance budgets.
- The explosive growth of anywhere-anytime digital content in K12 districts threatens to make the concept of library-as-media-center an anachronism.
- And in the most recent blow to librarians, the city of San Antonio announced plans in January to open the nation's first bookless public library, where all content will be available exclusively on e-readers.

So is this the beginning of the end for school libraries? Not by

a long shot, says Susan Ballard, president of the American Association of School Librarians (AASL). Enlightened administrators realize that school librarians still play a pivotal role for students, guiding them through search processes and helping them find appropriate, reliable, vetted resources in print and digital format for research and other classroom projects.

And the role of information navigator is becoming ever-more important. A November 2012 Pew study, "How Teens Do Research in the Digital World," which polled 2,462 middle and high school teachers, found that 83 percent of participants agreed the amount of information available online today is overwhelming to most students.

# Transitions to **DIGITAL MEDIA**



Elementary students at Forsyth County (Ga.) Schools have a newly renovated media center. The new space offers color, left, and computers, right, to keep students engaged and active 21st-century learners.

## **Custodians of Information**

Helping students sift through oceans of information and teaching them how to find and vet appropriate content for research is a digital-age challenge that students in earlier generations did not have to face, says Ballard.

Marcie Post, executive director of the International Reading Association (IRA), adds that the school librarian is “a digital

age lynchpin,” more important than ever to maintaining the integrity of information so integral to teaching and learning. Searching, researching, and accessing critical perspectives in all subject areas, as well as coaching and guiding students, is increasingly necessary, she adds.

What today’s school librarians really need are advanced skills in instructional technology and media, says Jill Hobson,

director of instructional technology for Forsyth County Schools in Cumming, Ga. Ideally, librarians perform various tasks, including working collaboratively with teachers to plan and design curriculum, delivering professional development on the newest technologies and resources, and piloting and reviewing emerging hardware, software, and web-based resources.

Creating a sense of community and transforming the library into a user-friendly space are other 21st-century services librarians are charged with to ensure the library stays viable.

## **Research Proves Libraries Far From Dead**

Publishers will continue with printed books.

Education content publishers say they are far from discontinuing traditional printed resources.

A 2010 Scholastic-Gates Foundation study of 40,000 pre-K12 teachers, “Primary Sources: America’s Teachers on America’s Schools,” found that 80 percent of high school students continue to get reading material primarily from school libraries. And a 2012 Pew Internet and American Life survey, “Reading Habits in Different Communities,” found that 90-93 percent of readers still preferred print books over e-books.

Mary Cullinane, executive vice president of global corporate responsibility for Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, says that while her company’s digital textbooks offer engaging interactive multimedia elements, many schools are still a long way from the 1:1 technology deployment that would allow students to take advantage of them.

Kate Miller, vice president of communications for Pearson, adds that the company will publish printed textbooks as long as there is a need.

## **Library to Learning Commons**

Building that sense of community requires an environment that accommodates and encourages physical and virtual learning, says Ballard. “School learning commons,” a term coined in 2008 by former AASL President David Loertscher, describes a flexible, student-centered space where students and teachers have access to mobile technologies, digital and print resources, and modular spaces that can be used for collaborative activities, content creation, presentations or even performances.

The library needs to stop being a place where children are forced to be quiet, and more closely emulate a café style environment where students can bring food



The Swan Valley High School library program in Saginaw, Mich., infuses technology into learning but still focuses on reading, as a high school volunteer shares story time with an elementary student, left. And Houghton Mifflin Harcourt volunteers, right, at a library in Dorchester, Mass.

and drink and relax in a comfortable setting, says Hobson. There should be open spaces, chat areas, places for students to work independently on their laptops or

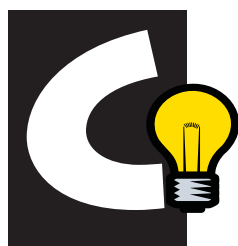
tablets, or in groups to leverage use of such technology resources as videoconferencing or editing software.

In a learning commons scenario, the

librarian's day might consist of: providing IT support to a small group of students who are editing an original video using high-end software; helping a student work

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*Fresno Unified School District students gather in the school library to create podcasts or a video story using digital media.*

says libraries should offer Wi-Fi, iPad or laptop carts, high-end video editing and podcast software, and videoconferencing equipment that helps develop “transliteracies,” or skills in the use of multimedia.

Hobson says that one high school, five elementary schools and one middle school library in Forsyth are equipped with media:scape technology from Steelcase, a high-definition video-conferencing solution that allows students to plug in their own devices and collaborate via large screens for cultural exchanges or projects with other learners around the globe.

At about \$15,000, says Hobson, media:scape technology is an example of an item most school leaders cannot afford in multiple quantities, but might be able to make available to all students through the school library.

on a personal technology device and find the best digital resources; giving primary-age students a review of printed books on the topic of pets; and conducting a training session for grade 8 social studies teachers on web-based products that allow students to connect with peers around the world and aligning such activities with Common Core State Standards.

Keith Fiels, American Library Association

(ALA) executive director, says transforming libraries to learning commons reflects a philosophical change, from the library as a “passive warehouse” to a more active community center, learning center, and study center.

### **Center for Technology Innovation**

School libraries should also be centers of innovation and experimentation. Ballard

### **Advocacy Key to Survival**

For libraries and librarians to overcome the perception of obsolescence, advocacy on several levels is needed, experts say. Jeffrey Katz, ALA’s assistant director of the office of government relations, says librarians have been especially vulnerable to layoffs because they are not protected under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Through an ALA School Library Task

## **The Digital Publishing Challenge**

The lack of a standard publishing model makes transitions tough.

A major obstacle for libraries in transitioning to digital content includes lacking a standard publishing model, primarily for popular fiction, says Ann Fondren, coordinator of library services for Spotsylvania County (Va.) Public Schools. As noted in the December 2012 National Public Radio broadcast, “Libraries and E-Learning: The ‘Wild West’ Of Digital Licensing?” some publishers, such as Simon and Schuster, refuse to license their e-books to libraries, and HarperCollins and Random House will license books, but each has its own revenue model, which can be confusing to librarians who must understand disparate purchasing models. HarperCollins allows 26 circulations of an e-book before requiring the library to purchase another copy, worth \$25 to \$35, while Random House charges up to

\$100 for a year’s license on a new title.

This is expensive, and discourages librarians from buying more books, says Fondren. On the other hand, libraries can own printed books and often circulate copies 100 times or more. Fondren uses the example of “The Hunger Games,” of which she bought 100 paper copies and three digital copies. In the end, she says, buying paper copies of books for now can be more economical than subscribing to digital versions.

AASL president Ballard says the confusion surrounding digital purchasing models is a serious issue that needs resolution as it strikes at the heart of a library’s mandate to provide students with as much exposure to content as possible.

Force, Katz, Fiels, and others are lobbying to ensure the next ESEA reauthorization includes language addressing the importance of libraries and librarians to schools.



**“Librarians should brag, brand, and create logos for their libraries and have business cards.”**

—Connie Williams, teacher librarian, Petaluma High School, Petaluma (Calif.) City Schools



On a local level, librarians need to aggressively conduct public relations campaigns, says Connie Williams, teacher librarian at Petaluma High School in the Petaluma (Calif.) City Schools.

Williams, an advocate for the California Campaign for Strong School Libraries, says she and other members write letters to parents, board members, and other stakeholders, present at conferences, such as the Global Education Conference and the California School Librarian Association (CSLA) conference, and participate in site-based committees, department meetings, and other communications activities where decisions are being made about curriculum and budgets. “Librarians should brag, brand, and create logos for their libraries, and have business cards, among other things,” says Williams.

She teamed up with teacher librarian Anna Koval from Casa Grande High School, of the same district, to brand the name and website, “Petadata,” which includes resources on intellectual property and digital content for students, teachers, and the community. Williams and Koval put the Petadata logo on bookmarks and publicity about their databases, and bring in authors to speak with students at schools and community members.

In the same vein, Shannon Miller, li-

brarian and technology specialist at Van Meter (Iowa) Community Schools, harnesses social media to brand and achieve visibility for her blog, the Van Meter Library Voice. YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, and Skype are among the tools she uses to open doors to NASA experts, authors, and others in the world beyond her school of 600.

“With all the cutbacks in schools, it’s tempting to look at the library or media

center and say I could recover [up to] \$50,000 dollars with that space,” says Post. “But with all the services librarians provide and especially with the upcoming adoption by most states of the Common Core placing a much greater emphasis on informational texts, librarians will have a greater role to play than ever.” **DA**

*Susan McLester is a contributing writer to DISTRICT ADMINISTRATION.*

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