

## [Urban Public School Libraries and Educational Reform: The Case of the Detroit Public Schools](#) | [Print](#)

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#### **Abstract**

This article explores the implications of school reform on school libraries using the Detroit Public Schools (DPS) as a case study in urban librarianship. A literature review on the role and impact of school librarians in K-12 education is included to help illustrate the role of school libraries in public school reform. Two DPS reforms are selected for closer evaluation: a 2002 district-initiated reform and a 2008 state-mandated reform. The article concludes by offering a list of recommendations to help strengthen DPS reform goals and objectives by utilizing the professional knowledge and resources of school librarians in the district. These recommendations are shaped by the author's personal and professional experiences as a former school library media specialist in DPS and as a college professor who teaches school and urban librarianship courses.

**Keywords:** Urban Education; School Reform; School Libraries; Student Achievement

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#### **Introduction**

Urban school districts across the country in places such as Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston, and Cleveland have reversed decades of poor student achievement by implementing successful school reforms. These cities have seen economic boosts because a key component of urban revitalization is having quality schooling choices for inner city residents. Unfortunately, Detroit has yet to see the same level of success as most of its urban counterparts when it comes to school reform. The purpose of this article is to show how the reform goals of the Detroit Public Schools (DPS) can be strengthened by utilizing the talents and resources of school library professionals in the district. The educational disparities that Detroit has experienced compared with surrounding suburban areas require a deeper analysis of the socio-historical backdrop of the region (see e.g., Sugrue, 2005). This article focuses solely on the academic aspect of the urban crisis in Detroit, in particular. I discuss the intersections between the academic goals of the district state-mandated reforms, and the professional expertise of school librarians. The article concludes by offering a series of recommendations for helping improve the quality of education for DPS students by taking advantage of school librarians' strengths in the areas of collaboration, technology, and leadership. Although the suggestions and recommendations made in this article relate to Detroit's circumstances, other big city school districts struggling to raise student achievement might benefit from this analysis as well.

#### **Background and Context**

Detroit has struggled to find innovative ways to manage its large bureaucratic infrastructures and landmass despite an ever-shrinking tax base caused by suburban flight. Population decline not only affects how city government operates, but it also determines how resources get allocated to public schools—a formula that is based on student enrollment figures. According to a report published by the Center on Education Policy (2009), student enrollment in the DPS declined to about 94,000 from about 105,000 students in 2007-08, well below the projected 98,356 students on which the 2008-09 budget had been based. Detroit's students are 90% African-American, 7% Latino, and 2% white. Of these students, 17% are students with disabilities and 87% are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, a measure of poverty (Center on Education Policy, 2009). In the face of losing large numbers of students to nearby charter or suburban schools, in addition to

having perennially low standardized tests scores, district officials in Detroit are seeking out ways to better educate all students. This article explores the implications of recent district- and state-level reforms for DPS school library programs. In order to contextualize these events, it is important to understand the role school libraries play in K-12 education in general.

## Literature Review

Few people would argue with the idea that students benefit from having a strong school library program that is well-equipped and administered by certified school library professionals. Most people equate libraries with helping individuals develop an affinity for reading and see libraries as a place to broaden one's horizons. Yet, when school districts undergo budget cuts, it is often school librarians whose positions are eliminated or reduced. This issue gets exacerbated during school reforms and restructuring plans when school officials fail to consider how school librarians might help them reach their reform goals and objectives.

Part of the problem is that school principals and district administrators often have a limited understanding of the skills and services school librarians can bring to a 21<sup>st</sup>-century learning environment. According to Hartzell (2002), many school principals have outdated perceptions of the role of school librarians, perceptions informed by their experiences as students in the 1950s and 1960s. At the same time, some of the problems stem from the school library profession itself. For example, the American Association of School Librarians recently approved a change in its chief professional title: the "school library media specialist" is now the "school librarian" (Staino, 2010). This change reflects a level of uncertainty among school library professionals about how best to describe and communicate to others what their work entails. To help clear up misunderstandings in the profession, Turner and Riedling (2003) recommend that school librarians clearly articulate their role:

1. Helping teachers teach;
2. Promoting reading; and
3. Providing information literacy instruction to students.

Of course, these roles describe only the instructional component of the school librarian's duties. They do not reflect the administrative roles that the school librarian must also assume, including collection development, circulation, weeding, budgeting, and annual reporting. However, this review focuses on the school librarian's contributions first to student academic achievement and then to the overall vitality of the school. Finally, the review will address the relationship between school libraries and educational reform.

### *The School Librarian's Contributions to Student Achievement*

Approximately 18 states have conducted correlation studies to explore the relationship between strong school library programs and increased academic achievement among students (see e.g., Lance, 2002). A government report evaluating these state-level studies showed a positive relationship between various services and characteristics of school library media centers and student reading test scores (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). According to the report, the following characteristics had significant positive correlations to reading test scores: number of hours libraries were open; presence of certified library staff members; flexibly scheduled access to libraries; cooperative relationships with public libraries; collaboration between library media specialists and teachers; number of Internet-connected computers; and extent of print and periodical collections. It is important to note that each of the state-level studies also considered other factors that relate to student achievement such as district per-pupil expenditure, educational attainment of parents, and minority enrollment in the districts.

Additionally, school librarians have taken a leadership role in creating a set of student learning standards that reflect the heightened demands of learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In a document entitled *Standards for the*

*21<sup>st</sup> Century Learner in Action* (2009) school library professionals have articulated a broad set of skills that today's students possess (or need to possess) in an increasingly information-rich, multi-model learning environment. At the heart of these new learning standards is the notion of inquiry-based learning. Inquiry-based learning has been described as:

A process where students are involved in their learning, formulate questions, investigate widely and then build new understandings, meanings and knowledge. That knowledge may be used to answer a question, to develop a solution or to support a position or point of view. The knowledge is usually presented to others and may result in some sort of action. (Alberta Learning, 2004, p.1)

An inquiry-based approach to teaching and learning teaches students *how* to think rather than *what* to think. The emphasis is on learning how to learn (Callison, 2006). Callison describes the inquiry process in five major stages: questioning, exploration, assimilation, inference, and reflection. Also, Todd, Kuhlthau, and Heinström (2005) have developed a toolkit to help school library professionals (in collaboration with teachers) track and assess student learning outcomes using inquiry-based teaching. This document is important given that school librarians need to learn concrete strategies for assessing student learning outcomes in the data-driven culture of accountability in schools under the No Child Left Behind Act. Overall, an inquiry-based approach to teaching is particularly beneficial for students because it affords them the opportunity to showcase a richer and more complex set of abilities that mirror today's learning styles. It is clear that school library professionals have been involved in the effort to help students become independent, information-literate, lifelong learners.

#### *The School Librarian's Contributions to the School*

The core of the school librarian's mission is to support student learning. However, there are many functions and services that school librarians must fulfill in order for student learning to occur in a seamless manner within the larger school community. Chapter Three of *Information Power* (American Association of School Librarians & Association for Educational Communications and Technology, 1998) highlights the following three areas where school librarians contribute to the entire school community:

1. Collaboration
2. Technology
3. Leadership

Research shows that students achieve more and learn better when teachers and librarians collaborate to design meaningful learning experiences for students (Montiel-Overall, 2005). In collaborative school cultures, librarians work with teachers and administrators to build and manage collections that include all formats and that support resource-based learning. Collaboration has been described as a symbiotic process that requires effort and commitment by all members of the instructional team (American Association of School Librarians & Association for Educational Communications and Technology, 1998). In the realm of teacher and school librarian collaboration, levels of cooperation range from low to high (Monteil-Overall). A high level of engagement is obviously the preferred approach since it has been linked to improved student achievement (Haycock, 2003). The push toward having an integrated school library program where teachers and school librarians collaborate to design meaningful units of instruction places today's school library professional more squarely at the center of the curriculum.

With regard to technology, school libraries provide leadership and service to the entire school community. No longer is it necessary for students, faculty, and staff to locate and retrieve materials solely through the physical collection. Instead, users can visit the library virtually through the Internet and access books through the online public access catalog (OPAC). Additionally, technology has transformed the role of the school librarian, making it a priority to help students critically and responsibly navigate the abundance of online resources.

Finally, leadership is a key element of an effective school library program. Leadership for school librarians means assuming high-profile, proactive roles in shaping the direction of learning in 21<sup>st</sup> century schools. *Information Power* (American Association of School Librarians & Association for Educational Communications and Technology, 1998) notes that it is important for school librarians to exert strong curricular and instructional leadership in order to help “clarify the nature of learning in an information-rich environment and promote a curriculum in which information literacy provides a coherent thread across all subjects and grade levels” (p. 52). As leaders in the school, it is also important that school librarians take the lead in educational reform by showing the connections between information-based learning and the skills students will need in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The next section looks more closely at the relationship between school libraries and educational reform.

### *School Libraries and Educational Reform*

Recent discussions concerning educational reform seem to favor preparing students by “teaching 21<sup>st</sup> century knowledge and skills for real world success” (Hasley, 2008). One might assume that school librarians would naturally be part of these conversations given their professional knowledge base in information access and delivery. However, such inclusion is not always the case. Consequently, it is up to school librarians to articulate how they can be important catalysts for successful and sustainable change. A number of school library professionals have written about these issues at length.

For example, in a recent article, Oberg (2009) contends that school library professionals must understand the organizational culture of change in their schools in order to set reasonable and attainable reform goals for themselves and their school library program. In Oberg’s work, culture refers to a group’s shared beliefs, customs, and behavior. The author identifies collaboration as a key feature of any effective school reform, not just one that revolves around creating an integrated school library program. According to Oberg, the principal, the teacher, and the teacher-librarian are three key players who should be involved in establishing a culture of collaboration in the school (p. 10). Oberg mentions an Ontario study showing that an exemplary school library should have a school librarian to serve as a change agent who continually strives to enhance library programs and modify existing contexts (p. 20).

Another important contribution to the literature on the role of school library media specialists in school reform initiatives is Hartzell’s (2001) article, “The Implications of Selected School Reform Approaches for School Library Media Services.” In this article, Hartzell describes different reform models and explains the principles undergirding each of them. This article helps to illustrate that school library media specialists are inextricably linked to successful reform efforts given their combined professional roles as information specialists, teachers, and instructional consultants.

Hughes-Hassell & Harada (2007) dedicate an entire volume to articulating the relationship between school reform and school libraries. A significant portion of the book deals with the impact of the standards movement in education on school libraries. One notable example is Loerstcher and Todd’s (2005) chapter on “Evidence-based Practice and School Libraries.” Todd argues that school librarians need to shift their focus away from touting the importance of information literacy instruction and instead show teachers, parents, and administrators how their work will help students demonstrate mastery beyond the school library. Todd also suggests that school librarians need to go further than simply pointing school principals to the extant research on the correlations between strong school libraries and increased student achievement. He argues that school librarians need to make student learning outcomes the center of their evidence for making this case. Each contributor to this volume stresses that school librarians act as key change agents to help improve student learning and are a vital resource for any school.

Kumasi-Johnson (2007) argues that school librarians need to come from behind the proverbial desk and adopt critical inquiry into their repertoire of pedagogical strategies. A critical approach to inquiry is rooted in critical theory and calls upon school librarians to become change agents who provide students with

space and opportunities to openly question, challenge, and investigate social and cultural issues they experience in the real world. This approach is particularly fitting for urban students who may be struggling in schools that do not sanction their home and community literacies. The goal of critical inquiry for school librarians is to help students “understand the relationships between power and domination underlying various information problems and to help students find creative ways to work toward social justice” (p. 42).

### **School Reform and School Libraries: The Case of the Detroit Public Schools**

The turn of the millennium might be described as the best of times and the worst of times for school library professionals in Detroit. On one hand, there was great promise that school librarians would be able to broaden their impact on students in the district because of a National Leadership Grant that the district’s Library Media Education Office secured in 2000 in partnership with Wayne State University. This grant, which was funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), provided education and training for 20 teachers from diverse cultural backgrounds as school library media specialists to meet a critical shortage in an urban school district (Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2009). On the other hand there were no mechanisms put in place to assure that DPS school principals would place priority on hiring these newly credentialed school librarians. Perhaps more importantly, there was no training provided to DPS school principals that would teach them how to create a school culture that supported the kind of integrated school library program that professional literature recommends. As mentioned previously, an integrated school library program is one where collaboration between classroom teachers and school library professionals serve as the foundation for curriculum development and instruction.

As a recipient of this IMLS scholarship, I believe the grant project was a mixed success. It was successful to the extent that it reached its goal of reopening some of the previously closed school libraries in the district. It was also successful in that it afforded the grant recipients, including me, an opportunity to establish careers in school librarianship by obtaining a masters degree in Library and Information Science. Unfortunately, the long-term success of the grant was also greatly dependent on the vision and the hiring practices of school principals within the district. It was an unfortunate coincidence that the end of the grant period in 2002 marked the beginning of a series of district and state-wide reforms that have since resulted in massive school closures and teacher layoffs in the past two or three years.

It should also be noted that DPS has been subjected to almost constant changes in leadership over the last twenty years. The last period of any real stability in the Detroit Public Schools was during the fourteen-year superintendency of Arthur Jefferson (1975-1989). In the 21 years since 1989, however, the Detroit school district has had approximately six superintendents and two Chief Executive Officers—a new chief every 2.3 years.

Student turnover has exacerbated the situation, as the district has lost nearly four thousand students a year for the last several years. Some students have left the city for the suburbs; some have decided on private schools; and others have opted to attend one of the area’s burgeoning charter schools. The result is a serious loss of revenues needed by the district to support its reforms.

In the next section, I look at two of the reforms that have been implemented in DPS in the past decade: one in 2002 and the other in 2008. I chose these two reforms because they represent the different types of reforms that an urban district such as Detroit might be undergoing concurrently, self-initiated or state-mandated. I discuss the broad implications of these reforms on the school library programs. I conclude by offering a set of recommendations for strengthening these two reform initiatives and strengthening the DPS in general.

### **2002: A Self-Initiated Reform in the DPS**

In 2002, Kenneth Burnley, the then Chief Executive officer of the Detroit Public Schools, requested a report from the Council of Great City Schools to review the school district’s efforts to improve student achievement. Burnley was interested in aligning the districts practices with those of cities that were seeing significant gains in student achievement. According to the report, Burnley “asked the Council to review the school district’s efforts to improve student achievement and propose ways to do better (Council of the Great City Schools, 2003).”

Using research on how fast-improving urban school districts in the nation were getting their results, the Council assembled a series of teams from other urban schools systems to propose ways that Detroit’s academic reforms could be strengthened. The report states:

These Strategic Support Teams (SSTs) visited the Detroit schools in 2002, collected data, reviewed district materials and plans, compared them with the practices of the faster-improving city schools systems, and proposed a series of steps that Detroit should take to improve student performance. The teams returned in 2003 to see how the district was progressing on the initial proposals and to suggest course corrections where needed (p. 23).

After one year of looking at the district’s practices, the Council prepared a report outlining the initial recommendations proposed by the SSTs in 2002 and then indicated whether each recommendation had been followed, was in the process of being implemented, or had not yet been initiated. Notably, most of the academic recommendations of the SST revolved around helping students reach grade-level proficiency in two areas: reading and math. Table 1 juxtaposes a few of the recommendations that the Council made with ideas about how school library professionals might help implement these recommendations using their library-specific knowledge and skill set.

Table 1	
Recommendation by the Council of the Great City Schools	A Possible Role for School Library Professionals
Establish a district-wide policy that mandates 120 minutes per day of reading instruction with re-looping in grades K-8.	School librarians can provide support to this mandate by helping teachers identify authentic, age-appropriate literature that can be checked for sustained silent reading by students.
Structure three specific levels of intervention for students who begin falling behind in reading (and/or math) based on the results of MEAP test scores.	School librarians can help devise and implement library-friendly interventions that address reading/literacy competencies such as reading comprehension, fluency, and critical thinking.

<p>Professional development and training for teachers on specific interventions, lesson plans, data use, and reading strategies for children at varying academic levels.</p>	<p>School librarians can attend these professional development opportunities and identify interventions that would apply to specific curriculum standards as well as standards for the 21<sup>st</sup>-century learner.</p>
<p>Provide specific, structured interventions before school, after school, and in the summer for students who are not reading proficiently or who are beginning to fall behind based on data from the quarterly assessments.</p>	<p>School librarians are accustomed to providing a variety of programs and services to struggling readers before and after school. School librarians could collaborate with classroom teachers to develop interventions for students that utilize the libraries' print and electronic resources.</p>
<p>Train principals to conduct professional “learning walks” or “walk throughs” in their schools.</p>	<p>Principals should also be trained in how to evaluate school librarians in a consistent way that considers their professional responsibilities to help teachers teach, provide information literacy instruction, and promote reading. Principals should also require an annual report from school librarians to assess other areas including: circulation and usage; budget; technology; programming, etc.</p>
<p>Establish common planning periods for teachers by grade level to allow for them to share and discuss best practices.</p>	<p>School librarians should be invited by teachers to attend common planning period sessions so that they might better develop instructional practices that support classroom learning.</p>

### **Implications of the 2002 Reform on School Library Programs**

Given that reading was a target area in this reform, it would seem logical for the district to utilize a professional resource it already had—certified school librarians—to implement its goals in this area. Unfortunately, according to the list of 40 personnel that the SST interviewed in 2002 (Council of the Great City Schools, 2003, p. 83), no school library professionals were represented, not even the director of the Library Media Education Office at that time. The report indicates that the director of the Reading and Literacy Department was interviewed along with several classroom teachers in the district.

This oversight may be due to the perception that school librarians do not directly affect students' performance in reading on standardized tests. However, in January 2009, the Department of Education released the *Second Evaluation of the Improving Literacy Through School Libraries Program*, a federally funded competitive grant program that provides school libraries with funding to acquire new learning resources (e.g. books, computer equipment). The study indicated that students attending schools

participating in this program perform better on state reading tests than do students in non-participating schools. Additionally, the study stated that for participating schools in 2003-04, the number of students who met or exceeded the proficiency requirements on state reading assessments increased by an extra 2.7% over the increase observed among non-participating schools during the same time period (U.S. Department of Education, 2005).

The issue for school librarians then becomes one of documenting and articulating to the wider school community the direct impact that they have on increasing students' reading proficiency. In *We Boost Achievement! : Evidence-Based Practice for School Library Media Specialists*, Loertscher and Todd (2003) describe a framework for helping school library professionals collect local evidence from multiple sources to show how the interventions they develop in relation to instructional collaboration, reading, information literacy, and information technology align with curriculum standards and with specific aspects of standardized tests. Todd (as cited in Hughes-Hassell & Harada, 2007) suggests that the school librarian can employ curriculum and standardized test audits to analyze the specific standards that relate to school library interventions.

### **2008: A State-Mandated Reform in the DPS**

Under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), the final stage of school improvement is restructuring. At this stage, federal law requires schools to choose one of five options, ranging from replacing staff to "any other major restructuring of school governance" to meet adequate yearly progress (AYP). Federal guidance emphasizes the need for schools to make dramatic changes in response to restructuring, but leaves it to states, districts, and schools to flesh out most of the details.

A 2009 report entitled, *Expanding Restructuring and Taking on High Schools: An NCLB Follow-up Report in Michigan* notes that since 2003-04, more than 100 Michigan schools have exited restructuring (Center for Education Policy, 2009). This report examines how Michigan worked with restructuring schools in the past and how the state will address the problem of more high schools entering restructuring with none exiting through AYP. The report addresses these issues by analyzing state test data and interviewing decision-makers at the state and local levels in the fall and winter of 2008. The report includes case studies of restructuring through interviews and document reviews in four school districts—Detroit Public Schools, Flint Community Schools, Harrison Community Schools, and Willow Run Community Schools—and in nine schools within these districts.

The report notes that after the DPS closed more than 30 schools in the summer of 2007 due to enrollment losses, enrollment declined from about 105,000 students in the 2007-08 school year to about 94,000 in fall 2008. Furthermore, the report points out that Detroit's school closures and resulting student reassignments substantially changed the populations of schools across the city, making it difficult to assess student achievement by school.

Overall, 10 Detroit schools exited restructuring because their student populations had changed by more than 50%, enabling them to start with a clean slate for AYP purposes. The report highlighted Cervený Middle as a case study of a school that successfully exited restructuring. The principal of Cervený, Gladys Stoner, noted in an interview that it took multiple strategies over time to make that happen. For example, the report notes that Stoner was one of a handful of Detroit principals of restructuring schools who were allowed to handpick an entirely new staff. The report also states that:

In addition to replacing staff, she created a building leadership team and grade-level teacher teams that had common planning time built into the school day. Since assuming the



principalship, Stoner said she has focused on reducing behavior problems and improving school climate. At the same time, she has worked with a leadership coach, and her teachers have received content coaching in English language arts and math from Wayne County Regional Educational Service Agency (p. 14).

The Cervený case study helps illustrate the often slow and arduous nature of school reform. Principal Stoner noted that a major hurdle she had to overcome was the loss of some of her chosen faculty due to seniority bumping after 34 Detroit schools were closed. This case also highlights the importance of teachers having common grade level planning time to make the learning experiences students receive across the curriculum more cohesive.

An important element of this report is a recommendation that school improvement support needs to be directed more at the classroom level. The report states that the current system of school improvement has focused mainly on leadership and governance rather than on supports that are closer to the classroom. To address this problem, the Michigan Department of Education has forged a partnership with the Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators (MAISA), an umbrella organization for the state's intermediate school districts. The report states:

With the \$4.2 million available under section 1003(g) for 2008-09, as well as the \$17 million the state expects to receive under this section for 2009-10, MAISA plans to expand services to schools in improvement. "We're still in the process of defining what the Title I Accountability Grant [Michigan's name for the section 1003(g) funds] will include," said Charlotte Koger, the grant administrator and program manager for Title I at MAISA. (Center for Education Policy, 2009, p. 10).

There is some speculation included in the report about the kind of classroom-level activities that will be the focus of the Title I Accountability Grant. The primary activities that are mentioned include: "refining and implementing a data-driven needs assessment, selecting evidence-based interventions attuned to a school's needs, and implementing the selected interventions through continued use of data and support from coaches in ELA and math" (p. 10).

### **Implications of the 2008 Reform on School Library Programs**

If Michigan's school improvement plans are being redirected towards collecting student level data, school librarians in the DPS are well equipped to help tackle this issue. As mentioned previously, there are numerous scholarly resources in school librarianship dedicated to helping school librarians document and assess student learning in ways that align with curriculum standards and standardized tests (see, e.g., Loertscher & Todd, 2003).

However, it is not clear whether school library professionals would qualify or be considered for the training opportunities mentioned in the report, which are aimed at helping educators develop their data skills. It will be critical for school librarians to be a part of these kinds of training sessions if they are expected to show their direct impact on student learning. Furthermore, since school librarians are charged with supporting students and teachers across the curriculum, it seems reasonable to expect that they would join school improvement teams that work on developing evidence-based practices in various content areas, such as reading and English language arts.

Also, this report helps bolster the idea that grade-level curriculum planning among teachers is a key component to turning a school around. It would benefit students if school librarians were included in these curriculum-planning meetings so that they could develop resources and strategies to support the curriculum

and better prepare students for standardized tests.

### **Recommendations for Strengthening DPS Reforms**

Solving Detroit's dilemmas will take a multi-pronged effort led by capable people who have skill sets in different arenas. The following recommendations are an attempt to help the DPS realize its goals for increasing student achievement by utilizing the knowledge and skills of school library professionals in the district. These recommendations build upon the literature that has been previously discussed concerning the role and impact of school librarians in 21<sup>st</sup> century schools.

**Recommendation:** *Hire a Director of Library Media Education.* Currently, the Library Media Education Director position is vacant due to a recent retirement and it is not clear whether this position will be filled. It is imperative that a qualified person be hired to direct the Library Media Education office. Without clear leadership, it is unlikely that school librarians in the district will have anyone representing their interests in school reform training opportunities such as those being initiated under the Title I Accountability Grant (Center for Education Policy, 2009). Given the emphasis on collecting student-level data expressed in the Title I Accountability Grant, it is critical that school librarians be trained to document and assess student learning to show how their instruction connects to curriculum standards and standardized tests.

Furthermore, a Library Media Education director is needed to provide administrative oversight for any federal grants that could be secured on behalf of the school libraries in the district. As mentioned previously, the DPS Library Media Education Office was able to secure a National Libraries Grant in 2000 through the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

An ideal candidate for this position would hold a master's degree in Library and Information Science, have experience as a school library media specialist, and hold a doctoral degree in a related field.

**Recommendation:** *Seek grant funding to modernize cyber infrastructure of school libraries in the DPS.* Grant funds should be sought on behalf of school library programs in the DPS. One area that may be particularly generative is grant funding to update the cyber infrastructure of school libraries in the district. School library scholars have recently begun piloting software that will enable students to access digital content directly from the school library online catalog (see e.g. Mardis, 2009). This development is exciting because it will potentially allow students to easily download open access audiovisual content into their class projects through the school library catalog. However, in order to ensure that students are able to locate this content seamlessly, schools will need to invest in cyber infrastructure, including bandwidth sufficient to handle large amounts of data being downloaded simultaneously.

Another reason it will be important to invest in the cyber infrastructure of DPS school libraries is that the DPS announced on February 4, 2010 that it wants to digitize all its teaching and learning as part of the comprehensive plan to accelerate student achievement, within five years. This digitization will include "all curriculum, textbooks and lessons plans district-wide (see <http://www.detroit.k12.mi.us/>).” School librarians are in a prime position to help the district manage the distribution and tracking of digital textbooks given their familiarity with school-wide book circulation processes and related software.

**Recommendation:** *Conduct workshops to help educate school and district administrators about the role of school librarians.* Some school administrators have outdated perceptions of the role of the school library media specialist (Hartzell, 2002). Thus, it will be important for school library professionals to conduct workshops or seminars that educate administrators on topics such as:

- How to hire and effectively evaluate the school library media specialist based on professional standards of the American Association of School Librarians.

- How to support professional collaboration between teachers and school librarians.
- What state of the art school libraries look like, what technologies and services they provide, and generally how they are ideally staffed.
- The latest trends in school library media center website design.
- The average yearly expenditures of well-maintained school library media centers.
- The various grant funding agencies that support school library improvement projects.
- School-wide curriculum mapping models that incorporate school library media learning standards.

**Recommendation:** *Consider how school library media programs can support major reform initiatives.* If school library media centers in DPS are to assume their rightful place as the hub of the school, there must be understanding and agreement among district-level and school administrators to consider what role the school library can play in supporting any given reform initiative put forth. Having this communication is essential when one considers that library media specialists support lifelong learning skills that cross every content area in the school. In order to ensure that this communication is transparent and ongoing, an advisory committee of practicing and/or retired school library media specialists in the district could be formed under the supervision of the district media coordinator. This committee would advise district administrators who make key decisions about how to reform schools in the district.

## Conclusion

It will take a concerted effort among a broad constituency to turn the Detroit Public Schools around. The knowledge and skill set that school library media professionals have are a valuable asset in helping improve student achievement and helping schools reach their reform goals. In most cases, school reform is a slow and arduous process that is contingent on a number of ancillary factors, such as budget cuts and teacher lay-offs. This is why it is important that all professional staff in urban school districts be utilized to their fullest potential. The recommendations provided in this article are not exhaustive and address only a few areas where school library professionals can have a greater impact on student learning. Future scholarship in this area might look more closely at the reform efforts of other urban school districts to determine whether school library professionals played a role in helping plan and implement any changes in the curriculum. Finally, if Detroit is ever to reclaim its former glory as a thriving metropolis, the school system will need to undergo an extreme makeover so that families can feel confident about living in the city and sending their children to the neighborhood public school. Placing time and resources into strengthening school libraries in the district would be a major step in the right direction.

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