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The trustee as school library advocate

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PODIUM

The Trustee as School Library Advocate

Education is a community concern. Governments have legislative authority for education but it is the local involvement of citizens in each community that gives public education its heart.

The members of the board of school trustees of each school district are elected by the residents to govern its public education in a progressive, farsighted, educationally sound, and economically-feasible manner. While only a board has legal authority to implement policy, a single trustee can and does have the opportunity to become knowledgeable about, and an advocate for, library resource centers and teacher-librarians in our schools on an individual basis.

How Can Trustees Be Effective School Library Advocates?

Trustees are leaders in the community. They indicate support for school library programs when they attend school library events and classes planned and team taught by classroom teachers and teacher-librarians. Trustees can make themselves knowledgeable about school libraries in each school, the program being offered, and the adequacy of support in terms of personnel, materials, equipment and facilities to support resource-based teaching and learning. It is reasonable to expect that each school district has a policy statement on school libraries in education, and if no such policy exists, any trustee can propose one.

Trustees can also act as a check to see that standards recommended by the state government and school district for school libraries are carried out in elementary and secondary schools. Both allocation of time and appropriate staff selection to make school library programs effective should be priorities in each district along with a fair share of equipment and supply budgets. Once

these programs are in place, it is reasonable to expect that program evaluations are conducted to ensure ongoing quality. The results of these evaluations should be reported to the board.

Trustees often have the ability and the opportunity to communicate to the media, and can publicize the many wonderful learning opportunities and achievements arising from instruction through teacher and teacher-librarian cooperation and co-curricular activities. Trustees help just by attending events and seeing work that is being done. In many cases, the teachers and teacher-librarian are planning together and the students are involved in guided independent work before school, at noon breaks and after school, after everyone else has gone home. They are encouraged by even a simple, "Well done!" from trustees who they view as educational policy leaders.

Perhaps board meetings would be more interesting with a brief presentation on a student assignment or project which resulted from good school libraries. District offices or board rooms may be a good location for a display of student work. Trustees may be able to rally community support for materials and volunteer assistance so that the teacher-librarian can leave fund-raising and clerical/technical routine to someone else, and concentrate on teaching. In brief, the opportunities to help give children access to quality school library experiences are unlimited—any active involvement will help.

What Kind of Trustee Can Be A School Library Advocate?

The kind of trustee who can improve school library education is the one who is interested and committed. Once a person accepts the value of good library resource centers as part of the basic

program and necessary on an equal basis with other instructional services, he or she just needs to be *persistent*. The district policy will outline the aim of the program, the role and qualifications of teacher-librarians, criteria and procedures for the selection of materials and handling complaints and it will insist on flexibly scheduled resource centers after teacher/teacher-librarian planning to prevent teacher-librarians being misused to provide spare periods for classroom teachers; the goals and learning outcomes are defined; and program evaluation procedures should be in place.

A trustee who is willing to visit and support school libraries; a trustee who will ask appropriate questions and persist until satisfactory answers are given; and a trustee who values the development of skills to process and use information and pursue lifelong learning will be successful as an advocate.

Trustee Action Program for School Libraries

Here are some suggestions for actions a trustee, or group of trustees, can take to support opportunities for young people to learn through the resources and services of a good school library. All of them will have an effect—doing some of them will have an effect. Even one will likely make the situation for school libraries better than it is at present—the key is action!

Action Ideas:

- Investigate whether your district has a policy which guarantees equal opportunity for students to use school libraries in each school. If no policy exists, institute one. Sample policies are available through both school library associations and trustee associations.
- Request from administration a statement about the status of school library standards for personnel and resources and the effectiveness of their use.

- Request a program assessment of school library programs so decisions can be made about changes and improvements based on up-to-date data.

- Ask for information about the number of elementary teacher-librarians and secondary teacher-librarians on staff and the number of teachers they work with; staffing patterns should reflect the number of teachers to plan with as well as the number of students in the school.

- Compare allocations on school library materials with allocations in other curricular areas.

- Inquire regarding the extent to which cooperatively planned and taught school library programs are restricted by the initiative of the principal and individual teacher; support an in-depth staff development program to encourage effective school library use.

- Request an assessment of school library facilities and equipment in each school and the impact on the instructional program of any identified deficiencies.

- Ask for presentations on each area of the curriculum using school library resources and services and at each level—15 minutes per board meeting bi-monthly could be devoted to an explanation or demonstration of school library learning.

- Develop a relationship with municipal or community library people with a view to advocating better libraries for everyone so that roles can be better defined and resources can be better shared.

- Ask to have a specific administrator appointed as the person responsible for supervising and developing school library programs in your district. This should be a school library supervisor who has special knowledge and training, not only in managing a district resource center but in building networks of libraries, advocating effective use and leading in-service sessions on cooperative program planning and teaching, including the roles of the district, principal and teacher. Professional associations and departments of education have statements on the role and responsibilities of school library supervisors.

- Attend school library programs in schools and encourage other trustees to attend. Volunteer to open these events and welcome parents as well as acknowledging the work done by the teacher and students.

- Make awareness of, and sensitivity to, school library programs an integral part of the criteria for the selection and

appointment of school and district administrators. These criteria should also be applied to the assessment of these educational leaders.

- Encourage your administration to see that trained teacher-librarians are hired in numbers sufficient to meet the curricular needs for all students.

- Encourage professional development to help administrators, teachers and teacher-librarians remain aware of their roles in fostering the school library

resource center in the curriculum, in developing cooperatively planned and taught programs, in new methodology, and current trends.

Above all, remember that the key is action. A trustee can make a qualitative difference in school library programs for the children in the district. Opportunities to learn through school libraries enrich the child, and the school library is part of the educational right of every child. Protecting that right is part of the trust.

In looking at the role of the trustee in fostering school library development, EL contacted a number of professional associations and advocacy groups for information and materials, to little avail. We therefore turned to other groups to look at what they were doing. Surprise! They are alive and well and focused clearly on the school trustee for support.

This document was originally prepared by Gary Rupert with Dennis Tupman and Kit Grauer for the Arts in Education Council of British Columbia. The Council is an independent group with wide representation and a part-time paid staff. This document is professionally designed as a brochure and distributed widely.

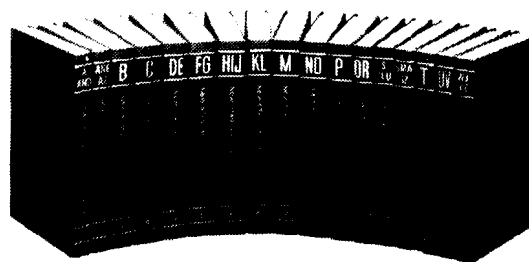
To prepare this sample statement for trustees as school library advocates we did little more than use the "search and replace" keys on our word processing equipment and modified statements which did not apply to both the arts and school libraries. An original document would be much better and is long overdue in our minds. We know that you and your organizations can do much better!

• Ken Haycock



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