

Why Florida's Kids Need School Library Media Specialists

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The School Library Media Specialist is an integral partner in the instructional program of every school. There's a saying among educators, "There is learning to READ and then there is reading to LEARN." While the classroom teacher is charged with helping students learn to read, the School Library Media Specialist helps students read to LEARN.

In many schools, the Library Media Specialist is the focal point person for collaboration. In most schools, the media center is the learning and resource hub. Further, any student who has visited a school library has met a friend and coach. This doesn't just happen. It takes educated, dedicated professionals who understand the myriad of materials available, to discern those of value, and to help students learn to use them.

The role of Library Media Specialist is especially important in the digital age. Classroom teachers are so overrun with standards and requirements that they simply do not have the time or expertise to be aware of all the resources available or of how to integrate those resources into instructional programs.

The role of the Library Media Specialist is even more important since Florida adopted the Common Core State Standards in 2010. These Standards are designed to ensure that all Florida's children graduate high school. Library Media Specialists are an integral part of the instructional plan to achieve those standards. A quick look at a sample standard from several grade levels makes this point evident:

- The words *collaborate*, *produce* and *publish* are found in virtually every Language Arts standard.
- It is no coincidence that the word collaborate is the single most repeated word in the national school library media standards, *Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning* published in 1996; yes, 1996. That is how long media specialists have been, by national standard, focusing on collaboration.
- The "media" specialist is the person most versed in software programs intended for the production and publication of students' work products.
- The media specialist is the person best versed in the identification of current, authoritative information and in the citing of that information.

A troubling trend appears to be recurring with several Florida school districts eliminating School Library Media Specialists positions. This trend came through public schools about a decade ago when Orange County Schools attempted to operate elementary school libraries with only a clerk and no Media Specialist. When, after a few years, that district's leadership determined that cutting these valuable members of the instructional team was a mistake, the Media Specialist positions were restored.

More than 20 state studies conducted over the past 16 years all demonstrate the positive impact of strong library media programs on student achievement. This research is convincing evidence that cutting library programs will adversely affect student achievement and success.

These are challenging times for school districts and budgets but administrators need to recognize that reducing or eliminating School Library Media Specialist positions is a false economy that will hurt student achievement.

Additional information about the value of School Library Media Specialists and supporting research can be found at **Strong School Libraries Build Strong Students** -- http://www.ala.org/aasl/sites/ala.org.aasl/files/content/aaslissues/advocacy/AASL_infographic.pdf .