

What One Area of Change Are You Most Excited to Make within the Library This Coming Year?

This summer we surveyed school librarians and asked them what one area of change they were most excited to make within the library this coming year. Out of 190 responses, 41% said they would be focused on programming, 18% have a new space or renovation, 10% have a new position or change in responsibilities, 9% want to work on their library collection, 3% on their schedule, 2% on new devices or equipment, and just 1% want to work on policy. The remaining 15% chose "other" and gave us a more specific answer, many of which focused on trying new things.

A majority of respondents are looking forward to tweaking or revamping their library program, and many of their comments centered around makerspaces and technology integration. They expressed enthusiasm about trying all kinds of new elements within their programs: Minecraft, gaming, robotics, yoga, after-school clubs, 3D printing clubs, book clubs, and makerspaces. A few comments even voiced the fear that we all experience when facing something we're not sure we have a handle on. If you happen to be reluctant to jump into something new, especially with technology, let your students help. Make it a journey and a learning opportunity for both you and your students. You do not have to have a new skill or technology perfected before trying it out in your classroom library.

This column often deals with "change" and things that are new to the school library world. The summer, generally, provides our profession with a unique opportunity to reflect, think, plan, and focus on goals for the next year. A theme that came up in many of the responses was relevance. Even if the respondent didn't use that exact word, the change that they spoke to was to increase their relevance and the relevance of their library program.

Our superintendent recently gave a short opening keynote to a school library conference that we participated in. We asked him to talk not only because he is a great speaker and innovative educator, but also because he supports our library. One statement he made, near the end, has been resonating with us: "I will support you (school librarians) one hundred percent, but you all have to remain relevant."

Relevance is directly impacted by how well needs are met. The survey respondents mentioned again and again how student, teacher, and administration input drives change in their library. One comment illustrates how seeking input to meet student needs has resulted in a cycle of more input being provided: "Word has already gotten around that the library DOES use their input so they continue to provide it. It's a win-win." As we turn toward the start of another school year, this is a natural time to seek input from stakeholders, perhaps in a new way. Google Forms is a fast and efficient way to collect data from staff and administration when you have specific questions you want to be answered. Attending PLN, administrative, and committee meetings is another great way to gain a greater understanding of the needs the library can or should be meeting. Simple measures, like running a circulation report, putting out a suggestions box, or passing out exit tickets the next time a class comes through, can give us the information we need to reflect appropriately on what kind of changes we need to be making.

Another element to consider as we reflect on where we should focus our efforts is to take steps that ensure our stakeholders know everything that is available to them through the school library. The summer is a great time to take stock of everything your library can offer students, and also your fellow teachers. One challenge is just remembering to reach out to new staff to let them know everything you can assist them with. Something we adopted last year that we are excited to try again is a library services menu. We unveiled ours at our opening day with staff and offered some fun incentives for teachers who used it to "book" a librarian or library service before the first day of school. No matter what format your list of library services takes, make sure you are communicating what you are willing and able to do. One important reason for reflecting and changing is to help the library be as relevant to student achievement as possible. If those efforts aren't communicated well enough, then they will have been wasted.

The enthusiasm we share as we look toward another beginning is obvious in this month's survey responses. This is a credit to our profession and the people in it. We look forward to seeing what is possible when we work to support our students, teachers, and schools.

About the Authors

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Jen loves spending her days in her school library, the EDhub, and promises a VIP tour to any fellow school librarians who want to check out the EDhub's impressive maker space.

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