

Pocantico Hills School Library Committee Report
February 24, 2003

Our goal is to establish the library as the life center of our school. The mission of the Pocantico Hills library is to support students' reading. Our library should foster literacy, provide the foundation of our school's curriculum, and be accessible to all students and faculty for reading and research. We feel a fresh new look to the library would appeal to readers the way a new book does, and it would also signal our intent to lead this library into the 21st century.

The New York State Education Department has published a school library media program evaluation rubric that the committee used to evaluate our library. While we have a superior facility and a large collection, we face particular challenges as the only library in our district, with ten grades (pre-kindergarten through eighth) to serve. As the rubric shows (see appendix), we are strong in the area of automation and fiscal support, but there is much room for improvement. Specifically, our students' access to the facility, our lack of full time staff, an outdated collection and limited technological support in the library are the areas of weakness that we feel need to be addressed.

Our committee divided into three teams and visited six school libraries (middle and elementary) that were recommended to us for their excellence. We saw libraries that operated on a shoestring budget in tiny spaces, and polished new libraries stocked with technology and thousands of new books. We'd be happy to list all the ingenious methods the poorer libraries use to entice their students into using the library, and all the technologies the richer libraries use to dazzle theirs—we got wonderful, specific ideas from each—but what impressed us most was the atmosphere that the successful libraries, rich and poor alike, shared. They were alive places. The librarians in them were dynamic and worked closely with their teachers, particularly their technology teachers. Both students and faculty were active users who came willingly and frequently to the library, with their classes and on their own. The materials in the library were used—absorbed, checked out, handled, passed around. We did not see a space we coveted. Our library space rivals the space in the richest school we visited. But there was something in the vibrant libraries that we find lacking at Pocantico Hills, and we are determined to generate that vibrancy and excitement here. All of the libraries we admired, both struggling and state-of-the-art, had the following features in common, which we recommend:

- Open access to students and faculty (before and after school, during recess and lunch, during class time when students' work is finished)
- Close coordination between the librarians, the technology teachers, and the rest of the faculties to teach the curriculum in inventive and exciting ways
- Flex scheduling
- Full-time library staff
- Use of the library for pleasure, as well as academics
- Involved PTA
- Full support of the faculty and board for a vibrant library

The library collection is the basis of our work in the school and it is important that we breathe life into it regularly. Our collection, which was substantially improved a decade ago, has become worn and dated and is in desperate need of weeding. An immediate infusion of new books, a collection of professional materials for teachers, a collection for parents, periodicals and non-book resources such as books on tapes will bring us up to date and provide the necessary stimulation for students, faculty and parents. The connection between classroom and library is critical in the selection of new materials. Also, our library computers are inadequate. There are too few of them, and those that we have are slow and dated, and lack printers. It was clear from our research that a strong library is strong technologically. We should increase and upgrade our library computers as soon as possible.

We feel it would defeat our purpose to improve the library, and then limit its use by students. A well-stocked and welcoming library would help our students become enthusiastic life-long learners, and we want to encourage them to read, not just for their education, but for their pleasure, as well; we feel these activities are linked. Knowledge, and the time to pursue it, matters. A full-time staff is important to welcome and assist students in these activities, and to increase accessibility to the library's resources. A full-time staff is also essential for successful collaboration with the faculty.

Turning this beautiful library into the cultural, scholastic and literary center of Pocantico Hills could be accomplished in a short time, with the combined energy and determination of the administration, the school board, the PTA and the faculty.

Recommendations for Immediate Implementation

Staff, curriculum, and scheduling

- Institute flex scheduling
- Increase student access to the library to include time before and after school and during school day
- Institute school-wide pass program
- Hire full-time staff
- Increase team-based planning time for librarian, computer teacher, ELO and special area teachers, and classroom teachers

Collection

- Upgrade the collection:
- Weed entire collection
- Make initial purchase of new books, books on tape, media, professional materials, periodicals, and reference, equal to 20% of the collection
- Increase and upgrade computers in library, possibly with a wireless lab and software to speed access to network
- Purchase printer, scanner, copy machine, dry erase board, and television

Physical improvements

- Install new, comfortable, child-friendly furniture, such as couches, stuffed chairs and ottomans
- Improve lighting (purchase lamps and clean windows)
- Wire library for cable TV
- Consider hiring a school library/architect to help plan the optimum use of this space
- Create area dedicated to middle school

Encouraging and overseeing library activities

- Establish ongoing committee of teachers, PTA, and community members to monitor and advise library and coordinate volunteer efforts in staffing and consulting (from shelving books to designing space)
- Increase budget for school-wide activities to take place in the library, such as author visits, book clubs, and book displays

Recommendations for Future Implementation

Staff, curriculum, and scheduling

- Increase student access to two evenings a week and part of Saturday
- Permit community access at same time
- Consider permitting student access during summer camp

Collection

- Maintain collection with regular weeding and increase purchases of books, tapes, etc., by 10% each year
- Purchase electronic bulletin board

Physical improvements

- Install air conditioner
- Install smaller, child-sized checkout desk
- Consider fresh paint and scrim shade on windows
- Improve lighting with lamps and drop lights
- Consider relocating computer lab next door

Additional ideas for Improvement

Staff, curriculum, and scheduling

- Teachers plan time in library on a monthly basis through sign-up sheets and discussion with librarian
- Planning occurs across disciplines—teams consisting of librarian, computer, ELO and special area teachers, and classroom teachers create projects for curriculum
- Librarian teaches skills training to students and faculty in problem-solving and finding information
- Teachers polled annually for their needs and wants
- Weekly emails from librarian to teachers
- Create time for staff to learn the collection
- Book exchange is available any time the library is open

Collection

- Set up schedule for weeding and ordering to be done regularly, including summer maintenance
- Upgrade reference section frequently
- Revitalize professional collection
- Increase parent resources in educational and parenting issues
- Order and display periodicals
- Add books and materials in foreign language
- Enhance media collection
- Consider home access to library catalogue

Physical improvements

- Create a "living room" just inside entrance with couches, stuffed chairs, coffee table and lamps for book club meetings and relaxed reading
- Install better lighting, especially in the dark corner

Encouraging and overseeing library activities

- Institute school-wide book talks and book clubs, with and without parental involvement
- Sponsor activities that will pull children into the library during their free time
- Encourage programs such as Parents as Reading Partners (PARP) and Sit Together and Read (STAR) and lunchtime book clubs
- Create book displays for browsing
- Install a suggestion box
- Display student work related to literature

We would like to thank the board and the administration for the opportunity to revitalize this critical part of our school. We feel that in times of scarce resources, the best investments are those that support all of our students in their most essential and fundamental skills. Investing in our library as a center for reading and learning, and as the heart of our educational community, is an investment in our entire school and every student and teacher in it.

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