

EVALU SCHOOL LIBRARY AT THE SITE AND DISTRICT



ATING COLLECTIONS LEVEL AS A TOOL FOR ADVOCACY

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What are ways to draw attention to the need for an annual library budget? How can school library leaders advocate for equitable library budgets across a school district? These are questions our library services team of three district librarians researched before taking the first steps toward making transformational change in our school libraries during the 2017–2018 school year. Sharing our journey and the resources we discovered and created may provide other school librarians and districts facing the same challenges with ideas and tools.

The Beaverton School District (BSD) is located in the suburbs of Portland, Oregon, and serves 41,000 students in 53 schools. At the elementary level, libraries are staffed by a paraprofessional library media assistant (LMA) in each school. Middle schools have one LMA and

comprehensive high schools have two LMAs who stagger their schedules to provide coverage. Secondary schools also have a library and instructional technology teacher (LITT). The LITT is a licensed teaching position with a media endorsement indicated as preferred rather than required. LITTs are teacher leaders within their buildings who provide professional development and work with classroom teachers to innovate instruction and integrate technology use in teaching and learning.

Our library services team provides collection development, support, and professional development across the district. Library budgets in Beaverton are site-based, so they are determined by building principals. Oregon does not have required formulas for school library budgets, and school funding has historically been tight, so library budgets vary

widely from school to school. This article describes the progress we made during the 2017–2018 school year and our preliminary plans for 2018–2019. (We are writing this in late summer 2018.) Readers will find resources from the Lilead Fellows Project and from other school library leaders, and tools our team used to convey and present information about our school libraries to building principals. Using collection and circulation data to inform principals about their libraries is an integral step to advocate for increased library budgets and/or changes in library procedures.

Connecting to Standards

Aligning work to district goals and national standards was one area of focus for the 2017–2018 Lilead Fellows cohort, of which I was a member. Creating a priority matrix

Table 1. Alignment of AASL “School Library Evaluation Checklist” criteria with Beaverton (OR) district school library program goals.

		School Library Program Goals		
		Provide access to welcoming and Future Ready library spaces	Provide access to carefully-selected books and library resources that are current, diverse, and relevant	Lead, collaborate, facilitate & model instructional innovation (secondary level)
AASL School Library Evaluation Checklist	Inquire	Provide access to resources and technology tools for students and staff.	Survey staff and student print and digital resource needs	LITTs cultivate a school-wide culture of learning by moving beyond the library walls to share instructional tools and resources in every classroom LITTs facilitate & lead varied PD opportunities in their buildings
	Include	Create safe and welcoming library spaces for all students	Pursue equitable library materials funding across the district with principals Enhance library collections and support choice reading by purchasing materials to reflect our diverse students and weeding outdated materials	LITTs identify and advocate for instructional resources that reflect the needs of students and staff LITTs model ideas for classrooms through innovative design and use of library spaces

comparison of district goals with national standards was one of the activities we completed last year during the “Cultivating Individual and Team Leadership” Lilead short course. This matrix planning tool was shared by Erin Downey, district consulting librarian for the Boise School District and a Lilead Fellow in the 2015–2016 cohort [Downey 2015]. The planning tool can be used to align district goals with any set of standards, set priorities, and determine action steps. [Editor’s note: Resources referenced in square brackets are in the “Recommended Resources” list at the end of the feature.]

I used the matrix to compare several of our district library goals with AASL’s “School Library Evaluation Checklist” (AASL 2018, 174–80). This AASL checklist is a useful tool for school librarians and library

staff at the district level to assess work in the Inquire, Include, Collaborate, Curate, Explore, and Engage Shared Foundations. I pulled out one or more of the checklist items for each AASL Shared Foundation and inserted them in the left column of the planning tool, and placed three of our district library goals in the top row (see table 1). Within each of the remaining boxes, I described some of the projects and responsibilities of school and district library staff in these areas. To view, copy, and modify this template for use in other schools and districts, go to <<http://bit.ly/samplematrix>>. Having a foundation like this in place can be helpful before diving into a project such as the one described next regarding our preliminary work with elementary principals.

Presenting to Elementary Principals

Prior to the spring of 2018, our library services team primarily communicated one-on-one with principals and e-mailed them with requests for library budget allocations. When our library services team was asked to be on the elementary leadership meeting agenda in the spring of 2018, we jumped at the opportunity to connect with principals about school libraries. This opportunity came about because of a conversation with Jared Cordon, our district’s administrator for elementary curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Jared Cordon and our team discovered we had shared values around access to quality books for all students and recognized that we needed to convey this vision for libraries across the district from our teaching and learning department.

Using collection and circulation data to inform principals about their libraries is an integral step to advocate for increased library budgets and/or changes in library procedures.



PHOTO CREDIT: Vince Radostitz, BSD
future ready communications specialist



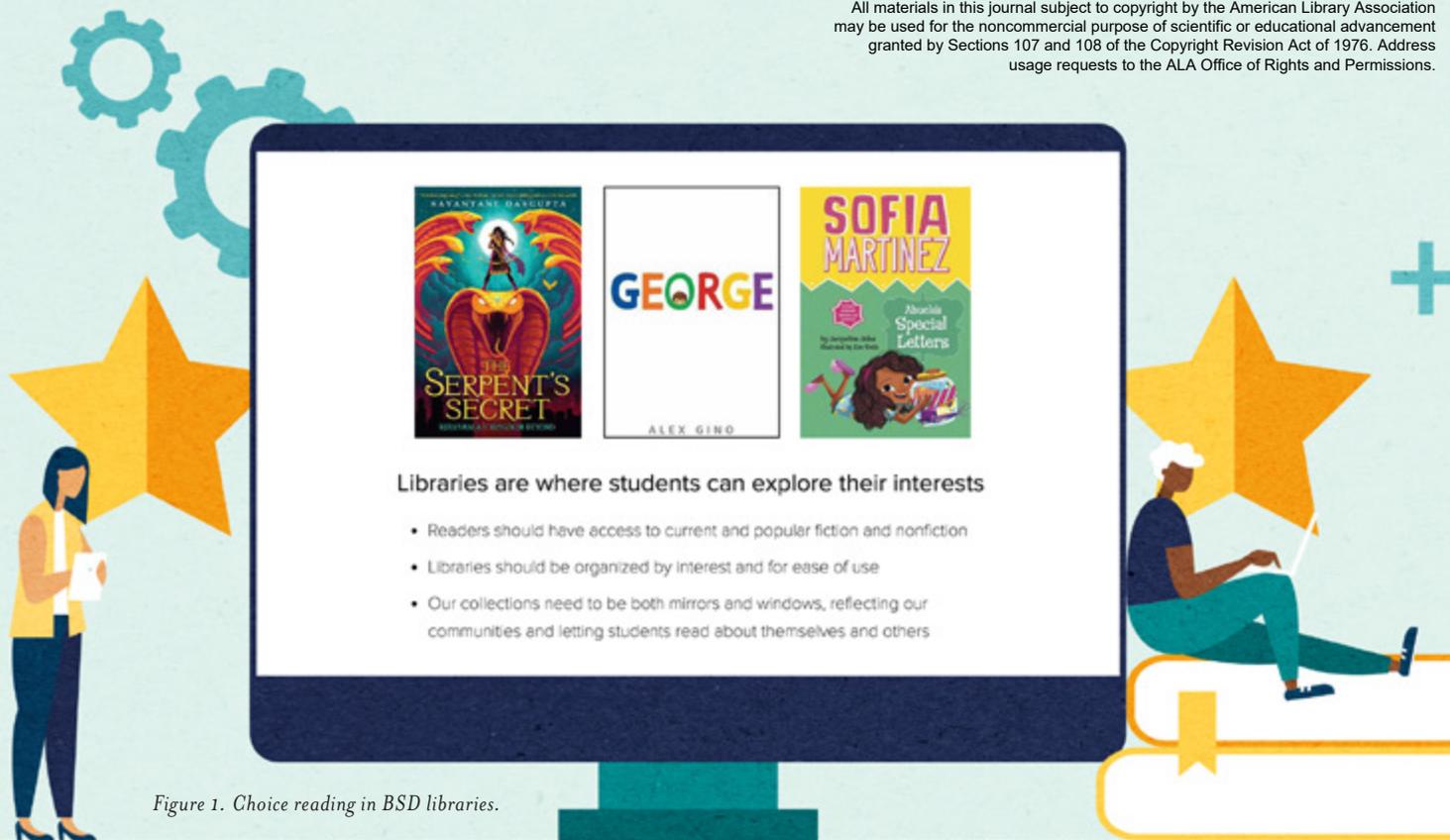


Figure 1. Choice reading in BSD libraries.

For the first presentation to principals, we chose to focus on three main areas: choice reading, diverse books, and access to books for all. We created an Adobe Spark page so we could include our talking points and several images in a format that differed from a typical slide deck. We used images from a photo library we have been building that features our students using our school libraries. Most of these images were taken by our future ready communications specialist and others were taken by our library services team.

One of the advocacy tools we used during the Lilead Fellows 2017–2018 year was the 27-9-3 Message. John Chrastka, founder and executive director of EveryLibrary, shared this tool and encouraged us to craft succinct messages that speak to the values and beliefs of various stakeholders. The structure of the 27-9-3 message is a statement with twenty-seven words that can be delivered in nine seconds, and contain three messages. The 27-9-3 message I created for my project was:

Our libraries support student growth as learners. We encourage students to explore their interests and provide access for all to carefully selected resources that are current and diverse.

My 27-9-3 message ties directly into the “Choice Reading in BSD Libraries” Adobe Spark page we created for principals. This page is available online at <http://bit.ly/choicereading>. We encourage librarians to use and modify the ideas from our presentation, as many of them are universal and can easily be applied to other settings. Background information about the main talking points is included in figure 1.

Choice Reading

Choice reading is an important component of our current K–12 language arts program. Classroom libraries were purchased several years ago to surround students with books in elementary classrooms and secondary language arts classes.

While funding for school library collections was not part of the English language arts curriculum adoption, the concept of classroom libraries provides a conversation starter about how school libraries differ from classroom libraries and the need to budget to maintain and enhance these collections. School libraries have the latest and greatest new releases and offer the complete set of books in a series, whereas classroom libraries typically only have the first book in a series and do not receive regular additions over the course of the school year.

Choice reading looks different in the school library than in the classroom. We organize books for ease of access, but do not level our school libraries. We encourage students to explore their own interests. As a result, they may be reading at, below, or above their identified reading level. Communicating about these differences is a work in progress as it takes time to convey to parents and classroom

In BSD, we created district-wide guidelines in the spring of 2018 so students may have up to five books checked out at a time and all students can borrow materials, regardless of fines. Principals applauded upon hearing about these new guidelines and the focus on getting books in the hands of students.



teachers how our focus in school libraries is about exploration, choice, and personal interests.

Diverse Books

Beaverton is a diverse community with 101 languages spoken at home. Like other districts across the country, purchasing mirrors and windows books for our collections is an important focus so our students can find themselves in books and also learn about other perspectives. Our library services team includes diverse books in the “New Book Recommendations” lists we create for library staff and classroom teachers <www.smore.com/wu4sv>. In the “Other Resources” section of our presentation to principals, we shared a blog post by associate professor Katie Cunningham from Manhattanville College. It is an approachable introduction for educators and parents to the concept of mirrors and windows, and provides suggestions for how to use and discuss diverse books with children [Cunningham 2013].

Within our presentation, we included talking points for handling book concerns because some of our community members did not feel that *George* by Alex Gino should be on the statewide 2018–2019 Oregon Battle of the Books (OBOB) list. OBOB is a voluntary program, and students may choose which books to read from the list. With all book challenges, our goal is for parents to feel heard and to be given options to express their thoughts within the school or classroom so concerns are resolved at the school level before becoming a formal request for an item’s reconsideration.

Access for All

Historically, individual schools in Beaverton established their own circulation practices. Despite the goal for our school libraries to be happy, welcoming places, some students were being turned away from checking out books because of lost or damaged materials. We researched how circulation practices were changing across the country and found incredibly helpful resources that cemented our thinking and provided evidence to support the need to modify our practices. Please see the “Recommended Resources” list following this article for documents, presentations, and blog posts from leaders in the library field, including a Colorado State Library report by Meg Johnson Depriest, blog postings

by Jennifer LaGarde, a presentation by Katie Salmela, presentations by Rita Ramstad, and a presentation by Suzanna Panter and her colleagues.

In BSD, we created district-wide guidelines in the spring of 2018 so students may have up to five books checked out at a time and all students can borrow materials, regardless of fines. Principals applauded upon hearing about these new guidelines and the focus on getting books in the hands of students. Library staff are encouraged to work with their administrators and counselors to identify when fines should be waived. There is also built-in flexibility for schools to start slowly, for example with kindergarten students, and increase the number of checkouts as the year progresses.

This presentation provided our first opportunity to begin talking about the need to develop budgets to replace lost library materials. Jared Cordon introduced our library services team to the concept of library books as consumables; this has been a useful way to convey that library books need to be replenished and are not meant to last forever.

Creating Library Collection Reports

Later in the spring of 2018, we were asked to do a follow-up segment with elementary principals to further the discussion about library budgets. We knew we needed to provide them with specific information about each school’s library. We initially hoped to create infographics for each school. However, we had a tight timeline and decided to create a simple one-page Library Collection Google Doc template that we duplicated and customized for each school. Here is a sample report from one of our elementary schools <<http://bit.ly/libreportsample>>. An excerpt is in table 2.

In the text above the data table, we conveyed our values about access and choice reading through this statement:

BSD libraries are accessible and a resource to all. Materials are purchased to support the learning of all students and encourage them to explore their own reading interests.

We decided to begin with a library budget recommendation for print materials before continuing with information about the school’s library collection. We decided to recommend a minimum amount that would be realistic and achievable for each school, so we set this at \$2,000 for elementary, \$3,000 for middle school, and \$5,000 for high school. We also included a recommended budget range for each level. We referenced two articles from *School Library Journal*: “SLJ’s Average Book Prices for 2018” and the “School Library Spending Report 2018” [SLJ Staff 2018]. The download of the full spending report requires filling out a short online form [Takeda 2018].

Due to the challenge of tracking varied funding sources such as the

general library budget, book fair profits, parent organizations, and donated books, we decided to report on the total dollar amount of all library books added to the collection using each item’s price as recorded in our Follett Destiny database. The drawback to this approach is that it can make the investment in the library collection look deceptively robust because the additions may primarily have been donations. To encourage quality donations, we post and share this Library Book Donations Guidelines document on the district website <<http://bit.ly/bkdonations>> and catalog materials centrally so donations can be reviewed before they are added to library collections.

To create the library statistics, we built a series of six reports using Report Builder in Destiny on books added and books lost for 2015–2016, 2016–2017, and 2017–2018. We numbered the reports 1–6 followed by a short description such as “1:Books Added: 2015–16.” After making the reports available for all sites within the district, we navigated to each site and ran the series of reports. Having them grouped together from 1–6

allowed us to quickly run each report. We also used the Library Statistics report in Destiny for the circulation data used in each collection report.

For Destiny users, we shared the XML files for reports 1–6 so they can be imported and modified. To download the reports, go to this Google Drive folder <<http://bit.ly/6reportstemplates>>. After downloading the XML files, use the Import Setup button in Report Builder to import each report individually. The reports can then be edited to include information pertinent to other schools and districts.

After running all the reports and filling out the Library Collection Google Doc, we completed a spreadsheet with totals for lost books, books added, and circulations per student so we could compile averages by school level for these categories. The elementary averages include data from our three K–8 schools. Then we sent an e-mail to each principal with a link to the school’s Library Collection Google Doc. We included an explanation of the nuances of each set of numbers using a Communication to Elementary Principals

ELEMENTARY LIBRARY COLLECTION EXAMPLE

	2015–16	2016–17	2017–18	BSD K–5 & K–8 AVERAGES
<i>Average Age of Books</i>	2000	2000	2001	2000
<i>Books Added</i>	472 – \$6,412	392 – \$5,659	403 – \$4,856	475 – \$5,848
<i>Checkouts</i>	51 checkouts per student [Based on 25,996 total circulations & 501 students]	45 checkouts per student [Based on 21,135 total circulations & 468 students]	55 checkouts per student [Based on 24,476 total circulations & 447 students]	40 checkouts per student
<i>Items Lost</i>	171 (\$1,996)	164 (\$1,739)	268 (\$2,502)	285

Table 2. Excerpt from elementary library collection report.

letter (available online at <http://bit.ly/principalsemail>).

Since the 2017–2018 figures were incomplete when we ran the reports last May, we updated the Library Collection reports in August 2018 with the full 2017–2018 statistics. We e-mailed the updated reports directly to all principals after the school year began. We included a request for information about their school's library book budget for the year.

Looking Ahead

At the time this article was submitted for publication, it was too early to see the impact on library budgets resulting from these communications with principals. We plan to update these reports annually and modify and adjust them as we discover better ways to present the information in a compelling manner to principals. Future plans include presenting to secondary principals about the school libraries and budgets, and continuing conversations with elementary principals. A long-term goal is to establish a district funding formula for library budgets, giving principals guidelines for funding their schools' libraries as they weigh many needs within



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their buildings. As school budgets fluctuate from year to year, it is important to continue advocating for our students' needs by evaluating library collections, sharing these data points with principals, and establishing library budgets to cultivate collections with current, diverse, and relevant library materials for all.

Recommended Resources:

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Ramstad, Rita. 2018. "Response to Library Overdues/Damaged Materials." <bit.ly/liboverdues> (accessed September 3, 2018).

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Takeda, Jenny. 2018. "Priority Matrix Sample with AASL School Library Evaluation Checklist." <bit.ly/samplematrix> (accessed September 3, 2018).