



FUTURE READY FRAMEWORK:

**Content Access
and Curation**



BECOMING FUTURE READY: ONE DISTRICT'S COMMITMENT TO LIBRARIANS, THE USE OF OERs AND DIGITAL LITERACY

LAWRENCE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Lawrence, Kansas

Building students' digital literacy skills and ensuring every student has access to engaging materials at the right time, with an emphasis on relevancy and rigor, is a chief goal for administrators at Lawrence Public Schools (LPS) in Kansas. This forward-thinking district made bold moves to curate and access content that illustrates its commitment to library media specialists and the essential role they play in helping students develop 21st-century skills. This includes the use of open educational resources (OERs).

Nestled between Topeka and Kansas City, Lawrence Public Schools is in America's heartland where open fields of wheat are met with endless blue sky. With nearly 12,000 students to educate in all grades, the district has a big job when it comes to ensuring every child receives a rich, diverse learning experience enhanced by technology.

So it was with those students in mind that LPS made the decision to involve library media specialists in all aspects of learning, from curation to curriculum planning and more. LPS's story of inclusion and transformation has helped their students become future-ready, and it all started with a desire to increase student engagement and improve access to a broader range of resources. Today, it has grown into an all-encompassing umbrella under which all learning takes place.



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GREATER COLLABORATION: JUST THE BEGINNING

Just a few years ago, LPS was exploring a variety of new teaching and learning approaches:

- How shall we use blended learning? How can personalized learning in a blended environment increase student engagement?
- What viable resources exist beyond textbooks (including OERs)?
- How can libraries become innovative learning commons with Makerspaces?

As the district forged ahead toward future-ready learning, and with the answers to the aforementioned questions outlined in its strategic plan, the important role (and expertise) of the library media specialist was obvious.



For three years, Ellen Willets, Assistant Director of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment for LPS, had been considering the evolution of the way library media specialists successfully collaborate with their peers. “During the 2015-16 school year, we began our shift to greater collaboration between media specialists and classroom teachers,” Willets said, describing the way library staff and other educators work together. “These are highly skilled individuals who were not historically seen as instructional support, but rather as a person to locate resources for special units. That’s not the case here anymore.” LPS quickly realized that each media specialist had a depth of expertise to share, and it was up to the district to use that wide-ranging knowledge to best benefit students. “As we developed our own future-ready plan, we involved the media specialists, because we believed their skills in research and technology further enhanced students’ learning experiences.”

While many districts are cutting library staff positions, LPS has proven it values the expertise of

its library media specialists by the responsibilities outlined in their job descriptions. As LPS’s Assistant Superintendent Dr. Angelique Nedved pointed out, the district ensures library staff impact curriculum decisions and classroom teaching through their leadership responsibilities and curation, as well as their expertise in research and knowledge of copyright laws. She explained how the district sees library media specialists of equal importance to other educators at each school. “There are no expendable positions in today’s library,” she shared. “Similar to any effective grade- or content-specific professional educator, our library media specialists impact learning on so many levels. They teach students how to build knowledge from information, as well as how to think and inquire. Our kids need to know how to ask good questions, find high-quality information from different points of view and draw their own conclusions from the evidence.” Both Nedved and Willets agree that every student at LPS is reaping the benefits from the inclusion of the library media specialists at all levels of education.



CURATION AND CONTENT ACCESS: A UNIQUE APPROACH

As the district moved ahead with its future-ready plan, a chief concern was how to provide access to relevant, timely materials. Relying solely on textbooks, with their quickly dated content (especially in social studies) just wasn't the answer anymore. A team explored online resources and soon arrived at a consensus that the use of OERs – so vast and varied in their scope – would be a part of students' future-ready learning. The use of OERs, however, posed new challenges. Students needed time to access them, and the district needed to determine how to curate them.

Undaunted, LPS forged ahead because administrators understood the benefits, including a wide-reaching, diverse offering of resources. District officials understood educators would be spending too much time searching

for appropriate materials to align with lessons. Again, LPS saw the need to involve and include library staff in the curation process. Soon, the district was involved in the OER movement on local and national levels.

"Not long ago, LPS was invited to the White House to discuss the use of open educational resources," Nedved explained. "As one of the 10 districts in the nation committed to the OER movement, we involved library media specialists strategically from the beginning. Now, their expertise is relied upon for multiple curriculum decisions, starting with curation and through all aspects of teaching and learning."

While Nedved is the first to admit the district's initiative to using OERs is "not there yet," she is thrilled with the progress they've made so far

and was quick to point out that the library staff is key to this future-ready commitment.

"We have not achieved a full integration of the library yet, but our beginning stages of working with OERs involve action and a definitive plan," she explained. "We have put together a committee to focus on the access and curation of OERs." The committee includes a classroom teacher, a library media specialist and a TOSA (Teacher on Special Assignment). As Nedved explained, the committee is focused on troubleshooting, planning and determining best practices for OERs for all classrooms and teachers. Additionally, the library media specialist helps guide curation and the conversation about regulations, guidelines, new standards, best sites and other issues related to OER usage.

WHY OERs?

With the expanse of information available today on the Internet and from educational publishers, Lawrence Public Schools is unique in its goal to increasingly include more and more open educational resources in every course. They've researched and considered other options, but realize increased use of OERs is the best path for their students to truly become future-ready, in every sense of the term.

"Part of our commitment to OERs is our district's desire to build students' digital literacy skills," Nedved said. "Not everything on the Internet is high-quality or correct. Using OERs helps students learn to seek sources that are valid and credible. Our students are learning early on about research skills, copyright rules, intellectual property usage instead of in later grades, like it used to be. Also, we're determined to be as current as our students, and with

OERs, we're not asking them to learn with dated information. It's a natural partner for today's students, who get their information from multiple social media sites. OERs can provide that immediacy."

Willets also pointed out that "with OERs, we can offer such diverse options, and can provide a broader, more holistic approach to any subject."



COURSE MASTERS: EVERYTHING NEEDED TO TEACH THE COURSE

The committee's job is to have materials ready for teachers so they don't have to search and curate the information they need for their curriculum. Called Course Masters, this collection of content is an approved, curriculum-aligned buffet of readings, articles, discussion topics, books, videos, assessments (formative and summative) and digital content. It includes everything a busy novice or veteran would need. "Teachers then pull from the Course Masters, which the librarians have helped create," said Willets. "Today, the committee is halfway through creating Course Masters using OERs at 100 percent. This team of three searches, plans, creates and problem solves to make each course dynamic and diverse."

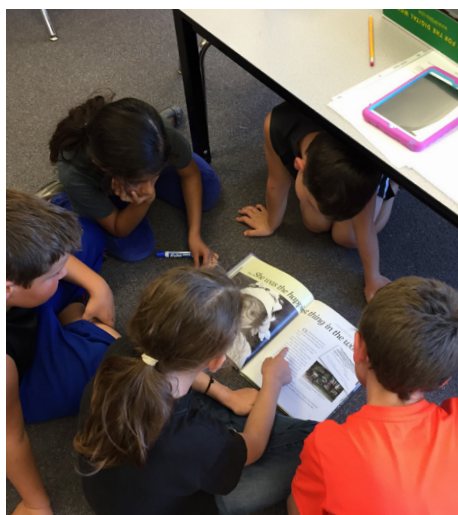
Both administrators pointed out that the ultimate goal is 100-percent use of OERs, with curation and access issues handled before classwork ever begins. "It's a work in progress, because we're always thinking about how our media specialists can support kids beyond the library, which is big," Nedved said.

During the district's early release on Wednesdays, the library media specialists meet with teachers to collaboratively plan lessons. Yet, the library staff's collaboration is consistent and ongoing, far beyond Wednesday afternoons, as Willets explained. "They may meet every day – in the halls, over lunch. Additionally, many of the staff participates in summer team planning in preparation for the next school year."

"We have found the library media specialists' involvement to be extremely beneficial as they have worked together with the grade- and content-specific teachers to curate, create, and design the year-long course for 7th grade ELA," said Nedved. "Their input on the viability and reliability of the course is critical. Our impetus for including them was due to their specialized skills in research and copyright issues."

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TODAY, AND BEYOND, AT LAWRENCE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Today, the library media specialists at LPS continue to work together with teachers to ensure dynamic curriculum for their students. Access to up-to-date, balanced and aligned digital and print resources is their goal, and eventually, all classes will rely upon the immediacy and breadth OERs can offer. "I ask other educators I meet, 'If you have a librarian in your district, why wouldn't you see this role as a curator?'"

Our library media specialists simply happen to have a deeper background in research and curation. Not to mention, they typically have vast knowledge of existing collections," Nedved explained. "They understand where and how to search using a discerning eye for accuracy, legitimacy and intellectual property. We are future ready and a large part of that is due to the expertise of our library staff."

