

1706 HARRIS-HILLMAN SCHOOL

FUTURE READY FRAMEWORK:
Equity



“The idea of Future Ready is so necessary and has been a great planning and development tool for our librarians. We have fully embraced the framework in Nashville, including a focus on better conditions and preparation for students, and equity is an important part of that. We base our goals on setting students up for success.”

STEPHANIE HAM

Director of Library Services at
Metro Nashville Public Schools

EQUITY FOR STUDENTS AND EMPOWERMENT FOR LIBRARIANS

METRO NASHVILLE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Tennessee

TAKING EQUITY SERIOUSLY

What are the elements of future-ready success? Empowering fellow teacher librarians, working for equal access for all students and collaborating closely with a district-wide library team. This vision is what the Metro Nashville Public Schools District (MNPS) achieved through hard work and foresight.

At MNPS, Stephanie Ham, Director of Library Services, and Doug Renfro, Executive Director of Learning Technology and Library Services, have been working to “move from operational to instructional,” which means ensuring their librarians are recognized as key members of the instructional process. This four-year process has not been without its challenges, but as both agree, the results are more than worthwhile.

MNPS has a district initiative to emphasize equity across the board, which means access for all students across all schools. The plan, which will be formally presented in spring 2017, will outline all resources available to all students, and libraries are slated as one of those equitable resources.



As Ham and Renfro say, their mission is to support schools in a student-centered way, providing whatever children need. At the district level, this emphasis on equity is broad and multi-faceted, and the examples are many. From scheduling flexibility designed to support collaboration and co-teaching to programs ensuring equal access to resources for all students, the district takes equity seriously. Starting with the commitment to allow students to come to the library as often as necessary (and after hours), the district's dedication ensures access to resources to those students who might not have

technology and resources at home. An exciting development currently underway at Metro Nashville is the construction of a new library for Harris-Hillman School, attended by students who have severe mental and physical disabilities. "This Special Day school, serving students with disabilities, was the only school within the district that didn't have a library," said Ham. "It was important to us to give those students access to a library." The new library – not a renovation – will give students and teachers at that site the print and digital content they need without leaving campus.

Ham and her team encourage thinking outside of the physical library. If a librarian can serve students by checking out books in the cafeteria or in the bus line, that's a win. They're constantly working in other ways to make sure all resources support instruction and allow anytime, anywhere access for all students. MNPS libraries provide year-round access to its resources so kids can keep reading and researching over the summer, with no return dates for items until students return to school in the fall.



EQUITY BEGINS WITH A COMMITMENT TO EXPERTISE

As Renfro explained, the district's commitment to providing abundant resources for all students went beyond having plenty of books on shelves – its dedication to equity starts at the top. "District leadership has ensured that all schools have a full-time, certified librarian," said Renfro. "In a time where many districts are cutting library staff, this is a really positive move." Each librarian is vigorously vetted during the interview process to ensure dynamic expertise and direction.

Renfro explained how the district works in collaboration with the community, giving students broad access to resources beyond the school. Additionally, the library program enlists all students in the Nashville Public Library summer

reading program. They even go the extra step to open satellite library locations to ensure access to those students who may not live near one of the public libraries.

"We're fortunate to have the support of the Nashville Public Library," said Renfro. "Our collaborative program, Limitless Libraries, provides much-needed collection-development support for all our libraries. No matter what school a student attends in Davidson County/MNPS, they have access to a high-quality collection." The district also works with the Nashville Public Library to deliver Braille books to vision-impaired students, ensuring on-campus access to popular books and resources for these students.



AN ALL-INCLUSIVE LIBRARIAN LEADERSHIP TEAM

Metro Nashville Public Schools has a librarian leadership team, called librarian coaches, who work closely with administrators to ensure their library programs are teaching future-ready skills, ensuring equity and promoting library advocacy. In a true team-centered fashion, Ham and Renfro asked team members to weigh in on equity at MNPS, and staff responses illustrate the dedication they share.

Connie Sharp, Librarian Training and Development Specialist, explained the many ways she uses technology to promote equity. “I use Twitter and other social media sites to highlight

lessons and collaborations that were effective,” said Sharp. “It’s great to use your school-specific hashtag on social media to draw attention to your work. Tag administrators, teachers and technology tools to raise their profile. Send out a scheduled newsletter highlighting technology and your willingness and availability to teach educators and students.” Sharp shares her skills and expertise with other educators to promote her programs and encourages patrons and colleagues to call on her.

Her colleague, Olivia Rodney, a librarian at Rosebank Elementary,

agrees. “I want people to know I am here and willing to help in any way I can. I draw attention to this by emailing teachers a weekly newsletter offering pertinent information, timely reminders and promoting my willingness to collaborate,” she said. Rodney also believes in the age-old credence of modeling positive actions and behavior. “I also promote my skills and expertise through my actions – if I hear that a teacher needs help with something or is looking for certain resources, I jump on the opportunity to provide it for them.”

LIBRARIANS ADVOCATE FOR THEIR STUDENTS AND THEMSELVES

The type of self-advocacy described by Rodney is shared by the entire library staff at MNPS, and the result is a district that relies upon and respects its librarians. Each library staff member, however, knows it is a constant effort, and empowerment is a regular part of the job. “Let everyone know what you are doing, and how well it’s going,” advised Alyssa Littrell, District Librarian. “Keep up with everything quantitative

and tangible such as data and statistics – circulation, number of lessons taught, etc. Every month or quarter make an eye-catching one-pager to hand out highlighting those wins. Never go to your principal or administration with a problem you don’t already have a solution for. Better yet – TWO solutions.”

Ham described how her team advocates for themselves through

good training as well as social media. “All librarians are required to attend four full-day PD sessions throughout the year where we discuss new information ranging from unique strategies to new software, and we collaborate with colleagues. Each librarian takes this back to their schools to implement and share,” she said. “Also, we all utilize Twitter as a personal learning network with the hashtag #mnpslibhack.”



“There are so many ways librarians can be their own advocate. I recommend requesting to be on the leadership team or administrative team where decisions are being made. Request a common grade-level planning and then plan together. Promote effective collaborations in the school and be visible to parents so that they, too, will begin to recognize the strong role the librarian plays in effective instructional partnerships. Meet with your administrator and speak in support of teachers who are collaborating and using library resources.”

CONNIE SHARP
Librarian Training and Development Specialist





LIBRARY RELEVANCY TODAY

Renfro credits Nashville district administrators with fully embracing the idea of using the library space and librarians for instructional purposes, which facilitates their mission of access and equity. The librarians provide feedback on space design, and most librarians in the district serve on school leadership teams that support the vision and focus on literacy in the district. Literacy (both in the traditional and digital sense) is a critical focus, of course, and librarians are uniquely suited to market themselves as experts on multiple forms of literacy.

Student use of the space is quantifiable and an easy way to determine perceived usefulness and relevancy. Are student needs being widely met? Circulation, an excellent barometer of equity and engagement, has been steadily

increasing across MNPS. As Renfro says, “Our librarians push the space to the limits so all students have an accessible, safe and quiet space to be and to learn.”

As Mark Ray says in his important TEDx talk, “Kids no longer come to the library for information, but they do still intuitively come to the library for help.” That makes equity of access as important as ever – perhaps even more. “We were fortunate enough to have Mark Ray come and explain the framework directly to our librarians,” Ham said, “and man, it was worth it. He talked about the entire framework, but then we worked with librarians so they could identify their strengths and areas of improvement.” Customizing each library’s needs to match the areas in which they needed support was key.

Why not implement future readiness all at once? As Renfro noted, “we knew it wasn’t going to happen overnight so we needed to build the expectation that it is a journey.” He believes that implementing the entire framework at once wasn’t a winning strategy, in large part because there are so many moving parts beyond the library and teacher librarians. Coordinating efforts can be slower than one might wish, but doing so is more likely to ensure effective and continued support for the process.



“Future Ready is bringing librarians back to the center of instruction and collaboration. We know librarians in MNPS have an impact, but it is great to see that impact mirrored on a national level.”

DOUG RENFRO

Executive Director of Learning Technology and Library Services
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