



FUTURE READY FRAMEWORK:

Professional Development



“When it comes to professional development, we focus our conversations on the essential question, what does it mean to be a librarian in the digital age? When we discovered Follett Project Connect, everything aligned so closely to that essential question, we began to plan our development sessions through the lens of these topics.”

– BILL BASS

Innovation Coordinator for
Instructional Technology,
Information and Library Media

LIBRARIANSHIP IN THE 21ST CENTURY: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IS THE KEY

**PARKWAY SCHOOL DISTRICT
ST. LOUIS, MO**

Translating trends and technology to fit the needs of school communities

When Bill Bass took on the job of Innovation Coordinator for St. Louis’s Parkway School District three years ago, his arrival complemented an ongoing, district-wide shift toward a collaborative, team-based model of curriculum development. That shift has also informed the district’s approach to professional development, from initial hiring decisions to training and continuing education. As a result, and because of Bass’s confidence in the expertise of the librarians in his district, library staff have a greater voice in a broad range of conversations at every level. This deeper level of school-wide communication affects the daily experience of over 17,000 children in 28 schools through an intentional mix of support, resources and development.

As Bass says, “The mission of the Parkway School District is to ensure all students are capable, curious, caring and confident learners who understand and respond to the challenges of an ever-changing world – and the role of the librarian is central to that mission.”



As he considered the way forward for Parkway's existing library program, Bass took a close look at what it means to be a librarian today. (As Mark Ray would say, "The theory is that we're very good at associating librarians with our past. The question is – do you see them as part of the future?") Bass explains, "We had been thinking a lot about ways to empower and recognize the importance of our librarians and the needs they can fill for both students and staff. A coworker came across news about Project Connect, and when I attended an AASL panel presentation in Columbus, I realized this is what we need, who we are, and how we want to be part of this movement."

CREATING A HUB AND ADOPTING NEW TECHNOLOGIES

Bass realized Follett Project Connect offered a framework and sense of focus closely aligned with the values his team had already defined. They needed to give librarians the freedom to focus their work on the needs of students while providing a common language for important conversations across the district. Bass considers professional development to be one of the most important opportunities of

Parkway's program, and each component of Project Connect informs some aspect of the district's approach to professional development.

When Bass reached out to his local Follett Sales Rep, she connected Parkway to solutions for the district's changing needs, but also put them in touch with other libraries in the area for additional support and insights, which have since proven invaluable. These connections have allowed Parkway to be more intentional in their choices every step of the way.

The Innovation Team (made up of five district-level coordinators, of whom Bass is one) also noticed a shift when recently adopting Google Apps for Education. "Our librarians became a key component in supporting teachers. Administrators began to more heavily rely on their librarians to be instructional leaders," he said. Bass sees changes in structure as opportunities for growth as well as ways to empower and recognize the importance of teacher-librarians.

CONNECTING THE DOTS

Today's librarians are an integral part of future-ready schools that

connect the dots for teachers and students. Whether the need is for a Makerspace, a learning commons, a collaborative learning space, a coffee shop, a safe place or one of countless other potential needs, the librarians at Parkway are trained to identify and respond to the requirements of students in their specific learning community.

"Libraries have shifted to become more and more collaborative because the role of the librarian has changed. We rely on our librarians to recognize and respond to their own school's culture and needs – they are truly the eyes and ears of the district when it comes to technology and instructional resources," Bass said.

But the impact of a Parkway district librarian goes beyond his or her own school spaces or even departmental dialogues about district-wide policies, Bass explained. In addition to the obvious benefits of Parkway's approach to professional development, one of the real eye-openers has been the way administration regards and values the librarians. "As they have become more integral to district conversations, curriculum leaders have begun to see



librarians as a vital piece of their curricular approach and now make consultations with them during curriculum revision a regular event,” Bass said. “They are relied upon for content knowledge, technical expertise and resource alignment. Already, the changes in our structure have empowered and highlighted the importance of librarians and the myriad needs they fill for students and staff.”

ONGOING AND EMBEDDED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

As our world and the technology we use to navigate it shifts and changes almost daily, it falls to librarians to pay attention to the trends impacting students and curriculum across the disciplines. With this in mind, Bass firmly believes viewing the librarian as a skilled professional is vital to the success of any school district. “At Parkway, librarians are trained and encouraged to tailor their approach to their individual communities,” Bass said. “They advocate for students while also developing classroom-centered solutions for teachers and administrators.

“When we approach our own in-house development, we look at the topics from the framework to determine our needs,” Bass

said. He explained how all training and development for the district’s libraries centers around specific skills outlined by the Future Ready Alliance and Project Connect. The focus remains on using the expertise of the librarians to help students leave the district with the foundation they’ll need to succeed in college and career.

“Each member of our library staff is on a continuous journey to become that digital-age librarian,” he shared. “Regardless of where an individual’s strengths and challenges lie, we work hard to support everyone through newsletters, personal visits, just-in-time professional learning, attendance at conferences and a continued focus on the Project Connect and Future Ready frameworks to guide our thinking and conversations.

“We know this is not a journey with an end point and we must remain cognizant of the work that came before and will come after us.”

Bass feels confident every librarian at Parkway is receiving the professional development they need to ensure their students are future-ready. “We consider professional development as more than an event, meeting or workshop – it’s both ongoing and

embedded on a daily basis, in every written communication and conversation.”



“Our students’ futures are brighter because of our commitment to training librarians and giving them opportunities to grow professionally. Our librarians are leaders in their schools and in their content areas who are pushing the boundaries of education to create relevant and meaningful experiences for students.”

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