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Research Skills Class at Red Jacket Middle School Library

by Tom Nichols, Red Jacket Jr.-Sr. High School Library Media Specialist

The Manchester/Shortsville “Red Jacket” Middle School has instituted a course in research skills for sixth graders. The course is taught by the high school/middle school library/teacher, Tom Nichols. It provides students with basic research skills. These basic research skills include learning how to use indices, use basic research tools, create successful search construction, use basic search strategies, use keywords and key points, and generate basic citations. The course culminates in a final research paper, which was created by the English and social studies teachers, Spencer Jones and Sally Osborne in collaboration with the librarian.

Middle school teachers have noticed differences in student research abilities since the program began two years ago. Abbie Vanwely, 7th grade English teacher, has seen a remarkable difference. Ms. Vanwely stated, “My seventh graders began the year with a very noticeable advantage... They know how to locate information in the library, how to use indices, how to phrase computer searches and how to identify useful information.” She went on to say “For the first time in many years, most of my students are self-running on research days in the library.”

Sixth grade teacher Spencer Jones notes that: “the research skills curriculum plays a vital role in the education of our middle schoolers. Following the *BIG 6* process, students are guided through the components of a research project from start to finish.” He further noted that “it is in this class that the students first learn the skills of a good researcher...and are walked through the steps involved to properly cite the source of information as well.”

In conclusion, the research skills class has made a large difference in the level of student performance. These research skills will help students throughout the rest of their high school careers and into college and the workplace. In addition, research* demonstrates that increased library usage means higher student achievement.

**The Impact of School Library Media Centers on Academic Achievement* by Keith Curry Lance and *Student Learning through Ohio School Libraries* by Ross Todd and Carol C. Kuhlthau.

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SPOTLIGHT ON A SCHOOL MEDIA SPECIALIST:

Who's Who Among America's Teachers...Tom Nichols

Tom Nichols, author of the feature article in this issue of the *Administrator Newsletter*, has also been honored in *Who's Who Among America's Teachers*.

Mr. Nichols appears in the 6th edition of *Who's Who Among America's Teachers*. This is the fourth time being so honored. To be included in this list a teacher must be nominated by a student who has been listed in *Who's Who Among America's High School Students* or is on the *National Dean's List*. Only 5% of America's teachers are honored in each edition and less than 2% are included in more than one edition. Additionally, librarians are among the lowest percentile of teachers nominated for this honor.

This is a great honor and we congratulate Mr. Nichols. We hope this “Spotlight on a School Library Media Specialist” gives you an even broader idea of what great accomplishments librarians obtain.

Library Leadership Day...Ross Todd

On January 27, 2005, the Wayne-Finger Lakes BOCES School Library System held its annual "Library Leadership Day." The goal of this day is to provide area school library media specialists with opportunities to attend professional development workshops.

This year, the keynote speaker was, Dr. Ross Todd. Dr. Todd is an Associate Professor and Director of Research (CISSL) at Rutgers University. Dr. Todd and Carol Kuhlthau led the recent Ohio Study, "Student Learning Through Ohio School Libraries" (see the December issue of the *Administrator Newsletter* or go to <http://www.oelma.org/studentlearning.htm> for a fact sheet about this study). This study "sought to understand how students benefit from school libraries."

Dr. Todd's presentation to WFL school library media specialists discussed what the study wanted to examine, how it was conducted, quotes from the study's participants (teachers and students), and the results. The study concluded that a school library is a "dynamic agent of learning" by "providing access to information resources, access to multiple viewpoints, engaging students in an active process of building their own understanding and knowledge, and [by being not only an] information place, but also knowledge space." These items develop the skills students need to do well on standards-based assessments. Thus, school library media programs help increase student achievement on standardized tests.

According to Dr. Todd's findings, to have successful library media programs, districts and school administrators need to support and promote school library media specialists and library media programs. School library media programs are central to a schools' goal of high student achievement. Administrators and school media specialists need to work together to promote school library media programs. Below is a section from the article, "Partners For An Effective LMP: Principals-Media Specialist-Teachers." It has suggestions for principals on what they can do to help promote the library media program.

"As Principal, What can I do to Have a Good Library Media Program?"

"First and foremost, be committed to having a top-notch program! Your enthusiasm and support garners the enthusiasm and support of others.

Second, consider the library media center as a learning lab and not a classroom. Encourage teachers to use the media center to extend classroom learning and not as a substitute classroom where students are dropped off for a designated period of time while the teacher is elsewhere.

Third, see that funds are sufficient to maintain an up-to-date and appropriate collection.

Fourth, provide adequate staff to meet or exceed accreditation requirements. At a minimum, every program needs a certified library media professional, and depending on the size of the student body and the complexity of the school program aides and technicians may also be needed.

Fifth, help teachers and parents understand that the library media specialist needs time for required management tasks.

Sixth, be involved in the program and confer regularly with the media specialist so you are informed about program implementation and the level of collection use."

Hopefully, the findings from Dr. Todd's study and suggestions above will provide you with some ideas and tools to help support and promote the library media programs at your schools.