Numerous state impact studies show that school libraries improve student achievement and standardized test scores, yet that fact is insufficient to keep financially strapped districts from closing their libraries. Teacher-librarians must be proactive and gather data at the school-site level to demonstrate how valuable they are to students and staff. Thorough library assessments—which include daily usage statistics, community and collection analyses, and student and faculty surveys—must be performed.

The 21st century will undoubtedly come to be known as the Age of Assessment and Accountability. Every day students and teachers in public education are inundated with yet another costly standardized test, exit exam, competency, or No Child Left Behind requirement. School libraries nationwide have been prey to superintendents and school board members looking for areas to trim district costs despite the astounding findings of impact studies in 15 states and Australia that demonstrate how school libraries improve student achievement and standardized test scores (IASL, n.d.). Data must be gathered at the school-site level, in conjunction with data from state impact studies, to ensure that library doors remain open.

As a new teacher-librarian for Washington High School (WHS) in Fremont, CA, I struggled last year with how to begin assessment of the library, but I also acknowledged the need to show that the resources and services were not expendable. Drawing from existing research, I devised a comprehensive assessment plan that included tracking daily usage statistics, performing community and collection analyses, and evaluating student and faculty survey results. The findings have helped me gain administrative support, identify collection gaps and weaknesses, foster funding partnerships for new materials and technology, increase student and faculty usage, and most importantly, ensure that the library remains open.

**Daily Library Statistics**

Automation software enables libraries to easily track circulation statistics; however, teacher-librarians need to gather data on other aspects of school library usage. How many teachers come to the library each day to sign up their classes, collaborate on lessons, or use materials? How many students visit daily before school, at lunch, after school, or with a library pass? How many collection resources are used by visiting classes? How many students and teachers use the library computers? Inexpensive hand-held counters from office supply stores may be useful to track some data, and spreadsheet software, such as Microsoft Excel, can facilitate recording the daily statistics (see Figure 1).

Washington is a large high school with approximately 90 teachers serving about 2,000 students. Finding out how many of them use our library was enlightening. Recording the number of students revealed that an average of 600-700 are seen daily. Tracking when students visit showed that about 100 students come before school, between 200 and 250 at lunch, and about 100 after school. Approximately 200-300 students visit daily with instructors who have reserved the library for their classes. Between 100 and 150 teachers are assisted monthly separate from when they are scheduled with their classes. This data shows the district how many students and teachers would be affect-
ed by closing the library or by reducing hours.

A security gate that was installed a couple years before I was hired provided a means by which the staff at that time could generally record the number of daily entrants. Total clicks on the gate counter were divided by two to account for users coming and going. This at least supplied a little information on approximately how many users entered daily before the library was staffed with a full-time teacher-librarian. I continued tracking gate data by this method and compared the end-of-year figures at the completion of my first year to those compiled the previous year. There was a 50% increase in the number of users entering the library.

Tracking statistics immediately from my date of hire not only provided valuable information about the school library, but it also provided a baseline for which future data could be compared. This school year’s findings were compared to the last two year’s data. The number of classes, checkouts, and patrons entering the library tripled since I was hired. Now that it was possible to discover what resources are needed “Library services, as well as their collections, must be based upon an understanding of the service community and its information wants and needs” (2000, p. 31). The community that a school library serves consists of more than the surrounding neighborhoods and city in which it resides. According to Evans, it also revolves around the “parent institute” or what comprises the school, which includes school curriculum, campus social and academic clubs, athletics, and school departments that must use library resources (2000, p. 43). Obtaining information on all of the aspects of the school is not as arduous as it may sound due to certain resources that are available.

City chamber of commerce web sites provide historical, political, economical, and industrial data. Online resources, such as City-data.com and Sperling’s Best Places.net, provide demographical information down to the zip code. Sperling’s also has district and school statistics available. Census data may be a few years old but still fulfills this purpose. The sites include information on the average educational level obtained in the community as well as valuable crime and unemployment rates. Especially helpful is the information on the socioeconomic, ethnic, and religious background of families in a school’s attendance area.

For curriculum information, district catalogs provide some information on the standards-based courses and electives, but nothing replaces communication with faculty to discover what resources are needed.

## COMMUNITY ANALYSIS

Evans, author of Developing Library and Information Center Collections, asserts, “Library services, as well as their collections, must be based upon an understanding of the service community and its information wants and needs” (2000, p. 31). The community that a school library serves consists of more than the surrounding neighborhoods and city in which it resides. According to Evans, it also revolves around the “parent institute” or what comprises the school, which includes school curriculum, campus social and academic clubs, athletics, and school departments that must use library resources (2000, p. 43). Obtaining information on all of the aspects of the school is not as arduous as it may sound due to certain resources that are available.

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to support their courses. Ask for specifics on each unit taught. The communication process may also increase usage and opportunities for collaboration.

District pupil services and site administrators are able to provide accurate data on the race and ethnicity of the student body, primary languages that are spoken on campus, and standardized test performances. Knowing the number of students receiving free school lunches may illuminate socioeconomic issues of the student body. Districts have statistics on the number and gender of students who are passing advanced placement and honors courses; graduating; and matriculating to community colleges, state universities, or private schools. School activities and athletic directors can provide information on campus groups and sports.

The WHS community analysis revealed that it is the oldest high school in Fremont, founded in the 1890s. Surprisingly, many of the students’ parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents attended WHS, which explains why there is such strong alumni support. The school is nestled in a community of 111 churches, 10 temples, and 1 synagogue. Although most students follow various forms of Christianity, there are also a number of Jewish, Buddhist, Muslim, and Sikh students as well. Only one-half mile from the high school is an area known as Little Kabul because it encompasses one of the nation’s highest concentrations of Afghan residents, many who are teens at WHS. Over 60 languages are spoken on campus, including 28% Spanish, 6% Punjabi, 12% Farsi, 14% Mandarin, 7% Cantonese, and 33% other languages. There are 229 English-language learners.

Gay-Straight Alliance, the Chess Club, Black Student Union, and the Spanish Club are but a few of the active clubs on campus.

The school has a standards-based curriculum, and due to budget cuts many electives have been dropped, including the German program. Now the only foreign language classes taught are French and Spanish. Forensics, contemporary film, art, digital photography, music, and speech and debate are the few remaining.

These are but a few of the valuable details revealed from the community analysis. When compared with results from the collection analysis, would the library collection prove capable of supporting so many language learners? Would all of the cultures and religions be represented? These questions and more would be answered by the collection analysis.

**COLLECTION ANALYSIS**

Teacher-librarians are aware that the quality of a collection is not equivalent to the amount of shelf space the material occupies—weed, weed, weed! No school library should have shelves filled with dated, inaccurate books that no one has checked out in decades or that do not support the community it serves. Yet, how does one actually begin the task of analyzing a school library collection? In “How Do You Measure a Library Collection?” Wolfe concluded that four points are essential: “Quality of records in the catalog database, age of the collection, titles per pupil, and how well the collection supports the curriculum” (2001, p. 30).

Most library software programs have built-in collection tools that measure the number of books and average age of the collection by Dewey classification. School libraries can also export collection records to TitleWise, a free collection analysis service provided by Follett Library Products and Services. These digital collection analysis tools are invaluable, but they overlook aspects of the collection that can only be seen by good old-fashioned observation. Outdated, damaged books with yellowed, dog-eared pages and illegible spine print are rarely checked out and lower the average date of that Dewey section.

When performing the WHS collection analysis, I obtained printouts from Sirsi, the library automation software used by my district, and TitleWise to compare information from the two sources. TitleWise provided the total number of books in the collection, which was compared to enrollment to determine how many items per pupil (IPP) were available. The district library plan goal is to have 25-plus IPP. WHS’s collection was found to be greatly lacking at 8 IPP, and the number was actually less than that because many of the titles were sorely in need of weeding. In fiction alone only one quarter of our collection was less that...
cleaning up those poor catalog records. It was now clear whom the library was serving and with what collection resources. Next, student and staff feedback was desired to see how effectively they felt the library was meeting their needs and what recommendations they had for improvements.

**STUDENT AND FACULTY SURVEYS**

Several questions had to be answered before surveys could be created, such as, What would be the best format for the survey? How could I reach as many students and faculty as possible and motivate them to complete the surveys in earnest? What information did I need to obtain?

The survey format presented a dilemma. Should the goal be manageable results or valuable responses? The temptation was to create a Scantron-type survey so that results could be easily calculated; however, anything Scantron in public schools has a history of not being taken seriously because so many standardized tests follow that format. Students despise bubbling in those little circles, which could potentially affect survey results. Bubble format also prohibits survey takers from being able to share insightful feedback. I chose to revise student and faculty surveys from Joyce Kasman Valenza’s (1998) *Power Tools: 100+ Essential Forms and Presentations for Your School Library Information Program*. Valenza provides a CD-ROM containing her forms and presentations for easy customization. The latest edition, *Power Tools Recharged: 125+ Essential Forms and Presentations for Your School Library Information Program*, was published in 2004.

Now armed with the knowledge of users’ information needs, it was easy to determine the collection strengths. It shined in the areas of geography, religion, literature, and sports, while severe collection gaps were evident in other areas, such as language, mathematics, and science.

The community analysis provided the necessary details to determine users’ information needs that when compared with the collection analysis showed the collection’s strengths and weaknesses. Areas of need were clearly identified for grant purposes. WHS administrators joined forces with me providing suggestions for funding resources like our alumni association. One administrator, who is in charge of Cultural Language and Diversity (CLAD) funding, helped me to obtain more books in Spanish through my CLAD certification. I have even been able to get an extra teaching assistant to help in this activity into their busy schedules. Each bundle of surveys had a teacher name to identify which teachers had returned them.

I also wondered if there would be a difference in the quality of survey responses from students whose teachers were avid library users to those whose teachers were not. Students come to the library individually or with classes from all departments, so I was not sure it would matter. Ultimately, students took the surveys more seriously when given to them by a teacher who used and required his or her students to use the library. All survey responses, however, were included in the final results, and I learned that I needed to do more outreach and provide a reason for all of our teachers to become library supporters.

For determining the kinds of questions to ask on the surveys I reviewed Valenza’s samples. I also made some revisions based on suggestions from my library media instructor, such as on how library staff and services help students complete assignments more quickly and receive higher grades. Other ideas for useful questions were obtained by researching articles and the state impact studies that are available online at www.lemi-la.org/LEMI119.html. For example, the Ohio study asked students 48 yes-or-no questions, including the following:

- The school has helped me do my schoolwork better.
- The school library has helped me get better grades on my projects and assignments.
- The information I have found in the...
school library has helped me become more interested in my topic.

- The school library has helped me know when I find good information.
- The school library has helped me know how to use the different kinds of information sources (books, magazines, CDs, web sites, and videos) (Whelan, 2004, p. 49).

I wanted to know if students found the staff helpful, what suggestions they had for improving the library, and how many would attend after-school tutorials if they were available. I wanted to know if staff would embrace collaborating on lesson plans and displaying student projects in the library. What suggestions did they have for how the library could better meet their needs? What material had they come to the library in search of that we failed to have?

Processing over 2,000 surveys was arduous and took several months to complete, but reading the responses was a reward in itself:

- "Last year I got an 'A' on an English project, which wouldn't have been possible without the school library and staff."
- "The teacher-librarian helped me learn PowerPoint and complete my presentation for science. Without her I wouldn't have done it."
- "I learned how to use the WebCat [the online catalog] to find books at my school library. Now I use those skills when I go to the public library."

About 42.2% of the faculty surveyed said they would like to collaborate on lessons, a far greater number than expected. Unanimously, they agreed that the library staff helped them find curricular and recreational material.

About 42% of the faculty surveyed said they would like to collaborate on lessons, a far greater number than expected. Unanimously, they agreed that the library staff helped them find curricular and recreational material.

I solicited the expertise of the school's statistics teacher to help me understand and present findings. He explained that data is better understood by pie and bar graphs than by lists of numbers (see Figure 2).

I began recording results by class as teachers' bundles of completed student surveys began returning to me. This provided the opportunity to share results with English teachers on their own students as well as with the staff as a whole. They were amazed to find how many of their students openly admitted to benefiting from the school library. For example, 71% of the students said they had completed assignments more quickly, and 46% said they had received higher grades on assignments. Needless to say, this year the number of teachers bringing classes to the library continues to rise.

Granted, not all students took the surveys seriously. There were a few with obscenities. My favorite had written across it, "pie, Pie, PIE!" The student's suggestion on how to improve the library was, "MAKE Pie!"

The amount of data can be overwhelming to share all at once. Perhaps a better way is to slowly disseminate the information to staff and students through school announcements and staff e-mails as a continual reminder of the exciting things going on in the library. The school newsletter proved to be an excellent means of sharing data with parents, and many of them joined forces to donate nearly $1,500 at the beginning of this school year to buy new books. I also shared our data and resources on the state studies with the district teacher-librarian and, of course, the school superintendent.

**CONCLUSION**

The data revealed from examining the library's daily usage, community and collection analyses, and student and faculty feedback continues to prove invaluable in the search for future support and funding. Glaring evidence of collection gaps, weaknesses, and inequities justify clear need for obtaining grant funds. Future collection purchases will be informed by demonstrated need, not guesswork, ensuring that funds are not wasted on materials or services that do not meet users' information needs.

The assessment findings also serve as a baseline by which to compare future assessments. In "The Numbers Game: How to Fatten Your Budget by Using Statistics," Fiore describes how several public librarians
used statistics to hire staff or expand libraries and collections. She asserts, “You can use statistics to justify budget requests, change resource allocations, expand services, show benefits of new services to the community (1998, p. 105). Fiore recommends using statistical data to demonstrate the strengths and weaknesses of the library services, staff, and resources, using the numbers to highlight inequities for grant funding. She also notes the benefits of comparing one library’s statistics to other similar libraries: “If a library with a similar budget presents fewer programs than yours or has lower program attendance, you can point out how efficient your library is” (p. 108).

Data collection and library assessment should be an ongoing process, requiring constant reflection to refine and improve the steps along the way. For the WHS library assessment, I do not regret avoiding a Scantron-type survey. Precious student and faculty comments reminded me that I had not just created busy work for myself as I recorded the responses to 20 questions from more than 2,000 surveys. Soliciting help to record responses would accelerate the process, but finding assistants who can take the task seriously and record the findings accurately can be difficult. One teacher suggested creating a digital survey and attaching it to the library web page; however, surveys would then only represent those using that resource, not all teachers and students. Survey questions will change as more states publish findings of their impact studies and offer suggestions on the most relevant, useful questions. I contemplated including a spot where students could provide their current grade point averages (GPAs) to see if there was any correlation between library use and higher overall GPAs but decided against this because students might not know or want to disclose their real GPAs.

It is the Age of Assessment and Accountability. If school libraries are to remain open for students and staff, teacher-librarians must demonstrate the value of their services and resources. Those resources must meet users’ educational and recreational needs, and that can only be determined through community and collection analyses. Proof that users’ needs are met can only be documented through survey feedback and by recording daily usage statistics. Although most states are conducting studies that show how important school libraries and teacher-librarians are, it is data from the individual school sites that will ensure that library doors remain open.

REFERENCES


