

# what can teacher-librarians do to promote their work and the school library media program? **offensive** **formula: P+M=A**

**W**HILE THERE ARE NO GUARANTEES THAT A STRONG SCHOOL LIBRARY PROGRAM ENSURES YOUR POSITION IS SECURE WHEN CUTS ARE THREATENED, IT IS THE CRUCIAL FIRST STEP. YOUR PROGRAM NEEDS TO MATCH THE SCHOOL'S MISSION AND BE THE FOUNDATION FOR STUDENT LEARNING IN EVERY SUBJECT AREA IN THE SCHOOL. SINCE DISTRICTS THAT ARE FACING SERIOUS PROBLEMS WITH FUNDING OFTEN DO HAVE STRONG LIBRARIES, IT'S NOT ENOUGH TO BE GOOD, EVEN GREAT, UNLESS THE ENTIRE SCHOOL COMMUNITY KNOWS WHAT YOU DO TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE FOR STUDENTS.

To take it up a notch to being as indispensable as possible, I've devised a rather obvious "formula:" P & M=A with variables of prioritization and leadership needed to get to that "A." Promotion and Marketing equals Advocates, those others who take up your cause because they *know* their students will not love reading and be able to use information well without you at the head of your program.

## ADVOCACY

Teacher-librarians are not known for being aggressive and often the best programs seem to run rather invisibly and smoothly. We have to get over the natural inclination of competence in the background and promote and market our programs consciously and deliberately, giving those areas a much higher priority of our time.

As a past president of the American Association of School Librarians (AASL), I am aware of the many resources available on the AASL Advocacy web page, [www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/aasl/aaslissues/aasladvocacy/advocacy.cfm](http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/aasl/aaslissues/aasladvocacy/advocacy.cfm), to make this easier. The definitions of the difference between public relations (PR), marketing, and advocacy are clearly stated on that page, helping to focus your time and efforts.

One of the biggest bargains in the American Library Association (ALA) Store is the five dollar *Toolkit for School Library Media Programs* (978-0-8389-8263-1) that can be used by individuals or groups to craft a key message and develop marketing strategies for programs. Once you have your message, developing talking points and an "elevator speech" is the next step. When I am introduced to someone in the school or community, I greet them and say, "I have the best job in the school. I teach with every teacher and every teaching style and I work with every student and every learning style. It's exciting and rewarding." It starts the conversation about your program. It is not about ME, it's about the program and the students, which is a leap I had

by sara kelly johns

## RESPONSES FROM THE FIELD

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to make to be effective at marketing the library.

Public relations is not always easy to fit into a crowded schedule, but if you average one press release per week about your program (even if it is distributed only to the school's e-mail list), the work is well worth the dividends. Add a "What's New" link on your library's web page that highlights good projects and student creations. What will make students and parents find your web presence crucial to their lives and their learning? Using Web 2.0 tools to communicate with students is both practical and good PR for today's technology-rich learning. There may be a learning curve for you, but one that is well worth it.

### PROMOTION/VISIBILITY

Visibility is important. Not only should you work out your schedule to include curriculum planning meetings or other important committees in the school, you need to be spotted at and involved with sporting events, concerts, festivals, plays. Any event the school sponsors is an opportunity for delivering your elevator speech and having a good time with your students. Even nonschool community activities can be seen as marketing opportunities. The t-shirts and pins you get at library conferences? Wear them and start the conversation.

You never know who is going to be the advocate writing a letter to the editor, calling a board member, or objecting to cutting your program at a school board meeting. It could be the parent you chatted with in the grocery store checkout line who went home and asked his child about the

library and was told how important and wonderful it is.

### AND FINALLY

AASL is adding to their resources with task forces that are producing an advocacy crisis kit, which includes resources for prevention as well as dealing with potential program cuts and a parent outreach toolkit to make it easier for building librarians to work with parents as advocates for their program. Watch for these and use them well.

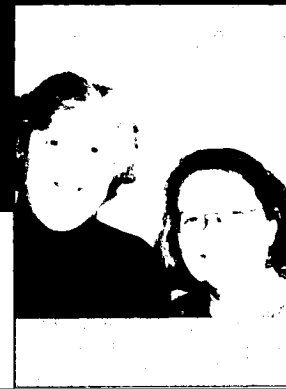
And, work for the abolition of property tax caps if they are part of your state's tax structure. They are the biggest threat across the country to funding districts at a level that can support strong school programs in our schools.

Remember, it is not about your job. It is about library programs for student learning.

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### ELEMENTARY

True stories inspire students and impart good information. The continuing rise of outstanding audiobook performances includes non-fiction titles that integrate with many instructional themes. This month we feature Trailblazers, people who stood for a cause, fought for their beliefs, and set a standard for the future.

Key: C=cd, c=cassette, h=hardcover, p=paperback

**Reaching for the moon.** Buzz Aldrin, ill. Wendell Minor. Read by author. Live Oak Media, 2006. \$28.95. 978-1-59519-582-1. Grades 2-5. On July 20, 1969, astronauts Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin became the first Americans to land on the moon. Unobtrusive sound effects and a soft musical bed accompany Aldrin's measured reading of his own story, while Minor's glorious paintings and some famous NASA sound bites round out this stellar choice for classroom use.

**Rosa.** Nikki Giovanni. ill. Bryan Collier. Read by author. Music Ernest V. Troost. Weston Woods, 2007. \$29.95. hC: 978-0-545-04261-1. Grades 2-5. The author's eloquent telling of Rosa Parks's story is enhanced by her melodious voice and background music that evokes the Civil Rights Movement era. Beautiful illustrations in the read-along format highlight the struggle that Parks began and showcase a true trailblazer.

**Snowflake Bentley.** Jacqueline Briggs Martin. ill. Mary Azarian. Read by Sean Astin. Weston Woods, 2003. \$29.95. hC: 978-1-55592-624-3. Grades K-4. Azarian's luminous, Caldecott Award-winning illustrations evoke the cold as Astin's careful pacing introduces William Bentley, the man whose pioneering photographs revealed that no two snowflakes are alike. Just as the book can be enjoyed with, or without, the informational sidebars, the tracks of the audiobook offer the same function, expanding classroom use from younger to older students.