

Librarian's Role in the Process of Designing a New or Renovating an Old School Library

One would never design a school library without the Librarian as a partner in the design process, just as an architect would never design a research lab without having the scientist be one of the planners.

When the school embarks on a renovation or new library project, the Librarian becomes an integral part of the process - from planning and design to completion. As the information specialist, the Librarian has the professional expertise to be a full partner in planning a new or renovated library and in seeing the project through its completion.

Of all members within the school community, the Librarian is in the unique position of working with both students and faculty members to interpret how the library program can best address their needs. Consequently, the Librarian knows the way the library and its program integrates into the school's curriculum and upholds the school's mission. The Librarian will help to develop a design where the library's functions are enhanced by its physical form, and where its form supports the program. For example, if the library program includes teaching research classes, then the new space must accommodate those classes in numbers and frequency.

Also, the Librarian is uniquely qualified to confer with colleagues about design criteria that would enhance their library experience and then, from this perspective, the Librarian interprets the latest research in library spatial or furnishings design. The Librarian consults with the architects on the layout of the new facility and collaborates on the choice of furniture that would accommodate students, print and electronic resources. The Librarian recommends the placement of essential library elements such as circulation area, book and periodical shelving, workroom space, study and conference areas; advises on ways to adapt to technological advances such as wireless technology; works with planners to establish necessary sight lines for supervision.

In addition to being an active member of the school and being familiar with its unique library program, the Librarian provides the planning group with

up-to-date national library standards. These standards provide guidance to the planners as they consider the role of the library within the school community, develop functions for specific areas, and consider relationships among the areas, furnishings, and space allocations.

In addition to the Librarian, the planning team should also include an architect, the technology coordinator, and a consultant in school library design. The architect selected should have proven experience and knowledge in library design. A myriad of issues having to do with lighting, shelving standards, weight support, and acoustics are specific to libraries and require specialized knowledge. The hiring of a special consultant in school library design would round out the experience of the planning team.

April 2000