

The Media Center: Moving a Boatload
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“You folks have a boatload to handle.” Having survived one of two media center moves our district is making this year, and my third experience with moving a media center, it’s time to share a few thoughts about what worked and what didn’t.

Preparing for the move and moving require you to assume the role of moving manager while you are still managing a media program. It’s a time to apply the superb organizational, managerial and communications skills that media specialist have.

- What are the timelines for each step? When should I start? What can be done now, what can be soon, what must wait till the very end?
- Who can help me? What skills do they need?
- What is absolutely essential to have in place when you open the doors to the new media center? What parts of the collection can be packed early? What must remain until the very end?
- Should the old media center remain open while we pack and should the new media center open while we are moving in?
- Who’s in charge? Who needs to know what? Who can answer my questions? Who will I answer to?

Preliminary Steps and Planning

Start communicating and asking questions. Develop an overall timeframe and big picture of what will be done when. Who’s in charge of each part of the move? Who’s in charge overall? Find out early because it will save frustration later. Plan with others and share your plans with the appropriate people so they understand what you are doing and why. Share timelines, plans and progress often because everyone involved is busy. Expect—and insist—that others share with you. Once the overall plan and timelines are in place you can begin to plan the details.

Who should help? All media staff should be involved process; they have a stake in how things turn out. District maintenance staff will provide valuable assistance and ideas. Volunteers, parents, and students who help you will not only provide help, they will help spread the word and generate enthusiasm. Involve teachers who are interested and can spare the time. You need people who are physically strong and people who are good at organizing and providing direction. You also need people to pick up the mess or throw away empty boxes. There is really enough work to be done to involve many types of workers.

When should I start packing? January is a good time to begin packing for a summer move. Begin with non-essentials and resources students and staff won’t be using for the remainder of the year. If you pack gradually you won’t have to totally disrupt media program operations.

Should I close the media center to pack? Arguably, moving and packing *is* a time to justify closing a media center, especially you need to vacate the old facility before the end of the school year or if the current facility is being remodeled. You may even have to move to essential resources to temporary quarters and operate out of a makeshift media center. Whatever the situation, think carefully about the ramifications of not having the media

center open even for just a short time; don't assume classroom teachers understand the amount of work involved in moving a media center. If it is essential do close temporarily, administrative support is of top importance; communications about lack of or limited access should come from administrators. Make your decision carefully because not everyone has your perspective of moving a boatload.

Weeding and de-junking

Weed and get rid of unnecessary resources before you pack and while you pack. You won't regret downsizing; you will regret shelving books or storing equipment that shouldn't have been moved in the first place. And it's not just books. Get rid of equipment, supplies, décor, and all those odds and ends of cables, cords, bulbs, and book processing supplies that you no longer use but haven't had time to get tired of. It's easier now than once you get settled. With proper direction and training, volunteers can be very helpful in this process. A first step in our senior high media center move was a weeding workshop for volunteers who contributed several weeks of assistance in a major collection revamp. Media specialists had the final say in what went, stayed, or was to be replaced; the process could not have been completed without dedicated volunteers. When possible, volunteers who are knowledgeable in subject areas; for example, a retired English teacher helped weed the literature section; a parent with a strong art background made suggestions about what to toss in the arts.) Volunteers can also help with sorting out and discarding odds and ends of supplies and equipment.

The Nitty-Gritty

Moving Supplies. Plan and budget for supplies. You'll go through a lot of labels, tape and makers! Start gathering boxes well in advance, preferably boxes of the same or similar size and durable. Publishers or book vendors may be willing to supply sturdy book boxes. Strong twist ties, rubber bands, see-through plastic storage bins, and packing foam come in handy too. Palettes, wheeled carts, and dollies are other essentials.

Large and bright or large and color-coded labels work well. (Green for books, purple for labs, red for the storage area etc) For one move we had bright pink, 5 X 7 labels pre-printed with the general information at our district's print shop. We filled in the blanks with very large print and taped them to each box or piece of equipment. They worked out very well and were easy to spot as we dug through stacks of boxes and mazes of equipment when everything arrived at the new school.

Books are the largest amount of single items you will move; they are also likely to be the heaviest. I was fortunate to experience one media center book move fire-brigade style. Teams of students picked up books in order, walked down the steps to a new media center and put them on the shelves in order. More likely you will have to box them. Book packing requires a considerable amount of time and strength, but it relatively easy once you get organized. Before you pack, calculate the number of feet each section of books requires; this will come in handy later. If you pack while school is in session begin with areas of the collection that are in low demand. For example, if your students do poetry related units in the fall and aren't too likely to need poetry books the rest of the year? Begin packing those. There's no need to begin with the 00's and work your way through; just keep track of what's been moved or packed and what hasn't.

Books in each box should be placed in order, preferably with the spine showing and in the same direction. Avoid layering. Use strong packing tape; masking tape dries out. Place the label on the same position on the ends of boxes so they can be easily spotted when the boxes are stacked. Avoid using small labels and writing with thick markers. Sounds too obvious? It may not be to those doing the packing. A sample of a properly packed and labeled box is also helpful.

Computer labs and other equipment

Whether you are only moving computers to a new location or putting them in temporary storage, secure the cords and cables to each item with ties or tape. Label each item with a media center label and a label designating the new location. Don't assume everyone knows where the equipment ultimately belongs. If cords and cables are disconnected from the equipment bundle each cord or cable separately with a strong rubber band or twist-tie to avoid tangles. Especially fragile equipment should be boxed with packing foam, but most equipment will do just fine without being boxed. Our computers and televisions were transported across town in the back of a semi without a problem. Audiovisual and computer carts that are part of a media center's collection will be in big demand by others in the school who are moving; label them prominently.

All those little odds and ends of audiovisual and technology supplies require careful sorting and packing. If there are unique items or one-of-a kind items designate that on the packing box. As you pack make note on the label of how many drawers or feet of shelf space will be needed for these items in their new location. Use a different color label for boxes of supplies than you used for books; this will help movers know where to place items in the new location.

Functioning during transition. What cannot be packed away or put storage, what must be available to you throughout the transition? Media staff will be lost without certain files and records, contact information, documents in progress, ordering supplies and materials, all files related to planning the new media center and of course staff computers. Media center staff may need to be assigned a temporary office. How will you deal with any teacher needs during the move? What do your teachers always need? Quite likely it will be audiovisual and supply items more than instructional resources. Our biggest requests during the final days of moving out of the old media center and the first days of moving into the media center were for laminating film, video cameras, cables, and projector bulbs! These are the must-haves for teachers during the busy end-of and beginning- the year days. Keep high demand items available.

Moving in!

Planning and communication are also an important part of moving in. Prepare timelines and a plan so that the people doing the move will know what is needed first and where it should be placed. Provide clear directions. People working with you are busy or may not be familiar with media center jargon. A labeled or color-coded map will help movers know where to place everything and will avoid having to move heavy books or equipment multiple times. Recruit volunteers to help unpack and put things in their new places. Consider what students and staff will need immediately, what can wait. Day by day, everything will fall into place. As it does, spread the word to celebrate and publicize the new facilities.

Next summer I will be involved in my 4th media center move. Perhaps this time we'll get it totally right.

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