

## **EXPECTATIONS: BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS WITH PRINCIPALS**

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Media specialists expect their principal will understand and support the school's media/technology program and its role in today's schools; they recognize that administrative support is a key factor in the development of a strong program. But what expectations do principals have of media specialists? Conversations with several principals suggest a higher degree of expectation and understanding of our role than many of us perceive. Many principals have higher and entirely different expectations of the program than the media specialist has.

Partnerships. Dr. Scott Hannon, principal of Winona Middle School expects a media specialist to be a partner who will help "provide the leadership and support needed to help classroom teachers make the transition from how and what is being taught today to what will be demanded by tomorrow's needs." He hopes that when students and staff wake up in the morning they want to go to school, and recognizes that the media center and a fully integrated media/technology program contributes to developing a positive and energized learning environment for everyone. Scott sees media specialists as "the backbone of education today" and recognizes a profession "affected by the last ten years of changes more than anyone else in education." Like other principals who are technology leaders, he sees the value of "we, " working together, and "empowering media specialists to help us break down the barriers that may get in the way of our efforts to move forward to meet the demands of tomorrow."

Principals appreciate media specialists who are technology savvy and "up on things." One said "it is important to us to have someone who really knows technology and is current." They like to see media specialists attend conferences and get "out and about" to improve their own skills. " They appreciate media specialists who are "willing to grow and change, break the mold and take the leap." Principals applaud media specialists who have a vision, see the big picture, provide leadership and "grasp the role media specialists have in the education of children today, " and help break down barriers to progress. They want media specialists to be proactive, creative, flexible and willing to adapt to both the rapid pace of education and to the rapid pace of change. A willingness to "go the extra mile" is a plus. Representing the school and program on district committees, offering extended hours, providing staff development for teachers, and helping with school initiatives are just some ways to go beyond routine job expectations.

Media specialists who model information retrieval and technology use are respected both for their abilities and the leadership such modeling provides. Principals want to see media specialists working with teachers to integrate technology in the curriculum process. They value and understand the importance of staff development and want media specialists to take a leadership role in helping staff acquire skills. They also see frequent communication and sharing with staff as an important job component.

Principals know it's important for media specialists to give up those things that no longer matter or do not meet the needs of today's learners and teachers. They do not want media specialists to be concerned about things that represent our traditional past such as overdue books or keeping the media center in perfect order. Busy media centers filled with active learners are the best. Among the most telling comments was one by an administrator who

reminded a group of media specialists that if administrators only see media specialists doing clerical tasks, "that's what we assume your job is."

Conversations and the literature suggest that elementary principals may have a stronger conception of the role of the media specialist than secondary principals. They value and see the integrated curricular relationship between the media program and the rest of the school. One principal describes how she posts a "map" showing who is teaching what so the media specialist can readily make curriculum connections. Another group of elementary principals commended a simple, concise media specialist/teacher curriculum planning form; a concrete document useful to help get "something going." Elementary media specialists frequently deplore rigid schedules and a desire to move to a completely flexible schedule. Principals share the same frustration, but often are hindered in a desire to make change by budget and contractual constraints. However, creative media specialists can work around constraints by reaching out to teachers who also might wish to make a change. By working with one or two teachers who want to promote change it may be possible to ultimately have school-wide change. They want media specialists to move beyond the walls of the media center and be involved with technology. For example, elementary principals in one district stressed a strong desire for media specialists to move well beyond the familiar "literature role" and spend the bulk of their time helping teachers effectively use classroom technology. They echoed the wishes of the teachers who felt they could handle any literature based teaching themselves.

Educate. Principals who are technology leaders view themselves as learners. They know that technology means more than wires and hardware but may not have the knowledge needed to make wise decisions. Most likely they didn't learn in a technology rich environment and have had little or limited technology training provided in administrative courses. The professional journals that principals read pay little attention to technology, especially to specifics. Their own technology use is likely limited to e-mail, Internet searches, and word processing. Yet, principals need to learn much of the same skills and information about technology as a media/technology specialists. They may want their media/technology program to be strong, but may not know what it involves or how it relates to the total educational plan for the school. Through ongoing communication and education you can help principals increase their expectations knowledge of technology. In turn you can strengthen the partnership between you and your principal.

Work with principals to understand the societal aspects of technology and develop a common vision for technology in the school. Help them understand the differences between instructional and management aspects of technology. Principals want to know how instructional technology can promote change within a school and how to help teachers integrate technology in their curriculum. They may need assistance understanding the management possibilities so they can manage budgets, staffing, and scheduling efficiently. Principals appreciate assistance in understanding technology funding, short and long range planning, and budgeting. Information about legal and ethical issues and policies such as Internet access or disciplinary procedures is useful for principals. Share information about emerging technologies and trends; keep them informed of what's happening in neighboring schools and elsewhere.

New hires are likely to be people with technology skills and prospective teachers at our school are asked to describe their technology experience and ideas for curricular integration. Not all principals know what questions to ask or even think to ask about technology. Media specialists can help design interview questions or participate on the interview team. Technology assessment is increasingly a topic of concern. Numerous conversations suggest that principal's want information about assessing programs or people. They appreciate checklists and assessment tools.

Staff development. Help principals with their personal and professional use of technology. There is a positive correlation between a principal's ability to make informed technology decisions and their own personal skill level. They need to know the limitations as well as the possibilities. Use your best teaching skills to teach and coach rather than doing it for them. Avoid jargon, but don't simplify too much. Several schools provide staff development classes or seminars for principals. I recently had the opportunity to teach a group of principals from area schools how to use Power Point. They were eager, enthusiastic, and appreciative learners.

Principals can also model appropriate use of technology and in turn influence teachers. If you are fortunate to have a technology savvy principal encourage him or her to help teach others. Scott has helped teach staff development classes for teachers and other administrators.

Don't assume principals know what you expect them to know or understand the role of the media specialist in today's schools. Visionary leadership and sharing your role should be ongoing. A discussion with secondary principals indicated a lack of solid knowledge about our curricular role. One said "I really don't know what this is all about, " but after thinking about the curricular role commented, "it seems like media people need to be involved in all of the curriculum committees." Another said "I never thought about your role until you explained it." Always be prepared to inform and educate during formal and incidental conversations. Information Power II and the information literacy guidelines are an excellent example of a current topic to share with principals, but ongoing communication about all aspects of your role and the media/technology program should be routine. Offer to do things that capitalize on your expertise and unique role. Don't whine. Keep the sharing process upbeat and positive with a focus on student learning and the whole school.

Timing. Administrators are busy and have many demands; respect their schedules and these multiple demands by not overwhelming them with more information than they need. It's beneficial to keep ideas in the forefront, but the specifics and details are best saved for the time they are needed.

Yes, it can happen! As media specialists we are in a position to make things happen; principals work continually to improve their schools. Through sharing, respect for each other's position and learning together single expectations can become mutual and make schools the place that teachers and kids want to be.

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