

**The Media Center**  
**Advocacy in Action: Preparing for visitors**  
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In recent months I've had numerous opportunities to media centers in visit other districts as we plan for media center renovations and program improvements at our senior high. Our visitation team included media specialists, board members, architects, administrators, local press, and community members who care about media centers. In recent years I've frequently hosted similar teams of visitors. What do visitors want to know? What can a media specialist do to prepare for?

**Assume you will have visitors.** It may be other educators just passing through, it may be people specifically coming to visit your media center, or it may be parents attending an open house. Assume they will not always ask the kinds of questions you would like to answer. Assume that you will not always know when company is coming. Most of the media specialists in the schools our committee visited didn't know we were coming because no one had told them to expect us! Worse yet, some host tour guides ignored them. Be prepared! Have the information in your head and on paper so you're ready when the time comes. Anticipate questions, compile the basic information, and take it one step further by being prepared to share information visitors don't know they need to know. If appropriate, approach the visitors to offer your insight.

**All visitors want to know numbers.** What's your square footage? How many computers are there? How books do you have? What's your staff? Those were the first questions our lay team members asked at every media center we visited. Do the math. Get out a yardstick, walk the floor, count the ceiling tiles; calculate square footage of all the spaces in the media center. It's important! Supervisors of buildings and grounds talk this language all the time; ours was amazed that people we visited didn't have this information in their heads. Architects do conceptual planning based on cost per square foot. Visiting principals always want to know how their school's media center compares. We need to know square footage to plan for program needs. Prepare a floor plan you can give to visitors; they will appreciate it. If your facility is new you should be able to get copies from architects or school dedication programs

**How many books are there?** You need to know that information because others are curious. If you're within a thousand it's probably close enough, but you need to know because people care. Adults in my community are very concerned that our senior high students don't have enough access to a quality media center book collection; I expect those in your community care, too. Determine the average copyright date; conversations with visitors may lead about outdated collections can pave the way for increased budgets or donations. I've seen it happen. Brag about the circulation numbers if you can; if they're low or declining be prepared to explain why. Adults who want students to have books might not know how much information students can find online or understand why quality and curricular relevancy are more important than quantity. Be prepared to explain.

**Lay people are equally concerned that students have enough technology access and what the computer specs are.** Every parent who visited one of our elementary schools prior to enrolling their child asked about the amount and kind of technology available in the media center. Make sure you know what's available and what the specs are. Visitors to one school were surprised that a media specialist would know the technical information; this is a time to show people that you are tech savvy.

Ideally, visitors will inquire about program activity. Visiting media specialists and others who are curious will sneak away to inquire while the rest of the folks are counting off seating capacity or looking at the wireless hub. It's possible the person hosting the tour group is a staff member who may not know about program activity. In one school our host was the person in charge of facilities renovation. This is your opportunity to jump in and share information about more than physical spaces. Here are some ideas that work for us.

**1. A brochure about your media center and program.**

Sounds basic, but do you have one and are copies visible? I was pleased to see that some media centers had them. Give one to every visitor so that you and your program are not invisible. The brochure should include basics such as hours, staff and resources. Highlight special resources such as the numbers of e-books and online databases the media center subscribes to. Describe what technology is available and what students can access in their classrooms or at home. Highlight key research about media programs and student achievement and special events such as family technology nights. The brochure should be professional looking and jargon free. Be sure to place it in other spots that visitors to your school go --- the central office, counseling services and other public spots. Other useful things to have on hand are lists of the magazines and databases you subscribe to, the web page URL, policies and sample forms.

**2. A list explaining how students use the media center.**

Visiting educators who are seeking ideas for improved program activity in their school and parents of your students will want to know what their kids are doing. Explain program activity in a way that makes sense to other educators and parents. We created a one-page chart listing curricular areas, the student learning activity, and resources used. This comes in handy when you're caught off guard or may not have the time to really explain all the wonderful things that happen in your media center. It's well received because it's brief. Parents say, "Now I know what this project is about." Visitors say, "Oh, this would work in my school." And, now that you have created it, it's there to share with your principal or put on your web site for virtual visitors. Figure 1 is a small sample.

<b>Unit</b>	<b>Subject, Grade</b>	<b>What Students Do</b>	<b>Key Resources &amp; Technology</b>
Mythology of constellations	Science 8	Students study a constellation and the myth behind it; They draw pictures of the constellation about write a short research paper.	Mythology of constellation web sites linked on the school's curriculum resources web page and books.
Family interviews and history	Social Studies 6	Students interview an older family member to learn about the person's life. They locate information about local, state and national events. Information is depicted in a timeline that includes photo of historical events and the person. Students present their timelines to the class and display artifacts.	Timeliner, <i>World Book Online</i> , <i>Reference Center</i> , Americas Library, scanners, decades books, video projector
Science fair papers	Science 5	Students download science fair paper starter pages on the school's web site & use the templates to begin word processing science fair papers.	Curriculum resources web page for 5 <sup>th</sup> grade, Microsoft Word, video projector

**3. Information documenting your behind the scenes work** to ensure that students have successful, problem free experiences with technology or in the labs. Lay visitors will be surprised or impressed. Don't be surprised if a principal comments "my media specialist doesn't do this," or "guess I'd better visit with my media specialist about what he does." A visiting media specialist may say, "This *is* what I do, but no one knows about it."

France Bryan Bradburn, Director of Instructional technology for the N.C. Dept of Public instruction noted, "Media and technology programs, if done well, are stealth positions. . . Our role is to make everyone else successful, and if we do our jobs well, no one else knows we're there." (*School Library Journal*, "SLJ Leadership Summit Special Report: More Research, Please," June 2005, p. 12)

A manageable way to document your tangible role in a project is simply to create a list. Here's an actual list, slightly modified for use here. It documents the behind the ongoing scenes work supporting keyboarding instruction.

#### *A Behind the Scenes Look at Today's Successful Keyboarding Experience*

- Scheduling labs and planning with ten 5th grade teachers; very complicated due to on going schedule changes
- Work with tech support when there are technical problems
- Verify that software is working on all computers in the media center. Involves ongoing minor tech support by media staff
- Add names of new students to keyboarding software database. Maintaining a database of all student logins and passwords and sharing information with teachers
- Working with teachers to assist students
- Teach volunteers how to create information sheets which provide login and password information for students
- Printing student reports
- Meeting with teachers to explain adjustments available to meet student needs; make ongoing adjustments as needed
- Assisting students who use keyboarding software before and after school or during lunch

#### **4. A multimedia presentation displaying our less tangible, often invisible collaborative instructional role.**

A slide show we originally created to use during a parent open house later became useful as a tool to show visitors from other schools. Parents came to see their children's projects, not the media center, but by running the slide show automatically in a place we knew they'd be—by the coffee pot and food—they did look at it. It was the perfect stealth presentation. (Idea #2: Run the slide show in a public area during parent teacher conferences or in the media center doorway during an event when you know there will be a parade of visitors passing by.)

The slide show is interspersed with photographs depicting teacher/media specialist collaboration, instruction, resources, note taking forms, and students working during all phases of the project. Parents who are there to see student work may just also learn about your work! Figure 2 provides the basic outline.

### **What Does it Take?**

A Behind the Scenes Look at a Successful Famous Minnesotans  
Research and Multimedia Project

#### **Media Specialist and Teacher Planning**

- What do the students need to know and do?
- What resources will they use?
- What do we need to teach?

#### **Multiple Steps and Processes**

- Introduction to the topic and process
- Learning to use resources
- Information gathering, note taking
- Working with the information
- Creating a multimedia presentation
- Presenting the information
- Evaluating the information

#### **Students use Many Resources**

- Online Catalog
- “Famous Minnesotan “web page on the school’s web site
- Online Magazines and Newspapers
- Online Reference Databases
  - Junior Reference Collection
  - World Book Online Reference Center

#### **Students Learn and Apply Multiple Processes and Skills**

- Information gathering
- Note taking
- Citing sources
- PowerPoint
- Presenting

Preparing for visitors is an ongoing part of advocacy; don't be caught off guard when you're company arrives.

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