Theme Section

Principal Support for Collaboration
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Principal support is the key to successful collaboration between classroom teachers and media specialists. The principal holds the power either to make or break collaborative efforts. Collaboration must be an expectation that is supported both vocally and administratively by the principal who wants collaboration to be a commonplace occurrence in schools. Communication and visibility are crucial to the process. The principal who wishes collaboration to occur must be seen and heard discussing collaboration in the school and throughout the community. Teachers must hear that collaboration with the media specialist is a top priority and that it is expected on a regular basis. The principal needs to know about the research on collaboration and increased student achievement and to be its strongest advocate in the school. As an administrator, as the person who “holds the purse strings,” the principal determines the media center budget and determines the technology opportunities offered to students and faculty.

Many of the following characteristics are evident when principals support collaboration in their schools.

- Encouraging a harmonious working environment that fosters a feeling of trust and mutual respect of colleagues;
- Communicating and advocating that collaboration is an expectation;
- Rewarding of teamwork between media specialists and classroom teachers;
- Scheduling that is flexible, allowing the media specialist to collaborate;
- Rewarding the sharing of ideas;
- Practicing the integration of information literacy skills and course content;
- Understanding that student achievement increases when collaboration occurs;
- Fostering the visibility of the media specialist as a leader in the school;
- Placing the media center and the media specialist at the forefront of instruction;
- Providing professional development activities to define and support collaboration;
- Advocating collaboration to the community as a top priority;
- Valuing and promoting classroom teacher/media specialist collaboration;
- Providing abundant resources, both print and online, for research;
- Staffing the media center to allow the media specialist to collaborate with teachers;
- Budgeting for the latest technological advances for access both in and outside the school;
• Modeling by teachers/media specialists how they expect students to learn to work as a team;
• Fostering a shared vision of instruction by media specialists and classroom teachers;
• Ensuring a common time for planning by media specialist and classroom teachers.

In this issue, Ken Haycock says, “The principal is thus a key player in supporting collaboration between teachers and teacher-librarians.” This statement sums up the theme for this issue. He concludes, “Collaboration between teacher and teacher-librarian not only has a positive effect on student achievement, but also leads to growth of relationships, growth of the environment, and growth of persons, all conducive to improved experiences for all members of the school community.” Haycock’s article, “Collaboration: Critical Success Factors for Student Learning,” addresses collaboration from a broad perspective and identifies 20 factors that influence successful collaboration. These 20 factors are clustered into six elements related to the environment, to membership characteristics, to process and structure, to communication, to purpose, and to resources. The context for successful collaboration and its effect on student learning is drawn from the research literature for each of the factors that influence successful collaboration.

Lesley Farmer’s article, “Principals: Catalysts for Collaboration” presents principals as the main decision-makers and chief catalysts for collaboration. She says that effective principals are those accountable for the successful workings of their school sites and that it is they who use broad-based governance systems. Teacher-librarians (TLs) need to make their unique and collaborative contributions to student success known to their principals. She suggests that TLs need to align their efforts with the school’s mission and the principal’s vision. Farmer suggests several strategies for mutual collaboration between principals and TLs and explains how assessment of such collaboration is also the key to sustained efforts.

Betty J. Morris and Abbot Packard, in “The Principal’s Support of Classroom Teacher/Media Specialist Collaboration,” report a research study designed to determine how well principals support collaboration in exemplary media program schools in Georgia from the viewpoints of media specialists, classroom teachers, and principals. A questionnaire was mailed to principals, teachers, and media specialists in 12 schools designated as having exemplary school library media programs by the Georgia State Department of Education. The hypothesis of the study was that principals in schools that are considered to have exemplary media programs provide support for collaboration for classroom teachers and media specialists. The findings for the study supported the hypothesis. Conclusions are discussed, as well as improvements needed by principals in their support of collaboration.

Enjoy the issue!