North Middle School:
Transforming our Space; Transforming our Practice
IMLS: Accelerating Promising Practices for Small Libraries

Narrative
Project Justification

What need, problem, challenge, or opportunity will your project address and how was it identified?

North Middle School library in Great Falls, MT, is a large space, 4725 square feet, and has had no significant updating since opening in 1970, except carpet and a desktop computer lab. The space is poorly organized and does not facilitate collaboration, nor does it inspire curiosity. Over the years, the open concept design has been divided into four distinct sections. Two corners have cramped classroom areas, one corner is the computer lab, and the other has shelving. The outdated space reflects the teaching staff's outdated attitudes toward the library and librarians. Generally, the library is viewed as a place to checkout books and the librarians are regarded as clerks or Audio-Visual aides. The IMLS Accelerating Promising Practices for Small Libraries grant provides our project with the means to modernize our space, creating a collaborative, inquiry driven learning environment for teachers to work alongside librarians as they prepare students for the future.

To identify our problem, we examined our circulation and attendance statistics. Circulation statistics indicate students check out less than two books per month despite the fact that we encourage students to check out two books every two weeks. Our school participates in Sustained Silent Reading Friday mornings, which helps boost those numbers, but they are not as high as we would like and indicate an overall decline in reading in the last two years.

Our attendance statistics reveal how often classes come to the library. Recently, our district has invested in mobile Chromebook labs, so fewer teachers are using the library computer lab. If teachers bring classes to the library, it is strictly for checkout, to use a computer lab for testing, or for a quick demonstration of how to use an online tool. True collaboration between teacher and librarian is a rare occurrence. In fact, only one true collaboration has occurred in the last five years. Montana is currently revising state library media standards, which will add to our concerns. One significant change to the current document is the addition of a standard addressing collaboration, which is one of the shared foundations in the AASL's Standards Framework for Learners. Students need to collaborate, but so do teachers and librarians. Our school librarians struggle to collaborate with classroom teachers, and as research or inquiry is conducted within classrooms, rather than the library, students are being shortchanged in learning effective inquiry skills. The library cannot achieve these standards unless our classroom counterparts cooperate with us and our administration supports us.

What best practice will inform your approach?

Inspired by the work of David Loertscher, Margaret Sullivan, the Future Ready Librarians Framework, and Chicago Learning Exchange, our intention is to transform our physical space in order to transform our

practice. Margaret Sullivan's work on redesigning school libraries will guide the planning as we create survey tools to assess the needs of staff and students.

With a library that facilitates a culture of learner driven inquiry, combining the best aspects of a Learning Commons as envisioned by Loertscher, and Learning Labs, or areas dedicated to connected learning, we can strengthen our relationship with classroom teachers so librarians are seen as valuable instructional partners benefiting students as well as teachers.

According to Chicago Learning Exchange, connected learning, in which student learning coalesces at the intersection of interests, relationships, and opportunities, results in improvements in "educational mindsets, attitudes toward persistence, openness to iteration...growth in critical thinking, and it was positively associated with increased test scores." Our librarian is currently taking an online course entitled *Future Ready Librarians Micro-Credential Cohort - Empowering Students as Creators*. This micro-credentialed course will help guide the planning for the Learning Lab, which will host connected learning experiences for students and teachers.

How would you qualify your library as small?

Our school district has been in a funding crisis for several years now, resulting in staff reductions, increased class sizes, and a general need to do more with less. Our library budget has decreased 36.5% in the last five years for a library serving 800 students. We have less than $6.00 to spend per student yearly, although the national recommendation is $12-15 per student. Our collection consists of 11,785 items, which helps us meet the bare minimum of the national recommendation of 15-20 items per student. However, the average age of books in our collection is 23 years old. We can also no longer afford to provide quality databases for student research.

Our equipment, including computers, projectors, and furniture is aging. Our shelving is original to the building, and shows its age in the cracking and peeling of the vinyl coverings and edging. We have an area near the circulation desk dedicated to quiet reading, but the donated chairs and sofa are showing their age, too. Brick walls line only the east and west sides, which significantly reduces the available space for wall shelving. Consequently, most of our shelving is on the floor, which divides the space even more. Our space is large, but our budget is small.

Who will benefit from your project? How have you engaged them in your planning?

The entire North Middle School community, as well as the entire district, will benefit from this project. Early on, school administrators were engaged in planning. Next, we involved our school leadership team by presenting the project idea and asking for input. Teacher leaders shared the project with their teacher teams, leading to more feedback and input. Our school's PTA was invited to participate in planning and funding as well. From this pool, we have built a team of teachers, administrators, parents, and students who will work on the project and offer suggestions after the announcement of the grant award. Once the project commences, professional development (PD) will extend the benefits district-wide.

How will your project address the goals of APP?

North Middle School: Transforming our Space; Transforming our Practice addresses the three APP goals. It will build capacity in our librarians, teachers, administration, and students by providing professional development, soliciting input from stakeholders, and encouraging staff to reimagine the role of the library and librarians in educating our students. The librarians will have the tools needed to inspire collaboration with classroom teachers. Administration will gain a better understanding of the best practices associated with school libraries so they can support the librarians' efforts to collaborate. Students will learn inquiry skills necessary for success in high school and beyond. By redesigning our space to accommodate collaboration and updating our technology, this project will increase access because the library update will create a future ready space conducive to instructing students and staff across the disciplines. The redesign will also create a more inviting atmosphere for other groups to use the space, such as our parent-teacher association (PTA.) With respect to lifelong learning, the library redesign will provide space to make learning visible. Students will witness staff learning alongside them. The project will provide training for staff to instruct students in skills that will carry over into their personal lives, such as digital citizenship and media creation over consumption.

Project work plan

What specific activities will you carry out?

Upon notice of the grant award, the project team will develop data collection surveys to determine perceptions of the library facility and how it is utilized. Surveys will be administered to three groups of stakeholders: students, staff, and parents in October of 2020, and again in May of 2021. Surveys will be readministered at the same times in the second project year. The team will convene focus groups of stakeholders to discuss the renovation and the proposed collaboration service model. The surveys and the discussions should positively guide the process to an outcome appreciated by all stakeholder groups, including staff, students, and parents. As these discussions are occurring, the librarians on the team will join both the state library association and the American Library Association. Using resources provided by these organizations, the librarians will engage in professional development on topics that align with the project goals in a "train the trainer" model. The librarians will offer PD to the school and district faculty based on their new learning. In addition, the librarians will arrange for a guest speaker, such as John Spencer, to visit our district and provide PD on how to incorporate connected and inquiry based learning into a crowded curriculum.

In the early stages, the project team will also visit three local elementary school libraries: two located in brand new schools and the third in an updated school library in an open concept school similar to our building. The librarians will also visit libraries around the state, including Helena High School, and a former recipient of the APP grant, Fort Benton, and Billings Public Library. Helena High School librarians are currently utilizing a collaboration model so it will be beneficial to see them in action. Fort Benton's Makerspace experience will be helpful as we create our own. The Tech Lab at the Billings Public Library will also help inform our project. The librarians will attend the state library conference in April of each project year, and the ALA conference in June of each project year. An administrator and a classroom teacher will join them for one of the ALA conferences.

Two opportunities for staff training and PD are built within our school day, professional learning communities, or PLCs, and common prep periods. The librarians will conduct training during PLCs starting in August and continuing every other month for the duration of the project. During the first PLC, we will introduce the project and administer the survey. Subsequent PLCs will concentrate on the progress of the renovation, the collaboration model, and training for using new equipment. Common prep periods, which bring together grade and subject level colleagues, will focus on models for teaching inquiry, how to collaborate with library staff, and exploring how the library can support teachers blending inquiry and standards based teaching and assessment.

To engage parents, the project team will coordinate with the PTA to provide parents with an opportunity to take the surveys in the library while receiving an introduction to the project. Monthly PTA meetings will take place in the library so parents can view the progress. Our PTA has also offered financial support to the project to supplement monies for equipment and supplies that might not be covered by grant funding. In year two, the librarian will conduct two summer learning camps on inquiry based learning.

Who will plan, implement, and manage your project? Will partners be engaged, and, if so, for what purpose?

The project team will consist of the librarian, Michelle O'Rourke; principal, Tara Rosipal; IT director, Tom Hering; and Director of Student Services, Dale Lambert. Michelle O'Rourke will participate in the community of practice. This team will meet quarterly to plan, review progress, and make adjustments based on feedback from stakeholders, including PTA. Additional potential partnerships that could benefit the project will be pursued, including our local college, Great Falls College- MSU, our state library association, and our local public library. The Great Falls Public Library is coordinating and hosting a conference for all librarians in our county in January of 2020 with the goal of creating partnerships between K-12 school and other libraries. Forming a partnership with the local college could yield results such as a summer learning camp taught in our library, outreach programming in our library.

What time, financial, personnel, and other resources will you need to carry out activities?

The most crucial resource needed to transform the physical space is funding, and to transform our practice, funding and time for professional development are equally important. The renovation will open eyes and minds to reimaging the partnership between classroom and library, and will support teachers in aligning instruction with national, state, and district standards. Administrative support and expertise for this initiative is strong and will secure a successful completion of the project and positive outcomes.

What are the risks and how will you mitigate them?

Two anticipated risks to the project include staff buy in and physical limitations of the space itself. The biggest risk, transforming staff perceptions of the library, will be mitigated by including staff in the planning process, surveying staff needs/interest, working with staff to model how library/classroom collaboration can benefit teachers and students alike, having a supportive principal, and by providing professional development for how to best meet our students' needs so they are prepared for the future.

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As for any hidden physical limitations in the library space, we will involve our IT and Building and Grounds departments in the planning early on, prior to the announcement of the grant award, to prepare for unforeseen issues. Early involvement for these departments will also mitigate timeline concerns about the availability of district workers.

How will you measure your progress and evaluate your project performance goals?

Progress on the project will be measured in monthly meetings to track changes and adjustments to the timeline against the schedule of completion, as well as any adjustments needed for the budget. In the event of changes, adjustments will be communicated promptly to the project team and IMLS.
Progress on performance goals will be measured by monitoring library circulation and usage statistics collected via circulation software and our calendar. Changes in staff and student attitudes will be tracked using surveys.

Project outcomes

What are the intended results and outputs of your project? How do they address the need articulated in your Project Justification?

The two primary intended results for this project are to redefine the library's role in educating our students and to create an environment for future ready instruction that engages all learners. By training librarians, teachers, administrators, and students we will spark innovation and collaboration throughout the school and the district. Building capacity in our teaching staff and administration will pave the way for transforming our school, and our district, into a true community of learners.

How do you define success for your project?

The most significant indicator of success is a transformation in the perception of the library and librarians and their role in instruction, which will be evident in survey data and usage statistics. We also want to see an increase in inquiry-based and student-centered learning across the curriculum.

How to collect and report data?

The project director will compile statistics on circulation and usage based on the previous school year's data collected by library software and attendance statistics from our library calendar. We expect circulation to increase by at least one item per student per month. We expect the number of teachers who use the library for classes to increase by 25% in the first year and 50% in the second year. We anticipate 12 teachers collaborating in the library in the first year and 24 teachers in the second year of the project. The project team will design surveys to include IMLS Build Capacity Performance Measure Statements to be distributed to students, staff, and parents in the first quarter of the project. Surveys will be re-administered at the end of the 2021 year, and again in September of 2021 and in May of 2022. Surveys will also be given before and after teacher PD sessions. The project director will document efforts at collaboration and feedback given by recording minutes of PLC and common prep time meetings. The project team will meet quarterly to review data, assess progress

toward project objectives, and adjust the plan using data and feedback. The project director will compose and submit narrative reports as required by IMLS. Dale Lambert, Student Services Director, will compile and submit financial reports. Additional reports will be submitted to internal stakeholders annually, if not more often.

How will you sustain the benefits of your project beyond the funding period?

The benefits of *North Middle School: Transforming our Space; Transforming our Practice* will be sustained long after the funding period ends. The redesigned library and new furniture will remain in our school for many years. New technology upgrades will be maintained in our school technology budget. The training and education of our staff and students provided by our librarians will be ongoing, and utilized for years to come. Staff members trained in collaboration can, in turn, provide professional development to their subject area colleagues. The district pays teachers to train each other, so the benefits from our project will extend beyond our school. Our students will learn collaboration and inquiry skills that will benefit them in high school and beyond. The culture of inquiry and collaboration will persist even as individual staff members and administrators come and go. The financial support necessary to support continued training opportunities for librarians will need to be addressed with additional grant funding via our GFPS Foundation and replenishment of Learning Lab supplies can be supplemented by our school PTA. The most important improvement gained from this project will be the change in attitude toward the library and the librarians. Their continued participation in professional development opportunities will maintain their newfound significance in the instruction of future ready students.

Activity	Year One											
	Sept. 2020	Oct. 2020	Nov. 2020	Dec. 2020	Jan. 2021	Feb. 2021	Mar. 2021	Apr. 2021	May 2021	June 2021	July 2021	Aug 2021
Convene project team	█			█			█			█		█
Develop survey tools for stakeholder groups	▓	▓										
Administer surveys		█	█						█			
Analyze data; conduct ongoing improvement			▓			▓			▓			▓
Compile monthly library usage/circulation statistics	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Join a community of practice and participate in activities as directed by IMLS	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓
Participate in evaluation activities as directed by IMLA third party evaluator	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Conduct focus groups with students and teachers	▓	▓										
Finalize plan, order furniture and technology, and rearrange the library	█											
Librarian meets with teachers during PLC	▓		▓		▓		▓		▓			
Librarians join professional organizations	█											
Librarians participates in PD and library visits	▓	▓	▓	▓				▓		▓		▓
Librarian delivers PD to teachers	█									█		█
Librarian develops instructional events for parents		▓		▓			▓					
Librarian delivers instructional events for parents			█		█			█				
Librarian contracts with guest speaker on inquiry based learning		▓										
Teachers participate in PD with guest speaker												█

Activity		Sept. 2021	Oct. 2021	Nov. 2021	Dec. 2021	Jan. 2022	Feb. 2022	Mar. 2022	Apr. 2022	May 2022	June 2022	July 2022	Aug 2022
	Year Two												
Convene project team		■			■			■			■		■
Develop survey tools for stakeholder groups													
Administer surveys			■	■						■			
Analyze data; conduct ongoing improvement				▨			▨			▨			▨
Compile library usage statistics		■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Join a community of practice and participate in activities as directed by IMLS		▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨
Participate in evaluation activities as directed by IMLA third party evaluator		■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Conduct focus groups with students and teachers		▨	▨										
Librarian teaches summer learning camp(s)											■	■	
Librarian meets with teachers during PLC		▨		▨		▨		▨		▨			
Librarians renew memberships prof.organizations		■											
Librarians participates in PD									▨		▨		
Librarian delivers PD to teachers		■									■		■
Librarian develops instructional events for parents		▨			▨			▨					
Librarian delivers instructional events for parents			■			■			■				