

***Proposal Narrative – The Board of Education of Worcester County – February 13, 2019***

**Project Justification**

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

With the adoption of the American Association of School Librarians' *National School Library Standards* by the Maryland State Department of Education, Worcester County Public Schools has a unique opportunity to create a strategic plan for the twelve small school libraries in the school system to grow towards meeting those standards. In addition, the school system is experiencing high turnover with school librarians due to retirements. There are three new school librarians this year, new school librarians anticipated next year (2019-2020), and two anticipated openings in 2020-2021. In two years, more than 50% of the system's school librarians will be new in their roles, so it is important to begin to identify needed professional development for all certified librarians. The role of the school library is changing from transactions to a hub for independent study, group work, and research that ties directly to the curriculum in the classroom.

Based on a survey of Worcester County Public Schools' twelve librarians, needs for strategic planning and recommendations were expressed in the areas of: staffing (need for supplemental staff for some libraries), flexible scheduling, clearly defined budget allocations per school, instructional models/models for collaboration with classroom teachers, professional development, and use of space in the libraries to create Makerspaces. Makerspaces are work areas, including appropriate technology, where groups of students can collaborate on projects and produce work that will be shared in the classroom. The need for vital and well-operated school libraries is tied to the success of students in all content areas, but especially in reading, writing, and language arts. "The school librarian plays an instrumental role in preparing students to be twenty-first-century learners: problem solvers, critical thinkers, and effective users of information."<sup>1</sup>

*What best practices or prior IMLS funded work will inform your approach?*

In 2013, the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation called for "a summary of the current research on the impact of school libraries which can be used by the Harry & Jeanette Weinberg Foundation to better assess and develop current and future library initiatives." In order to assess and develop WCPS's current and future library initiatives, the conclusions from the research will be used to benchmark the impact of WCPS's libraries. In some instances, specific qualitative measures were drawn from "The Report on the Delaware School Library Survey" and NEA's "Library/Media Centers in U.S. Public Schools: Growth, Staffing, and Resources Executive Summary" The following is a list of the best practices:

- "Longer hours of operation and flexible scheduling (including summer openings) help students perform better."
- "Increased expenditure per student makes students perform better." The Report on the Delaware School Library Survey recommends \$12-15 per student.
- "Increased and better collaboration of school librarians with teachers, principals, committees, and public libraries improve outcomes."
- "The school library should be envisioned as a classroom as well as a welcoming place of learning with spaces for individual and group uses. The facility should be flexible and customizable to support multiple activities."

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<sup>1</sup> Effective School Library Media Programs and their Impact on Student Achievement (/tools/research/librariesmatter/effective-school-library-media-prgrmas-and-their-impact-student-achievement) in <http://www.ala.org/tools/research/librariesmattehr/high-school-teen-talking-point-8> (1/29/19).

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- “Librarians play an essential role in teaching 21st century skills supporting implementation of Common Core State Standards, integrating technology and digital tools into instruction, and developing student literacy.”
- “School libraries are ‘powerful agents of learning, central to engaging students in the transformation of information into deep knowledge and understanding, and providing them with life skills....’ (Gordon, 2012)”
- “School libraries can serve a wider purpose by reaching out to families and the community.”
- “School libraries have the ability to bridge the gap between privileged and at-risk students by providing equal access and resources for learning.”
- “Collections are measured by the number of print volumes, currency, number of subscriptions, and audiovisual equipment/resources. Availability of bi-lingual material is becoming an important topic.”
- “Studies show that the larger the staff, the higher the student achievement. Statistics vary regarding full/part time certified librarian and support staff. (See the AASL’s “Position Statement on Appropriate Staffing for School Libraries”. <http://www.ala.org/aasl/advocacy/resources/position-statements/staffing>)”
- “School librarians perform an integral role in promoting the effective use of educational technologies in their schools.”
- “The more students use the library, the better the test scores. Usage is measured by the number of visits to the library, the number of books and materials checked out, and the amount of time spent in the library.” The Average 1 book per student per week or approximately 40 books a year. (<https://www.nea.org/assets/docs/Trends%20in%20School%20Library%20Media%20Centers%20Executive%20Summary.pdf>).

Based on a recent survey of all school librarians in the school system and observations by the Coordinator of Instruction for School libraries, there are several areas where there is room for growth. Few librarians are currently collaborating with community groups and families, library collections spending on collections and technology varies widely from school to school. Hours of operation and flexible scheduling also vary widely from school to school. Few schools have extended hours or summer hours. There is also currently little consistency on the role of the librarian in the school buildings. The strategic plan and recommendations will help make library services more consistent throughout the school system.

*How would you qualify your library as small and rural (See Section A1 Applicants)?*

Worcester County, Maryland, is an isolated rural county on Maryland’s Lower Eastern Shore. It is 3 hours away from the major cities of Washington, D.C., Baltimore, MD, or Philadelphia, PA. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) code for Worcester County Public Schools is 32 – Town, Distant, which means we are at least 35 miles from the nearest town (not city). The northern sections of Worcester County near the Atlantic Barrier Islands are developed lightly, supporting retirement communities and tourism associated with the Barrier Islands. These include Ocean City, which is completely developed, and Assateague Island, which is all in State and Federal park land. Aside from the seasonal tourism industry, the county’s major industry is agriculture.

Worcester County schools vary in size according to the grades they serve and where they are located in the county. The smallest school, Snow Hill High School, serves 322 students in grades 9 – 12. There are also two combined elementary and middle schools in Pocomoke City and Snow Hill that serve grades 4 – 8. Pocomoke’s combined school serves 415 students and has a Free and Reduced Meals (FARMS) rate of 70% (very high poverty) and Snow Hill’s combined school serves 416 students with a FARMS rate of 52% (also high poverty). Stephen Decatur Middle School, however, serves grades 7 – 8 and has 650 students and a FARMS rate of 31%. The largest school in the county is Stephen Decatur High School, with three feeder elementary

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schools and a student enrollment of 1,383 and a FARMS rate of 27%. The schools in the more rural parts of the county are smaller and have higher FARMS rates than the schools in the northern areas of the county where the population is denser near the Atlantic Barrier Islands.

The libraries in the schools that have not been renovated in the last 20 years, which is most schools, are small compared to larger schools in urban and suburban centers. No school library has more than one school librarian on staff; three of the twelve have one educational assistant, and one has two educational assistant (SDHS). The collections are below the range of the recommendations for school libraries at 12 books per student. The recommended collections are 15 – 20 books per student.

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

The chief beneficiaries of the strategic plan and recommendations will be the students of Worcester County Public Schools. They have not been formally engaged in the planning process of this grant. However, groups of students at the elementary, middle, and high school level will be brought into focus groups-during the strategic planning process to get input on what they would like to see improved in their libraries and staff within the libraries.

The adult beneficiaries include the school librarians and educational assistants, classroom teachers, curriculum resource teachers, and school administrators. As stated above all twelve school librarians were surveyed about their most pressing needs and those are being taken into consideration in this proposal. To develop the strategic plan and recommendations, representatives from stakeholder groups, including teachers and administrators, will work together with school librarians to put together plans that benefit the whole school system and turn school libraries into drivers for student academic success. The stakeholder focus groups will be grouped into elementary, middle, and high school teachers and administrators, as separate focus groups.

*How will your project address the goals of APP (as described above in Section A, in particular A1), your selected project category, and the agency-side goal you selected on the IMLS Program Information Sheet?*

APP Goal – Support projects that strengthen the ability of small and rural libraries and archives to serve their communities. The communities that school libraries serve is the whole school community, including students, teachers, administrators, and even parents. This project will produce a strategic plan and recommendations (and, implement some of those recommendations within funding guidelines). It will give the twelve school librarians in WCPS who are working independently a unified set of strategies and recommendations in order to benefit all programs and impact all of the school libraries consistently.

Selected Project Category – Transforming School Library Practice. Many of the school libraries in WCPS are still in a transactional mode. Staff require professional development on how to use new technologies and how to teach students to think creatively, critically, and to work successfully in groups. Time is needed for school librarians to co-plan with classroom teachers so that student work in the library extends or complements the learning in the classroom. A strategic plan based on current best practices for school libraries is required and the librarians need to work together toward the goal of creating this strategic plan and making any necessary recommendation to the administration.

Agency-Level Goal – Build Capacity: IMLS strengthens the capacity of museums and libraries to improve the well-being of their communities. Because so much of Worcester County is rural and remote, 25% of families of students have no Internet or computer at home for the student to use for school work or other interests. A well-planned school library system with strengthened capacity will serve as a place for these students to complete school projects and explore the world outside of their local communities. When school librarians and staff start

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working with classroom teachers on the information technology needs of their students, students and families will benefit.

### **Project Work Plan**

*What specific activities will you carry out?*

Year one of the grant period will focus on strategic planning for the school libraries in Worcester County Public Schools. There will be monthly strategic planning committee meetings, updates from the strategic planning committee to key stakeholders, and professional development will take place in the form of attending school library conferences (AASL and MASL). Even though the first year is planning, the Project Director and Coordinator of Instruction for Library Media Services will conduct observations and collect artifacts to show the beginnings of the transformation of the libraries from transactional approaches to information management approaches. In the summer of 2020, activities will focus on professional learning and project formative evaluation. Activities will be limited in April and May because those are school testing months. Data will be collected using several different qualitative methods. There will be two focus groups – one of representative teachers and one of representative school administrators, to gather input about what the roles and responsibilities of the newly-defined school librarian role should be – how they should work with teachers on instruction and how they should work within the school administration to help move the school forward with student academic achievement and 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. By the end of year one, a list of recommendations based on the strategic plan will be developed.

Year two of the grant period will be the first part of implementation of the recommendations of the planning committee. These recommendations will have been approved by the Assistant Superintendent for Instruction and presented to the Superintendent and the Board of Education. Professional learning for all school librarians will take place in year two as well. As a group, school librarians, led by Ms. Sills, the Project Director, will begin the process of formulating curricula for the grade bands for school libraries. This curricula will be consistent across the school system, will be based on the recommendations and strategic plan, and will be in alignment with the new Maryland Standards. This project may take more time than the second year allows, but will continue with local support, if approved. Each school library will receive an allowance of \$500 to implement one or more of the new recommendations. With the implementation of the recommendations, WCPS hopes to make a presentation at both the Maryland Association of School Librarians in October 2020 and the Maryland Common Ground Conference in May of 2021. The Common Ground Conference is for educational leaders, including teachers, to present initiatives that are happening in Maryland School Districts and the Maryland State Department of Education. Once again, Ms. Sills will be conducting observations and collecting artifacts for documentation and evaluation. The summer of 2021 the final evaluation for the grant period will take place.

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

Jennifer Sills, the Instructional Coordinator for Science and School Library Media Services will be the Project Director. She is a certified school librarian who has a vision for the entire school system. Assisting her will be the school librarian from one of the smaller high schools, Brittany Hulme-Tignor. Ms. Hulme recently went from a very high poverty middle school to a high poverty high school and is the President of the Maryland Association of School Librarians. The Instructional Coordinator for Reading and English Language Arts will be a member of the Strategic Planning Committee as well as two representative teachers and two representative school administrators.

The partners to be engaged are the Worcester County Public Libraries (five branches) and the Salisbury University Media Literacy Institute. We are currently partnering with both of these organizations. Salisbury

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University is in the process of applying for a grant for a Media Literacy Institute that would look at the roles and responsibilities of the media and other media-related current topics.

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

Resources that are needed are money for travel to two conferences – the American Association of School Librarians conference and the Maryland Association of School Librarians conference. Representatives from the school system will go to AASL but all twelve librarians will go to MASL, which takes place on a day off for all school system staff. Funds are also needed for substitutes for meetings for school librarians and teachers who are serving on the Strategic Planning Committee. Funds are needed for summer professional development for school librarians to move from transactional to instructional practice. Funds are also needed for school year professional development to help the librarians implement the recommendations of the strategic plan. Finally, each school library will receive an allocation of \$500 to be used on supplies and materials (not collections) that would allow school librarians to implement the approved recommendations.

*What are the risks to the project and how will you mitigate them?*

The major risk to the project is that school administrators may be reluctant to permit their librarians to use substitutes for strategic planning and professional development during the school year. We will mitigate this by presenting administrators with a year-long calendar so they will know exactly what dates their school librarians will be committed to the work of the program. No meetings or professional development are planned during school testing months.

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

Progress will be measured using qualitative measures. Project goals will be measured by observations and examining teaching and learning artifacts. Data for the performance goals provided by IMLS in the Request for Proposals will also be collected.

- Project Goal 1: WCPS librarians will build their capacity as co-teachers and information specialists in their buildings. This will be measured by observations on how well they are implementing the new county school library curriculum and collaborating with teachers in accordance with best practices and recommendations of the strategic planning committee.
- Project Objective Year One: WCPS will develop a new school library strategic plan and recommendations to be approved by the Assistant Superintendent for Instruction and presented to the Superintendent and the Board of Education. This will be measured on the success of the strategic planning committee to have their plan approved by the Assistant Superintendent for Instruction.
- Project Objective Year Two: Individual school libraries will have opportunities to implement the recommendations of the approved strategic plan and recommendations. Librarians will act as co-teachers and information specialists in their schools. This will be measured by observations and examining artifacts of teaching and learning.

### **Project Outcomes**

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

The outcome of the APP Goal (Support Projects the Strengthen the Ability of Small and Rural Libraries and Archives to Serve Their Communities) is that the strategic plan will ultimately ensure that the communities the school libraries serve will have highly improved services and improved community outcomes including

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college and career readiness, support for classroom teachers, and improved leadership capacity of school librarians. The output for this goal is an approved strategic plan with recommendations for year two and onward.

The outcomes of the Agency Goal (Build Capacity) will be begin implementing recommendations of the planning committees and steering committees. Each school library will receive an allowance of \$500 to begin this at the school level. Outputs of this goal are professional learning, school library curriculum at age appropriate levels, and other recommendations including the additions of Makerspaces in school libraries that align with and support school curricular goals. Outputs may also include technology needs and services for databases needed for research skills (determined by each individual school library).

*How do you define the success of your project?*

The school system has a clearly defined vision of what a school librarian is and what the roles of school librarians across the county are. The definition and roles are consistent from grades pre-kindergarten through 12 and from school to school; they are also aligned with 21<sup>st</sup> century learning skills, the Maryland College and Career Readiness Standards, and the new Maryland School Library Standards.

*What is your plan for collecting and reporting data on your performance goals and outcomes?*

The Project Director, with the assistance of school administrators, will be collecting qualitative data. This will include curriculum plans (once they are in place), teaching artifacts, and student work. The Project Director will also be conducting observations to see how well the recommendations of the strategic plan are being implemented at the school libraries (within the constraints of the budget). Professional evaluation will be measured through exit surveys at the end of each professional development workshop, and these exit surveys will be based on Maryland's Learning Forward Standards for Professional Learning, which are used throughout K-12 educational organizations in the State. This data will be assessed using rubrics and included in the final evaluation of the project. Finally, the focus groups established in year one will be re-convened to do a reality check on the progress of the project – How Are We Doing?

Quantitative data, which will include benchmark data in different literacy skills from different grades, will be collected with the assistance of Ms. Brittany Hulme-Tignor of Snow Hill High School, who has helped put together some of the premises of this proposal. She has access to data networks that will assist in collecting academic achievement data. Although not always singularly tied to the success in academics of the students they serve, the best practices outlined in the first part of this narrative indicate that more time spent in school libraries and checking out books leads to greater academic achievement for students.

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

Because this project, with its strategic plan, recommendations, and implementation involve a paradigm shift for the roles and responsibilities of school librarians in Worcester County Public Schools, it will take more than one year to implement and assess the successes of the recommendations. This will begin in year two, but the budget from this grant is mostly being spent on professional development and planning time, and does not permit a large budget for implementation. These costs will have to be phased in in accordance with the strategic plan and recommendations.

The approval process by the Assistant Superintendent of Instruction and the presentation to the Board of Education and the Superintendent do more than validate the process, it puts in motion the processes by which initiatives are integrated into the annual school system operating budget. The implementation of the plans in the years after year two will have to be paid locally either through days set aside for professional learning or instructional technology budgets or both.

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**Schedule of Completion – IMLS Grant Year One – February 13, 2019**

Activity – Year One	Month											
	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A
Establish Strategic Planning Committee	X											
Monthly Meetings of Strategic Planning Committee	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X	X
Assess Current State	X	X										
Design a Vision for the Future			X	X	X							
Build a Plan to Get There						X	X					
Writing Recommendations								X	X			
Presentations to Stakeholder Panels			X			X				X		
Develop Action Plans for Implementing Recommendations											X	X
Maryland Association of School Librarians Conference		X										
American Association of School Librarians Conference			X									
Develop Action Plan for School Libraries											X	X
Present Strategic Plan and Action Plan to Assistant Superintendent for Instruction											X	
County-Wide Testing								X	X			
Conduct Observations, Collect Artifacts			X	X	X	X	X			X		
First Year Evaluation										X	X	X

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Schedule of Completion – IMLS Grant Year Two**

Activity – Year Two	Month											
	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A
Present Strategic Plan and Action Plan to Board of Education	X											
Maryland Association of School Librarians Conference (Present Strategic Planning Process to MASL)		X										
Implement Recommendations and Gather Data	X	X	X	X	X							
Training for School Librarians on New Roles of the School Librarian	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X		
Work with Potential Partners for Training and Implementation		X		X			X					
Curriculum Writing and Planning with Project Director	X		X		X	X				X		
Present to Maryland Common Ground Conference									X			
Conduct Observations, Collect Artifacts			X	X	X	X	X			X		
Project Evaluation Year One and Final										X	X	X
County-Wide Testing								X	X			