

Budget and Advocacy Group Project

Site Visit and Interview Report

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Introduction

Our group visited Southeast Middle School in Greensboro on October 25 to meet with the Media Specialist, Betsy Crone. Ms. Crone has been at Southeast Middle School for seven years, following seven years at Joyner Elementary School in Greensboro, NC. She received both her Bachelor's Degree as well as her Masters in Library and Information Studies from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, finishing her MLIS in 1996.

Ms. Crone puts a lot of care and energy into her work, knows her students well, and works hard to promote her collection to the student population. She has one Media/Tech Assistant, Brigette Mottram, which is now rare for middle schools in Guilford County. She also has two student assistants, who receive school credit for the work they do in the media center. The program follows a state curriculum, has an application process, and the students are trained on the circulation system as well as shelf maintenance.

Southeast Middle School has about 1000 students, with their demographics listed as follows: 23% African American, 67% Caucasian, and 4% Hispanic (nc.com/education/components/scrapbook/default.php?sectiondetailid=37763 &). Betsy described the school as largely rural where many of the children's parents also attended the same school. They are currently undergoing a major renovation. This will result in an entirely new Media Center even though the current one received an extensive renovation just five years ago. While Ms. Crone serves on the Building Advisory Committee, she does not feel that she has meaningful input as to what will actually go into the new Media Center.

Budget

Each year, Ms. Crone submits a budget request to the principal (see appendix A). The principal will take the request to a committee of staff on the

leadership team that decide on the overall school budget for all departments and needs. This year, with the state's limited funding, she requested based on her usual formula, but noted that she understood that the committee would not be able to allocate her full request. She stated she never expects to receive all that she requests, but it never hurts to ask. With the money she is given, she prioritizes what is needed, and purchases accordingly.

To compute her instructional budget, Ms. Crone takes the cost of one young adult book per student and multiplies the cost by the number of enrolled students (1000). She uses the guideline of \$21.36 for a YA book, which is the latest recommendation from *School Library Journal*. Based on this formula, her budget should be \$21,360; however, she only requested \$12,500 for her instructional budget and \$5000 for her capital outlay. This is only about 60% of the necessary amount, and is 20% less than her request the previous year. In previous years, she has typically requested 85% of the recommended amount. Capital outlay of \$5000 is requested for four AverKeys (\$480), eight DVD/VCR combos (\$1200), and four Notebook computers (\$2400), which are necessary equipment purchases this year. There is a remaining \$920 of the \$5000 to cover any additional equipment needs throughout the year. Federal funding for technology is given to schools that have special programs such as Title I schools, but Southeast Middle does not qualify for any special funding. As a result, they struggle with a small amount of outdated technology equipment and do their best to update within their budget. Fortunately, this library does not have to purchase items such as bulbs, ink, and other replacements for the equipment. This saves the library a great deal of money whereas other school libraries have to fund these supplies from their budget. A helpful point she made was that she also includes budget request amounts from previous years on the bottom of a current request so principals can see what was requested and what was allotted as a comparison.

As for other sources of funding, her main source is through Scholastic Book Fair sales. Remarkably, she holds as many as four each year. The PTA filters the money from sales through their tax exempt status and gives all profits to the library. The school keeps a “bank account” for the library and Book Fair profits go into this account and kept separate from the budget allocation. This account is used for incidentals such as the purchase of a new release on the day it is available or a video that is found while out shopping. These types of items can be purchased with a check from this account, which is more efficient than having to go through a purchase order and allows flexibility for the librarian.

For several years now, the financial secretary of the school has come to Ms. Crone around March with “extra” money that must be spent or lost, so she typically benefits from this money as well. For example, she received \$30,000 last year and used most of it to purchase projectors and document cameras for the teachers to use in their classrooms. Technology must be purchased through a state contract which costs considerably more than buying from a local store, but this is necessary to have the maintenance support and updates from the school system. For instance, a Netbook could be bought for \$300 in a local store, but costs about \$600 when purchased through the state contract. With these prices, money is spent very quickly. Books, DVDs and other resources can be bought through any vendor and do not have to rely on specific contracts, so searching for deals and specials helps save money.

A final source we discussed is applying for grants. There are several opportunities for grants if a librarian has time to apply. Donors Choose and LTSA are two grants that she mentioned that she has applied for and received the items or money she requested.

Collection Management and Development

Ms. Crone has created a 5-Year Weeding Plan that she uses to continually focus her attention on her collection. See appendix B for a copy of this weeding plan. By examining the materials in the current year of the plan, Ms. Crone is able to repair materials, replace materials, and fill needs within that portion of her collection.

Another means of managing and developing her collection is the analysis of her collection by others. Teachers who utilize specific collections for their course of study will often inform Ms. Crone when materials within that area are in need of attention. Last year, several new books were purchased for the Roman collection to update some that worn out and out-dated. Book vendors freely supply Ms. Crone with an analysis of her entire collection. See Appendix C for a sample analysis. These free evaluations of the library's entire collection informs Ms. Crone of what materials are being circulated as well as how many materials are in a given discipline. This also allows Ms. Crone to evaluate her collection and adjust accordingly.

Although the weeding plan may be in the area of reference this year, if the vendor analysis shows a significant hole in mathematics, adjustments can be made to fill some of that gap. Likewise, as curriculum or student preferences change, ongoing potential books are kept in lists within the book vendor's websites for quick reference for purchasing. Ms. Crone keeps these lists ongoing so that when she has funds become available or a need arises, titles are ready to be purchased and added to her collection.

Selection and Acquisition

Ms. Crone's ongoing lists of titles for future acquisition are often selected based on the requests made by the students and/or faculty. Other titles may

be chosen based on titles highlighted during a Scholastic Book Fair. Selection requirements and guidelines are determined by the Guilford County Schools (GCS) Selection Policy (See Appendix D). However, books and DVD's that meet this selection policy can be purchased from any vendor. Some examples of vendors Ms. Crone uses are Follett, Scholastic, and Capstone.

The selection and acquisition of technological items, on the other hand, are driven more through GCS contractual agreements. While this is usually not the most cost-effective, the benefits usually are worthwhile. The products purchased through these contractual agreements enable GCS technological support members more familiarity with products which results in faster repair time. The contractual agreements removes the need to maintain and keep up with warranty information by the school media specialist, making it less time-consuming and much easier in the event of repairs that require a return to the manufacturer.

Marketing

Being one of only two middle school media specialists with a full time assistant, Ms. Crone is able to focus much of her time on collection management and marketing. The functions of the circulation desk are often performed by the student workers. Her assistant manages the Accelerated Reading Program (A/R) and much of the technology troubleshooting in the school. Some of the best marketing happens by word of mouth of the Media Center student workers and the Battle of the Books students who often are allowed to have first pick of the new books. They recommend their favorites to their friends, classmates and team mates. Ms. Crone utilizes her knowledge of middle school culture, the fact that many of the students want to read what their peers are reading, to calculate the popularity of the fiction collection.

Some of the students even donate their own books to the media center helping to keep the collection relevant and updated.

Another way the media specialist capitalizes on marketing is the two week rotation of students through the library during their Language Arts class time. Part of the period in the Media Center is used by Ms. Crone to present a PowerPoint of the new books that are available. Talking about the books helps to make the students aware that there are new books available for them to read and interest them by discussing what they are about. The schools investment in the Media Center and the accessibility of all the students to the book collection, for class reading and for their own personal interest, is a major opportunity that Ms. Crone uses to market new materials to the students.

In addition to the new fiction PowerPoint, Ms. Crone also uses the rotation of classes to hold two book fairs a year. The students all have access to explore the books presented in the fair during their class visit to the library. In addition to the two book fairs, the media specialist also takes folding book cases of books from Scholastic into the school hallways during special school nights for students to look at books for a brief period of time; about two hours are spent at these “mini” book fairs.

The final piece of marketing found in the school is posters in display cases relating to the A/R program. The poster displays throughout the school hallways challenge the students to discover how many books they can read. There are also sample selections of A/R approved books in the display cases to interest students in reading and to visit the Media Center.

Conclusion

Ms. Crone has a well-developed, highly organized school media center at Southeast Middle School. While she brings excellent skill, care, and work ethic

to her profession, several other factors contribute to her success. First, she is one of few middle schools in the county to have a full-time assistant. This allows Ms. Crone to concentrate on the collection and the marketing of the collection in a very focused manner. Many Media Specialists are likely forced to be so focused on keeping their Media Center afloat that concentrating on these core elements can fall to the wayside. While her internship program creates some extra work and ongoing training, it pays dividends in their collection maintenance and keeping a hand on the pulse of the interests of middle school students. Finally, her general budget is supplemented substantially by several annual Scholastic Book Fairs and extra money that often appears towards the end of the school year. Challenges Ms. Crone will face in the near future include a move into a new facility and the possibility of losing her assistant if the school population sees a drop in enrollment.

Ms. Crone has great systems in place and support to continue to manage an excellent School Media Center. She has formulas in place for budgeting, but is prepared to quickly adjust in a constantly changing school budget environment. She follows a weeding plan and is able to receive analysis from her vendors. She has guidelines for acquisitions that are provided but also remains open and makes many of her purchases based on student requests. She is able to market to her students by developing Power Point presentations for them, utilizing Battle of the Books, and through poster displays. With Ms. Crone's leadership, Southeast Middle School has the formula for a successful school media center.

Appendix A

The Five- Year Weeding Plan developed by Ms. Crone to weed materials from the Media Center collection.

Appendix B

The Yearly Budget Request developed by Ms. Crone

Appendix C

Collection Analysis used by Ms. Crone to identify gaps in the Media Center collection.

Appendix D

Guilford County Schools Selection Policy