

School Libraries in Action: A MASL Research Journal

**Library Media Program Evaluation Guides Parkway School
District into the Future**

By: Bill Bass



Missouri Association of School Librarians

Library Media Program Evaluation Guides Parkway School District into the Future

Project Summary

Bill Bass of Parkway School District discusses their district-wide library media program evaluation and how they used this process to identify areas for growth to fulfill Parkway School District's mission, "to ensure all students are capable, curious, caring and confident learners who understand and respond to the challenges of an ever-changing world."

Alignment to the district's mission changes the focus of the library program and highlights the work that librarians do to teach students and faculty critical thinking skills, technology integration, and research methodologies. Each librarian is actively engaged with students as they make sense of ideas and information while implementing a responsive district library curriculum, and providing opportunities that support student exploration, learning, and creation while fostering a love of reading. In addition, librarians also perform many administrative tasks. This work leads those charged with librarianship to be innovative, flexible, and responsive as they support all of Parkway in meeting this mission.

The multi-step program evaluation process involved multiple stakeholders – librarians, teachers, administrators, students, and parents. This study used focus groups, surveys and existing data to examine how librarians, parents, teachers, students and administrators feel about the future of libraries. The study began by conducting a needs assessment to determine areas for growth as determined by Parkway librarians. Librarians attended professional development to learn more about the future ready framework, then conducted surveys and focus groups within their schools, as well as open forums for the community. Project results, examples, and benchmarks will be useful to school librarians and administrators seeking to review their own school library programs.

This report is an abridged version of a longer report available at <http://pkwy.info/pkwylibrary>.

Project Context

The Parkway Library Program is made up of 33 certified building librarians; one in each elementary and middle school libraries as well as a newly established program at Fern Ridge, and two in each high school. Additionally, high school librarians are supported by a staff secretary. District library staff includes a certified library systems support specialist offering professional development and support to librarians, as well as central processing staff that manage all incoming library books and materials, district textbooks, and digital resources, including databases and other online tools used by students across the district. Due to reorganization and budget reductions, clerical support is no longer available at middle and elementary levels. At the same time, librarians have taken on the additional role of supporting teachers in their use of technology with students and are leaders in their buildings on digital tools and resources.

Parkway has a rich history of leadership in the school library field and is considered to be a premier program in the state of Missouri and beyond. Among other things, Parkway is known

for its partnership with St. Louis County Library in the White House's ConnectEd initiative and the adoption of the U.S. Department of Education's Future Ready Librarian program, both with the goals of increasing student access to high-quality materials for digital age learning.

In 2009, the library media program presented their last program evaluation to the Board of Education. At that time, our goals for improvement included developing a model library and district-wide library curriculum, ensuring our librarians' professional development, ensuring our libraries' online presence, updating our collections of materials and technology, increasing flexible scheduling to ensure access to libraries, and providing additional clerical support for our librarians. Through the work of multiple stakeholders, growth was made in all of these areas.

Since our last program evaluation in 2009, however, the library program has experienced a number of shifts in order to stay relevant in the ever-changing world. These shifts highlight the broad reach that the Parkway library program has in the district and beyond.

Research Goal

Starting in the fall of 2014, the library program began to focus on the essential question, *What does it mean to be a librarian in the digital age?*

This guiding question led us through a lengthy program evaluation and prompted the topics of study and recommendations outlined in this report. Our ultimate goal was to present a new program evaluation to the Board of Education that would highlight the role of the library program as well as provide guidance for the future of the Parkway school library program.

Method

The library program engaged in a number of steps over a two-year period, starting May 2016, to analyze its effectiveness and look for areas of improvement.

The questions driving this study, as presented to the Parkway Board of Education, are these:

- Role of the Librarian
 - What does it mean to be a librarian in the digital age?
 - In today's ever-changing world, what characteristics define the influence librarians have on their communities?
 - How can librarians cultivate productive, safe and responsible citizens in a digital world?
- Digital Strategies
 - What kind of digital resources should libraries provide to students for use in curricular areas?
 - What new challenges, demands, and expectations are libraries facing in terms of services and digital products to add value and satisfy the changing information needs of the community?
- Student Choice and Personalization
 - When students visit school libraries, what activities and services should be

- readily available to support learning?
 - How does the library support personalized learning experiences for students?
 - In what ways can the library support student creativity and exploration?
- Flexible Programming
 - What programs can the library offer that have the potential to transform the educational experiences of all students?
 - How do we evaluate the success of the programs that we offer our communities?
 - What additional development do librarians need in order to meet the needs of every student?
 - What strategies are librarians using to respond to the social-emotional needs of students?
 - How do libraries connect the school community through programming, space design, and instructional leadership?
 - What strategies can libraries use to address equity needs (access, experience, resources) in their communities?
- Literacy Advocacy
 - What strategies do libraries use to support the love of literature and encourage a culture of reading for all?
 - How do libraries support and enhance the multiple forms of literacies that students will create and encounter throughout their lives?

The following timeline outlines major events in the process.

- May 2016 – Parkway librarians formally evaluate 2009 program evaluation goals looking for growth and achievement
- June 2016 – Future Ready Librarian workshop introducing Project Connect and Future Ready Librarian frameworks set the stage for future work. These guiding documents can be found here:
 - Future Ready Librarians: <https://futureready.org/program-overview/librarians/>
 - Project Connect: <https://www2.follettlearning.com/projectconnect/>
- August 2016 – Program Evaluation Committee formed with eight librarians, representing all grade levels
- September 2016 – Program Evaluation Committee has a Professional Learning release day to explore topics such as professional learning, redesigning library spaces, national trends in libraries
- December 2016 – Parkway Library hosts an Open Forum for community engagement, combining the input of experts in the field and Parkway community members. Panel experts included Gina Donato of Follett Solutions, Missouri Association of School Librarians vice-president Mernie Maestas, Lindenwood University professor Amy Peach, and St. Louis County Library director Kristen Sorth, each of whom shared their visions about the future of libraries.

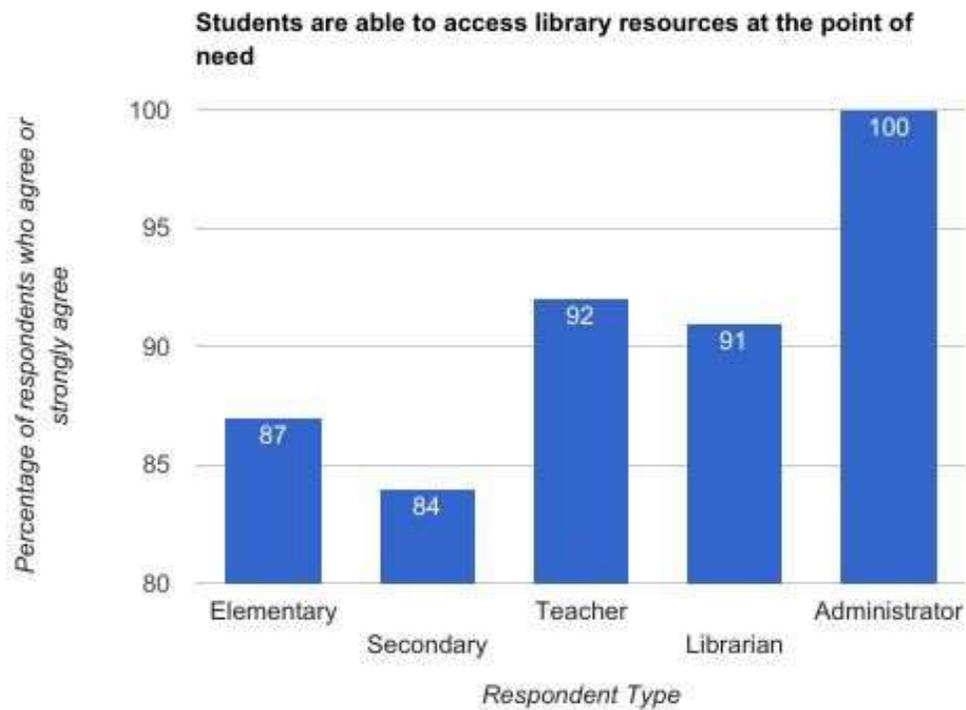
- January 2017 – Topics of study and guiding questions were discussed with Board of Education
- March 2017 – Each member of the Program Evaluation Committee held a student focus group in their building to capture student opinions and voice. Each focus group had between six and eight students attending
- March/April 2017 – Librarians nationwide were surveyed through AASL, ISTE, MASL, and Future Ready Libraries Facebook group and social media, in order to capture national trends in library programs. Results came from 144 respondents representing 22 states and four countries.
- April 2017 – Parkway parents, teachers, students, and administrators were surveyed. Responses were received from 20 administrators, 24 Parkway school librarians, 444 Parkway teachers, 644 elementary students, 749 parents, and 803 secondary students.
- April 2017 – Program Evaluation Committee reviewed all the data collected
- June 2017 – Program Evaluation Committee presented its final recommendations to the Board of Education

The Parkway Library Program Evaluation Committee collected qualitative and quantitative data from a variety of sources to get a broad, yet detailed view of national and local trends in library programs and the state of Parkway libraries.

Outcomes

In April 2017, the Program Evaluation Committee came together to analyze all of the collected data for the library program. The following key findings are a compilation of all pieces of data with a summary of the themes that came through across all data points. Some of the findings are below, but the full array of data can be found in the longer report (<http://pkwy.info/pkwylibrary>).

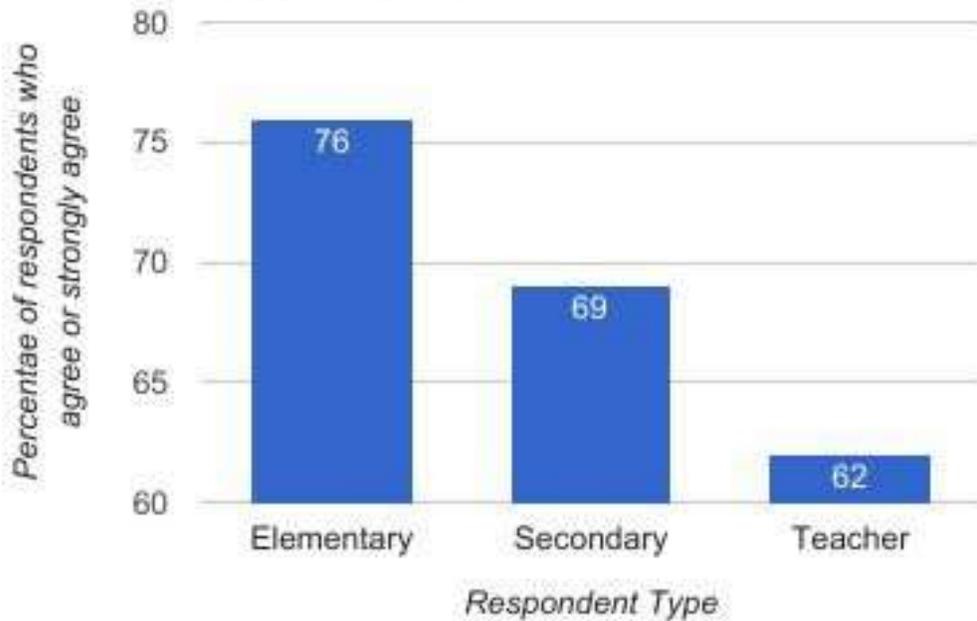
- Students and teachers at all grade levels value the library program and want more time/access to the library. Procedures and scheduling (release time and duties at the elementary level) prevent access at point of need for students.



Survey comments indicated that due to digital access of many resources, students can access library resources at point of need through any connected device. However, student access to the library and the librarian is limited because of scheduling practices (specifically at the elementary levels) and procedures.

- Teachers value time for collaboration with librarians to enhance lesson plans and receive professional development around technology.

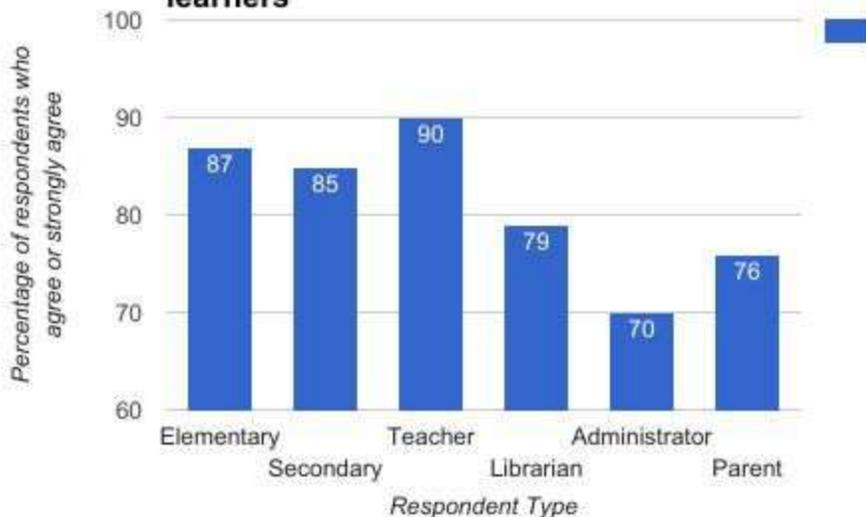
Librarians and teachers collaborate to support curriculum



Comments indicate that teachers and librarians desire scheduled time to collaborate in order to better support individual curricular needs.

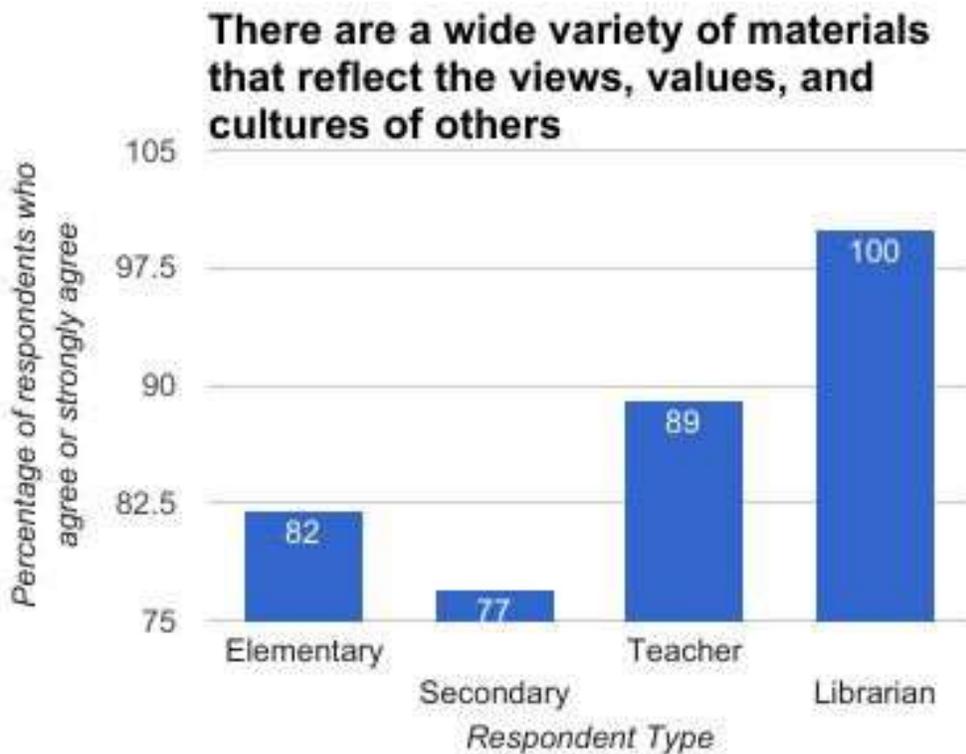
- Teachers, students, librarians and administrators feel that current library spaces are outdated and in need of remodeling.

The library space is flexibly designed to meet the needs of a wide variety of learners

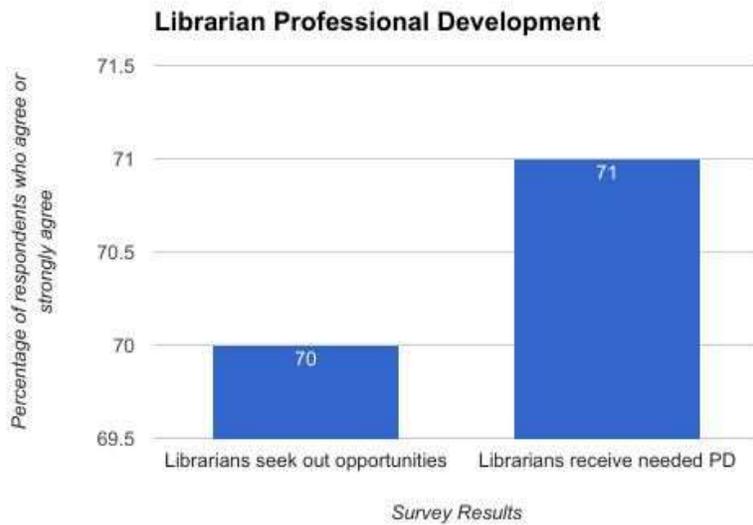


Comments indicate that many Parkway library spaces should include a variety of spaces based on the type of task (quiet study, makerspace, video editing, collaboration, etc.) and should include comfortable seating to make it more inviting.

- High quality digital content (ebooks, databases) is available but not being utilized by students beyond required research and classroom projects.
- Parkway libraries have a wide variety of reading materials and resources for classroom use that meet the needs of their communities but should focus on expanding their collections to include more materials for pleasure reading and those that represent diverse cultures and social justice topics.
- All those surveyed feel that they would like more communication from their respective library about what the library has to offer beyond books.

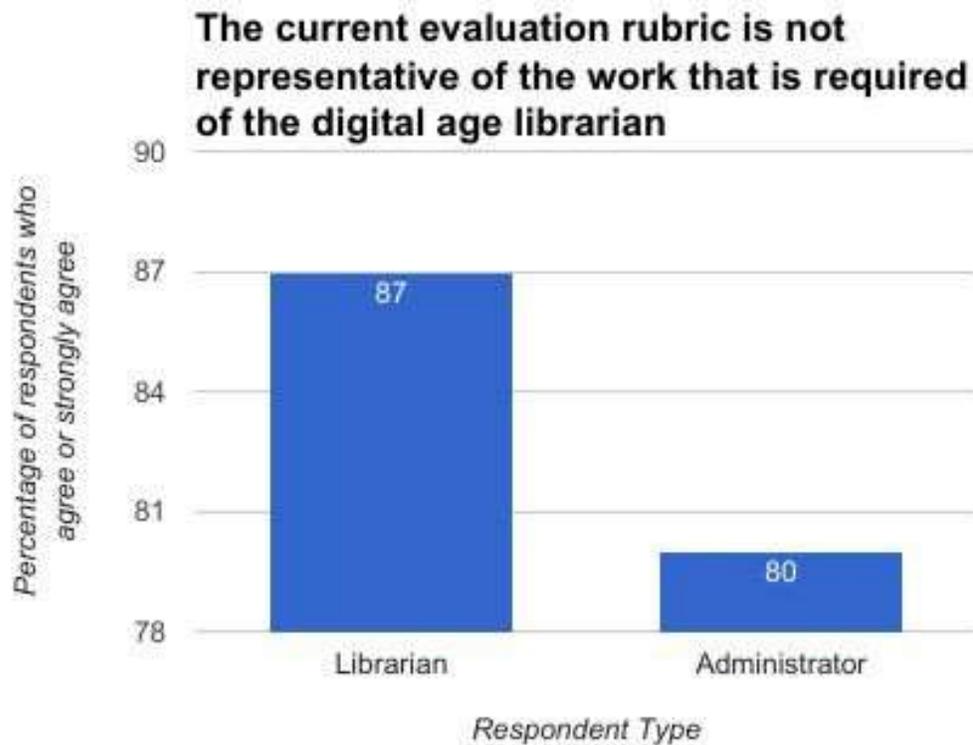


- Parkway librarians need continued opportunities for professional development in order to be Future Ready.



Comments indicate that the professional development for librarians makes an impact on their practice, however, in order to be able to serve their communities in their expanded and ever-changing role, they need consistent, ongoing development.

- The current evaluation rubric for librarians does not reflect their expanded role.
- Librarians struggle to balance administrative tasks (collection development, data collection and analysis, development of relevant programming, staying current with technology) with scheduling and teacher support.



Comments indicate that the current library evaluation model does not reflect the current work of building librarians in terms of collection development, communication and marketing, inventory, data collection and reporting, etc.

- Libraries are seen as innovative spaces for creativity and discovery, and inspire students to explore personal interests.
- Librarians support students in the areas of critical thinking, digital citizenship, research, and literacy skills.

After synthesizing all the data that was collected, the Parkway Library Program Evaluation Committee, in accordance with the adoption of the Future Ready Librarian and Project Connect Frameworks, recommends the following topics and goals for improvement for its 2017 program evaluation.

Main Topic 1: Advocacy

Parkway libraries will strive for clear communication of the role of school librarians.

- Create multiple avenues for communicating with the school community (students, parents, teachers, administrators, etc.)
- Ensure equity of access to print and digital materials for all Parkway students
- Promote use of technology in classrooms to support equity of experience in the use of digital tools and materials
- Develop district materials outlining the role of the librarian in the digital age

Main Topic 2: Responsiveness to community

Parkway libraries will be responsive to the community and have a finger on the pulse of each individual building.

- Align individual library program goals to building CSIP
 - Character Education
 - Social Justice
 - Literacy
 - Personalization
 - Globalization
- Flexible use of budget to meet school needs
 - Collection management (both print and digital)
 - Makerspace
 - Software subscriptions
 - Furniture
- Advocate for student privacy
- Scheduling
 - Utilize flexible scheduling for elementary libraries
 - Schedule time for intentional collaboration between librarian and teacher teams to support curriculum
 - Consistent scheduling limiting number of release time minutes for elementary librarians
- Development of building collections (print and digital)
 - Actively pursue materials that represent diverse cultures
 - Develop and maintain modern collection to include recent and classic titles
- Create intentional time for administrative tasks
 - Cataloging
 - Reporting
 - Development of programming
 - Collection development
 - Data collection and analysis

Main Topic 3: Instruction and Programming

Parkway libraries will support classroom instruction and provide relevant, timely programming to meet the needs and interests of each individual community.

- Evaluate and update current library curriculum to include the following topics:
 - AASL Standards for the 21st Century Learner
 - ISTE Standards for Students, Teachers, and Administrators
 - Digital Age Literacy
 - Literature appreciation
 - Information literacy
 - Media literacy
 - Digital citizenship
 - Research skills

- Library skills
- Develop experiences for creativity, exploration, and discovery as a part of library program
 - Makerspaces
 - Coding and technology
 - Innovation

Main Topic 4: Educational Leadership and Professional Development

Parkway librarians will strive to be seen as leaders in buildings and will have access to just in time, targeted professional learning for librarians.

- Provide ongoing support for librarians around Future Ready and Project Connect Frameworks and technology integration
- Seek individual and group opportunities for leadership and professional learning

Main Topic 5: Library Physical Spaces

Parkway libraries are multi-use spaces that are inviting and available for learners of all ages.

- Explore opportunities to create modern library spaces with flexible seating and multi-use zones for a variety of educational experiences