

# Connection + Collaboration =

## **SUCCESSFUL INTEGRATION OF TECHNOLOGY IN A LARGE HIGH SCHOOL**



# Formula for Success

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### A Familiar Scene in Many High School Libraries

As you look around your learning commons-enabled library, you feel proud that the redesign accommodates collaborative work areas as well as quiet study areas. The school library has enough desktop computers to serve two classes at a time, as well as additional seating designed for working with laptops, iPads, and other BYOD tools (see figure 1). A makerspace full of materials conducive to curriculum-based product development as well as innovative creations by students pursuing their own interests has been established. Teachers enjoy seeing their students' work displayed and are beginning to create assignments with the makerspace area in mind (see figure 2).

Your library research calendar is full, partly due to pathfinders that have been designed in support of collaboratively planned research assignments. You feel confident that teachers and students use these



*Figure 1. Seating designed for students using portable devices.*

*Figure 2. Enticing displays encourage students to explore.*



Figure 3. QR code pointing to related Civil War e-books.

pathfinders in their classrooms, computer labs, and remotely from home, as your database statistics are consistently high. Yet, you feel that you aren't reaching every department and every teacher. The teaching staff increases each year to accommodate an ever-growing student enrollment, and a substantial rate of teacher turnover results in new faces appearing each year.

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*Your strategy here is to jumpstart the collaboration process with new teachers by joining forces with the content leaders.*

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A formula that has worked at my school of 2,500 students and 170 teachers involves making a connection with school leaders, who in turn can assist you in your effort to collaborate and support new teachers. These leaders include administrators, the instructional coaches from each academic department, department chairs, and returning teachers who already embrace the value of your technology-rich library program. This group will help you bring the new teachers onboard.

### **Starting Point**

Begin by connecting or reconnecting with department leaders. Schedule a meeting with the instructional coaches and department heads during in-service week. Send an invitation to your administrators to stop in to see the school library program presented

as a critical component of student learning.

Your strategy here is to jumpstart the collaboration process with new teachers by joining forces with the content leaders. Tidy up your library, fill it with eye-catching displays, and present it as a user-friendly space. Invite the group of department heads to tour at their leisure, connecting each subject-area specialist with specific content areas in the stacks. Encourage them to download a QR app on their phones so they can scan codes for related e-books and databases. Explain that you have digitized the reference section to make it accessible to students and staff from any Internet-enabled location 24-7. All electronic sources support simultaneous use. Use clip-on-the-shelf bookstop section markers (available from library supply companies) to not only support your print books but also to highlight



Figure 4. Career books and related online resources.

QR codes for related e-books and databases (see figure 3). Another idea is to create a sign indicating a related database or website and post it next to special collections such as careers or social issues (see figure 4).

After the tour, present a slideshow illustrating how you can support teachers and their curriculum. The key word here is *illustrate*. Use pictures of students and teachers in action, using library resources. A picture of you coteaching with a teacher in the school library, classroom, or computer lab sends a powerful message that collaboration is effective, no matter where it takes place—and that you are willing to step outside the library space to provide instruction.

### Introduction of Technology Tools

Next, introduce two technology tools that you recommend for use in the classroom. For example, like me, you could project the popular Symbaloo tool and show how it can be used with Blendspace, a teachers' tool for presenting lessons. Explain that the effectiveness of these tools would depend on the quality of the resources collected by three groups: instructional coaches, teachers, and school librarians. The finished product would be a Symbaloo webmix of online resources for teachers, created collaboratively by subject-area specialists, as well as information specialists.

At this point, project an "example" Symbaloo webmix that you have already created for a specific course. Figure 5 shows an example for World Geography. (If you want to get a feel for the user experience, go to <http://schslibrary.symbaloo.com/mix/worldgeography-schsI> and click on a few tiles.<sup>1</sup>) The Symbaloo should contain websites, teachers' instructional tools, and recommended related subscription databases available through the library's website. Assure the group that deleting and adding tiles is easy and that you welcome their input. Project an online form that you have created and linked on your library website. Ask the group to list a few favorite subject-related websites, apps, and Web 2.0 instructional tools for teachers. Before you wrap up the meeting, make sure that these forms are submitted to you.

1 To explore more webmixes created by the author, go to <http://schs.humbleisd.libguides.com/content.php?pid=291788&sid=2397056>.

Create the remaining course-related webmixes, remembering to add your related library databases, e-book collections, etc. The collaborative element is already in place and will gain momentum as the year goes on.

The more proficient you become with the Symbaloo tool, the faster you will be able to work. As you create additional webmixes for the remaining courses, you will find that the research you completed while creating the first Symbaloo will pay off. Copy your first webmix, rename it, and add or delete tiles in support of the new subject area you are working with. You most likely came across tiles that match up nicely with other courses, especially your research databases and teacher productivity tools. (Because you are so organized, as you ran across websites relevant to departments other than the one you're working on at the moment, you've bookmarked the sites for future use.)

Check your library databases for recommended and related websites, borrow content-area textbooks, consult AASL's lists of best websites and apps for teaching and learning, check out library blogs and websites for ideas, and remember to keep up with library literature. This might seem like a lot of work, but it is an effective way to show (not just talk about) the power of collaboration. Most of all, classroom teachers will begin to view you not only as an important resource but also as a valued instructional partner.

### Ready. Set. Go. The First Department Meeting

At your first department meeting, you will find that most teachers are excited about seeing the Symbaloo webmix that was created for the



Figure 5. Example of Symbaloo webmix created by the author.

If your school is fortunate enough to be moving toward a one-to-one technology initiative in which each student is paired with a laptop computer or tablet, use this circumstance to your advantage. Get involved with the selection of apps, websites, teachers' tools, and, especially, subscription databases. This involvement will ensure that library resources are used beyond the physical walls of the school library.

### Follow Up

Explain that you would like to meet with each department chair's teachers at a future weekly or monthly department meeting. Project an online calendar, fill in each department's date choice, and send the calendar via e-mail for acceptance. Do not include September in the schedule, as you will be busy with freshmen orientation sessions and will need time to complete the project that is described below.

Share your plan to continue creating course-specific webmixes based on department chairs' suggestions, as well as on input from teachers. Charge the department leaders with the task of introducing the same form to their teachers at their first department meeting. Remind them that the results would come directly to you for inclusion in the course Symbaloo.

### Simplifying Your Plan of Action for Department Meetings

Divide your work into reasonable segments. Think in ones: one department at a time. In this case, it would be the department that chose the earliest date for meeting with you. Look on the bright side. You will have at least a month to get a start on creating Symbaloo while you complete freshman orientation sessions.

Continue referring to the department leaders' forms as well as the forms sent by their teachers.

course or courses they teach. They will feel affirmed when they see their favorite online resources highlighted and delighted to find new ones recommended by fellow teachers. You can also pat yourself on the back because you have successfully promoted your online databases, e-books, etc.

Use your display of the course-specific webmixes as the perfect lead-in to a discussion about research and pathfinders. Show off your library website, direct teachers to your calendar, the sign-up form used by teachers to schedule class visits to the library, and existing pathfinders that have been created for their courses. LibGuides is a great tool to use, but free tools are also available; these include LiveBinders, Weebly, or your district or personal website editor. These pathfinders should inspire your new (and old) teachers to collaborate with you as they plan research projects. Remember to tell them that "Have Librarians, Will Travel" to labs or classrooms to introduce the guides and to work with their students.

The pathfinders can lead into an overview of your subscription research databases. Invite teachers to use them in the classroom as well as for research projects. Take a minute to explain how to access information, making sure that you have sent each database company's tech support staff identical username and password requests. That way, students and staff have only one username and password to remember and are, therefore, more likely to use these valuable resources throughout the school, as well as remotely from home. Be sure to pass out signs displaying database usernames and passwords; send one to each teacher to post in the classroom. If you have the ability to



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create posters, design and print a super-sized username/password sign for each of your school's computer labs. Finally, include an overview of your online catalog. Show as many features as time allows, paying special attention to the records for e-books and references to related databases.

### **Reflect. Revise. Repeat.**

Once you've presented at one department meeting, reflect on what went well, what teachers' were most interested in, what didn't capture teachers' attention, and how you can apply what you learned at the first meeting as you prep for presentations at other departments. Consult the calendar and begin working on the Symbaloo webmix for the next department. At this point, you have become an expert at creating these visual portals and can work more quickly. Be prepared for an increase in pathfinder requests, scheduled time in the library, and collaborative teaching sessions in classrooms!

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### **Including Elective Courses**

In a high school, teachers of elective courses are sometimes overlooked because they don't necessarily teach state-tested material. However, they certainly have comprehensive benchmarks to achieve. These teachers are often some of the most talented and inspiring teachers on staff. Imagine creating Symbaloo webmixes highlighting the best art, music, auto tech, culinary arts, health, and medical resources. Include these instructional coaches in your back-to-school meetings and watch as your pathfinders start to reflect the amazing work of these teachers, many of whom are among students' favorites.

### **Ensuring Administrative Help with Library Initiatives**

As you become a valued leader in your school, your administrators will seek you out to speak at school-wide meetings. Ask for a fifteen-minute slot during one of the back-to-school staff meetings or one soon after the school year begins. Give a short introduction to the school library program, pointing out a teacher resource page or section on your library website. Be sure to include laminating or poster-printing services, so that you can establish yourself as a team player. (Yes, I know you are busy, but once you've trained a few student aides to print and laminate, they'll teach others, enjoy the process, and feel like insiders at the library.)

This opportunity to talk to assembled teachers will also give you a sneak preview of their curriculum. End with a five-minute library orientation slideshow using PowToon, an engaging free slideshow tool (one of AASL's picks for a best website for teaching and learning) that encourages the use of

animation elements. Although my PowToon slideshow was designed for freshmen orientation, I have found that adults also can enjoy and learn from this humorous introduction to the school library program. Your goal here is to present your library in a positive way, as an essential resource for teachers as well as students.

### **Reaching Teachers**

You will feel good that you have informed all staff members of your desire to help them be successful by integrating technology into their teaching. The level of success will be determined by the number of teachers who decide to include you as a teaching partner. All of this outreach and fostering of partnerships takes time and energy and will not be accomplished overnight. However, the payoff is worth the time and effort. Improved student learning and engagement will be outcomes. Teachers can find more and better resources more easily. The library program will gain advocates. You've created a win-win-win situation, and next year you can build on this year's successes!

### **Lessons Learned and Pointers for Successful Collaboration and Integration of Technology**

My thirty-five years of school library experience at various grade levels has resulted in the following top-ten list:

- 1) Show rather than talk about how to integrate technology. Use content-specific examples. Explain what expertise the teacher shared, as well as the part you played.

- 2) In the beginning, plan to do the lion's share of the work while prepping for collaborative lessons. As time goes on, teachers will feel more comfortable with the collaborative process and will be more comfortable with stepping up their level of involvement.
- 3) Remember that "new" teachers on your staff are not always teachers new to the profession. Many experienced teachers come to you with varied library experiences, not always good. Be patient and positive with them. Go the extra mile to help them, especially with library services such as laminating or designing and printing posters. You will gain knowledge of their curriculum, as well as their trust.
- 4) Don't always expect teachers to come to you in the library. Travel to their classrooms or school computer labs. Make yourself accessible.
- 5) Study benchmarks and course content. Remember that we are not expected to be a content expert in every area but should know how to locate state- and district-required benchmarks.
- 6) Be on the lookout for new technology tools so that you can continually present new ideas at school department meetings—even district-level meetings. Offer to present with district subject coordinators so that technology and library resources will be included. Gear your presentations to specific content areas.
- 7) Get to know your students! They are a great source of information about what is going on in the classroom. For example, if a

student asks for books on social issues topics, e-mail the relevant teacher with a link to the *Opposing Viewpoints* website. Offer to come to the teacher's classroom to give students an overview.

- 8) Don't assume that all teachers understand the value of subscription databases or that students understand the importance of evaluating websites.
- 9) Make the library the printing capital of your school. This service is not only a source of revenue for the library, but it can provide you with an ongoing bird's eye view of the curriculum. Our students' economic situations vary widely; we try to keep printing costs low for students. Each student can print five black and white pages per day for free; additional pages are 10 cents. Color printouts are always 50

cents each. This money is placed in the library activity fund and is used to help pay for replacement cartridges.

- 10) Recognize teachers who use the library: shout-outs at faculty meetings, pictures in newsletters, fun awards given for whatever you can think of: most check-outs, most library time, most-creative projects, etc.

Rest assured that your efforts will not go unnoticed and will continue to gain momentum. Periodically inviting your administrators and members of the community in to see the library in action might even result in some positive outcomes. Take a look at the SCHS Library Website at [www.humbleisd.net/Page/26005](http://www.humbleisd.net/Page/26005), book blog (linked to the website), and Twitter handle (@SCHSLibraryNews) for more ideas; notice that the library staff has increased to two full-time librarians!



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**Recommended Reading:**

American Association of School Librarians. 2015. "Best Apps for Teaching and Learning." <[www.ala.org/aasl/standards-guidelines/best-apps](http://www.ala.org/aasl/standards-guidelines/best-apps)> (accessed May 1, 2015).

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