

The New Library

As the school started it was clear that the SMHS Library had changed—and was changing still. For example, a lot of the books were gone and a big flat-screen TV appeared on the wall. What is up with the library? We interviewed new librarian Mr. Palin, hoping to get some answers.

What happened to the old library? Didn't you like it?

In short, no, I didn't like it. Based on my observations it seemed more like a warehouse of books, rather than a complete library media center. A library should contain a wide variety of reading materials, but it should also be much more. In my opinion, a library should be a vibrant and well organized information center. Among other things, it should have various points of information access, like streaming news, a sizable magazine rack, multiple daily newspapers, and an extensive and navigable web site. Further, a library media center needs to be inviting and spacious enough to be comfortable. It needs to promote student work, reading, and research. By changing the floor design, I was able to divide the room into areas with individual purposes. Near the copier, you find office supplies. Near the windows you find reading chairs and a newspaper table. There's now a reference section. I'll stop with the examples; I think you get it. Basically the goal was to create a space that could accommodate classes, individual student work, recreational reading, and information gathering.

Are there fewer books now than before?

Yes, there are. To be more precise, there are about 2,500 fewer books. Last June there were approximately 13,000 books and now there are about 10,500.

Were the books removed simply to free up space?

No. The extra space is a huge advantage to the book removal, but that was not the primary reason for weeding the collection. Basically all library book collections need to be regularly weeded so that the collection remains balanced, attractive, and useful. What I mean by this is that books which no longer serve the information needs of the school should be removed to make space for books that will meet those needs. If, for example, a career book on nursing or computers was published in 1990, then it really has no business on the shelves. Because the info would be dated and inaccurate, it would be useless for research. All researchers need to avoid lies when gathering their info. The goal is truth, not almost. That's why we weed. People probably don't want to hear this, but using standard weeding criteria, many more books could have been heaved. I tried to strike a balance between maintaining coverage of a subject and keeping it real.

You're ordering new books, right?

Yes, of course. After weeding a collection, the next part of the collection development process is to determine what's needed. In addition to physically examining most of the books, I've used several catalog analyses to determine what the library needs. We're currently looking to add books in several areas, such as medical science and literature. Also, the more I work with the collection and see what teachers are assigning, the more I see what's needed. Regarding fiction books, we simply buy new award-winning fiction, as well as best sellers appropriate for middle and high school students.

A lot of kids say that the gate at the door is a metal detector. What is it?

The gate is part of a book security system designed to prevent books from leaving the library without first being checked out. When Books aren't properly checked out, the online book catalog always lists these books as available. This leads to immense frustration when you're doing research. You know, you think you've found a perfect book, and the online catalog says that it's in, but it's not actually on the

shelf when you go looking for it. It's a huge bummer and discourages good school work. Another issue is that books which aren't properly checked out generally don't come back to the library. We're trying to solve these problems with the security gate. Most libraries use a security system of some kind.

When is all this going to be complete?

We're getting closer. Mrs. Ricketts has been working very hard processing the books so that they can be scanned with a barcode reader. This is the first step in going live with our new check-out system. Mrs. Ricketts and I also need to be trained on a new library management system, which will allow us to eliminate the check-out signature cards. This really should have been done years ago. What you read should be your business and should not be advertised inside the book cover. Anyway, we're hoping to have everything in place by spring. There is one thing that will be ready in December or January, though: a new online public access catalog, or OPAC, will be searchable from the library website. It'll be a huge improvement over the existing catalog. It'll look and work like amazon, a little. The last thing we'll be doing this year is an inventory of all the books. That'll be done in June, I imagine. This will help us match the catalog with the shelves.

What else is new in the library? Is there anything you haven't mentioned?

Yeah, there's a bunch of other stuff. You really don't want a list though, do you? I'd say the sign-up system is worth mentioning, since it caused a lot of consternation for a while. Why do we use it? It's actually pretty simple. We try to accommodate classes and study hall students at the same time, but we can't have unlimited sign-ups because the place would get too crowded and unproductive. We therefore do sign-ups on a first-come-first-serve basis. If a class of fifteen were scheduled for research in the library, then we'd limit the number of study hall students to ten or fifteen. I should mention that seniors in good standing, meaning they aren't on the restricted list, have open access all day long.

You came from Newfound, right?

Yes, the same place where [Mr.] Coverdale and [Mr.] Pruett taught. I taught social studies there for five years before becoming library media specialist. I did a lot of tech work there, too. Before that I taught in Florida. That's where I got my library degree—at FSU.

What do you think of SMHS?

I like it. It's the smallest school I've worked in and that has its advantages, such as knowing everyone's name. In case you're wondering, no, I don't know everyone's name. The expectations are pretty high here, too, which I like. Kids seem to take achievement fairly seriously. That's good to see. I have three kids in the elementary school and I look forward to them having a quality high school experience.

Is there anything else you'd like to say about the school or the library?

Yeah, I'd like to tell people to get themselves to the library and get their work done. It's a great place to collaborate on projects and do homework and computer work. If we had a mantra, it'd be something like: Be productive. Visit the library. Oh yeah, one more thing. If you have a suggestion that could improve our service, let us know. We might not be able to do it, but we'll give it some thought. iPods in the library have been brought up by one student. Another has asked about a few lawn chairs outside the library for sunny, warm days. I think it's a great idea. I'm not yet sure if it's going to happen, but we're thinking and talking about it. Eventually, if I can figure it out, I might build into Moodle a suggestion form for the library, which I'd tie to the library web site. This would be a place where you'd be able to recommend a book, a magazine, or whatever. Until that happens, the best thing to do would be to simply speak up. The library's here to serve the school. If you think we can serve it better, then let us know.