

STRONG LIBRARIES



MOORESVILLE GRADED SCHOOL DISTRICT
MOORESVILLE | NORTH CAROLINA

Just 20 miles outside of Charlotte, North Carolina, Mooreville Graded School District (MGSD) in North Carolina—a district of seven schools and 6,000 students—stands as a heralded example of what it looks like to educate students in a culture and with the technology they'll rely upon in college, career, and life.

In all the publicity and attention that's been deservedly heaped upon Mooreville in recent years, most of the attention has been aimed at the computers and technology. However, one aspect of their Cinderella story many have not read about was the role libraries played in this highly publicized transition.

“The value of a school librarian lies in his or her ability to both select and direct students to the most relevant and reputable informational resources, and to also maximize classroom learning by providing instructional support to teachers. Here at Mooreville, not only do school librarians assist in the development of digital-literate students, but they also help teachers achieve their curriculum goals.”

KRISTI KALLIO,
Media Specialist



“In the beginning, I knew we had a lot to learn,” said Edwards. “But even then, I understood the important connection between the library, the classroom, the administration, and IT, and how that connection would keep evolving. We focused on what today’s kids are doing, and we recognized how libraries have to keep up with kids, or libraries fall behind. Information is not just words—it’s video, it’s music, it’s social media—so our libraries must stay a step ahead.”

IN THE BEGINNING: GETTING IT ALL STARTED

Back in 2007, Edwards and his team envisioned what the future looked like for MGSD: a 1:1 environment in which every

student from fourth grade on, along with every teacher, received a MacBook. “At that time, we said to ourselves, ‘if we don’t bring along our librarians and media specialists in this digital transition, then we are leaving behind one of the most important aspects of education delivery.’ ”

Empowered with that commitment, Edwards and his team began to ‘elevate the level of involvement of our libraries and librarians.’ Other changes were made as well, including changing the name of libraries to ‘media centers’ and the title of librarian to ‘media specialists.’ Additionally, media specialists were increasingly brought to the table for decision making and curriculum matters.

“These are professionals who are connecting children with knowledge, connecting students with hope for their future,” said Edwards. “They had to be part of the process.”

A CHANGE OF CULTURE, NOT JUST EQUIPMENT

While MGSD managed the major undertaking of distributing and maintaining 5,000 laptops with the help of Follett Destiny® Asset Manager™, Edwards made it clear to parents, teachers, administrators, and students that the digital conversion wasn’t just about technology. It was about all areas of the school, including the library, working together to prepare all of the district’s students for a successful and bright future.

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“The work librarians are doing is building information access, to students, to schools, to communities, and I believe this is vital to our future. And through school libraries and librarians, I think we can have a positive impact on the future.”

DR. MARK EDWARDS
Superintendent, Mooresville Graded School District



Before Edwards arrived in 2007, MGSD's media coordinators were very much their own entity in the district and the school, standing alone as a separate 'silo' of information dispensing. "In many cases the libraries were the technical support in the schools at that time," said Scott Smith, chief technology officer. "As part of our digital conversion, they were brought in to the fold to help develop and deliver PD as well as be part of the overall instructional practice. During our conversion, technical duties were removed from their responsibility and a "teammate" – an Instructional Technology Facilitator (ITF) – was hired. Both of these positions worked in tandem to help teachers and schools with the digital transition. Technical responsibilities became someone else's responsibility. Back then, the media program was digital, but it was very limited. "

Smith and his team now meet monthly with the media centers

and the ITFs to make sure everyone is on the same page and headed in the same direction. "Today, the media specialists play a vital role in digital citizenship, online curriculum resources, traditional resources, and meeting with teacher planning teams," said Smith. "Collaboration is KEY to how we now do business, and we are in the business of educating children. The media coordinators, instructional technology facilitators, and administrators all collaborate and play a vital role in making sure every child can succeed."

As Edwards pointed out, most people think the biggest change during the conversion was the addition of laptops. He's quick to correct that assumption, however. "Ninety percent of our visitors come here talking about hardware and leave talking about culture. This was very much about engendering a culture of caring," says Edwards. "We implemented the digital conversion to increase

student achievement and close gaps between different groups of students, and each media center is an integral part of that."

THE MEDIA CENTERS TODAY

In the libraries on each of the seven campuses, students now frequently work in groups, and they use dozens of interactive learning platforms in lieu of textbooks. Instead of quiet tables with children reading; the media centers have learning stations, whiteboards, green screens; and tech station items are available for checkout. "The media center is a place where students want to be," said Allison Long, Media Specialist. "We have plenty of learning spaces for students to collaborate in groups and we can accommodate whole class settings if needed. Every subject area is using the facility throughout the year, and I'm so excited about that."





Whereas the media center used to be a place for books that included a computer lab, it's now a research hub where Long and her colleagues can lead students through the research process using online sources and proper citations. It's also the heart of where they teach digital citizenship school-wide. Complete with digital resources (ebooks from Titlewave® and online reference databases) that support classroom curriculum, the media centers offer students just about anything they might need for 21st-century learning.

"Since the conversion, students can take online classes that aren't offered in the classroom," said Kristi Kallio, Media Specialist. "They come here to work and access the materials they need. At any given time, there are teachers here to check out Smart Boards, document cameras, and video cameras. Students also utilize this tech equipment in the

Media Center when collaborating on group projects or presenting information to their peers." Kallio also mentioned that since the onset of MGSD's digital conversion, the media coordinators have provided countless hours of assistance to teachers as they adjusted to the 1:1 laptop initiative. In addition, they were instrumental in the building and facilitation of the school's vibrant print and digital research collection.

Always keeping up with kids is also a priority, as Edwards noted earlier. "We listen to our students," said Long, "and find out what their needs and wants are for the media center."

The district sees media center staff as change agents and digital experts upon whom teachers rely to collaborate on all matters that impact student learning. Being valued and participating fully in every child's education adds to the

job satisfaction of Mooresville's library staff.

"It is hard to put into words how much I love what I do every day," said Long. "And until I speak with other media specialists around the country, I forget how great working in MGSD is for me. From the beginning of our 1:1 digital conversion, I was empowered as a leader, not just in my school but in our district. Even today as we continue to evolve and take the next step toward the future, media specialists have been empowered again in the second-tier leadership at our schools to help 'refresh' our teachers across the line. It's a privilege to work in a district that values my position, with teachers who value me as a resource and allow me to collaborate inside their classrooms every day, and students who still love to come to the media center because it is a great learning space with people who care about their success."



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ENTER PROJECT CONNECT:

With his long-time trust and belief in the necessity of the library for a successful school, Edwards was eager to become part of Project Connect – a national initiative and a panel of industry thought leaders from the PreK-12, professional association, and higher education space working to link school libraries to 21st-century student learning.

“My involvement in Project Connect gives me a chance to share the success we’ve enjoyed, which is due in part to the fact that we’ve made libraries and librarians central to everything we do,” said Edwards. “It’s also a commitment to the future of learning for all kids, not just those here at MGSD.”

Sponsored by Follett, and the brainchild of Todd Litzsinger, chairman of Follett Corporation, Project Connect’s roots began as a library advocacy effort to improve student outcomes by ensuring the role of the librarian remains

relevant; empowering librarians to have a more influential voice; and enhancing the role of the librarian to impact curriculum decisions and develop digital content.

STUDENTS ARE THE WINNERS

As a result of MGSD’s conversion, student achievement continues to improve at every school, every year. The graduation rate for African-American students was 95% in 2013, up from 67% six years earlier. The overall graduation rate is the third highest in the state, and 89% of graduates are attending college, compared with 74% in 2007. Absentee rates have plunged, and the district is seeing far fewer disciplinary problems.

“It’s a collaborative effort,” said Edwards. “We’re so proud of our great results, but we know it’s a constant work in progress, and always will be. But one thing is clear: It could not have been a reality without the libraries and media specialists at the table. No way.”

