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School Library Media Specialist (SLMS) Roles and Responsibilities October 2019

Should every school have a library?

Yes. Our collective bargaining agreement and New York State regulations require every school have a functioning, well-stocked, technologically up-to-date library. There must be open access periods for students to visit the library, select books and materials, access technology or conduct research for assignments under the guidance of a SLMS.

Who should be in charge of the library?

In secondary schools, our collective bargaining agreement requires there be a certified SLMS in the library. Although we continue to advocate for an SLMS in every school, in elementary schools, a licensed teacher, subject to a posting, can also serve as the librarian. In either case, the school librarian is a pedagogue, covered by the UFT contract similar to all other teachers in the school in terms of salary, assignments and working conditions. Principals must include this position in their budget.

What are some responsibilities for librarians related to the school library?

The role of a school librarian is very complex and multifaceted. Some responsibilities directly related to the library include but are not limited to:

- Aligning the library collections with the needs of the school and the student population;
- Ensuring the technology is sufficient to serve the school;
- Organizing the physical space so that it can be used for a variety of uses;
- Meeting with colleagues at professional development opportunities and conferences to expand knowledge and create a strong professional learning network;
- Setting up schedules to combine open access, special events and instructional use;
- Maintaining records of library use and expenditures;
- Developing collaborations with local public libraries and other educational institutions.

Some responsibilities as a member of the school community might include:

- Collaborating with teachers and other educators to plan and implement instruction;
- Providing teachers with materials related to what they are teaching;
- Developing and implementing reading and research strategies for students;
- Providing professional learning opportunities for teachers on how to use the library to support classroom instruction
- Participating in school, department and grade level professional learning.



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Can librarians teach?

The contract specifies in elementary schools the program shall include twenty 45 minute teaching periods per week. The SLMS has the same number of preps and professional activities as other teachers. All other periods are for activities related to the library program. The SLMS should not be given coverages, unless consistent with the contract, nor should open-access library periods be canceled so that the SLMS can cover the program of an absent teacher. The classes shall be related to information literacy, namely the Empire State Information Fluency Continuum (ESIFC). The ESIFC was developed by the New York City School Library System and endorsed by the School Library Systems Association of New York.

What are some appropriate instructional topics and units for librarians?

The overall theme should be how to use the school library as a tool to support classroom instruction, foster facility with technology, instill a love of reading, and teach students about resources that a library has to offer and how to use them. When planning instruction librarians must have opportunities to meet with colleagues and collaboratively decide what they and the students need. In that way, they can design and deliver appropriate instruction.

Some collaboratively developed topics can include research projects linked to content area instruction, how to gather information, the use, and organization of the library and strategies to develop critical thinking skills and support the school's literacy programs.

The school leadership team should discuss what they feel the instructional focus of the school librarian should be, based on the students' needs, and incorporate this into the school's comprehensive education plan (CEP). If not a member of the school leadership team the SLMS should have the opportunity to offer suggestions and insights into what his or her instructional focus should be. The SLMS should have an opportunity in the spring to discuss this with the school administration and receive all materials and resources necessary to deliver instruction.

The SLMS should talk to the chapter leader to resolve concerns over professional issues such as curriculum, program offerings and scheduling that might be inappropriate.

What are the class size limits for teaching periods for librarians?

They are the same as for all other teachers in the school. (In kindergarten, 25 students; grades 1-6 32 students; in middle schools, 33 students in non-Title I schools; 30 in Title I schools; and 34 students in high schools.)

If class size exceeds these contractual limits librarians should bring this information to the chapter leader for resolution.



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What are some safety considerations for use of the library during open access periods?

Similar to classrooms, offices, and special facilities such as gymnasiums, school libraries are subject to fire and safety code regulations regarding the number of occupants.

Directional signage that shows exit routes in the case of an emergency should be visible and school safety plans should include procedures for students and staff who are in the school library during an emergency. There also should be adequate adult supervision to ensure student safety.

If a SLMS feels there is an unsafe condition in the library they should bring this to the attention of the chapter leader and school administration immediately.

What about campus schools?

Libraries in campus schools are often shared. However, according to our collective bargaining agreement, a campus is considered one school. Our agreement says the principals, the SLMS and the chapter leaders of the campus schools should create a plan, consistent with our collective bargaining agreement that includes a schedule for library use by the various campus schools as well as any additional staffing needs.

In addition "the SLMS will be observed and rated only by the principal of the school of which the SLMS is on the table of organization."

How should school librarians be evaluated?

The principal and SLMS should discuss the parameters for evaluation at an initial planning conference in the fall. Many of the broad areas in the Danielson rubric for teachers-- planning and preparation, classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities--should be modified and adapted to showcase special roles and responsibilities of the SLMS. (Currently, the New York City Department of Education does not use the separate Danielson framework for the SLMS as a tool for evaluation but it can be used as an unofficial guide.)

School library media specialists should present their goals for the library program, discuss how they plan to integrate the library program with the overall school program and what supports and resources they will need to do so. They should discuss how they will create an environment in the school library conducive to learning and how they plan to collaborate with teachers in the design of instructional units, especially those that align with the school's instructional program. Particular emphasis should be on how they will assist their colleagues and students in the use of the library's technology and other resources as a tool to support teaching and learning. The SLMS should also discuss responsibilities related to ordering, preparing and submitting budgets and professional learning opportunities.



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How can classroom teachers assist and support the work of the SLMS

Classroom teachers should have adequate time to co-plan with the SLMS on how to integrate library resources with what they are teaching. This includes print and non-print materials, connecting classroom resources with those in the school library and sharing content area instructional units and curriculum with the SLMS as well as websites they have found useful.

Classroom teachers should set aside sufficient lead time to plan with the SLMS to provide opportunities for students to use the library for class-related research as well as independent reading and the students' individual interests. Many teachers share student work with the SLMS for display in the library. Classroom teachers can also collaborate with the SLMS in planning professional learning opportunities and scheduling special events.

How can chapter leaders involve the school library/media specialist in the chapter?

Chapter leaders should welcome the SLMS into all activities of the chapter including meetings and social functions. The SLMS can be an important voice on school leadership and professional development teams as well as the consultation committee. Chapter leaders should share all relevant information from the union with the SLMS and ascertain what issues and concerns are of particular importance to the SLMS. Chapter leaders can also actively respond to inquiries or concerns that the SLMS might have by discussing them with the principal or district representative, especially those that can affect the entire school such as availability of open access or inappropriate teaching assignments. In this way, chapter leaders can make the SLMS a valued member of the chapter and the school community and show the value of a collective, organizing-based approach to problem-solving and school solidarity.