

# The Executive Briefing

## A Management Tool for Improving Communication between School Library Media Specialists and Their Principals

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Knowledge Quest

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Research into principals' perceptions of the roles and responsibilities of school library media specialists (SLMSs) and conversely SLMSs' perceptions of the roles and responsibilities of their school principals together reveal that a lack of communication is at the root of most managerial conflicts and misunderstandings involving the school library media center.<sup>1</sup> The executive briefing is a management tool that can be used by SLMSs to open up effective channels of communication with their school principals. The timing of the executive briefing is most effective at the beginning of the school year or a new semester, as it gives the school principal a concise perspective on what the SLMS hopes to accomplish during a specified period.

### **The Problem**

Research reveals that secondary school principals are often unaware of the fact that SLMSs manage, assess, and evaluate their school library media programs by guidelines promulgated in the second edition of *Information Power*.<sup>2</sup> Principals as a group are most familiar with the guidelines promulgated by the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) and the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP). Efforts to coordinate, cooperate, and communicate with NAESP and NASSP with regard to standards and guidelines for school libraries should be encouraged.<sup>3</sup>

*Information Power* guidelines state unequivocally that the SLMS has a threefold role: information specialist, teacher, and

instructional consultant. *Information Power* discusses the role of the school principal as an advocate for the school library media center. A central theme that runs throughout *Information Power* is the need for the SLMS to be the initiator, the leader in establishing effective communication about the positive aspects of the school library media program in the lives of students, not only between the school principal and the school librarian, but also among the site-based school management team.<sup>4</sup>

### **A Solution**

An obvious solution to lack of communication is to establish a rapport between the school principal and SLMS in which effective sharing of information for the improvement of the school library can take place. An executive briefing, a managerial term for a comprehensive planning memorandum, should be the best first step toward opening up channels of communication between SLMSs and their principals. Following up with regularly scheduled one-on-one meetings will establish a rapport between librarians and principals that the research literature reveals is often lacking.

The executive briefing includes up-to-date, specific, jargon-free information on the five functions of the school library manager: planning, organizing, staffing, directing, and controlling.<sup>5</sup> The executive briefing can be used effectively by SLMSs at the beginning of each school year to open up effective communication with their administrators and provide the basis for continuing dialogue throughout the year.

The annual report at the end of the school year will become a record of what has been accomplished with the help of the principal, while setting the stage for the following year's briefing goals.

## The Executive Briefing

The SLMS can use the executive briefing to share information that is vital to the effective and efficient functioning not only of the school library media center, but also the school itself. Research reveals that school principals have not been exposed to management issues involving school library media centers in their graduate preparation for building-level educational administration, and that they would welcome the opportunity to talk with SLMSs in their schools to get inside knowledge about the needs of the school library media center.<sup>6</sup> By using the executive briefing the SLMS can open up communication channels that formerly would have been nonexistent.

A suggested arrangement of the executive briefing is as follows:

- introduction
- planning
- organizing
- staffing
- directing
- controlling
- conclusion and request for follow-up meetings

Purchase a copy of *Information Power* for the school principal and include it with the executive briefing so that both the SLMS and the school principal have access to the same information. *Information Power* is replete with examples for school principals supporting the correlation between an effective school library media program and the improvement of student achievement.

### Introduction

The SLMS should introduce himself or herself to the principal in terms of educational background, degrees held, competencies acquired, and years of teaching experience. While this section is crucial if the school principal or the SLMS is new to the school, updating

professional development continues to remind your administrator that you are growing and learning.

The SLMS should articulate clearly what will be covered in the executive briefing and be forthright that its primary purpose is to open up a channel of communication between the SLMS and his or her principal-supervisor. This is the perfect forum for SLMSs to share their philosophies of learning and service and to inform the principal about the scope of library services and the communities of interest that the school library media center serves.

### Planning

SLMSs need to plan for effective, efficient library service to meet the needs not only of students and teachers, but school principals, parents, and advocates for the school library media center from the community at large. The SLMS should make the library's planning goals integral to the school's vision (long-range) and mission (day-to-day) statements, indeed placing it at the very heart of the learning process.

Principals need to know the goals of the library. They need to know the measurable objectives (strategies) for meeting these goals and activities or individual programs that the library will engage in for the benefit of students, teachers, the school as a whole, and ultimately the community served by the school. Principals with this information are more apt to include the library in their plans for improvement of their schools.

If there are goals and objectives that cut across school boundaries, principals need to know this. They need to know about school district library initiatives, state library initiatives, and national library initiatives, and how their school libraries would benefit from involvement.<sup>7</sup>

SLMSs should serve on school-based management teams and network with colleagues across the district, state, and nation to develop support for a shared vision of good library service. The SLMS must be at the table to shape the decisions that affect the future of school libraries.<sup>8</sup>

### Organizing

The principal should be informed of how the library is organized. Emphasize that the school

library media center is organized according to standards promulgated in *Information Power*.<sup>9</sup>

## Five Functions of the Executive Briefing

The executive briefing includes up-to-date, specific, jargon-free information on the five functions of the manager as defined by Stueart and Moran in the sixth edition of their text, *Library and Information Center Management*: planning, organizing, staffing, directing, and controlling.

**Planning** is the process of moving an organization from where it is (mission) to where it wants to be (vision) in a given period of time by setting it on a predetermined course of action and committing its human and physical resources.

**Organizing** involves determining the specific activities necessary to accomplish the planned goals of the organization, grouping the activities logically, assigning these activities to specific positions and people, and providing the means for coordinating the efforts of individuals and groups.

**Staffing** encompasses all the tasks associated with obtaining and retaining the human resources of an organization, including recruitment, selection, training, evaluation, compensation, and development of employees.

**Directing** builds upon staffing in that it takes the human resources of an organization and guides and coordinates them toward achieving the organization's goals.

**Controlling** involves setting standards, establishing criteria, developing policies and budgets, conducting personnel performance evaluation, setting a time table for achieving objectives, monitoring outcomes on a periodic basis, providing feedback to ensure efficiency and effectiveness, and suggesting adjustments or alternatives for improvement.



## Correlation between *Information Power* Principles and Executive Briefing Functions

This correlation shows clearly that each of the ten principles of *Information Power* illustrates one or more of the five functions delineated in the Executive Briefing.

**Principle 1:** The library media program supports the mission, goals, objectives, and continuous improvement of the school. (Planning, Controlling)

**Principle 2:** In every school, a minimum of one full-time, certified/licensed library media specialist supported by qualified staff is fundamental to the implementation of an effective library media program at the building level. (Staffing, Directing)

**Principle 3:** An effective library media program requires a level of professional and support staffing that is based upon a school's instructional programs, services, facilities, size, and numbers of students and teachers. (Organizing, Staffing)

**Principle 4:** An effective library media program requires ongoing administrative support. (Planning, Controlling)

**Principle 5:** Comprehensive and collaborative long-range, strategic planning is essential to the effectiveness of the library media program. (Planning, Directing)

**Principle 6:** Ongoing assessment for improvement is essential to the vitality of an effective library media program. (Directing, Controlling)

**Principle 7:** Sufficient funding is fundamental to the success of the library media program. (Controlling)

**Principle 8:** Ongoing staff development—both to maintain professional knowledge and skills and to provide instruction in information literacy for teachers, administrators, and other members of the learning community—is an essential component of the library media program. (Staffing, Directing)

**Principle 9:** Clear communication of the mission, goals, functions, and impact of the library media program is necessary to the effectiveness of the program. (Planning, Controlling)

**Principle 10:** Effective management of human, financial, and physical resources undergirds a strong library media program. (Organizing, Staffing, Directing, Controlling)

What resources are collected and made accessible to students, teachers, and staff? How are the needs of the curriculum reflected in the arrangement of the school library media center? Is the school library designed to encourage collaboration between the SLMS and the teachers? Are there special collections of materials that will be beneficial to the principals and their staff, teachers, and curriculum advisory groups?

### Staffing

Let your principal know what the staffing needs for the school library are. Explain some specific tasks that assistants could perform for the enhancement of service. If there are insufficient funds for a full-time assistant, perhaps there are funds to employ assistants at those times when volunteers can't be counted on.

SLMSs need assistants in order to have the time to get involved as members of school

management teams to work toward improvements in personnel, curriculum, budget, staffing, and facilities. They must engage in professional development programs outside the school walls that build research and leadership skills necessary to educate colleagues, teachers, principals, school staffs, and community members.<sup>10</sup>

### Directing

Let your principal know about opportunities for professional development as a school librarian. The SLMS should take the initiative in the area of in-service training for teachers *and* principals.<sup>11</sup>

SLMSs and their principals should set up times to shadow each other during a typical day to develop a better understanding of their respective roles. It is particularly crucial for the school principal to see the SLMS in a collaborative role, working with teachers to incorporate library resources into the curriculum.<sup>12</sup>

Invite your principals to attend professional development programs that offer information that will help them become more articulate advocates for school library media programs. Ask to be invited to join your principal in meetings where issues involving school library media centers are discussed. It will soon be clear that the concerns of the SLMS and the school principal differ only in scope and not in substance.<sup>13</sup>

Take your principal on the road to visit other school library media center programs that you consider as models of excellence. For example, visit schools where flexible scheduling is used successfully to provide avenues for collaboration between teachers and SLMSs.<sup>14</sup>

### Controlling

SLMSs must be more vocal if they are to get fair shares for their school library media centers. Always justify budget requests. Make all budget requests in terms of how funds will be used to affect the education of students and the educational health of the school as a whole.<sup>15</sup>

Give examples of resources and services that you will be able to offer the students and teachers if budgeting requests are met. Let school principals know the consequences of cutting various budget lines. Provide budgeting options showing what can be accomplished with a minimal amount as compared with what can be expected if funding is increased.

The SLMS must be the official public relations professional for the school library media center by making it the center of what is exciting and inviting at your school. Never miss an opportunity to show how indispensable the school library is to making positive things happen at your school.<sup>16</sup>

Demonstrate your skills as a teacher and the role you play in the learning process. Show your principal that you are a team player and that the success of the students is your primary goal, too. You can be a change agent in a school that has identified the need for improvement but has not determined what to do next.

### Conclusion and Request for Follow-up Meetings

Once the executive briefing has been sent to the principal, the SLMS must follow up by schedul-

## Web Sites to Consult for More Information on Standards and Guidelines for School Library Media Centers

American Association of School Librarians, <[www.ala.org/aasl](http://www.ala.org/aasl)>

National Association of Secondary School Principals, <[www.nassp.org](http://www.nassp.org)>

National Association of Elementary School Principals, <[www.naesp.org](http://www.naesp.org)>

ing regular meetings with the principal and sending him or her periodic updates, particularly in the areas of planning and controlling. Some SLMSs have found it effective to meet with the principal during summer sessions or less hectic times, when principals are relaxed and open to learning.<sup>17</sup>

Throughout the school year, contact principals when there are positive aspects of the library program to show or tell them. Make certain that problems are not the only reason that principals visit the library. When there are problems, present them along with some possible, acceptable solutions. Your principal will appreciate your insights as the information professional.

Ask your principals for advice in situations in which there is no clear direction. School principals should be able to see your ability to collaborate and solve problems in their interactions with you. Consider ways of adjusting your own goals so that they can be incorporated into those of the principal and thus have more support.<sup>18</sup>

SLMSs are chiefly responsible for principals' perceptions of the school library media programs. The best way to change these perceptions is to work toward improving both communication and promotion efforts so that principals are fully aware of the excellence of your program and how it affects the entire school community. ●

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KQWeb Extra: See Professor Jones' example of an effective Executive Briefing at [www.ala.org/aasl/kqweb](http://www.ala.org/aasl/kqweb).

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