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Community Input Review

Introduction

School libraries benefit from community input by increasing support for the library program and assisting in the development and achievement of library goals. The Vaud International School library in Switzerland* will create a Library Advisory Committee (LAC) for the purpose of maximizing community investment in the school library. The LAC will give a voice to community members, which will "build an atmosphere of support and service that would ground the library program in collective ownership" (Pickett, 2013, p. 15). The distribution of decision-making responsibilities and goal setting will help to raise awareness and understanding of library strategic planning, which will in turn increase the usage and effectiveness of library resources and services (Teske, 2010, p. 272).

Members/stakeholders

The Vaud International School is a small, privately-owned institution with 500 students aged 2-18. The LAC will be headed by the school librarian and supervised by the school principal. School community representatives will include two parents, two students, and two teachers. The school owners are not open to the participation of public library professionals, local community members, or university faculty members.

An announcement soliciting LAC volunteers will be made at the annual autumn term coffee morning welcoming new and returning families. A corresponding email will be sent to parents. Student LAC representatives will be requested at the first senior school assembly in September. The school librarian and the principal will choose parent and student representatives from among the volunteers. The school librarian and the principal will invite two teachers to join

the LAC. Members of the LAC will be selected based on the goal of establishing a group with varying perspectives and ideas.

Types of input to be sought

The school librarian and administration will seek the input and perspective of the LAC on library goals and initiatives. Members of the LAC will assist in developing and reviewing a mission statement and strategic plan, creating short- and long-term objectives, and fundraising for library projects. Specific member roles, responsibilities, and length of terms will be agreed on and articulated by members. The librarian will "emphasize that LAC is an advisory and support committee, and final decision making remains the responsibility of the librarian and school administrators" (Harper & Schwelik, 2013, p. 26).

The LAC will begin by solving an immediate problem, such as fundraising for a graphic novel collection or for outdoor furniture for a patio reading area. This type of project, which benefits all students, will most likely be supported by students, parents, and staff. The required items, which will be agreed on by the LAC, will be viewed as "extras," rather than essentials that should be provided by the school and paid for by tuition fees. Results of LAC efforts (a new graphic novel collection or patio furniture) will be visible and appreciated. The school library and the LAC will gain momentum, confidence, and support after having succeeded in solving this initial problem.

Once the LAC has established its positive influence on the school community, long-term goals and a strategic plan will be developed. LAC activities may include conducting a needs assessment, collecting relevant data and preparing reports, creating collection development plans, and preparing budget requests (Harper & Schwelik, 2013, p. 27). The LAC will be responsible for helping the school librarian in communicating those goals and plans to the school

community, advocating for the school library, "and continuing inquiry to make the library relevant to and integrated in student life" (Pickett, 2013, p. 15).

Plan for ongoing input

Formal ongoing input from the LAC will be sought by regular meetings. Agendas with clear goals and expected outcomes will be established and approved by the school principal. At the first meeting, the LAC will determine the number of meetings per year, the dates and times of the meetings, and the method of communication. Minutes of all meetings will be taken and shared with members and school administration. (Harper & Schwelik, 2013, p. 26)

The LAC will agree on its policies and procedures to ensure clarity and efficiency. Issues to be addressed will include the handling of budgetary decisions and disputes between members, how to nominate new members, who gets a voice, and how to designate a leader (Teske, 2010, p. 273). LAC activities for gathering ongoing input may include conducting surveys, collecting relevant data, and preparing reports (Harper & Schwelik, 2013, p. 27).

Informal ongoing input will be sought through continuous engagement with as many students, families, and teachers as possible. Volunteering and taking part in a variety of school activities establishes the school librarian's commitment to student growth and learning, and helps to develop relationships with students, parents, and teachers (AASL, n.d., p. 29). Deskins (2011) stresses that "these points of contact translate into parents who become advocates for you and your library program" (p. 275). Input from infrequent library users will be sought through daily interactions with students.

Documentation and sharing of community input

The LAC will document its activities and share them with the school community. Meeting minutes and quarterly and annual progress reports will be shared with LAC members

and school administration. E-newsletters, with updates on resources, circulation statistics, events, programs, and successes, will be communicated to parents and staff regularly (AASL, n.d., p. 28). The school library website will include a blog to keep the school community abreast of library events and LAC activities and progress. The school librarian will attend meetings of the Parent Liaison Group, and share library news, events, plans, and projects with members. The LAC meeting schedule will be included on the school calendar, listings of school activities, and on the library website (Harper & Schwelik, 2013, p. 28).

Conclusion

The Library Advisory Committee for the Vaud International School in Switzerland will become a dynamic group that will positively influence student learning. The entire school community will benefit from ongoing input and perspectives of a range of stakeholders in library resources and services. Short- and long-term goals and objectives will be developed and achieved by an LAC dedicated to working together to solve problems, brainstorm solutions, and create the best learning environment for our students.

* The name of the school has been changed for privacy concerns.

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