

## Research into Practice. A School District's Biggest Bargain

Article

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When we meet someone new and the conversation inevitably rolls around to what we do for a living, we might say, "I'm a school librarian and I teach research and technology skills." If the person asks follow-up questions, we explain our jobs in terms of technology integration, team teaching, supporting research assignments, and helping kids separate the wheat from the chaff within the vast and ever expanding digital universe. Have you noticed what we don't do is talk about money? Perhaps we hesitate to put a financial value on ourselves because it makes us uncomfortable or it feels tacky. We did not get into this profession for the money, so why would we ever bring money into the advocacy conversation? As it turns out, money might be the very key to turning our whole world upside down.

Did you know that Salary.com keeps a list of the jobs within the job of being a parent along with associated salaries (<https://www.salary.com/2016-mothers-day-infographics>)? Driving your kids to and from school can be likened to the role of taxi driver; grocery shopping and preparing family meals to being a chef or short-order cook. Not only do these numbers give us a better understanding of the daily responsibilities parents take on, they also remind us that parenting is more complex than navigating playdates and adapting to nap schedules.

Arlen Kimmelman, past-president of the New Jersey Association of School Librarians and librarian at Clearview Regional High School in Mullica Hills, extended this thought process with an infographic that expertly outlines the multiple roles of school librarianship (<https://www.easel.ly/browserEasel/7437131>). This infographic has the potential to completely change your advocacy efforts.

First, examine the job titles. Kimmelman clustered our day-to-day responsibilities and came up with eight different jobs. She then consulted the *Occupational Outlook Handbook* of the Bureau of Labor Statistics to match these jobs with salaries. Job titles vary from district to district. What's important is that many librarians for example do indeed design and implement professional development opportunities for staff members. This means, in addition to their duties as a librarian, they're also taking on some or all of the responsibilities of an entirely separate job. Now multiply that by all eight jobs on Kimmelman's infographic and you begin to understand why she calls school librarians a district's biggest bargain. You may not dabble in all eight, but an overlap with even two or three of them means you are extremely valuable to your students, staff, and community.

Then, there are the salaries. All eight salaries combined equal \$581,870. Some might protest that the figures are irrelevant because they do not reflect salaries in their part of the country. Do not let that derail you. It's doubtful that Kimmelman or anyone else would argue that this should actually be our annual median salary. However, while we did not choose this career for large financial windfalls, we want—we need—school leaders to acknowledge the value we bring and the impact we have on teaching and learning for students and teachers. Every librarian, whether full-time in one building or stretched thinly throughout an entire district, takes on a myriad of duties, and our advocacy efforts are strengthened when stakeholders understand what our jobs entail.

Ann Ewbank examined how school librarians could use influence-building techniques to advocate for strong library programs. Through an in-depth study of the advocacy efforts of librarians in British Columbia, as well as a comparison of these efforts with studies in educational administration and leadership, Ewbank affirmed the importance of advocating outside of our professional silos. She found that even states where librarians do not have access to a union, they can harness the power of transformational leadership to "connect to the larger social agenda of providing a world-class education for all children...[allowing] school librarians to find common ground with educational institutions and positively influence policy considerations" (2015, p.16).

One of her recommendations was for librarians to establish and strengthen communication between themselves, building administration, and district leadership. Kimmelman's infographic enables us to foster these types of conversations by helping us advocate for certified school librarians on every campus in the numerical terms that district leaders and community members appreciate and understand.

Should we carry around this infographic and hand it out to everyone we encounter? Probably not. What we can do is take stock of the different roles we play. Start with something simple like tracking your daily tasks and activities for a couple months. Make a list of everything you work on throughout the day. Everything. Ignore the voice that tells you something is too insignificant to write down. Pretty soon you'll have a detailed account of exactly how you spend your time so that you are able to categorize your tasks into more general roles. You will have actual data about how much of your time is dedicated to students, staff, administrative tasks, and program management activities. You will be able to clearly demonstrate you are your school's *Biggest Bargain!*

### Work Cited

Ewbank, Ann Dutton. "Union-Active School Librarians and School Library Advocacy: A Modified Case Study of the British Columbia Teacher-Librarians' Association and the British Columbia Teachers Federation." *School Library Research* 18 (2015).

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