

September 2003

President's Message: SHOUT!

By Ann Perham

“The best defense is a good offense”..... that’s what I learned in field hockey. It’s been a few years since I have swung a stick, but I am reviving this advice and applying it to the school library world as we deal with the challenge of cuts and the shrinking education dollar. “The game is played on two sides of the field....don’t just guard the goal....get out there and push for what you want and show ‘em what you’re made of!” Perhaps that’s not an exact quote from Coach, but it’s the essence of what we need to do on the school library field in the game of Student Achievement vs. Economic Crisis. Library Teachers have always been the “silent partner” with classroom teachers, collaborating on lessons and celebrating student successes as they gain skills in information literacy. Gary Hartzell gave it a name – the “Invisible Librarian.” We know the research that proves the direct connection between student achievement and school libraries. Who ELSE knows it? Who ELSE knows what we do? Who ELSE knows that we are teachers, not glorified book checkers?



We need to SHOUT about what we do, and connect our programs to REAL results. We may not be able to stop cuts, but we can make administrators think twice about cutting a vital library program that represents lifelong skills across the curriculum for our learners. When the Pointer Sisters’ song comes on, the dancers “Shout” and raise their arms ... repeatedly ... please bear with me ... picture the dance floor at the last wedding you were at ... think about the excitement stretched across the dancers’ faces. SHOUT! That’s what I can see us doing....SHOUT about our programs and their connection to student achievement. Perhaps I should move the metaphor back to the playing field, and picture an excited crowd, SHOUTing for their favorite team ... the Media Mavens!

### **Media Task Force**

This past spring saw an assault on the school library world. I ran a “fast track” poll in April just before our bill was heard in testimony before the Education Committee. The situation was bleak as school library programs were being axed. In June, I updated the survey with new data from our members and the picture had darkened even more. The MSLMA Executive Board discussed the situation

and agreed that we had no choice but to meet this assault head on. The Media Task Force was commissioned to formulate a strategy for our organization and its members.

The Media Task Force met throughout the summer, and I am proud to say that we had 18 members who attended meetings. In my June President's Message, I called for volunteerism, and the following answered the call: Judi Paradis, Cheryl Caskie Chase, Rebecca Sharry, Arlena Bernstein, Claire Pagnotta, Ellen Mandell, Rita Fontinha, Melinda Webster Loof, Connie Schlotterbeck, Kathy Dubrovsky, Paula Byrne, Doris Smith, Mary Melaugh, Dorothy McQuillan, Kathy Lowe, Donna Guerin, and Barbara Andrews.

After identifying the problem and its many facets, we decided on a variety of actions:

- We will develop a PR Toolkit with shared resources: letters, brochures, programs and articles contributed by members. Sharing is what librarians do best.
- I will prepare Letters to the Editors and to school administrators that you may request be personalized and sent. I will have versions for systems with cuts, systems that have restored, and systems that have maintained quality programs.
- We will be writing articles for other professional organizations' publications.
- MSLMA will continue to lobby for legislation to improve school libraries.

The group agreed that we have a mandate to bring about change – so we decided to change our approach to the problem: NO MORE WHINING....SHOUT!

### **Positive and Proactive**

The Media Task Force has discussed many tactics, and has come up with a three-pronged campaign that would benefit any library program in any economic climate. Given the economic climate and the alarming list of cuts to school libraries, they make more sense than ever.

First of all, the Annual Conference on November 2 and 3 offers a terrific opportunity for professional growth and networking. Our conference lineup with Peggy Sharpe, Ross Todd, Carol Gordon, Kathy Schrock, Della Curtis and many others will offer you strategies for improving your program and your skills – you will leave with a “toolbox” ready to use in your library. Registration materials will be mailed soon and will be posted on our webpage. Check out the program <http://www.mslma.org/annualconference.org/index> BEST of all, there is a special “deal” for you to bring along teachers or administrators – those are the

folks who need to hear these speakers and attend these workshops...Sign them up! SHOUT!

Why don't teachers / parents / administrators / students take better advantage of what our school libraries have to offer? Why aren't more people defending the library? The second prong of our "SHOUT!" campaign will be in the spring. Diane Pardes ran a workshop in Newton this past spring centering on the theme of strengthening communications and connections with school communities; the library teachers of Newton believe that they made a difference in their connection to teachers, administrators, parents and students. Our Spring Communications Workshops will be held at least three different sites across the state, in cooperation with the Regional Library System, modeled after the Newton workshops. See the article, "Strengthening Connections with the School Library" in this issue of MFO. More details will be announced soon - watch the listserv and the webpage. SHOUT!

Our third prong, but actually our kickoff event of the school year, will be a series of workshops by Dr. David Loertscher, "Evidence-Based Practice: Project Achievement". Dr. Loertscher is an international authority in the field of school library practice, with a passion for advocacy and evidence-based practice. Some of you may remember that he spoke at our 2000 conference. In May, Dr. Loertscher designed and delivered a series of workshops in California, where they have experienced devastating cuts to school libraries. "Don't wait until it's too late to make the connection between the library program and achievement at your school," was the phrase from his flyer that rang true with me. Doris Smith and I contacted Dr. Loertscher and asked what he might propose for Massachusetts. "Do it NOW," was his immediate response....there is NO good time to have a special event, and we need to start at the start of the school year. I believe that it is safe to say that he is a "GO FOR IT" professional who leads by example.

Dr. Loertscher will present a series of workshops across Massachusetts. On Thursday, September 18th he will be in Westborough from 3:30 to 5:30 PM at the high school, followed by another workshop at Palmer High School from 7 to 9 PM. On Friday the 19th, 3:30 to 5:30 PM Dr Loertscher will travel to Duxbury High School; on Saturday the 20th, 10 to 12 AM he will present the final workshop in Tyngsboro at the BU Conference Center. Handouts will be provided to introduce library teachers to the collection of evidence in four topical areas: reading, information literacy, collaborative planning and technology. From a list of 17 critical and recommended measures of direct and indirect impact on student achievement, participants will select those that best apply to their situation. Our Massachusetts participants will be a part of "Project Achievement"

involving library media specialists from California, Texas and Michigan, with more to come. There will be a listserv for sharing and helping. At our own November Conference, we will re-gather participants as a "User Group" to discuss progress. The hope is that Dr. Loertscher will re-connect with us in April or May, when folks are preparing their presentation to their faculties, administrators and perhaps delivering a statewide message that combines the best of the group. More details are on the webpage – check it out for sites, directions and information.

MSLMA will also host an Advocacy Breakfast on Friday the 19th from 7:30 to 9 AM with Dr. Loertscher at the John Glenn Middle School in Bedford. In an informal setting, discuss the state of school libraries in Massachusetts with other professionals. Dr. Loertscher will also offer a short program on the subject of Advocacy.

WHEW!

I KNOW that:

- This is an extremely busy time of year
- Many of us are operating short-handed as the result of program cuts
- We all have meetings, classes and personal commitments.

I ALSO know that:

- If we sit back, we could be seeing more cuts to our programs..
- This is an investment in OUR programs, OUR profession, OUR students!
- MSLMA will continue to advocate for us, but we have to advocate for ourselves.

This is an incredible professional development opportunity. A self-proclaimed cheerleader for school libraries, perhaps Dr Loertscher will lead us in a special rendition of ... SHOUT!

### **Standards and Rubrics: Tools!**

Have you downloaded your copy of the 2003 Standards? This revision represents over two years' worth of work by our Standards Committee: Peg Hallisey, Sandy Kelly, Mary Weaver, Mary Saunders and Lorraine Sousa. What does a quality school library media program look like? Here is your resource, with connections to research, frameworks, NEASC and other standards. SHOUT!

The Rubrics document is a valuable resource for evaluating your program. Tied to Information Power, the Rubrics is a tool for establishing and maintaining a quality program. We would like you to evaluate your program and send the results to our executive Director, Doris Smith. Consider using the Rubrics as

Kathy Lowe does at Boston Arts Academy / Fenway High School in Boston. She asks faculty members to score her program, using the Rubrics. Ah-ha....they see what the goals are of a quality program and she gets valuable feedback. SHOUT!

### Ann's Crystal Ball

As we face this new school year, the future has some swirling gray clouds..... I see difficulties with state budgets, town politics..... there are school finances stretched thin..... I see schools with minimal library staff.... But, I also see hope through the clouds... energized library teachers.... no longer invisible.... pointing to the evidence that connects their programs to student achievement... teachers who collaborate with librarians as they co-teach units with embedded information literacy goals... parents who defend their school libraries because they understand the need for life-long information skills ... principals who safeguard their libraries from disproportionate budget axing because they believe that libraries are integral, not peripheral... kids who LOVE their libraries... as MSLMA continues to advocate .... and library teachers SHOUT!