A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE:
HOW WE GOT TO THIS POINT

According to the United States Department of Education, in 1959 there were 17,363 librarians in K-12 public schools. During the next five decades their ranks grew to 54,444 librarians. If you look at the increase in the number of librarians in that time period, it’s easy to assume the inherent value of the librarian in the K-12 public school arena. At that time, the primary role of the librarian was to select materials and preserve them within the school. In fact, their role was very similar to their counterparts in public libraries. That role continued unabated until the advent of the personal computer in the late 1980s and the explosion of the Internet in the 1990s. The school librarian evolved into the library media specialist, and their role as selector and protector began to change as well. The change was accelerated after the Global Financial Crisis of 2008. Many districts were confronted with shrinking revenues and rising costs resulting in unsustainable budgetary situations. The response by many was to initiate austerity measures with dramatic cuts to programs and school personnel. Library media specialists suffered the same fate as other non-tested area teachers (not English Language Arts or mathematics), and were laid off by the thousands. By 2009 the U.S. Department of Education reported the number of K-12 librarians had diminished to 52,541.

Unfortunately many districts reduced the number of certified librarians on staff and continued to make cuts well after 2009. If you look at California as an example, the State Department of Education reported the number of California school librarians had been reduced by 427 or 25% of their ranks since the 2009 numbers. The drastic measures employed by districts across the country forced school librarians to take on the uncomfortable role as library evangelist, educating parents and district administrators as to how their roles had evolved from content curator to technology integrationist and curriculum developer.

**INTRODUCTION: THE EVOLUTION OF THE LIBRARY–AND THE LIBRARIAN**

It’s not too far from the truth to say the digital transition started mainly in the library. As the card catalog became library automation programs like Follett Destiny®, librarians were at the forefront of tech integration. Databases like Destiny evolved, and it soon became apparent that these tools extended the reach of the library and could easily be integrated into the classroom.

Librarians also taught teachers how to integrate the Internet into their instructional practice. In their emerging role as technologists, library media specialists taught the mechanics of how to use these tools, how to integrate them into teaching and learning, and how to use them ethically. The continuing trend of the library media specialist as a technology integration specialist is illustrated by School Library Journal’s 2013 Technology Survey infographic.

With the use of the personal computer and later, the use of the Internet in the 1990s, the school librarian evolved into the library media specialist.

This infographic points out the obvious importance of the K-12 school library media specialists, and their overall impact on technology integration in schools across the country.

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CURRICULUM DEVELOPER:
CHALLENGES OF THE COMMON CORE

The move to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) further illustrates the importance of the library media specialist, and how ‘curriculum developer’ can be included in their job description. School districts across the country are engaged in a comprehensive rewriting of their curricula in English language arts, mathematics, social studies, science and the arts to meet the challenges of the Common Core and 21st century skills, and it only makes sense to leverage all the educational resources in the school's library to meet the new standards. The Partnership for 21st Century Skills outlines additional outcomes valued by school districts that include critical thinking, communication, collaboration, information, media and technology skills. For many districts, the move to implement the Common Core and 21st century skills has been a challenge. Some districts have positioned themselves to handle these new challenges well, because they have been able to weather the financial storms of the recent past and retain their library staff. Library media specialists are well suited to meet these challenges and are an asset for districts. The Aspen™ Instructional Management System (IMS), is the perfect solution to incorporate well-known and widely used library science applications and sorely needed curriculum development tools. Media specialists are already comfortable using tools such as Destiny Quest™, WebPath Express™ and One Search™ to connect resources used by educators in their units. Aspen IMS connects the Common Core to resources within well-articulated curriculum maps in an intuitive straightforward manner.

ASPEN IMS & LIBRARY MEDIA SPECIALISTS:
ONE DISTRICT’S STORY

Library media specialists have a long history in the West Warwick Public Schools as being strong educational leaders involved in district initiatives. All are active members of School Improvement Teams (SIT) and are at the forefront of school-wide and district-wide technology initiatives. Their multiple roles as curator, technology integrationist and curriculum developer are well recognized by district leaders and educators at the building level. Wakefield Hills Elementary School is a case in point: a PK-4 Title I school received a grant to build units of study that integrated technology into instruction and student performance. Staff members used Aspen™ IMS as the tool to create, organize and revise units of study aligned to the CCSS. This grant grew into additional opportunities and the school recently became a 1:1 Chromebook school. The library media specialist has been an integral member of the team since the beginning of this two-year process, and illustrates the changing role from archivist to technology/curriculum integration specialist. She has assisted teachers in the unit of study development process, and has assisted everyone with the Chromebook initiative.

The process of curriculum development in the district is simple and straightforward in that grade-level teachers work with district-level and building-level support personnel to develop units of study. Units are created during common planning time, professional development days or additional release days by grade-level teams. The illustration on the following page shows a kindergarten unit of study on weather and climate aligned with the Next Generation Science Standards (K-ESS3-2 and K-ESS2-1). The timeframe for the unit is displayed in the Gantt chart, the standards are clearly articulated in the unit of study, and the appropriate resources are displayed in the appropriate fields. Teachers can access and revise any of the resources tied to the unit of study.

For many districts, the move to implement the Common Core and 21st century skills has been a challenge, yet a phenomenal resource to help overcome the challenge is usually already on staff: the library media specialists. Aspen IMS assists staff as it connects the Common Core to resources within well-articulated curriculum maps in an intuitive straightforward manner.

The library media specialist is essential to finding and aligning standards-based resources to units of study. At West Warwick, our library media specialists and district support personnel assist teachers in getting the appropriately aligned resources to support the teacher’s work.

These grade-level teams work in Aspen™ IMS to create curriculum maps that are connected to courses at each grade level. Courses are connected to students, their schedules and ultimately their standards-based gradebook. This connection brings us closer to the educational promised land of linking curricula, standards, assessments and student performance in one comprehensive package.

The mantra in the district repeated during professional development opportunities is the following: “When teachers know the timeframe, the standards to be taught and have the resources to teach those standards, we can experience great success with our students.” The library media specialist is essential to finding and aligning standards-based resources to units of study. The essential questions, key concepts, instructional activities, formative and summative assessments are developed by grade-level teams. Our library media specialists and district support personnel assist teachers in getting the appropriately aligned resources to support the teachers’ work.

Our library media specialist works with our teachers to demonstrate how to use some of the built-in search tools within Aspen™. Library media specialists have been using Destiny®, WebPath™ Express and One Search™ for some time, and have a lot of familiarity and experience with the power of these tools. The graphic below displays the seamless integration of the powerful search tools well known by librarians, and further illustrates their importance in the curriculum development process.
INTEGRATED SEARCH CAN BE A POWERFUL CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT TOOL.

The K-12 library media specialist has been transforming their role from archivist to curriculum developer/technology integrationist for some time. Districts that have been able to weather the destructive economic turbulence of the recent past by retaining their library media specialists have afforded themselves an opportunity to support their educators and administrators during the challenging period of Common Core implementation. Districts that have been able to retain their library media specialists, and use tools such as Aspen IMS have hit the educational jackpot, and are well positioned for the future.