Teacher librarians need to be able to defend and advocate for their positions and the role of school libraries in education at all times. You never know when you will meet a school board member in the checkout lane of a grocery store or the PTA president at a soccer game.

That may be your opportunity to share a compelling talking point or an elevator speech about why students need strong school library programs with certified staff.

Most times we think about talking points as they relate to a politician and his or her campaign. Talking points are succinct statements designed to persuasively support an argument or a position. They can clearly, without educational or library jargon, communicate the benefits of school libraries and librarians to students, faculty, and other stakeholders. Ideally, talking points need to articulate the unique and essential contributions of school libraries and librarians—attributes that no other component of the school can deliver. They need to be short, cogent, and easily remembered, so they can be repeated at any opportunity.

Elevator speeches are similar, as they include relevant talking points but are usually two to three sentences. Elevator speeches are short, highly focused, prepared speeches used to persuade specific audiences or stakeholders. The name refers to the time it can be delivered—about the same time as an average elevator ride (usually 30 seconds to a minute; about 150 words). The speech is memorized and ready for those serendipitous moments when you have an opportunity to influence a potential school library advocate. Through constant use and repetition, it becomes your signature speech and you begin to own it.

An elevator speech usually consists of a lead sentence that is your position and two or three supporting points or short sentences—a hook to engage the interest of the stakeholder, some evidence or proof verifying your position, and a “bring-it-home” personalization related to the school or students. For more on creating elevator speeches, refer to the “Developing Talking Points and More: The Communications Pieces of the Advocacy Plan” (Kachel, 2013). To view an elevator speech, go to http://paschoollibraryproject.org/content.php?pid=289948&sidx=4415210&st=16147495 (Lance and Schwarz, 2012).

Two essentials in creating both talking points and elevator speeches are (1) knowing your audience and (2) focusing on students and student learning. Learning what the potential audience or stakeholder cares about is critical. Phrase the message to engage the stakeholder. For example, school administrators care about test scores and graduation rates. Parents want their children to be good readers and safe on the Internet. Work these viewpoints into your message. Ask yourself, “Does this position focus on students? Is it about student learning and their academic success?” If not, reword the talking point accordingly.

**STEPS TO CREATE TALKING POINTS**

**Step 1: Identify the “Ask” or Position**

Talking points are usually created to address a specific issue, such as improvement or maintenance of school library staffing, adding technology or digital resources, renovation of a library facility, increased library budget, or separate professional development release days for the librarian to attend trainings or workshops. Knowing what you ultimately want to happen is the first step. This is the “ask.”

**Step 2: Know the Audience**

Second, you need to craft your talking points to the audience. Will you be using the talking points with teachers, legislators,
Step 3: Be Concise and Compelling

Brevity without jargon is important when creating talking points because a concise and clear statement is often easily remembered, both for the speaker and the audience. Talking points help to keep the speaker on topic and focus the dialog. Think about how politicians stay on message. They seldom directly answer a question from a reporter. They have their memorized talking points and stick to them, often continually repeating the same message.

Step 4: Put Students First!

Be sure that the talking point is focused on what is best for students and how this position or “ask” will benefit students and improve their academic success.

Step 4: Follow Up

When a planned meeting occurs and talking points are used, it is a good practice to leave a one-page fact sheet with the stakeholder. This repeats and clarifies the talking points and may include references to supporting research. Always be prepared if the person you are talking to says, “I’d like to see the research on that” or “Do you have any facts to back that up?” A useful example is the “Highlights of the Research” handout prepared based on the 2012 Pennsylvania school library impact study report by Keith Curry Lance and Bill Schwarz, How Pennsylvania School Libraries Pay Off: Investments in Student Achievement and Academic Standards.

Developing talking points from research transforms sometimes complicated data and statistics into more conventional and memorable language. Recently, the Washington Library Media Association completed a statewide survey to gather data about school library programs and their impact on student achievement. This is an example of a study that examined inputs to library programs (number of staff, computers, books, library access, and the like) and outputs (test scores and graduation rates) while controlling for school size and students living in poverty. The report, titled Certified Teacher-Librarians, Library Quality and Student Achievement in Washington State Public Schools, can be found at https://wala.memberclicks.net/assets/WLMA/Advocacy/wslitreport_final%204_11_15final.pdf.

This important research adds to the growing base of the school library impact studies now conducted in more than twenty states and elsewhere (“School Library Impact Studies”). School librarians need to have a deep understanding of the research about school library programs and staffing and be able to communicate its findings in compelling and meaningful ways to nonlibrarians.

The Washington State study presents an opportunity for crafting talking points from its findings. With this goal in mind, the teachers and yet-to-be certified school librarians taking Collection and Program Management as part of a graduate school library endorsement program offered by Antioch University Seattle were assigned the task of reading the Washington report and developing compelling talking points for specific stakeholders in spring 2015. As their instructor, I modeled the task in a previously published article, “Using Data to Influence Stakeholders” (Kachel, 2013) that I wrote based on the 2012 Pennsylvania school library impact study.

The class read the full Washington State report and identified statements that would hol currently be used with the identified stakeholder. In order to do this, they had to think like the stakeholder and focus on what the stakeholder cared about or deemed important. They needed to rephrase the findings in language that the stakeholder would find appealing, understandable, and meaningful, while focusing on student achievement.

Here are the best talking points from the class, with the intended stakeholder for which the talking point was designed.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder</th>
<th>Quoted from the Washington Study</th>
<th>Talking Point</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Superintendent</td>
<td>“High schools with CTLs on staff had an average five-year graduation rate of 85 percent compared to 76 percent for high schools without CTLs” (p. 20).</td>
<td>Higher graduation rates and test scores are found in schools staffed with certified teacher librarians.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Board Members</td>
<td>“Schools with CTLs on staff have higher 5-year graduation rates and higher percentages of students passing standardized exams” (p. 34).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role</td>
<td>Text</td>
<td>Implication</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Curriculum Coordinator</strong></td>
<td>Compared to non-certified library staff, CTLs are far more likely to be directly involved in teaching curriculum designed around Common Core standards. CTL-staffed libraries are more likely to use up-to-date library curriculum developed in collaboration with general education teachers” (p. 15).</td>
<td>Certified teacher librarians collaborate with teachers to teach academic standards and carefully select up-to-date resources for teaching and learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teachers</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Curriculum Coordinator</strong></td>
<td>CTLs carry a heavy load of teaching responsibilities focused on information technology; skills that are necessary for success in higher education as well as virtually any profession in today’s world” (p. 15).</td>
<td>Certified teacher librarians coteach with teachers to integrate technology and information skills that students need to succeed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Technology Coordinator</strong></td>
<td>School libraries staffed by CTLs are far more likely to provide on-site and remote access to commercially available online catalogs and databases of published materials, allowing for library access outside of school hours” (p. 16).</td>
<td>Schools with certified teacher librarians facilitate the use of digital resources, making better use of our district’s technology.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School Board Members</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Principal**                 | 1. “High schools with CTLs on staff had an average five-year graduation rate of 85 percent compared to 76 percent for high schools without CTLs” (p. 20).  
2. “A school library can only benefit students insofar as it is available for student use. Study results indicate that libraries staffed by CTLs are more accessible are used more frequently than libraries without CTLs” (p. 15).  
3. “Consistently, reading and writing scores are better for students who have a full-time certified librarian than those who do not. Students who are economically disadvantaged, black, Hispanic, or have disabilities benefit proportionally more than general students. Students who are poor or otherwise disadvantaged, but who have full-time librarians, are at least twice as likely to have advanced writing scores [on the state standardized tests] as their counterparts without full-time librarians” (Lance and Schwarz, 2012, p. 15). | 1. One way to accomplish the goal of graduating as many students as possible is to hire certified teacher librarians for every school.  
2. Libraries with certified teacher librarians are used more than those without certified teacher librarians.  
3. Certified teacher librarians are unique because they reach and teach every student and significantly impact at-risk learners. |
| **Legislator**                | 1. “Funding for certified teacher-librarians is uneven among districts and should be a staffing-funding priority to improve student success, graduation rates, and information literacy instruction in Washington State” (p. 35).  
2. “Quality public school libraries as indicated by a paid CTL on staff are unequally distributed across the state. Furthermore, students who are least likely to have access to a quality library are disproportionately more likely to face poverty and other risk factors known to adversely impact student achievement” (p. 30). | 1. Students in all types of communities, rich and poor, have a better chance to succeed academically and graduate if their schools have certified teacher librarians.  
2. At-risk learners and students in high-poverty areas are the most adversely impacted when their schools do not have school libraries and certified teacher librarians. |
| **Business Owners**           | “These important information and ELA literacy skills provide the foundation for ensuring that students are career and college ready. These skills prepare students for the rigorous research required for college-level work and provide them with an understanding of how to find and use information effectively in the workforce” (p. 34). | If you want college-level, workforce-ready students to employ in your business, we need certified teacher librarians in our schools to teach rigorous research and inquiry skills.                                                 |
PTA/Parents | 1. "In addition to more books and computers, libraries staffed by CTLs have more online resources available to both students and staff. School libraries staffed by CTLs are far more likely to provide on-site and remote access to commercially available online catalogs and databases of published materials, allowing for library access outside of school hours. The additional access provided through information technology can therefore enhance student learning beyond the school day" (p. 16).

2. "Libraries staffed by CTLs are open and available to students for significantly more hours than are libraries without CTLs on staff. In turn, students attending schools with CTLs on staff spend more time in the library both individually and in learning groups" (p. 15).

Classroom Teachers

Parents | Certified teacher librarians help teachers create, coteach, and assess student work, integrating information skills students need to succeed in college and careers.

Students | Schools with certified teacher librarians have more books and more computers for you to use—librarians are here for you!

"As will be seen, the relationship between a CTL on staff and library resources is consistent regardless of school size" (p. 16).

CONCLUSION

This article utilizes findings from the Washington State school library study to illustrate how research can be reworded for stakeholders as talking points. However, it should be noted that the Washington study concentrates on one piece of a much larger impact that the school library makes in a school. Readers are urged to combine a number of studies and build a larger repertoire of impacts. Consult studies based more in technology and its boost to learning, coteaching studies that make a difference in learning experiences, the impact of learning commons and makerspaces, and the influence of the library program on the soft skills such as critical thinking, creativity, digital citizenship, and reading. Including these types of studies will round out your message and push your audience to view the new frontiers of an exciting transition in school libraries. Give the impression that we are not just about preserving traditional practices but are on the cutting edge of the best in education.

Talking points, whether used individually or within an elevator speech, are thoughtfully written to convince or persuade a specific group or individual to endorse a desired action or position. Talking points, when memorized and incorporated into elevator speeches, become a teacher librarian's signature message when both planned and unplanned meetings with stakeholders occur. Creating talking points from research that will resonate with various influential stakeholders should be embedded in the practice of today's teacher librarians.
librarian. Finding and interpreting information and research are fundamental skills of teacher librarians. However, we have not necessarily thought about translating the research about how school libraries and staff impact students for others to understand. Influential stakeholders—those who can sway decisions about school library budgets, staffing, and resources, such as school board members, administrators, prominent community members and parents—need to hear about the findings of school library research and best practices in order to make good decisions for our students. Creating talking points and sharing them with others—taking advantage of both planned and serendipitous meetings—need to be part of every teacher librarian’s advocacy skill set. An advocacy moment can be fleeting. Be prepared.

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REFERENCES


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