Advocacy work takes time and planning, but the results are well worth the effort.

Since time is a limiting and defining factor, set a goal each school year to do one significant and impactful advocacy act. This strategy, over time, will reap benefits in developing school library champions that ensure strong library programs. Presenting at a school board meeting can be one of those potentially powerful advocacy events that can change perceptions and garner needed support.

**WHY?**

There are very few librarians in a school district compared with classroom teachers. Consequently, to decision makers such as school board members, cuts and staffing changes are perceived to impact few personnel. Often school board members only see the library as a big-ticket item without knowing about the good things happening in libraries for students. If the librarian does not make them aware, no one else will.

Library-supportive school board members and administrators need librarians to provide them with reasons and evidence to validate their support. In other words, the librarian has to be invested enough to do some of the heavy-lifting PR work to provide needed information to library decision makers. This includes presenting to the board and other influential community organizations, along with traditional promotional strategies.

**WHO?**

Clearly, the librarian needs to take the lead for seeking permission, securing a date, and organizing the presentation. Including others in planning, attending, and speaking at the board meeting shows that the library has support. This is also recognized by board members when a large group of library supporters sit in the audience. It is harder to cut programs that have a wide base of support.

A planning team that includes the district librarians shows unity among librarians, highlighting the entire K–12 program. Consider adding a teacher or two who are familiar with the community and board members to provide some local insight. The planning team should decide the goal of the presentation and two to three talking points that board members need to know and understand about libraries. Keep in mind that the time for a presentation will be limited, so make the most of that precious time with clear, poignant, and significant points.

**HOW?**

Plan ahead; board meetings are packed with issues, so don’t expect to get on the next month’s agenda. When your planning team has coalesced around a goal and talking points, seek permission to do a presentation by contacting a principal or library supervisor. They will need to make the request at the district level and secure a date. Find out how much time is allowed and practice so that you do not exceed the allotted time. State upfront the topic, talking points, and potentially who will be speaking. This is essential when asking for time to present.

Prior to the date of the presentation, and if time permits, have different librarians attend and observe school board meetings. They can learn and share the dynamics of the board, such as the hot topics being discussed, which members others listen to, who the vociferous parents are and their issues, and so forth. Or the observer may learn that the real power and leader is the superintendent, not individual board members. The goal may need to be redirected, in this case, to the superintendent. Find out if a local reporter attends and reports on meetings. If so, check with your district’s publicist or PR director to create a one-page summary to share with the media. If your district does not have PR personnel, prepare a summary, with administrator approval, to give or email to the local news media. This may be an opportunity for wider coverage.

Whether you have time to observe at board meetings or not, research the board members, checking FaceBook and other social media sites, to learn where they work, which...
schools their children attend, and their backgrounds and interests. All this information will help the planning team craft the message and key points to resonate with board members. Research any community member or parent who regularly attends board meetings.

Create an outline and decide who will speak when—no more than three or four speakers. Speakers should include a mix of stakeholders—a librarian or two, a teacher, a student or two, or a parent. Decide the best public speakers to carry the message depending on the focused topic. A PowerPoint or short (3–4 minute) video always adds professionalism and helps speakers stay on track (but pre-test technology). For visual interest, consider displaying student work that involved library research or resources.

WHAT?

It is best to be proactive instead of reactive. In other words, don’t wait for an unwanted situation that the librarians need to push back on, such as staffing cuts. It is easier to do a school board presentation coming from a position of strength than one of defense. Make a presentation that emphasizes library contributions to student achievement. Don’t ask for money unless you are asked a question about support. School board members often become resentful when employees continually ask for money. Make your pitch upbeat and positive and show how the library program is cost-effectively utilizing district-purchased resources. Highlight a special program, like a Renaissance Day, science fair or history day projects, curated library web pages, a recently funded grant project, or how the library is assisting in major technology initiatives. Consider inviting the board to meet in a library to show off a makerspace or have students demonstrate databases. Other good topics include sharing an overview of the library or digital literacy curriculum, giving an example of how skills are cotought with teachers to reinforce classroom curriculum. Any prepared handout should be no more than two pages. Use a library header with librarians’ names and emails at the end. Take and show ownership of your good work!

THE Q & A

Typically, if the program is positively received, there will be questions at the end of the presentation. With the planning team and before the event, brainstorm questions that might be asked, who will respond, and what the responses will be. Particularly think about current school and district initiatives. Be sure that all the librarians agree on the basic responses. You do not want one librarian disagreeing with another at a public meeting. Questions to anticipate might be: Why don’t all the libraries have makerspaces or teach XYZ? Do you have much damage/loss of laptops or other technology? Don’t be surprised if you are asked questions that have nothing to do with the topic presented. Anticipate the unexpected! Preparation is key, and while you can’t be prepared for everything, do your best. If you don’t know an answer to a question, don’t make up something. State that you will investigate and get back to the board member.

Sometimes board members will ask what support the library needs. Have an answer ready with supporting data. For example, “We know money is tight, but our current library budgets only allow us to buy 40 new books on average per year per school, and we service between 500 and 1,000 students in each school.” Or, “We are seeking grant funds to . . .” Or “Since we are tasked with providing resources to support the curriculum, librarians would like to serve on curriculum revision committees and be more actively involved in technology decisions.” The “asks” should not all be about money but about what and how librarians can contribute. Brainstorm these with the planning team prior to presenting.

THE POSTMORTEM

After the presentation, thank each board member and attending administrator via email. Include links to relevant websites that pertained to the presentation or minimally links to library websites. Ask your principal, if in attendance, for feedback.

Hold a postmortem meeting with the planning team to debrief. Ask a library supporter who sat in the audience to report on body language and reactions from board members and others in attendance. Often the presenter cannot pay attention to these details while presenting. Reflect on which board members are library advocates and which are not. Think about ways to win them over. If a rapport with a local news reporter who attended was initiated, consider ways to keep this communications expert informed in the future. If there were supportive parents in attendance, consider inviting them to serve on a library advisory council. Additionally, include the presentation in your job performance documents or portfolio as evidence of that year’s accomplishments.
**IT’S MAGIC!**

Dale, Anna. *Magical Mischief*. Bloomsbury, 2011. 304p. $16.99. 9781599906294. Grades 3-6. When magic fills a space, it causes all sorts of problems. When it takes over the Hardbattle Book Store, the customers object to the vile odors it produces and the mischief that keeps happening, and they stop shopping there. This means no sales! But magic can be moved, if you’re careful, so Mr. Hardbattle asks a young boy, Arthur, and a lonely neighbor lady, Miss Quinn, to help him find magic a new home.

Meanwhile, Miss Quinn uses some to bring book characters to life “for company”, first one little girl, then more people - and the characters are causing a neighborhood crime wave! Mr. Hardcastle, busy hunting magic’s new home, doesn’t know it, but Arthur does. How are he and Miss Quinn going to stop the characters from stealing and send them back to their stories, without Mr. H. (or the police) finding out? And can the magic really be moved?

Harris, Neil Patrick. Marlin, Lissy, ill. *The Magic Misfits*. Little, Brown and Co., 2017. 273p. $16.99. ISBN: 9780316391825. Grades 3-7. When Carter runs away, he doesn’t have any place to run to, only a place to run from. His “Uncle” Sly may have taken up teaching him illusions after he was orphaned, but his illusions are used to swindle people, and he’s trying to force Carter to do the same. Hopping a train, Carter ends up in a random New England town, Mineral Falls. Maybe this could be home!

After a scary run-in with a crooked carnival boss, Carter meets an elderly illusionist, Dante Vernon, and five other kid illusionists. Together, the kids become “The Magic Misfits.” Their mission? Stop B. B. Bosso and his band of crooks!

This book’s narrator speaks directly to the reader from time to time and has a fairly advanced vocabulary, a math-puzzle table of contents, a cast of diverse characters, a series of “How To” illustrations teaching various magic tricks, and codes and puzzles strewn throughout.


Little by little, Maria discovers the ring can control certain spiders. They can bring her things, even gang up to scare her school nemesis. Weird, but Maria sees this could be an awesome power to have!

That is, until she discovers that Esme probably didn’t die of natural causes, and Maria’s best friend’s mysterious aunt (actually the Black Widow) is trying to collect all eight spider rings that once belonged to the Order of Anansi. She has six; once she has eight, she will be able to control all the spiders in the world. Maria has to stop her! But how?

Huckerby, Mark. Ostler, Nick. *Defender of the Realm* (Defender of the Realm, Bk. #1). Scholastic Press, 2017. 320p. $17.99.ISBN: 9780545936668. Grades 3-7. Prince Alfred’s the heir to the British throne, but everyone (even Alfie) hopes King Henry the Ninth lives a long time. Alfie’s not king material! Prince Richard, his twin, is—but he’s 10 seconds younger. So, Alfie is it. Thankfully, England also has the Defender of the Realm, a magical knight figure who appears at odd times to do battle with evil.

Meanwhile, Hayley, an ordinary London girl, has no time to worry about all that—her gran is slipping into dementia. Then, she and her gran get a front row seat to a battle between the Defender and a monstrous Black Lizard, her gran ends up in a rest home, King Henry dies, and Hayley is sucked into Alfie’s problems, facing a life he never wanted, family secrets he never suspected, and a monster who wants the throne. Can Hayley’s encouragement help him carry this off, or should he let Richard take over?

Collaborative planning and research will set up the school board presentation for success. Careful identification of the goal and talking points and selection of good public speakers with relevant props and visuals are also critical. Although a school board presentation may seem like a one-time event, use it as a springboard to nurture library champions. Presenting to key decision makers offers many opportunities if you look at it through the advocacy lens.

**FURTHER READING**


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