

# THE DATA-DRIVEN LIBRARY PROGRAM

By Judith Dzikowski,  
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and Justin Ashworth

Collaboration empowers each of us in different ways: in the school setting it brings partnerships with colleagues and relevance to the cycle of ongoing instructional improvement; in a regional setting it provides an understanding of the various facets that make up an exemplary library media program along with the challenges of the classroom. School librarians need to embrace a collaborative mindset because it is the world we live in; it is the world our students live in; and it is the world they will be working in. This article is written in the spirit of collaboration.

Onondaga-Cortland-Madison Board of Cooperative Educational Services (OCM BOCES) School Library System (SLS) is a state and district funded consortium of 24 districts, 117 schools, and 64,000+ students. The SLS's mission is to empower school librarians to be instructional experts and leaders in their school community.

A question our member school librarians have been asking over time is, *“So through collaboration, how can the library program be instrumental at leading efforts to school-wide improvement in student learning?”* Our response to this question was the creation of the PALS initiative. Throughout the last five years, 42 School Librarians, 61 Teacher Partners, and 3 Instructional Specialists from 17 school districts within our region have participated in the Partners in Achievement: Library and

Students (PALS), Improving Student Achievement through Data Use for Library Media Specialists service. This article is written by Judi Dzikowski, the Director of the OCM SLS who initiated the process with vision, leadership, and membership feedback; Mary Tiedemann, the OCM SLS librarian and a BOCES Curriculum Staff Development Specialist, who guided the design and implementation of the program and Justin Ashworth, a school librarian who participated in the program for three years.

We will start with Justin's experience as he began his quest to answer the question of how to improve student learning within his building and district. This quest also led to the expansion of his role as school librarian to include that of a building instructional data leader.

## JUSTIN'S STORY BEGINS...

If you had asked me five years ago to define my role as a school librarian, taking a leadership role working with student assessment data wouldn't have been part of the conversation. Such work is usually reserved for curriculum coordinators or administrators. In 2006, my second year as a K-5 school librarian, my

school district registered me with a cohort of my fellow school librarians in PALS. I participated in this program for the next three years.

The focus of PALS was to glean student achievement data from state assessments to inform and enhance library collections and collaborations with classroom teachers and to plan units of instruction to address identified student learning needs. At first I was skeptical, even a little annoyed, at the idea that the school librarian needed assessment data to justify collaboration. After all, annual standardized assessments prepared by the state are just a snapshot of where students are at a single point in time. The essential question posed by PALS became, *“How could my library program in partnership with classroom teachers leverage data from standardized state assessments to respond to students' academic strengths and challenges?”* Starting out, the learning curve was steep. PALS provided a model for the program, but there was no step-by-step instruction manual for the school librarian to take the lead as a data facilitator.

The first step in PALS (we met for five full days throughout the school year) was to identify a teacher partner to participate in the program with you. I worked closely with a 3rd grade teacher partner who had mastery of grade level curriculum and a willingness to participate in the collaborative inquiry process.

During the PALS training sessions, we began to learn how to use the Web application DataMentor. This is a reporting tool that warehouses results from standardized assessment data over time, and allows for



various levels of aggregation. The reporting features allowed us to access Web-based reports that helped us answer questions like:

- How do New York State (NYS) assessment questions relate to NYS and AASL Standards for various grade levels?
- How is a grade level performing on a specific standard/performance indicator?
- What are grade level student strengths and challenges (gaps)?
- What are our steps for planning targeted instruction?

Starting small, my classroom teacher and I focused on reviewing test questions and identifying performance and trend gaps from the NYS English Language Arts assessment results. In addition, my teacher partner contributed summative and formative assessment data for us to consider.

In answering these questions, we developed a two-year action plan that detailed the specific ELA standards and performance indicators where grade level students were outperformed by the state. The data showed that the 3rd grade cohort were struggling on the performance indicator—making predictions, drawing conclusions, and making inferences. The next step was to develop a collaborative instructional unit designed to address the identified gap(s). Once we pinpointed this, my teacher partner and I designed learning experiences for our students. This involved creating, producing, and differentiating lessons using research-based strategies for a unit that targeted the skills that make students more proficient at predicting and making inferences. Our library was the perfect place to work on these gaps with its abundance of resources and our library curriculum that has a focus on the AASL standards for the 21st century learner.

A valuable component of the program was the two sessions of on-site coaching. Experts from the SLS, in collaboration with the BOCES staff development department, facilitated one to one or team coaching as needed, providing another set of eyes to analyze our data and give us feedback. We focused on student performance data, unit/lessons being developed, collection development, and the library curriculum/information literacy skills.

A parallel activity was the use of various circulation reports to analyze the library collection and devise a two-year action plan to address areas that needed alignment to the curriculum. At this point my teacher partner and I implemented the Prediction/Inference Unit and I began to work on collection development, alignment, and weeding. By year two, the word about our work began to gradually spread through the school. Other teachers inquired as to my willingness to work with them and their students

in a similar fashion. Each collaboration afforded me the opportunity to develop my instructional expertise and data analysis skills. In year three I became recognized as a person who shared in the responsibility of analyzing standardized student assessment data results, and I facilitated sessions with teachers as they focused instruction on identified achievement gaps of their students.

I now co-chair the building planning team with my principal. Principals play a critical role in structuring time for the school librarian to collaborate and setting the expectation that the data team works to regularly examine student work. Becoming a school-wide leader and increasing my own data literacy has paid dividends for the students. Data-driven dialogue between the school librarian and grade level teachers has resulted in collaborative, informed instruction that is targeted at the identified achievement gaps. Leading an effective data dialogue requires focus, guiding questions, and an understanding of the collaborative inquiry process. The increase in the use of data in our school has become a strategy for me to evaluate my instructional program and make changes aimed at improving student achievement. This year, I have had an opportunity to present to 35 members of the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) on the data cycle. I was able to show the relevance of the data analysis process and the impact that assessment data has on their child's learning. The feedback was positive; they were impressed that instruction is well-informed, dynamic, and responsive to student learning needs.

## WHAT WAS THE EFFECT ON THE LIBRARY PROGRAM?

### How Did the PALS Service Develop?

New York State's 41 School Library Systems are a state-funded consortia designed to support the school library media programs for students, school librarians, faculty, and administrators in public school districts and nonpublic schools. SLSs provide services and programs that support the learning process by: promoting 21st Century skills emphasizing the AASL Standards for the 21st Century Learner, supporting preK-12 curriculum and NYS Learning Standards, providing professional development on the latest advancement in technologies, and providing access to print and digital resources locally, regionally, statewide, and nationally.

Starting in 2004 OCM SLS began to ask the question *“How do librarians use various types of data to inform their instruction and to build a library collection aligned to curriculum and recreational reading?”* As we investigated throughout the region and beyond, the answer we heard most often was that their use of data was linked to the creation of annual

*“How do I begin to identify student learning needs in my building, and how do I connect this to the library program to improve student achievement?”*

### In the area of instruction:

- Accept the reality that you have the authority to ask for and use student achievement data.
- Consider how you utilize the AASL Standards for the 21st Century Learner to guide instruction as you align it to content areas (Language Arts, Social Studies, etc.).
- Become informed about data-driven collaboration.
- Investigate your local curriculum documents, strengthening your understanding of the content areas.
- Connect with your principal and ask, “How do I become a part of the standardized assessment data analysis process in this building?” Yes, it is a mouthful!
- Embrace that opportunity and assist with the interpretation of test results with teachers.
- Begin to develop curriculum connections and offer to collaborate with teachers on focused instructional units that address identified gaps.

### In the area of collection development:

- Generate circulation/age/holdings reports to gain an understanding of collection use by grade level, gender, age, balance, and alignment to curriculum.
- Collaborate with teachers involving them in the analysis of targeted sections of the collection, developing a sense of shared ownership of the collection.
- After developing an understanding of the collection needs, develop a statement or pictogram of collection strengths and needs.

reports on library usage, circulation and programming, and nothing further.

SLS envisioned that student assessment data could be a powerful tool for librarians to use to leverage their program in addressing student learning needs. Our goal was to develop a pilot program that came to be known as (PALS). From its inception the program was a collaborative effort as SLS partnered with the curriculum and data departments within our BOCES organization to help design and implement this pilot program.

The intent of PALS is to address the challenge of improving library instruction in information literacy skills and strategies, and library collections, by linking to identified student learning needs based on standardized assessment data results. In the first year of the program (2005), 15 librarians participated. Their teacher partners joined in for the second year as the design of collaborative units began. In subsequent years librarians and teacher partners participated for one, two, or three years depending on their team goal. Using data analysis tools we focused on reviewing test questions, establishing the connection between NYS standards and the AASL Standards, analyzing assessment results, and identifying performance and trend gaps. The resulting identification of student learning need was applied to collection development, library instruction, and lesson design done in collaboration with classroom teachers. Two-year action plans were created that focused on collection alignment and development, curriculum development, and collaborative unit design.

The general purpose of the coaching visits was to support the collaboration between the school librarian and their teacher partners and to improve instruction based on student performance data.

During the next four years SLS continued to grow the program. The work was modified yearly as needed with a clear focus on data analysis. The school librarians used the data to improve the quality and relevance of their instruction, and to guide the alignment of the collection to better support the curriculum and student learning needs.

Using the data gathers, the next step is to create an action plan comprised of two sections—one for instruction and one for collection development—detailing the steps to implementation of your targeted collaborative curriculum units including gaps identified, standards addressed, teachers involved, resources needed, and time frame for implementation. Create an action plan for collection management clearly stating the weakness identified, steps you have identified to rectify those weakness, and time frame for completion of this work.

The following is a sample of an Action Plan Template you may wish to use. For additional examples of data analysis results, action plans, collection development, and instructional units, please see the SLS Web site (<http://sls.ocmboces.org>).

How	Why	Who	When
Action Steps	Supporting Assessment Data	Persons Responsible/Involved	Timeline

How Much	Support	Resources
Costs/Time	Professional Development (If Needed)	Web, Print

## Librarians—

“PALS has changed how my library program is carried out. It has allowed for growth in how I teach, what I teach, and how I develop lessons.”

“PALS has empowered me, I have the data to back up what I want to do with classroom teachers.”

## Teachers—

“By collaborating with the librarians I can provide more varied and interesting lessons for the students.”

“Librarians are essential to literacy development.”

So, now that you have heard Justin’s story and the PALS story, we would like to encourage you to write your own story.

Recognizing the impact the library media program has on student achievement, we suggest you take what we have shared and apply it to your district’s goals and strategic plans.

### Comments from some of our participants:

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We hope this article has inspired you to consider the tools described, tailored to your district/school strategic plan, and the role school librarians have in 21st Century student learning as you rethink, retool, and reinvent your library program. 🍌

### SUGGESTED READING

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