

Adolescents *Read!*

Issue 1

Tips for Educators and Students

September 2005



New York Life
Foundation

Lessons from New York Life Revitalizing High School Libraries Initiative 2003-2005

Results:

- Library circulation at least doubled across all sites, with a reported increase as high as five times previous years' levels in one school.
- Sites witnessed increases in total numbers of individual students visiting library media centers, as high as 1600 additional student visits in one school, and an increasing number of "regulars," from 5 to 75, in another school.
- An average increase of thirty percent in numbers of teachers visiting the library media centers across all sites, especially in grades 9 and 10.
- Library media centers leveraged over a quarter of a million dollars through collaboration with local partners.

This is just a snapshot of the important results of the New York Life Revitalizing High School Libraries Initiative (RHSL). According to the 2004 position statement of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Commission on Reading, to reach high levels of literacy adolescent readers require: "Sustained experiences with diverse texts in a variety of genres and offering multiple perspectives on real life experiences. Although many of these texts will be required by the curriculum, others should be self-selected and of high interest to the reader." Teachers of adolescents, the Commission goes on to say, require "Adequate and appropriate reading materials that tap students' diverse interests and represent a range of difficulty." (www.ncte.org) New York Life Foundation understood this fully in 2003 when it funded RHSL through Public Education Network (PEN), a network of 89 local education funds (LEFs) across the country.

New York Life RHSL allowed PEN and its LEF members in three cities—Minneapolis, San Francisco and Tampa—to work closely with four high schools to create library media centers that are true centers of teaching and learning and foster a school culture that values and promotes high levels of adolescent literacy. According to New York Life Foundation's vision, library media centers begin this process by providing students with access to a wide range of high-interest, developmentally appropriate fiction and non-fiction reading materials. But beyond providing new materials, New York Life RHSL also created an opportunity for library media specialists to forge new relationships with students, teachers, and community members, and to expand their roles within the school in a variety of ways.

Below, we highlight key features of the pilot phase (2003-2005) that led to the initiative's promising results, and thereby hope to promote high school library media center development in other schools throughout the nation.

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Updating Collections: Collaborate, Collaborate, Collaborate!

At the core of New York Life RHSL is a targeted and collaborative collection development process. Library media specialists interviewed and conducted surveys of students, teachers, and parents to determine which titles and online resources were most needed and of greatest interest. Across sites, library media specialists planned new purchases in collaboration with teacher teams, often organized as small learning communities. In Minneapolis, district staff consulted a librarian who works with incarcerated boys in a neighboring county public library system for recommendations on book titles and periodicals for reluctant readers and non-readers, especially teenage boys. In San Francisco, the library media specialist was concerned that few African-American girls were visiting the library. She sought the advice of one avid reader, who promptly provided a list of 45 authors and titles she said her friends would like.

Purchasing Schedules: Keep It Flexible.

Participating library media specialists agreed that the New York Life Foundation grant had given them much-needed flexibility in responding to students' demand for books. Instead of waiting to place a single annual order through their district purchasing office, the grant funds allowed them to buy books, periodicals subscriptions, and online resources as needed throughout the school year. Lessons from this initiative indicate that district policies that do not permit such flexibility must be re-examined.

Physical Space: Plants, Rugs, Lighting, and Comfort.

Freshly painted walls, new lighting and new furniture all convey the renewed vigor and central importance of the library media centers in the schools. Sites have renovated and reorganized physical spaces, making the library media centers more attractive, more comfortable, and more inviting than they were. All sites have added rugs, comfortable seating, and couches to create more pleasant reading areas for students. Plants and colorful posters have made the centers more appealing and inspiring. All sites have set up separate work and independent reading areas so students have a place to read for pleasure while other classes are in the center. As one eleventh grade student commented: "It seems more like a library now—now I like it—I can relax and read a book here. It makes you want to be in here more and read more."

Getting the Word Out: Don't Assume They Know!

Library media specialists at each of the sites produced newsletters, web sites, and videos to advertise new library media center resources to students, teachers, and equally important, to the community at large. All sites conducted an open house for parents and other community members as a way of raising awareness of the importance of supporting adolescent literacy development. These activities were key in helping to secure additional resources for collection development and improvement of the physical space.

Engage Reluctant Readers.

Library media specialists have worked hard to encourage independent reading and use of the library among high school students. Each of the library media centers participating in New York Life RHSL has extended hours, and library media specialists have developed a variety of strategies to help students engage with books and choose books that they will enjoy reading on their own. For example, each of the sites has hosted book talks by public librarians. At these events, librarians present books to students in a way that is meant to pique their interest and to help them select books that they will find engaging. Similarly, sites have organized student "book passes," where students have two to three minutes to review a book before passing it on to the next student or setting it aside to check out later. Library media specialists have also organized author visits, book clubs, and poetry cafés as a means of generating and supporting students' interest in reading.

Library Media Specialist: An Expanded Role.

In all sites, library media specialists help teachers by pulling books for individual students and orienting them to online resources. Many of the specialists receive assignments from teachers ahead of time and prepare materials for class sessions in the library media center. In San Francisco, they collaborate regularly with three small learning community teams, attending team meetings and helping to design cross-curricular units. In Tampa and Minneapolis, library media specialists collaborate with individual teachers on a variety of student research projects, and routinely work one-on-one with students to complete the projects.

"We have current books that students see in the bookstores, where the author is still living and breathing... There is something for all of my students."

Teacher, Robinson High School, Tampa, FL

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or

Participating Local Education Funds:

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In the next issue of *Adolescents Read!* students at all four high schools will describe--in their own voice--how New York Life RHSL has helped them to become more motivated and proficient readers!