Facility Design

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Samples of Media Center Facility Designs

In designing a school media center, one must be knowledgeable about the elements necessary for a specific population and to support specific standards. Unlike designing a public library, a school library must be catered towards children and/or young adults, and must have instructional areas that mirror most of the capabilities of a classroom teaching area. When creating an elementary school library, it will be distinguished by furniture to fit young children, and shorter stacks (MSDE, 1998, p.18). Design elements, like décor and color, in an elementary school may also be more playful to engage younger learners (MSDE, 1998, p.18). Moreover, the size and collection at an elementary school will differ from the collection needed to support middle or high school students. A lot of specific elements of the library will also reflect the size and population of the student body. According to the Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) At a Glance Report, Flora M. Singer Elementary school has 675 students (MCPS, 2014). This figure will influence the amount of space and materials that will be included in the media center design (MSDE, 1998, p.36).

Floor Plan Design Introduction

The entrance to a library and the layout of the library are two important features. The entrance should be welcoming and noticeable so that the media center is easy to locate. The overall layout of the library reflects what is most important to the library program. At Flora M. Singer, the media center’s mission is to “provide students and staff with access to books, technology, ideas, information, and other learning opportunities. [The media center will] strive to instill a love of learning and literature, facilitate access to information, and help media center patrons become effective users of information” (FMSES, 2015). Therefore, the design of the media center should
be a place that teaches the Flora Singer community to explore information and nurture the community’s appreciation of literature.

**Access Points**

There is one main entrance to the library. The entrance has double doors to allow for large groups, or incoming parcels to enter and exit the library. The entrance way is also large to ensure that students, parents or staff that are in wheelchairs, using crutches, or use walkers, can comfortably access the library through the main entrance. The entrance will be labeled with large letters so that it is easy to locate. This will be especially helpful when directing parents and students to the library for special events. The circulation desk will be positioned by the entrance (MSDE, 1998, p.34). This will provide constant surveillance of the incoming and out-going students/staff.

**Technological Connectivity/Wireless Access**

Every effort will be made to create a flexible space that accounts for movement of furniture and computer workstations (MSDE, 1998, p.46). This means that electrical outlets will be placed in several areas throughout the library along the walls and in the floor. With the movement towards wireless devices, another consideration will be ensuring that the library has adequate independent circuits or power to support the amount of devices that will be charging overnight (MSDE, 1998, p.44). The attainment of large quantities of wireless devices in the media center also means that the charging areas should be located in secured storage areas in the media center (MSDE, 1998, p.49). The office area in the media center will have storage cabinets that can be
locked in order to secure wireless devices. This storage area will also hold items that teachers can check out, like cameras, microphones, and headphones (MSDE, 1998, p.49).

**Visual Supervision**

A good elementary school library design will give teachers the ability to supervise students in the library. Several design features will permit ample sight lines (MSDE, 1998, p.49). Having lower stacks and an open floor plan are key to being able to supervise several students in a large library (MSDE, 1998, p.49). Also, having glass windows from the office area into the library will keep the media specialist aware of who is entering and exiting the library at all times.

**Instructional Areas**

An instructional area will be created to accommodate classes that visit the library and receive a lesson by the media specialist and co-teachers (MSDE, 1998, p. 27-28). This area will be equip with technology that is similar to that in the classroom setting (MSDE, 1998, p.27-28). The technology necessary for daily instruction includes: a promethean board, and teacher’s computer. In addition, adequate seating for students on a rug, and around tables should be available. This technology will also be useful for professional development presentations and other events held in the library.

**Work Areas**

The tables by the instruction area serve as group work areas for classes or independent small groups of students using the library (MSDE, 1998, p. 20). Additional group work areas will be situated next to the circulation desk, and next to the instruction area. These two additional work
stations will have five laptops situated on each table, with an option to project any laptop on a large screen located at the center of the station. Following Maryland State Depart of Education recommendations, the library will have twenty computers (MSDE, 1998, p.18). This will accommodate groups that are working collaboratively together, or individuals that need access to a computer. Another work area option is located in the center of the library. This space has open table areas where students can do individual work or read (MSDE, 1998, p.22).

**Leisure Reading**

Students are welcome, and encouraged, to read in the library. To promote leisure reading, a comfortable lounge area will be created (MSDE, 1998, p.26). The lounge will have comfortable seating options: including a couch, and several cushioned chairs. This seating will be situated farthest from the instruction area, and close to the circulation desk (MSDE, 1998, p.26). Therefore this location will have ample supervision, and will not be prone to hearing the discussion from the instruction and work areas. An additional reading area is available in the circular seating area in the middle of the library.

**Flooring**

The flooring selected for this library design is wall-to-wall carpeting. Carpeting does present some challenges regarding allergens, however if routinely cleaned the adverse effects can be mediated (MSDE, 1998, p. 43). Carpeting allows students to sit on the floor anywhere in the library, and will cushion the fall of any materials. Also, it will reduce the noise of moving furniture, like chairs, in the media center.
Bookcases

There is a minimum of 800 net square feet required to accommodate books in an elementary school library (MSDE, 1998, p.21). In the prescribed library design, tall bookcases align the perimeter of the library. Since elementary students have a limited range of reach, the top shelves of the book cases will be used to hold signs that provide useful information about the books in the shelves below. Without counting the top shelves of the tall bookcases, the proposed design includes 1277 net square feet of shelf space (MSDE, 1998, p.21). The extra space will allow for growth of the collection, and accommodate the recommended 12,000 library media items (MSDE, 2000, p.18).

Flexible Shelving

All shelving that is not positioned along the perimeter walls of the library will be on casters. The casters will be locked once the shelves are moved into designated areas that adhere to the daily library floor plan. The movable shelves will provide flexibility in opening the floor plan to accommodate larger numbers of people for special events. During these events the shelves on casters will easily be re-positioned by the circulation desk or in the office.

Environmental Design

The media center will ultimately be a space where large volumes of people use the space, and interact with materials and technology. To keep students and staff comfortable in this environment, proper ventilation, heating and air-conditioning units should be evaluated (MSDE, 1998, p.45). It is important that there are several vents throughout the library, including the office area, to ensure that a suitable temperature is achieved in the entire media center. The open floor plan is conducive to creating a uniform temperature in the space. However, the large
number of computers and devices may contribute excess heat in the room. A thermostat should be installed in the library, so that a comfortable temperature can be maintained. Additional environmental considerations, such as sound, and allergens have been addressed in the flooring and layout sections.

**ADA Guidelines**

The Americans with Disabilities Act, and the Maryland State Department of Education Guidelines for Library Media Programs provide regulations that must be followed to ensure that equal access is granted to all potential library patrons in a public school setting. In terms of the placement of shelves, there must be at least three feet between each book case to ensure that wheelchairs can comfortably move through these areas (ADA, 2010). Also, the entrance way, consisting of two double doors, surpasses the minimum ADA doorway recommendation of 36 inches. (ADA, 2010).

**Accommodations**

The media specialist should take into account the need for assistive technologies to ensure that all students can comfortably access materials in the media center. While some assistive technologies are expensive, and should be purchased when a need arises, a number of low tech assistive technologies should be accounted for in the library design and budget. Examples of low-tech assistive technology that should be considered when creating a new library plan include: space to accommodate large print text books, audio books, and large print signage. In addition, shelf space that will house hand-held magnifying glasses and reachers or grabbers will be helpful to students that have limited vision or limited ranges of motion (Assistive Technology,
Additional table space should also be accounted for so that students can use large-text keyboards if needed (Tools for Life, 2014).

**Signage**

Proper signage printed in dark colors against a light background will be easy to read by students and staff. The signs in the library will be created to help users find the materials or types of books that they are looking for. Signs to indicate the fiction, non-fiction, reference and “everybody” book sections will be produced. In alignment with ADA standards, all letters/ non-tactile characters, in each sign, will be at least three inches in height (Knowles, 1992). All overhead signs will follow ADA recommendations, and be positioned a minimum of 80 inches from the floor (Knowles, 1992).

**Outcomes**

The floor plan and overall design of a school library can play a role in supporting the school media center’s mission and vision. By creating a welcoming and accommodating space, the library program sends a clear message: the library is a space for everyone to learn and utilize resources. Work stations and instructional areas support the library program’s mission to educate students, staff and parents about the research tools and resources available in the 21st century. Moreover, the flexible layout of the library make the media center a gathering place, for special events and meetings.
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