

School Libraries in the 21st Century Program (SL 21)

Background and How to Use Information

SL 21 is a voluntary tool to help measure the quality of school library programs within individual school buildings in Michigan. Research on student achievement has consistently shown that students in schools with robust school library programs have higher achievement levels. That research calls into question, “What is a robust school library program?” It is the intent of the School Libraries for the 21st Century (SL21) Program to answer that question for school librarians, administrators, parents and community members.

The Library of Michigan promotes the role of the school library program in student achievement through a call for all elementary and secondary students to have ready access to a library in their school with appropriate resources, programming and certified staff. To ensure the quality of individual libraries, the Library of Michigan calls for school administrators and school librarians to use the SL 21 measures to assess the quality of school library programs in individual buildings.

The program was developed in 2009 by Library of Michigan staff members, Michigan Association for Media in Education (MAME) members, and certified school librarians. The Library of Michigan Board of Trustees endorsed the initial measures on February 5th, 2010. The measures were significantly revised in 2012 and 2013 by the newly formed School Library Workgroup, made up of school librarians, MAME members, and a school administrator. The Library of Michigan Board of Trustees endorsed the revised measures on April 3, 2013.

To achieve Qualified or Exemplary Status for a school library program, schools submit a completed benchmark measurement form to the Library of Michigan, an Office of the Michigan Department of Education. School administrators evaluate their building's school library program in conjunction with their school librarian and then review the measures with their district superintendent. Submissions require the signature of the school librarian, principal and superintendent. Status earned is valid for three years.

The Library of Michigan recommends using the measures as a tool to discuss and explore the role of the school library and the school librarian in the school building, the school district and the larger community. The school librarian can review the measures and the bibliography of reference materials at the SL 21 site (www.michigan.gov/sl21). The goal is to use these materials as conversation starters with principals and school administrators.

Such a conversation may help dispel stereotypes about library services and reinforce an understanding of the value of these services for student achievement in the building. The measures and the bibliography provide documentation about the role of school library programs for each benchmark within the categories. The Measures and the Additional Materials section of the bibliography provide resources for school librarians to advocate for an evaluation from school administration that is appropriate for the school library program.

Some of the benchmarks from the measures are in areas that are not under the direct control of school library staff. These benchmarks are integral to a successful program. The benchmarks are intended to foster understanding of the program in order to support and strengthen it and thus increase student

achievement. To do so, the measures may help make the case for resources to be directed to priorities identified in the school library program review. The Evidence of Practice sections allow school librarians to document for their administration, and for the submission of the form, how they are achieving the measures and where resources may need to be directed.

After reviewing how a local program meets the measures with the building principal, the measures can then be used to discuss the value of the program with district administration. The Library of Michigan believes that the SL 21 measures will be an effective educational, professional development and advocacy tool that assists school library programs to provide the highest quality services to students and the overall school community.

SL 21 Development Participants:

School Library Initiative Committee Members (2009):

George Bishop, Dee Gwaltney, Judy Hauser, Cynthia Kleinheksel, Barbara LaBeau, Kathleen McBroom, Cyndi Phillip, Tim Staal, Melissa White. Library of Michigan Members: Nancy Robertson, Sheryl Mase, Lori Poznanski-Mason

SL21 Sub-Committee Writing Sub-Committee Members (2009):

Cynthia Kleinheksel, Barbara LaBeau, Kathleen McBroom, Tim Staal, Melissa White

School Library Workgroup Members (2012 to present):

Teri Belcher, Julie Harris, Judy Hauser, Cynthia Kleinheksel, Marsha Lambert, Sue Lay, Karen Lemmons, Margaret Lincoln, Dan Pappas, Jeanna Walker, Melissa White.
Library of Michigan Members: Nancy Robertson, Sheryl Mase, Karren Reish

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