

Non-Library Uses of the Library

School leaders must protect the integrity of the library program from non-library uses of the facilities during the library's regular hours. When teachers or administrators hold regularly scheduled, non-library-related classes in the Library, they negatively affect library users. Some inappropriate uses of the Library may include non-library activities such as meetings, presentations, mandated study halls or school detention periods. All these uses detract from the Library's mission and focus.

The mission of the school Library can be achieved best by developing and maintaining a diverse and encompassing library program reflecting the educational goals of the school.

This mission is accomplished mainly through librarians collaborating with faculty on research projects and collection development, supporting the curriculum through carefully selected resources and library events, instructing information literacy skills, and integrating them into the curriculum.

But aside from this academic role of the library program and its librarians, the school Library has a more subtle function, one that is both practical and essential.

The Library is unique because it is the only place outside a classroom where students are assured of a learning environment with a professional educator at the ready. This learning environment assumes that students respect one another and the library's mission, balance is important; an absolutely quiet Library is impractical because it doesn't allow for the productive buzz of students working together. But if students use the library as a main place for socializing, the Library cannot fulfill its mission.

Our students are under constant pressure to perform. They have heavy workloads. Students need a place where they get help with research, make up tests, work with tutors, and study individually or in groups. Students also need time for leisure reading including magazines and newspapers, and the Library is the place for such activities.

Teachers come to the Library to work and research, to help students or do curriculum planning with other teachers. They bring their classes to the Library for library skills instruction and for research. Even students' parents use the Library as a convenient place to work or browse while waiting for their children. There are myriad ways that the Library serves the school community by simply being that central place where the librarians and resources are always available.

Recent research proves that a strong library program has a direct impact on academic performance.(1) The strength of the Library relies on excluding uses that are extraneous to its major purpose of supporting academic pursuits. Using the Library as a place to teach a regular non-library class dilutes the Library's effectiveness.

When a teacher or administrator teaches a class in the Library on a regular basis during the school day, the teacher alone plans the class, so it may not support the library mission and program.

Holding a class in the Library, during the school day, on a regular basis assumes that the Library is merely a storehouse for books and does not acknowledge the essential role of its professional librarians, mission, or program.

Holding a class in the Library, even the most well managed class, is distracting to the many students, teachers, community members who use the Library throughout the school day.

When teachers and administrators consistently use the library space for non-library uses, it may indicate a need for additional facilities.

Some schools divide up the Library into smaller enclosed units for classrooms and group meeting places. This action is shortsighted. During the school day, two to three classes at a time may come to use library resources. These resources include books and the expertise of the librarian who guides the students towards acquiring critical thinking skills essential in an information age. Having many classes together requires a large enough space to accommodate students. Making the Library smaller seriously affects the librarian's ability to address the full needs of students.

Also, cutting library space takes away its use after hours. The Library's larger space can be used for meetings, evening classes, conferences, and social events. Some schools rent their spaces to outside groups and find that having a library space is a huge advantage in attracting such groups. The librarian must participate in the scheduling procedure for potential uses of the Library.

*Submitted by the BAISL Position Papers Committee
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Citations

1. *Standards and Guidelines for Strong School Libraries*. California School Library Association. Sacramento: CSLA, 2004. Pp. 53-58.