

SCHOOL LIBRARY

Eastview Middle School – Leanne Gosse

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While there is no such thing as a typical day in a middle school library, there are a few things that do happen every day. I start the day off with supervision for half an hour before school, the kids like to come in and play games before classes. I also supervise at noon and after school. The rest of the day is spent with classes or individual students either in the library or in their classroom, often I am called on to fix various bits of equipment that are causing trouble. I fit in cataloguing and shelving when I can.

I have worked in two different school libraries, an oil & gas record centre, an academic library and a regional library system. I enjoy schools because of the students, they keep it interesting! There is nothing quite like the feeling you get after successfully getting a non-reader, or reluctant reader to not only take something you suggested but read it and come back for more. In schools, some of the most important attributes a Library technician can have are friendliness, confidence and a real heart for the students of the school. While it may be impossible to get to know each one individually, it is worth it to try to find out what their interests are. It not only helps in selecting their reading material, but makes them feel valued. The kids are always thrilled when I can call them by name (even if I have to discretely check the screen first) as they sign out their materials.

As the lone staff member in this busy school library I am responsible for all aspects of its successful operation from budgeting, collection development, circulation, reader's advisory, research support, computer help, consultation with teachers on everything from classroom projects to professional and library resources. A portion of my time is also spent as the first line trouble shooter for the computers and AV equipment in the school.

Important skills needed in a school library tech include communication, being able to speak in front of a class or four of students or during a staff meeting is crucial. Conducting reference interviews is done multiple times each day and it helps to become proficient at it; knowledge of what materials are available and where to get them is also very important. Concrete skills include technical skills, with both computers and other equipment; working on a variety of library programs allows one to be flexible and competent with whatever program you may be using.

Every day has something fun in it, for me, working with the students, helping them find something to read is very fulfilling. Organizing author visits is 'fun' as well but happens on a less frequent basis. Handing out prizes every time someone reaches a milestone of library use and prizes at the end of the year are great. Visiting classes to do booktalks, or reading scary stories in the dark around Halloween are so fun, the kids love it and so do I. storytelling (yes even to teenagers) is always a joy, or starting off a poetry unit by reading

an entertaining poem to an L.A. class are a couple of other things that bring a smile on the job. Some of the more repetitive tasks include circulation, here the students often sign out their own materials, but I'm still the one who has to sign them all back in and get them back on the shelves. Cataloguing and processing new materials is also something that never seems to end, but putting new materials out for the kids is fun too... it kind of fits into both categories. Challenging tasks including stretching the budget, and making sure that everyone is using the library to its fullest potential.

Some things that only happen periodically include weeding (I try to go through the entire collection every couple of years), inventory once a year, library prizes and awards, book fairs (also falls into the 'fun' category)

Keeping up with changes in this profession can be a challenge. It is very easy to feel like you're alone on an island but I find that going to conferences, and membership in a professional organization like AALT can help to not only keep up with changes, but provide excellent networking opportunities.

I have been a library technician for about thirteen years and I've seen the roles change, especially in schools. In so many schools, there aren't trained people at all, and when you come across one that has a library tech in it, the difference really shows. More responsibility is added to the technicians in this field, where once they may have only provided technical assistance, they are now doing more and more with technology. There is also more responsibility in the library itself, technicians are responsible for maintaining and expanding expensive collections and equipment, management of the budget, in some cases of several budgets. Libraries themselves are evolving, no longer are they simply a repository for musty old books, they are now vibrant places of learning with a blend of print and computer resources that can and should be the hub of any school. The role of the library technician has changed to become a perfect complement to the dynamic nature of the school library.