

School Matters



Special Insert
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School News for Residents of the Kimberly Area School District



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Superintendent

Welcome to this Special Insert section to our School Matters newsletter. School libraries offer more now than ever. There are books for research and reading, and spaces for students to collaborate, socialize and make things. Now called LMCs, which stands for Library Media Centers, the libraries at J.R. Gerritts Middle School and Kimberly High School have undergone renovations in the last two years. I'm especially proud of these types of facility projects because the improvements are good examples of buildings using budgeted maintenance funds to upgrade facilities to meet students' needs without having to pursue a referendum. These LMCs are now student centered spaces that are available all day long for them to participate in activities they enjoy in a social setting.

-- Bob Mayfield

LMCs are a Great Place to Be: Transforming school libraries into student-centered spaces.

A traditional library in many people's memory is a quiet place dominated by rows of books. But the Library Media Centers (LMCs) at Kimberly High School (KHS) and J.R. Gerritts Middle School (JRG) are great examples of what modern school libraries look like. Open spaces with plenty of seating options for studying, collaborating, tinkering and socializing. The improvements are paying off - both schools have seen dramatic increases in their use.

It started with the carpet.

Over the last three years, both libraries came due for scheduled facility maintenance, like painting and carpet replacement, which meant that everything in the libraries had to be moved out. This presented an ideal opportunity to rethink how the libraries were being used and how they could be improved to better serve students.



The school library at Kimberly High School features student-centered collaboration space.

Phil Yunk and Brad Klitzke, both teachers at Kimberly High School, have presented on their school's LMC transformation to fellow educators across the nation. Their presentation called "It started with the carpet" describes the transformation literally starting with the carpet, which was being replaced. What started as an open invitation in 2012 by Principal Mike Rietveld for staff to share their input on revamping the LMC, evolved into Yunk and Klitzke taking leadership roles in the transformation during the summer of 2013. They studied trends, gathered input and created a plan to transform it into a modern learning space.

One big change they identified early on was that the high shelving made the space feel constricted. The future layout of the room started to take shape as they aimed to open up the space. "We wanted it to be student-centered, instead of just a place to house books," said Yunk. "We wanted it to be a place students could use." He describes it as a place where students can bring ideas and hobbies, and the LMC staff supports their exploration.

Last summer, the JRG renovation was an opportunity to embrace what a 21st century space for middle school students looks like. The school has a student group, the LMC Crew, which helps with projects throughout the school year. "I engaged the LMC Crew to find out what types of changes they wanted to see and what types of things they like," said Erin Wedemeier, Library Media Specialist and Reading Interventionist at JRG. "They were able to serve as student voices that were representative for the student body."

Just like the high school, the library appears more spacious although the square footage has not changed. "We opened up the space by moving the bookshelves to the wall, which provides a lot more opportunities for multiple classes to utilize it all at once," said Wedemeier. "Now, we can have up to three classes using the library at the same time. This was huge in making it more of a central hub for our school where everyone's comfortable working here and utilizing the

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materials.” Tiana M., an eighth grader at JRG, who belongs to the LMC crew and helps with a variety projects, likes the new color-coded and genre organization system. “I think it gives everyone an easier opportunity to find a book that you need,” said Tiana. “Also, I like how it’s up against the wall so it’s easier to see everything. It’s just really nice and it looks cool.”

Another change at both schools was updating some of the furniture. “We have comfortable seating for students, we have collaborative work spaces for group work and we still have classroom instructional seating for teachers to provide instruction,” said Wedemeier. “The furniture is also really cool,” said Tiana. “It’s fancy yet modern. It gives a sophisticated yet fun look. It’s super comfy.”

Does more collaborative space mean there are fewer books?

Absolutely not! The open space leads one to speculate that there are considerably less books at both schools. But that’s an illusion, according to both Phil Yunk and Erin Wedemeier. Reorganizing the space, getting shorter bookshelves and placing them in less central areas puts the focus on the learning space instead of book storage. “There was an initial concern when we took down the stacks and reorganized the books, it looked like we got rid of tons of books,” said Yunk. “But we didn’t actually reduce the number books. We have more fiction books now than when we started, it’s just organized differently in the space.”

Becoming Makers

KHS and JRG are embracing the national Maker movement in their libraries. They offer a Makerspace, which simply means providing a community space to be a Maker, one who creates and tinkers. The Maker movement at both schools has developed organically in music, art and Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) endeavors.

“Students are invited to create, invent, try, play and sometimes fail at things without having to worry about receiving a grade,” said Wedemeier. “These are the types of activities that help grow independent problem solvers – the students figure things out on their own.” Students at JRG can tinker with small robots, circuitry kits, GoPro cameras and even problem-solving games. “The Maker movement in school libraries really engages students so when they’re in the classroom, they can offer more toward the success of that curricular area,” added Wedemeier. Tiana especially enjoys the robots, “The robots give a start into the knowledge of coding, and shows people how fun it can be. And it gets people into the world of coding. I love coding! It’s like taking what we do in our computer classes and putting it into real life stuff.”

With nearly 1,500 students at the high school, there are a wide variety of interests and hobbies. By giving students an area where they can make things, socialize and explore their niche interests, they are able to find peers who enjoy similar activities.

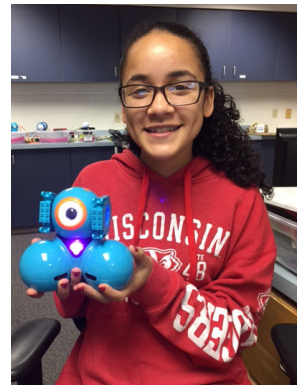
Something as simple as putting a chess game out has blossomed into a culture of gaming and role-playing. Students with different backgrounds now come together to enjoy a shared or newly discovered interest in chess. “That grew into students taking on leadership roles with regards to gaming and organizing tournaments,” said Yunk. It further developed into students making the LARP (Live Action Role Playing) Club. A similar situation occurred when graphic novels were added to the book collection. Students found a new type of reading material they could bond over and it grew into an Anime Club.

At KHS, they have littleBits, which are small electronic and circuit modules for students to experiment with. That grew into an interest to create something larger, so the LMC acquired a quadcopter that arrived unassembled and, unbeknownst to them, with minimal instructions. The students had to figure out how to assemble the remote control quadcopter through trial and error. This has blossomed into a stronger connection with technical education courses and resources, where students have an informal Makerspace network that extends beyond the library.

More than a quiet space to research and read.

Culturally, the LMCs have come to represent a space for students to grow their interests beyond research, reading and class assignments. They still do those things in the school library, but it’s so much more now. They go there to learn more about and use technology, to collaborate on projects, to gather and socialize, and to work on projects of interest to them. It also has become a place to gather and find other students who have similar interests. “I think it should be a place to hang out because once students are here, we can surround them with books and other sources of information,” added Wedemeier. “Inevitably, they will pick up something that could be beneficial to them in their academic life.”

By connecting with other students who share similar interests they can learn and grow together. This self-directed exploration exemplifies what the District hopes for all students – that they grow as independent-problem solvers.



Tiana, an eighth grader, pictured with one of the robots students can experiment with at the JRG LMC.

Evolution of LMC Resources

- *eBooks allow multiple students to access the same material*
- *Online reference materials (encyclopedias and dictionaries)*
- *Checkout electronic devices such as Kindles and Chromebooks*
- *Genre organization like bookstores*
- *Access eBooks and online resources from home*