



Future Ready Framework:
Instructional Partnership

BUILDING EDUCATOR CAPACITY THROUGH COLLABORATION

TACOMA PUBLIC SCHOOLS
TACOMA | WASHINGTON

How far would you go to help students learn? One librarian chose to go all the way across the country.

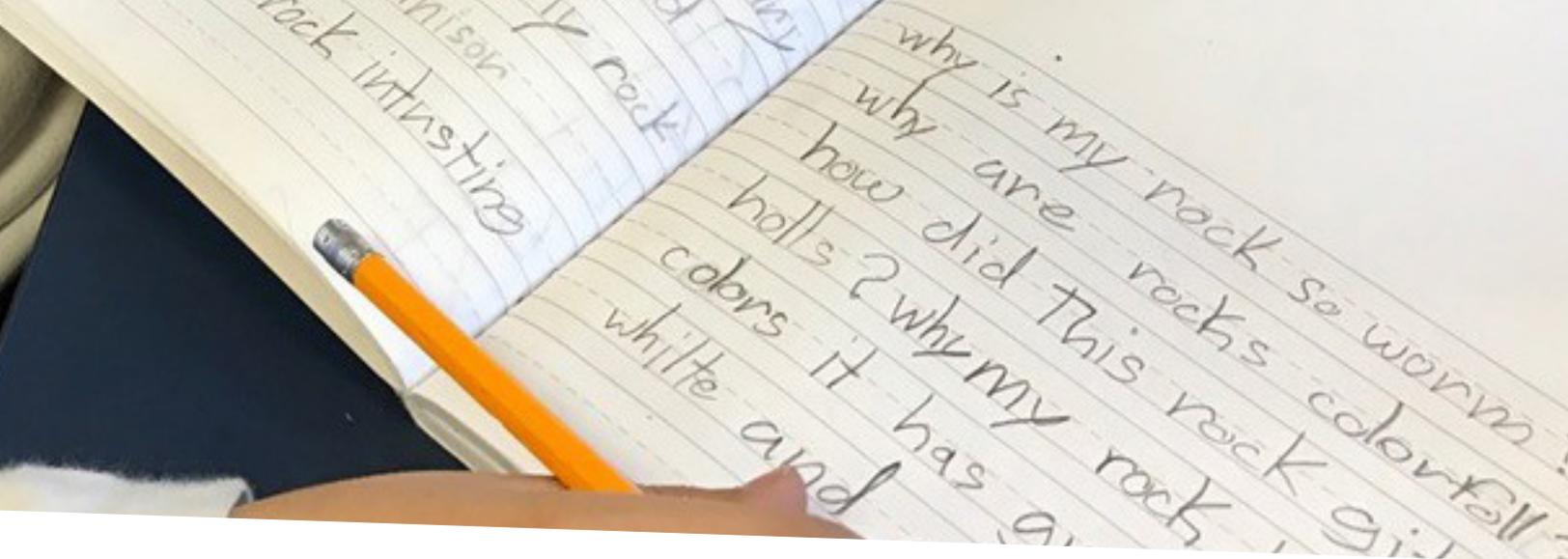
Suzanna Panter, NBCT, M.Ed., is the Innovator and Facilitator for Teacher Librarians at Tacoma Public Schools (TPS). She first encountered administrators from her new district last year as they explored future ready library programs nationwide. Tacoma (a district of 53 schools) had launched a two-year pilot program, “Libraries of the Future,” which was placed under the management of the instructional technology department. Director Dave Davis, along with former Project Manager Dr. Hannah Gbenro, was tasked with trying to understand what a library of the future looks like, and hiring the perfect person to drive the initiative and bring the vision to fruition. During their discovery of different future-ready libraries, they met Panter in Henrico, VA.

“They spent that first year visiting regional and national school library programs to get a better feel for what future-ready libraries were,” Panter explained. “Like many administrators, they were initially unaware of the many ways the role of the school librarian had changed and evolved over the years, but they were eager to learn how to change for the better.”



“It’s been an amazing experience in Tacoma, and we’re seeing a lot of progress. Assistant superintendents are going into the libraries and making concerted efforts to talk to the teacher librarians and see for themselves what’s going on instructionally. We are looking deeply at assessment in the library, how we work with teachers, and we’re working closely with all educators to make sure everything we do is a true partnership.”

SUZANNA PANTER
Innovator | Facilitator | Libraries
Tacoma Public Schools



“They knew they needed a school library expert to support their new program.” The Tacoma administrators were excited when they saw how Panter’s previous district integrated technology, had open-access libraries and vibrant Makerspaces, and co-taught with classroom teachers. “This was the very model they had envisioned for their district,” Panter explained. “So, I moved to Tacoma to help them implement it and build on progress they’d already made.”

LAYING A NEW FOUNDATION

Tacoma school administrators had already taken important initial steps to support the digital transformation of the library program and staff. Davis was able to secure a cart of 30 new laptops for each library to help integrate technology daily. Davis and Gbenro, realizing the library’s book collection was becoming very out-of-date, also worked with the school board to secure a one-time \$750,000 library collection refresh with Follett. Many schools also received funding to start Makerspaces.

Once Panter began her new role, she realized that more was holding back the TPS library program than simply resources or technology. She recognized that collaboration

and the leadership to create instructional partnerships were paramount, yet some processes and precedent were necessary to foster true collaboration. “At that time, the department remained siloed, and library staff were bogged down with inefficient tasks as well as outdated policies and processes,” Panter said. “We needed to build trust and a feeling of teamwork with teachers. Additionally, the inefficiency amounted to limited time with students, which in turn dampened student enthusiasm. We had to break down barriers to access. In the past, kids had to jump through hoops to get a book. The librarian could only check books out during certain narrow windows. No one was there to question the old rules like book limits and student book fines.” Panter sized up the situation and quickly began to build credibility among staff and students by integrating updated common-sense policies, processes, and equipment.

Panter approached vendors with an instructional partnership mindset and restructured the district’s central processing department to maximize efficiency. “We are now relying more on vendors for shelf-ready processing, which speeds up the

time it takes to get new books into our students’ hands,” Panter said. “This partnership with vendors means we are all able to work better together for each student’s benefit.”

Tacoma Public Schools doesn’t have library assistants, so kiosks were purchased to allow students to self check-out materials at their convenience, freeing up teacher librarians to spend more time teaching and planning.

Panter further broadened student access by widening book borrowing limits for students. Since the changes, the district reports a 28,000+ increase in circulation along with a seven books-per-student circulation increase in the participating pilot schools. Working with the community’s local public libraries through the district’s Pathways program, students use their school IDs as public library cards. Panter also wanted teachers to learn along with her team, so the library program offers increased professional development and training on Microsoft Office 365, which allows library staff to help teachers learn the best ways to integrate technology into classroom lessons.



INSTITUTIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

One key initiative Panter tackled upon her arrival at TPS was to focus on building robust, mutually beneficial institutional partnerships with teachers, local universities, and community members.

Part of this endeavor was the selection of six TPS elementary schools and three middle schools to participate in the Libraries of the Future pilot program. The nine librarians from these schools spent six intensive days training on the respected Guided Inquiry Design (GID) framework by Kuhlthau, Maniotes, and Caspari. “We are using this framework to help guide our coteaching work with classroom teachers,” Panter explained. “Classroom teachers come to the teacher librarians with a standard or topic they need

to teach. The teacher librarian works with the teacher using the GID framework to co-plan a unit, teaching the content.”

Panter realizes that instructional partnership can be a delicate balance, but she wants administrators and educators to know her staff is there to improve student outcomes – a shared goal for everyone at TPS. “We are not there to add things to their plate, but instead to take things off of it to enhance their teaching,” she explained. “Having students dig deep into inquiry is our goal. Their research process should include building strong background knowledge around the content and getting students to ask their own questions, and this should start

early in elementary school. When our experienced library staff works closely with classroom teachers, we can help students master these skills early.”

Panter added that community volunteers are also being tapped to come in and help the teachers present a subject in collaboration with teacher librarians. “Teacher librarians are going to the classroom and asking, ‘What is coming up soon?’ Then they collaborate and beef it up – the team comes together to build the lesson.” For instance, one of the pilot middle schools recently decided to study the concept of individual rights versus common good, so a teacher who was previously a lawyer was invited to be a guest speaker on the topic.

INNOVATIVE PROGRAMS, BIG RESULTS

Tacoma’s Libraries of the Future are off and running, bringing big innovations and partnerships to a district that is now seeing aggressive gains in important benchmarks, like on-time graduation rates. The Washington Library Association took notice, recognizing the leaders of the TPS Instructional Technology department as Supervisors of the Year for school libraries in Washington.

“I’m thrilled with the way we’re working together,” Panter said. “Everyone’s been open and welcoming to the new model. Our leadership is fully on board, which is crucial. We are sharing and making an impact. Libraries of the Future are about more than books and story time. Future ready libraries allow students not only to deepen and widen their knowledge base and love of reading, but also give them a time and place to explore their own

interests and develop life skills and passion for projects. This model is especially effective and important in lower socioeconomic schools and struggling schools because it allows students to get more one-on-one time. When you are able to give students more of the attention they desperately need, they thrive, and the library becomes a really special place.”

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