

Leslie Wurtak

Principal

Chancellor School

Pembina Trails School Division



Leslie Wurtak has been the Principal at Chancellor School for the past three years. Her administrative talent shone through with her recognition to continue promoting an effective school library program when she arrived. Together, with her vice-principals, she has been instrumental in growing and improving the school library. Leslie and her administrative team keep themselves abreast of current research and information and trust their library staff to do the same; they have been able to lead, guide, encourage and support school library staff to provide effective and engaging resources programming for students and staff.

“Leslie is an innovative administrator who is both thoughtful and intuitive about supporting library programming in an elementary school.”

Valerie Wood

Leslie has made a difference in each of these key areas: adequate funding, flexible scheduling, supporting the teacher librarian as an educational leader, and promoting the school library as a central and vital learning area.

Leslie provides adequate funding to purchase relevant nonfiction, fiction, picture books, graphic novels, magazines and DVDs to keep our library collection current and stimulating and to purchase online databases useful for our students. Through traditional budgeting, additional funding and encouraging the use of available grants, funds are available to fully support the MYRCA reading program, the newly

adopted Forest Of Reading program from Ontario, an Aboriginal resource collection, dual language books, and relevant staff resources. These materials support students and staff through the whole school.

The library patrons have also benefited from the replacement of older furniture with more colourful and flexible pieces that fit the learning commons model. In the last 2 years, our administrative team has also purchased a large whiteboard on wheels, a large screen for our computer projector to complement our portable Smartboard. These teaching supports and equipment definitely contribute to making the school library a useful and relevant learning area for everyone.

Leslie has been leading our discussions to modify and modernize our computer lab. The computer pod in the library has been upgraded and there are additional devices to supplement it. She always encourages thoughtful, appropriate and balanced use of technology, when educationally sound and feasible. Additionally, Leslie supports bringing authors and illustrators to the school to share their experience with students and to inspire them, and she ensures that there are funds for students to experience other forms of interaction with literature, such as going to plays.

It is paramount to have trained and qualified library staff available. Leslie has been able to provide a flexible schedule so that the teacher librarian is able to collaborate and teach with every homeroom teacher in the school. The flexible schedule ensures that students and staff are taught how to use the catalogue, and the vast array of options available on our databases and through other libraries. When new students or staff arrives, we are also able to provide some individualized instruction about the library and on-line resources. The flexible scheduling allows time for critical review of various materials to order and time to weed out the old, out of date materials from our collection. A flexible schedule also allows the teacher librarian to attend various leadership meetings and initiatives in our school or division, and our library staff is able to attend our divisional library PD sessions every month.

Leslie understands how important it is to have a teacher librarian in the school. Staffing allocations in a small school are never adequate. Leslie always supplemented the staffing allocation for the teacher librarian as much as she could within the total staffing allocation she was given by the division. She believes in collaboration and increasing the teacher librarian time is a significant support to collaboration among the staff.

Sue Hjalmarson

Leslie supports the teacher librarian in either Literacy or Citizenship leadership roles. This has a significant impact on our school plan, which ultimately affects staff professional development and student educational focus for the year. She has also been supportive of collaborative PD projects in the school, bringing in divisional staff to support us. Leslie continues to support me in student leadership roles as well, including coaching students in public speaking roles and chairing the Citizenship group. Leslie's support allows students and staff to see the school library as a place of citizenship and social justice.

“She encouraged teachers to collaborate with the librarian and endorsed a flexible timetable so that an effective program for students could happen.”

Joan Macdonald

There are over 15 individual or ongoing activities that take place in the library, from readings by authors to buddy book exchanges, from learning nights to PD, from 1:1 work with students and a variety of support staff to book fairs, from drumming to citizenship, that demonstrate how Leslie supports the central role of the library. The library website is included in the student section of the school website, and the library is invited to provide material to the school newsletter regularly. Leslie supports collaboration with the Winnipeg Public Library and the Manitoba Education Library. She was instrumental in the successful application for a Community Outreach Grant to promote literacy through the school library. Also, the CLA School Library National Standards Committee (Manitoba Division) was welcome to use the library over the past two years.

In Leslie's own words: as a school-based administrator, I have had the honour to work with exemplary teacher-librarians. My role was not to direct or implement initiatives; rather it was to inspire staff to create collaborative school cultures that support teaching and learning. Student and staff library use and teacher librarian involvement and interaction is valued and promoted. ... Often I am the cheerleader - the dedicated and un-wavering support on the sidelines. Changing my leadership stances from "collecting and engaging" staff with the goal of building common understanding, to stepping out of the way as an initiative moves to implementation. I have always viewed the library as the most significant classroom in the school. It is the public classroom - where everyone sees and hears the breadth and diversity of learning experiences. The school library is a central, vital and dynamic learning environment.

As an administrator, Leslie is defending the rights of our students to have the best education that they can have. By her conscious decisions and careful judgments she is also defending the right that our students have to access information for their well-being from a variety of reliable sources. She is making sure that students are not getting harmful information and that they are being supported to understand the information they need. These are specific rights as outlined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.