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When 25 librarians from an Alabama school district took ISTE's Future Ready Librarianship course, the result was transformative!

SHELBY COUNTY SCHOOLS, COLUMBIANA, ALABAMA

INTRODUCTION

Follett— a long-time advocate for the vital role of school librarians – is proud to partner with the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) and Future Ready Librarians® to co-sponsor Exploring Future Ready Librarianship: Practices for the Emerging Leader, an empowering professional development course. Designed by Mark Ray of Vancouver Public Schools (who's been instrumental in Future Ready Librarians from its infancy), the 15-hour, self-paced ISTE U course helps school librarians and media specialists at every level maximize student-centered learning opportunities. It also empowers districts to leverage technology as part of the Future Ready Schools Initiative. This story demonstrates not only the value of the course itself, but also what happened when a district made the course available for 25 of its librarians.



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MICHELLE HALL
*Media Services
Program Supervisor*



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THE CHALLENGE

Administrators at Shelby County Schools, outside Birmingham, Alabama, had long valued their librarians for the way they embrace their role of bringing teaching and learning into the digital age. While they still helped students with traditional services, such as research and finding the perfect resource, they were just as often engaged in showing students how to use technology, helping them detect whether information was from a trustworthy source, or facilitating school-wide technology trainings.

As pleased as they were with what their librarians were accomplishing, Shelby County Schools administrators were convinced it was important to empower them even more. The district found the perfect opportunity in ISTE U's online professional learning course, Exploring Future Ready Librarianship: Practices for the Emerging Leader.

THE SOLUTION

Impressed with the goals, curriculum and real-world results of the course, administrators made a commitment to fund not just a handful of librarians, but librarians from all grade levels to take the course. The project was funded by an "above and beyond" request from the County Library Media Budget, and the district has already felt the impact of their decision.

"Our district was looking for ways to blend the skills associated with 21st-century learning and our Library Media curriculum," Library Media Services Program Supervisor Michelle Hall explained. "By participating in the ISTE course, our librarians had the opportunity to dive deeper into each of the components of the Future Ready Framework and to discover how best to infuse these practices into their diverse libraries. They also had opportunities to collaborate with each other on areas of professional and program growth."

Whitney Howton, Oak Mountain School librarian, added, "Our kids are being prepared for jobs that don't exist yet. They're being asked to problem solve, not just learn facts. In order to meet their needs, the library must be a place they're comfortable, a place where they can get what

they need and a place where they can collaborate and communicate. The Exploring Future Ready Librarianship course gave us an opportunity to reflect on our current practice; identify areas for professional inquiry and growth; explore the Future Ready Librarians framework®; and create and implement a personal action plan to lead from the library."

THE COURSE

Shelby County Schools put together an implementation team to organize the year-round PD plan. In addition to collaborating with the course instructor, librarians designed the wrap-around supports; for instance, librarians Mallory Swinsick and Michelle Wilson were asked to design the agenda, Library Media Services Program Supervisor Michelle Hall took responsibility for contacting speakers and organizing the PD, and librarian Dawn Dixon provided input along the way.

During the course, Shelby County school librarians first worked through the Future Ready Librarianship modules individually, then met as a team. They also learned from visits and special speakers from all areas of district leadership.

"This structure highlighted the wide range of resources available right here within our district, and each of us left the course knowing who we could depend on to source for stronger collaborative efforts in the future," Wilson said. "That was very empowering."



ELISSA MALESPINA
*ISTE U course instructor
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the NJ Future Ready
Librarian Network*



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Howton found the course to be applicable from start to finish. “I could not imagine a more logistical, practical breakdown of the Future Ready library framework and ISTE standards [for Educators]. It allowed us to take a conscientious, introspective look at our program that was encouraging (we already were doing a lot!) and at the same time inspiring (we learned all the things we could do to make our program better!).”

Wilson couldn’t agree more. “The course was even more meaningful for our librarians because we were able to connect the wedges of the Future Ready framework to the existing leadership, services and resources within Shelby County. It was a perfect opportunity for us to collaborate with supervisors at the central office level to broaden the impact librarians have on student learning and to discover new ways to support instructional goals within our district.”

Dawn Dixon, Chelsea High School librarian, felt that the course helped her assess current practices and identify areas for adjustment, allowing her to better serve the community and implement the Future Ready framework. “When planning for our program, I now take a broader look at potential areas of need,” Dixon said. “I don’t just focus on one aspect, such as instruction. I look for possible community collaborations, technology integration and more.”

Mallory Swinsick found the course a great opportunity to reflect on her library’s past and current practice. “It gave me a strategic plan and map for looking at what we’ve done in the past and how we can take it to the next level, as well as identify new ways to grow,” she said. “I also enjoyed the opportunity to create and implement a personal action plan that I can lead from the library in the coming months.”

THE RESULTS

Shelby County School District has already begun to experience the impact of their investment in professional development for their librarians and media specialists.

“The Exploring Future Ready Librarianship professional development course has definitely changed the discussion surrounding the role of the library in our schools,” Hall said. “Our Library Media Specialists have become leaders

in their schools and communities by providing the space and opportunities for collaborative learning and exploration.”

Hall also feels that with the district’s participation in the ISTE program, its librarians were able to engage in meaningful conversations about the shift in perception and responsibility. “As a district, our goal was to provide a space and time for our librarians to examine the future role of the media center in the ever-changing field of education,” Hall explained. “Librarians generated new ideas and plans that created a vision for the library that will impact and influence the overall school culture while continuing to focus on literacy and encouraging a love of reading.” Additionally, the participants’ capstone projects range from creating a vertically aligned library media curriculum to finding new ways to engage their community and stakeholders. Flexible hours that include staying

open in the evenings for study groups and during the summer for special events are just a few of the ways Shelby County librarians are transforming their media centers.

For Wilson, the ability to go through the course as a group was key. “Honestly, I believe that it was one hundredfold more powerful to go through the course as a group than it would have been to go through it individually,” she said.

“Our learning journey throughout the course was amazing. On top of having guest speakers from our Tech Department and Instructional Division (our Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent both attended one of the workshops), our librarians were able to travel outside of our district to observe other librarians in Alabama who are implementing 21st-century ideas into their curriculum. We provided time and subs for librarians to collaborate with classroom teachers to design collaborative lessons. It was an amazing, well-rounded experience.”

MICHELLE HALL
Media Services Program Supervisor



Photo courtesy of ISTE

“The whole experience was helpful and revolutionizing. It has had widespread impact because we’ve been able to partner with leadership in our district, and it has empowered us to create and implement our strategic vision and to speak passionately about where we are, where we’re going and how we’re going to get there.”

The course focused on the evolving role of the librarian across multiple facets, which appealed to the Shelby County library staff. “Most professional development we attend is not focused on our specific needs, and most conferences address one small aspect of our jobs, such as book acquisition or technology integration,” Dixon shared. “The ISTE program was directed specifically to our needs across the board. Just as importantly, the format promoted collaboration and inspired me to be more creative in my practice.”

The focus now is consistent improvement for the Shelby County team, with inspiration and new skills in their arsenal. “We can be better because we have a clearer understanding of our role in the holistic plan for the entire district,” Wilson said. “Because we elected to implement this course as a group, the connection between central office leadership and building level librarians enabled us to determine several key areas in which our unique role can be used most efficiently and strategically to serve students and teachers.”

While the Shelby County library staff benefitted as a whole, the individual gains can’t be overlooked. “Now, I am more confident in presenting my ideas to my administration and am going to find a way to toot my own horn,” Howton said. “I’ll show what great things are happening in our library and how the district and the community can help us do better.”

The unanimous approval of the course by the Shelby County library staff rings clear, with the participants all recommending the ISTE course to librarians in other districts.

ISTE provides professional learning resources to schools and districts across the globe, and ISTE U courses can help meet leaders’ needs in developing a shared vision for transformation through technology. To learn more about how to start your team’s transformation journey, visit iste.org/ISTEU.

