

# Fran Kompar

## Moving from Vision to Reality

### The Library Learning Commons

TL Editors

**F**ran Kompar has been the K-12 Coordinator for Library Media Services for Greenwich Public Schools, Greenwich, Connecticut, since 2004. She oversees the district's 15 library media centers (soon-to-be Learning Commons) including curriculum, personnel, resources, professional learning and, of course, advocacy during a digital transition. The message is that the profession is at a crossroads – one in which all roads lead to a reimagined, reinvented library – the Learning Commons. This year, Greenwich is implementing a 1:1 digital learning plan K-12 that will provide all K-5 students with iPads and 6-12 with Chromebooks. The focus of the plan is on improving teaching and learning – not the devices. The Library Media Services team, which she oversees, has a critical role in the support for the District's digital transition. As a Program Coordinator for the Greenwich Public Schools she has taken on the challenge to affect change necessary in the Library Media Program and incorporated the evolving role of media in our schools to meet the needs of the digitally-connected student. It has been clear that the Library Media Staff is the “hub of learning” regardless the format of the resources. Prior to her current role, Fran was a library media specialist at Eastern Middle School, Greenwich.



Fran is committed to advocating for the importance of an exemplary, well-staffed and resourced library media program that focuses on encouraging students to imagine, be curious, think and create. In addition, she serves as an Educational Consultant for the Fairfield County Regional Educational Service Center (R.E.S.C.), Cooperative Educational Services (C.E.S). This year, she is implementing Year Two for all member districts (14 districts, over 133 schools represented) entitled *Re-Imagining the School Library*. The program is designed for districts interested in transforming their traditional school libraries into a Learning Commons. She is also on the Board of Directors and faculty for Connecticut's Alternate Route to Certification for Library Media Specialists delivered through the R.E.S.C., Area Cooperative Educational Services (ACES) to prepare successful teachers to become successful certified Library Media Specialists. She is the recipient of the Connecticut Association for School Librarians (CASL) Administrator of the Year Award (2007) for support of Library Media

Programs and, recently, was awarded the 2015 Hilda and John Jay Award from CASL (The Connecticut Association for School Librarians) for significant contribution to the Library Media profession at the local, state and national level. She has and will be presenting at several regional, state and national conferences—specifically on the critical role of the Library Media Specialist in today's evolving society. Connect with Fran by following her on Twitter @fkompar or send her an e-mail at fkompar@gmail.com.

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*Whatever you can do or dream you can, begin it.  
Boldness has genius, and magic and power in it. Begin it now.*—  
—Goethe

This year I have the privilege of beginning my eleventh year as a K-12 library media services coordinator for Greenwich Public Schools, a district in Fairfield County, Connecticut, with fifteen schools. In our profession, a new school year is always exciting, filled with so many opportunities. For many reasons, this year feels different. It's a feeling reminiscent of arriving at a destination after a very long journey filled with choruses of “Are we there yet?” Our vision for an excellent media program has many familiar components: dynamic learner-centered environment, innovative programming, rich print and digital resources, inquiry learning, collaboration, passionate readers, and, of course, life-long learning. Many of these align with educational reforms under way. So what happens when the vision is your next stop on your journey? It's hard to change from our endless journey to living in the reality of now—of the destination. In order to move from vision to reality, we need to change more than just our space or the name on the door; we need to own the change that has slowly been taking place for the past decade (or longer), quantify the results, and celebrate the successes as an integral member of the community of professionals that enrich, improve, and elevate student learning.

So why does this year feel different? Perhaps it is because Greenwich is implementing a digital learning environment plan that will provide devices for all our students in all schools with clear goals to personalize learning for every child. The library media staff is key to the implementation and ongoing support of this digital transition. Perhaps it is also because I have an equally exciting privilege of facilitating year two of a countywide program, *Reimagining the School Library as a Learning Commons*, through Cooperative Educational Services (CES), a regional educational services center for all districts in Fairfield County. Year one of the same program reached 100 participants representing 14 districts and 133 schools. Year two has as many school-based teams moving from planning to implementation of their plan. For so many reasons, it feels that we have arrived—that advocacy has given way to accountability. Most importantly, the reality of arriving at a new destination simply signifies the start of a new journey.

It's undeniable that there is a national movement in the world of library media that can best be defined as a metamorphosis—a new beginning. Professor David Loertscher kicked off “The Year

of the Learning Commons” in April 2015. CoSN (Consortium of School Networking) identified makerspaces as a major trend expected to be implemented in the next one to three years and noted that the International Society of Technology Education’s (ISTE) 2015 conference offered numerous sessions directly applicable and important to library media professionals. The American Association for School Librarians (AASL) has begun the process of updating standards, as has the ISTE. Whether we call it reaching the critical mass or the tipping point, the change we have all been advocating is here. The importance of life-long learning, reading, inquiry-based instruction, and innovation are at the centerfold of what is happening throughout education, at all levels and content areas. In what seemed an endless journey to get to our vision, we have arrived without realizing it. At this point in our profession, it is more important than ever to coalesce around the destination rather than the struggle to get here. It’s our time to shine and demonstrate the promise.

### FROM VISION TO REALITY THROUGH A LEARNING COMMONS MODEL: GETTING PAST “SPEAKING TO THE CHOIR”

Every road leads to the re-imagined, re-invented school library: the learning commons.

—Fran Kompar, *Teacher Librarian*

In the *Teacher Librarian* April 2015 edition, I wrote about achieving systemic reform through the Reimagining the School Library as a Learning Commons program. The program, offered through Fairfield County’s CES as a professional learning opportunity, required participation from key decision makers. The message was simple. The learning commons is not only a renewal of the physical space but also a fulfillment of the advocacy for collaborative instruction, leadership, and community liaison for innovative programming that can be achieved using the services of their highly credentialed, often underutilized, li-

brary media specialists (LMSs).

Year one of the program featured district teams including assistant superintendents, directors of technology, and principals alongside their LMSs. The teams worked together to develop a vision for their learning commons; review data analysis, curriculum, and innovative programming, including makerspaces; and, of course, redesign the physical and virtual space to reflect the learner-centered environment.

Year two is comprised of teams that are responsible for making it happen. The teams consist of school-based participants including a principal, an LMS, and one or two teachers. The learning commons belongs to the school community—planning and implementation must be a collaborative effort. In the *Teacher Librarian* article I wrote,

For years, many in our field have embraced the library learning commons model as the road forward. However, my “aha moment” was the realization that we can no longer embark on this road alone. . . . We are at a tipping point that screams for a transformation in the profession—one in which every road leads to the re-imagined, re-invented school library: the learning commons.(p. 10)

Systemic reform involves all stakeholders and key decision makers. When I see articles touting the renewal of the teacher librarian’s role in publications written for superintendents, such as *Teacher Librarians: Digital Mavens in a Digital Age* (Webb, Ray, American Association for School Superintendents) I know that there is a major change that is not only stirring but is also an awakening. Our challenge in having reached the destination is that we must now define it rather than have it defined for us.

### AN INSTRUCTIONAL BLUEPRINT: THE LEARNING COMMONS

According to the AASL, our goals and mission include connecting learners with ideas and information and preparing students for life-long learning, informed decision

making, a love of reading, and the use of information technologies (“AASL Governing Documents,” 2015). Our goals have not changed; however, the information age of the late 1990s and early 2000s gave way to an exponential increase to information, reading formats, and, of course, technologies. At the end of this school year, Carl Fisch’s video *Shift Happens* will be ten years old. The short video describes an information explosion and served as a signal that we had a responsibility to prepare students for the new global society. Soon after Fisch showed it at a faculty meeting in 2006, it was viewed by more than twenty million people.

The learning commons model provides a framework that emphasizes flexibility of space, resources, and instruction and addresses the new literacies, including traditional, digital, media, and global. The implied instructional framework for a learning commons requires that the LMS have flexibility to make our journey and vision reality.

### COLLABORATIVE INSTRUCTION (CO-PLANNING, CO-TEACHING AND CO-ASSESSING)

LMSs need time to plan, teach, and assess learning in collaboration with other content teachers in order to provide students with meaningful and connected information, skills, and ideas. Flexible scheduling frees up the time. Through co-planning and co-teaching, the two professionals provide access to digital tools, rich resources, and processes for exploring student-posed questions. This approach provides flexibility to teach in all content areas rather than in isolation—to provide teachers ongoing professional learning, technical, and literacy support.

In 2014–2015, the International School of Dundee (ISD) implemented a learning commons. One of the major elements was flexible access to the LMS for collaborative instruction. After the first year, there was a 300 percent increase in collaboration. Jeannine Madoff, the LMS, shared her thoughts about collaboration in the learning commons:

“Scheduled collaboration time is crucial to making the learning commons model a success. I meet with the teachers at each grade level on a biweekly basis just before classes begin to ensure that their needs are met. During these collaboration times, we are brainstorming, planning lessons, and reflecting on our units so that our teaching improves and our responsibilities are shared. During our co-taught lessons, I focus on research, information, and technology skills while the classroom teacher is looking at understanding of content. Ideally, we inspire each other, and the entire learning experience is blended for the students, who might not even realize that their classroom teacher and LMS have different objectives.”

One of the collaborating teachers, Esra Murray, a third-grade classroom teacher at ISD, provided the teacher’s perspective on the experience:

“One of the keys to our success was our shared understanding that we needed to be flexible—and at times, spontaneous—with our schedules. . . . Again, what was truly highlighted here was our separate focuses: I was honing the student content knowledge while Mrs. Madoff was focusing on the use and learning of the technology and research cycle. With two separate and distinct perspectives combined, there was a constant flow of ideas between the two of us. Even our three-minute conversations were incredibly valuable as we observed and assessed our learners and then revised our plans to personalize their learning experiences.”

The perspectives shared by this collaborative partnership evidence the power of collaboration and co-teaching in a learning commons model. Both the LMS and classroom teacher described a shared responsibility that benefits the students in a transparent, reflective manner. The unifying thread is to deepen and personalize learning for all students. The research for the effectiveness of collaborative instruction is clear. In the book *Co-Teaching and Collaboration* (Loertscher and Koechlin, 2015), an impact study on the effect of teachers who co-teach with teacher librarians, 70–100 percent reported that students met or exceeded expectations for a learning experience, which was an increase of 20–

50 percent over teaching in isolation. The recommendation and next step for anyone requesting or beginning collaborative instruction through flexible scheduling is to collect similar data on the quality of the collaboration.

## PROFESSIONAL LEARNING IN A DIGITAL AGE

The LMS has traditionally facilitated and led professional learning for teachers in areas including ethical use of information, online resources, digital citizenship, and inquiry/research. This role is expanding by necessity, to keep up with the ongoing changes related to digital resources. Providing ongoing, embedded professional learning is critical to the digital transition and the LMSs’ expertise in selecting, curating, organizing, and sharing resources make them invaluable to teachers who are acclimating to using digital learning in their classrooms. In 2014–2015, Greenwich LMSs facilitated fifteen hours of districtwide professional learning related to digital learning, as well as many 1:1 and small-group sessions. In addition to faculty or district professional learning, our district provides ongoing support through 1:1, small-group, and large-group instruction.

## THE LEARNING COMMONS: A RE-IMAGINED STUDENT-DRIVEN LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

*Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember.*

*Involve me and I learn.*

—Benjamin Franklin

The learning commons vision is to provide a shared space for curricular work and quiet exploration and to nurture students’ interests, passions, and imagination. The learning commons includes specific areas that are flexible and provides space for students to support learning needs. The space includes moveable furniture and areas for large-group instruction/meetings, as well as areas for innovative programming, reading nooks, small collaborative spaces, independent work stations, and a

makerspace (also referred to as an innovation space).

Cos Cob School, another one of our eleven elementary schools, redesigned its learning spaces during the past summer to meet the vision of a learning commons. Principal Gene Schmidt and LMS Nancy Shwartz worked in partnership to make the design a reality for the 2015–2016 school year (see photo on opposite page). The Cos Cob teams will continue their work to re-imagine not only the space but also the learning opportunities—they’ll participate in the school-based team re-imagining the school library program at CES to network with other schools in the planning stage of the metamorphosis.

In the Greenwich Public Schools district, last year began with an approach to redesign the school library from a center of media to a center of learning—a library learning commons. The change to a learning commons instructional framework helped align the digital learning goals with the library media program mission. The elements of this redesign will resonate with most of us who have advocated for a research-based approach to delivering curriculum in a dynamic, resource-rich learning environment. The reorganization of the library media services department was a priority area related to my work. This involved ongoing communication with staff, empowering them to share in this new vision and forming a consensus of what the new expectations will be by the end of the year. With the guidance of the Greenwich Public Schools chief information officer, Phil Dunn, we quantified the vision of how library media should change to meet needs by creating an “As Is/Learning Commons” document to guide and capture the change through analysis and an evidence-based approach. The analysis led to the district’s new flexible schedule this year for grades 3–5. The flexible schedule will provide the LMSs time to collaborate, provide professional learning, support the digital learning transition, and oversee the learning commons resources and spaces.



## THE MOST IMPORTANT PARTNERSHIP

*Collaboration is valuable because it helps us transcend our individual limits and create something greater than ourselves.*

—Bob Sullo

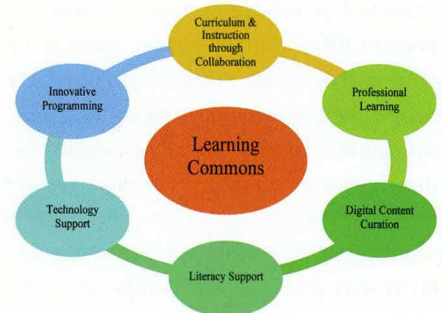
Library media professionals are expert collaborators and teacher partners, with both internal and external groups. In such a service-driven program, we work with everyone. I have read many articles about the importance of advocating and partnering with principals, other teachers, and community organizations. I agree with the importance of these partnerships. However, I am going to be bold by saying that the most crucial service-oriented partnership for library media is information technology (IT).

The two departments—media and IT—have a longstanding love/hate relationship. Many library media professionals have war stories about tech that is outdated, doesn't work, is filtered beyond recogni-

tion . . . and more. Many are reluctant to embrace the changes in the format of resources, fearing that print books are “going away.” All these fears are understandable—but not founded in evidence. What we have found is that the learning commons is a new way of providing students with a personalized learning experience. We found that circulation of print books increases when a learning commons model is implemented. We also find that we are able to access a variety of formats (audio, video, print, digital, and materials). Many of the resources are our favorite categories come alive and literally spring out of our shelves. I heard once from my friend and makerspace expert Bill Derry, Westport Public Library, director of innovation, that we can consider the makerspace part of the applied sciences category—in a different format, of course. I see the opportunities of interactive e-books that provide struggling students with easy access to a dictionary or, for others, the text-to-speech function. I also see the way students learn—and the way society has changed from an isolated experience to one that is collaborative and

crowd sourced. In fact, technology has made social skills more important than at any time in our history. Now, in addition to consuming information, students can create their own meanings using such tools as Book Creator, Storify, and educational blogs to reach a much wider audience. All of the possibilities that are now here at our fingertips require many partnerships.

I have had clarity of purpose in the past year. This comes at a time when the library media program in our district has partnered with the IT department, with both now led by the chief information officer, Phil Dunn. The partnership was inspired by a mutual need and desire to be successful in the 1:1 digital learning implementation for the Greenwich Public Schools through an alignment with the digital learning goals and library media goals. Dunn offered a different perspective on how to tackle the age-old challenge of providing LMSs with a flexible schedule. His perspective resonated with me, as it was about accountability and evidence-based outcomes. Through a data analysis process, we looked at the time of the LMS's day and created a document that quantified the vision. The comparative document included a snapshot of the current schedule and the future learning commons framework with corresponding responsibilities. We zeroed in on the vision through a backward design process, making this truly an outcome-based model. We created a roadmap and conditions to achieve the goals that would best serve our students.



## QUANTIFYING THE VISION

Below is a snapshot of the As Is/Future Learning Commons Framework Change.

LMS as instructional partner, including embedding new literacies—information, media, global.	300% increase
LMS as professional learning leader	284% increase
LMS as innovative programming and spaces coordinator	100% increase
LMS as technology expert	110% increase

## EVIDENCE-BASED CHANGE: CREATE A DATA PORTAL FOR THE LEARNING COMMONS

*Learning and innovation go hand in hand. The arrogance of success is to think that what you did yesterday will be sufficient for tomorrow.*  
—William Pollard

So how do we prove that what we know works? What does the data look like during our day-to-day operations? What is actually possible by making the change to a learning commons model? LMSs are accustomed to collecting data on many aspects of their program. In fact, many write annual reports for reasons ranging from budgeting to communicating to the greater community. Our usual analysis of circulation, books per student, number of collaborative learning experiences, and literacy events must be updated. A learning commons data portal would include collection of data on circulated books per students, e-book usage, digital resources usage, professional learning hours and topics, collaborative partnerships rated on a quality of

collaboration rubric, and reporting of innovative programming usage.

Now that we have arrived at the destination, we need a GPS to guide us. Many in the profession have done incredible research on the impact of the LMS; longitudinal studies have often been used to alleviate reduction of staff in the profession. We are at a time when with this great opportunity comes a great responsibility. The evidence-based model is not in keeping with most of our philosophies—by nature LMSs must be idealists and visionaries. Again, the push/pull of the IT department and media department needs to come to a consensus. If we can look at our vision through the eyes of a decision maker, we'll see the opportunity that a data portal signifies. Many in supervisory positions such as mine that constantly advocate for furthering the profession—and ensuring that we continue on our journey of an undeniable, invaluable role—concur with this conclusion.

Susan Ballard, a past president of AASL, is developing a new school librarian preparation program through Granite State College/USNH that includes an emphasis on the use of a variety of data to support evidence-based practice. Ballard noted, "We are focusing on the need for school librarians to be much more strategic and intentional in documenting that what they do has a positive impact on student achievement and teacher effectiveness. We are accountable to our learning communities and decision makers and have an obligation to identify, measure, and substantiate that their investment pays learning dividends."

I know that too many districts are struggling with cuts to library media staff and funding—success to some, however, will spread to others. Just as the news of so many cuts in the past decade resulted in more cuts, news of LMSs' key role in supporting the new standards, innovation, and digital learning is welcome. The challenge and work ahead is at times daunting, but the feeling that we are here, a place worthy of much exploration, reflection, and opportunity to improve our contributions to our students, is a much better than being in survival mode. In the year of the learning

commons, let's make the vision a reality.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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