



"Guests cannot set foot on our campus without knowing that staff and students love the library!"

Moving Down the Path and Hitting Stride

More on the Transition from Traditional Library to Learning Commons

CHRISTINA A. BENTHEIM

Last time around (see the February issue), you read about the ups and downs I faced during the winter while continuing the transition from traditional school library to learning commons.

This month, I'm pleased to share with you how my program is starting to hit stride and become something valuable.

BACK INTO THE SWING

Having been gone for a month when combining the time out with loss of my father and winter break, there was a lot of ground to catch up when school re-opened in January. My first step was to revisit my calendar for the remainder of the year. Earlier in the fall I planned special events for the entire year. As time has progressed, I've made some changes here and there to reflect the needs of my school community and interests of students. Having a solid fresh start in January, I decided to taper back some of the previously planned events so I could put all of my energy into making those selected events extra special, while removing some pressure from myself as I worked to come to terms with my new personal reality.

A BUSY END OF THE YEAR

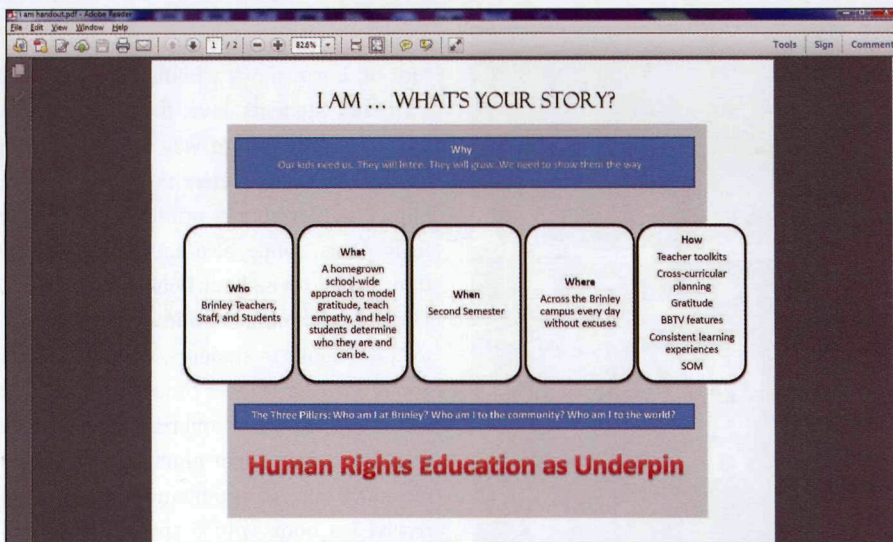
Some of the spring events for which I am responsible for organizing and executing, with the help of my library media center (LMC) committee, are:

- Love My Library Month (February)
- Blind Date with a Book Lock-in (February)
- Second Book Fair (February)
- Nevada Reading Week (February)
- Holocaust Remembrance Week (April)
- An Evening with Holocaust Survivors (April)
- Third Book Fair (May)

In addition, one of the literacy strategists and I are chairing a committee of teachers and staff who are working on ways to model gratitude, teach empathy, and help students determine who they are and can be. This was borne from discussions on a staff development day in the fall where teachers had overarching concerns about the large amounts of apathy and the extremely low levels of empathy they were seeing. To address their concerns, we titled the initiative the I Am . . . Project and developed, with the help of our committee, a semester-long plan. With special library displays both in and out of the library, a number of wall and bulletin board displays around school, push-in lessons taught in context of all subject areas, brief video clips made by students for our daily closed-circuit broadcast, the I Am . . . Project is a schoolwide effort. It is underpinned by human rights education using the Universal Declaration for Human Rights, Holocaust educational resources from my work with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum as a teacher fellow, and ongoing student studies about contemporary genocide. At the end of the year, we hope students can answer these three questions in personally meaningful ways:

- Who am I at Brinley?
- Who am I to the community?
- Who am I to the world?

With the I Am . . . Project and other LMC



For the "I am...Project," in which the learning commons played a significant role, we provided staff with the document seen here.

events calendared, it is shaping up to be a very brisk end of the school year.

IDEALLY POSITIONED FOR THE LEARNING COMMONS TO FLOURISH

One of my goals this year was to make the LMC the hub of the school so that it could truly flourish as a learning commons. With

all of these things planned, it has started to become that. By serving both formal and informal leadership roles in so many schoolwide events and initiatives (including the planning team for our brand-new Flex blended learning academy next year), the library program is front and center by design. Many of the things we do as a school have a home base in the LMC. This includes staff meetings, visiting administrator meet-



Our school-wide Holocaust Timeline is based on the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's Guidelines for Teaching the Holocaust. Each panel is in kid-friendly terms and teachers have even built their own versions of the timeline in their classrooms and pod areas to reference during instruction. Students and teachers can come to the LMC for support on this and related topics.

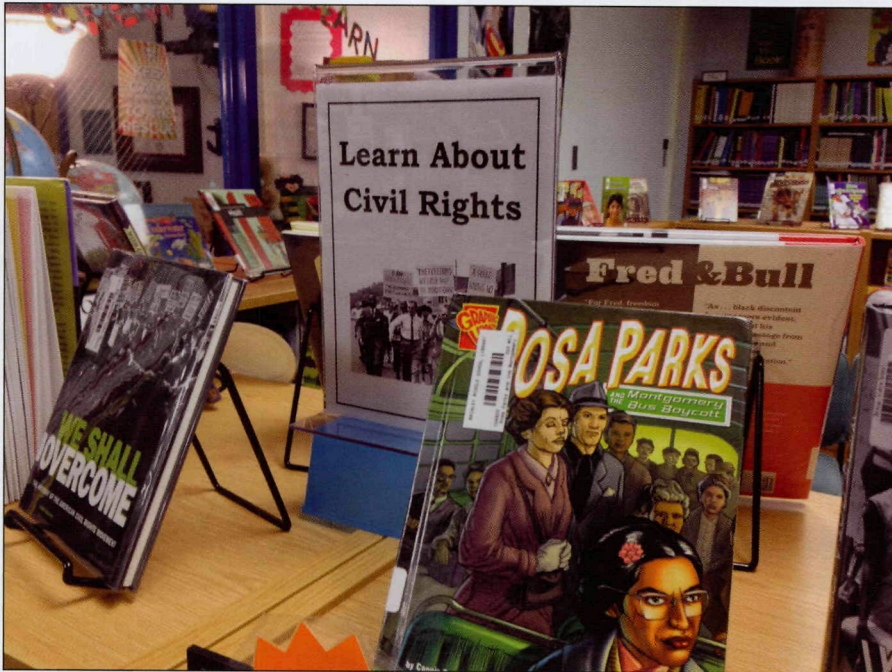
ings, peer-to-peer collaboration sessions, monthly student celebrations, and collaborative instruction, among other things.

LOVE MY LIBRARY MONTH

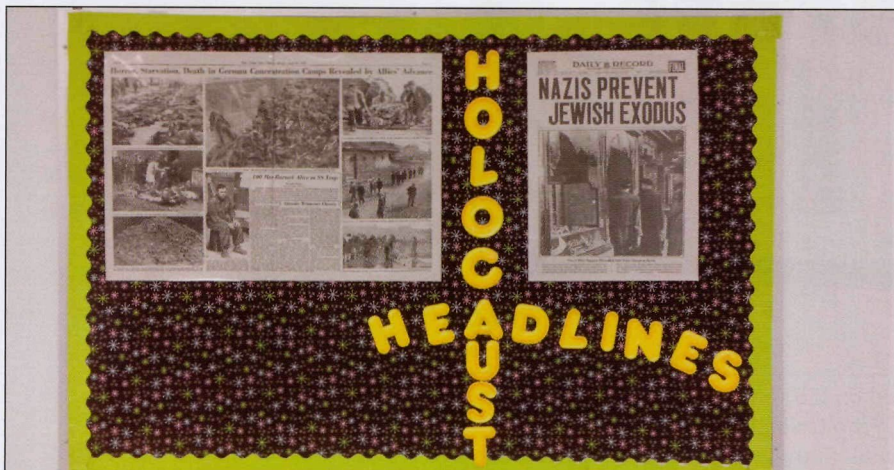
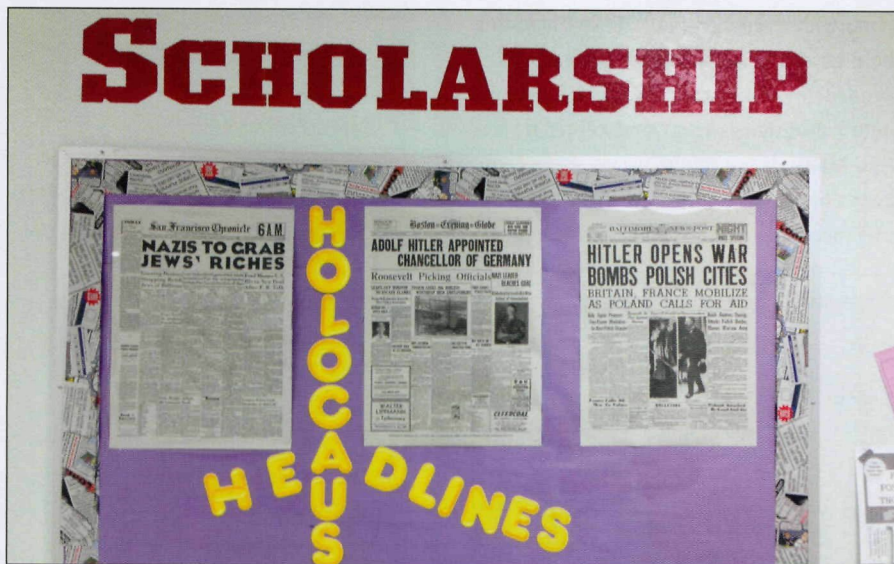
To bring this global view of the LMC into perspective for advocacy purposes, I chose to use the love theme in February for Love My Library Month. Every student was given a slip where they wrote what they love about the Brinley LMC. We did this school-wide during a five-minute period at the beginning of February. As slips came back in droves, I read through them all and had my Hero Squad (student aides) post them all around and inside the LMC. In addition, we selected several top-notch examples and featured them on BBTV, our school's closed-

BLIND DATE WITH A BOOK LOCK-IN STATIONS

- Speed Dating with Books
 - One-minute "dates" with books to preview the jacket, cover, general text, and/or illustrations
 - Students kept track of books they wanted to "see again"
- Book Talks
 - Students took turns exploring books and book talking them to each other
- Shelfies
 - A bookish spin on selfies, students showed their love for books and the library media center by making self-portraits with iPads
- Book Spine Poetry
 - Students created and shared poems they made from book spines and then forever immortalized their creativity with an iPad photo
- Book Fair Videos
 - Students used iPads to preview book trailers for our upcoming book fair while keeping track of favorites on their wish list



In-library displays support the I am...Project.



The hallway bulletin boards that the LMC has adopted also feature primary sources to support the I Am... Project.

circuit television system. Guests cannot set foot on our campus without knowing that staff and students love the library! Also part of this campaign was a push to have teachers publicly declare their love for the library by hanging a printed sign outside their doors, while also talking about the things they love about books and reading. The LMC committee also invited teachers in to “gift” books to students, with little notes about why the teacher thought the student would like to borrow and read the book. We distributed more than ninety books, which means 10 percent of our student population received a book with a special note from one of their teachers.

The other major event during Love My Library Month was the Blind Date with a Book Lock-in. Similar to the fall lock-in discussed in my last article, this one was scaled back just a bit to meet the needs of staff and students. After the last lock-in, I sought feedback from the teachers and students and set out to implement those suggestions. We had a lot fewer students attend this time because of scheduling conflicts with other extracurricular activities. However, it was still a fantastic experience where kids who really need some extra love got quality time with teachers while participating in meaningful literacy-related multimedia stations. Every student left with stacks of library books they had been exposed to during the station activities and, of course, their “blind dates.” Once students were finished reading their blind dates, they returned “Rate Your Date” slips that served well as student-generated book reviews.

COLLABORATIVE INSTRUCTION IN THE LEARNING COMMONS

The last few months have not been all fun and games, though. Students have worked a lot, too. One such project was co-constructed by our talented Spanish teacher and me. Her students are studying the culture of Spain, so she wanted to create a learning experience that would be authentic, rigorous, and aligned to the Common Core. We started with the end in mind and worked back to create the project. She worked to teach her students about Spain while I taught the Big



YA FICTION

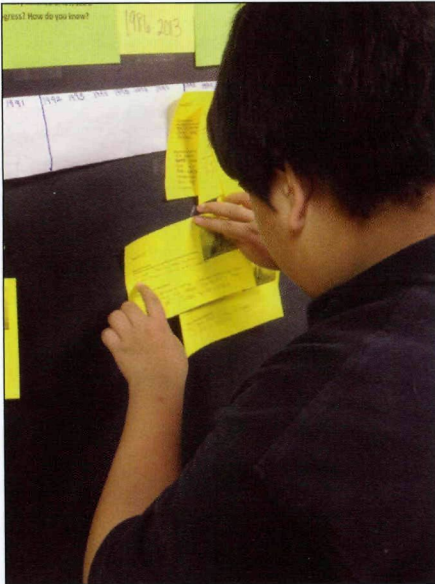
NO MOTHER IN SIGHT

Rowell, Rainbow. **Fangirl**. St. Martin, 2013. 445p. \$18.99. 9781250030955. Grades 9-12. Cath and her twin, Wren, whose mother left years earlier, say goodbye to their father and go off to college. Cath, hurt that the more sociable Wren wants a separate life at school, immerses herself in classes and writing fan fiction but avoids fellow students. When her edgy roommate and two young men pull Cath out of her isolation, she gains a new view of herself in this thoughtful novel about love and change.

Murdoch, Emily. **If You Find Me**. St. Martin, 2013. 256p. \$17.99. 9781250021526. Grades 8-11. Having been raised by their meth-addicted mother hidden in a national park, Carey, 15, and her sister, Nessa, 6, are scared when the mother disappears and they are unexpectedly rescued from the woods. Suddenly the girls have to deal with a new family and a modern world they've rarely seen. Carey must learn to trust for the first time in this compelling novel with psychological tension and complex characters.

Engle, Margarita. **Mountain Dog**. Holt, 2013. 224p. \$16.99. 9780805095166. Grades 4-7. When Tony's mother goes to prison, the 11-year-old is surprised to have a great-uncle appear and take him to the Sierras. Though sad about his mother, Tony grows to love the outdoors; his uncle who's a forest ranger; and the uncle's search-and-rescue dog, Gabe. A satisfying, warm-hearted verse novel.

Harrington, Karen. **Sure Signs of Crazy**. Little, Brown, 2013. 288p. \$17.00. 9780316210584. Grades 5-8. Sarah's mother, now in a psychiatric facility, tried to drown her when Sarah was a baby, a huge news story. Sarah, 12, is growing up with her caring but sad father who drinks too much. They move often to avoid publicity. Her memorable narrative voice recounts a complicated summer of love and hope, in which she also writes letters to Atticus Finch, the kind of father she'd like to have.



Students used the newly expanded space in the LMC to create a room-sized timeline. The timeline helped them to put events of their topic of study in context while having access to technology and print resources.

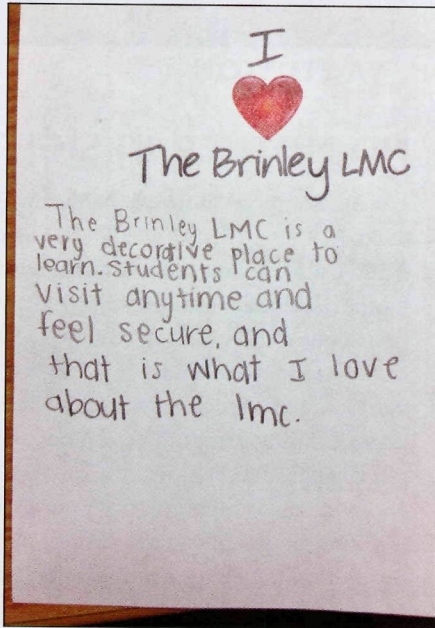
6 research model step by step. I guided students through the process, helping them lay out their research road map so they could access materials and properly cite them. We spent an extensive amount of time helping the students to develop high-level questions worthy of research. To build background

knowledge, we also conducted a virtual field trip to one of the Spanish cathedrals and had the kids create a subsequent room-sized time line to help them grasp the context of Spanish history ranging hundreds of years. Once projects are in, we will engage students in a "Big Think" to help them reflect on their new knowledge and connect it to new learning experiences. The teacher and I are grading the final essays together. In doing so, we will be able to get a feel for what we can do to improve next time.

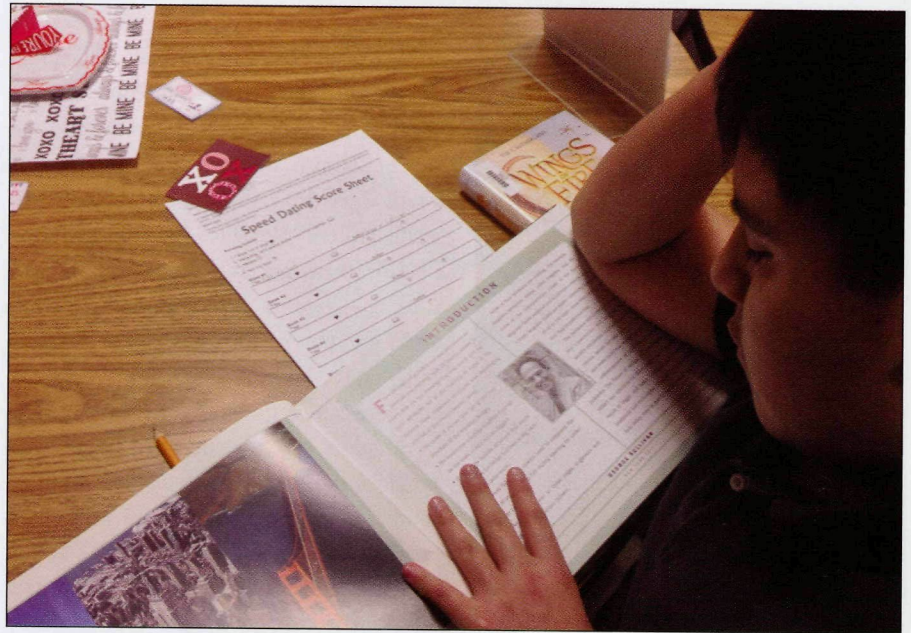
Another key learning experience was provided in a just-in-time manner for one-third of our sixth grade. I released the latest reading data from a benchmark test to our principal and staff one afternoon. As teachers started sharing the data with students, students began to get angry. They were angry and upset that they were reading upward of three years below grade level. One of our sixth-grade teachers took this as a teaching moment and asked the students why they are upset and who they think is to blame. She issued them a written survey and brought me the results. These students responded that the poor reading in the school was the librarian's fault! Some of their comments had complaints like there are too many "baby" books, she doesn't let us check out more



During Love My Library month, teachers selected books for students that were then "valentine-grammed" to them with a little note attached. The response from students was positive—they enjoyed getting books from teachers. One student said, "I didn't think my teacher even liked me!"



This is just one of the 900 slips received for Love My Library Month. Kids wrote what it is about the Brinley LMC that they absolutely love.



At one of the Lock-in stations, students participated in quick book passes, known as book speed dating! This was a great way to expose students to a number of quality books. Lots of these books were checked out at the end of the evening!

than one book, and other bits of nonsense that proved those students don't set foot into our LMC on a regular basis, or that they were looking for someone to blame. The teacher and I decided that we would use this information to let the kids right their own misconceptions. She brought them in, and I wrote lots of numbers on the board. These were basically numbers without context. As I spoke with the kids, I created context so they started to understand where I was going. By the end, the students declared that all the barriers to get books and materials had been removed by me, and it was, in fact, their own faults for not taking more of an advantage of our services. Kids were really amazed when I showed them our circulation

numbers. When they realized that halfway through the year, kids have already checked out more books than in six previous years for the entire school year, they saw the flaws to their logic. I even had a few kids apologize that they used me as a scapegoat (a word that I was proud to hear because it means some of the work we are doing with the I Am ... Project is sinking in).

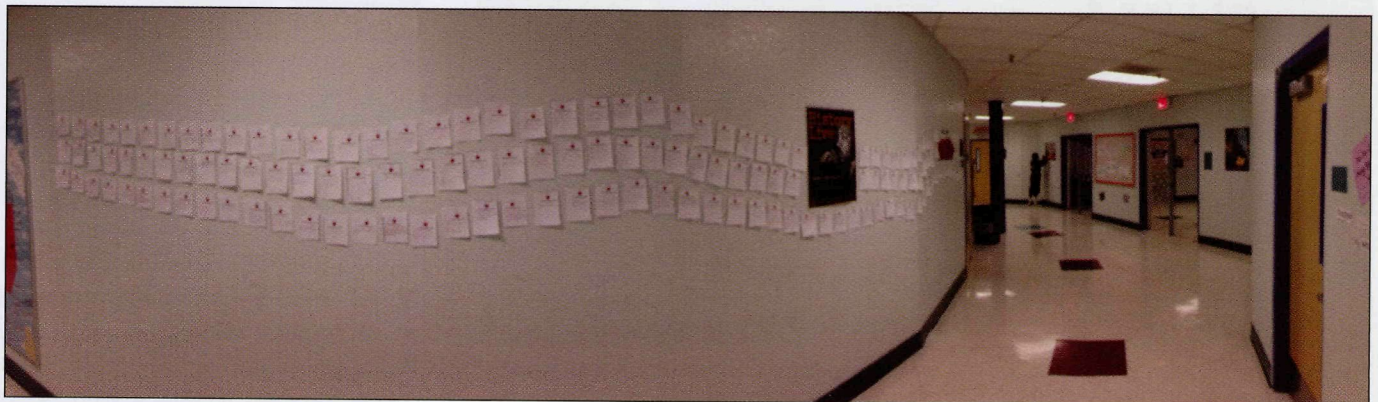
NEW PHYSICAL CHANGES TO THE LMC SPACE

In a previous article I mentioned my desire to remove the "permanent" bulky computer stations within the library to create a wide open space for students to work. This also

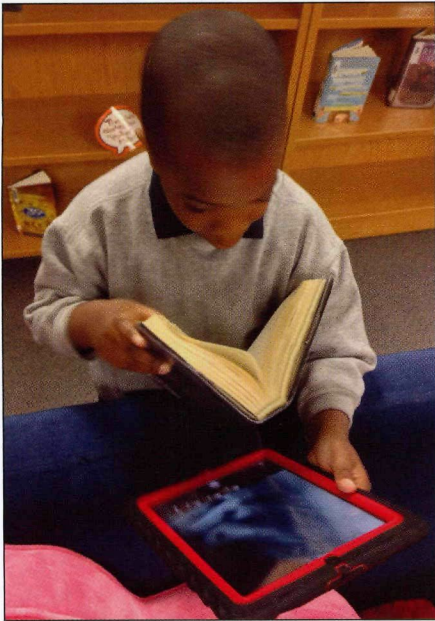
creates flexibility to have more of a modular work environment for staff and students that can be customized to meet needs of small and large groups. Changes slated for the future include knocking down walls in my back storage room and office area to add additional square footage to the physical space of the library. We estimate that construction will begin during the next school year.

BUILDING THE VIRTUAL PIECE OF THE LEARNING COMMONS

With the new blended learning Flex Academy launching at Brinley next year, there are a number of implications for the LMC.



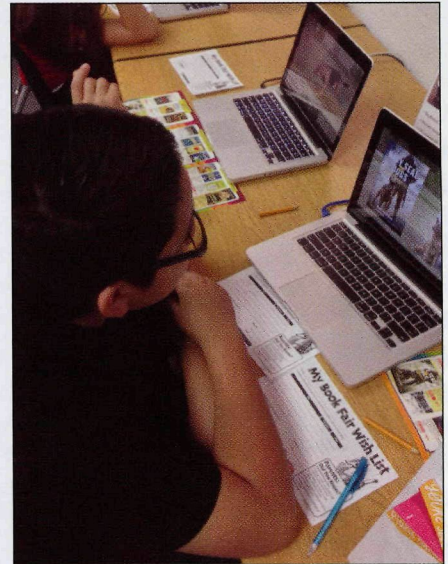
Every student in the school filled out an I Love the Brinley LMC slip. My Hero Squad (student aides) then plastered them all over the school so that when guests arrive at our school, there is no doubt how important the library is to our kids.



Students enjoyed taking shelfies of themselves with their favorite books!



At the Lock-in, students made videos of each other giving book talks. Those book talks are broadcast to the entire school on our closed-circuit TV system.



One of the Lock-in stations provided kids with the opportunity to navigate our Library website (www.brinleylmc.com) to watch book fair preview videos.

This is a fantastic opportunity to build the virtual learning commons and engage students and teachers in project-based learning through knowledge building centers. As I work with my principal to determine the new direction of the library within the context of the Flex Academy, I will report on those efforts.

SOME PARTING WORDS

I take great pride in running a library that welcomes every child with open arms. Just

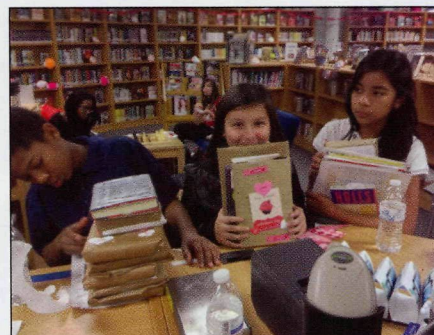
today two of our self-contained classes came into the library for story time and checkout and to preview the book fair. I truly love seeing all kids in the library enjoying themselves, but there is something about the kiddos with severe developmental disabilities that brings me great joy. They love taking selfies on the iPads and exploring the maps. Seeing them gathered around the tables, giggling and thoroughly enjoying themselves, is very special. Watching them stumble out of the library with massive piles of books that they may or may not read is also wonderful. Many of them cannot speak or read. However, libraries truly are the great equalizer. The learning commons, though, what we have built at Brinley Middle School, is where those who have been equalized can truly thrive because the environment is tailored

to meet the needs of whomever happens to be in the physical space at the moment.

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Students from the Lock-in sifted through stacks and stacks of blind date books to find just the right one! When they left, every single book was gone!



Kids left the Lock-in with stacks of books to enjoy for their blind dates!



This space previously had three permanent computer banks. Without them, our space is large, open, and flexible.

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