

## FEATURE ARTICLE



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# Collaboration Works—When It Happens!

## The Idaho School Library Impact Study

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**C**ollaboration between teacher-librarians and classroom teachers is valued by principals and other administrators.

Where it is valued and when it happens, makes a demonstrable difference in the teaching of Information/Communication/Technology standards and state Reading and Language Arts scores. Alas, according to both classroom teachers and teacher-librarians, despite its known value, collaboration happens all too infrequently.

Last year, the latest in a series of state studies was undertaken for the Idaho Commission for Libraries and endorsed by the Idaho State Department of Education. Survey responses were received from 176 principals and other administrators, 668 classroom teachers, and 146 library media specialists (aka teacher-librarians).

These are the major findings about collaboration from the Idaho School Library Impact Study—2009: How Idaho Librarians, Teachers, and Administrators Collaborate for Student Success.

### Administrators on Collaboration

*(Our) High School has a new librarian...who is inspiring to the staff there. She has used the library as a study, technology and research resource to students. She has brought teachers in and encouraged them to partner with her in working with writing, technology and subject exploration. —a district administrator*

*Our librarian ... sits on our school advisory committee... She is a great asset to our school. —an elementary school principal*

### COLLABORATION: HOW MUCH IT IS VALUED & HOW FREQUENTLY IT OCCURS

Principals and other administrators were asked how much they value librarian-teacher collaboration, while classroom teachers and teacher-librarians were asked how frequently such collaboration takes place, whether initiated by them or the other party.

The overwhelming majority of administrators—almost nine out of ten—identified collaboration on instructional design and delivery as essential or desirable. More than a quarter (27.6%) deemed it essential, while more than three out of five (61.5%) deemed it desirable. Only 2.3% of responding administrators deemed collaboration unnecessary (See Table 1). With such substantial support for librarian-teacher collaboration among administrators, one would expect it to happen with great frequency; but, according to both classroom teachers and teacher-librarians, that is not the case.

Classroom teachers were asked if they collaborate with teacher-librarians in the design and delivery of instruction—whether initiated by them or by their TL. Many report highly successful team efforts, but, far too many report a lack of such teamwork.

## Teachers on Collaboration

*When I first started teaching three years ago I found the librarian to be a vital resource for my teaching. She has given direction to students and developed reading lists that my students use to find appropriate books. She has also made me aware of new books that might encourage at-risk students to read. Together with the librarian we now have students who read regularly who would have not picked up a book two years ago. – a high school teacher*

*After being assigned to instruct a new elective class ... I floundered in designing a new curriculum that would be innovative [and] interesting... I happened to mention my dilemma to our school librarian one afternoon. She quickly responded with several great ideas that I was able to adapt almost immediately, helping me with my own creative juices! Without her input, I would not have put together a new curriculum so quickly (or possibly at all) ... She's a genius! Whenever I have a curriculum/technology problem, I know she's the "go-to" person. – a junior high school teacher*

*[The middle school librarian came] to our school to do a 10-week library lesson. She taught the students the Big 6. The six steps in writing a research report. I have been able to ... incorporate it into my classroom. The other day we were reading an autobiography ... As we were reading the story, A Kind of Grace, we came up with questions that were not answered in the story, so we went to the computer lab to use the Internet and World Book online to do more research about Jackie Joyner Kersee. The students were so excited and engaged about the story and being able to find more information. They talked about the research for the rest of the day. I walked away ... ready to incorporate new ideas into my classroom and put the student's new knowledge to work. – an elementary school teacher*

Almost half of classroom teachers report that neither they (45.1%) nor their teacher-librarians (48.1%) initiate instructional collaboration with each other. Fewer than 18% of teachers report their teacher-librarians initiating collaboration at least weekly (5.8%) or at least monthly (12.1%). Even fewer teachers—fewer than 16%—report initiating such collaboration themselves at least weekly (3.9%) or at least monthly (10.8%)—see Table 2. One explanation for these low figures is that teachers responding to the survey may or may not have had the services of a credentialed teacher-librarian.

Like their classroom colleagues, teacher-librarians were asked how frequently they collaborated on the design and delivery of instruction, and whether it was initiated by them or the teacher. When those self-identified as library media specialists were asked similar questions, the responses were somewhat better (see textbox 3).

About three out of ten of these teacher-librarians reported that collaboration happened rarely or never, regardless of whether they or their teacher colleagues initiated it. On the other hand, more than a third of teacher-librarians reported that they initiated collaboration at least monthly (24.7%) or at least weekly (9.6%). Similarly, about a quarter of teacher-librarians reported that their teacher colleagues initiated collaboration at least monthly (16.4%) or at least weekly (7.5%)—see Table 3.

Clearly, there is a "disconnect." Administrators value librarian-teacher collaboration but both classroom teachers and teacher-librarians indicate that it is far from commonplace.

## LINKS BETWEEN COLLABORATION AND ICT STANDARDS TEACHING ASSESSMENTS

What are the costs of missed opportunities for collaboration between teacher-librarians and classroom teachers? The most immediate effect is on the teaching of ICT standards.

The definitions of the three ICT standards, ICT literacy, independent learning, and social responsibility, are as follow:

	Importance to Administrator of Activity Happening in School/ District (Regardless of Actual Practice)				
Practice		Essential	Desirable	Acceptable	Unnecessary
Librarian and teacher design and teach instructional units together					
	Number	48	107	15	4
	Percent	27.6	61.5	8.6	2.3

**Table 1.** Value Placed on Collaboration by Principals & Other Administrators

Activity		Frequency of Activity Reported by Teacher				
		At least Weekly	At least Monthly	At least once per semester	At least annually	Rarely or never
Librarian initiates collaboration with me to design and deliver instruction together	Number	39	81	112	115	321
	Percent	5.8	12.1	16.8	17.2	48.1
I initiate collaboration with the librarian to design and deliver instruction together	Number	26	72	138	131	301
	Percent	3.9	10.8	20.7	19.6	45.1

**Table 2.** Frequency of Collaboration with Librarians Reported by Classroom Teachers





## TIME TRAVEL

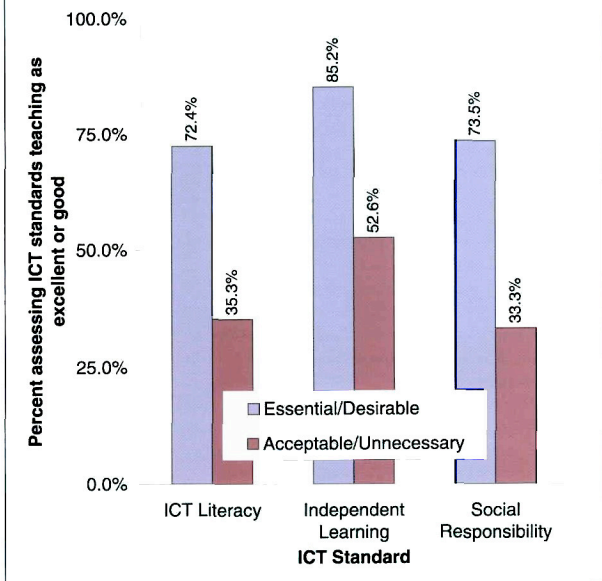
**Three days to never.** Tim Powers. Harper, 2007. \$7.99. 978-0-380-798377. Grades 9-12. In this compelling novel, Frank Marry discovers that his recently deceased grandmother was Einstein's daughter Leiserl. When Frank finds a time machine among her effects, he and his daughter twelve-year-old Daphne, embark on a great adventure involving the Mossad, supernatural elements, Einstein, Charlie Chaplin, and much more.

**Lightning.** Dean Koontz. Berkley Trade, 2010. \$16.00. 978-0-425-233603. Grades 9-12. Orphan Laura Shane has had a tragic life, but without the intervention of her apparent guardian angel Stefan, she'd suffer worse calamities. The mysterious Stefan appears during lightning storms and has a curious connection to the past and World War II. This fast-paced story effectively combines the thriller and science fiction genres.

**Time Travelers Never Die.** Jack McDevitt. Ace, 2009. \$24.95. 978-0-441-017638. Grades 9-12. Brilliant physicist Michael Shelbourne disappears, leaving behind small technological devices that prove to be time machines. Adrian "Shel" Shelbourne looks for his father with his friend Dave Dryden; their often hair-raising adventures throughout time are both exciting and fascinating. This time travel novel contains several great plot twists.

**The Accidental Time Machine.** Joe Haldeman. Ace, 2008. \$7.99. 978-0-441-016167. Grade 9-12. While adjusting a quantum calibrator, MIT graduate student Matt Fuller realizes the machine can somehow travel through time. The catch in this time travel tale is that the machine can only move forward. Interesting and fun, this entertaining story has an engaging protagonist and a fresh look at both time travel and the future.

## Administrator Assessments of ICT Standards Teaching as Excellent or Good by Value of Librarian/Teacher Collaboration



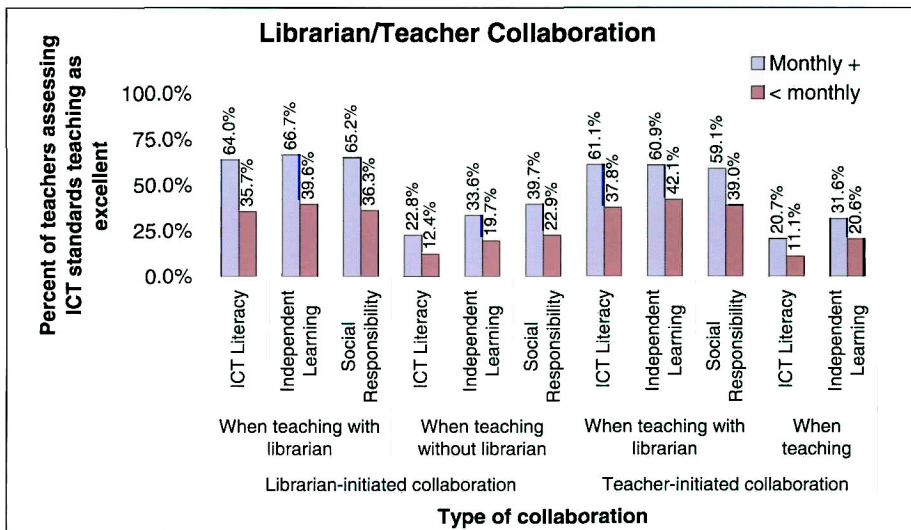
**Chart 1.** Administrator Assessments of ICT Standards Teaching as Excellent or Good by Value of Librarian/Teacher Collaboration

- **ICT literacy:** Students are taught to identify information needs and to access, evaluate, manage, integrate, create, and communicate information.
- **Independent learning:** Students are taught to pursue information related to their personal interests, to appreciate literature and other creative expression, and to generate knowledge.
- **Social responsibility:** Students are taught to recognize the importance of information in a democratic society, practice ethical behavior in regard to information and technology, and to share information and collaborate in its use in groups.

Where administrators regard librarian-teacher collaboration as essential or desirable, they are about twice as likely to assess

their school's teaching of ICT standards as excellent or good. Of the administrators that value collaboration more highly, at least seven out of ten assess the teaching of ICT standards more highly. Of those who value collaboration less highly, only about a third assess teaching of ICT literacy and social responsibility more highly, and only about half assess teaching of independent learning more highly (see Chart 1).

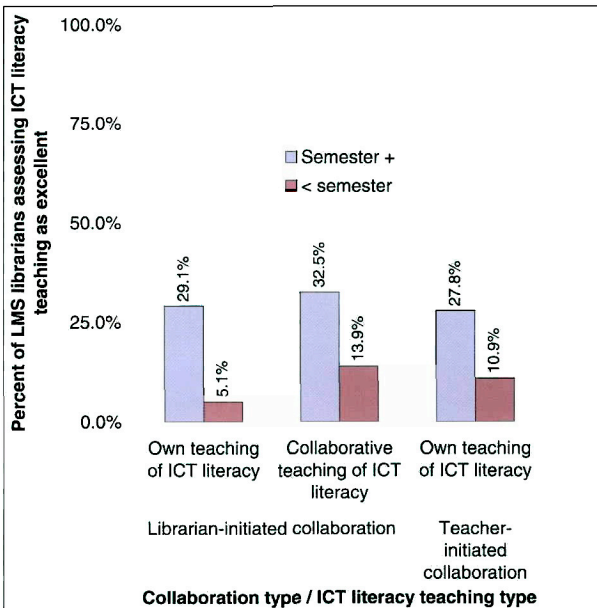
Where classroom teachers report collaboration happening at least monthly (regardless of who the initiator is), they are twice as likely to self-assess their ICT standards teaching as excellent. For example, 64% of teachers reporting more frequent collaboration and fewer than 36% of those reporting less frequent collaboration rate



**Chart 2.** Percent of Teachers Assessing ICT Standards Teaching as Excellent by Frequency of Librarian/Teacher Collaboration

their collaborative teaching of ICT literacy as excellent. This finding is remarkably consistent with the preceding one for administrators. Teachers are also two to three times more likely to assess their ICT standards teaching as excellent when collaborating with a teacher-librarian than when not doing so. For example, 64% of teachers reporting more frequent collaboration rate their collaborative teaching of ICT literacy as excellent, while fewer than 23% of frequently-collaborating teachers rate their solo teaching of ICT literacy as highly (see Chart 2).

For teacher-librarians (aka library media specialists), the difference in self-assessments of ICT literacy teaching based on collaboration status are even more dramatic. When TLs initiate collaboration at least once per semester, they report an almost six-fold increase in excellent self-assessments of their solo teaching (29.1% vs. 5.1% for less than once per semester) and more than double the excellent self-assessments for collaborative ICT literacy teaching (32.5% vs. 13.9%). When teachers initiate collaboration at least once per se-



**Chart 3.** Percent of LMS Librarians Assessing ICT Literacy Teaching as Excellent by Frequency of Collaboration by Type



## PICTURE BOOKS

### CELEBRATIONS

#### **Conejito: A folktale from Panama.**

Margaret Read MacDonald, reteller. Ill. Geraldo Valério. August House, 2006. \$16.95. 978-0-874-83779-7. Grades 1-3. A young rabbit on the way to visit his wise Tia Mónica runs into and outwits Señors Zorro, Tigre, and León. Spanish words imbedded in the veteran storyteller's vigorous narrative and defined in context give this tale plenty of atmosphere.

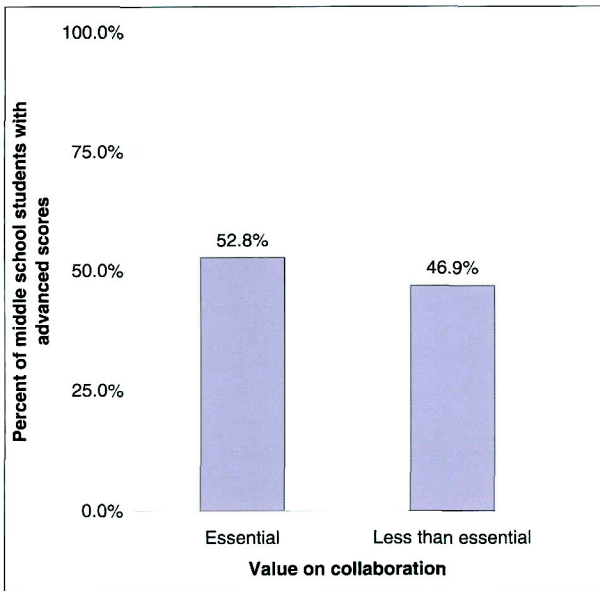
#### **Eight animals on the town.**

Susan Middleton Elya. Ill. Lee Chapman. Putnam, 2000. \$15.99. 978-0-399-23437-8. Grades 1-3. In a rhymed blend of English and Spanish that children of any background will enjoy reading or hearing, eight animals gather up party food then get together to dance the night away. Chapman catches the rhythmic text's high energy in particularly animated illustrations, and adds all sorts of amusing visual jokes too.

**Gonzalo grabs the good life.** Janice Levy. Ill. Bill Slavin & Esperança Melo. Eerdman's, 2009. \$17.50. 978-0-8028-5328-8. Grades 1-3. A rooster gladly leaves the farmyard behind to sample la vida loca in this Spanish-inflected original tale. Humans and animals mingle freely in the thickly-textured illustrations, and young viewers will find plenty of visual jokes to go along with the general plot's funny twists. In the end, Gonzalo returns. Has he learned from his experiences? Not hardly!

#### **Road to Santiago.**

Danilo Figueroa. Ill. Pablo Torrecilla. Lee & Low, 2003. \$16.95. 978-1-584-30059-5. Grades 2-3. A family undertakes the difficult journey from Havana to Abuela's house in this warmly atmospheric Christmas tale, set in Cuba just prior to Castro's rise. Vividly colored illustrations capture the look of the people, the city and the countryside.



**Chart 4.** Percent of Middle School Students with Advanced ISAT Reading Scores by Value Placed on Librarian/Teacher Collaboration by Administrator

master, TLs are almost three times as likely to report excellent self-assessments of their solo teaching (27.8% vs. 10.9%)—see Chart 3. Curiously, these findings do not play through for their self-assessments of collaborative teaching.

### LINKS BETWEEN COLLABORATION AND READING AND LANGUAGE ARTS SCORES

There is also evidence that advanced scores on the state Reading and Language Arts tests are more likely when administrators value collaboration more highly and librarians report more frequent collaborative interactions with classroom colleagues (especially at the latter's initiation).

Where administrators consider librarian-teacher collaboration to be essential, the percent of middle school students with advanced reading scores is almost six percentage points higher (5.9%). That is a proportional difference of almost 13% (12.6%)

over schools where administrators consider collaboration anything less than essential (i.e., desirable, acceptable, or unnecessary)—see Chart 4.

Where TLs at elementary and middle school levels report that their classroom colleagues initiate collaboration with them at least monthly, Reading and Language Arts scores are three to seven percent higher—proportional differences of 14% to 21% over schools where librarians report less frequent teacher-initiated collaboration (see Chart 5).

Where high school teacher-librarians report two types of teacher-initiated collaboration activity at least monthly—asking for help finding instructional resources and inviting the TL to the classroom—advanced scores on the state Reading and Language Arts tests are consistently more likely. The absolute difference ranges from 3.7% on Language Arts for teachers asking for help finding resources to 6.9% on Reading for teachers inviting their library colleagues to





## JUNIOR NON-FICTION

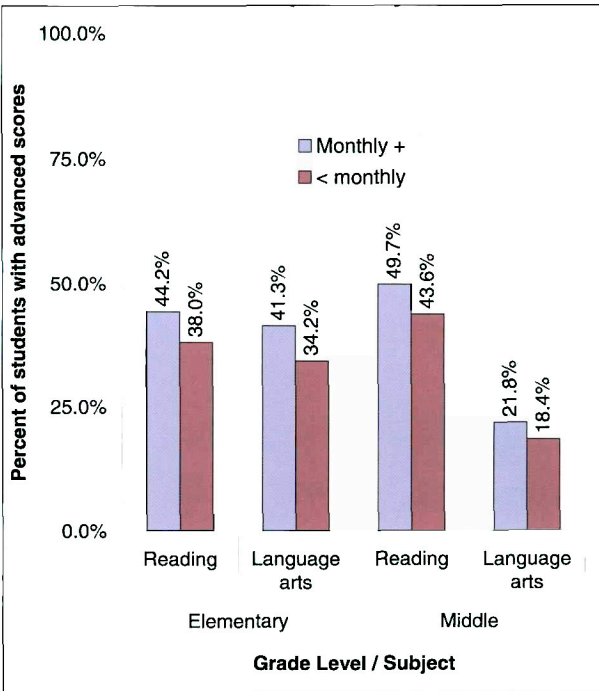
## MAKING THEIR MARK!

**Alexander the Great: Master of the ancient world** (A Wicked History). Doug Wilhelm. Franklin Watts, 2010. \$21.90. 978-0-531-21275-2. Grades 6-12. Easy to read and compelling! Alexander achieved enough in his short life that "the Great" was the only nickname that would fit. Alexander, Attila, Napoleon are all names associated with accomplishment and adventure, and just enough "wicked" to make history fascinating. A timeline, detailed glossary, index, and bibliography are included.

**Henry Hudson: New world voyager** (Quest Biography). Edward Butts. Dundurn Press, 2009. \$15.99. 978-1-55488-455-1. Grades 7-12. Hudson went from an unknown sailor to an honored explorer, credited with numerous maritime endeavors. The epilogue tells of the surviving mutineers and concludes with a comprehensive chronology, bibliography, and index.

**Kanye West** (People in the News). Barbara Sheen. Lucent Books, 2010. \$32.45. 978-1-4205-0159-9. Grades 6-10. Well-researched and documented, this biography of Kanye describes his middle-class childhood, his love of music, and his decision to be more than a traditional "gangsta" rapper, choosing instead to represent a more positive music message. Back matter has chapter-by-chapter source notes, timeline, more information, and a detailed index.

**The life and times of Attila the Hun** (Biography from Ancient Civilizations). Earle Rice. Mitchell Lane, 2010. \$29.95. 978-1-58415-741-0. Grades 6-8. Ideal for high/low readers, here is a series of books written in interesting narrative format including Buddha, Moses, and Plato among others. Called sinister, "scourge of God," the king of the Huns left behind those who celebrated his death and those who mourned. Chapter Notes, timeline, further reading, glossary, and an index complete each title.



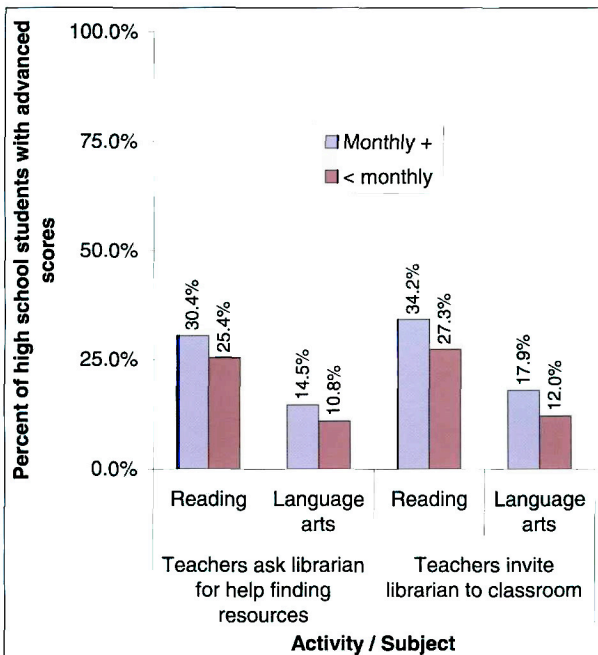
**Chart 5.** Percent of Students with Advanced ISAT Scores by Grade Level and Subject by Frequency of Teacher/Librarian Collaboration Reported by Librarian

the classroom. The proportional differences over schools with less frequent collaborative activities range from 20.0% for Reading and teachers asking for help finding resources to 49.2% for Language Arts and teachers inviting the TL to the classroom (see Chart 6).

## SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATION

The evidence from the Idaho study is clear: when administrators value collaboration between teacher-librarians and classroom teachers and when teacher-librarians and their classroom colleagues report that it happens more frequently, students are more likely to master ICT standards and more likely to earn advanced scores on

state reading and language arts tests. The problem is that, despite a high level of support for collaboration as an essential practice among administrators, teacher-librarians and classroom teachers indicate that it does not happen regularly in many cases, and, in far too many cases, it happens rarely or never. A major recommendation of this study, therefore, is that administrators should take action to make collaboration a practical reality, and teacher-librarians and classroom teachers should take initiative to establish and strengthen their collaborative efforts. The latest evidence from Idaho indicates that more widespread and more effective instructional collaboration between teacher-librarians and their classroom colleagues will benefit students.



**Chart 6.** Percent of High School Students with Advanced ISAT Scores by Frequency of Selected Library-Related Activities Reported by Librarian

Keith Curry Lance is known widely for his contributions to library research and statistics. He is founding and longtime director of the Library Research Service (RSL) at the Colorado State Library. He has also served as an Affiliated Faculty member of the Library and Information Science Program, College of Education, University of Denver.

Marcia J. Rodney is the principal analyst with RSL Group with more than fifteen years of extensive research experience, in both education and business. She has worked with numerous states on survey design and analysis, examining the rigor and impact of school library programs, and traveled and spoken extensively about the import of these studies.

Bill Schwarz is an experienced project manager at RSL Group with over six years of survey design, data collection, and database management experience, and has been a key participant in every project RSL has completed. They may be contacted at [rsinfo@rslresearch.com](mailto:rsinfo@rslresearch.com).

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