



CASE STUDY: MEAD SCHOOL DISTRICT

## TRANSFORMING A LIBRARY INTO A FUTURE-READY “SMARTLIBRARY”



School libraries have always served an important purpose in K–12 education because they provide students with unbiased and unlimited access to information. With the help of qualified librarians, students learn to research and expand their reading and writing skills independently while helping to assist in student achievement.

However, as the first internet-generation rises through the school ranks, libraries across the country are faced with the struggle of how to remain relevant. It's no longer enough for libraries to simply "be there."



School librarians recognize the need to develop new ways to reach students and pull them in to explore their creative inclinations, learn new skills, and apply their learning in innovative ways.

## BEST OF BOTH WORLDS: A LIBRARY AND A TECHNOLOGY LAB

Many school libraries are already making strides to capture and maintain school budgets, but the majority are falling short.

Recent reports show that between 2009–10 and 2015–16, there was a 15% decrease (nearly 9,200) in full-time school librarians across the U.S.; with more than 10,000 total losses since 2000 (Lance, 2018).

For Mead School District in Mead, Washington, where library staff had been reduced because of severe budget cuts, librarians were committed to doing something different in their district library.

Now, the library is thriving with students engaged in a variety of student-led STEM experiences.

"We knew libraries were being shut down across our state," said Trish Henry, Mead School District Librarian and Learning

WE KNEW WE  
COULDN'T DO  
THIS ON OUR OWN



Coordinator, “but we also noticed that these libraries were being replaced with technology labs and specialists. We wanted to find a STEM solution we could integrate into an existing library so we could get the best of both worlds,” she said.

Although Mead School District’s library purchased makerspace project kits, librarians feared the perception that kids were just playing and not learning STEM concepts.

They found that “although makerspaces helped engage students, it was time-consuming for our librarians to create standards-based lessons that could be delivered in the allotted time.

“We needed to find something more sustainable while making it easier for our librarians to create lessons that integrated technology, but also correlated to library standards.” Ms. Henry explained.

After being introduced to SmartLab Learning, Ms. Henry was invited to tour a few SmartLab HQs in other schools.

“When we walked into the first SmartLab HQ, our first thought was ‘we can do this ourselves,’” she explained. “By the time we got to the second SmartLab HQ, we knew we couldn’t do this on our own. We saw how a SmartLab HQ could help us create a learning environment where everyone doesn’t have to do the same thing at the same time.”

The unique thing about SmartLab Learning is that students choose a challenge within a project they design.

“Students were at six different learning stations doing something different at each one. We knew our librarians wouldn’t be able to create this level of personalization and engagement on their own,” she said.

Once the team experienced the SmartLab HQs, they went back to Mead School District determined to build a SmartLab HQ while keeping the existing library intact.

After funding their new SmartLab HQ with the school’s Title

funds, the team designed a “SmartLibrary” for the elementary students of Mead School District.

“We removed an oversized circulation desk, old books, and even a shelving and dividing wall. Yes, we still have a fully stocked library that’s equivalent in collection size to the other libraries in the district,” she explains, “but now, students engage in STEM projects as part of their core library class.”

This initiative has helped the district continue to grow the library.

“The Lab Facilitator, a trained teacher–librarian, even loans some of the kits and tools to other classrooms across the district. Teachers are beginning to explore how to integrate the projects into their core classes and lessons,” she said.

### **GROWING THE “SMARTLIBRARY” ACROSS MEAD SCHOOL DISTRICT**

In an elementary SmartLab HQ program, young learners discover a wide range of technologies.

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Students begin to explore robotics, software engineering, mechanics and structures, circuitry, scientific data and analysis, alternative energy, computer graphics, and digital media arts.

Now, the elementary students in Mead School District engage in authentic first-hand experiences in STEM.

“Our goal was to prepare elementary students for middle school STEM courses. In just a short time, we can see they are building interest and will continue to explore these fields as they move on to middle school, which was the goal of the initiative. I think we are well on our way to reaching it.”

Ms. Henry recommends that the key is to shift the mindset of faculty while ensuring they understand how learning is different in a SmartLab HQ.

When Ms. Henry first opened the SmartLab HQ, she invited teachers across the district to attend several trainings and to use the lab.

“Additionally, our SmartLab Facilitator proactively reaches out to teachers to integrate projects into their core subjects.

“The biggest learning and mindset shift is that students don’t have to do the same project at the same time,” she explained.

Ms. Henry and her team plan to offer professional development in the SmartLab HQ and encourage teachers to follow students to the SmartLab HQ for deeper involvement and engagement.

“We are excited to continue to integrate STEM across the district while making sure we align outcomes to library standards,” she finishes.



#### ABOUT MEAD SCHOOL DISTRICT

- Students: 10,475
- Low Income: 32%
- English Learners: 3%
- Met Math Standards: 62%
- Met ELA Standards: 70%
- Met Science Standards: 59%
- Graduated in 4 Years: 89.7%
- 9th-Graders on Track to Graduate: 87%

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