

Library Learning Commons Certification Letter of Support

Fall 2022

Dear Review Committee Members:

This letter is written in support of our goal for Dodgen Middle School to obtain the prestigious Learning Commons Certification. The transition in our library from a traditional media center into a thriving Learning Commons has been a work in progress for several years. It has taken the partnership of our community, Dodgen Administration, our teachers and staff, and our Librarians – both former and current. Today, those who walk into our Dodgen Library will find it is almost completely unrecognizable from just 5 years ago.

The work began several years ago with the addition of flexible furniture for student seating, paint, etc. Traditional student furniture was replaced by more modern student seating that allowed for movement, collaboration, flexibility, and a more relaxed atmosphere. This was paid for with the support of our school community with funds raised by the Dodgen Foundation, and this was the early start of the new look in our library. Once the furniture was updated, the focus continued with weeding of materials, reduction and eventual elimination of the “stacks” of books which closed off the space and made finding materials more difficult, and the opening up of space for more student collaboration. Along with the transition, our technology has been transformed as well. The library went from a room full of bulky and stationary desktop computers, to a space full of portable devices – iPads, laptops, etc. Now, the last of the large clunky furniture has been fully removed and the library has been repainted into school colors.

In taking over as Dodgen’s principal in 2019, I encouraged the staff to “Spark Joy” and clear the clutter from our building. Through the collaborative effort of our staff, more than 4 moving vans full of old furniture and outdated items left our building to make space for our kids. This had probably the greatest impact on the library, where old magazines, videos, sets of novels and books, globes, etc. were cleared out in favor of a brand new MakerSpace and a teacher/staff workroom and collaborative room. Once the space was designated to its new purpose, we have added to our student MakerSpace continually over the years to provide more opportunity for design and creativity for our students. In addition, there is now a Maker Club and students across the building are offered Maker Challenges to help them get creative and get “making.” We’ve added a poster maker, 3D printers, tons of materials and supplies, a cricut, etc. And, the space behind the library, which once served as an office space, now serves as a collaboration space for students, with a collaboration table conducive to smaller group collaborations. Our librarian along with some invited community volunteers have trained students and staff in how to use some of the materials available in order to bring awareness to the resources now available in our library.

The library collection has had a complete overhaul, with significant input from our students, both in the content of the collection as well as the presentation. Our librarian spent every single day of the summer of 2021 weeding the collection, looking at the data of circulation, and re-organizing our library from the traditional Dewey Decimal System of organization into a genrefied collection that operates much like a bookstore. This approach has increased circulation and created student self-reliance and confidence in their selections. In addition, frequently refreshed displays allow books of interest practically to fall into students’ hands. Our library collection celebrates all cultures, and curates materials that provide “windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors” (Bishop) for students to see themselves and to develop empathy and understanding about cultures different from theirs.

The space is significantly different, but what has really changed the most is the student and staff usage. Through a review of our circulation data, checkout data, types of books available to students, activities occurring through our library, and the work of our library staff, there is no doubt that our library is the “hub” of our school. We have a very active Library Advisory Committee of students who provide input on what books need to be added to the collection and even on how the library would best function – and how to display the materials for kids to find and use. The library is packed with students every morning, and students can’t wait to visit the library with a pass from class, to eat lunch in the library to discuss what they are reading, or to attend one of our many club meetings.

Our library has been infused with an energetic and collaborative approach that, in turn, impacts the community and performance of the school. Our librarian regularly collaborates with teachers in all content areas and all three grade levels to empower our students to be enthusiastic readers, skillful researchers and critical thinkers. To facilitate the role of research, our librarian curates targeted resources for individual teachers or departments to allow students to focus on developing their critical thinking skills to evaluate information and express it in meaningful ways. Lessons planned together with content teachers deliver engaging, meaningful activities that ask students to go beyond basic internet searches to find the specific information they need to complete the task at hand. And, lessons incorporate technology in a way that engages students in meaningful, real-life projects.

As the principal of Dodgen Middle School, I could not be more proud of the significant work that has gone into the transition from a traditional media center space to a true learning commons, and we are excited to share our work with you!

Sincerely,

Dr. Patricia Alford
Principal
Dodgen Middle School