

# Rural and Ready for Change

Fostering dynamic access to well-rounded, integrated library services for rural students in kindergarten through 8th grade.

## PROJECT JUSTIFICATION

Orleans Elementary School is located in Vermont's rural Northeast Kingdom. It serves a total of 115 students in grades kindergarten through 8th grade and is part of the larger Orleans Central Supervisory Union.

The Orleans Elementary School Library is a good fit for this initiative. There is one part-time certified librarian that serves 115 students in grades kindergarten through 8th grade. It is a recipient of the Community Eligibility Program which provides all meals for free to all students in high poverty areas. 24 students are on Individualized Education Plans and 504 plans. The current budget for library supplies is \$400 and \$1,900 for library books/periodicals. The collection currently has 2,800 holdings and has just recently added a digital database to support research in grades 2 through 8.

The school is located in a **high-poverty community** with one small, local library open 3.5 days a week and has had high staff-turnover in recent years. There are few accessible cultural spaces such as museums, recreation centers, and parks. Large areas of the community lack high-speed internet access and there is no public transportation. **A large portion of community needs must be met through the school.**

The school and the larger supervisory union are in the process of making some significant **system wide shifts in teaching and learning toward more personalized learning, cross curricular skills, and proficiency based learning**. These changes are exciting and well-received, but like all initiatives take time and supports to see their full impact. School libraries have the important task of supporting teachers and students throughout these changes. Access to a certified librarian and the library resources is critical to the success of these more equitable initiatives. **We would like to add access and flexibility to our library program.**

Apart from a recent project to automate circulation, which is almost completed, it has not been updated since 1991. The current setup of the space does not support the 21st-century learning that is happening throughout the school and what best practice requires it to do. Instead of being a dynamic hub of the school that can quickly adapt to increasingly more personalized approaches toward learning, it is seen as static, as its own entity, and simply a place to check out books.

A beginning of the year student survey reported that the most common uses for the library have been to check out books and use the printer. Students reported using the library for research or to help

support learning in their classrooms just 30% of the time. Additionally, only 18% of middle school students reported being able to find what they were looking for in the library. When asked what they would do to improve the library, popular suggestions included: rearranging so that it isn't so crowded, provide different options for seating and workspaces to make it more welcoming and flexible for a variety of purposes, and adding more relevant signage.

While rearranging the space will promote collaboration, easier access to relevant materials, and creation over consumption, these changes will only be effective with proper staffing. Thus, **increased access to the certified librarian** needs to be addressed. The 2018-2019 school year was the first year ever that OES had a certified school library media specialist. This was a major step in providing high-quality instruction and integration within the library. Unfortunately, this position only allows the librarian to be in the building 2 days a week. Library classes are taught in 30-40 minute self-contained class groups to students in grades K through 8. Book checkout occurs in the last 10 minutes of those library classes, limiting the amount of time spent on inquiry, creation, and integration. Additionally, those classes coincide with teacher planning time, limiting the amount of collaboration between teachers and the librarian. This results in a disconnect between what is taught in the library and how it connects to other academic areas. The current schedule also leaves the students only visiting the library once a week, not counting snow days and other schedule interruptions. It can be difficult to not only address misunderstandings in the day's lesson but also limits relationship building and the all-around responsiveness of the librarian to student needs.

A recent staff survey identified the need for more access to the librarian for help on projects. There is also a need for more education around the different tools and resources available. More flexible collaboration time would also inform the librarian's decisions as to what books and resources to purchase and to guide students.

The librarian would like to better implement the new American Association of School Librarians (AASL) standards into instruction and Future-Ready Librarians framework. Analysis of lesson plans and student work indicate that those goals won't be met without **help shifting both the physical space and the schedule to allow for more collaboration and in-depth learning.**

This project will benefit families, as well as current students and staff. The project includes the **creation of a resource center to provide the community with resources and materials to support some identified needs.** In addition, many of the projects that classroom teachers are currently doing are community orientated. The librarian would be more involved in planning and helping foster those connections, thus spreading the benefits of the project into the local community. **Staff and students will directly benefit from a library space that is more flexible and accessible.** A small team will be developed comprised of staff and students to help implement the project goals and give feedback when necessary. Additionally, the larger supervisory (OCSU) that Orleans Elementary belongs to has a shortage of certified school librarians. There are four other elementary schools in the supervisory union

currently operating without fully-trained certified staff, including one school with no library services. The two-year experience of focused collaboration and implementation of the project will allow Orleans Elementary School to **guide preservice librarians on how to improve library services** in their own schools and to **serve as a resource for teachers across OCSU looking to transform their learning through collaboration.**

**This project will transform school library practice by increasing the librarian's time specifically to work on integrated units throughout the school.** By collaborating on those units, the librarian can better integrate innovative practices and an inquiry-based approach to teaching and learning. **That collaborative time will also inform how to best configure the space to be the learner-centric hub the school needs for creative, challenging, and personalized learning.**

## **PROJECT WORK PLAN**

This project will span two years beginning in September 2019 and ending August 2021. One major goal beginning in the first year is to plan and implement at least one collaborative, inquiry-based unit of study with each classroom teacher in the building. This includes common professional learning as identified by a staff needs assessment, co-planning, co-teaching, collecting evidence of learning and reflecting on progress. "Each classroom teacher" is defined as primary/elementary classroom teachers (currently teaching in flexible grade bands: The Primary Unit with grades K-2 and the 3rd and 4th Team ), and middle school content area teachers: 5-8 humanities (english/social studies), 5-8 science, and 5-8 math. Those are the teachers who will be directly involved during the first year of the grant period. During the second year, we will work to include the two special educators, and the various specials teachers (art, music, physical education and guidance).

Co-Planning can involve the classroom teachers and the librarian developing essential questions and long-term learning targets together or have the classroom teacher identify targets that will benefit from an integrated approach. Collaboration can include, but will extend beyond, simply curating resources and allowing classes to use the space. The librarian will be actively involved in planning learning activities, providing feedback, and brainstorming next steps. Learning targets will be tied to the supervisory union cross-curricular proficiencies, the common core, and the AASL standards. In addition, assessment of student learning will be varied and conducted throughout all learning opportunities, including the library.

This project also includes **common professional learning opportunities and focused planning** time that will be regularly scheduled both during and outside of school hours to ensure that there is ongoing and adequate time for collaboration. In addition, our proposal allocates funding for stipends for concentrated summer learning, work, and collaborative team time in support of this important goal.

In addition to applying for the APP Grant, the middle school is working to partner with the Tarrant Institute for Innovative Education. The Tarrant Institute works throughout Vermont, “helping them get a student-driven, tech-rich vision of middle-level education.” This partnership would further enhance the Grant’s impact at the middle school level because they will provide the teachers and the librarian guidance and feedback on the collaborative units created with the help of APP funding including personalization, active student engagement, and proficiency-based grading. The goal is to make sure the improvements made with APP funding are supported, sustainable and results-driven and seeking out partners like the Tarrant Institute is just one way we might achieve that goal.

All teachers will be invited to attend three days of **summer team time** between Year 1 and Year 2 to continue the learning and collaboration with colleagues. Teams will be flexibly created based on individual professional learning needs and/or collaborative planning projects. The schedule and agenda for this work will be established before the end of the school in Year One.

Another goal that will be worked on across the two year span is the **transformation of the library space and procedures**. Our library has been static for many years, with students only coming to the space for one “class” per week. The layout is inflexible with only traditional one-sized tables and chairs available. In year one, steps will be taken to immediately add more flexible, comfortable, student-centered learning areas to the library space. Students and staff interests and ideas will drive the change. Then, in year two, continued efforts to enlist community feedback will help to revise procedures. Our connections with other school stakeholders, most particularly parents, will help to expand access to our library. This will include reaching out to the small public library to explore ways to compliment the services between the two.

**Potential risks** for this project would involve the time constraints of a busy system. There may be additional responsibilities or initiatives that are assigned to us as a system from outside agencies such as the Vermont Agency of Education or our supervisory union staff. Since the current focus areas of those two entities fully complement and support this grant proposal, we should be able to successfully mitigate any effects on such additional time demands. Careful planning and maintaining the schedule of professional learning and collaboration will ensure that ample time is available, within the grant period.

Budget constraints, due to other unanticipated budget expenditures, may slow down the progress of improvements that go beyond purchases made with grant funds. . Although this is not anticipated to be a problem, we must consider it. We will explore additional funding sources, if necessary, and will reach out to community stakeholders.

OES staff will **measure the progress and evaluate the project goals** in a variety of ways. For each collaborative unit, both the teacher and librarian will gather student work and assess how well students

met the learning targets and plan next steps. Next steps could include reteaching certain aspects, adding more personalization and student choice, and adding enrichment opportunities. Reflections on the unit will be shared with the principal and potentially with Tarrant Institute. Student reflections on the unit will also be used in future planning.

The librarian will also collect data on how the library space is being used throughout the two years. Each year should see an increase in library usage in general. Specifically, we would analyze that data to better balance the usage between upper and lower grades, across subjects and student creation over consumption of information. We will also conduct ongoing surveys and elicit feedback whenever necessary to ensure that our future actions are responsive and move us towards our collective vision.

## **PROJECT OUTCOMES**

We anticipate the proposed work to have significant impact on student learning and school culture. After the two year project is completed, we expect to **Increase Public Access** by:

- 1) Collaborative co-teaching to more fully integrate the library into creative student-centered learning opportunities will have occurred across all grades and will continue between teachers and the librarian.
- 2) Systems will be created to facilitate this work and the body of work collected over the course of the two years will serve as evidence to maintain the librarian's position for three days a week within the school budget.
- 3) There will be increased use of the library, for a wide variety of purposes, by students and staff.
- 4) We will have increased community awareness and access to the library through the new Community Resource Center, increased communication, and welcoming events.
- 5) The library will serve as the learning hub of the school and the space and procedures will be much more student-centered, flexible, and responsive to the learning within the school.
- 6) The changes implemented will model school librarianship across the SU.

Success will be defined as a positive and productive relationship between the librarian and the entire school community. Teachers will view the librarian and library as valuable resources that directly impact student success in their content areas. This will be measured in end-of-the year anonymous staff surveys. The success of the teaching and collaboration within a "unit" will be determined by analyzing whether the student work meets or brings them closer to the long-term learning target. Students and staff will be asked to reflect on how well the library supported their learning for specific tasks. Changes in the library space will be considered successful when teachers and students use it for a variety of tasks. For this, the librarian will collect data on how the space is being used throughout

the school year. A library website will be created to share photographs of student engagement and learning. The website will also be a place to collect feedback and highlight specific resources. Soliciting feedback and sharing results are essential components of quality library programs and services. The above plans to measure the outcomes for this grant fit well with the direction we want to take anyway.

# SCHEDULE OF COMPLETION

## Year One: Action Steps

	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	Aug
Act. 1												
Act. 2												
Act. 3												
Act. 4												
Act. 5												
Act. 6												
Act. 7												
Act. 8												
Act. 9												
Act. 10												
Act. 11												

*(August Inservice: Introduce the grant goals, work plan, and timeline to the staff)*

**Activity 1: Professional Learning Needs Assessment:** Identify current levels of teacher understanding and needs around project-based learning, co-teaching, and personalization. Focus on just classroom teachers this year. (Person responsible: Kim)

**Activity 2: Professional Learning Communities (PLC):** Schedule and hold monthly professional learning and collaboration opportunities for whole team (topics and dates TBD) AND weekly PLC grade band team meetings (days/times TBD) (Person responsible: Kim with Bridget and classroom teachers)

**Activity 3: Project-based Learning (PBL) Training:** Plan and conduct professional learning series to ensure common teacher understanding of project design, integration of subjects, and standards-based assessment/grading practices. (Person responsible: Kim with classroom teachers)

**Activity 4: Library Surveys:** Pre/post surveys for students and staff to gauge wants and needs regarding the transformation of the library space and better integration of the library into learning. (Person responsible: Bridget)

**Activity 5: Flexible Learning and Work Spaces:** Utilize student/staff feedback to create our first flexible seating and varied work stations within the library. This involves the purchase of the materials within this grant budget. Members of the school community will be invited to help with these tasks, possibly including the eighth-grade class which completes a community service project at the end of each year. (Person responsible: Kim and Bridget with volunteers)

**Activity 6: Collaborative Co-Teaching:** Librarian will have completed one collaborative, inquiry-based unit of study with each classroom teacher. (Person responsible: Bridget with all classroom teachers)

**Activity 7: Parent Surveys:** Elicit information from parents regarding the creation of a Parent Resource Center and to request feedback to identify particular topics of need or interest to them. Analyze responses in order to plan actions for the following year. (Person responsible: Kim and Bridget)

**Activity 8: Summer Team Time:** All teachers will be invited to attend three days of summer team time to continue the learning and collaboration with colleagues. Teams will be flexibly created based on individual professional learning needs and/or collaborative planning projects. The schedule and agenda for this work will be established before the end of the school. (Person responsible: Kim and Bridget and ALL teachers)

**Activity 9: Mid-Project Assessment:** Review project goals, survey results, and data to determine progress towards completion. Elicit staff feedback and identify next steps at June Inservice. (Person responsible: Kim and Bridget with classroom teachers)

**Activity 10: Mid-Project Planning:** Review and analyze staff feedback from June Inservice and information from all surveys. Plan out next actions steps and timeline. (Person responsible: Kim and Bridget)

**Activity 11: Website Creation:** Create a library website to share results and resources. (Person responsible: Bridget)

**Year Two: Action Steps**

	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	Aug
Act. 1												
Act. 2												
Act. 3												
Act. 4												
Act. 5												
Act. 6												
Act. 7												
Act. 8												
Act. 9												
Act. 10												

**Activity 1: Mid-Project Review:** Review the grant goals, progress, and the revised work plan and timeline at August Inservice. (Person responsible: Kim and Bridget with ALL teachers)

**Activity 2: Professional Learning Needs Assessment:** Reassess level of classroom teacher understanding and needs around project-based learning, co-teaching, and personalization; Conduct an initial assessment of the “extra” teachers, including the arts, PE, guidance, and special education. (Person responsible: Kim)

**Activity 3: Professional Learning Communities (PLC):** Schedule and hold monthly professional learning and collaboration opportunities for whole team (topics and dates TBD) AND weekly PLC grade band team meetings (days/times TBD) (Person responsible: Kim with Bridget and ALL teachers)

**Activity 4: Project-based Learning (PBL) Training:** Plan and conduct professional learning series to ensure common teacher understanding of project design, integration of subjects, and standards-based assessment/grading practices. (Person responsible: Kim with extra teachers)

**Activity 5: Library Surveys:** Pre/post surveys for students, staff, and families regarding further integration of the library into learning and the community. (Person responsible: Bridget)

**Activity 6: Flexible Learning and Work Spaces:** Utilize student/staff/parent feedback to continue our transformation of the seating, work stations, and practices within the library. This next phase may involve funding sources TBD outside of this grant budget. (Person responsible: Kim and Bridget)

**Activity 7: Collaborative Co-Teaching:** Librarian will have completed one collaborative, inquiry-based unit of study involving each extra teacher. (Person responsible: Bridget with all extra teachers)

**Activity 8: Community Library Night(s):** Invite the school community in to learn about the new library space and available services. (Person responsible: Kim and Bridget with OES staff and community)

**Activity 9: End of Project Assessment:** Review project goals, survey results, and data to determine progress towards completion. (Person responsible: Kim and Bridget with all teachers)

**Activity 10: End of Project Planning:** Review and analyze feedback from all surveys and stakeholder groups. Identify future goals and plan out potential next steps. (Person responsible: Kim and Bridget)