



LAURA BUSH 21st CENTURY LIBRARIAN PROGRAM

Sample Application RE-259778-OLS-26
Project Category: Community-Centered Implementation

School Board of Miami-Dade County

Amount awarded by IMLS:	\$100,000
Amount of cost share:	\$7,500

Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) will expand the capacity of its library professionals to deliver high-quality, standards-aligned library programs to its 230,000 students. This community-centered implementation project will address the gap between current certification of educational media specialists and their sometimes-limited library experience. To improve their ability to provide high-level library programming across 323 school libraries, M-DCPS will train a cohort of 50 library media specialists through a structured summer institute. The training will equip participants to build vibrant library programs and train future cohorts districtwide. The intended results include districtwide adoption of a library evaluation framework, measurable improvement in library programs, and a replicable peer-training model that strengthens student achievement across M-DCPS.

Attached are the following components excerpted from the original application.

- Narrative
- Schedule of Completion

When preparing an application for the next deadline, be sure to follow the instructions in the most recent Notice of Funding Opportunity for the grant program to which you are applying.

Narrative

Introduction

Aligned with the Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program's interest in alternative credentialing pathways and innovative continuing education, Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS), the lead applicant, requests \$100,000 in Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) funds to implement **Developing Expert Leaders: Creating a Blueprint for Vibrant Libraries (Vibrant Libraries)** from September 2026 through August 2027. M-DCPS Library Media Specialists oversee 323 school libraries serving over 230,000 students, from multiple linguistic and national backgrounds, with approximately 40% classified as economically disadvantaged. To best serve this broad constituency, M-DCPS has identified an opportunity to expand the capacity of its library professionals beyond initial certification through the sustained professional development needed to deliver high-quality, standards-aligned library programs. This Community-Centered Implementation project supports the training of an inaugural cohort of 50 Library Media Specialists built around a structured Summer Institute, equipping them to build vibrant library programs and train future cohorts districtwide. The established model guiding this project is the ExC3EL (Expectations for Collaboration, Collections, and Connections to Enhance Learning) Rubric, the Florida Department of Education's data-driven school library evaluation framework aligned to American Association of School Librarians (AASL) national standards, which assesses programs across six core areas on a continuum from Entering to Outstanding. The intended results include districtwide adoption of the ExC3EL framework, measurable improvement in library programs, and a replicable peer-training model that strengthens student achievement across M-DCPS, with potential for statewide replication for years to come.

Project Justification

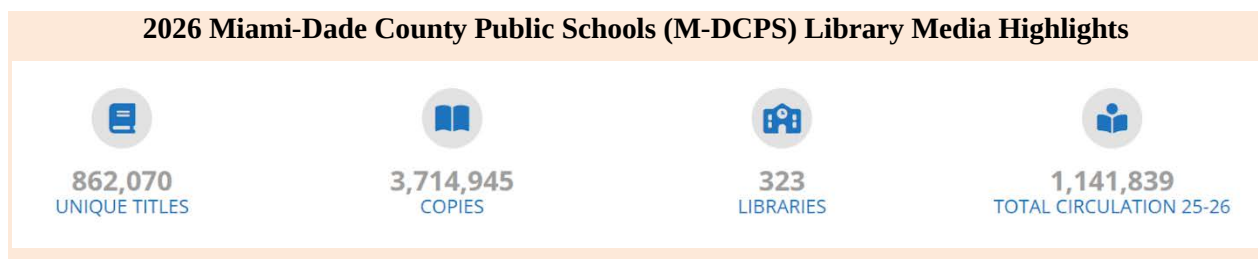
Effective libraries teach critical information literacy, responsible internet use, and help students become effective, independent learners, as described by the American Library Association. Most importantly, strong school library media programs, staffed by certified Library Media Specialists, significantly boost student achievement in reading. As of 2026, M-DCPS has an average reading proficiency score of 56%, above the Florida state average of 52%, and an overall school ranking in the top 30% of Florida public schools (*Source: Florida Department of Education*). While district students are performing above the state average, there remains room for growth. M-DCPS structures its literacy efforts around a Comprehensive Evidence-Based Reading Plan (CERP), which prioritizes early intervention, all-grade literacy proficiency, and cultivating a culture of reading. Since Library Media Specialists are essential to meeting these goals, the district has identified an opportunity to increase their capacity. M-DCPS employs approximately 250 Library Media Specialists, with the majority serving in that role part-time due to teaching assignments. The district has approximately 50 Library Media Specialists serving in the role full time.

The Florida Department of Education (FDOE) provides a pathway for teachers to obtain the Educational Media Specialist certification with a bachelor's degree. While this pathway addresses critical staffing shortages in library media professionals by allowing for specialization in school media without pursuing the Master of Library Science pathway, this means many specialists enter the role with limited library experience. To address this gap between initial certification and the ability to deliver high-quality, standards-aligned library programs with fidelity, M-DCPS proposes *Vibrant Libraries* as an acceleration strategy for a district that is already outperforming. M-DCPS has proven it can lead large urban districts nationally in literacy outcomes. To sustain and deepen that lead *Vibrant Libraries* will have fully trained, ExC3EL-equipped Library Media Specialists leading the development of high-level library programs at every school.

Vibrant Libraries will have direct and lasting benefits for the 50 M-DCPS Library Media Specialists who participate in the program and its inaugural Summer Institute, the approximately 230,000 M-DCPS students they serve, and the broader school communities including classroom teachers, school administrators, and families. The program's replicable, peer-training model ensures that benefits will extend to subsequent cohorts of Library Media Specialists in future years, ultimately transforming library programs across all 323 M-DCPS schools. This concentrated, in-depth summer training will guide them in curating age-appropriate collections, providing engaging programming, and implementing positive changes in the upcoming school year. FDOE's ExC3EL rubric will serve as the established framework for this project. ExC3EL evaluates school library programs across six core areas: Instructional Leadership, Curriculum and Assessment Support, Resource Management, Program Administration, Environment, and Advocacy, scoring them on a four-level continuum from Entering to Outstanding. Aligned with AASL national standards and tailored to Florida's Benchmarks for Excellent Student Thinking (B.E.S.T.) curriculum standards and Florida's Focus, Investigate, Note, Develop, Self-Evaluate (FINDS) research model, ExC3EL transforms school libraries into dynamic hubs of inquiry and collaboration.

Since 1992, a growing body of research known as the school library impact studies has consistently shown positive correlations between high-quality library programs and student achievement. Data from more than 34 statewide studies suggest students tend to earn better standardized test scores in schools with strong library programs, with newer studies also linking strong libraries to higher graduation rates and mastery of academic standards (Source: Lance, K.C. & Kachel, D.E. (2018). "Why school librarians matter: What years of research tell us." *Phi Delta Kappan*. kappanonline.org). This is precisely why *Vibrant Libraries* will develop trained, ExC3EL-equipped media specialists, not as a supplement to classroom instruction, but as an essential instructional partner in student achievement.

While books certainly play a central role, effective school librarians do far more than manage collections. They ignite students' interest in reading by creating engaging library environments, building reading stamina, and encouraging exploration across genres. Research demonstrates that reading for pleasure contributes significantly to improved literacy outcomes. A nationwide study using National Center for Education Statistics and National Assessment of Educational Progress scores further confirmed that losses of school librarians are associated with measurable declines or the absence of meaningful gains in student achievement scores. *Vibrant Libraries'* success will be a result of stronger relationships among students, teachers, principals, and community members.



Project Work Plan

Vibrant Libraries will be implemented over twelve months, from September 2026 through August 2027, in three sequential phases: Pre-Institute Preparation, Summer Institute Delivery, and Post-Institute Implementation and Evaluation.

Pre-Institute Preparation (September 2026 – May 2027) The program launches in September 2026 with foundational preparation activities designed to ensure that the Summer Institute is evidence-based, logistically sound, and responsive to participants' actual needs. A key activity in this phase is participant identification. The project team will administer a district-wide interest survey to the pool of approximately 250 Library Media Specialists, targeting full-time specialists who have the greatest capacity to implement robust library programs at their school sites. To support recruitment and participation, grant funds will be used to provide stipends for Institute participants since attendance will be required over the summer, outside of their regular work schedule. Each participant will receive a daily stipend of \$200 for each of the five days. In addition to the participation stipends, Institute participants will be provided with a curated selection of books to incorporate into their school collection. These incentives will motivate Library Media Specialists to engage in the project. Survey responses will be reviewed and vetted to confirm the inaugural cohort of 50 participants. Once selected, participants will receive an initial program orientation, including an overview of the ExC3EL framework, program expectations, portfolio requirements, and the Summer

Institute schedule. Coinciding with participant identification, the project team will conduct a targeted needs assessment, drawing on formal and informal observations, administrative data, and a participant-specific area of interest survey to identify critical knowledge gaps and professional learning priorities across the cohort. This data will directly inform curriculum development, ensuring that all professional learning content is aligned with the programmatic goals of the FDOE ExC3EL Rubric, grounded in participants' daily practice, and responsive to the varying experience levels within the cohort.

From October 2026 through May 2027, participants will engage in four monthly group training and product development sessions that serve as structured preparation for the Summer Institute. These sessions will introduce ExC3EL's six core domains, build foundational skills in instructional collaboration, collection development, and program advocacy, and guide participants in beginning the development of their digital portfolios (a user-friendly, no-cost online file sharing service such as Google Drive allowing participants to document domain-specific evidence and upload monthly artifacts). Between sessions, participants will complete monthly portfolio uploads to document early progress and reflect on goals, keeping the learning continuous and connected to their school-site work. Throughout this phase, the project team will finalize all logistical arrangements and develop the complete Summer Institute curriculum.

Summer Institute Delivery (June 2027) The centerpiece of *Vibrant Libraries* is the five-day Summer Institute, an intensive, off-site professional learning experience grounded entirely in the ExC3EL framework. Each day of the Institute corresponds to one or more of ExC3EL's core domains with sessions structured for active participation, practical application, and ongoing reflection. Participants will engage in collaborative lesson design, collection development planning, library environment redesign, and advocacy strategy development all documented in real time through their digital portfolios.

Post-Institute Implementation and Evaluation (July – August 2027) Following the Summer Institute, participants return to their schools as trained, ExC3EL-equipped practitioners. Monthly portfolio uploads continue through the close of the program period, documenting site-level implementation, progress toward ExC3EL domain goals, and emerging evidence of student impact.

The project team will monitor progress through portfolio reviews, check-in surveys, and direct observation support. Participants will complete a comprehensive post-program self-assessment using the ExC3EL rubric, measuring movement along the Entering-to-Outstanding continuum from their baseline established at program launch. These results, combined with statistical data and implementation documentation, will inform the final program report and the launch of planning for the second cohort ensuring that *Vibrant*

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Developing Expert Leaders: Creating a Blueprint for Vibrant Libraries (Vibrant Libraries)

Libraries transitions seamlessly from a grant-funded initiative into a permanent, self-sustaining feature of M-DCPS' Library Media Specialists professional learning infrastructure.

Vibrant Libraries will be planned, implemented, and managed by the M-DCPS Library Media Services team, a dedicated group of experienced library professionals with deep expertise in school library program development, curriculum design, instructional leadership, and district-level professional development.

Team Member	Responsibilities
Mr. Dwight G. Bailey, Instructional Supervisor	Mr. Bailey has 33 years of demonstrated knowledge and experience in all aspects of site and district level library media services and serves as the Library Media Services department head for M-DCPS. Mr. Bailey will lead all curriculum development, drawing on initial needs assessment and interest survey results to design the monthly training sessions and the full five-day Summer Institute curriculum.
Dr. Showanda Richardson, District Library Curator	Dr. Richardson is a highly experienced and dedicated educator with over three decades of progressive experience in media program management, curriculum development, and professional training within M-DCPS. Dr. Richardson will serve as the Project Manager and be the principal point of contact, communicating program expectations to participants, maintaining responsibility for budget management, partner coordination, IMLS reporting, and overall project integrity. Responsibilities also include participant recruitment, coordinating monthly training sessions, managing stipends, and tracking pre- and post-assessment progress throughout the program year. Serving as the primary liaison between M-DCPS district leadership and all participants, Dr. Richardson will convene the Library Media Services team regularly to review progress data, address emerging challenges, and ensure all phases of implementation remain on schedule and aligned with program goals.
Ms. Lisa Gomez, Information Technology Liaison	Ms. Lisa Gomez has a decade of specialized leadership in Library Media Services and currently serves at the district level driving the modernization of 21st century learning environments through large-scale programming, professional development, and technical integration. Ms. Gomez will primarily support curriculum development. Responsibilities will also include participant vetting, administering surveys, monitoring portfolio uploads to ensure timely participation, and identifying specialists needing additional support. She will also

	support logistics and materials procurement, ensuring the Institute delivers a professional, distraction-free learning environment that promotes consistent attendance and deep engagement across all five days.
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Program evaluation will be a shared responsibility across the project team, coordinated by the Project Manager. The team will administer self-assessments at the beginning, midpoint, and conclusion of the program year using the ExC3EL rubric as the primary evaluation instrument, measuring each participant's movement along the Entering-to-Outstanding continuum. Survey data, portfolio evidence, and site-level adoption records will be compiled and analyzed monthly, informing continuous program improvement and compiled in the final program report. This report will serve as a comprehensive case for sustainability and a replicable model for future cohort training across M-DCPS and beyond.

The success of *Vibrant Libraries* depends on the meaningful involvement of a community of stakeholders, each with a distinct role in shaping, supporting, and sustaining the program.

Library Media Specialists selected for the inaugural cohort (50) are the program's primary participants, bringing varying levels of library experience through Florida's bachelor's degree certification pathway. Their needs, knowledge gaps, and school-site contexts will drive curriculum development from the outset, and they will ultimately return to their schools as ExC3EL-equipped practitioners and future peer trainers.

School Principals and Administrators are essential stakeholders whose decisions around scheduling and staffing directly guide the library media specialist's capacity to implement program learning. *Vibrant Libraries* will engage principals through the ExC3EL Advocacy domain, equipping library media specialists to align library goals with each school's School Improvement Plan (SIP) and make the case for sustained administrative investment.

Classroom Teachers are the library media specialist's most immediate instructional partners, benefiting directly from a library professional trained in collaborative lesson design, information literacy instruction, and curriculum-aligned resource support. *Vibrant Libraries* will engage teachers through workshops and co-planning sessions that position the library as an integrated extension of classroom instruction rather than an additional demand.

M-DCPS Students, over 230,000 of them, with approximately 40% classified as economically disadvantaged are the ultimate beneficiaries of *Vibrant Libraries* and the central motivation for every program decision.

Parents & Guardians strengthen the culture of reading beyond school hours and, when engaged effectively, become important advocates for the library program within their school communities. *Vibrant Libraries* will train media specialists in the ExC3EL Advocacy domain to communicate the library's value to families and build the community trust that sustains strong programs over time.

M-DCPS Library Media Services Department provides the strategic direction, operational management, and institutional commitment necessary to carry *Vibrant Libraries* from a grant-funded initiative into a permanent district program. The department is committed to embedding the ExC3EL framework into existing professional learning infrastructure — including Frontline and the Annual Media Center Statistics Report — ensuring lasting impact beyond the IMLS performance period.

Impact will be evaluated using the FDOE's ExC3EL Library Media Services rubric. Participants will complete a self-assessment at the beginning and end of the project to determine their status (Entering, Developing, Advancing, or Outstanding) and demonstrate progress. Media Specialists will maintain a portfolio to document evidence of program improvement, including statistical data and their pre- and post-improvement plan worksheets. The initial status of participating programs will be tracked, and measurable criteria will be updated regularly.

Project Results

Vibrant Libraries will transform Miami-Dade school libraries into high-functioning dynamic instructional hubs that cultivate inquiry, foster independent learning, and deliver measurable improvements across all six ExC3EL domains. The program's primary deliverables, 50 ExC3EL-trained media specialists, individualized digital portfolios documenting domain-level growth, and a comprehensive implementation blueprint, directly address the professional learning gap between initial certification and the sustained, standards-aligned practice required to lead a high-quality library program. Long-term sustainability is embedded in the program's peer-training design, as each cohort trains the next, institutionalizing the ExC3EL framework within M-DCPS' Library Media Services professional learning infrastructure, delivering lasting impact to the 230,000 students whose academic achievement depends on the quality of the library programs that serve them.

While challenges related to budget constraints, staffing limitations, and the part-time status of many library media staff remain a district-wide reality, *Vibrant Libraries* represents a focused and strategic opportunity to invest where the impact will be greatest: in the approximately 50 certified, fully time media specialists who have the capacity, time, and school-site positioning to immediately implement a high-functioning library program.

By concentrating resources on this cohort, the program addresses the most critical gap in M-DCPS library development: the absence of structured, sustained professional development that connects newly certified specialists to the standards, tools, and collaborative practices required to lead an ExC3EL-aligned program. Central to this effort is the ExC3EL Advocacy domain, which will equip participating specialists with the language, data, and strategies needed to reframe the library's identity, transforming it from a perceived cost center into a recognized vital academic asset and hub for community engagement.

The tailored curriculum and Summer Institute will close knowledge gaps across all six ExC3EL domains, building stronger, more intentional partnerships between the library and the classroom. Each participant will demonstrate this growth through a comprehensive digital portfolio containing the five domain-specific deliverables detailed below.

Collaborative Lesson Logs: Documentation of the FINDS research model used in collaboration with classroom teachers, embedding research skills aligned to Florida B.E.S.T. Standards and strengthening the instructional partnership between the library and the classroom.

Collection Development Plan: A curricular alignment and acquisition strategy designed to build a diverse, engaging collection across multiple formats — directly supporting the development of a sustained culture of reading among students and staff.

Facilities Physical Space Layout: A redesigned, flexible media center floor plan supported by visual documentation of new media displays, reading promotions, and environmental enhancements that create a welcoming, student-centered space.

Management Domain Roadmap: A structured plan for maximizing existing resources and effectively recruiting, training, and utilizing volunteers and student assistants to strengthen the library program's daily operations.

Advocacy Domain Strategy: A targeted communication and outreach plan for promoting the library media program, its partnerships, and its student impact throughout the school community building the administrative and community support needed to sustain the program long term.

Together, these five deliverables ensure that every participating specialist leaves the program not only trained, but fully equipped with a concrete, evidence-based action plan. To ensure the benefits are sustained beyond the performance period, the implementation relies on standardization. The program is modularly

designed so that individual components and universal templates based on the ExC3EL rubrics can be adopted by other schools.

This initiative will transform traditional school library spaces into dynamic Learning Commons environments that support active, student-centered learning which creates collaborative spaces within schools that merge library resources with tutoring and academic support. This strategy will enable students to engage in hands-on learning while developing essential 21st-century skills such as creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking. Through this approach, the library becomes more than a repository of books, it becomes an integrated hub for exploration, problem-solving, and academic support. Students will participate in interactive learning experiences that blend physical and digital resources, encouraging curiosity, collaboration, and real-world application of knowledge. Because the model is built on the FDOE ExC3EL Rubric and aligned to AASL national standards, its curriculum components and portfolio templates are readily adaptable by any Florida school district and replicable to library programs nationally.

The sustainability of *Vibrant Libraries* is embedded in its design. By training an initial cohort of 50 media specialists through a structured curriculum and 5-day Summer Institute, the program deliberately creates a corps of ExC3EL-trained leaders who will return to their schools as model practitioners and peer trainers, equipped to onboard new cohorts in subsequent years during the district's regularly scheduled professional learning days without reliance on external funding. Survey data, curriculum progress reports, and site-level adoption records collected throughout the program year will inform and continuously improve each successive cohort training, ensuring the model grows stronger over time.

Vibrant Libraries will utilize IMLS' four performance measures as a basis for understanding how well the project is meeting its goals and how well M-DCPS is managing the project. The *effectiveness* of program activities will be evidenced by the 50 trained library media specialists and will be documented through the development of a digital portfolio, used to create a comprehensive, user-friendly implementation of a blueprint supporting the broader adoption and long-term sustainability of vibrant library media programs across the district. This *efficiency* reflects our commitment to direct investment in our educators. The M-DCPS Office of Grants administration will support the team in maximizing efficiency by providing a grant expenditures projection report to the project team that tracks actual expenditures against the approved budget. The team will utilize this tool to monitor expenditures, minimize expenses, and ensure no grant funds are unspent. To ensure program *quality*, the project team leader will continuously monitor and evaluate progress. Participants will complete and submit self-assessments at the beginning, midpoint, and conclusion of the project year. To maintain *timeliness*, the Project Manager will monitor progress against

the Schedule of Completion and participants will update their digital portfolios monthly to reflect progress toward their self-assessment goals.

M-DCPS is committed to integrating the ExC3EL framework permanently into its professional learning infrastructure for Library Media Specialists. As Library Media Specialists across the district advance through the ExC3EL continuum, M-DCPS schools will be well-positioned to pursue Florida Power-Library School (FPLS) recognition, the state's highest honor for school library programs fully integrated into the curriculum. Benefits from the launch of *Vibrant Libraries* will afford administrators the ability to include the library's collaborative role in the school's School Improvement Plan (SIP), building capacity by training new media staff, and establishing an annual ExC3EL self-assessment cycle every May. Both recognitions share the same goal of improving student achievement, including having a direct impact on literacy rates in the district. At the heart of *Vibrant Libraries*, exists a shared genuine effort to consistently help our students to succeed.

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