

## LIBRARIES: Volunteers are needed for next school year

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ffective side of education — developmentally, kids this age are trying to decide who they are. We've tried to make the school library a home away from home, a place where they can discuss ideas, a safe place."

The volunteers not only make sure the books are checked in and checked out appropriately, they also restock shelves, work directly with students to help them find books that ignite their interest in reading, help teachers find books that are in the area of study their class is working on, offer lunch space on Fridays, music and games throughout the week, and a monthly art project where the students can create drawings or paintings to be displayed at the library.

"They have created a space that truly is the heart of our school," said fifth-grade teacher Tiffany Tisdel. "Kids want to hang out at the library because of the life that they bring to the space."

"They take their own time and volunteer," said fifth-grader Ashlynn Moffat. "It's really big and has a good system — and they have activities that draw people."

While it would be ideal to have at least a half-time librarian at each of the schools, paid for by the Sisters School District, that hasn't been the case. No budget has been set aside for the library over the past three years. The volunteers

believe they have saved the district thousands of dollars based on their accounting of the books that were being checked out and not returned as well as lost teaching time, when teachers were coming to the library to prepare for a lesson. With the lack of staff in the library, teachers were coordinating checking out books and maintaining many novel sets in their own classroom.

These are all things the volunteers monitor now.

"Without a librarian, the students had less access to books and resources," said Tisdel. "The Deschutes Public Library is great, but not all students have the opportunity to use their facility or the access to it. Having the library as a functional place within the school is critical to student success."

Over the past few years the middle school library was painted, and the volunteers spent countless hours going through old copies of books — weeding out copies that needed to be retired — and added over 1,000 books. Throughout this process they have more than tripled the number of checkouts.

At the elementary school the library sat stagnant with little use from students and teachers since the shared media specialist's departure three years ago. Last November, Jennith Hoyt, a relatively new member of the Sisters Country community, stepped in to help. Her degree in education coupled with her background in the military and computer systems gave her the dedication and drive to get the library back to a vibrant place.

"I coordinate with the middle school for shared books, work with the kindergartners, and help prepare books for teachers and students," said Hoyt. "The kids are excited and the teachers are appreciative."

Having volunteers at the elementary school has helped give time back to the teachers. Where they would normally be pulling books and information, now the volunteers have the information ready for the teachers and students when they arrive at the library, allowing students to get right to work.

"There is something about helping a student find a book that excites them," said Hoyt. "When they find a book and 'click' they think reading is cool."

Both libraries received a small grant through the Sisters Schools Foundation this spring to support a new Follett check-in/check-out system. This grant came with a volunteer training period and allows both the Sisters Elementary School and Sisters Middle School libraries to share books.

In addition to the Schools Foundation support this spring, private donors along with a small contribution from the school district have helped to fund bringing in computer search programs. The Lexile Reading Levels program allows volunteers and teachers to sort books based on reading level and is available at both schools. Webpath Express, only funded at the elementary level, helps to filter Internet searches to teacher-approved



PHOTO BY ERIN BORLA

Ann Alisa Duerden, Mary Kay Ferwalt, and Sherri Kissinger are full-time volunteer "Library Staffistas."

websites for student research and to supplement classroom materials.

Both the Sisters Elementary School and Sisters Middle School libraries are seeking volunteers for the next school year. Volunteers will do more than sit at the desk and help check in and check out books. They get to work directly with students, offer reading

advisory, catalog books and assist with special programming. Ideal volunteers would be able to commit two hours a week on a consistent basis. All interested volunteers should be pre-screened by the District and contact the libraries directly at checkout. sms@sisters.k12.or.us for the middle school or checkout. ses@sisters.k12.or.us for the elementary school.

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