

The bell had rung about 10 minutes ago when Mark, the principal, walked in and told me he would need the library. "The leadership committee and I are meeting with members of the district office and a School Trustee at 4." He asked me if I could make sure the library was empty by then. So I told the few kids who had come in, while they waited for their buses to arrive, they would need to pick something quickly as I would need the library. Jiovanna said "it will only take me two seconds I already know what I want." I too, already knew what she would be checking out. She would be checking out *The Brightest Night*, #5 in the *Wings of Fire Series*. She was sure rifling through the series. As Jiovanna made her way to the checkout counter I could hear Ethan grumbling "but I don't know what I want. That's not fair Mr. Manhas." That's when I heard from near the front entrance of the Learning Commons, "what do you like to read maybe I can help you?" Ethan popped his head out from the graphic novels section and looked towards the doorway and responded "who are you? I don't know you."

School Trustee: Hi! My name is Cathy I am from your school board. What's your name?

Ethan: Hi Ms. Cathy. I am Ethan. Mr. M usually knows what I like, I will just ask him. Mr. Manhas, do you have any good Star Wars books. You know like the ones I took out last week?

Me: Hi Cathy I am Mike. Can you give me a second while I help Ethan out? Hey buddy I just ordered some new ones for you. Let me see if they are in.

Ethan: Ooooooh which ones?

Me: Let me show you....What about these? Will they work?

Ethan: Yep! Thanks Mr M. Can I sign them out?

I headed back to the counter to check out the books. Along the way I see Cathy standing there smiling. So I take the time to walk by and offer my hand to Cathy. "It's nice to meet you. Are you here for the meeting?" She smiled and said she was. Then she turned to Ethan again.

School Trustee: Ethan I am surprised to see you in here and not outside playing. Do you like coming to the library?

Ethan: I love it. I don't really like reading much. Especially the stuff we have to read in class it's so boring. At least here I can find stuff like Star Wars, or Amulet or stuff on space. I really like the books on space. And it's pretty cool Mr. Manhas lets me get books whenever I want.

School Trustee: Well that's really nice of Mr. Manhas. It was really nice to meet you Ethan.

While walking out of the library Ethan turns towards Cathy.

Ethan: Uh huh. Ok. Well thanks Mr. Manhas. Maybe tomorrow you won't rush us out of here?

School Trustee: I am glad I got to see that! He sure seems to like you. I am not sure if you are aware but many people think libraries and learning commons are a relic of the past that don't serve the school

system like they once used to. Many people feel the money could be better allocated elsewhere. What are your thoughts on that?

ME: Well Cathy I feel lots of money could be allocated in lots of different places. More money for our learning commons is one of the first places I would try to allocate more funds if I was in charge of the budgets. There have been numerous studies done, over the past couple of decades that conclusively prove the positive effects an active Learning Commons/library has on the student population. It is indisputable that a strong library program that is adequately staffed, resourced and funded can lead to higher student achievement regardless of any community challenges. Test scores tend to be higher when the space is utilized by students and teachers. Collaboration between the teachers and librarians has a significant impact on learning. Libraries are the epi-centre of the school. It's where students can engage in self-directed learning, find passion, escape, and a love for learning. As you just witnessed with Ethan the library has given him a place where he too can engage in the educational process. He is one of our students who struggle in the classroom environment, the library gives Ethan a chance to engage while helping his teacher find creative and resourceful ways to have Ethan partake in classroom activities. It's a space that makes a positive difference in students' self-esteem, confidence, independence, and sense of responsibility in regards to their own learning. And if that's not enough the library is also a place where students can have fun!

School Trustee: It seems like you have thought about this before. That's very interesting. Have you been here long?

Me: Actually I have just embarked on my learning commons journey. I am only here for a short term. I am filling in for the actual librarian. She's on maternity leave. I fell into the position. However after spending the last five months here I have absolutely fallen in love with the position. This is what I want to do. So much so I just recently enrolled in the distinguished Teacher Librarian Certificate program at Queens.

School Trustee: That's interesting what made you decide that? That's a big commitment. What made you decide this was the path you wanted to follow?

Me: Well Cathy, I have a similar path as Ethan's. My challenges were more to do with my ancestry though. When I was put in school, things were different. As a nation we were just embarking on cultural diversity. Due to my ethnic background I was put into the ESL program, even though most of my dad's siblings were born here and English was the language we predominantly spoke at home. I heard more often than I care to admit how I wasn't smart enough or I would need to try harder. It wasn't until I was in grade 5 when Mrs. Lane, our librarian, led me to the sports fiction section of the library that my passion for reading was ignited. After reading that first novel, I began to devour every book on sports our library had. As I did, unbeknownst to me, my reading level started to increase. So much so that the following year my standardised reading assessment came back at a grade 11 level, thus instilling in me the self-esteem I needed, that allowed me to move forward in my education with confidence and initiative. And Cathy if I could motivate or be a small part of even one student having that experience, I am all in. The learning commons allows me to meet and build relationships with all the students of the

school. I get the chance to get to know them and work with them to find what they are passionate about and work on bringing that to this space! That is an honour that is so rewarding and fulfilling that I am not sure if I have the words to properly explain it.

School Trustee: How do you feel the learning commons model fits with our district vision and values?

Me: Our vision to honour student voice and choice through engaging, purposeful and experiential learning in a safe and respectful community takes a village to realise. The schools are a great place to foster and build that vision. The learning commons is the hub of our school. It is like the community hall that ties a community together. Since taking over five months ago it has been my goal to create a learning environment that is conducive to student growth, built on ownership through student choice and voice. Having students come in to help build library boards, do projects, help raise funds, do book talks, and request books has helped the kids feel included and a part of the learning commons. Displaying their work in the learning commons and on the boards on the hallways also helps them take ownership of the space. By doing so I feel the workspace has become more friendly and welcoming. We are working together to build relationships through kindness, respect and thoughtfulness of others while utilizing the different services and resources in the learning commons.

Students, here, are afforded the choice of utilizing the space as little or as much as they want. Creating opportunities for the kids to do tasks, catalogue books or making book trailers I feel falls in line with Dunsmuir Middle School's mission statement of fostering a sense of belonging through personal and social responsibility. Working collaboratively with students, teachers and administration we strive to create an atmosphere of learning in a safe environment. It is my goal to have students wanting to come to the learning commons to work on projects, read, or to get the space they may need to gather themselves. By doing so I get to build relationships with the students that can help me get to know them, so that I can better help them build on their technological, research and literacy skills. By building a trusting relationship, based on mutual respect and integrity, my job becomes much easier.

School Trustee: You sound so excited when you talk about it. It's nice to hear about some of your thoughts on the subject. Sounds like the kids are lucky to have you.

Me: Honestly Cathy, I feel lucky to be a part of this process. Collaboration, teamwork, processing, administration and teaching are just some of the duties a Teacher Librarian deals with on a daily basis. The position has so many moving parts to it. There is a tremendous amount of research that illustrates how district and school wide support, for their librarians and their learning commons, can play an integral role in the success of the students and schools. The learning commons needs qualified librarians that can collaborate successfully to help create a hub for learning in the heart of all their schools. As much as I love the classroom, Cathy, I feel I belong in the learning commons. It is the one place I can help create community, spirit, and smiles through the many different faces of literacy!

School Trustee: It's been a pleasure chatting with you Mike. I wish we had more time. But it looks like the troops are coming this way. I wish you luck in your endeavors at Queens!



Sooke School District has approximately 11,300 students and serves the communities of Sooke, Port Renfrew, Metchosin, Highlands, Langford and Colwood. Surrounded by forests, ocean, mountains and lakes, we are located a short distance from Victoria, the capital city of the province of British Columbia.

We are a busy school district and unlike many other districts in our province, we are increasing in size! In fact, we anticipate growing by more than 300 students per year for the next 15 years.

### Our Vision

We honour student voice and choice through engaging, purposeful and experiential learning in a safe and respectful community.

### Our Values

– Relationships – Choice – Respect – Integrity – Trust – Safety

Number of Schools: 26  
 Elementary (kindergarten to Grade 5): 18  
 Middle (Grades 6-8): 4  
 Secondary (Grades 9-12): 3  
 Alternate/Adult: 1 (three different locations)

