

Adolescents *Read!*

Issue 2

In Their Own Words

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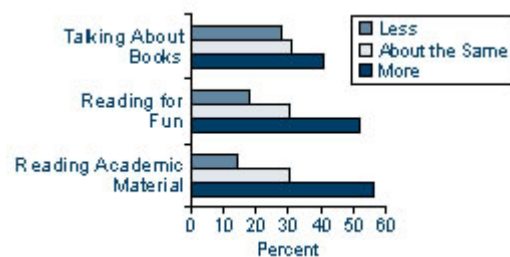
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Students at New York Life *Revitalizing High School Libraries* Sites Talk About Why Their Library Media Centers “Rock”!

Funded by the New York Life Foundation from 2003-2005, *Revitalizing High School Libraries* (RHSL) was a pilot program that allowed Public Education Network (PEN) and its member local education funds (LEFs) in Minneapolis, San Francisco and Tampa to update and refurbish library media centers in four high schools. The high schools are: Washburn High School and Roosevelt High School in Minneapolis; Robinson High School in Tampa; and Mission High School in San Francisco. In this issue of *Adolescents Read!*, we report what students at these schools are saying about the impact that RHSL is having on their experiences with reading and studying. We close with some online resources that students at the four high schools recommend.

Not Just for Class: Students Are Reading More for Fun

Findings from a survey administered in late 2005 to over 600 students across the participating high schools suggest that students in RHSL sites are reading more for fun as well as for class. They also suggest that students are talking more about books and reading with family and friends (see graph below). These behaviors are strongly associated with higher reading and academic achievement.



That well over half of the students at RHSL schools report reading more for any reason should not come as a surprise. Consider what Daniela, a 12th grade student at Robinson High School, had to say in an essay about Robinson High School’s library media center:

My Media Center “rocks” for a myriad of reasons. To begin with, it is simply outstanding to see the transformation that it has undergone. New laptop computers, interesting books, plush couches, and a SMART Board are among the products of the renovation. Honestly, the aesthetic aspect of the building makes a big difference in the way the students view the Media Center, and so – improving the inside encourages pupils to enter and take part of the library’s resources. Also, the comfort level has increased. Instead of the stuffy, uncomfortable environment associated with libraries, bright, wrap-around couches and chairs have allowed Robinson students to relax and learn simultaneously. Overall, the Media Center “rocks!”

Other students across the participating high schools reported similar experiences with their library media centers. Read on to find out more.

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Students Read More on Their Own Time

Given the opportunity through extended hours of operation and more flexible access, students at RHSL sites visit their library media centers on their own time. As two students at Roosevelt High School and Mission High School report:

"I've been able to visit the library during my lunch hour or after school to study in a peaceful environment and check out books in the comfort of my school's library."

"If you come to the library for a school assignment, you are bound to check out a book to read on your own time. It's just something that makes you want to walk down the aisles and look through the books. I have improved my reading skills, I am reading like almost everyday."

Equally important, students can find books that appeal to their personal interests. Why? At RHSL schools, students are routinely consulted about the books they are interested in when book orders are being placed. As a student at Robinson High School puts it:

"I like how books come to life as you are sitting there just reading for fun. Some people read because the teacher said you have to or because they were commanded to by somebody. Basically, you should have a choice when you read, so I think that is good to have books to enjoy."

Students Conduct Deeper Inquiry into Subject Areas

Conducting research becomes a more enjoyable and productive process when a library media center has up-to-date books and other resources on a wide range of topics related to the subjects students must take. Students at RHSL sites are therefore more motivated to explore the core subject areas beyond what they are learning in class. At Washburn High School, Robinson High School, and Mission High School, students are clear about this:

"The library gives me the option to go back and do more extensive research on certain subjects that I'm studying. That has helped my grades improve—as well as my attitude."

"I can learn something that teachers wouldn't have mentioned during classes, especially when I need to do research work in the library. I learned to use different databases and search engines on the internet that help me a lot on school work."

"[The library media center] has helped to expand my knowledge on the subjects that I have already learned about."

"Just being in there makes you want to study more and it just feels so comfortable."

Students' Reading and Language Skills Improve

As is evident from the students' comments presented above, RHSL sites have increased the frequency of and reasons for student reading. But beyond greater access to media centers with current materials that supplement core subject areas and that are of interest to students, library media center specialists purchase high-interest books that are appropriate for a variety of reading levels. As a result, many students across all schools report increased reading levels, and especially comprehension and use of new vocabulary.

"I went through three books that were fairly long that averaged about 700 pages each. Since I started reading these books, I have learned to use and master several words that were not in my regular vocabulary."

"The library helped me get books that are in my reading level, and while the library was doing that, my reading level went up...it was 1 and now I'm in 6."

Some Student-Recommended Websites:

- **Washburn High School** students highly recommend www.mpls.k12.mn.us/Online_Research_Databases.html, a link to a site where students can search encyclopedias, magazines, maps, newspapers, and other references.
- Students at **Roosevelt High School** recommend <http://refdesk.com/> for indexes and reviews of quality, credible, and timely reference resources that are free and family-friendly.
- Students at **Robinson High School** like <http://www.teenreads.com/> for great reviews of current books of interest to teens.
- At **Mission High School**, students really like *Reading Rants!* at <http://tln.lib.mi.us/%7Eamutch/jen/index.html> for "out of the ordinary" teen booklists.

What Does Literacy Mean to You—to All of Us?

We now know much about the relationship between literacy and the likelihood of leading a personally and professionally rewarding life. Research shows, for example, that:

- the average literacy level required for all American jobs continues to rise.
- high school students with higher reading ability are more likely to succeed in college-level courses such as history, sociology, literature, and others that require extensive reading.
- even good health is associated with higher literacy and education levels.

(Source: Alliance for Excellent Education, www.all4ed.org)

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