

Cassandra Jacobs

Cassandra Jacobs, graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Madison with a Bachelor's Degree in English in 1984. She later earned her Master's Degree in Library Science in 1995. Her experiences include teaching English as a Second Language while in the Peace Corps at Lycee M'Baiki in the Central African Republic as an English as a Second Language teacher. Fort Atkinson had the good fortune of hiring Cassandra when Luther Elementary opened in 2001-2002. After one year she transferred to the high school in 2002 and has been making a great difference in the learning community ever since.

Cassandra, being a librarian focuses on a philosophy where equal access of information, both physically and intellectually, are her most concrete core goals as a professional in providing these services to her students. All of her teaching efforts and management of library resources are driven toward making information accessible to students.

In the Fort Atkinson high school library, equal access to resources means students can interact with resources at the moment learning is taking place-not only during third period, for example, or when a teacher has scheduled computer lab time. This is a philosophical shift from the past practice where teachers and some librarians dictate when and how students sought information. Cassandra encourages a "learning commons" approach – students can drop in throughout the day whenever a need arises. They need not schedule, ask permission, or defend their need to use the library or its resources. Consequently, students learn to self-advocate for and assess their information needs, a skill that will carryover into their adult lives. Once they walk through the door, students know they will receive expert advice on how and when to use technology responsibly and effectively and they will learn the information literacy skills they will need to be productive learners.

Cassandra introduces students to sophisticated online databases that require a high level of search savvy to extract information. These databases are not particularly easy to use but with instruction, students can learn to craft topic-specific searches that yield expert scholarly research.

A huge barrier for some students is simply learning how to convert schoolwork from one format to another. They may have a free word processing program at home, but find they cannot open or print their work at school. Teaching these students how to move between software

applications is a valuable skill that solves an immediate problem; it also prepares them for a future where change is constant.

Students taking online classes are assigned to the library where they can be guaranteed the use of a computer and adult assistance in accessing and using the online material. After school, as many as 50 students use the library while they wait for athletic practices to begin or rides home. It is not uncommon for families to use the library while a parent meets with a teacher to discuss academic progress.

From Sabine Bottum, “Imagine limitless resources, a place and person you can talk to if you need access to the latest research article on stem cells or are faced with a technology issue two minutes before your next class is scheduled to use computers to measure the respiration of crickets. I have found myself in that situation many times and each time I’ve heard the same cheerful voice on the other end of the phone, “Do you have a class right now? I’ll be there in 30 seconds.” It is also exciting to see so many kids in the library at all hours of the day – whether doing research, reading a newly acquired book or for a quiet game of chess. Our library is a welcoming place for academic and social interaction.”

Yvette Loiselle states, “I consider Cassandra to be my learning partner here at school. You cannot find a more model educator for this prestigious award – she is an inspiration to us all.”