Cathy Evans
St. Mary's Episcopal School
Memphis, Tennessee

Nominated by: Carrie Steakley

In what ways does the nominee go above in beyond in their role as librarian?

The mission of the St. Mary’s Episcopal School library, under the direction of Cathy Evans, is to be an integral part of the learning community by providing collections, support, and instruction that promote a culture of reading, encourages curiosity, and ensures that all learners are informed critical thinkers prepared to contribute to a global society.

Living out this mission, Cathy has created a library that is truly an integral part of the school. In 2017 - 2018, Cathy collected the following data that, I believe, tells the story:

- 94,946 resources retrieved from 70+ databases
- 25,593 books checked out
- 2,780 projects created using NoodleTools
- 1,366 new books and videos
- 488 Overdrive check-outs
- 429 videos streamed from Discovery Education

The library program at St. Mary's is extensive, including programming for faculty, students, alumnae, parents, and community. Cathy coordinates an author visit every year. Oftentimes, she couples the author visit with a “whole-school” read. For example, this year she invited Kwame Alexander, and for summer reading, the entire Upper School read one of his books and did book discussions and activities in preparation for his visit. In fact, Cathy has led several all-school reads, and published an article about her successful process, "One Book One School, One Great Impact" (in Library Media Connections, August 2013).

Most schools have book clubs, and we have very active student book clubs across divisions. However, Cathy has also initiated an Alumnae book club and a Faculty/Student book club, both of which have served to bring our community closer together. Additionally, she created Cupcakes and Cool Reads, an opportunity for teachers to share their favorite books with students. The students walk around the room to different tables manned by faculty members discussing their books while students decorate their cupcakes with different toppings at each stop. The event shows that even the coaches, music teacher, or school administrators are committed, avid readers.
Cathy is always on the cutting edge of new techniques and technologies. She continuously updates her own skills, most recently using tools such as Pear Deck and Google Classroom to enhance lessons and keep our faculty current. She became proficient in PowerSchool Learning, and many teachers invite her to be a co-teacher on their pages so she can create content for them and their student projects. She secures and coordinates Title funding to bring quality professional development to school such as workshops on Guided Inquiry led by Leslie Maniotes and consultants from Staff Development for Educators to lead sessions on Differentiated Instruction and Formative Assessment. She has also overseen the use of these funds to send teachers to conferences such as the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) and Differentiated Instruction. Additionally, Cathy has led many in-house professional development sessions on using library resources such as databases and streaming video, but also goes beyond library resources alone to such topics as Problem Based Learning, Using Rubrics for Assessment, Differentiated Instruction, and Incorporating Podcasts in the Curriculum.

For students, Cathy has created a number of self-paced modules that students can access at any time, such as how to use databases, how to access e-books, how nonfiction books are arranged, how to locate books, how to evaluate websites, and more.

Finally, a true testament to the success of our library program comes from our alumnae. Year after year, recent graduates share how prepared they were for college, not only in terms of research and writing skills, but also in their ability to access and utilize library resources on their college campuses. Cathy implemented College Libraries 101 where seniors visit their college library’s website to become familiar with resources. The seniors often skype or begin online chats with their future college librarians.

How does the nominee make their community a better place?
The library facility is our students’ favorite spot in the school. Cathy sees the library space as student space and actively sought student input in designing the library for their needs and wishes. As a result, Cathy created a warm, inviting environment filled with comfortable chairs, flexible seating, and window benches. Everything from student chosen magazine subscriptions to two exercise bikes to pedal and study at the same time are a result of Cathy’s vision.

Before, during, and after school, our librarians can be found working with students and teachers in this beautiful, welcoming space. However, it is not just the physical features of the library that attracts them; it is the programming that happens there. One of my favorite activities in the library is “Fireside Chats,” an opportunity for students to lead courageous conversations in a supportive, shared space with faculty and students. Cathy started the Fireside Chats by the fireplace in the library which in some ways has changed the culture of the school. Student lead discussions on topics they are passionate about such as gun control, confederate monuments, mental illness, being adopted, etc. It has become a comfortable forum for open and meaningful discussions. Our school chaplain and religion teacher Katherine Bush reflected on Fireside Chats saying, “People tell personal stories or connect the issues of the day to their personal lives and experiences. And we don’t debate, we just get curious and say things like ‘tell me more’ or ‘I see where you’re coming from but I see it like this.’ I have seen students and teachers weep in Fireside Chats and for lots of different reasons, but mostly because our hearts are touched.”
Another way in which Cathy makes our community a better place is that she works in collaboration with the guidance counselors to purchase and continually update self-help books on relevant student issues such as anxiety, eating disorders, and divorce. The books are in an isolated section of the library for privacy, and the students are encouraged to take the books without checking them out in order to protect their anonymity. This section is called the Green Dot collection because green dots are on the spine of the books to show where to shelve them when they are returned by the students.

In 2014, author Katie Klise visited our school. Our students and our library impressed her greatly. In particular, the green dot collection inspired her to write a book coming out in March called Don’t Check out this Book. Here is what she wrote to Cathy: "I was so blown away when I visited St. Mary's back in 2014 and saw your community of enthusiastic young readers. This doesn't just happen, as we know. It takes dedicated teachers, parents, and someone like *you* to build a collection of books that children and young adults *want* to read and talk about with their friends. What impressed me most (besides that cozy coffee area for h.s. girls) was the "green dot" collection of books along the back wall of your library. Readers could borrow a "green dot" book that might seem too embarrassing to check out. It's not an exaggeration to say I would've been a different person if I'd had books like those available to me at my Catholic school in the '70s. Thank you, Cathy Evans, for inspiring my 31st book, which I am convinced is my best yet. I literally couldn't have done it without you."

*How has the nominee improved your life or the lives of others in your community?*

As a teacher, I saw the librarians as co-teachers, experts in their field, and creative partners. Brainstorming project ideas with them was great fun, and seeing how they could take my objective to an entirely different level was exciting. This support of academic excellence continues today as our librarians collaborate daily with teachers and students at all grade levels to integrate information skills and library resources into classroom instruction and projects. Additionally, they play an active role in assessment. The time and expertise that they add to the evaluation and feedback our students receive are crucial to promoting higher learning and achievement.

Cathy insists that the library is the center of learning, and she is a gifted instructor. She works directly with teachers to create assignments that encourage critical thinking and student engagement. She developed a K-12 information skills curriculum and incorporates lessons by collaborating with faculty in many content areas. One such project is our sophomore term paper. The teachers find her to be an invaluable partner. One teacher commented, "While working with Cathy on the history paper, she was tenacious, informed, collaborative, and just easy - as in a joy to work with. Often going to great links to search for sources, she inspired students to 'lean into' the research process. Consequently, many would find themselves enjoying the process after witnessing Cathy's passion for the perfect 'find.' She is not only willing but eager to toss around ideas to help curate stronger research for the sake of superior writing. Cathy Evans lives as an example for other budding scholars."

*What makes the nominee a leader in their community?*

Cathy is not only a collaborative innovator, she is also a leader and trendsetter in her field. Locally, she serves on the school’s Academic Council, leads professional development for teachers, and works with parents to promote community use of library resources. On a national level, she presents at conferences, submits articles for publication, and serves in various leadership capacities. Cathy’s incredible work has
been recognized at the local, state, and national levels, as is evidenced by the numerous awards and leadership positions she has held:

- Tennessee’s School Librarian of the Year from the Tennessee Library Association
- Tennessee’s Library Instruction Award from Tennessee Library Association
- Memphis Librarian of the Year
- Tenn-Share’s Resource Sharing Award
- St. Mary’s Ellen Feild Todd Service Award
- Tennessee’s Library Instruction Award from Tennessee Library Association
- President of Memphis Area Library Consortium
- President of Tenn-Share, a resource sharing organization composed of over 450 libraries and information agencies of all types in Tennessee.
- Tennessee Electronic Library Database selection committee, Chaired the TEL curriculum manual committee, and chaired the TEL Training Committee
- Tennessee’s Governor’s Advisory Council on Libraries
- Board of Directors of American Association of School Librarians; on executive committee 2 years; co-chaired national conference; served on School Library Program of the Year Committee, chaired Innovative Reading Grant Award committee
- Technology Innovation Challenge Grant Evaluator for the U.S. Department of Education
- Presented at Tennessee Library Association Conferences, Tennessee Association of School Librarians Conference, Tn. Ass. of Independent Schools Conf., National Association of Independent Schools Conference

Cathy also was instrumental in securing the Tennessee Electronic Library (TEL), a virtual library funded by the state which provides convenient and equitable access to library and information resources for all citizens of Tennessee. As described by the TEL website, “TEL was entirely supported by federal funds under the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) and administered by the Tennessee State Library and Archives, a division of the Tennessee Department of State. In 2006, Aubrey Mitchell, retired University of Tennessee Associate Dean of Libraries, and Cathy Evans, Director of Libraries for St. Mary’s Episcopal School, Memphis, Tennessee, serving as co-chairs of the Tenn-Share TEL II Committee, brokered an agreement to include Literature Resource Center in TEL and sought voluntary contributions to fund the database.”

One thing that impresses me most is how much Cathy cares about library services nationwide. She attends many State Legislative day activities and most recently invited and was successful in bringing two federal congressmen, Steve Cohen and David Kustoff, to St. Mary’s to talk about the importance of libraries and continued federal funding. Our political leaders were able to hear directly from our students why library funding should be protected. It was inspiring to hear our students articulate how valuable the St. Mary’s library is to them.

Additionally, she promotes reading beyond our school to other schools in the community. When we have a visiting author at SMS, she also has the author stay a second day and visit three area public schools who otherwise would not be able to have an author visit. As part of the program, she visits the schools ahead of time to give them copies of all of the authors books in order for the school to read the book prior to the visit.
Finally and perhaps most importantly, she is a role model for our students. Recently, she was on the cover of Memphis Health and Fitness magazine and featured in an article about life-long physical fitness. Additionally, Cathy did a chapel talk about her personal struggles in school and how today’s struggles do not define who you will become. The impact on the students was immense. Cathy received numerous notes, e-mails, comments, and even tears about how much the talk meant to students. Opportunities like this allow students to see Cathy as a real, vulnerable person, and perhaps gives them a new perspective, and hopefully, a positive role model.

For all these reasons and many, many more, I love my librarian! Thank you for considering Cathy Evans for this award.