

Establishing a School Archives

Adapted from

"Building an Archives" at <http://www.archives.gov/about/history/building-an-archives/school-archives.html>

By Mildred Tilley for IBSC Conference, 2008

"Students can benefit in several ways from researching their school's history. . . This is history that is near at hand and that has a direct connection to their lives."

--Larry J. Hackman, New York State Archivist, 1985

Schools produce rich historical records. yearbooks, school lunch menus, flyers promoting dances or student elections, photographs, letters, issues of the school newspaper, and other items document not only the history of the school, but also often reflect the history of the community, state, or nation. Developing a school archives provides a valuable service-learning opportunity for students and creates a lasting legacy from which future students will benefit.

A school archives is different from an official school records system. Most school districts have an established record-keeping system for official records, which includes record-keeping guidelines, a records officer, and a records center or other storage facility. A school archives can take on many characteristics and serve many purposes--but it will not replace the official record-keeping systems.

A school archives or historical collection should serve two primary purposes:

1. Be a repository for the collection and preservation of historically valuable documents relating to the history of the school or the community, which otherwise would be lost.
2. Constitute an element of a program for teaching research-related skills to students.

Creating a school archives will entail a considerable amount of planning and responsibility for those involved. One way to avoid overloading yourselves would be to start the program in a small way and expand it if it proves successful. The following suggestions may be helpful:

1. Establish a steering committee.
2. Discuss the project with the official school system record-keepers.
3. Establish a working relationship with other archivists or historians.
4. Establish a steering committee
5. Select someone to serve as the archivist.

6. Select a physical location to house the collection, and determine what equipment and supplies are needed to accomplish the project for the first year and on a continuing basis.
7. Estimate a budget for the project.
8. Establish basic working rules and regulations.
9. Come to an agreement with an established archival institution to which the collected materials could be turned over if the school archives program should be discontinued.

Using Technology

As you establish your school archives, there are a number of ways technology can improve the organization of, and access to, your collection. Computer software programs (**PastPerfect Museum Software** at <http://www.museumsoftware.com> or **Rediscovery Software** at <http://www.rediscover.com>) that create spreadsheets and databases can assist with cataloging records. Scanning documents and making their images available on the school's Web site can increase student usage of the documents, while limiting the handling of the originals. Teachers can integrate these images or photocopies of the originals into their lesson plans. Other technologies can add to the diversity of your collection. For example, audio- and videotapes of oral history interviews, school performances, and sporting events can be included.

Items to Collect

- student handbooks
- student newspapers
- yearbooks
- photographs
- school lunch menus
- course catalogs
- rare text books
- student term papers about the school or community
- artifacts (trophies, flags, uniforms, donated objects, memorabilia)
- newspaper articles from the local newspaper
- special awards received by the school
- records of special school programs

- special research files developed by teachers (this could provide a place to preserve valuable files that otherwise would be lost when a teacher retires or moves)
- audiotaped or videotaped oral histories
- scrapbooks
- videotapes of school performances and athletic events