



An Interactive Environment for Learning: *The WPSD Learning Center*

Linda Burik
Director of the Learning Center
Technology, Media and Library Services

Formerly the school's library, The Edward R. Schatz Learning Center at the Western PA School for the Deaf was recently renovated to provide an active, engaging educational environment for the entire WPSD campus.



Access to up-to-date electronic materials, visual media and the Internet bring a world of information into our students' educational venue, and the technical skills they learn enables them to manage this wealth of information effectively.

Through the use of the Alexandria Companion computerized catalog and circulation system, the students learn how to locate materials in the Learning Center. Learning Center staff use a circulation computer with a bar code reader for the check in / check out of materials and for maintenance of the extensive collection of over 18,000 titles.



At computer workstations the students learn to search through electronic reference materials loaded from a CD-ROM server. The students use software located at the workstations to organize their information into outlines and mind-mapping charts, and to cite their sources accurately. Through network access via a T-1 line to the Internet, students learn the relevance of up-to-date multimedia information that can be obtained on the Internet, and have access to vast electronic databases of the most current periodicals and other print materials.

A more traditional study area in the Learning Center houses not only the reference area and professional library, but also contains a rear screen projection system, a document camera and a SMART interactive whiteboard connected to a computer for class instruction, workshops, and presentations.



Television displays connected to the school's in-house video distribution system throughout the Learning Center areas allow students to view in-house broadcasts and live educational programming via cable or satellite.



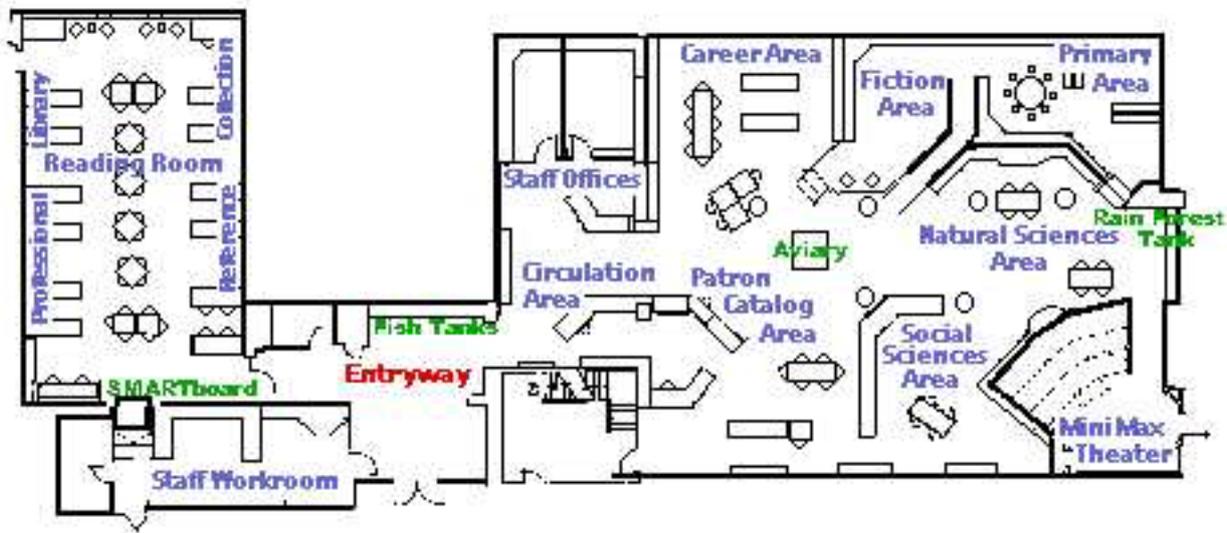
The Learning Center is also an active, interactive environment where students can learn by browsing, experimenting and interacting with materials and displays. Quarterly themes focus on areas of study for students school-wide, and students of all ages have an opportunity to view book displays, computer based activities, and collections borrowed from local community resources.



The minimax theater is the setting for story telling in American Sign Language, and also provides a mini stage for invited guests to give book talks or demonstrations related to the themes.



The primary reading corner creates a relaxing and fun environment to spark an interest in reading and interactive learning opportunities at an early age.



Each component of the Learning Center has been selected because it meets a specific need to improve the quality of education to our students and to remove the communication barriers present in more traditional educational settings.

We believe that we are providing the ultimate educational experience, where students will learn by doing, by learning to locate and analyze information themselves and by communicating effectively what they are learning with others.

