INTRODUCTION

Weeding is the important and constructive process of clearing library media center collections of materials that have outlived their usefulness. This term comes from gardening and means the same thing—eliminating the unsuitable or unwanted. It is a carefully planned procedure that is as important as selecting and acquiring new quality materials, both print and non-print.

A balanced, up-to-date collection of materials is essential to a quality school library media center. Materials are to be carefully selected, and the collection tailored to the needs of students and curriculum. Constant evaluation of materials will result in a highly effective and quality collection. Therefore, weeding is a valuable and integral part of the selection or collection development policy, and one of the best techniques available for the long-range building of useful collections.

When approaching weeding, it is well to remember that numbers aren’t everything. Quality is as important as quantity. It is useless to have shelves cluttered with outdated, irrelevant materials that obscure more current items and make it difficult for patrons to find what they really need.

Current literature on the topic gives the following reasons for weeding:

- To utilize the space in the library media center in the best and most efficient manner.
- To give the library media center a reputation for reliability by having a collection that is current and up-to-date.
- To remove an outward illusion of a well-stocked library media center in the eyes of those who do not use it and who may oppose requests for funding for new materials.
- To identify books and non-print materials which need to be repaired or replaced.
- To make room for new technologies.
- To be able to give the best possible service through a collection of quality materials.
- To increase circulation and create a culture of reading.
WEEDING SCHEDULE

While weeding should be done on a regular, ongoing basis, Jefferson County Public School Board policy 08.233, Library Media Centers, states:

“The school media librarian shall inventory and review the print collection at least every two years for wear and obsolescence and, with the approval of the Principal, dispose of materials which are no longer suitable for use for these reasons.”

For collections that have been in existence for a few years, it is recommended that approximately four to five percent of the collection be weeded annually. However, the unique space, budget, curriculum requirements and user needs of each library media center must be considered when deciding how rigorously to weed. Bear in mind that the useful life of all library media is limited by one factor or another. Media can become educationally outmoded and physically worn. Curriculum and student enrollment pattern changes render some materials no longer pertinent. School libraries have no responsibility to preserve national or local heritage, to be comprehensive resource centers, or to be complete or comprehensive in any subject or interest area.

Remember, a primary purpose of a school library media center is to support the school’s curriculum.

CRITERIA FOR DISCARDING

In general, the following criteria should be used in weeding out undesirable materials. These criteria are presented as guidelines. It is important that librarians apply them with judgment while carefully considering their school’s curriculum, collection, and clientele. See Weeding Guidelines by Dewey Classification for recommendations for specific Dewey sections.

Record of use: If an item has not circulated in three to five years, it should be considered for weeding. Similarly, consider shelf-time periods (i.e. the length of time the book or item remains on the shelf between circulations) that reflect a declining or non-existent pattern of use. Remember that seasonal, monthly or some similar patterns of use exist in school libraries and these patterns must be taken into consideration.
Currency of content: If the subject matter is out-of-date, factually inaccurate, or no longer relevant to the curriculum; if illustrations or content are outmoded or perpetuate sexual, racial, or cultural stereotypes. (See Suggested Guidelines.)

Consider the following:

- Has the material been superseded by better, or more up-to-date material, even though it is only a year or two old?
- Has the curriculum changed to the point where the material is no longer pertinent?
- Is it obsolete in content, style, or theme?
- Is the approach no longer appropriate (word choice and style of writing a generation or two ago leave today’s youngsters guessing instead of helping them to understand).
- If it no longer appears in standard listing, such as H. W. Wilson’s Children’s Catalog, Middle and Junior High School Library Catalog, etc.

Technical quality: For non-print media, if visuals are poor, faded, off color, or scratched. If sound reproductions are faulty or inferior. VHS and/or cassette tapes should be discarded as they are replaced with material in updated formats. Do not retain reel-to-reel tapes, laserdiscs, phonograph records or filmstrips regardless of their technical quality.

Physical condition If it is worn, torn, soiled or generally ragged; if pages or parts are missing. If the pages have very fine print or yellowed paper. (Classics with such make-up have no place on school library shelves).

Dispensability If it is a duplicate copy where multiple copies exist of a title that rarely circulates or if it duplicates materials no longer needed in the collection. If it is a textbook which is no longer useful for reference purposes.

REASONS FOR RECONSIDERING DISCARDING MATERIALS

Here are some reasons for not discarding materials, even if they meet the above listed criteria. Professional judgment should be exercised in all decisions.

- If it is a work of historical significance in the field of children’s literature.
- If it has unusual illustrations or illustrations done by a well-known artist.
- If it is a work by a local author, illustrator, or editor.
- If it describes local history or personalities.
- If it is a memorial gift.
- If it bears a significant relationship to other books or materials on the same subject.
- If it has possible usefulness to some special group or individual in the school.
MAINTAINING THE COLLECTION

In selecting for purchase, consider each new title or acquisition in relation to the total collection, and consider the possibility of discarding one already in the collection.

If a new title supersedes an older one, withdraw the older material when the new is received. The exception might be to retain such items as atlases, almanacs, periodicals, etc., to use for instructional purposes. While not useful for information, out-dated materials of this type retain usefulness for students learning how to use such tools. However, such materials should be deleted from the circulation system, stored out of sight, and used only for instruction.

HELPFUL HINTS

These suggestions come from a survey of the literature and from actual, practical experiences in weeding libraries. They are offered as hints that might be helpful. Individual discretion and judgment should be exercised in their use.

- Books and other media in which any significant portion of the information is out-dated should be considered out-dated and withdrawn from the collection. It is better to have no information about a particular topic in your collection than it is to provide misinformation.
- When in doubt about the currency of a particular content area, consult a teacher or other colleague with expertise in that area.
- Retain good examples of weeded titles to share with administrators, staff, and parents to demonstrate the need for weeding.
- Un-indexed periodicals should be kept no more than a year.
- Filmstrips, laser discs, phonograph records, transparencies, and VHS tapes are obsolete, so should be discarded. Cassette tapes should be discarded as updated formats are purchased.
- The same weeding guidelines apply to audiovisual materials as to print (record of use, currency, etc.) Be aware that older AV materials may have been re-recorded (i.e., transferred by the production company with no updates from VHS to DVD) and given a more current copyright date. Updating the format does not update the content.
- Pictures and study prints quickly fade and become dated.
- The tendency is to leave materials once they have been placed in reference. If present, reference collections should contain the most recent and up-to-date information available. Reference sections may be rendered obsolete by digital resources.
- Replace weeded materials if their content is still significant. Keep a running list of topics and titles that need to be purchased.
THE WEEDING PROCEDURE

Weeding requires physically handling and examining each book or piece of library media. Check the physical condition, the copyright date, the content and the circulation statistics of the item against the criteria for removal. In most instances the decision to weed or to keep is easily made. Discards are set aside on a waiting book truck, while those to remain are replaced on the shelf. Items to be retained that are in need of repair should be set aside.

DOCUMENTATION

The areas reviewed and the number of print items weeded from each section of the collection should be recorded as weeding occurs to document compliance with Board policy. School Library Statistics will be updated upon submission of a completed Weeding Documentation form to Library Media Services.

DISCARD PROCEDURES

Update all inventory records. Delete holdings and/or bibliographic records from LibraryWorld. Note any titles to be replaced and subject areas which need additional materials. Stamp or mark inside front cover “discard.” Remove, or thoroughly mark out barcode label.

Books:

Place all discards in cardboard boxes (available from the Warehouse, ext. 3362.) Create 8 ½ x 11 shipping labels (2 per box) with the following:

Ms. Grinder
C. B. Young Service Center

Apply address label to the top and one side of each box. Write the school location number as return address on each label. Call the warehouse (ext. 3362) to arrange for a special pick up. Place boxes in same location used in your school for the pickup by the JCPS Pony. Boxes will be transported to C.B. Young Service Center for disposal.

Other materials:

Other materials, such as cassette tapes, DVDs, binders, study guides, booklets, pamphlets, magazines, etc. should be disposed of at the school using the trash or recycling dumpster after deleting the records, removing barcodes, and removing ownership marks. Anything that qualifies for recycling (plastic cases, magazines etc.) should be disposed of via the recycling dumpster.
REFERENCES


ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

JCPS Suggested Guidelines provide recommended average dates of publication by section

Weeding Documentation Form for JCPS school librarian use only, to record the number of items discarded by section.

Weeding Flowchart Fiction to assist in decision-making when items are older that the recommended age, but may still have value for the collection.

Weeding Flowchart Nonfiction to assist in decision-making when items are older that the recommended age, but may still contain current information.

Weeding Guidelines by Dewey Classification provides tips for weeding decisions by Dewey section.