Williams Amos Hough High School in Cornelius, North Carolina is one of the largest, highest achieving high schools in the Charlotte Mecklenburg school system. The student body is 2,615 pupils and does not seem to be very racially diverse; Caucasians are in the majority at 77 percent, followed by an 11.4 percent African American and 6.2 percent Hispanic population. Increasing student diversity does not seem to be a very prominent school goal at this time. Despite high levels of affluence and achievement, the school media specialist can still play an important role in bolstering these levels through enrichment opportunities, while being vigilant in supporting those lower performing, less affluent students. The student graduation rate of 92.4 percent is well above the 85.1 percent district average.

According to the NC department of public instruction school report card,during the 2013-2014 school year, there were 144 faculty members, 113 of which are classroom teachers (nearly 30 more than the district average). Of these teachers, 44 percent hold advanced degrees compared to a 29 percent district wide average. Not surprisingly, teacher turnover rates are equal with the district’s 16 percent turnover rate.

Also not surprisingly, student academic performance, particularly enrollment in advanced classes and standardized test scores, is quite high. According to the school’s website, over 685 students are enrolled in one or more AP class with 59 percent of students scoring a 3 or higher (passing grade) on last years’ AP exams. According to the school report card, the overall achievement score is an 84, a high B, while the overall school growth score is a 91.8, a low A, which averaged a very high B score for overall performance and growth. Likewise, the 2013-2014 high school tested EOC scores (English II, math 1, and biology) all fell within the high B range. Hough also has a slightly above district average AP and IB course enrollment (31 percent compared to 22 percent district wide) and career and technical course enrollment (66 percent compared to 61 percent district wide).

Hough’s commitment to academic excellence is evident in their school’s mission and improvement. The schools’ mission is “to foster high student achievement through a strong collaborative school culture that maintains high expectations for all members of the school community.” The school media specialist has no doubt been one of the key players in this “school community;” one of the key ways that school media specialist has and could continue to help students reach their full academic potential is through one of the school’s primary beliefs aligned with this mission. This belief states that “information literacy and skill in using technology are essential 21st century skills for all students.” By collaborating with teachers to lead instructional technology and research course for students, media specialists will inevitably begin to hone students’ 21st century skillset. Likewise, collaboration is another one of the school’s primary beliefs, which states that “a strong, positive, collaborative school culture is necessary for high student achievement.”

The media specialist’s collaborative partnerships to benefit the students doesn’t have to be limited to partnerships within the school. In fact, one of the 2016 strategic plan goals for the school is to “cultivate partnerships with families, businesses, faith-based groups, and community organizations to provide a sustainable system of support and care for each child.” The media specialist is in an ideal position to leverage support from outside community groups and families since she serves the entire student body and would therefore be most in tune with their needs. Already, the school’s media specialist serves as secretary of the school leadership team, which is led by a principal, two assistant principals and a parent chair and is comprised of 11 teacher and 9 parent representatives. It seems logical then for the media specialist to serve on the board of the school’s PTSA, which is also a very strong, parent led organization, or to at least attend the PTSA meetings to provide parents and other outside community partners with insight taken from the school leadership team regarding the school’s internal needs and how the community can help meet these. For instance, this year, through a program known as One Access, all Charlotte Mecklenburg School students are eligible to use their school ID numbers to access all resources and programs at local public libraries for free. After consulting with the school leadership team about how this opportunity could better enable students to achieve academically, the media specialist could then communicate to the PTSA attendees the ways in which parents and businesses could encourage students to take advantage of this resource through some kind of incentive program perhaps.

The school also has an improvement plan, which aligns directly with the school’s primary mission and vision, but is bolstered by a series of SMART goals. One of these SMART goals is “to provide duty free lunch periods for all teachers on a daily basis as well as duty free instruction planning periods for each teacher daily.” The media specialist could help make this goal realized by encouraging teachers to let their students either enjoy open circulation and research time at the library or by leading instructional information literacy type help sessions for these teachers’ classes. While this could be misconstrued as a way to give media specialists more work or as a way for teachers to shirk their class responsibilities by dumping their students on the media specialist, I think school media specialists should look at this as an opportunity to help students achieve academically. The media specialist could also use this teacher planning/lunch period to build students’ SAT/ACT skillset, which fulfills another SMART goal to “increase the number of students that are college ready by improving SAT/ACT scores by 5 percent points.”

The media specialist at Hough seems to be well supported by technology faculty, enabling her to devote more time toward directly helping the students. There is a full time technology facilitator, who makes sure all technology is provided to teachers upon request and is operating smoothly, as well as an advanced degree teacher, who is in charge of the school’s website and network functions. Already, this “master teacher,” as he is called, is in the process of updating the media specialists’ website; through the website, the media specialist, with the help of her nine help desk students, can add useful content to the website, including resource links for students, and could even create libguides for specific subjects to help students succeed in certain classes.

Finally, there are two programs which seem to be quite unique to Hough High School and which have the potential for building student academic excellence of which the media specialist could be a part. One of these is the student services center, whose mission is to provide services pertaining to post-secondary plans, primarily resume and cover letter writing clinics, help with identifying scholarship opportunities, and general help with the career and college search process, etc. It seems like this department would be an excellent opportunity for the media specialist to offer her expertise in finding useful resources pertaining to college and careers for high school students to utilize. This would build the media specialists’ visibility and respect among students while also bolstering the school’s mission of producing students who can succeed in the 21st century, global world. The second program which the media specialist should align herself with is “Husky Time.” This is a kind of club for students built into the regular school day every Wednesday and Thursday morning that “supports and challenges students while building a sense of community across the school” in the form of extra tutoring, a study hall period, or some kind of enrichment activity. The media specialist could provide tutoring services, especially if they involved library or technology skills, or she could develop her own bookish or technology focused club for those accelerated students who might be interested.

Overall, while it seems that Hough High School is and has been performing with a very high student and teacher achievement track record, the importance of the media specialist as a kind of “extra enrichment specialist” for students and staff cannot be underestimated.