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Teen Power Library at PRSEF

In an article of this series published on December 23 of last year (<https://www.murrysvillelibrary.org/about-us/the-magic-library-card-series/>), I told you about the Pittsburgh Regional Science & Engineering Fair (PRSEF) and its first-time coordinated use of Power Library, a very important and informed topical statewide search vehicle offered by public libraries in PA.

It was then near the beginning of preparations for the 82nd year of this highly regarded affiliate of the Regeneron International Science & Engineering Fair (ISEF). The PRSEF is run by the Carnegie Science Center aided by a lot of volunteers such as myself, and it is among the very top of ISEF-affiliated fairs around the country.

I want to update you about the Teen Power Library project that was fully implemented for the first time this year, now that the Fair itself is concluded for the year. It was held virtually, for the first time, on March 24. Because of COVID-19 and the virtual format, Fair participation was down from its more usual 1000 or so students to only about 400. Therefore, it is very difficult to draw comparative quantitative conclusions about how well the Power Library project worked. But there is clearly good news.

The purpose of the project was to encourage students to improve in one particular aspect of the Scientific Method, namely identifying informed resources and writing a proper bibliography containing them. Students are required to include in their Project Plans at least five scientific bibliographic sources. As I wrote previously, this goes to the matter of distinguishing fact from fiction, even from outright falsehoods at the extreme, and expressing oneself in a way that others, joining you in the Scientific Method, can understand and evaluate.

Power Library includes STEM resources suitable for the proper preparation of a bibliography, and Fair participants are directed to it at the WLN website (<https://www.wlonline.org/prsef/>). This serves to help avoid bad practices such as: (1) bibliographic formatting that is unacceptable, including using URLs without author name, publisher, volume, or year of publication; (2) references that are not of high scientific quality, not informed; (3) Over 200

Of 36 Project Plan reviews that I personally did in advance of Fair day, about 9% of the whole Fair population, I approved 12 bibliographies outright, meaning with no corrections needed. That seems to me to be significantly better than my usual, but I lack quantitative historical data. Also, qualitatively speaking, the deficiencies seemed to be more minor than usual, but again the student population, and maybe mix, was quite different.

What can be quantified is the number of projects awarded Literature Review Merit Certificates, other Certificates being for Presentation, Scientific Method, and Creativity. These all serve, very importantly, as positive feedback mechanisms. Unlike the other three Certificates, the Literature Review Merit Certificate had not been awarded in any

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previous year; it was added to the process when the Power Library project fully came to be in 2021. Fifty two projects earned the Literature Review Merit Certificate. That, at least, is a certifiable first benefit of the first full year of Teen Power Library at PRSEF.

That's all very good but, now that we have started down this path of improvement with Teen Power Library, we'll have to see how the numbers go in future years, hopefully without the added variable of COVID-19, which made holding the Fair at all a huge challenge.

That said, the Fair was a huge success in every way, despite its first-time-virtual glitches. These kids got invaluable experience by deep immersion in STEM projects of their own choosing. It was a joy to be part of that. It was such a success that in the coming week I will tell you more about how it was done.

Charles B. Greenberg,
Immediate Past President, WLN Board