

I Love My Librarian!

Award

Jesse Braun
Middle School Librarian
Beverly Vista Middle School
Beverly Hills, California

Nominated by: HaRim Lee, Tina Wiener, Robin Strug, Romi Azevedo, and Bahare Yektafar

“Siempre imaginé que el Paraíso sería algún tipo de biblioteca.” The quote, from Jorge Luis Borges hangs on a small card behind the circulation desk in the Beverly Vista Middle School Library. “I have always imagined that Paradise would be some kind of library.” Students rarely take notice of it. The card was placed there by our librarian, Mr. Jesse Braun, as a reminder to himself, he says, that he has the best job in the world.

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, the library was an essential part of daily life at Beverly Vista Middle School. With Mr. Braun as our librarian, our library was a warm and welcoming place, often at full capacity from before 7:00 in the morning until after 4:30 in the afternoon. As our Principal Kevin Allen often noted, Mr. Braun made sure that “at Beverly Vista Middle School, the library is the hub of our campus.”

During Mr. Braun’s tenure, the Beverly Vista Middle School Library grew into a beloved, student-centered environment, where every child, every teacher, and every family could feel at home.

Since the pandemic closed our school, Mr. Braun has continued to work tirelessly to ensure that our library continues to serve a central role in the Beverly Vista Middle School community. It has been an undertaking requiring a level of dedication and steadfastness that has been an inspiration to every member of the Beverly Vista Middle School community.

Mr. Braun truly embodies R. David Lankes’ maxim, “To be a librarian is not to be neutral, or passive, or waiting for a question. It is to be a radical positive change agent within your community.”

“This summer Mr. Braun put in hundreds of hours to make sure our kiddos had their supplies safely before school opened! He came in every day to organize and check-out bags of textbooks from each student’s schedule, and then moved 900 canvas bags down the stairs from the second floor library into the atrium where he organized them alphabetically and by grade level. It was amazing. He goes the

extra mile for us all! Our kids are always foremost in his mind!" -- Jeanne McCrae, Assistant Principal, Beverly Vista Middle School

Mr. Braun organized an outdoor, touch-free system for textbook distribution, finishing the process with enough time to quarantine the bags of textbooks for a full week in an open-air location at the recommendation of our county health offices. Using this system he ensured that, despite the reality that our area was at that time experiencing one of the nation's largest outbreaks of Covid-19, our students would remain safe as they collected their supplies in time for the first day of school.

In his recorded address to BHUSD families Dr. Michael Bregy, Superintendent of BHUSD, boasted that Mr. Braun's bagged distribution system was a "national model for safety and efficiency, providing students with an exciting, safe, and efficient way to kick off the school year in the middle of this unprecedented pandemic."

Mr. Braun coordinated his efforts with the Beverly Vista Middle School PTA and community leaders to procure canvas book bags and water bottles printed with our school logo for every student. He even arranged to complete most of the work outdoors, using portable digital scanners, with assistance of Beverly Vista's library technician, Rachel Levin, staggering their hours and using physical distance to avoid exposing one another, or any volunteers to unnecessary risk from the pandemic.

"I got to meet Mr Braun as a parent volunteer when children returned their books to school at the end of the last school year, which was the early days of the pandemic. This was a very tense time for everyone and I was very nervous about how things would go. Mr Braun coordinated such a smooth process that the entire event felt effortless ... and dare I say it... fun!" --Frank Chechel, Beverly Hills Board of Education Candidate

Since that time, Mr. Braun has continued to actively provide library services. He has used his background in educational technology to build a dedicated web-based system for the reservation of library books, and has worked with the campus's administration to design a distribution schedule and set of policies around the safe dissemination of library resources. He has organized a twice-weekly curbside circulation table, and coordinated with teachers and staff to distribute student worksheets, packets and workbooks from that destination.

"During these unprecedented times, Mr. Braun has made library books available for all students through curbside pick up. He is always thinking of innovative ways to spread knowledge and the love of reading. During this time when books are inaccessible he has truly "opened up" the world of reading to our students." -- HaRim Lee, PTA Member.

Since the beginning of the pandemic Mr. Braun has ensured that each of the clubs he sponsors in the library have been able to continue to meet through Zoom, and has even employed his technology background in developing a secure head-to-head online chess forum where Beverly Vista Middle School students can gather, chat, and play chess against one another during the pandemic.

Also, while not expressly related to the manner in which he delivers library services, we feel it should also be noted that Mr. Braun is also a volunteer in the Moderna mRNA-1273 Covid-19 Vaccine trial. He has already received two doses of either the experimental vaccine, or a placebo, and has been instrumental in providing the our middle school community with well-sourced and up-to-date information about the spread of the virus. As a trial volunteer he has used his personal experience to inspire district students, parents, and faculty to find ways in which they can help support and protect populations at risk from great illness and death due to Covid-19.

Even before the pandemic, Mr. Braun's dedication to our students was unparalleled.

Early in the last school year, on September 5th of 2019, Mr. Braun's daughter was struck by a runaway car. Her tibia was crushed and there was some question as to whether she would ever be able to walk without assistance again. While she was hospitalized at UCLA Ronald Reagan Children's Hospital, Mr. Braun alternated sleeping at her bedside and returning each morning to open the Beverly Vista Middle School Library. Throughout the ordeal, he continued to provide exemplary service to our students and staff, demonstrating great personal resilience. His commitment provided an indispensable instructional asset at a critical time in our school year.

In his time at Beverly Vista Middle School Mr. Braun has been a transformational figure, making exemplary use of 21st-century tools to teach our students essential information and digital literacy skills. He has coordinated with teachers across all subject areas to deliver library lessons, and fostered a warm and welcoming atmosphere that has resulted in a steady increase in library use.

"Mr. Braun is more than our school's librarian. He helps the students and staff with any technical issues that they may have, as he is also an expert I.T. guru! Since the pandemic, Mr. Braun has arranged and organized a Drive-thru book pickup for all of the middle school students. Where he takes orders of books online, cleans them and has them ready for pickup for the students. He also made sure that the textbooks were safe to use for all of the students. Mr. Braun has also been, and currently is, an advisor for many of the clubs available at BVMS. Without him these clubs would not be available to the students." -- Bahare Yektafar, 7th grade parent

Mr. Braun, who was previously an English teacher, and a Teacher on Special Assignment for Educational Technology, was the founding teacher librarian for the Beverly Vista Middle School campus. He was chosen for this role, in part, because, in addition to holding credentials to teach English, and Computer Concepts and Applications, he holds a Teacher Librarian Services Credential, a MLIS, and a California Commission on Teacher Credentialing Special Class Authorization to teach Digital Literacy and Information Theory. He is also certified as a Google Educator at Levels 1 and 2, and a Common Sense Digital Citizenship Educator.

"He is so generous with his time and skills and always looking for ways to help the teachers with any of their library or tech needs. He takes it upon himself to help out where he sees there is a need. When we

were about to go to remote teaching in the spring, he came to my room to try and help me set up my Google Classrooms. When we both hit a snag in the process, he did extra research to find a way over the hurdle, so that I was up and running the moment I needed to teach remotely. He has demonstrated complete competence in his craft and dependability in his willingness to be of any help possible. I have total confidence that he would be able to handle any of my library needs.” -- Mark Frenn, 8th grade Math/Finance Teacher

Mr. Braun has used his background in Educational Technology to push the boundaries of what it means to be an effective teacher librarian. Early in his tenure he was able to leverage his existing relationship with the district’s technology department to help to secure 12 zSpace Augmented Reality virtual-holographic computers for the Beverly Vista Middle School Library, as well as a ViewSonic ViewBoard and a cart of student chromebooks for library use. These advanced technology resources are the medium through which he delivers his lessons to every Beverly Vista Middle School student.

“This year Mr. Braun taught all of our students essential skills such as how to check the reliability of online sources, proper internet safety habits, and how to access online district resources like Aeries, our grading, communication, and informational program. He seamlessly incorporates technology into his lessons, and uses groups so that students can learn to collaborate and work together. The students were particularly drawn-in by his delivery and the playfulness of his lessons and the way he uses technology to deliver them.” -- Richard Waters, Assistant Principal, Beverly Vista Middle School

Since the Covid-19 pandemic closed our campus, Mr. Braun has employed the library’s technology resources, and his educational technology background to move his lessons online using Zoom and PearDeck interactives on topics ranging from online Research and Citation skills, to Digital Citizenship and Information Literacy. These lessons have been followed by self-paced assignments that leverage the Alludo online platform to complete Digital Citizenship games based on International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) Digital Citizenship Standards.

Mr. Braun also designed and maintains the Beverly Vista Middle School Library website replete with citation tools, live chat links for reference questions, and digital literacy resources. Thanks to Mr. Braun’s comprehensive Digital and Information Literacy instruction, last year Beverly Vista Middle School was the first school in our district named a Common Sense School for Digital Citizenship.

“He is so kind to everyone and helps with anything you need. He is strong and positive and sets a good example for every student walking into the library.” -- Maytal Maryamian, 8th grade Student

Concurrent with Mr. Braun’s selection as our Teacher Librarian, our school district undertook a complete reorganization, closing two elementary schools and opening a middle school for the first time. As a result, Mr. Braun’s tenure began with the task of merging the holdings of the district’s four elementary school libraries to create a 6-8th grade collection. It was a process that involved moving, cataloging, and shelving more than one-thousand boxes of library resources. In a very real sense, it could be said that Mr. Braun had a pivotal hand in building the Beverly Vista Middle School Library collection from scratch.

By organizing and directing a small army of parent volunteers, Mr. Braun, and his library technicians Ms. Levin and Ms. Roberts, were able to complete this project in less than three months, packing, moving, unpacking, cataloging, and shelving nearly 15,000 titles. It was a move in which Mr. Braun took an active, hands-on role, despite being significantly physically handicapped. As a congenital amputee, Mr. Braun was born without a left arm.

Since reorganization, Mr. Braun also continues to reach out and assist with cataloging and support for the remaining two elementary campuses in our school district. Though Mr. Braun's advisory role on these campuses is unofficial, the support he offers has been invaluable and has helped keep their libraries vital and growing as well.

"Mr. Braun has created an environment where students feel safe and welcome. Teachers feel comfortable entrusting their classes to his instruction and see Mr. Braun as an asset from whom they can seek assistance when needed. This is because of Mr. Braun's kind and approachable manner and his willingness to help anyone he can. Beverly Vista Middle School is fortunate to have him on our campus."
--Richard Waters, Assistant Principal, Beverly Vista Middle School

Mr Braun has acted as the campus director for Techsperts, a student-led technology support service, and is the faculty sponsor for both the Book and Chess Clubs, which met weekly in the library when the campus was open. Through these clubs Mr. Braun shares a deep love of reading, learning, technology, and chess with Beverly Vista Middle School students.

Since the beginning of the pandemic Mr. Braun has ensured that his clubs have been able to continue to meet through Zoom, and he has continued to lead themed activities, like e-book discussions, and head-to-head games of online chess.

"Mr. Braun has raised the bar, showing the highest standards in his commitment to engaging and supporting children with different interests, whether it's research, books, chess or technology. He has created a safe space for students to explore their interests and connect with each other. He leads our community with his heart. He is always present and available to discuss any issue. He listens attentively, is an excellent communicator, and collaborates with all those fortunate enough to work together with him."--R.A., PTA member and BVMS parent

Mr. Braun contributes his time to our school's Instructional Leadership Team which advises our Principal, Kevin Allen, on policies and practices affecting the campus, and is a member of the Beverly Hills Unified School district's technology leadership program "BHUSD Innovators," where he keeps abreast of the latest developments and district technology adoptions. He has presented at conferences on topics of school library leadership, technology, and innovation, including The Lead 3.0 Symposium, the flagship Future Ready Schools event in the state of California, and has been a collaborating member of the BHUSD technology department where he assisted in drafting the Beverly Hills Unified School District Technology Plan on Digital Citizenship.

The leadership Mr. Braun has demonstrated has resulted in his frequently being called upon to deliver professional development in the spheres of Educational Technology and Information Literacy. Over the past year he has mentored colleagues on topics such as Google Suite for Education, Schoology, Alludo Gamified Learning, and IXL, and he regularly works with teachers in all subject areas about strategies for incorporating research and information literacy instruction across the curriculum.

Because the worlds of information and technology move at a rapid pace, Mr. Braun is always involved in personal professional development as well. This year he completed The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards process and has advanced to candidacy. Through the certification process, he has received additional training on topics ranging from Apps like Padlet, Jamboard, Flipgrid, GooseChase, Quizizz, Socrative, Geoguesser, and Kahoot, to blended learning strategies, and issues affecting educational equity and social justice. He is currently awaiting his scores and hopes to be certified in December of 2020.

“When we opened the doors of the first consolidated Middle School in the history of Beverly Hills, Jesse Braun had already transformed the library into a welcoming modern and resourceful environment designed for middle school students coming from 4 different schools and cultures. With his combined tech expertise and proactive resourceful nature, he has been the perfect librarian for this new era in our city. Mr. Braun is one of the most committed teachers in our district, devoted to both students and parents, and always ready to help whenever needed. His radar is always on, proactively searching for ways to support and inspire. Whether through his digital citizenship classes or through the 3 clubs that he sponsors to engage students with books, chess or technology, he demonstrates the love of learning in every fiber from his core. We absolutely LOVE our Librarian and are excited to share his profound example with the world.” --Romi Azevedo PTA Member and PTA Advisor

Being a Middle School Librarian has always been Mr. Braun's dream job, he says it is something he's wanted to do for all of his professional life, and that commitment shows in everything he does.

“Mr. Braun always works hard to enrich the lives of the students at our school. He may have been born with a disability but this has never stopped him from fulfilling his dream to be an amazing middle school librarian, a job which he takes great pride in.” --Robin Strug, Beverly Vista Middle School Executive Board Member

Mr. Braun says he sees the role of a school librarian as one of mentorship, as well as service, and he particularly strives to make the Beverly Vista Middle School Library an inclusive and welcoming environment that serves the needs of every student. The way he has overcome his physical handicap offers those students the opportunity to see a physical embodiment of resilience, and success through diversity. He often tells them that he may have been born without a left arm, but he's never let that stop him from doing anything.

“Mr. Braun is at the forefront of EVERYTHING that is happening at BVMS. He runs student clubs, teaches Digital Citizenship classes to students, and is always willing to help out with any activity that the PTA is spearheading. He has amazing ideas and is always looking for ways to improve the resources that our library has to offer. Mr. Braun's positive attitude and cheerful demeanor go a long way in making our community a better place. He is incredibly approachable and is always willing to stop and chat. He treats parents, students, and colleagues with tremendous respect and has created an environment in the library that is dynamic, warm and welcoming to all. He seems to anticipate needs and areas where he can help before even the parents or administration identify the need. Before BVMS even opened, Mr. Braun worked tirelessly, culling through K-8 titles and creating a library collection that was relevant and timely for our first group of 6th-8th grade students. During the summer of 2020, Mr. Braun once again went above and beyond the call of duty by preparing individual bags of textbooks for each of our 900+ middle school students, which streamlined the pickup process and which was recognized by our superintendent (and parents) as a stellar model of leadership. Mr. Braun really connects with this age group of students. He has made the library a comfortable, fun and safe place for them to hang out. He is incredibly patient with kids and allows them to be themselves. He is a great listener, extremely well versed in literature (and lots of other topics), and takes time to "hear" the students, which is so important with kids of this age. Seeing the library in constant use by kids engaged in clubs, small group discussions, or just silent reading is a testament to what an amazing librarian Mr. Braun is and what a special place he has created!” -- Tina Wiener, BVMS PTA President