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ON THE HORIZON

New Standards to Dawn at AASL 2017

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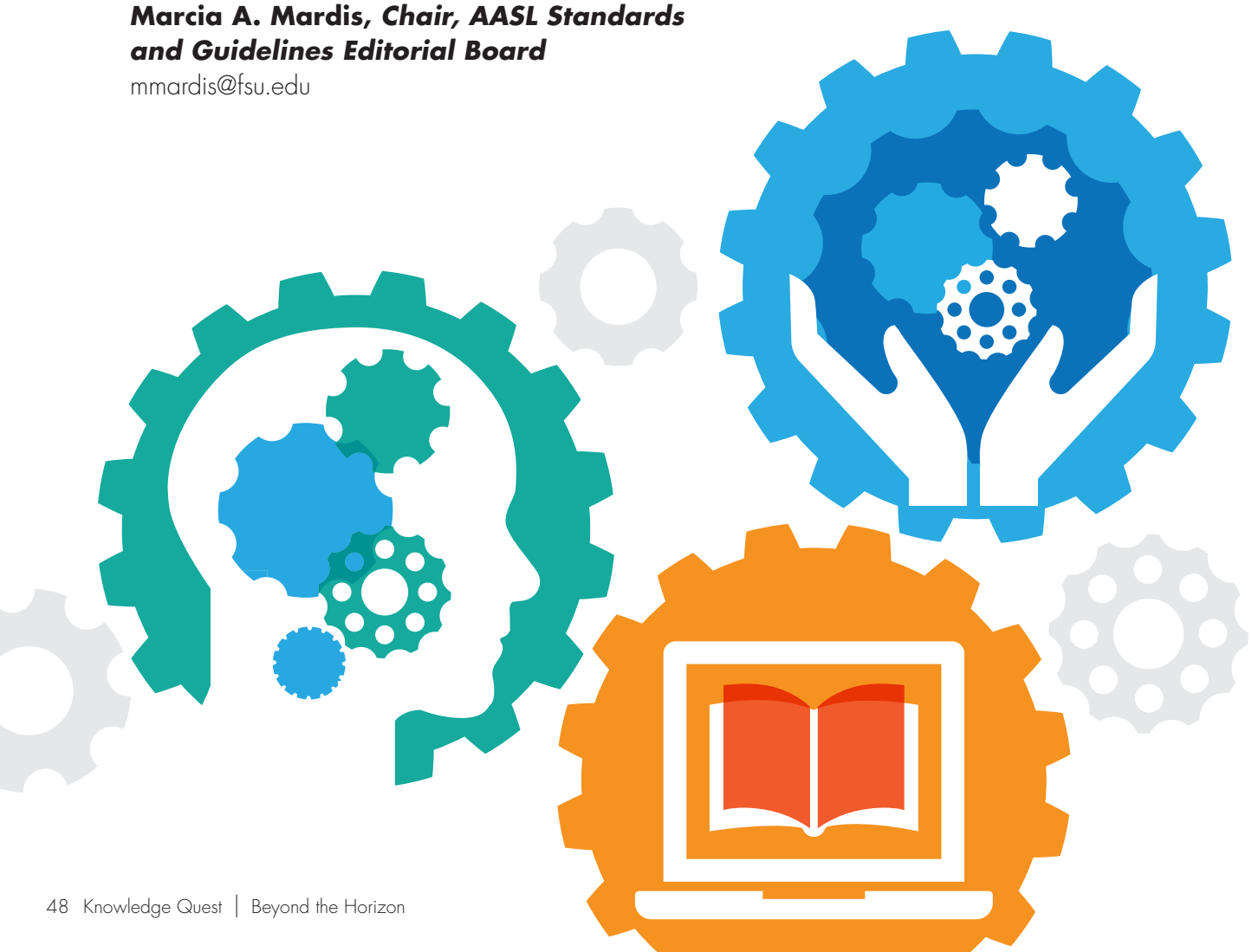

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As the sun rises over the horizon each day, we rarely get the opportunity to consider how the new day contributes to the month that forms part of a season that culminates in the year. A year's progress guides and shapes the development of all growing things. Though not necessarily in a tidy twelve-month cycle, while developing your new standards the AASL Standards and Guidelines Editorial Board worked day by day, assembling components gradually. Now we find ourselves having completed our development cycle. With our new standards just about to dawn, let's take a moment to reflect on the seasons that have yielded our new standards.

We did not plow our current standards under; we made measured, informed decisions about where and how to update what we have.

The Standards' Winter: Thinking and Planning

Winter is a time to think, to reflect on past challenges and successes, and to plan for new opportunities. At the beginning of our process, the editorial board worked together to review AASL's current standards and their function in current teaching, learning, and leading. We contemplated the conditions that produced the current standards and guidelines as well as how well you told us they suited your work lives, your students' needs, and conditions in your schools. AASL's learning standards and program guidelines help school librarians outline ways to provide high-quality learning experiences that prepare learners for college, careers, and citizenship; create dynamic information environments; and establish effective school library programs. We critically examined signs of success and frustration.

Clearing the ground for new standards is very hard work that involves a concerted and balanced assessment of current standards and current learning, teaching, and leading needs, all blended with carefully selected past accomplishments and bold, optimistic future-casting. The editorial board used findings from an online survey to determine key areas for subsequent discussions in focus groups. In November 2015, at the AASL National Conference, forty attendees participated in six focus groups dedicated to standards and guidelines. Throughout spring 2016 AASL held fourteen additional focus groups at seven state affiliate conferences, including Alaska, California, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Texas, and Wisconsin.

In other words, your editorial board made decisions about the depth and breadth of the standards based on our shared history—our challenges and expertise and a sense of what needed to come next to continue our clear-eyed, steady progress toward our profession's vision for learners' futures. As we listened in focus groups, reviewed survey data, and discussed key documents, we noted changes that had occurred in education and society since 2007 when AASL's *Standards for the 21st-Century Learner* were published. We read and analyzed research and reports about educational practices now and to come. We prioritized and planned what would grow best in the next season of development. And we realized that, as a team, we had the diversity and resilience to envision strong, sustainable standards.

The Standards' Spring: Creating the Foundation

Spring is a time for renewal; it is a moving forward from careful planning to bold action. We did not plow our current standards under; we made measured, informed decisions about where and how to update what we have.

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We reviewed the common beliefs and learner standards in *Standards for the 21st-Century Learner in Action* (2009) and the program guidelines in *Empowering Learners: Guidelines for School Library Programs* (2009) as well as AASL's official position statements on effective school library programs as recognized in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). These documents provided us with a clear expression of the qualities of well-prepared learners, effective school librarians, and dynamic school libraries.

Read AASL's Position Statements Related to ESSA and School Libraries <essa.aasl.org/aasl-position-statements/>

We then listened to the school library community and learned that most school librarians reported that our existing guiding documents reflected current learning environments and professional best practices. You asked us to streamline the standards' structure, and make the standards and their structure simple, easy to use, interlinked, and parallel for learners, school librarians, and school libraries. You wanted us to remove repetitive text and dated terminology in the current standards, and use language and terminology that would resonate with stakeholders as well as school librarians. Your ideal standards are visual, driven by beloved elements like Think, Create, Share, Grow, and include single-word key-verb shortcuts. Because you are busy, innovative educators you asked us to make the standards' content digital and searchable in a mobile app.

After carefully considering our guiding assumptions, values, and perspectives, the editorial board affirmed that:

1. The school library is a unique and essential part of a learning community.

As a destination for on-site and virtual personalized learning, the school library is a vital bridge between the classroom and home. As the leader of this space and its functions, the school librarian ensures that the school library environment provides all members of the school community access to information and technology, connecting learning to real-world events. By providing access to an array of well-managed resources, school librarians enable academic knowledge to be linked to deep understanding.

2. Qualified school librarians lead effective school libraries.

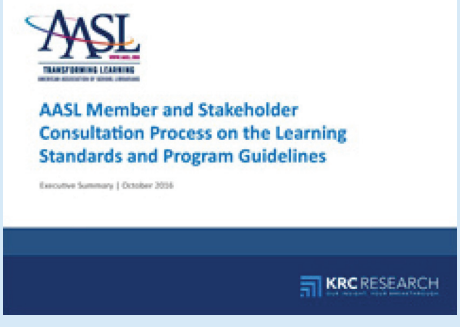
As they guide organizational and personal change, effective school librarians model, promote, and foster inquiry learning in adequately staffed and resourced school libraries. Qualified school librarians perform interlinked, interdisciplinary, and cross-cutting roles as instructional leaders, program administrators, educators, collaborative partners, and information specialists.

3. Learners should be prepared for college, career, and life.

Committed to inclusion and equity, effective school librarians use evidence to determine what works, for whom, and under what set of conditions for each learner. Complemented by community engagement and innovative leadership, school librarians improve all learners' opportunities for success. This success empowers learners to persist in inquiry, advanced study, enriching professional work, or community engagement through continuous improvement within and beyond the school building and school day.

4. Reading is the core of personal and academic mastery.

The school library program is centered on engaging with relevant information resources and digital learning opportunities in a culture of reading. School librarians initiate and elevate motivational reading initiatives by using story and personal narrative to engage learners. School librarians curate current digital and print materials and technology to provide access to high-quality reading materials that encourage learners, educators, and families to become lifelong learners and readers.



To read the full executive summary of the research results from both the online survey and focus group phases, visit <http://knowledgequest.aasl.org/informing-school-library-standards-evidence-executive-summary-standards-guidelines-editorial-board-process>.

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5. Intellectual freedom is every learner's right.

Learners have the freedom to speak and hear what others have to say, rather than allowing others to control access to ideas and information. The school librarian's responsibility is to develop in learners, educators, and all other members of the learning community the dispositions of freely expressing ideas and rigorously protecting the free expression of others.

6. Information technologies must be appropriately integrated and equitably available.

Although information technology is woven into almost every aspect of learning and life, not every learner and educator has equal access to up-to-date, robust technology and connectivity. An effective school library plays a crucial role in bridging digital and socioeconomic divides by providing access to information technology and fostering development of digital and information-related skills in all learners.

With our ideas and intent in place, and on the solid ground of our current standards, the editorial board dug its hands deep into the earth of creation. We chose our strongest ideas, positioned them favorably, planted them deeply, and ensured that they received adequate care and support to thrive.

The Standards' Summer: Bringing and Sharing Ideas

The editorial board agreed that every new endeavor begins with a seed—the encapsulation of a question and the necessary information to develop it into an idea. This foundational notion led us to consider the range of seeds that would be needed to result in a garden of knowledge. Planting many seeds requires many hands and is work best done with partners and teams within learning communities. Choosing the best information to spark a wide variety of nascent ideas is a careful process, undertaken thoughtfully, and fertilized by high-quality resources. Ideas hold the seeds of new questions, different questions that result in new ideas. The confidence, ability, and resilience to identify these new learning opportunities and act on them often leads to exchanging ideas and questions with others, ever increasing the range and amount of knowledge one has to enjoy, produce, and provide. As we worked, we came to understand that we were not merely articulating a closed-ended process of learning; we were writing standards that reflected what we saw as a rich, ongoing growth cycle for learners, school librarians, and school libraries.

During this season, we were joined by collaborators who would help the standards reach new markets as well as the communities that we have always served. With the help of the implementation task force [see sidebar], we are able to widely share ideas to strengthen and enrich a range of learners and educators.

The Standards' Autumn: Growing in New Directions

In the last decade standards have been a reliable contributor to effective educators' practice. To keep school librarianship healthy, hearty, and productive, we revitalized our standards and guidelines to ensure that we're cultivating dynamic, exciting learning and leadership. At the AASL National Conference we will all celebrate our year of standards creation. As a professional community, we will reap our intellectual contributions and visions, savor our harvest, and rest assured that our lasting and best ideas will not only be enjoyed this season but will nourish learners, school librarians, and school libraries in the seasons to come.

As we worked, we came to understand that we were not merely articulating a closed-ended process of learning; we were writing standards that reflected what we saw as a rich, ongoing growth cycle for learners, school librarians, and school libraries.

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Implementation Task Force: A Broad Timeline

Mary Keeling, Chair, AASL Standards and Guidelines Implementation Task Force

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As the standards and guidelines editorial board concluded its planning stages, the AASL Standards and Guidelines Implementation Task Force (ITF) convened. Its charge was to develop a plan to support states, school systems, and individual schools as they implement the association's new *National School Library Standards*. This broad outline describes some of the tasks involved in preparing the ITF plan.

September 2015–June 2016. Establish Implementation Priorities

Examined previous implementation plans, change theory, adult learning theory, and marketing principles as we considered big questions:

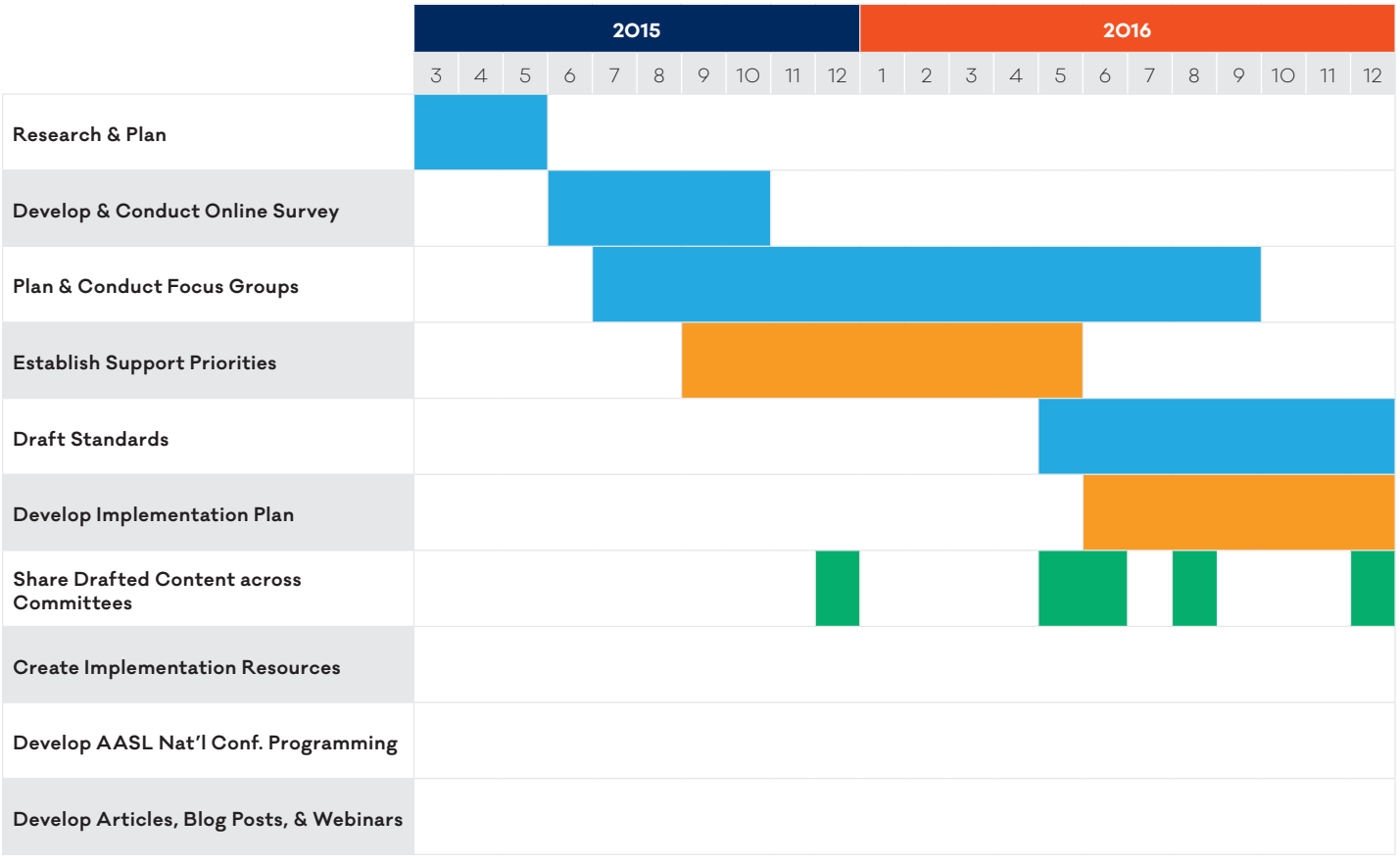
- What makes ideas "stick?"
- What features of effective organizational change management, professional development, marketing, and advocacy work in our context?
- How will the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) affect implementation of new standards?

Consulted editorial board's research findings to discover school librarians' and stakeholders' goals. Identified priorities for implementation plan:

- The plan should be simple but customizable for different situations and adaptable to respond to changes in the educational landscape.
- The plan should reflect the core values of school librarianship.
- The plan should balance the tension between aspirational and realistic goals and objectives.

Established guiding principles to satisfy member needs, such as:

- Develop messages, tools, and resources for a variety of users.



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- Plan for connecting librarians to each other and to other educators.
- Provide multiple paths and entry points for personalized learning.

June 2016–February 2017. Develop Implementation Plan

- Examined editorial board's draft materials and provided feedback.
- Recommended branding strategies to AASL staff.
- Conceptualized audience segments as "personas."
- Predicted learning needs of audience segments.
- Generated ideas for multiple professional development channels, including face-to-face, traditional print, Web portal, and social media.
- Determined goals, objectives, and action items.
- Prioritized action items in a three-year plan.
- Contributed persona descriptions and an appendix on implementation planning to the editorial board's book manuscript.

February 2017–February 2018. Create Implementation Resources

- Developed functional outline for Web portal.
- Reviewed and provided feedback to AASL designers on brand development.
- Synthesized shared foundations for "at-a-glance" one-page documents and infographics.
- Collaborated with the editorial board to plan AASL National Conference programming, including preconference workshops, general session, Unconference conversations, and concurrent sessions.
- Wrote articles and blog posts for *Knowledge Quest* (with editorial board).
- Developed webinars for eCOLLAB (with editorial board).

The Gantt chart in figure 1 helps to further illustrate the parallel working timelines and collaboration points between the editorial board and the task force to create your new standards and to ensure implementation support is available immediately upon launch.

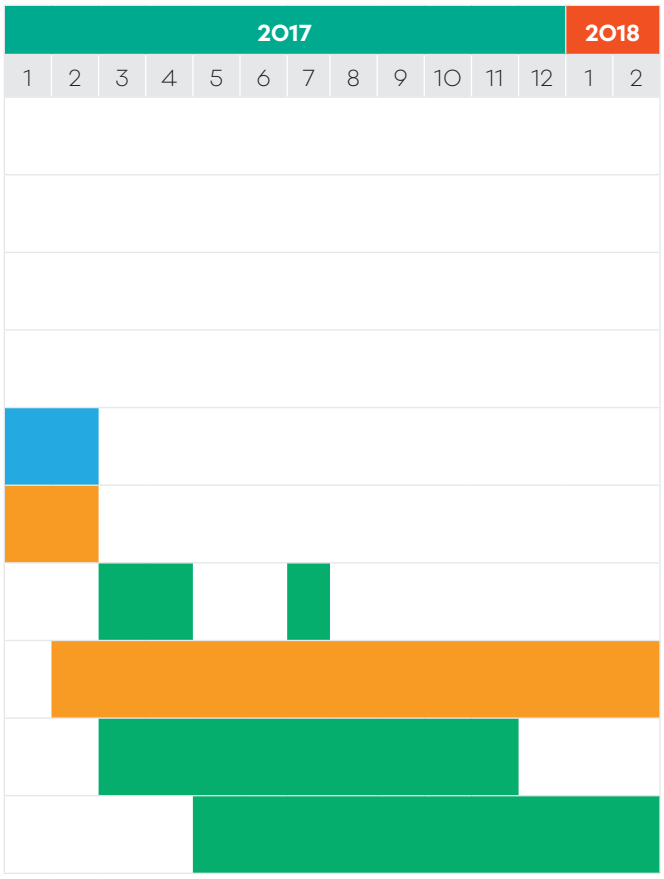

FIGURE 1

Concurrent Timeline of AASL Standards and Implementation Development

KEY

- Editorial Board
- Implementation Task Force
- Collaborative Work

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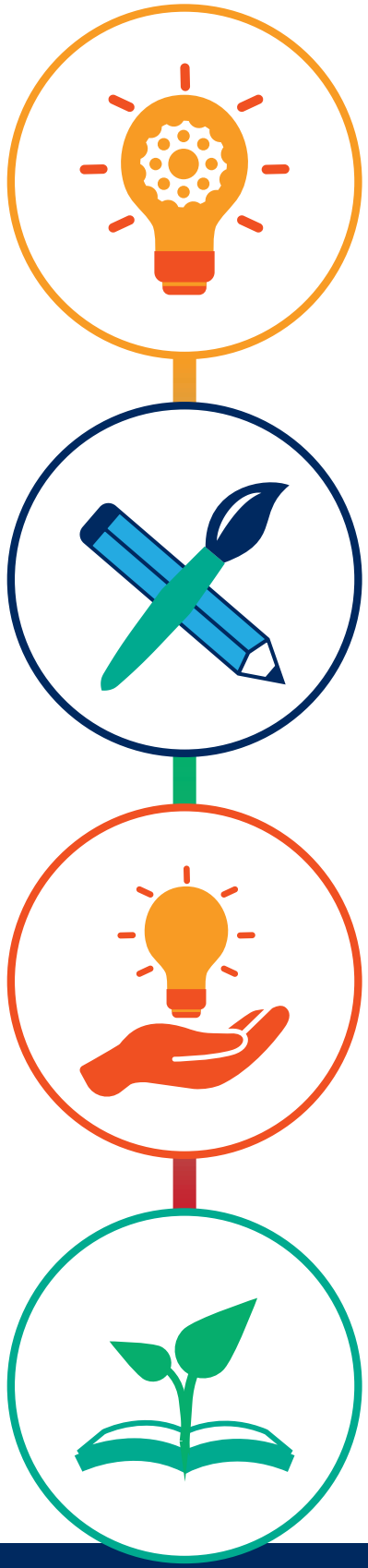

Marcia A. Mardis *is associate professor and assistant dean, Interdisciplinary Research and Education, in the College of Communication and Information at Florida State University (FSU) in Tallahassee. A longtime member of AASL, Marcia is chair of the AASL Standards and Guidelines Editorial Board. Among her recent honors were receiving the 2016 FSU College of Communication and Information's Leadership Builder Award, a 2016 Michigan Association for Media in Education President's Award for Outstanding Contribution to the Profession, and several research and teaching awards from FSU. She is the author of the in-press article "The OER Curation Life Cycle: Closing the Loop for Our Learners" to be published in* School Library Connection *and co-author of a number of in-press papers, including "Usage Data as Indicators of OER Utility" to be published in* Journal of Online Learning Research, *and the recently published "Potential of Graphic Nonfiction for Teaching and Learning Earth Science" in* School Libraries Worldwide.

Mary Keeling *is district supervisor of library media services for Newport News (VA) Public Schools where she has led development and implementation of a district-wide inquiry process model. She chairs the AASL Standards and Guidelines Implementation Task Force. A former Lilead Fellow, she has written for many school library-related publications; during 2015 and 2016 she was author of the "Management Matters" column in* School Library Connection.