Finding Your Way with GPS
Going Places with the Standards

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You know, when I was a kid and wanted to go on a trip I had to pull out the road atlas and look at the different routes I might take to get to my destination. What would be the quickest way to my destination? Or would I take the scenic route? I would plan the stops along the way and get excited about the things I would see. I spent a lot of time planning and even writing down specific directions. I guess you might call my navigation a PPS (paper positioning system). I had time to think about where I was going and how I was going to get there.

Now students have one device that provides everything in one or two clicks, not only for getting from point A to point Z but for everything in between. Why is it, then, that I see my students struggling to find their way? Not in the physical sense necessarily, but in the process of getting through the intersection of content and question! In fact, most students just go dumpster diving and hope they will find the question while trying to discover the answer.

The *National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries* are really a wonderful compass that provides a GPS (Going Places with the Standards) navigation system. The Shared Foundations that are aligned to our libraries, our practice, and our learners provide strategies for all three elements needed to make meaning with a growth mindset. Let me tell you about my journey to introducing this GPS to our school librarians in New Jersey.

My “road trip” began in Phoenix 2017, at the AASL pre-conference training for the standards. As the New Jersey delegate to the AASL Affiliate Assembly, I began my journey with the standards there. This intensive training provided the tools for me to go back to my state and begin developing an itinerary for rolling out the standards in New Jersey.

Our annual conference was only a month after my trip to Phoenix. New Jersey is home to Rutgers University and Dr. Joyce Valenza… hmmm… I knew introducing the standards with her help could work at a packed-ballroom conference “big event!” Together Dr. Valenza and I danced to “Ice Ice Baby” by Vanilla Ice; rolled out the standards; introduced the symbology (how to read the standards starting with the Shared Foundation, moving to the Domain, and ending at a specific Competency, e.g., I.B.3); looked at the Shared Foundations, the Domains, and the Competencies; and heard from student voices. The AASL Standards portal provided great food for whetting the appetites of our audience. Attendees were ready to hop aboard using the GPS and take the journey.

Following the conference I began touring the state, training school librarians at county group workshops. Our county groups are made up of school librarians from school districts within the counties of New Jersey, and in some cases county groups of school librarians have merged to form one group. Each group selects its own executive board from their membership and is an affiliate of the New Jersey Association of School Librarians (NJASL). The county president (or president’s designee) represents the group to the NJASL county affiliates’ subcommittee. Many of NJASL’s state-level leaders have come from the leadership of county groups.

The workshops are generally about an hour and a half long to fit the format of a regular after-school county meeting. That time frame is not really long enough to dig deep. Therefore, I formatted the workshops to have a part 1 and part 2.

Part 1 is an overview and introduction to the layout of the standards and the great wealth of resources available on the standards portal. It is important for our members to have history and knowledge of what the standards are, how to read them, and then to be able to roll up their sleeves and transform their lessons—and that is where part 2 comes into play.

What fun! In a part 2 workshop we play the *National School Library Standards Card Game* (available at [https://standards.aasl.org/project/card-game](https://standards.aasl.org/project/card-game)), brainstorm lessons as a group, and infuse the new standards into these lessons. Nothing is more rewarding than working with these school librarians and hearing, “Oh, now I get it.” “Wow, this all makes sense now.”

However, traveling around the state to train each group is next to impossible for one person to do, even though our state is fairly small in comparison to other states around our nation. For all our county groups to be able to have similar training we really needed a good trip advisor. I was really excited when our New Jersey Association of School Librarians President, Christina Cucci, had the vision to develop a train-the-trainer workshop. The old dirt trail opened up to Route 66. And what a kick it is!
Train the Trainer

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The New Jersey Association of School Librarians (NJASL) serves more than eight hundred school librarians across our state. Members have traveled different highways to arrive at their understanding of the AASL Standards. As the new incoming president, I wanted NJASL’s goal in the new year to be to find a way to give everyone a strong foundation of the updated standards, and then provide time to work on revising their lessons at our fall conference in December 2018.

Our solution was to hold a train-the-trainer session to prepare about twenty trainers; these members would provide the training wheels to help others feel prepared to use the standards. Trainers we invited were from NJASL’s executive board, committee chairs, presidents of our county groups, and others who were identified as leaders in our state. A small ad hoc committee, including the NJASL Professional Development Chair, AASL Affiliate Liaison (LaDawna Harrington), and Standards Chair, met to plan the event. The Standards Subcommittee of NJASL’s Professional Development and Resources Committee is charged with maintaining communications with our national affiliates to promote and provide training for the implementation and the integration of national standards with state and local curriculum standards.

NJASL reserved a small meeting room at the Westervelt Public Library in Piscataway and used NJASL budget monies to purchase copies of the updated standards books. LaDawna Harrington led trainers through a guided primer of the AASL Standards. The workshop attendees identified the Shared Foundation that was the most relevant to their current practice. During the workshop we played the National School Library Standards Card Game (see <https://standards.aasl.org/project/card-game> for more about the game) to gain understanding of the different perspectives of those who may use the standards differently than the participants do.

For me, the most meaningful part of the day was working through hands-on activities as we looked at sample lessons and incorporated the AASL Standards. The activity that seemed to help the trainers turn the corner and really understand the frameworks and how to implement them was one in which a single lesson was identified and then teams worked together to transform this typical lesson. Participants created meaningful activities for learners to help them develop specific competencies within the standards framework. Essential questions were posted on big sticky notes to get the teams thinking about specific Domains and Competencies. This was a practical way to grasp the standards within a school library setting.

Attendees left feeling like they were prepared, as if NJASL had handed them a map filled with turn-by-turn directions, ready to share their knowledge with others.
Finally the crossroads would intersect at NJASL’s 2018 annual conference in December. LaDawna presented a workshop (a part 1 scenario) that was followed up with two additional days of open scheduling for conference attendees to have individual help in transforming their lessons into new learning (a part 2 scenario). The newly minted trainers were on hand to work with individuals, helping attendees transform tried and true lessons with the AASL Standards. Many times when we are presented with a new way to travel (new standards) we can easily get discouraged with all the potholes along the way.

To repair potholes there is a process:

1. Remove the debris,
2. Fill the pothole with new gravel, and
3. Compact the patch.

Our trainers started at our 2018 conference doing just that. Workshop attendees were asked to bring a lesson to work with. The trainers provided support over all three days of the conference. Each day had open drop-in sessions for every block of professional development time.

The blocks were organized by grade level so that grade-level trainer “experts” could be on hand to work with individual school librarians. The trainers brainstormed with individuals about their own lessons, helping participants to find potholes, to see what debris needed to be removed, and then to envision how the new standards could fill in potholes and be packed down (integrated).

To help individual librarians during the brainstorming sessions LaDawna created a template, fashioned after one of the pre-conference workshops she attended in Phoenix, that helped individuals identify elements of their lessons, activities for learners, and what standard(s) they would be addressing at particular junctures of the lesson.

For example, a middle school librarian working in collaboration with a seventh-grade social studies teacher has always done a unit on the fifty states. The lesson has always been divided across the classes to make sure all fifty states are covered and a report is given about the capital, economy, etc. The team was encouraged to look at what the unit is and was asked essential questions to get them thinking about the learner framework. Having considered what Domains or Competencies might be addressed at different points in the lesson—such as, How will learners curate to make and share meaning? How will learners critically inquire to build new knowledge?—this team identified the standard “give a report that includes a bibliography” assignment as the pothole.

The team started asking themselves what they liked about visiting another state and how they share that excitement with friends and family. This discussion led to one about the silly roadside places that can be found in almost any state. The excitement started to build, and soon the team was making plans to build their unit around the website Roadside America, Your Online Guide to Offbeat Tourist Attractions <roadsideamerica.com>. These educators thought about how their students could explore the fifty states in a new and exciting way and then curate their learning into a Google Site of their own to share weird facts, fun facts, etc., while also including the necessary information that would fulfill the content requirements.

As this team started “filling in the pothole with new gravel” they realized they were creating an environment where learners would be exchanging information resources within and beyond their learning community, thereby practicing two of the Curate Paving the Way

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Shared Foundation’s Share Domain Competencies: Learner IV.C.1 and IV.C.2. The templates that were used during the sessions really helped generate this kind of thinking and transformation of lessons.

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Sometimes that ineffective approach is a result of just not really understanding how to do a really good repair job. The work is so much easier and the trip so much more enjoyable when you journey together. We encourage school librarians in other states to have a conversation with the leadership in their own states and start planning their adventures!

Pave the way and use GPS (Going Places with the Standards) as your instrument for mapping the trip!

As we continue with our implementation efforts we have included Twitter chats and other meet-ups throughout the state. These opportunities for sharing have helped NJASL members pave the way for a beautiful journey that includes glorious scenery, and interesting and informative stops along the way.

Really, if you think about it, when you journey alone most of the time you are just trying to dodge or ignore old, recurring potholes.

LaDawna Harrington is school librarian at Millburn (NJ) High School and past-president of the New Jersey Association of School Librarians (NJASL). A long-time AASL member, she currently serves as Region 2 delegate to the AASL Affiliate Assembly. In 2018 she received the NJASL President’s Award. In prior years she was honored by NJASL as the Outstanding School Library Media Specialist of the Year, was a nominee for the Princeton Prize for Distinguished Secondary School Teaching, and received the Villy Gandhi Leadership Training Scholarship from NJASL. Her library program received the New Jersey Center for the Book’s Miss Rumphius Award.

Christina Cucci is technology/media specialist at Reynolds Elementary School in Upper Saddle River, New Jersey. An AASL member, she is currently the president of the New Jersey Association of School Librarians (NJASL). In 2015 Christina was a member of ALA’s class of Emerging Leaders. In 2014 she received the Villy Gandhi Leadership Training Scholarship from NJASL.