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## Civic Engagement: It's a MUST for School Librarians

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"A small group of thoughtful people could change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

– Margaret Mead

Welcome to the November/December 2022 issue of *Knowledge Quest*. This issue is dedicated to the ideas and actions that surround civic engagement. As members of society, it is our responsibility to be engaged in our communities, districts, states, and nationally to promote social discourse and the benefits of a strong school library program. When we are engaged civically, we create a stronger community, and a stronger community benefits everyone.

In this issue of *Knowledge Quest*, Carolyn Foote, a retired/rewired school librarian, consultant, and co-founder of the #FReadom Fighters serves as our content expert. In her article, she highlights her experiences with civic engagement through the school library lens and her work as a #FReadom Fighter. Carolyn outlines the ways in which school librarians can open lines of communication for productive dialogue in the school community. She shares the art of the elevator speech and why the elevator speech is so incredibly effective and important. Carolyn points out how our work as school librarians provides students with a model of civil discourse and engaging in a working democracy. Her article reinforces the importance of engaging beyond the "traditional" roles of the school librarian and why advocacy, being involved in the community, and providing a safe space for students to engage in democracy matters.

Carolyn did an outstanding job of recruiting authors for this issue who have longstanding records of being engaged civically and of working to create a more engaged community not only in their own school community but beyond.

Amanda Jones shares how she has learned to "roar" and is fighting back against unfounded allegations and a social media campaign against her after she spoke out against censorship at her local library board meeting. Amanda shares her journey and the support she has received from the school library community and beyond as she stands up to censorship and personal attacks. As you read her story, you will see how she has truly taken a stand to ensure the freedom to read.

In Sarah Sansbury's article, she recounts how the horrific events of March 16, 2021, in a nearby community and the rise in hate crimes in general toward those of Asian American descent led to a project that embraced social justice through collaboration with teachers, the community, and the local parks and recreation department. Sarah describes the project and the use of literature that informed students about Asian American history in the United States and fostered their development of empathy. She explains how her team wanted to go beyond the walls of the classroom and into the community to share the importance of listening to all voices—especially those of marginalized communities—by creating a StoryWalk in a local park. Through this collaboration Sarah empowered her students and the community with important knowledge and a way to

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share that knowledge. Her team was able to illuminate past injustices and to have the contributions of Asian Americans acknowledged and appreciated by both the school and the broader community.

How often are we told that if we are unhappy about how our local, state, and national governments work that we should vote? In Lucy Podmore's article she outlines how the school library can play an integral part in voter registration drives for a new generation of voters. Through supporting voter registration and pointing students toward nonpartisan information about elections and candidates, Lucy shows how the school library can be a center of civic engagement. She also points us toward American Library Association resources that can help librarians increase voter awareness and shares how she successfully supports voter registration in her building. Lucy also articulates how the school library prepares students for life beyond high school—and ways in which the school library contributes to students becoming informed and civically minded citizens.

Jennifer LaGarde and Darren Hudgins explain why barriers to civic engagement exist in news deserts, areas where many people don't have access to professionally vetted news. With the decline in traditional media and newspapers, more and more people are turning to social media to consume news. Jennifer and Darren recommend that we become familiar with platforms, such as TikTok, that are popular with students and teach students information literacy skills that can be used on platforms students favor, not just the vetted websites we recommend. Jennifer and Darren point out that most students use mobile devices to access information, and, therefore, we should use them too sometimes as we explicitly teach young people how social media algorithms work and about ways posts are often designed to manipulate emotions and engagement. These authors also recommend that we collaborate with classroom

teachers to design lessons focusing on dis-information campaigns, and mis- and mal-information related to specific subject areas.

Last, but certainly not least, Carolyn Foote posed questions about advocacy and civic participation to Jinnie Spiegler of the Anti-Defamation League, Ellen Kahn at the Human Rights Campaign, John Chrastka, founder of EveryLibrary, and Megan Cusick from the ALA Public Policy and Advocacy Office. In the thoughtful responses to Carolyn's questions, school librarians will learn about ways to be civically engaged themselves and be advocates for their school communities.

This issue on civic engagement could not come at a better time. The insights, ideas, and effective ways to participate in our democracy shared in this issue are relevant and reflect the time that we live in. As school librarians, our civic engagement will allow us to look back ten, fifteen, or twenty years from now and realize that by being active in our communities and our democracy we made a difference for future generations.

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**Jennifer Sturge** is the specialist for school libraries and digital learning for Calvert County Public Schools. In 2021 Calvert County Public School libraries received AASL's National School Library of the Year Award. She has been an educator and librarian for twenty-nine years and is always looking forward. She is a member of ALA and AASL, and was president of the Maryland Association of School Librarians for 2020–2021 and 2021 AASL National Conference program co-chair. She was a 2017–2018 Lilead Fellow. Most recently she is the immediate past chair for the Supervisor's Section of AASL. She received her Ed.D. in Leadership and Administration at Point Park University in Pittsburgh.

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