



*During this unprecedented time in history when a global pandemic forced physical school closings, school librarians got creative to support teaching and learning.*

## School Librarians Shine during Uncertain Times

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Certain events are unforgettable and leave an indelible mark on how we view the world. Some may be personal such as a marriage, the birth of a child, or the death of a loved one. Others are more a part of our national consciousness, such as 9/11 or Hurricane Katrina. So, I am certain all of us will retain a collective memory about the spring of 2020 and its aftermath. By this time of year many of us would be putting the finishing touches on our spaces and eagerly awaiting the start of a new school year. For others whose schools start earlier, formalities would have been completed and we would be settled into a familiar routine working with learners and other educators. Yet words like “typical” and “familiar” are used less frequently now.

While we are all still valiantly trying to adjust to our new normal, nothing has felt normal for quite some time. Ongoing conversations and planning have taken place over the summer about how to best restart schools after our abrupt departure and transformation to online learning last spring. I now wonder if you are back in your school building. Are some of you still working remotely? Is there a segment attempting to perform a hybrid of these options? What previously would have been inconceivable feels completely plausible. Yet in the midst of abrupt school closures, school librarians were a stabilizing and innovative resource for their learning communities. During this unprecedented time in history when a global pandemic forced physical school closings, school librarians got creative to support teaching and learning.

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From the start of the coronavirus pandemic, school librarians were at the forefront of educational leadership. AASL’s vision statement describes every school librarian as a leader, and that was never more evident than during spring 2020. Literally over night we were charged with changing how most of us interacted with our learners and educators, while simultaneously dealing with personal lives and wondering about our global future. It has been said, “You never let a serious crisis go to waste...It’s an opportunity to do things you think you could not do before” (Emanuel n.d.). Well, school librarians did just that. We did not shrink away from challenges. We learned new technologies, created new ways to disseminate information, and built remote learning spaces to connect and collaborate with other educators, learners, and families.

We became a cohesive community that supported and encouraged each other. While some struggled to find basic essentials due to hoarding and fear, our community was generous and selfless with our resources. Many of you became first-time contributors to the *Knowledge Quest* website; an avalanche of digital resources was shared; and Twitter exploded with helpful tips and pedagogical recommendations. AASL Forum members shared a wealth of information that supported teaching and learning, and the weekly AASL town halls provided a space for lively and informative conversations.

While pivoting to online learning, our AASL Standards were indispensable. No one knew we would have to test the standards in such extreme circumstances, but they have proven to be an exceptional source of professional guidance. In the midst of multiple unexpected and sometimes troubling events, school librarians also realized that our learners, educators, and parents want more than resources; they also want community, and we strove to provide them with both.

Sometimes we allow our differences to be at the forefront of our interactions. Some of us are school librarians, some supervisors; some feel isolated, while others are supported. Yet during this time of crisis, we focused on our commonalities and not our differences and facilitated meaningful learning. I am pleased that our efforts have not gone unnoticed and our contributions have been acknowledged. According to one such supporter, Bill Bass, current president of the ISTE Board of Directors, "In this time of uncertainty, librarians have never been more critical to our school" (ESchool News Staff 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic changed how we educate our children. It also exposed profound gaps in Internet and technology access among our learners. While some communities were equipped with the necessary tools and training to quickly adapt to online learning, others struggled due to lack of digital access and devices. This inequity has been discussed and solutions deliberated for a long time, but this disparity has been humanized by the many stories shared by learners and educators. Millions of students between kindergarten and 12th grade do not have computers or speedy Web connections (Camera 2020). This lack of connectivity may stem from economics, geographical location, natural disasters, or a myriad other reasons. Regardless of the reason, learners without adequate connectivity or devices will be left on the wrong side of the digital divide. COVID-19 has shown a spotlight on these inequalities, and we cannot unsee them.

Just when we all were trying to come to terms with COVID-19, George Floyd's death, other atrocities against humanity, and the global protests that followed further revealed inequities that permeate our society. These and other recent events have changed how we view the world, and I don't think things will ever return to the status quo. But change, while uncomfortable, is often to our benefit. Many recent positive, radical changes may have otherwise taken years or even decades to occur. While events are still unfolding and there are no perfect answers to our many educational and societal concerns, we cannot allow ourselves to be overwhelmed or discouraged. We cannot grow weary in our efforts to support our learning communities. We must not become cynical or lament what we do not have. All we can do is our best, and based on what school librarians have accomplished and continue to do during this unprecedented time in history, I know our learners, educators, and communities are in safe hands.

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