



As school librarians, we lead students toward engagement, inquiry, inclusion, collaboration, curation of information, and exploration.

New Year Offers New Opportunities to Advocate for School Libraries and Learners

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Every January I, like countless others, make a list of resolutions for the new year. While I always have the best of intentions, my focus and resolve are usually short lived. This past year, 2020, has left many of us weary, but hopefully unbowed and optimistic about 2021. We should take a moment for self-reflection on our professional practice and celebrate our accomplishments, acknowledge our shortcomings, and make plans for improvement.

I think we all can agree that we do not have the luxury of time as we work to meet the needs of our learning communities. Countless educators are facing challenging work conditions, many learners are experiencing the effects of the “COVID slide,” and everyone is unsure about the future. When possible, we must combat uncertainty with absolutes. To that end, all school librarians should use AASL’s *National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries* to provide a foundation of sound pedagogical practice to support learner success. Moving into the new year, we must use the standards as the framework for our professional practice while relentlessly advocating for qualified, certified school librarians for all learners. Qualified, certified school librarians who use the AASL Standards as the foundation of their practice will empower the school library profession to transform teaching and learning.

Our learners must be prepared to participate in a future that once seemed unimaginable. Therefore, they need the best education that we can provide. Those states that do

not mandate trained and qualified school library professionals in schools do a disservice to learners and learning communities. Qualified school library professionals provide learners with equitable learning opportunities through the adoption and implementation of the *National School Library Standards*.

I want us all to continuously advocate for our role in preparing students for the future. When any of our colleagues’ positions are in jeopardy of being cut or are not provided adequate support, it ultimately impacts all of us. The AASL Standards enable school librarians to demonstrate our integral role in preparing learners for college, career, and life. We must advocate for the standards and our role in preparing students for the future. Geography, socioeconomic, ethnicity, and other factors should never be a barrier to a child’s access to certified school librarians and the services they provide.

As school librarians, we lead students toward engagement, inquiry, inclusion, collaboration, curation of information, and exploration. Schools without qualified school librarians do not maximize educational opportunities for their learners. This is a message your district’s parents, administrators, and state legislators must hear and understand. Who in your state department of education is accountable for school libraries? Who are the decision makers at the district level? Do they have a working knowledge of the standards or even school libraries? Do they embrace how curriculum and learning can be enriched through the standards? We cannot merely

passively accept our fate or passively wait for our roles to be defined. Rather, it is our responsibility to educate, advocate, and foster relationships to champion our cause.

The characteristics of an effective school library are clearly defined in the AASL Standards; yet these goals are not possible without trained school library professionals. The standards note a hallmark of an effective school library includes “resources and policies that ensure equitable access to highly qualified school librarians and support personnel” (AASL 2018, 171). Equitable access cannot be translated into an occasional encounter or a visiting consultant. Equitable access needs to have the same definition across the country, across the economic spectrum, and across grade levels.

The AASL Standards also note a school library should include “[c]arefully selected and organized collections of physical and digital materials and learning assets” (AASL 2018, 171). Who should be expected to carefully select and organize the materials? The answer is a professional school librarian. The school librarian is immersed in the mission of the school and the curriculum and can develop and implement a strategic plan with administrators, educators, and legitimate school library vendors.

A professional school librarian can articulate what constitutes “flexible up-to-date barrier-free facilities, appropriate technology, and learning opportunities for school community members with diverse cultural, linguistic, financial, and learning differences” (AASL 2018, 171). Planning a state-of-the-art learning environment for learners cannot be left to architects or interior designers. Translating learning standards into physical space is complicated and requires more than soft seating and trendy breakout spaces.

The school library should provide a space for every learner to retreat to, grow out of, and see themselves belonging in; every student’s learning style should be acknowledged in the school library. We understand how to provide resources to support schools’ education goals and learners’ needs through library spaces and programming.

School librarians are vital to learning communities and are often the stopgap between success and failure for many learners. Quality education is paramount for our democracy, because ultimately, resource and personnel inequities have consequences. Thinking about education and what the landscape could look like without dedicated educators and trained, certified school librarians made me envision an almost Dickensian reality reminiscent of the orphaned urchins in *A Christmas Carol*. Scrooge thinks the children must belong to the apparition, but the Ghost of Christmas Present replies: “They are Man’s. The boy is

Ignorance. The girl is Want. Beware them both, and all their degree, but most of all beware this boy, for on his brow I see that written which is Doom, unless the writing is erased” (Dickens 1843). Although this is a fanciful reference, let’s make it our mission to ensure this is merely a cautionary tale and not a glimpse into our future.

In 2021 let’s all continue the good fight to make things better for ourselves, our friends and families, our learning communities, our profession, our country, and our world. While this may seem like an extensive list, we are school librarians, and we are up to the task because we get things done!

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Works Cited:

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