



*The COVID slide is real, and school librarians must work with other educators to evaluate students and establish ways to supplement gaps in their education.*

## Lessons from the COVID Chronicles

Kathy Carroll, 2020–2021 AASL President | [aaslcarroll@gmail.com](mailto:aaslcarroll@gmail.com)

If I could talk to my March 2020 self, I would say that you are about to embark on an unimaginable journey filled with challenges and self-discovery. I would say this is a marathon, not a sprint; embrace change; and realize that necessity truly is the mother of invention. As educators have continued to adapt to virtual and hybrid learning, we have witnessed the transformation of instruction, and I do not think we will ever return to the status quo. I think many of these changes would have happened eventually, but the pandemic and other variables sped up education’s evolution. So, whether a Luddite or a technophile, we must acknowledge that components of virtual and hybrid learning are now a permanent part of education.

Our transition to virtual learning began abruptly. There was no comprehensive preparation, no systematic distribution of devices, nor unified training for educators and students. When we were thrust into this new world, school librarians promptly implemented ways to support our learning communities. There were many missteps, yet somehow, we persevered. I clearly remember in the early days how school librarians worked with school personnel to quickly distribute devices to students, some of whom spent hours in parking lots and other locations to access the internet. We sought ways to best interact with our learners and intensified our collaborations with colleagues, caregivers, and our communities. We school librarians were in uncharted territory but consistently embodied the best parts of our profession.

---

*When we were thrust into this new world, school librarians promptly implemented ways to support our learning communities.*

---

One early lesson I learned during the pandemic was that sometimes too much is simply too much. An abundant number of resources was suddenly made available when we abruptly shifted to virtual learning. Vendors, publishers, and other groups generously offered their wares in an effort to help support learners. Many of us quickly shared these resources with our faculty and parents but soon realized the need to carefully curate and distribute them. This lesson learned reinforced my belief that our best work happens when we exercise discernment and rely on AASL’s *National School Library Standards* for guidance.

The loss of classroom communities, daily structure, and continuity impacted learning. The COVID slide is real, and school librarians must work with other educators to evaluate students and establish ways to supplement gaps in their education. We can’t assume “They will just have to catch up.” We have to be strategic in creating plans to identify and help students who need additional support.

I learned that when we ignore inequities, there will eventually be a day of reckoning. Some schools were poised to shift to a virtual environment, while others struggled. Students without reliable, fast internet, suitable devices for schoolwork, or trained educators to guide them are at an unfair disadvantage. I believe that education and equitable access to technology will continue to be the cornerstone for success in the future.

I have a new respect for our need for personal connections and rites of passage. Throughout the pandemic educators have sought to maintain a semblance of normalcy, and school librarians continue to provide academic and personal support to our learners. From the onset of remote learning, we provided virtual book clubs and read-alouds. Virtual crafts, games, and general daily gatherings were used to encourage learners to stay connected. We helped parents and caregivers navigate the technology so crucial to their children's success. We have consistently found ways to do what is needed for our learning communities.

AASL has offered town halls for school librarians to communicate with each other. Through these town halls, AASL and school librarians from across the country provided resources to assist in working with our learning communities. More importantly, these town halls offered us a sense of community. Universally, society created ways to celebrate milestones. Birthdays, anniversaries, births, deaths, and every other human experience were somehow acknowledged during this time. I have learned that regardless of the challenges, nothing will ever replace our need for human connections.

I've learned that school libraries are no place for cowards. There were numerous times during the pandemic when moving forward was unnerving, yet staying complacent was not an option. Across our country, school libraries were turned into classrooms, colleagues served as substitute or classroom teachers, and programs were diminished or eliminated. This has been a time for us to show a united front and extol our role as essential workers, not optional staffing. We are frontline workers in education and need policies in place to cement our roles. In the AASL Strategic Plan, the education policy goal is to "influence local, state, and national policy to ensure that school libraries are well-funded and fully staffed with full-time, certified school librarians and dedicated support personnel" (2019). In January 2021, AASL played an integral role in crafting a letter to then President-Elect Joe Biden's transition team stressing how school librarians are an equity-oriented solution to some of the most pressing concerns facing educators at this moment. When I announced this on social media, I

---

*This has been a time for us to show a united front and extol our role as essential workers, not optional staffing. We are frontline workers in education and need policies in place to cement our roles.*

---

included the hashtag #ProactiveNotReactive. We must be tireless and strategic advocates for ourselves.

This is my last column as president of AASL. It has been my honor to represent school librarians. I have had the opportunity to serve during one of the most eventful times in recent history. Yet regardless of what transpired, I could always count on our members to do what is best for learners. Thank you all for your contributions—our association is only as strong as our members. School librarians are an amazing group of professionals, and I know we will continue to make great advancements. I am excited for what lies ahead for our profession. Thank you all for your hard work, commitment, and dedication. I have never been prouder to be a school librarian, and I know that our future is bright and that the best is yet to come!

---

**Kathy Carroll** is the 2020–2021 AASL President. She is a school librarian at Westwood High School in Blythewood, South Carolina. She served on the ALA Spectrum Advisory Committee from 2018 to 2020 and is serving as an ALA Councilor at Large. She also served on the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards Library Media Specialist Standards Committee in 2010 and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards Teacher Leadership Competency Framework Committee in 2013. Kathy was awarded an ALA Spectrum Scholarship in 2007. She also was a participant in the Toyota International Teacher Program in South Africa in 2011 and was a Fulbright Teacher Scholar in Tokyo, Japan, in 2001.

### Work Cited:

AASL. 2019. "AASL Strategic Plan." <[www.ala.org/aasl/govern/strategic-plan](http://www.ala.org/aasl/govern/strategic-plan)> (accessed Feb. 2, 2021).