



It is important for school librarians to be literacy leaders at their schools.

Opportunity: Strengthening Your School's Reading Community

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The school library is the hub of the school learning community. School librarians support teaching and learning through collaborations with administrators, counselors and social workers, classroom teachers, parents, the public library, and other community organizations. School librarians provide many services, including teaching media literacy skills, providing a safe space for students, supporting STEM and technology integration, providing equitable access to resources, and creating a reading community. Therefore, school librarians have many opportunities to work with both the school community and the wider community to enhance student learning. One important opportunity based on our current educational landscape is the opportunity for school librarians to strengthen the reading community at their schools.

The results of the spring 2022 administration of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) were released in October 2022 and show the largest decline in reading scores since 1990 (NAEP n.d.). About one-third of students in fourth and eighth grades cannot read at even the basic achievement level (Sparks 2022). Policy makers and administrators will be looking for ways to strengthen students' reading achievement. Thus, there is an opportunity for school librarians to work with their school community—

including school administrators, classroom teachers, parents, and community partners—to reverse these negative trends.

It is important for school librarians to be literacy leaders at their schools. The International Reading Association's Literacy Leadership Brief: *The Essential Leadership of School Librarians* identifies three tenets to ensure the literacy leadership role of school librarians: school librarians as collaborators, school librarians as advocates of literacy equity, and school librarians as providers of access (ILA 2022).

School Librarians as Collaborators

It is important for school librarians to collaborate with administrators, classroom teachers, and others to support literacy initiatives at their schools. The AASL position statement "The School Librarian's Role in Reading" (AASL 2020) provides excellent information on reading promotion, instruction, resources, and services developed around the AASL National Standards Shared Foundations. Aligned with the Shared Foundation of Collaborate, the school librarian collaborates to plan and teach inquiry-based lessons that help learners increase reading comprehension. School librarians also collaborate to integrate reading comprehension strategies into library instruction.

Students will read more when they have choice in what they read and when they can find choices that are relevant and interesting to them.

Tammy S. Gruer and Karen M. Perry's article "Yes, School Librarians Teach Reading" in the May/June 2020 issue of *Knowledge Quest* is a must read. Gruer and Perry list key reading skills taught and supported by school librarians beyond providing access to books:

- teaching story structure through sequencing, literacy elements, and parts of a book,
- expanding vocabulary through rhyming, decoding, and keywords, and
- constructing meaning through retelling and summarizing, inference, and character study and visualizing.

Multiple studies (Lance and Kachel 2018) have found that test scores are higher in schools where school librarians plan collaboratively with classroom teachers and specifically spend more time doing the following:

- instructing students, both with classroom teachers and independently,
- planning collaboratively with classroom teachers,
- providing professional development to teachers,
- meeting regularly with the principal,
- serving on key school leadership committees,
- facilitating the use of technology by students and teachers,
- providing technology support to teachers, and
- providing reading incentive programs.

School Librarians as Advocates of Literacy Equity

School librarians support intellectual freedom. They help develop and support administrators with collection development and reconsideration policies. School librarians professionally curate age-relevant, inclusive library collections with resources to support school curricular needs, personal learning, and choice reading.

There are many benefits for learners to having access to a wide range of reading material. The Unite Against Book Bans organization's "Empowered by Reading" 2022 report specifically lists benefits as:

- promoting student achievement,
- enhancing youth wellbeing, and
- contributing to community cohesion.

Promoting Student Achievement

Students will read more when they have choice in what they read and when they can find choices that are relevant and interesting to them. When they read more, their reading skills improve.

Enhancing Youth Wellbeing

Giving students access to books that reflect difficult topics that youth may face allows them to explore struggles in a safe way. It helps students consider different options and perspectives, and think about consequences of decisions.

Contributing to Community Cohesion

Giving students access to a wide variety of books helps foster empathy, tolerance, and connection.

School Librarians as Providers of Access

School librarians advocate for students' regular access to the school library and its resources.

A solution for book deserts (geographical areas where books are difficult to obtain), at least for school-age children, is to make sure that all students have equitable access to school libraries staffed by certified school librarians. The school library and the school librarian are the principal sources of reading materials for most students. This is especially important for

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students from underserved communities, students with inequitable access to resources, and students with reading difficulties.

Literacy Teams

If your school, your district, or your state has literacy teams working to improve reading achievement, it is very important for school librarians to reach out and make sure that school librarians are part of the team. School librarians are experts at building reading communities by collaborating with the entire school community and beyond, by advocating for literacy equity, and by providing access for all students.

School Library Community

In this issue of *Knowledge Quest* focusing on community, it is also important to recognize the opportunities available for school librarians who are members of professional learning networks: their state and national associations. Through the professional communities of professional associations, school librarians can share best practices and ideas around building a strong reading community in their schools, their districts, and their states. We are all stronger when we stand together, support each other, and share ideas.

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