



As we are called upon to sort through our most important beliefs on the value of diverse access to information in print, I suspect we'll find that that philosophy is echoed more strongly when we articulate our priorities of diverse access in digital media.

Shifts in our State of the Art

Sarah Searles | sarah.searles@knoxschools.org

As a school library supervisor for a large school district, one of the enjoyable parts of my job is assisting principals with hiring school librarians for their buildings. When I speak with potential candidates, I always ask them, among other things, to tell me about what they believe is important for students to learn about technology in the school library. When I first began as a supervisor in 2014, the answer from candidates was frequently (and sadly) “They need more practice typing!” Happily, in recent years, the average response has gravitated much more strongly toward some variation on “They need to become competent and contributing digital citizens!”

All candidates are unique and have individual thoughts and strengths, obviously—but those major patterns in responses are predictable and understandable as products of the times in which the conversations were held. In 2014, it was NOT the case that no school librarian could think of anything better to do with ed tech equipment than a typing game. Rather, it was that many districts in our region were just starting to move toward computer-based standardized testing delivery in elementary schools. Their schools were panicking about how their previously tech-sheltered kids were going to gain enough experience with keyboards and mice to be able to accurately display their mastery of the curriculum standards, and school librarians were being asked to step into the gap.

Similarly, in the next several years, school librarianship didn’t suddenly find out about digital citizenship, as if it hadn’t been an important topic in the previous decade.

The shift came alongside shifts in national politics and news coverage, which laid bare the differences between “haves” and “have-nots” when it came to skills in media literacy and thoughtful online communication.

The shift came alongside shifts in national politics and news coverage, which laid bare the differences between “haves” and “have-nots” when it came to skills in media literacy and thoughtful online communication. Again, school librarians have acted as leaders to bridge the gap.

In the last three years, unsurprisingly, the interview pattern has begun to show another shift: Responses still tend to be about digital citizenship, but they’ve also taken on a tinge of safety and mental health, distinctly colored by the changes in schools’ and families’ technology use prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Candidates now also need to ponder what tech learning specifically needs to happen in the school library, as opposed to any other instructional setting in the school, now that 1:1 device is nearly universal and most classroom educators are responsible for their own daily ed tech.

Interview settings do a good job of revealing, in a short amount of time, a succinct version of school librarians' prevailing attitudes and skill sets. For candidates who are new graduates of Library and Information Science programs, they also reveal patterns in how the emphases of master's coursework is shifting. However, interview conversations are high-stakes situations and thus often feel a bit artificial. The much deeper and more effective way to explore the state of the art in school librarians' decisions around school librarianship, then, is to use the network and the literature of our professional associations to gather up and enter the most important discussions happening in our field. And that's exactly what the contributing authors of this issue have done.

Our content expert for this issue, Ashley Cooksey, lays out the most important underpinnings of our field's understanding of digital citizenship today, including school librarians' role as leaders. She lays out current research and standards for how this topic may be approached in schools' instructional programs, and speaks to how school librarians can model digital citizenship practices in order to increase connection, empathy, and empowerment among the learners they serve.

Bill Morelan offers a valuable administrator perspective regarding the impact effective school libraries can have on the digital practices of the whole school community. While designed as an open letter for school librarian readers to share with their own principals and district leaders, his article also supports school librarians' learning by highlighting some of the issues administrators find most pressing, to assist us in our own thinking around instructional prioritization and how we align with leaders' goals and needs.

Pushing the envelope on our current common understanding of digital citizenship, Elissa Malespina dives into artificial intelligence and how school librarians can lead the way in developing comprehensive acceptable use policies (AUPs) for how these technologies are implemented in buildings and districts. This is an important conversation that we may see circling back many times, as these technologies rapidly evolve and grow in the public consciousness.

Readers who may quietly admit their discomfort in tackling copyright instruction as part of their overall digital citizenship programming will be relieved to see Brittany Fleming's reassuring primer on the topic. She lays out a practical understanding of the four-factor test for determining fair use, debunks commonly held myths about copyright in education, and offers advice on how

this topic can be broached in collaboration with other educators without ruffling any feathers.

Rounding out this issue is James Allen's empowering description of school librarians as superheroes in the modern age. He shows how the age of artificial intelligence demands that our school library practice transcend its traditional boundaries—but also demonstrates that we are well-equipped with the superpowers to do so, particularly by supporting our fellow educator partners.

It is not difficult to predict that candidates for school library positions will continue to evolve their technology interview responses as fast as the world around them changes. I personally predict that the next wave of change will be influenced by the same community social dynamics that have impacted our profession with an increase in book challenges: As we are called upon to sort through our most important beliefs on the value of diverse access to information in print, I suspect we'll find that that philosophy is echoed more strongly when we articulate our priorities of diverse access in digital media. As our authors in this issue demonstrate, digital citizenship as a core knowledge topic is neither passive, nor neutral, nor simple. Ultimately it is not a technology issue at all, but a profoundly human pursuit, reflecting both the messiness and the beauty present in our communities.

Sarah Searles is the Academic Resources Supervisor for the Knox County Schools. She was a Lilead Fellow and served on the AASL Board of Directors 2016–19. Sarah's book *Explore, part of the Shared Foundations series*, was published by ALA Editions in 2021. Her articles on school librarianship have appeared in *Knowledge Quest* and *School Library Connection*.