

KNOWLEDGE QUEST



LEGACY & VISION—HOW DOES OUR PAST INFORM OUR FUTURE?

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The space is different, but we continue to be the largest classroom in the building, a safe haven for those that need it, and a gathering place to study or meet friends or find the best book.

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2023 AASL ELECTION

PRESIDENT CANDIDATE STATEMENTS



BECKY CALZADA

Libraries with certified librarians are invaluable. As a first generation Hispanic girl growing up in South Texas, my parents prioritized weekly visits to our library in Mercedes, Texas. Eventually, I was introduced to the school library when I began my public school education.

My educational journey eventually steered me to librarianship. When I reflect on school libraries, I see vibrant thriving spaces where learners are encouraged to inquire thoughtfully, think deeply, and curate selectively. I see school librarians nudging learners to explore resources to empower them to become life-long readers and creating spaces and collections which affirm and include all identities.

I see school librarians working to engage learners by building relationships and elevating instruction in a meaningful way.

School librarians are facing challenges including attacks on intellectual freedom, budget/program reductions, the cutback of certified positions and a decline in school librarian employment. If elected, I will seek opportunities for AASL members to share challenges and work to connect members to solutions. I will leverage the research of our practice to build understanding. I will use my leadership experience to amplify celebrations to show the impact school librarians make. Together, we can demonstrate how school librarians are essential.



HANNAH BYRD LITTLE

I have received much from the American Association of School Librarians (AASL). My membership has afforded me incredible opportunities to write and lead as I would never have imagined. I primarily offer to serve in AASL leadership to realize our ongoing vision of “every learner has a school librarian.” However, an equally pressing goal is championing intellectual freedom. Our students deserve school libraries staffed with qualified librarians, and our readers need to see themselves in books. We must uphold our core values, like access and freedom to read, while simultaneously committing to innovative practices.

Part of the AASL strategic plan is to increase research related to school libraries and communicate this research. I plan to work tirelessly to encourage research to help with these critical industry issues. In many cases, those librarians who want to pursue research find the programs logistically or financially out of reach. But research is needed! Increasing the visibility of research related to school librarians will help us be recognized as vital and respected professionals when we need it the most. If elected, I hope to offer encouragement for those who need it, research to bolster our industry, and support and resources for members experiencing challenges.

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When will it stop being “new” that school libraries staffed by credentialed school librarians are dynamic learning hubs that provide “experiences with and access to resources, information, ideas, and technology.”

Reflections on Traditional Practices of the School Librarian

Kathy Lester, 2022–2023 AASL President | kathylester.lib@gmail.com

What are the “traditional practices” of the school librarian? Which of those practices are still relevant today? When I reflect back on my twenty-two years as a school librarian, I believe that my practice has always been learner-centered and will continue to be as I move forward. I have also always aligned my goals to the mission and needs of my learning community and have reflected on these goals yearly. This practice includes communicating with administrators and working with them as partners to achieve the goals for our learners.

However, when I reflect back on specific practices, I think about the professional standards and their influence on my work. First, *Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning* (AASL and AECT 1998) was an essential text book while earning my school library certification and Master’s Degree in Library and Information Science, and it informed my early practice as a school librarian. In 2009 I shifted to using the AASL text *Empowering Learners: Guidelines for School Library Programs*. I now rely on the *National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries* (AASL 2018) as the core text to guide my practice and my lessons. Guided by these important documents, my practice has consistently involved teaching and supporting the following elements within my school community:

- reading
- information literacy, and
- technology.

Reading

“Reading is the core of personal and academic competency” and “Intellectual freedom is every learner’s right” are two of the common beliefs identified in the AASL Standards as being central to our profession (AASL 2018, 11). These common beliefs point to the need to have selection policies that provide criteria to develop an inclusive collection to support all learners. (Example selection criteria for school libraries can be found in the ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom’s 2018 “Selection & Reconsideration Policy Toolkit for Public, School, & Academic Libraries.”) The school librarian’s training and expertise in collection development is essential. School librarians must build a collection of resources for their entire community of learners. It is important for school librarians to recognize personal biases and to not let those biases influence purchase decisions. Best practices have shifted to put a heightened emphasis on inclusive collections and for school librarians to audit their collections for representation.

However, having an inclusive collection is just the foundation of the school librarian’s role in reading. School librarians must motivate, engage, and instruct learners in reading, and ensure learners understand how to access the collection. It is important that students can easily find what they need. I have always provided reader’s advisory, book talks, book displays, and reading promotions; sponsored author visits; and

School librarians must motivate, engage, and instruct learners in reading, and ensure learners understand how to access the collection. It is important that students can easily find what they need.

more. I have also taught learners how to access resources, and co-taught inquiry lessons while supporting learners' use of reading comprehension strategies as part of these lessons.

AASL's position statement "School Librarian's Role in Reading" (AASL 2020a) is an excellent resource that positions the school librarian as a literacy leader and provides the details of their role in reading aligned with the AASL Standards' Shared Foundations: Inquire, Include, Collaborate, Curate, Explore, and Engage.

Information Literacy

Back in 1998, information literacy standards were a foundational part of *Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning*. However, with the expansion of information available to our learners and the proliferation of social media, the importance and urgency for teaching these skills has greatly increased. Information literacy (including effective use of all forms of information and media) has been woven into AASL's *National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries*. School librarians engage learners in the inquiry process and teach the research process per the Inquire Shared Foundation. As stated in the Engage and Include Shared Foundations, school librarians teach how to evaluate information and media, and also how to evaluate a variety of perspectives.

Best practices for teaching information literacy have been updated since my earlier days as a school librarian. School librarians should be aware that many previous practices such as focusing only on teaching learners evaluation guidelines using acronyms such as "CRAAP" and teaching them to use domain extensions such as ".org" in their source evaluation could be doing more harm than good (Valenza 2020). The Stanford History Education Group (SHEG) Civic Online Reasoning (COR)

Curriculum is a 2022 AASL Best Digital Tool for Teaching and Learning. Teaching students "lateral reading," which is checking what other sources have to say about your source, is an integral part of this curriculum. SHEG recommends teaching students to think more like fact-checkers (SHEG n.d.). The framework of teaching our learners to think like "digital detectives" (LaGarde and Hudgins 2021) can be used with students of all ages.

Technology

The article "K–12's Digital Transformation Is Giving Libraries a Modern Makeover" in *EdTech Magazine*, although written in 2018, came up recently in my Twitter feed with the quote "Today's school libraries are reinvented. No longer just a haven for dusty books and stern shushes, the library is now a place for digital resources and makerspaces and flexible learning!" (Andrade 2018). My reaction was a sense of frustration. When will it stop being "new" that school libraries staffed by credentialed school librarians are dynamic learning hubs that provide "experiences with and access to resources, information, ideas, and technology" (AASL 2018, 59). This is my twenty-second year as a school librarian, and my job has *always* involved integrating technology into my teaching and collaborating with other educators. The types of technology that I and my students use may have changed, for example, from HyperStudio to Google apps and from a lab of desktop computers to supporting one-to-one Chromebooks, but I have always been considered one of the technology leaders at my school.

In 1998 *Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning* stated, "Three basic ideas—collaboration, leadership, and technology—underlie the vision of library media programs" (AASL and AECT 1998, 47). In 2013 *School Library Journal* published the infographic "Q: Who's the tech leader at your school? A: Odds are, it's the librarian" (Ishizuka 2013). In 2018 one of the common beliefs expressed in the AASL Standards is "Information technologies must be appropriately integrated and equitably available" (AASL 2018, 11). In 2020 school librarians rose to the challenges during the pandemic and played an important role in translating their services to support new virtual and hybrid learning environments (AASL 2020b). Innovation is one of AASL's core values, and school librarians continue to often be the first adopters of new technologies whether it be film strips or personal computing or 3-D printing.

School librarians work to elevate learning by using technology in meaningful ways to inspire and engage learners. AASL's Best Digital Tools for Teaching and Learning webpage <www.ala.org/aasl/awards/best> is a great resource for all educators.

Summary

The job of the school librarian is multiplex. School librarians are leaders, instructional partners, information specialists, teachers, and program administrators. And although specific best practices have changed, three disciplines that have long been a part of a school librarian's practice include reading, information literacy, and technology. I believe that these three elements will continue to be essential to our student-centered and mission-driven practices as we move into the future.

Kathy Lester, 2022–2023 President of AASL, is a school librarian at East Middle School in Plymouth-Canton Community Schools in Michigan. She is also an ALA Councilor-at-Large and serves on ALA's Committee on Library Advocacy (COLA). She is active in her state association, the Michigan Association for Media in Education (MAME). She is a past-president of MAME and serves as a co-chair for its Advocacy Committee. Kathy also serves on the advisory council of two Institute of Museum and Library Services Grant Projects: *School Librarian Investigation—Decline or Evolution?* (SLIDE) led by Project Director Debra E. Kachel and Principal Investigator Keith Curry Lance, and *Restoring Urban School Libraries* (RUSL) with Project Director Kafi Kumasi.

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The colors, patterns, and textures handed down by our foremothers weave the fabric of today's profession.

Inspired by the Past to Serve Our Learners Today

Rita Reinsel Soulen | soulenr19@ecu.edu

In my role as assistant professor, I dance around the tenets of school librarianship in a whirlwind of meetings, proposals, conferences, reviews, manuscripts, and publications. My teaching, my research, and my service all revolve around the role of the school librarian in ensuring that students are effective users of ideas and information, as set forth in *Empowering Learners Guidelines for School Library Programs* (ALA 2009) and further outlined in AASL's 2018 *National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries*. But these ideas did not develop in a vacuum. There are many who have come before us whose ideas have coalesced into our idea of school librarianship today.

School librarianship, for the most part, has been stitched together by women and dominated by individuals who by their very birth provide a feminine perspective. The colors, patterns, and textures handed down by our foremothers weave the fabric of today's profession. For me, personally, certain women have been highly influential in my education as a NxtWave Scholar. Within this female-dominated field, however, there are some notable exceptions, including Charles C. Certain, who chaired the committee that developed the first standards, *Standard Library Organization and Equipment for Secondary Schools of Different Sizes* (ALA 1920), and Ross J. Todd, champion of evidence-based school library practice.

This issue of *Knowledge Quest* rolls out with "MVG and the Power of the School Library Ladies: Our Legacy/Their Vision" in which I present some of the history of school librarianship through mini-biographies of my role models. Foremost is Mary Virginia Gaver (MVG)

who studied levels of libraries and the influence on student achievement, a topic that I continue to include in my research agenda. As the story goes, in the early 1900s MVG, then a child, and her mother collected \$200 to establish a school library for children in her Virginia mill town. MVG's work grew from those roots. Today, I find myself soliciting funds to develop a digital library for our university lab school, which serves mostly African American children from socioeconomically disadvantaged families and which does not have space for a traditional school library. I spend a lot of my time thinking, talking, and writing about levels of libraries ranging from traditional and digital to unconventional such as Little Free Libraries, Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, and the International Children's Digital Library.

Next Mary Keeling, another role model, describes the complicated legacy of school librarians as teachers. I have known Mary for many years as a district library supervisor and adjunct instructor in library science. As she says, her "missionary zeal" for use of an inquiry process model could set certain people on edge, a quality that I find highly appealing. As I share with my MLS students, if I have you at the edge of your comfort zone, then you are right where I want you to be. Similarly, Mary Keeling finds herself at the edge of her own comfort zone as she questions the contradiction between prioritizing information literacy instruction and the power of stories. She advocates using the power of story to dismantle political structures that prevent students' access to information and ideas while directly promoting legislation that has the potential to provide for school libraries and school librarians across the nation.

Through all of these articles thread the themes of growth, unfolding, and transformation.

In her feature article Becca Munson, content editor for this issue of *Knowledge Quest*, describes how the past informs our profession today. She presents role models as historical influencers who continue to shape our practice in the present. She outlines how visions and goals outlined in the second edition of *Information Power* (AASL and AECT 1998) and in today's AASL Standards have influenced her practice. She also shares the value of attending the AASL conference to enhance collaboration with teachers and fellow librarians in the "shared mindset of the group" and enhance opportunities "to be better at what we do." These shared foundations contribute to the consistency of our beliefs while allowing for the change that is inherent to our profession.

In the next article, Shirley Dickey reminds us that librarians are innovators and problem solvers. The transformative nature of technology has led her to explore the maker movement in her school library as an innovation center, with creative ideas to engage her high school students. For her students, testing and failure are a starting point for creative thinking that can lead to the joy of success while teaching and learning resilience, collaboration, and teamwork along the way. Shirley Dickey's curriculum-connected makerspaces teach and reinforce classroom content in an atmosphere of acceptance that is central to her school community. Her students push this library space outward to include school clubs and service projects, and to embrace social media. Looking toward the future, she sees school librarians as advocates for student rights with a determination to support curriculum, community, and, of course, our students.

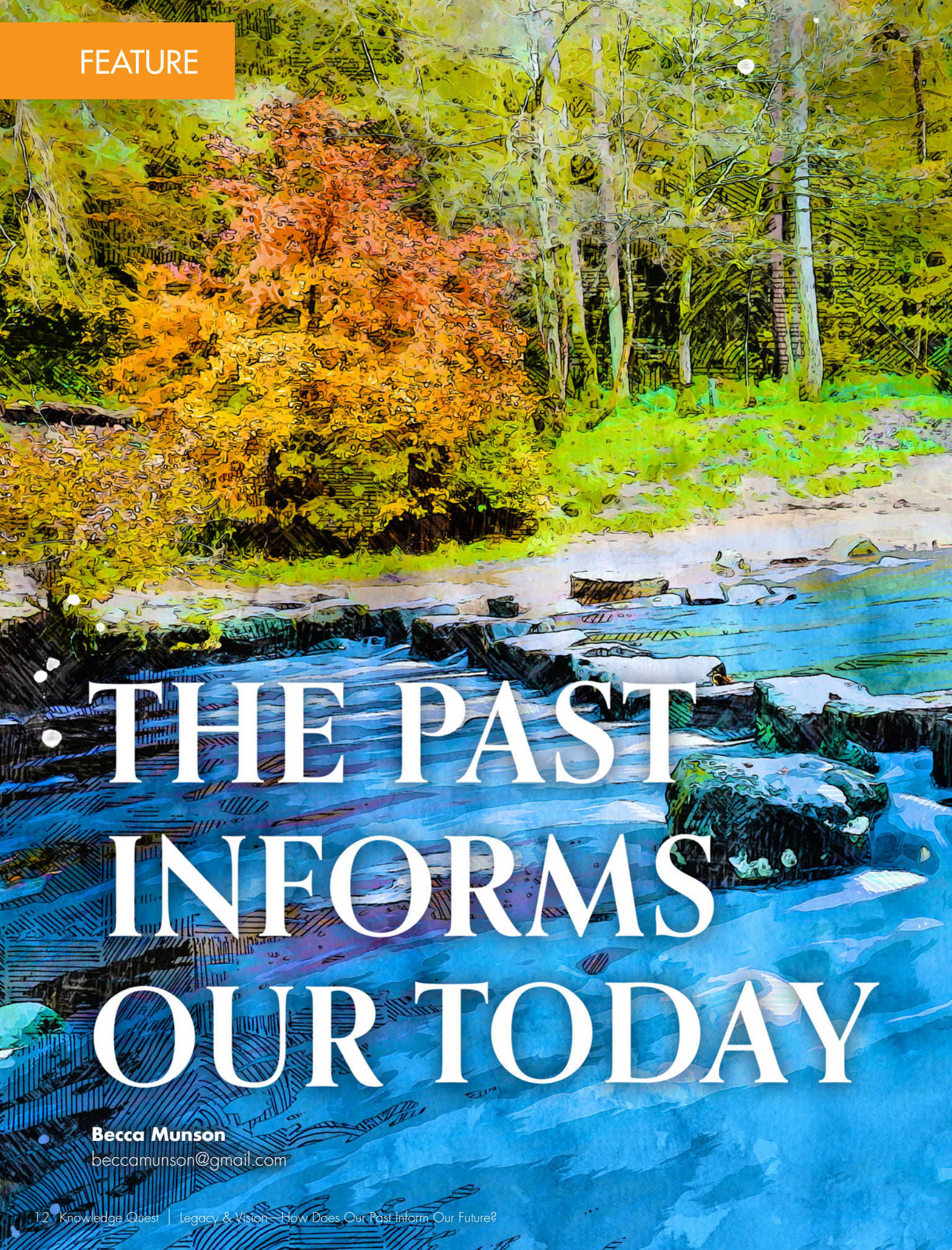
Andrea Trudeau leads from the heart. Harking back to the origins of the school library as a warehouse for shared books focused primarily on academics, she sees the development of early libraries not only as increasing access to information, but also as the locations of "guardians and guides to information." She sees 21st-century librarians as maintaining "the tenets of access and intellectual freedom from times past even as we embrace a broader whole-child approach." As part of this approach, she advocates an emphasis on shared relationships that impact students both socially and academically. She suggests the school library as

a feeling that welcomes, sees, and values our students through space, collection, instruction, programming, and self-care. This human-centered approach "allows us to build upon the foundational work of those who came before us while our practices evolve to meet the diverse needs of our school communities." By seeing the potential in each student, Andrea Trudeau encourages the "lifesaving librarians" to pay attention, ask the right questions, and change lives.

Through all of these articles thread the themes of growth, unfolding, and transformation.

As school librarians, we stand on the shoulders of the giants in our field who were often quite small in stature but enormous in their visions for our profession and the learners we serve. They might be surprised to see the expansion of the school library program as technology evolves and the library becomes more and more embedded in the lives of our school children. They certainly would be saddened at the current ambush on students' rights—but encouraged by the response of school librarians to those who would restrict access to diverse ideas. Let us hope that the proposed Right to Read Act ensures that all students have access to an appropriately resourced school library staffed by a certified school librarian. We have inherited a proud legacy. Let us lean on each other to push our vision forward with every power in our being.

Dr. Rita Soulen is an assistant professor teaching in the Library Science program at East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina. She is a *NxtWave Scholar* and researcher of school librarianship. She serves on AASL's *Knowledge Quest* and *School Library Research* editorial boards.



FEATURE

THE PAST INFORMS OUR TODAY

Becca Munson

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The day an individual steps into the role of a school librarian, they enter a collective that is passionate about creating change while also safeguarding a lasting vision. A mentor kindly suggests how to collaborate with a reluctant classroom teacher. A library coordinator or district leader provides direction with policies for selecting library materials. A district or state library organizer invites discussion about funding and equity across the area. National leaders in AASL advocate and publish library standards and data. School librarians consistently hold to core values of collaboration, learning, equity and inclusion, access and literacy amidst changes in the landscape—technology, materials, school expectations, and student needs.

Influences of the Past

School librarians of the past influence our decisions and roles today. In the mid-1960s, Lillian L. Batchelor, former AASL President, instituted 166 elementary school libraries in Philadelphia. Not unlike school librarians of today, she understood the importance of providing access to resources for all children in the school district (Miller 2003, 15). Her influence went beyond these schools, as she was a leader in AASL and shared her ideas to colleagues in publications and conferences. In an ALA publication she shared how a school librarian can work with administrators to present at a faculty meeting, demonstrating how to utilize library resources (Batchelor 1963).

In the 1980s and 1990s Michael L. Printz was another influential school librarian. He started an “author-in-residence” with authors working one-on-one with students and their writing. As a Best Books for Young Adults committee chair,

he championed student voices by asking his students to record their opinions about the novels. His positive influence with his students and leadership with colleagues led to the creation of the Michael L. Printz Award for Excellence in Young Adult Literature (Miller 2003, 195–96).

Ruth V. Bell, former library director and contributor to the 1988 edition of *Information Power*, was an advocate for the importance of school library programs. Involved in her district, state, and national organizations, her leadership contributed to her district twice being named by ALA the school library media program of the year for both large and small districts. Her influence is felt still within her school district as the library program continues to focus on the goals of literacy, flexible scheduling, and collaboration in every building.

These school librarians are but three examples of many others that came before us. While we may be in awe of the magnitude of their work, we are continuing their momentum through interactions with students, teachers, colleagues, and our professional organizations. They had a vision for how the school library can positively impact students, and we carry that vision forward today.

Keeping the Old with the New

At the beginning of my school library career, I was given the second edition of *Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning*. *Information Power* focused on the school librarian’s role in “teaching and learning, information access and program administration.” Nine information literacy standards were included with indicators and standards in action. The nine standards encompassed information literacy, independent learning, and social responsibility (AASL and AECT 1998, 8–10). The program administration chapters included ten principles and goals to assist in

meeting each principle. The details were practical and helpful for a first-year librarian as I referred to the book throughout my early career and still refer to many principles today.

For instance, the principles listed gave me courage to ask my principal to add the librarian to the building’s leadership team and to sign me up for various district committees to guarantee a librarian’s perspective was provided. I was given a vision of how I can be helpful to classroom teachers by learning new technology and instructional tools to enhance lessons. “The school library media specialist takes a proactive role in promoting the use of technology by staff, in determining staff development needs, in determining staff development explorations, and serving as a leader in staff development opportunities” (AASL and AECT 1998, 52).

Over twenty years later, similar visions and goals from *Information Power* remain influential. For example, *Information Power* included the school librarian’s role as leader. Currently, the AASL vision statement emphasizes the leadership role: “Every school librarian is a leader; every learner has a school librarian” (AASL 2022). As *Information Power* had, the *National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries* published in 2018 emphasize the school librarian’s instructional role. Other examples include standards that encourage collaboration among peers, ethical use of information, and recognizing the importance of multiple viewpoints (AASL 2018).

While some of the terminology has changed—information literacy, digital literacy, media literacy, and so on—we remain focused on embedding skills that help students become better consumers of information. We continue to develop

instructional opportunities that challenge our students to evaluate quality sources from various media. Access to digital sources and millions of available websites fuels our passion to work with students to become critical evaluators of information.

In 1988 Marilyn L. Miller, former AASL President, articulated the importance of the school librarian's roles in instruction and collaboration:

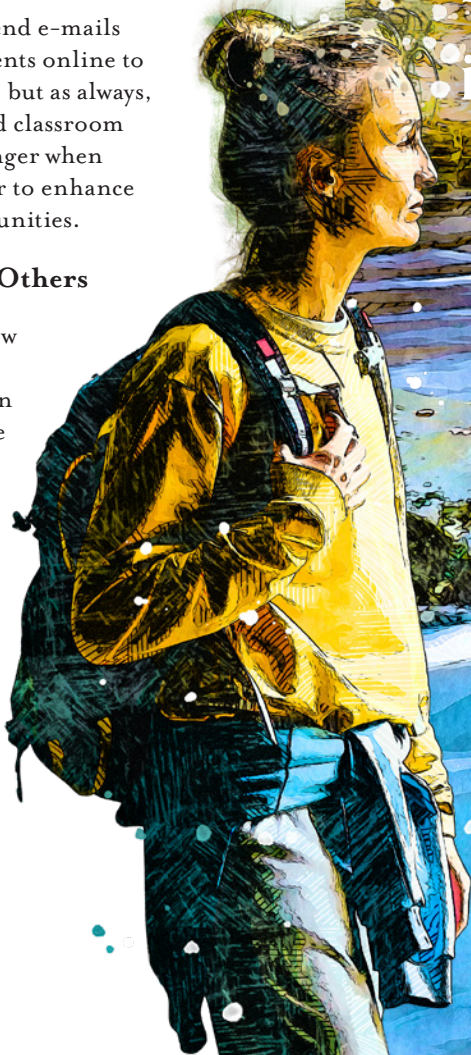
Good school librarians work closely with teachers to integrate information seeking and use activities into curriculum units that are designed to deliver content as well as to equip students to locate, evaluate, and use effectively a broad range of resources: print, audio, video, tactile, and now electronic data systems. (Miller 1988)

Today, we may send e-mails and edit documents online to develop a lesson, but as always, the librarian and classroom teacher are stronger when working together to enhance learning opportunities.

Sharing with Others

In mentoring new librarians, I am passing the vision of our past to the next generation of librarians to adopt for today. I share the "why" along with the "how." For example, when discussing how I create instructional webpages with links to our

While some of the terminology has changed—information literacy, digital literacy, media literacy, and so on—we remain focused on embedding skills that help students become better consumers of information.





databases and helpful tutorials, I am also discussing the importance of providing access to students with a variety of needs. When assisting in designing a lesson on keyword searching, I reach for the library and content area standards. This is not unlike what I did years ago when students were searching in a card catalog. Today, we design lessons incorporating similar standards, but students are using up-to-date resources such as an online database or search engine.

The AASL conference is another opportunity for school librarians to share knowledge and learn from one another. As a new librarian, I attended sessions presented by veteran school librarians who shared their experiences and best practices. With colleagues I discussed what I had learned and how to implement best practices in our buildings. While I learned from each session, I was most impacted by the collaborative and shared mindset of the group. I recognized that my actions as a librarian in my one building impacted my colleagues in my district, state, and nation. School librarians fight to hold on to—or advocate for—flexible scheduling, adequate staffing, adequate budgets, and more.

From message boards of the past to Twitter hashtags of today, school librarians are sharing with colleagues new learning and best practices. Through blogs and publications, school librarians invest in each other to be better at what we do. A shared understanding exists between

librarians that we are stronger together. When a school librarian struggles to find a resource or becomes frustrated by the lack of collaboration in the building, other librarians create and share resources to provide support.

Twenty years ago I worked in a library with a large circulation desk, shelves full of books, a reference section, and many large computer desktops. Currently, I don't have a circulation desk, my reference materials are online, and students carry laptops to and from class. The space is different, but we continue to be the largest classroom in the building, a safe haven for those that need it, and a gathering place to study or meet friends or find the best book. It is also a place to sew, 3D print or play a game of chess. As technology changes, student needs change, library spaces change, and the school librarian adapts to remain relevant



Becca Munson,
librarian, is a *National Board Certified Teacher* with over twenty-three years of experience in

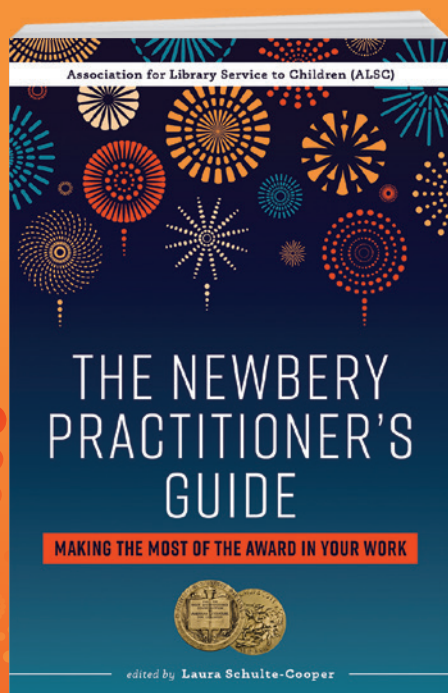
education. An AASL member and KQ blogger, she is currently a school librarian at Blue Valley West High School in Overland Park, Kansas. Becca continues to find ways to positively impact student learning with literacy initiatives, technology integration, and building rapport with students and staff. Follow her on Twitter to view the library in action @bvwlibrary and @beccamunson.

while able to stay consistent with a foundation that continues to stand strong over time.

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CELEBRATE A CENTURY OF the Newbery Medal with this handy guide from ALSC!



The Newbery Practitioner's Guide Making the Most of the Award in Your Work

Edited by LAURA SCHULTE-COOPER

ISBN: 978-0-8389-3827-0

This book digs in and explores where the distinguished award intersects with library work in a range of areas such as collection policy, advocacy, programming, EDI efforts, and censorship. Recognized experts in the fields of library service to youth, children's literature, and education present strategies and tips to support practitioners in making the most of the Newbery in their work.

Inside, you'll find time-saving programming and book group resources, discussion prompts and literature-related activities for dozens of Newbery titles, guidance to help you objectively and confidently address controversies involving Newbery winners and honor books, and much more.

A woman with curly hair, wearing a white halter top, is holding a stack of three books. The background is a warm, orange-toned image of a library with bookshelves.

MVG AND THE POWER OF THE SCHOOL LIBRARY LADIES

*OUR LEGACY/
THEIR VISION*

Rita Reinsel Soulen

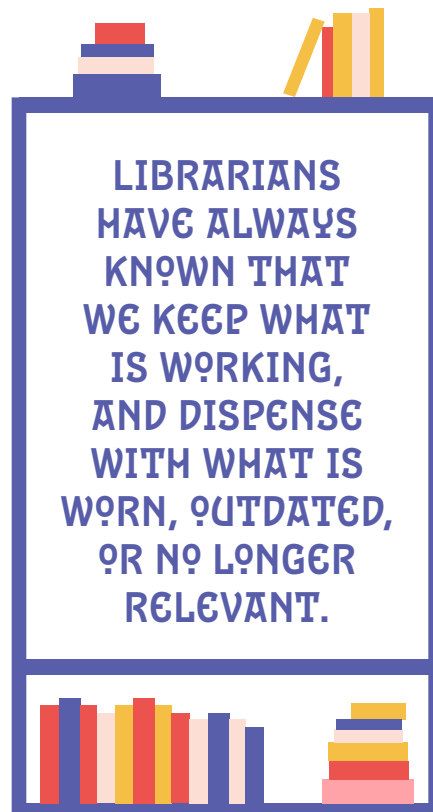
soulenr19@ecu.edu

In the first weeks of my first year as a school librarian, the new district superintendent who was visiting my library commented that libraries had really changed. In response I protested that libraries had not fundamentally changed—and watched in dismay as my principal standing behind him raised her eyebrows at me for my contradiction. But we went on to have a conversation about what had changed and what had not.

In my library a large section of shelving had recently been removed and replaced by tables with office chairs to house a laptop lab and a SMART board so that large classes could come to the library to work on projects in a digital environment. While this space within which the students were working had changed, the lessons being learned fundamentally had not. Students were still learning to find source materials, researching, writing, constructing projects, creating reference lists, and completing assessments as they had prior to the renovations. But they were also learning new skills to work effectively in the new environment: using the online catalog and library databases, using word processing to write papers, creating digital presentations, making digital charts and graphs, communicating via e-mail, and

selecting credible sources from the myriad available on the Web.

Librarians have always known that we keep what is working, and dispense with what is worn, outdated, or no longer relevant. We weed our science sections, purchase new materials for diversifying school populations, and replace old equipment with new.



But the fundamental role of the school librarian as instructional partner, teacher, leader, information specialist, and program administrator does not change. We continue to empower students to think, create, share, and grow. We share our foundational values to inquire, include, collaborate, curate, explore, and engage (AASL 2018).

Our Legacy

20th-Century Visionaries and Influencers

Three women come to my mind when discussing role models in the development of school libraries (Sullivan 2013). Mary Virginia Gaver (1906–1991) was an early school library researcher, professor of librarianship, and president of both AASL and ALA. In 1960 Gaver's pioneer study *Effectiveness of Centralized Libraries in Elementary Schools* (updated in 1963) showed the correlation between higher student achievement and the presence of a school library with a certified school librarian. Her study set in motion a new field of research in school librarianship and resulted in many correlational studies (Soulen 2016). Gaver's work has led to the use of strong research design to demonstrate the influence

of school librarians on teaching and student achievement (Soulen 2020; Wine 2020).

The work of two other important figures complemented the achievements of Mary Virginia Gaver. As a staff member of the American Book Publishers Council, Virginia H. Matthews (1925–2011) worked with AASL leaders to bring attention to exemplary school libraries and to garner support from a major foundation. Matthews was instrumental in telling the story of model school libraries to a broad audience. Alongside Gaver and Mathews, Frances Henne (1906–1985) demonstrated leadership in the development of standards for school libraries. Henne was also a library professor and an early advocate for school libraries as media centers that included films, filmstrips, and recordings in the collection. Her legacy continues to be demonstrated through AASL’s Frances Henne Award, which provides travel stipends to early career school librarians who demonstrate leadership qualities so they can attend AASL and ALA conferences (AASL 2022b).

When these ladies put their heads together, anything could happen. Together they collaborated with project director Peggy Sullivan to develop AASL’s Knapp School Libraries Project. The team used \$1,130,000 provided by the Knapp Foundation to create eight model school library media centers across the country. Educators from all over the U.S. visited these schools to see the best of the best, and had their perspectives changed. The project sparked state and local efforts to improve school libraries according to the AASL standards of the time. The team members were “delightfully balanced, each with special strengths and personal charm, each with different backgrounds and career paths, but united in their

commitment to school librarianship especially” (Sullivan 2013). Their vision demonstrated the value of school library programs.

21st-Century Visionaries and Influencers

In 2010 another set of women put their heads together to write a grant for \$353,760 from the Institute of Museum and Library Services, this time with the emphasis on leaders in school librarianship. University professors from across the country envisioned a force of NxtWave scholars disseminating the good news of school librarianship as visible and engaged leaders to articulate a vision of the profession and to contribute to the knowledge base of the profession. Dr. Audrey Church (AASL President 2016–2017), Dr. Gail Dickinson (AASL President 2013–2014), Dr. Jodie Howard, and Dr. Rebecca Pasco recruited sixteen practicing school librarians to pursue doctoral studies. The aim was to develop library leaders for teaching new librarians at the university level, to lead and manage committees at local, regional, and national levels, and to write and implement curricula and policy (Branyon and Dawkins 2018). These scholars, including me, continue to influence the profession through teaching, research, and service.



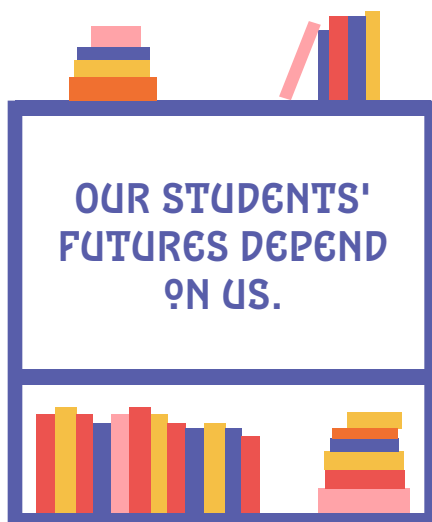
Dr. Rebecca Pasco and NxtWave Scholars, Rita Soulen and Lois Wine at AASL 2019 National Conference.

As a NxtWave Scholar, I internalized these guiding principles:

- Develop a depth of knowledge about the school library profession.
- Be visible and engaged leaders in the professional community.
- Articulate an informed vision for the profession.
- Create and contribute to the knowledge base of the profession.

While these principles were developed for the NxtWave program, they apply to all current and future members of our profession, whether practitioners, researchers, or district leaders. These principles build on the early work of our predecessors and provide a bridge to the future of our profession.

Through another burst of collaborative innovation, the Lilead Project (established in 2011), led by director Dr. Ann Carlson Weeks, provided opportunities to study, support, and build community among school library leaders, specifically district library supervisors. In this national effort, the Lilead Survey (Weeks et al. 2017) collected empirical data, the Fellows Program offered professional development, and the Leaders Program provided professional education to all school library leaders. Mary Keeling, author of “A



Complicated Legacy Defines School Librarians as Teachers” in this issue, was a 2015–2016 Lilead Fellow. She went on to serve as AASL President (2019–2020), and currently teaches at the university level, a tribute to the success of the Lilead Project.

Our Moment and Our Future

As time moves forward, the vision becomes our moment and the portal to our future. Kathy Lester, our current AASL president, exemplifies this vision. Working collaboratively to develop empathetic critical thinkers and to build equitable, diverse, and inclusive school libraries, Lester serves as a role model to the entire profession. When elected in April 2021, she could not have foreseen the unprecedented surge in book challenges and book bans that we are currently experiencing nationwide. As part of her leadership role, Lester continues to develop and disseminate resources for school library professionals, with advice for action and safety during these difficult times. Her most recent blog addresses the need for school librarians to support each other and our essential work when faced with book challenges and polarized communities (Lester 2022).

Where Do We Go from Here?

We each set out on the path of school librarianship from our own home place, following the divergences

that present themselves in our own professional environment. We continue to exemplify AASL’s vision statement: “Every school librarian is a leader; every learner has a school librarian” (AASL 2022a). This fundamental role of the school librarian remains unchanged, yet it continues to be expressed in innovative ways as we share our foundational values to empower the young people we teach. Our students’ futures depend on us.



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A Complicated Legacy ✧ Defines School ✧ Librarians as Teachers





Mary Keeling

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A Complicated Legacy

How does the legacy of school librarianship inform the future of school librarians as teachers? We have engaged in a long and productive struggle to transform teaching and learning. Our history is complicated; our profession embodies several internal contradictions.

My Experience

My reading identity was formed in my school library. As a proto-obsessive fourth-grader, I frequently engaged my librarian, Mrs. Dugger, in my search for the next great read about horses. To her frustration, she failed to expand my genre repertoire; however, our conversations about stories made me a reader. Later, as a school librarian, my focus on reading receded as I embraced information literacy and the idea that kids learn best when the information search is connected to the curriculum. As a library supervisor, I championed the use of a district-wide inquiry process model to teach information literacy. My missionary zeal irritated many people, school librarians included.

Was my library the “heart of the school” (Certain 1918)? No, but it was integrated into the intellectual life of the classrooms. Did I achieve high levels of collaboration? Rarely.

Although the school welcomed the library’s support of classroom instruction through parallel efforts, it was never the “right time” for my principal to require teachers to co-plan, co-teach, and co-evaluate with me. Did my students become “effective users of ideas and information” (AASL 1988, 1)? I’ll never know. Some anecdotal evidence suggests that some of my students used information strategies they learned from me later when they were in middle school, but no statistically relevant measure of my impact on their learning exists. Did all of my district’s school librarians embrace the district’s Inquiry Process Model? Sadly, no. Many of them reported that their schools had other priorities.

My experience illustrates several of the internal contradictions in our profession.

- My state, unlike half of the United States, requires libraries and state-certified school librarians in every school.
- School library goals related to information literacy and collaboration are rarely supported by school-level policy, governance, and structures.
- My love for reading got me into this business, but in most official school

library channels information literacy and other educational innovations trump “reading for pleasure.”

As we look to our future, I believe we need to acknowledge and address these and other internal tensions. Wayne A. Wiegand has placed many factors of our complex legacy in their historical context in *American Public School Librarianship: A History* (Johns Hopkins University Press 2021). This article will address two of them: the power structures that govern our work in schools, and our concepts about books and information literacy.

Who Gets to Be a School Librarian?

Power structures determine who can be a school librarian, how school libraries are supported by legislation and funding, and the extent to which a librarian can achieve their goals.

We have had a long struggle for professional identity in both education and library worlds. The first set of school library standards was developed under the aegis of the National Education Association, not the American Library Association (Wiegand 2021, 61–64). Until AASL was established as a division in ALA, advocacy and leadership for school libraries bounced back

and forth between ALA and the larger—and more powerful—NEA, and efforts to co-develop standards extended to 1969 (Wiegand 2021). While there is a national consensus that the entry-level credential for public and academic librarians is an ALA-accredited master's degree in library science, many paths to school librarianship are determined by state law and educational licensing requirements. A school library credential may be an ALA-accredited master's degree, a Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation-accredited master's degree in education with a school library concentration, teaching experience plus a library endorsement earned through a variable number of accredited or non-accredited courses, local or state-level certificate programs, or a competency test (Kimmel et al. 2019; Kachel and Lance 2021a). Without guidance from the United States Department of Education (USDOE), these disparities are likely to continue (Yates 2022). In comparing course requirements of ALA-accredited MLIS degrees and CAEP-accredited library licensure programs, Judi Moreillon, Sue Kimmel, and Karen Gavigan found that readings and assignments in MLIS degree programs tend to favor the information specialist role of the school librarian and those in the education programs tend to favor the teacher role of the school librarian (2014).

It is no wonder that school library practice varies so much, or that some MLIS-degreed librarians regard some of their fellow school librarians as less well prepared for the profession.

Legislation and School Libraries

For a century we have been engaged in the struggle to achieve AASL's current vision that "every school librarian is a leader; every learner has a school librarian" (AASL 2022). We need federal legislation in place for this vision to become a reality. Up until now, local and regional policies have determined what school libraries can be and whether there are librarians in them.

The federal government establishes national educational policy and promotes policy through funding and guidance issued through the USDOE. Presently, there is no representation for school librarians at the USDOE and no guidance as to staffing and services in school libraries. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) defined a school library as:

An organized collection of printed and/or audiovisual and/or computer resources which is administered as a unit, is located in a designated place or places, and makes resources and services available to students,

teachers, and administrators. A library media center may be called a school library, media center, information center, instructional materials center, learning resource center, or any other similar name. (IES, NCES 2019, 19)

Note that this definition does not reference a school librarian or any other person in charge. By contrast, R. David Lankes has contended that "a room full of books is simply a closet, but. . .an empty room with a librarian in it is a library" (2011, 32). And yet many "school libraries" in the U.S. are without librarians.

Debra E. Kachel and Keith Curry Lance have used NCES data to show the disparities in librarian staffing throughout the country. They noted that ten states and the District of Columbia mandate school librarians and enforce the mandates, while another fourteen states mandate but do not enforce school library staffing standards. Kachel and Lance further concluded that library staffing is not correlated with funding. In schools that lost librarians in the last decade, the numbers of other school employees either stayed about the same, as with teachers, or increased, as with administrators and curriculum coordinators (2021b).

Wiegand noted that the most significant legislation for school libraries was Lyndon B. Johnson's Elementary and Secondary Education Act, passed in 1965 as part of his War on Poverty (2021, 151–52). Title II funding in this legislation provided \$900,000,000 for the purchase of library materials between 1966 and 1976, but there was little funding for school librarians (Wiegand 2021, 153). As I write this article on October 6, 2022, ALA and AASL announced that Senator Jack Reed (D-RI) and Representative Raúl Grijalva (D-AZ-03) introduced the bicameral Right to Read Act (S. 5064

For a century we have been engaged in the struggle to achieve AASL's current vision that "every school librarian is a leader; every learner has a school librarian" (AASL 2022). We need federal legislation in place for this vision to become a reality.

and H.R. 9056). If passed, this would be the first national funding since the 1960s designated specifically for school libraries.

Achieving Our Goals

Collaboration

We have tried to make library learning essential by connecting it with the curriculum. According to the *National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries*, “collaboration is integral to school librarians’ work as educators. . . [and] practicing coteaching positively affect[s] learners learning” (AASL 2018, 148). A checklist of success indicators includes:

- The school librarian participates in the implementation of collaboratively planned learning experiences by providing group and individual instruction, assessing student progress, and evaluating activities.
- The school library provides an environment in which collaboration, innovation, and creative problem solving thrive. (AASL 2018, 176)

It is easy to plan lessons and even units that support classroom learning; this action is fully within the individual’s control. Yet our standards challenge us to co-plan, co-teach, and co-evaluate with classroom teachers. Success in this level of collaboration is often beyond the practitioner’s immediate control. More often, systemic change is required to change the classroom-centric nature of schools. The power structures in place in a given school may determine that the librarian’s primary responsibility is to provide release time so classroom teachers can have unencumbered planning time. The kind of collaborative practice described in our literature requires full participation and

buy-in from other educators, starting with the principal, who is already balancing many competing demands on teachers’ time. School librarians have little chance of success at collaboration without extraordinary interpersonal and political gifts and a lot of very hard work.

What’s Our Purpose?

According to the ALA’s Library Bill of Rights, “all libraries are forums for information and ideas” (ALA 2019). Books are central to users’ experiences in libraries (Wiegand 2021, 8). As containers for ideas, books have power beyond their physical, tactile, and sensory characteristics to engender human connection and cement themselves in our collective consciousness as symbols. I believe that in a word-association game, most folks will say “books” or “story-time” in response to the prompt “library.”

Where do we stand with regard to books and reading in school libraries? In the struggle for relevance to educators, could we have compromised our association with story and the power of reading?

Wiegand has posited that early libraries collected “useful knowledge” to build capacity for production in the emerging industrial age. Then, school librarians prioritized “useful knowledge” connected to the curriculum and “quality literature” selected from vetted lists (Wiegand 2021, 39–40). As 1960s-era futurists predicted computer-enabled paperless information ecosystems, “useful knowledge” became “information” (Wiegand 2021, 217–18). Finally, “information literacy” became a central focus for school libraries (Wiegand 2021, 7). This is reflected in the AASL Standards, which since the 1980s have continued to refine and expand information and other kinds of

literacy as a primary focus of school libraries.

AASL continues to reference reading in its standards. For example, look at the common beliefs in the *National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries*. The statements “Reading is the core of personal and academic competency” and “Intellectual Freedom is every learner’s right” speak to the librarian’s role in “elevating” the learner’s literary experience and promoting their choice and agency as a reader (AASL 2018, 13). Does this adequately describe why our users read? Does it adequately describe why each of us reads?

Look, y’all: The struggle is real. Like AASL, I have staked my professional reputation on teaching information literacy through an inquiry process. Yet, there is nothing about that effort that engages the imagination like putting books in kids’ hands. Don’t you go all shimmery inside when you see a repurposed school bus bookmobile? Books, because they represent the power of story to connect humans across time and place, are our future. Mrs. Dugger, my librarian, knew this.

Multiple Expressions/Multiple Voices

As I have been writing and thinking about this article, I became convinced that our way forward is to honor multiple expressions of school librarianship. Why not just acknowledge that different states will choose different paths? Why not celebrate divergent forms of school library practice? Why not define what appropriate library work looks like for paraprofessionals, or for librarians who split time between buildings? If fully certified, great! And why can’t Librarian A center his library practice on books and reading, and Librarian B center her

practice on information literacy, and Librarian C center their practice on tinkering, making, and other forms of play, while Librarian D develops a completely online library experience? I believe the *National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries* support any of these paths to provide multiple opportunities for learners to develop their own reading and learning identities.

In today's political climate, I'm not optimistic about U.S. public education. I'm worried about teacher shortages, attacks on teachers and librarians, political gamesmanship that diverts funding from public schools, and, of course, the unprecedented number of book challenges. This is a time of crisis. But we've had crises before. Giving in to the status quo may be premature.

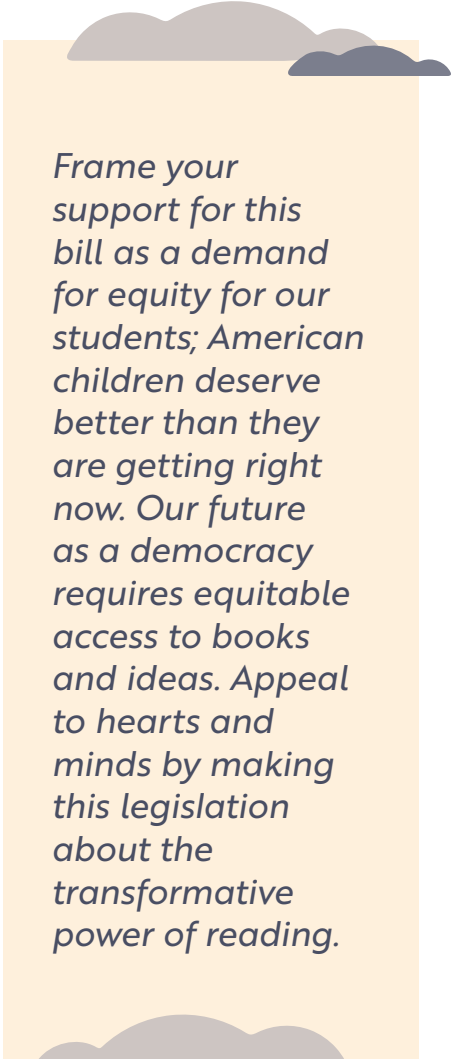
Influence the Power Structure

The Soviet launch of Sputnik in 1957 had a significant impact in the U.S. Sputnik spurred twenty years of the greatest federal investment in K–12 education in the last century through the National Defense Education Act (1958) and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965). The former supplemented funding for existing school libraries to make U.S. students more competitive in the sciences (Wiegand 2021, 127). ESEA was intended to provide equitable opportunity to all learners. Title II of ESEA poured millions of dollars into school library collections in every state so kids of all income levels would have access to new books. If you've ever weeded a book that was stamped "Title II Funding," you've touched history.

We may be in another such a moment. The Covid-19 pandemic laid bare the inequities of access to broadband Internet and other opportunities to access education across our country.

The introduction of the Right to Read Act is a response to the crisis of our day. If passed, the Right to Read Act will support hiring and training of state-certified school librarians, authorize funding up to \$600 million for school library materials, reaffirm the First Amendment rights of readers of all ages, and provide liability protection for teachers and librarians who provide access to reading materials (ALA Public Policy and Advocacy Office 2022).

This is our opening to influence the power structure that could enable a school library in every school. Use your voice and engage the voices of your teacher partners to support this bill. We are not alone; the NEA is an ally.



Frame your support for this bill as a demand for equity for our students; American children deserve better than they are getting right now. Our future as a democracy requires equitable access to books and ideas. Appeal to hearts and minds by making this legislation about the transformative power of reading.

The NEA's legislative agenda for 2022–2023 lists full funding for school librarians and school libraries as priorities (NEA 2022, 4, 9, 30). Frame your support for this bill as a demand for equity for our students; American children deserve better than they are getting right now. Our future as a democracy requires equitable access to books and ideas. Appeal to hearts and minds by making this legislation about the transformative power of reading.

To influence your principal and teacher colleagues, take steps to be a leader. Talk about your students' learning and reading success. Figure out how to track student progress. Negotiate to prioritize time and make space in the library for learner-centered inquiry and exploration. Center the story you tell on learners: How are they developing their reading identity? What insights do they have into the curriculum concept? Who helped someone solve a problem?

Make Literacy Central

Our job moving into the future is to make our libraries places where learners can engage with stories, develop their reading identities, and fall in love with learning. Whether you choose books and reading, information literacy, tinkering and gaming, or a virtual library as your focus, I believe we will continue to grow and prosper as a profession if we ground our work in the power of story.





Mary Keeling,
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University's Library and
Information Studies

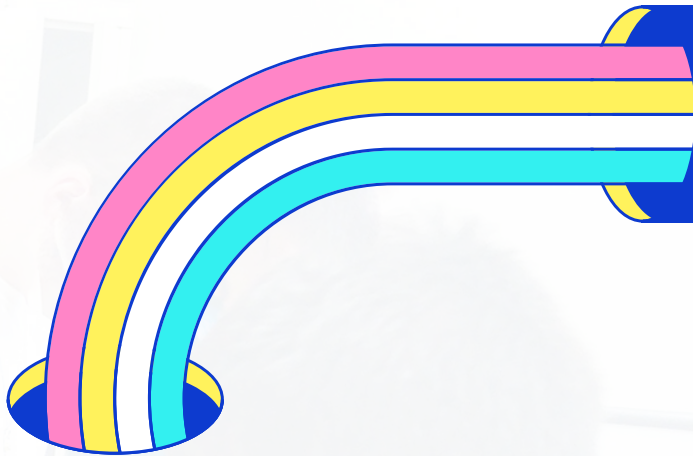
Program. Mary has worked in school, academic, and museum libraries, and in 2021 retired as Supervisor of Library Media Services in Newport News, Virginia. She is a past president of the American Association of School Librarians and of the Virginia Association of School Librarians, and chaired AASL's Standards and Guidelines Implementation Task Force, which developed a plan for launching AASL's National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries in 2017. She has written and taught courses for AASL's online learning platform, served on state and national committees, and written for school library journals. She is currently serving as AASL's representative to ALA's Committee on Professional Ethics. Mary has been married to a very patient man for forty years and has two adult children. In her spare time, she sews, lifts weights, and binge-reads mysteries, police procedurals, and some historical fiction. She got her start as a binge-reader in the fourth grade, when she read every horse book in the school library and then announced there was nothing left to read. She claims her nine years doing readers' advisory in an elementary school was well-deserved karma.

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**SCHOOL LIBRARIANS
AS INNOVATORS.
THE TRADITION
ENDURES AND
EXPANDS.**





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Innovation isn't change for the sake of change. It's driven by a sense of purpose and meaning. It's what happens when you say, "There's got to be a better way," and then you experiment and take creative risks to see what happens (Spencer and Juliani 2017, 95).

School Librarians have always been innovators and problem solvers. Historically, we were the early adopters of technology like overheads, VCRs, and the first versions of databases like LexisNexis. Librarians in the 90s gleefully purchased the first versions of e-books for their libraries and worked thousands of hours adding their book collections to early OPACs so that their patrons could access library resources using their new personal computers. Because of the innovative mindset of these and earlier school librarians, teachers have always known where to go when they needed new ideas, collaborations, or resources, and students have always come to librarians for the latest books, help with their classwork, or to discuss new directions in thinking.

Over the last few decades, school libraries have undergone a tremendous transformation. The technological age has ushered in a new type of library where online databases are king for research,

students are issued their own laptops in one-to-one districts, and the integration of technology into the school environment has become a major initiative in most schools. Consequently, librarians across the country have been faced with the idea that they must pivot to remain relevant in the school environment. We knew we must innovate or become obsolete.

Today the job of a school library professional looks very different from those of the past. These days, we have 3D printers, Raspberry Pi computers, laser engravers, and sewing machines available for our students. Librarians provide Cricut machines and teach collaborative lessons with Bee-Bot robots and Makey Makey kits. Libraries still offer books, but our collections have flipped from majority nonfiction to majority fiction, with the focus more on reading for pleasure since research today is largely conducted in online databases. We offer huge collections of e-books and digital audiobooks. Many of us have wholeheartedly embraced makerspaces, which foster innovative thinking, collaboration, creativity, and many other 21st-century skills our students will need when they enter the workforce. School libraries are still the campus source for information and research, but now they are also emerging as

community centers, safe spaces, and SEL (social-emotional learning) support locations.

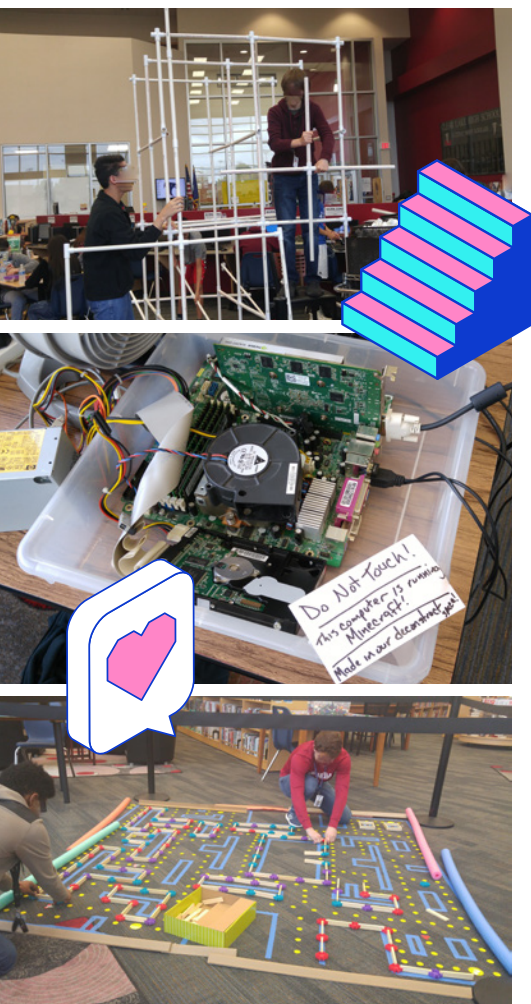
My Makerspace Story

Somewhere around 2010, I became aware of the maker movement and I began looking into the idea that perhaps makerspaces belonged in school libraries. For a while, I soaked in knowledge at conference maker sessions, lurked online in maker discussions, and haunted maker websites. While I recognized the value of the maker movement, I just wasn't sure it belonged in my high school library. When I finally understood that makerspaces were not only valuable but vital to our students, I wrote and received a \$5,000 grant I named Makerspace-a-Month, which would launch my makerspace program with one maker opportunity per month for a year. Since then, I have never looked back.

The authors of *Invent to Learn* express the value of makerspaces succinctly:

A makerspace offers the potential today for students to engage in the real work of mathematicians, scientists, composers, filmmakers, authors, computer scientists, and engineers, etc." (Martinez and Stager 2013, 245)

My engagement in the maker movement has transformed our library into an innovation center and the hub of the school. Together, my students and I have used Sphero robot balls and tape to create a life-size Pac-Man game.



We've used PVC pipe to create 40-foot structures that reached the library ceiling, and we have engaged in community builds that spanned multiple weeks, several combined tables, and dozens of building tools such as K'NEX and GraviTrax. My students have deconstructed computers and built other contraptions using those salvaged parts, such as a server for our Minecraft Pi units so students can game together.

These same students have made more than eight hundred items on our 3D printers and used our LEGO pieces to invigorate their creative thinking. In recent years, we have added a Moth Slam library club that performs slam poetry and does Moth-style storytelling at our campus. We have held drone races and built a wall-size piano using conductive paint and Arduino boards. Our most-recent accomplishment is an interactive mural installation that involved three departments at our high school collaborating and working together to accomplish the task. Our high school library also has a music jam zone where students make music together every day. The music jam zone includes an electronic keyboard, electronic drum kit, acoustic guitar, ukulele, bongo drums, bass guitar, and electric guitar. I have learned to embrace engaged chaos.

Benefits to Learners

One of the foundations of the maker movement is the idea that failure is not the end. It is only the beginning of innovative problem-solving and creative thinking. This idea fits in perfectly with the ethos of innovation and transformation that have always existed in school libraries. In *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*, the author wrote:

...failure can be a painful experience. But it doesn't define you. It's a problem to be faced, dealt with, and learned from. (Dweck 2008, 33)

I cannot express how much joy has been experienced by our students as a result of open-ended makerspace experiments that succeeded after several failed tries. However, joy is just the tip of the open-ended makerspace experience. This kind of organic learning has taught my students resilience, collaboration, and teamwork. They have taken a concept from idea to design and re-design, and eventually succeeded. They have engineered projects from start to finish learning many, many things along the way. They have improved their critical thinking skills, communication, and flexibility. They have learned to think outside the box to solve problems. They have persevered in the face of failure. When I reflect on the ways makerspace has transformed our library alongside our teachers and students, I feel overwhelmed with gratitude for the people who began this movement. Indeed, it has not only changed their lives but also mine.



My engagement in the maker movement has transformed our library into an innovation center and the hub of the school.



Curricular Connections

The next step in our innovation journey came from the knowledge that libraries also support curriculum, and that has not changed over the years and generations. This support is an important part of the legacy of libraries. From the desire to continue this service to our stakeholders came the curriculum-connected makerspace. At my high school we have engaged in many types of curriculum-connected makerspaces, such as using the cardboard challenge with our physics classes to make cardboard boats they must sail across the school swimming pool in races. Our green screen and 3D printers are often used in connection with project-based learning experiences, and we regularly collaborate with teachers using our makerspace to teach and reinforce the concepts students are learning in class. I also have several amazing colleagues in my district who are using KEVA planks to teach science, Sphero robots to teach history and coding, Bee-Bot devices to teach math, and much, much more.

Because of my choice years ago to include makerspace as part of my library program, my library has become a vital, thriving hub in our school. A lot of hard work has gone into that transformation, including much grant writing for funds alongside tremendous support from



our library director, district, and campus administration. However, the makerspace movement has not been the only factor in the transformation of our library. I have intentionally and consistently created a space that welcomes every student, and I have actively protected our students and our library as a safe space. The culture in our library is one of acceptance, and we have grown as a community as a natural outcome of that fact.

Libraries as Community Centers

We school librarians have a great deal to learn from public libraries. Public libraries have always served as

local gathering places in their towns as well as *de facto* community centers where the towns in question needed them to provide that space. Taking this cue from public libraries, many school libraries are increasingly focused on becoming community centers within their buildings. At my school, we are using that newly achieved power to provide monthly service projects and activities for our students. In that way, we are expanding their world view as we teach our students to become better citizens and to care for others in their adult life. One of my recent DonorsChoose grants was for the supplies needed to make bags



GOOD
VIBES
ONLY



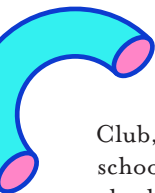
Libraries have always been places of innovation and learning. I have every confidence that we will come out of the other side of our current tribulations with even more of that staunch determination to stand up for the rights of all people that the librarians of the past taught us.

to hand out to people who are currently experiencing life without a home, so that was our first outreach activity this year. The project following that one will be to make pet beds, kerchiefs, and toys for local animal shelters. Always, we school librarians are reaching for more ways to serve our school communities, while also impacting learners' educational growth.

As Tracy Brower has written:

Strong communities have a significant sense of purpose. People's roles have meaning in the bigger picture of the community, and each member of the group understands how their work connects to others' and adds value to the whole. As members of community, people don't just want to lay bricks, they want to build a cathedral. (2020, 3)

Making your library a space where social communities are welcome is vital to increasing the use of your space and building your capacity for supporting your school community. One way to do this is to welcome special groups into your library during school lunchtimes, and before or after school. We have been working on this strategy for a couple of years at Clear Lake High School, and in library spaces we now host daily a Magic the Gathering card playing group, the Smash Brothers Gaming Club, LEGO Club, Chess



Club, and Cubing Club during school lunch and after school. We also have a room that can be booked for other club meetings on an as-needed basis, and it is well utilized by clubs and their sponsors.

Library Professional Learning Communities

Social media has been a tremendous boon for school librarian professional learning communities. Not only has social media connected librarians across the country, but also the world. Librarians are helping each other around the globe, sharing their successes and knowledge across all platforms, and their generosity has positively impacted libraries, librarianship, and, ultimately, learners. Speaking for myself, the kindness and generosity of other librarians on social media has helped me generate new ideas and increase grant funding for school library projects and programs. I've also been inspired to do more and serve more while increasing my capacity for quality, relevant, and engaging library instruction in support of curriculum. I would not be the librarian I am today without these amazing professionals. They are the foundation of my innovation.

Our Future

Libraries have always been places of innovation and learning. I have every confidence that we will come out of the other side of our current tribulations with even more of that staunch determination to stand up for the rights of all people that the librarians of the past taught us. Their legacy informs our actions now and into the future as we continue to be innovators on the leading edge of education, effectively supporting the curriculum, the school community, and those who have our hearts: our students.

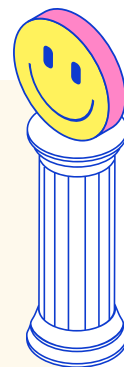


Shirley Dickey is librarian at Clear Lake High School, Clear Creek ISD, Houston, Texas. With thirty-five

years in education, she has presented at AASL and in Texas on topics such as 3D printing, genrefication, makerspaces, fake news, libraries as safe spaces, hot YA titles, and tech tools for libraries and their patrons. She is also a member of the podcast team for the *Unshushed Librarians* at <<https://sites.google.com/view/unshushedlibrarians/home>>. Shirley is a member of Texas Library Association (TLA), Texas Association of School Librarians, TLA's Young Adult Round Tables, Young Adult Library Services Association, Texas Computer Education Association, ALA, and AASL.

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Recommended Resources

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LEADING FROM THE HEART

in the School Library



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If I had to give one piece of advice to those who are interested in entering the field of school librarianship it would simply be this:

Relationships first. *Always.*

After many years working as a public school educator and school librarian, it is evident to me that the relationships we cultivate with our school library stakeholders—students, teachers, staff members, administrators, families, and community members—are *the* most critical ingredient to creating and maintaining vibrant modern-day school libraries. Relationships are truly the cornerstone of school libraries today, and without them, we cannot reach our full potential in our role as librarians. It is these relationships that grant us the power to have both a meaningful and widespread impact on our school communities.

Then vs. Now

Unfortunately, this emphasis on relationships did not exist when I embarked upon my career in education a quarter century ago. Instead, the focus was on academics. Common advice at the time was, “Don’t smile until winter break,” and some educators even scoffed at anything beyond teaching the

subject matter, calling it “fluff.” If we step even further back in time to the first school libraries, which were, quite simply, the mere placement of a book on the corner of a teacher’s desk in a one-room schoolhouse in the colonial period, it is clear that our field is rooted in access to information to support academics (ALA n.d.). Over time, individuals realized that by pooling resources, the benefit to the community was much more widespread. Ben Franklin noted in his autobiography published in 1791, “[B]y thus clubbing our books to a common library, we should, while we lik’d to keep them together, have each of us the advantage of using the books of all the other members, which would be nearly as beneficial as if each owned the whole” (Franklin 1916). Consequently, school libraries began as defined spaces within a learning community that housed resources for its members with school librarians working as both guardians and guides to information.

School libraries of today have moved well beyond these designated spaces that serve merely as warehouses of books, while we, as school librarians, maintain the tenets of access and intellectual freedom from times past even as we embrace a broader whole-child approach to instructional practices and programming. This

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shift is due to social-emotional learning making its way into the mainstream in 1995 with Daniel Goleman’s publication, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*, and, as the COVID-19 pandemic reminded all of us, social-emotional learning has become a critical part of students’ success both socially and academically in classrooms and school libraries alike (Edutopia 2011).

School libraries of today, often referred to as the heart of the school, are vibrant, human-centered spaces that promote camaraderie and the exchange of ideas. They are responsive, adaptive, and evolving in an ever-changing informational and technological landscape. Their influence pulses throughout a school and can be felt well beyond the walls of the designated library space: in the hallways and classrooms throughout the school, and even in the community at large. At the helm of this critical work in our schools is an unsung hero in education today: the school librarian. In *American Public School Librarianship: A History*, Wayne A. Wiegand challenged us to redefine what he has called “School Library as Place” (2021, 12). Rather than holding onto our past where libraries are sacred spaces focused solely on housing resources for a school community, perhaps we should acknowledge our modern-day school libraries as a *feeling*—one that is shared widely and unabashedly, so it becomes enmeshed throughout a school and is unmistakably felt throughout a school community by its stakeholders and even visitors.

School library as a feeling is not something that happens by accident

At the helm of this critical work in our schools is an unsung hero in education today: the school librarian.

or even organically. To create this sense of feeling, we as school librarians must work diligently and deliberately to disrupt antiquated thinking about our roles and our spaces, and make a conscious effort to make people feel welcome, seen, and valued through our space, our collection, our programming, and our presence. Through a mindset of leading with our hearts, we can promote a positive culture and climate, which is vital for all we set out to accomplish in our school communities. At the core of this work are *relationships*.

A Lesson From Hannah

I was reminded of the power of relationships on my very first day as a school librarian, a day I will never forget. What felt like a seemingly brief interaction with an anxious

sixth-grade student named Hannah that day turned out to be the impetus for everything we do in our school library each day since.

The first day of middle school is a day filled with anxiety for many students, especially for our youngest, the sixth-grade students, and I certainly felt it along with them. After all, I had just left the classroom after seventeen years of teaching English language arts and social studies to seventh- and eighth-grade students in the same middle school since graduating from college. Four years prior, I went back to school to become certified as a school information specialist. This change was met with some resistance. Naysayers around me expressed doubts about my plans for this new role. “Won’t you be incredibly bored?” my parents interrogated. “I don’t want to lose you in the classroom,” my then principal retorted upon hearing the news. On that first day in late August 2015, I found myself standing in the largest learning space in the school—the school library—wondering if I had made the right decision.

Just as my own uncertainties in this new role threatened to swallow me, Hannah entered the school library. She hesitantly walked in with a teaching assistant several paces behind her. She glanced all around the space with her gaze rapidly moving from left to right, seemingly overwhelmed by the vastness of the space and the books lining the walls around her. As I promptly approached her and warmly introduced myself to her, she immediately blurted out that she did not like to read. Her face quickly contorted and reddened as her eyes welled up with tears. She again blurted out, “I don’t like school.”

I asked her if she would like to color with me and ushered her to our makerspace area, which, at that



time, was simply a long wooden table next to several bookshelves full of community-donated supplies and others I had scavenged myself. For about ten minutes, she and I sat together and colored while chatting about our summer break and the activities we like to do in our free time, making all kinds of connections between our lives. When it was time for Hannah to head out to class, her tears had dried, the redness in her cheeks had faded, and she left with a slight smile. As she exited the library, I told her she was welcome to come back anytime, and that I hoped to see her again soon.

Hannah returned to the school library the next day and pretty much every day she could after that. What started as a simple interaction turned into daily visits where she explored, tinkered, and devised all sorts of wonderful creations in our makerspace—many of which we discussed together and proudly displayed at our circulation desk for all to see. She later branched out from working independently and talking only to me to working and chatting with her peers and making new friends.

And then there was that day when she asked me for a book recommendation. This sixth-grade girl who declared she did not like to read and did not like school had become comfortable enough with our school library and felt safe enough with me that she was willing to take a risk and try reading a book. After some time browsing together, it was clear she was drawn to the graphic novels of Raina Telgemeier and Victoria Jamieson. She later read everything we had on hand by these two authors and any other graphic novel that had a similar art style.

By the time Hannah was in eighth grade, she was an avid reader, checking out books regularly and reading an array of book genres and formats. She was full of joy and confidence, and her enthusiasm for the library was infectious. The school library had become her safe place—a place she could always count on throughout her three years in middle school. A place that was welcoming and accessible and always there for her. A place that helped her find her voice and her strengths and eventually helped her gain the confidence to fly.

Five Areas of Focus

To create a human-centered library that emphasizes the value of relationships, I focus on five areas in my own school library: space, collection, instruction, programming, and self-care. Within each of these

Through a mindset of leading with our hearts, we can promote a positive culture and climate, which is vital for all we set out to accomplish in our school communities.



strands, except for self-care, student voice takes a prominent role:

- **Space:** Our school library is an inviting, flexible, and accessible space that is responsive to our patrons' needs and interests. I consider the overall aesthetic and psychology of the space from placement of furniture to digital and print displays to even the music we play throughout our library and the feelings it evokes. When I have any doubts, I turn to our school community and seek either informal or formal input to guide my decision-making.
- **Collection:** I continue to work diligently to maintain a collection full of materials that are diverse, accessible, and relevant to our students and staff. These materials are organized and displayed in a manner that strives to engage and entice our readers and ultimately get books into their hands.
- **Instruction:** With a great emphasis on experiential or "sticky" learning, I find ways to bring learning to life for our students. I try to make authentic connections to real-world experiences and even bring in experts in a field to support our instruction and make learning more meaningful for our students whenever possible.
- **Programming:** Our library's programming is constantly evolving as a way to meet students' needs. To develop programming that is relevant and engaging for our students, I need to stay up on the latest interests and trends, and really listen to the conversations happening throughout the school and around the library.
- **Self-Care:** The reality is we cannot pour our hearts out for others if we do not take care of ourselves first. For me, this means finding my people. It can feel lonely at times being the only individual holding my position in my school, but I am fortunate to have some incredibly supportive coworkers. I have also found some amazing people on Twitter and built a strong professional learning network I can lean on for support or ideas.

To explore more specific and actionable ideas to implement in your school library, please visit bit.ly/leadfromtheheart and do not

hesitate to share your own ideas in this crowdsourced Padlet.

Leveraging the Power of Relationships

Taking a human-centered approach to school librarianship and leading with your heart opens up doorways to so many possibilities and allows us to build upon the foundational work of those who came before us while our practices evolve to meet the diverse needs of our school communities. Consequently, this means our role may expand well beyond teacher-librarian to



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innovator, trailblazer, maker, cheerleader, community builder, or change agent, just to name a few. By emphasizing relationships and relationship-building, we become much better equipped to recognize and anticipate the needs of our patrons, which, in turn, allows us to transform our spaces and even ourselves to serve them in ways that school librarians of the past could not.

We develop warm and welcoming spaces that address the social-emotional needs of our school community in a time when mental health is more important than ever.

We champion access and intellectual freedom in an age when these are being increasingly threatened.

We create learning playgrounds based on a culture of “yes,”

embracing risk, failure, vulnerability, and grit.

We advocate for marginalized and underrepresented groups through our collections and programming.

We provide “mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors” (Bishop 1990) not just through books but also through instructional technology tools.

We embrace technology and are leaders in navigating both the digital and print information landscape.

And we *clearly* do so much more than sit behind a desk to check out books and shush students all day long.

“Lifesaving Librarians”

While relationships are a critical ingredient for all we accomplish within our school libraries, the

reality is we as school librarians hold the power in creating a welcoming space to cultivate these relationships. In *Starfish* Lisa Fipps wrote about “Lifesaving Librarians”: “It’s unknown how many students’ lives / librarians have saved / by welcoming loners at lunch” (2021, 36). It is our responsibility to find ways to connect with our patrons—even when some may be hard to reach. If we take the time to pay attention and ask the right questions, we may find that a seemingly insignificant interaction turns into much more. As I experienced with Hannah, a small connection has the potential to metamorphose into something much bigger and certainly can go a long way in the critical work we do to serve and support people in our school communities. We truly hold the power to change lives when we lead with our hearts.

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LET THEM READ COOKBOOKS

Food Literacy Is Literacy



Karyn Hlad Miller

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Teachers and school librarians know that giving students the freedom to choose what to read from a variety of materials is the most effective way to foster a love of reading. Curiosity, pre-existing interests, or even a desire for connection cause students to reach for books that inform instead of entertain (Ahlfeld 2020). But a genre of books is often left out of a school library's nonfiction collection: cookbooks. Food is our greatest common denominator, which makes books about food our most-accessible subject. Cookbooks and food-related books are perfect for fostering connections among learners as they read to improve their literacy skills. I recommend that teachers and school librarians consider cookbooks or nonfiction food stories when offering reading materials to students. Now is an optimal time to embrace the promotion of cookbooks to support multiple literacies. The isolation during the pandemic was tough on kids in the moment and caused a real setback in practicing social skills, but now our students have opportunities to reengage with one another. I see cookbooks as a prompt towards connection. Having a project (cooking) or a conversation starter (food) can ease the tension in many social interactions with friends,

family, and community. As a bonus, in these times of acrimonious social divides and the need for greater connections within our populace, sharing food and food stories can build bridges between learners bringing various experiences and cultural heritages to the discussions.

Unfortunately, nonfiction, including cookbooks, is often an underappreciated aspect of the school library. Jennifer M. Graff and Courtney Shimek, professors at the University of Georgia and West Virginia University respectively, have described the impact of children's nonfiction literature as profound. Their research suggests that nonfiction could "demonstrate and invite interconnectedness among people and disciplines rather than individualism" (2020, 224). The potential for incorporating exciting and beneficial nonfiction books in school libraries has never been greater. With many textbooks, required readings, and nonfiction reference resources moved out of the library onto online digital platforms, the nonfiction section is no longer primarily the realm of instructors.

As a grad student, I interned with Stephanie Steele, a middle school librarian at Culbreth Middle School in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. She told me that during her six years at

that library she has experienced this shift firsthand. I benefitted from seeing what she had done to change the focus of the Culbreth school library's nonfiction collection away from teacher resources and toward students' interests. Of course, the transition from a textbook-like nonfiction collection to a student-centered one can have only a positive influence on student interest in reading. A 2007 study from Western Michigan University found that for best student engagement, "[t]he largest portion of the nonfiction collection... should be devoted to books for student voluntary reading" (Young, Moss, and Cornwell 2007, 7).

The cookbook collection in your school library can also serve to supplement the digital media consumed by kids. YouTube and TikTok are popular sources for cooking instruction. Netflix has several food shows that are of interest to kids, such as the *Great British Baking Show*, *Nailed It!*, and *Salt Fat Acid Heat*, all of which have companion cookbooks. In addition, food historian Jessica B. Harris's book *High on the Hog* was the basis for the 2020 Netflix limited series of the same name. Reading *High on the Hog: A Culinary Journey from Africa to America* (Bloomsbury USA 2012) would support the American

History essential standards for high school students who are required to analyze cultural contributions because of voluntary and involuntary immigration trends.

Many popular movies, television shows, and books have companion cookbooks (both official and unofficial) based on food inspired by the original production. Star Wars, Doctor Who, Harry Potter, Twilight, Little Women, and Hunger Games are just a few examples. A quick online search will yield many more! Adding these books to the nonfiction shelves—or better yet, putting them on display—could encourage kids who’ve seen the movie or show that inspired a cookbook to read it. Judith Hendershot and Barbara Moss studied sixth-graders’ engagement with nonfiction and found that one in four sixth-graders chose nonfiction books based on personal connection they feel to the material (2002, 13). Let’s help young readers make those connections.

Additionally, cookbooks not already affiliated with other media could be paired with fiction books to increase students’ interest in reading. Fiction fans who lack culinary literacy and kids interested in cooking who are not passionate readers would all benefit. Display books designed to be checked out together. For example, pair Jenna Evans Welch’s YA novel *Love and Gelato* (Simon & Schuster 2016) with a gelato cookbook. For younger readers, present classics like Lucy Maud Montgomery’s *Anne of Green Gables* with a cookbook featuring summer drinks or layer cakes, and C. S. Lewis’s *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* with a candy cookbook bookmarked at a recipe for Turkish Delight.

Food-Focused Books Support Standards

There is no shortage of food-centric books for kids. In fact,

some publishers focus exclusively on books about food. Readers to Eaters of Bellevue, Washington, was cofounded in 2009 by Philip Lee and June Jo Lee with the mission to promote food literacy. According to Philip Lee’s bio on the Readers to Eaters website, his work in educational reporting showed him that “youth obesity, hunger, and lack of access to good foods are major obstacles for children learning in school” (Readers to Eaters n.d.). In 2021 Ten Speed Press, an imprint of Random House, launched 4 Color Books, a new imprint in partnership with award-winning chef Bryant Terry. This new imprint collaborates with BIPOC chefs and other creatives to produce nonfiction books “that inspire readers and give rise to a more healthy, just, and sustainable world for all” (Penguin Random House 2021). While not focused exclusively on children’s publishing, the titles from 4 Color Books will appeal to high school students. For example, *Black Food*, edited and curated by Bryant Terry (4 Color Books 2021), includes essays and recipes from dozens of Black voices, as well as interviews, artwork, and a music playlist for each chapter. If your collection is light on books about cooking and healthy eating, looking at the offerings from these publishers—and others—is a good place to start.

If a buy-in to cookbooks as legitimate reading is proving to be a challenge at your school, consider sharing with classroom teachers the potential for multiple literacies that cookbooks and food-centric books can provide. Cookbooks and food-related books can be tie-ins to standards for almost any subject. Most obviously, cookbooks easily incorporate math and chemistry lessons through their recipes. On the humanities side, social studies standards from early elementary through high school incorporate the

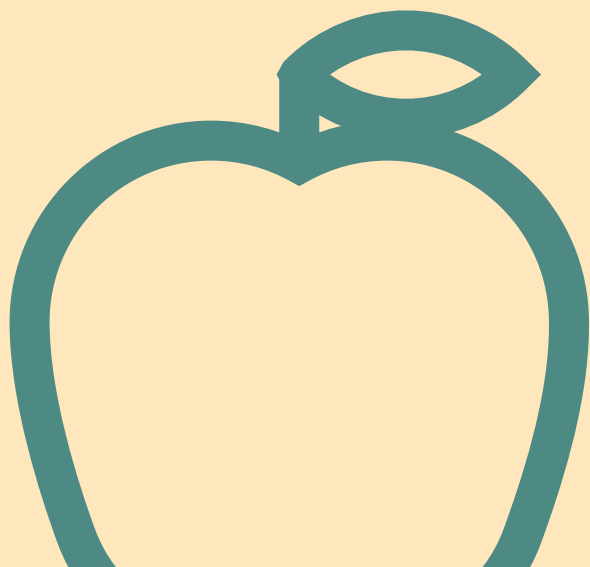
concepts of culture, values, beliefs, people, places, and environments (NCDPI 2021). Each of the concepts addressed in social studies standards can be examined through food. For example, the popular picture book *Magic Ramen* by Andrea Wang (Little Bee Books 2019) tells the story of how Momofuku Ando invented instant ramen in response to seeing hungry people waiting in long lines for food. Andrea Wang, along with illustrator Jason Chin, received the 2022 Caldecott Medal for their book *Watercress* (Neal Porter 2021) about an immigrant family’s connection with the food from their homeland and family members’ varying perspectives on food and food insecurity.

Supporting the elementary history essential standard of understanding how individuals have influenced the history of local and regional communities can be shown through the reading of *Sweet Justice: Georgia Gilmore and the Montgomery Bus Boycott* by Mara Rockliff and illustrated by R. Gregory Christie (Random House 2022). *Our Little Kitchen* by Jillian Tamaki (Abrams 2020) is a colorful picture book in celebration of the vibrancy of community kitchens, inspired by the author’s time volunteering in her neighborhood’s community kitchen. In my state, middle school educators will be able to support students in the Career and Technical Education (CTE) North Carolina Standard Course of Study program areas of agricultural education, and marketing and entrepreneurship education through the reading of Mark Kurlansky’s *Frozen in Time: Clarence Birdseye’s Outrageous Idea about Frozen Food* (Delacorte 2014).

Food-Focused Education Resources Abound

School librarians are not alone in promoting literacy through food. Dozens of farms, culinary centers,

FOOD is our greatest common denominator,
which makes books about food
our most-accessible subject.
Cookbooks and food-
related books are perfect for
FOSTERING CONNECTIONS
among learners as they read to
improve their literacy skills.



and food education organizations are working with schools across the country to promote literacy through a focus on food and awareness of healthy eating habits through hands-on experiences. For example, the Jones Valley Teaching Farm in Birmingham, Alabama, collaborates with teachers from local schools to use a food-based education model for academic exploration, leadership, and pursuit of post-secondary pathways (JVTF 2022). Through the Jones Valley Teaching Farm's Center for Food Education, students in grades K–12 participate in inquiry-based learning at school-based farms supporting all subject areas. For example, third-grade students learn the origins of Soul Food and how it played a part in the Civil Rights Movement (Fifolt 2018). Maybe you can find a similar organization in your area.

School Garden Doctor based in Napa, California, collaborates with teachers and students through food-centered programs such as Dirt Girls and Common Core Cooking. Their website <<https://schoolgardendoctor.org>>

<www.midwestfoodconnection.org> might give you inspiration for programs at your school.

In Minnesota, Midwest Food Connection (MFC) has been teaching food lessons to children in the Twin Cities since 1994. MFC instructors guide students in grades K–8 through lessons that explore native foods such as wild rice and local foods from Minnesota farms while focusing on the connection between food and health. Of interest to educators outside the MFC service area are recipes and links at the website <www.midwestfoodconnection.org> to resources from other organizations.

The Food Project based in Lincoln, Massachusetts, employs 120 diverse teenagers every year to cultivate land in urban and suburban areas. In addition to agricultural tasks, the teenagers in the program work with hunger relief organizations and study ways to improve food access to underserved neighborhoods. You can download their free cookbook, *Sprouting Chefs*, and see other resources at <<https://thefoodproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Sprouting-Chefs.pdf>>.

The Food Literacy Center in Sacramento, California, instructs students at sixteen local under-resourced elementary schools about nutrition and gardening. In conjunction with a local farm, the Food Literacy Center opened a brand-new cooking school in November of 2021 adjacent to one of the elementary schools. You and your students can see a wealth of recipes (some with videos) at the website <www.foodliteracycenter.org>.

Partnerships

Advocating for food literacy in the library and classroom need not be a solo endeavor. To help you encourage learners' enthusiasm and curiosity about reading, food, and the world around them, consider reaching out to local chefs, restaurant owners, or teachers for food-related lessons from an expert. Ideally, these lessons are hands-on opportunities. For example, Hillary Marshall, a librarian at Washougal High School in Washington state (D'Orio 2022), partnered with her school's culinary instructor who prepared Puerto Rican food with the kids after they



COOKBOOKS and
FOOD-RELATED
BOOKS can be tie-ins
to standards for almost
any subject.

read Elizabeth Acevedo's *With the Fire on High* (Quill Tree 2019). In this way, cookbooks can be made appealing to all readers, especially kids and teens who prefer to learn by doing. Having a tangible representation of their reading in the form of a drink, baked good, or meal is a way for students to see the impact learning from books can have on their lives. We can offer no better genre than cookbooks to help young people produce physical (and delicious) results at school and at home.

Maybe a local restaurant or store would be willing to provide supplies to make tea at school. This activity could be paired with *Luli and the Language of Tea* by Andrea Wang (Neal Porter 2022), a book that discusses various methods of preparing and drinking tea around the world. The picture book *Chaiwala!* by Priti Birla Maheshwari introduces the spices involved in making chai tea. If you are lucky, someone in your school might know someone who could demonstrate the Japanese tea ceremony or whip up a batch of chai tea in your library. Even showing a food- or beverage-preparation video can introduce kids to different cultures and perspectives, show students how reading connects to their physical world, and help them associate reading with exciting and new experiences.

For students or schools without access to the resources to make food, book clubs involving cookbooks and food-related nonfiction could still be a vehicle for connection, literacy, and learning. Community members could get involved here, too. Guest speakers at a book club meeting could participate in a discussion about recipes in a cookbook focused on a specific country's cuisine. Learners could share descriptions of similar recipes or meals that their family makes. These opportunities could encourage connection between students as well as between

individuals and books. On a broader scale, for National Hispanic Heritage Month, Asian Pacific American Heritage Month, and Black History Month, your library could feature cookbooks and food-related stories as part of the celebration. Community members could be involved here, too.

Capitalize on Personal Connections with Food

In my peripatetic life two types of spaces have been constant for me: libraries and kitchens. As a recent library school graduate and a former pastry chef I know the potential of both books and food to nourish our minds and our overall well-being. Of all the strategies used by teachers and school librarians to promote reading, finding a topic of common interest is one of the most effective. Because we all eat, cookbooks and stories about food are sure to entice readers of all ages. Everyone has a personal connection with food. As educators, let's take advantage of that fact. Culinary literacy resources are abundant in a variety of formats and can be used to support teachers and students across multiple disciplines.



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to refugee farmers with *Orange Literacy* at
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She has been a middle school art teacher,
tutored middle school ELLs, and a public library
volunteer. She is interested in the opportunities
and connections between libraries and culinary
literacy, food, and food insecurity. She grew up
on a campground in southeastern Ohio and now
resides in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, where
she checks out as many cookbooks from the public
library as she can carry.

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ENGAGING STUDENTS THROUGH WORDLESS PICTURE BOOKS DURING STORY TIME



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Stories. Librarians love stories, and libraries are among the few forums that can offer exposure to collections of stories in various formats as well as encourage independent exploration and group discussion. While in the school library, students also experience opportunities to soak in a story, take time to see the characters from varying points of view, and practice storytelling skills.

Storytelling or retelling helps students develop the ability to describe and organize details and events. Strong retelling skills can potentially lead to positive outcomes such as increased comprehension. These are ideas and pedagogical methods we are familiar with.

We read, encourage talking, writing about, and searching for stories, but this is text-based. What of the students new to the English language, so text and language are inaccessible to them? What if the books are without words? How should we implement the ideas and pedagogy we know so well? In fact, the library experience for an English Language Learner (ELL) can be different from their classroom experience if we as school librarians can reduce the pressure to perform. Dual-language students that are newer to the English language can be

Could a wordless picture book be an opportunity to encourage students new to the English language to approach books and to experiment with English?

hesitate to comment or participate in group discussions. Many students fear mispronouncing or incorrectly reading a word, making a mistake in front of their peers. To do so is upsetting and embarrassing. Students I have taught have become authority figures while at home. Parents working, lack of childcare, and many other reasons saddle these children with adult responsibilities outside of school. At nine years old, it is difficult to continue to perceive oneself as an authority figure after publicly making a mistake. Regularly scheduled class visits to the library or other times in the library can provide opportunities that allow all students—including ELLs—to explore both oral and text-based language without fear of making mistakes.

A wordless picture book offers a different experience than hearing or attempting to read a picture book with text. When a wordless picture book is presented, every reader has the opportunity to tell the story in their own voice, effectively integrating the reader into the storytelling process (Wiesner 1992). Could a wordless picture book be an opportunity to encourage students new to the English language to approach books and to experiment with English?

Even though students in my library are encouraged to speak and write in either their native language or in English, fear of publicly making a mistake can prevent many from participating in a discussion. To all but eliminate the pressure to perform, students with a range of fluencies are partnered to work together to decide which words would be best as they collaborate on how to communicate what they see. Yet, many students struggling with language will still not volunteer or participate. It is those students sitting quietly, hoping no one calls on them to answer because their basic English language skills may not be strong enough to answer an academic question, who may benefit from a chance to become the storyteller in either language.



Students created a shared experience, one that differed slightly with each class or group—a shared experience they could recall with excitement and without fear of being “wrong.” The story offered an opportunity to explore language in unique way they may not otherwise have had.



Taking a Fresh Look

One day, as I was checking out materials for a class, I heard two boys laughing and giggling. Handing a book back to a student after it had been checked out, I set down the scanner and walked over to the boys, watching them as they were pointing and falling over on each other, laughing out loud as they talked through the story. Shocked, I stood quietly listening as two boys who usually say next to nothing while in the library shared the experience of a story. As soon as they noticed I was there, each boy asked for a copy of David Wiesner’s nearly wordless *Tuesday* (Clarion 1991). From that point on, during each weekly class visit to the library, they asked for “one more.”

An important piece of this story is that the boys were both ELLs. They spoke very limited English, but in Wiesner’s *Tuesday*, they discovered the story together and became the storytellers in their first language. Scouring my library for other wordless picture books, I found works by Chris Van Allsburg, Lois Ellert, Aaron Becker, Mitsumasa Anno, and many others. I gathered them up and made them available to anyone who wanted to look through these books at the end of class while we checked out books. The boys who enjoyed *Tuesday* loved the books! So did other students. As I watched them pour over the stories I wondered, could a wordless picture book be used during story time?

I thought about the boys again, this time through the lens of someone learning a new language. They came to the library every week with their class. They listened to a story but may have understood only small amounts of it, were not fluent enough to participate in a discussion in English, and had an almost palpable fear of making a mistake. But with *Tuesday*, not only

did they tell the story, but they retold it to their classmates (and anyone who would listen). Even though they were mostly speaking in their native language, this shared experience led to a greater willingness to explore and use their new language. It was *their* version of the story. They could use any words they chose without fear of making a mistake.

Integrating a Wordless Book into Story Time

But how could a wordless picture book work for a story time? Initially when I introduced a wordless picture book, the students looked at me in disbelief. It must have been a trick or test of some kind, and so they began pointing out all the places they saw words—generally not reading the words, just pointing out their position on the front or back covers. Students were confused. How could they tell me what the story was about if there were no words printed on the pages? One student more fluent in English suggested the book was probably cheaper without the words. The rest of the students conferred with each other in English and Spanish, then nodded in agreement.

To begin “reading” the story the students were asked to describe what they saw, but the responses were slow—painfully slow. Again, they thought it was some sort of trick or test. Gradually, slowly, we talked about the characters we saw in the illustrations. Who were they? What were they doing? What were we learning about them? What did we see in the pictures that told us about the setting and what was happening?

As we moved deeper into the story, and the students got to know the characters and the adventure, the excitement grew. The students became part of the story and became the tellers of the story. They were creating the words for the picture book. This act alone filled them with

immense pride. They “wrote” this story.

During story time with wordless picture books the opportunity to become the storyteller allowed the students to explore language without fear. Students with varying levels of fluency in English enjoyed expressing themselves and, interestingly, would often use more-academic language as the storyteller than they did during a more-structured class discussion. The level of engagement demanded by wordless picture books is comparable to the process of language learning and general communication. Opportunities to experience wordless picture books—to become storytellers—can have a significant impact on language learning.

As we explored other wordless or nearly wordless picture books, we began writing about some of what we saw. Using the smart board and a Word document, I followed the “I do, we do, you do” model and would type in some of the words the group collaborated on. At first, the focus was on their weekly words or challenge words in both English and Spanish. But as we grew comfortable with the process we stretched to small sentences. Gradually, I would leave our creations up on the board, while they worked in groups to describe what they saw on the next page, or what the characters were doing, or (one of our standards) what was the main idea of the story.

To place the students in groups, I worked carefully with the teachers to make sure each student would have the opportunity to become part of the conversation and outcome. The rules were that they could speak and write in English or Spanish—or both—and spelling did not count. Initially, they were hesitant. Once they discovered they really could speak and write in either language or both, and spelling would not be

corrected, their output increased. When copies of their weekly words were made available in the library, the output began to surprise their teachers.

Additional Benefits

Wordless picture books can elicit a deeper level of engagement as well. The lack of words requires students to dive into the images to pull out the story and then use their words to create the story. During this process, a beautiful cultural component emerges as well. Students tell the story through their experiences and backgrounds. Using the boys as an example, they brought a perspective to *Tuesday* different from mine and

*The wordless and nearly
wordless books open doors
to reading for all readers,
including reluctant readers.*

some of their classmates because in some Spanish-language-based cultures, frogs are considered good luck, bringers of good fortune and much more. Therefore, the story created by the boys when they looked at Wiesner’s illustrations had a very different focus for them than it might for other students. These cultural elements the boys discovered in the book allowed them to connect to each other and to the story.

As when the boys read *Tuesday* together, when the wordless picture books were “read” together during story time, students interacted with the story elements in a deeply personal way. Students created a shared experience, one that differed slightly with each class or group—a shared experience they could recall

with excitement and without fear of being “wrong.” The story offered an opportunity to explore language in unique way they may not otherwise have had.

Wordless picture books can help to build a culturally responsive classroom, and help to eliminate potential language barriers and many other challenges faced when learners read or talk about text-based books. Wordless—and almost wordless—picture books can be included in library classrooms in many ways. The books can simply be available for the students to enjoy and create their own stories. Wordless picture books can be used in small groups to encourage writing or sequencing. Also, well-constructed visual narratives provide students with opportunities to develop their understanding of words and images, use their imaginations and context clues to derive meaning, develop retelling skills, and discuss story elements. We can model the process, guide the process, or just sit back and let the learners explore.

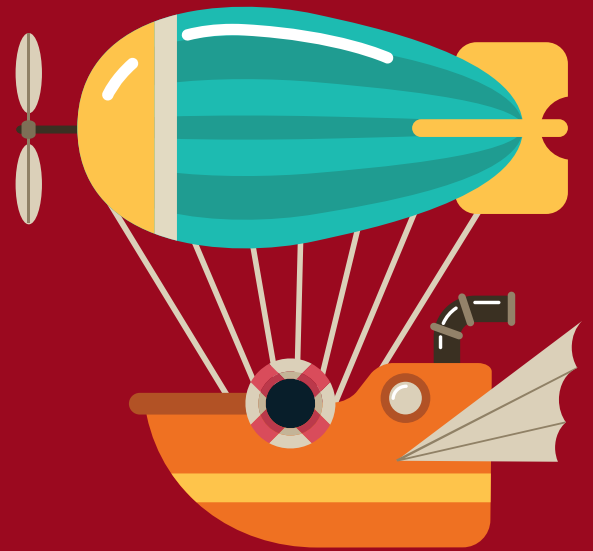
I have learned more about my students and their experiences while listening to them describe a page from Aaron Becker’s *Journey* than I ever thought possible. Students also learn about each other: where they have come from, what they’ve experienced, and how they view the world. Learners develop a much deeper understanding of and appreciation for their classmates and themselves. This was true for native English speakers as well. Native English speakers were excited to create the story together, enjoyed working together and were patient with each other. The wordless and nearly wordless books open doors to reading for all readers, including reluctant readers.

Additionally, students were more eager to explore texts they had previously passed by. I witnessed an

Here is a short list of authors who have created wordless—or nearly wordless—picture books. This is list just a starting point. Many other authors have created books that will let your learners create their own stories.

Aaron Becker
Alexandra Day
Amy Nielander
Anne Belov
Anno (Mitsumasa Anno)
Barbara Lehman
Beatrice Blue
Bill Thomson
Chris Van Allsburg
Daniel Miyares
David Wiesner
Elisha Cooper
Eric Rohmann
Guojing
Henry Cole
Issa Watanabe
Istvan Bonyai
Jeannie Baker
JiHyeon Lee

JonArno Lawson
Juan Felipe Herrera
Liam Francis Walsh
Lizi Boyd
Lois Ellert
Mark Teague
Matthew Cordell
Mercer Mayer
Molly Idle
Peggy Rathmann
Peter Spier
Raúl Colón
Shaun Tan
Shutta Crum
Stephanie Graegin
Suzy Lee
Thao Lam
Tomie dePaola



Reluctant readers who either do not wish to read or are willing to read only lower-level text can benefit from the unique features of the wordless picture book, resulting in increased comprehension and greater love of reading.

increased willingness to take risks and be seen publicly taking risks. Students who were in the process of learning English exhibited a greater level of confidence than they had in the past, even though they were still learning a new language. Those same two boys who so enjoyed experiencing Wiesner's *Tuesday* began reading and sharing books by Eric Carle, early readers, and then early chapter books and graphic novels in both languages.

More Reasons to Offer Wordless Picture Books

Research suggests that—particularly for ELL students—the extent of reader engagement is different for picture books with and without words. It is the level of engagement that enables the reader to become a co-constructor of meaning in the transaction with these texts (Arizpe, Colomer, and Roldan 2015). This difference in engagement was evident when my students, instead of listening to a story they only partially understood, enthusiastically collaborated to create their own story using words they felt were best, and then retelling that story in both languages to others.

According to Belinda Louie and Jarek Sierschynski, when “reading” wordless picture books, individuals generally experience higher concentration, leading to increased comprehension, a crucial step in using text to gain knowledge (2015). Students who struggle with language are not the only ones to benefit from experiences with wordless picture books. Reluctant readers who either do not wish to read or are willing to read only lower-level text can benefit from the unique features of the wordless picture book, resulting in increased comprehension and greater love of reading.

Other aspects of reading, literacy, and learning can benefit from the use of wordless picture books. Consider that traditional text has had a privileged position within classrooms, but we construct meaning in our world through images, symbols, colors, signs, body language (in person and in videos), gaps and margins, and printed text. Our engagement with the world has changed. The idea of using wordless picture books in the library should be a natural extension of our interaction with stories in all their forms. Additionally, multiple literacies needed to interact with our world could be considered multimodal: visual, oral, written, and tactile. Because wordless picture books remove the language input, all students can share critical retelling and storytelling experiences through engaging with visual elements. In the process, readers also can reflect on and describe what they are thinking and feeling as they examine the images.

Wordless picture books provide many opportunities to connect students to reading in unique ways. When exploring stories such as David Wiesner's *Tuesday* (and a host of others; see sidebar for more authors), students are engaged in telling

and retelling their stories, cultural connections are made and shared, and stories take on more-personal meanings. In the process, language and reading skills develop and strengthen. Wordless picture books open the doors to worlds of reading for all our students, while especially encouraging our ELL students to take more steps forward in their adventure of learning English.



Kelly McGuire

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This made me believe again in magic. Not the kind that comes from wishing on stars or blowing out candles. This magic was only arm's length away and reached out to me.

Walking Books and Pixie Dust: The True Magic at Arm's Length

Charity Alyse

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Within the depths of our souls lies a glimmer of hope for even the tiniest twinkle of magic to sprinkle upon our lives and send our hopes and dreams into shining fruition. Some wish to fall into love that lasts; others wish on stars like children for longer, healthy lives filled with contentment and peace. In the age of modern technology, this can feel impossible to obtain. With one swipe of our thumb, the lives of millions spread out like a canvas before our eyes, making it impossible to ignore that the colors on *theirs* are more vibrant than the dimness of *ours*. One single swipe has the power to pull the seed of our wants and dreams right from the soil of our hearts.

I dare say, perhaps the spark of magic we hope to fuel the gnawing within us isn't found in the experiences we have. Perhaps it isn't even in the size of our bank accounts. Maybe the all-

encompassing peace and contentment we crave exists right before our eyes, and it is all—yes, every piece of it—at arm's length. Words are magic. So are people.

I discovered this early on in life. In kindergarten to be exact. I found the darkest color in my crayon box and let it mold a new and different Snow White. Her hair spun in braids around her waist, and under her prince charming's golden crown were dreadlocks. To me, the "white" in her name meant only purity and innocence. Unfortunately, I was in for a rude awakening when I showed my rendition of Disney's first princess to my kindergarten teacher. While she read through my first manuscript, her lips were pursed, and eyebrows slung. She explained to me the importance of copyright infringement: I could not remaster anything without the

author's permission. She made it clear that I should hang up my paper and crayons and never write again. If I continued to write stories such as these, no one would read them, and I might be sued or arrested. Her words, like vines wrung the glimmering magic of dreams and wishes right out of me. Or so I thought.

In wants to keep a clear criminal record and avoid being the first six-year-old sued, I vowed to give up creating worlds for good. This meant no more writing stories about Black princesses—or anything else for that matter. Magical things like words and stories rarely die. Words are eternal just like our personal stories.

The next summer, my grandmother's air conditioner lost its ability to keep us cool. She found relief in the only place where one could sit all day, stay safe, and, most importantly, stay cool. Her local library. I'm sure every

person in the brick building found it strange to see a little girl gawking out of the large glass boundary separating the children's section from the rest of the place. Especially, when she was surrounded by endless shelves of books, toys, and coloring pages at her disposal. My little heart was too busy dancing within me. The vines that poured from my kindergarten teacher's lips to hold me captive were drying at the root. I was *finally* reading the most beautiful stories again, and it wasn't those that lay between paperback and hard covers. These stories were alive and walking all around me.

The homeless man who usually slept on the bus stop bench waited patiently next to the vending machines while a librarian purchased food for him. Others dropped off cans into overflowing boxes labeled "food drive." Paintings of every color hung around the library, a gallery of artwork on canvas created by the neighbors I met during the summers I spent with my grandmother. Teens who crumpled the pages of their summer homework in frustration found solace in the sweet voice of their tutors who showed them another way. The clicking of countless keyboards and hushed whispers sounded as a symphony to my ears. This made me believe again in magic. Not the kind that comes from wishing on stars or blowing out candles. This magic was only arm's length away and reached out to me.

The library was where I learned to do more than read books. As I grew older, under the direction of librarians I had the pleasure of volunteering my time in various ways. From reading books to little children to aiding in homework help like many librarians did for me. I learned to play guitar (and realized it wasn't for me), did crafts, and tasted international food for the first time.



The glimmer of magic that I mentioned earlier never ceases to meet me when I walk through the doors of my local library. I still feel the fluttering in my heart reminding me of the pleasure that comes in grazing the spines of unread stories and worlds. Most importantly, the desire to reach out to those around me—whether the homeless man, the teenager, child, or family in need—has endured.

The past patiently waits to be called forth by the present, and, when the two meet, the warmth of nostalgia settles in. A new generation lies in front of us, another little Charity—an open book ready to embrace lessons of love and acceptance. What better

place to find them than in a building that houses both bound and walking stories. There is power in both words and action. Our words can set a child to dreaming, and our actions can show them a better world. It was in my grandmother's local library that I found both. The magic we search for is bubbling before us, walking stories waiting to be influenced by our good works. Can you see the magic glimmering before your eyes, now? The pixie dust sparkling on your words? Contentment lies not in the dreams that are fulfilled but the people we serve. May the difference we make in the walking stories around us light the way to a brighter future.

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Selection Policies Across the United States

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In today's climate of challenges to classroom and library content, it's important to have robust policies to both guide selection of materials and the procedures to follow when materials are challenged. Selection and reconsideration policies may appear under a variety of names including Collection Development, Acquisitions, or Materials Selection Policy. I collaborated with Emily Eidson, my former graduate student assistant and current School Library Media Coordinator in Davidson County, North Carolina, in conducting a research study "A Content Analysis of District School Library Selection Policies in the United States" (Dawkins and Eidson 2021). The published paper was selected to receive the AASL Research Grant, which "recognizes excellence in manuscripts addressing a persistent and recurring challenge in the field of school librarianship" (AASL 2022).

Background

Guidelines for creating school library policies can be found through several sources. One of the oldest published discussions about collection development in school libraries is Esther Stallmann's article in the 1935 *Peabody Journal of Education*. In her article, Stallmann outlined key principles for selection, including the use of selection aids and providing books for all kinds of readers. In the United States many school library selection policies are guided by the ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom's "Selection & Reconsideration Policy Toolkit for Public, School, & Academic Libraries" (2018). This toolkit was developed to update and replace "Workbook for Selection Policy Writing," which was published in 1998 by the ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom. The

original 1998 workbook was intended for use by school libraries. The 2018 toolkit was developed over a two-year period (2016–2018) with input from school, public, and academic librarians, and provides guidelines for all three types of libraries. The 2018 toolkit includes suggested components and sample text for each of the types of libraries (Dawkins 2018).

Research Study

For this study, Emily and I wanted to explore samples of policies from across the United States to see what components were included or excluded from district-level policies and also determine their currency. An important thing to note: the policies we studied were retrieved and analyzed prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Many districts have undertaken revisions to their policies in the last two years because of the flood of challenges that have occurred.

During the study we focused on two main questions:

1. What is the state of district school library selection policies in school systems in the United States?
2. Do these policies have components that are recommended by the "Selection & Reconsideration Policy Toolkit for Public, School, & Academic Libraries"?

For our research, we chose to look for specific components that are considered best practice for inclusion in selection and reconsideration policies using the guidelines from the American Library Association. This is criterion-based content analysis.

We intended to randomly select two sample districts from each state for a total of 100 districts' policies to analyze. As we began to select districts,

we discovered that Hawaii has a statewide school district. Therefore, we identified 99 school districts to include in the sample. We would search these districts' websites to locate selection policies. In each state except Hawaii, one large and one small district were randomly selected for analysis. Out of the 99 school districts' sites that were examined, we were able to locate selection policies on 80 districts' websites. This task wasn't always easy as some district board policy manuals are difficult to navigate and sometimes components of the policy are located in multiple locations within the manual.

We chose to examine district-level policies because in most states the public school library policies are determined at the district level. Some states, such as North Carolina, even have general statutes that stipulate that school library selection policies must be created by each district. After locating each policy, we then examined it to determine if it contained the twenty components that we identified as best practices based on the ALA selection and reconsideration toolkit. (See sidebar for list of components and our research paper for descriptions.)

Findings

This study found that 81 percent of the school districts in the sample have selection policies, but there was wide variation in the components that were included in the policies. Looking at the district policies as a whole group, we found that a total of 51 percent of the twenty policy components were present within the 80 policies that were examined. Only one of the policies we examined included almost all (19) of the 20 components that we had identified.

The highest rates of inclusion were for the following components: list of selection criteria (80 percent), publication and revision dates (78 percent), objectives of the policy (85 percent), and reconsideration of materials (80 percent).

The lowest rates of inclusion were for the following components: mission statement (25 percent), Intellectual Freedom documents (27 percent), Intellectual Freedom statement (14 percent), Intellectual Freedom definition (0), and classroom collections (1 percent).

Some Areas of Concern

Vocabulary variation was one problem we encountered as we studied each policy. The policies themselves had different names and sometimes referred only to library materials, and in other cases referred to both classroom instructional materials and supplementary materials. Varying terminology was also used in relation to diversity. Selection policies that encouraged the use of diverse perspectives (73 percent) used varying language to describe diverse representation, while some policies did not use the word “diversity” at all. The use of inconsistent language allows more room for subjective interpretation by those who are working to implement the policy and those who are enforcing it. If a policy does not explicitly state “diversity,” then it provides less protection for diverse materials and allows for a more-limited interpretation of what constitutes diversity. The effectiveness of policy documents could be improved if they included the word “diversity” and defined it appropriately.

One of our greatest concerns was the lack of mention of “intellectual freedom” in these policies. Only 14 percent of the policies we studied had an intellectual freedom statement and even those did not define what intellectual freedom actually is.

As challenges to library collections increase, so have challenges to classroom collections and curriculum materials. Therefore, it is concerning

that only one of the policies explicitly included a reference to classroom collections. This was also a policy area that was difficult to determine because sometimes selection policies were for supplementary instructional materials or specifically for libraries. The question remains whether or not the reconsideration policy that would be used for the school library would apply for instructional materials or teacher-created classroom collections.

And finally, although 62 (78 percent) of the policies had publication and/or revision dates, 22 of those policies with dates had not been revised or updated in the previous decade. This may no longer be the case as many school districts have been revising their policies as a result of the challenges to content districts have been facing.

Implications for Practice

While the results of this study are not generalizable, they can provide a process and checklist of essential components for practicing librarians to conduct a review of their own district’s or school’s selection and reconsideration policies.

Here are a few suggestions we have based on our research:

- Your selection policy should be reviewed and revised (if needed) at least once every five years. This review and revision process should include the voices of experts: school librarians!
- Consider including a glossary in your policy that explains terms that are specific to our field but that may be unfamiliar to non-librarians. For example, define what weeding is.
- Use examples of policies from other districts to inform your own policy development. Also consult the ALA selection toolkit for more information and sample language about each of the recommended components.
- Really discuss and consider who has standing to request reconsideration

of materials. Is it only parents, staff, and students? Do requesters have to live in your school district or could an outside individual or organized group present a challenge? Consider the implications.

- Policies are good only when they are implemented consistently. It’s very important that your school board, district administration, and school-level administration understand the procedures, and the legal and ethical ramifications of a failure to follow policy.

Conclusion

Selection is an extremely important professional responsibility that school librarians exercise to meet the needs of their learning communities. While some have claimed that the practice of selecting (or not selecting) books for inclusion in a collection is in itself an act of censorship, making decisions about whether to acquire specific resources is necessary as no library has unlimited funding to provide access to everything that is available. Therefore, we must have policies to guide us in our decision-making. As Lester Asheim explained:

Selection...begins with a presumption in favor of liberty of thought; censorship, with a presumption in favor of thought control. Selection’s approach to the book is positive, seeking its value in the book as a book and in the book as a whole. Censorship’s approach is negative, seeking for vulnerable characteristics wherever they can be found—anywhere within the book, or even outside it. Selection seeks to protect the right of the reader to read; censorship seeks to protect—not the right—but the reader himself from the fancied effects of his reading. The selector has faith in the intelligence of the reader; the censor has faith only in his own. (Asheim 1953, 67)

As school librarians we are charged with using our professional skills to create collections to support both the curricular and recreational

information needs of all students. Policies serve as both guidelines for our decisions and public explanation for how those decisions are made. Therefore, it is essential that all school districts have current and comprehensive policies for selection and reconsideration. Then, we must insist that they be followed.



Dr. April M. Dawkins is an assistant professor of Library and Information Science at the University of North Carolina Greensboro. Her research focuses on intellectual freedom and access issues in school libraries. Her recent articles include “Prepared to Defend? Results of a Gap Analysis to Measure School Librarian Students’ Prior Knowledge and Learning of Intellectual Freedom Concepts” in *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science* (coauthored with Dr. Angela Branyon). She also writes a monthly column about legal and intellectual freedom issues “Community of Courage” for *School Library Connection*. She is the editor of the book *Intellectual Freedom Issues in School Libraries* (Libraries Unlimited 2020) and coauthor of the forthcoming seventh edition of *The School Library Manager* (Libraries Unlimited 2023).

Checklist of Components:

- list of criteria for selection
- mission statement of the library
- policies and procedures for selection and acquisition
- publication and revision dates of the policy
- who the library serves
- who has responsibility for selection
- selection aids
- policy objectives
- intellectual freedom documents
- controversial materials
- intellectual freedom statement
- intellectual freedom definition
- diversity of collection
- weeding the collection
- gifts and donations
- reconsideration of materials
- request for reconsideration form
- reconsideration committee guidelines
- classroom collections
- who has standing to request reconsideration

Additional Resources:

Kerby, Mona. 2019. *An Introduction to Collection Development for School Librarians*, 2nd ed. Chicago: ALA.

Mardis, Marcia A. 2021. *The Collection Program in Schools: Concepts and Practices*, 7th ed. Santa Barbara, CA: Libraries Unlimited.

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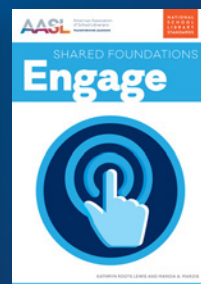
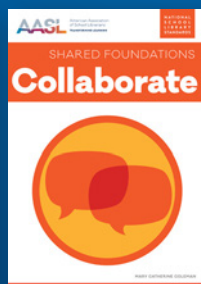
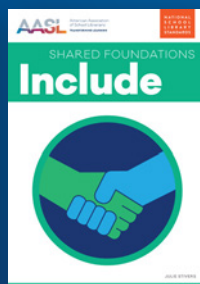
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