

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN



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The Power of Connection: How School Librarians Build Stronger Schools and Stronger Communities

What a way to close out the fall season!

A NEW EDITION of the AASL *National Standards for Learners, Librarians and School Libraries* was published right before our national conference and the standards committee presented multiple concurrent sessions introducing the updates to the second edition.

It was an exciting time in St Louis and school librarians had an incredible time collaborating and learning from each other.

If there's one thing school librarians know better than anyone, it's that all types of literacy and learning is a collaborative experience. No single educator can do it alone. The modern school library is no longer just a space for books; it is a dynamic hub where collaboration fuels creativity, expands access, and strengthens learning communities. As education becomes more complex and more interconnected, the ability of school librarians to build relationships—with teachers, administrators, other districts, and community partners—has never been more essential.

In today's world, collaboration isn't a bonus; it's a superpower. And school librarians wield it well. Throughout this issue of *Knowledge Quest* you will find and explore many of the different ways school librarians connect and collaborate.

Collaboration With Teachers: The Heartbeat of the Library

The most powerful partnerships often begin just down the hall. Collaborating with classroom teachers remains the core work of the school librarian—and the impact is immediate.

When librarians and teachers co-plan, co-teach, and co-assess, learners benefit from richer lessons and deeper learning. Together, these educators create instruction that blends content expertise with information literacy, research skills, digital citizenship, and media literacy.

The Standards committee has provided us with a pathway to build learner competency across grade levels and to look deeply at the skills progressions we ideally see when we are teaching our standards. I especially love how they have broken our shared foundations down and highlighted two standards to emphasize at each grade band level in their column *From Curiosity to Mastery: Building Learner Capacity Across Grade Levels with the AASL Standards*.

A school librarian might sit down with a 7th-grade ELA teacher to redesign a mythology research project, shifting it from a traditional report into a multimedia exploration that incorporates source evaluation and creative retelling. Or they may partner with a science teacher to help learners navigate databases for a unit on climate change, guiding them through bias detection and data interpretation.

These collaborations extend beyond instruction—they strengthen school culture. When teachers see the librarian as a trusted ally and instructional partner, the library transforms from a quiet room into a vibrant learning commons. Learners walk in ready to solve problems, build projects, and try new things. Teachers trust that the library is a place where both they and their learners will be supported.

And ultimately, collaboration with teachers helps librarians do what they do best: empower learners with the skills to navigate, question, and create in an increasingly information-rich world.

When librarians are included at leadership tables, school decisions become more informed, more equitable, and more centered on learners' real experiences.

Partnering With Administrators: Aligning the Library With Schoolwide Goals

Strong administrators understand that a robust school library elevates the entire building. When librarians collaborate with principals, curriculum directors, and district leaders, the library becomes aligned with—and essential to—larger school goals.

Effective collaboration with administrators often starts with communication:

Sharing data about student library use

Presenting evidence about the impact of information literacy instruction

Advocating for resources, staffing, and programming

Connecting library initiatives to school improvement plans

Librarians who regularly meet with administrators become key partners in shaping school priorities. For instance, if a district is aiming to improve writing proficiency, the librarian can help design inquiry-based writing units. If a principal wants to enhance family engagement, the librarian can host multicultural literacy nights or parent tech workshops.

Administrators also benefit from the librarian's unique vantage point: librarians see the whole school, across grade levels, content areas, and student needs. They are often the first to spot gaps in literacy access, technology inequities, or opportunities for interdisciplinary learning. When librarians are included at leadership tables, school decisions become more informed, more equitable, and more centered on learners' real experiences.

A powerful look at how administrators can be a school librarians biggest ally is explored through the lens of the School Library Leader Collaborative. This is emphasized in the article by two former AASL Past Presidents, Kathy Carroll and Kathryn Roots Lewis as they take a deep dive into the impact that the two Overdrive School Library Collaborative Cohorts made while working with school administrators who champion collaboration with libraries. Having “non-library” administrators take an in depth look at how our standards connected to every content area and why, as an administrator, you want to see every content area connecting and learning in the school library. It expands our reach and the more administrators who recognize and harness the power of the collaborative learning hub an active school library becomes when everyone sees and appreciates the impact of strong collaboration.

Connecting Across Districts: The Power of Professional Learning Networks

School librarians are natural networkers. Whether through local consortiums, regional library systems, state associations, or AASL, librarians know that sharing ideas across districts and states strengthens everyone’s practice.

These cross-district collaborations can take many forms:

- **Resource-sharing**, like digital collections or professional development opportunities
- **Co-hosted student events**, such as Battle of the Books or regional research showcases
- **Curriculum alignment**, especially for inquiry, media literacy, or digital citizenship

- **Collective problem-solving**, such as navigating AI in schools or balancing intellectual freedom challenges

When librarians collaborate across districts, they build communities that can innovate together—testing new tools, refining instructional strategies, and amplifying student voices across entire regions. These networks ensure that librarians are never working in isolation; they are part of a profession that grows stronger through shared expertise.

Cross-district collaboration also models a critical lesson for learners: knowledge expands when we work together.

Partnering With Other Schools: Creating a Seamless Literacy Ecosystem

One of the most overlooked but powerful partnerships is the connection between school librarians in different buildings within the same district. These relationships help create consistency and continuity for learners as they move from elementary to middle to high school.

Imagine a district where:

- Elementary librarians introduce inquiry practices
- Middle school librarians build research literacy
- High school librarians integrate college- and career-ready information skills

When librarians from all levels meet regularly, these skills reinforce one another. Learners move from grade to grade with a solid foundation, and teachers benefit from shared vocabulary, expectations, and instructional approaches.

In a world filled with information, challenge, and possibility, learners need communities that work together to support them. School librarians are essential in building those communities—not just by offering resources, but by forging relationships that make literacy, learning, and innovation possible.

Inter-school collaboration can include:

- Joint professional development
- Shared makerspace equipment
- Vertical alignment of research units
- Districtwide literacy events
- Shared reading initiatives or one-book programs

Such collaboration creates a literacy ecosystem where every learner feels supported and every educator feels connected.

Expanding Possibilities Beyond the School Walls

The most vibrant school libraries often extend well beyond campus through partnerships with nonprofits. These collaborations widen access for learners, bringing in community expertise, funding, and programming that schools may not provide on their own.

Some common nonprofit partners include:

- **Public libraries**, offering summer reading programs, card drives, and joint author events
- **Local Rotary clubs**, supporting literacy initiatives, book donations, or learner-focused literacy events
- **Arts organizations**, providing workshops, writing residencies, and creative experiences
- **STEM nonprofits**, offering coding clubs, robotics equipment, or maker workshops
- **Historical societies and museums**, enriching curriculum with primary sources and local history

These partnerships connect learners to their community while expanding their understanding of the world. When school librarians collaborate with nonprofits, they create bridges—between school and home, between learning and experience, and between learners and opportunities they might never have discovered on their own.

When you read Kate Macmillan's article: *Napa Valley Unified School District: Partnering for Student Success*, you explore several west coast districts and their quest to protect and provide equitable access to library resources by partnering with their public library systems in Napa Valley, CA and Tacoma, WA. Our public and academic library

counterparts can be an incredible addition to a collaborative team working for increased and consistent access to literature and resources. Are your families aware of all the resources they have through the public library? You are making connections for families to see the bridge between school resources and involvement and becoming an engaged citizen and public library user.

School Librarians as Collaboration Leaders

At the heart of all these partnerships is the school librarian as connector-in-chief. Librarians are uniquely positioned to see where needs exist, where opportunities lie, and how people and programs can be brought together to make something extraordinary.

Librarians are:

- **Instructional leaders**
- **Relationship builders**
- **Equity advocates**
- **Technology integrators**
- **Program designers**
- **Community connectors**

In every role, collaboration strengthens their impact.

When librarians connect with teachers, administrators, other schools, and nonprofits, the result is a richer, more equitable, more vibrant learning experience for every student.

Stronger Together

In a world filled with information, challenge, and possibility, learners need communities that work together to support them. School librarians are essential in building those communities—not just by offering resources, but by forging relationships that make literacy, learning, and innovation possible.

Collaboration isn't just what librarians do.

It's who we are.

It's how we lead.

And it's why we remain one of the most powerful forces for connection in our schools and communities today.