

FEATURE

A Seat at the Table

K–12 and Higher Ed Collaboration
to Align Evaluation Instruments for
School Librarians and Teachers

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When program coordinators at the university level, library coordinators at the system level, active members of the AASL-affiliated state-level organization, and building-level practicing school librarians work together, the collaboration

builds a bridge

from theory to practice.



In 2013 Georgia passed House Bill 244 in response to the state's Race to the Top (RT3) application requirements. The bill was passed to "revise certain provisions relating to annual performance evaluations; [and] to provide for the development of evaluation systems for teachers of record..." (Georgia General Assembly 2015). The bill became law on July 1, 2014, and the resulting evaluation instrument was called the Teacher Keys Effectiveness System (TKES). Twenty-six school systems in Georgia were part of the original RT3 application; these systems educate about 40 percent of the state's public school students (Georgia Dept. of Ed. 2014). In preparation for the passage of HB 244, those twenty-six systems used the first five months of 2012 to implement the TKES and LKES (Leader Keys Evaluation System) as a pilot program; Gwinnett County Public Schools, the largest system in Georgia with 134 schools and more than 170,000 students, was a part.

Gwinnett County Media Services Responds to TKES

With the teacher evaluation system about to begin a pilot in Gwinnett, across the county school librarians (called "library media specialists," "media specialists," and "teacher librarians" in Georgia) were concerned and unclear about how their performance would be measured in the upcoming years. In response to this concern, the Media Services and Technology Training team at Gwinnett County Public Schools (GCPS) began work on an evaluation instrument for school librarians. During the summer of 2013, a small group of GCPS school librarians met several times to research existing school librarian evaluation instruments from around the country. Unfortunately, many of these instruments relied heavily on standards for classroom

teachers and attempted to fit school librarians into those categories. At this point, the group's objective changed from adopting an existing model to creating their own instrument. The initial evaluation instrument that came from those summer meetings was based heavily on AASL's *Standards for the 21st-Century Learner* as well as both TKES and LKES. The inclusion of LKES was a deliberate choice since often school librarian evaluation instruments reflect only the instructional portion of the job when, in fact, that position has many aspects that involve leadership roles and responsibilities.

After the summer group provided a basic framework for the Media Specialist Effectiveness Measure (MSEM), the draft of these standards went to Gwinnett's Media Leaders. The media leaders group consists of twelve school librarians from across the county who are invited each year to help shape and guide district initiatives through workshop meetings. During the 2013–2014 school year, the media leaders reviewed and revised the standards, developed rubrics, and created a resource bank for administrators and school librarians to use during evaluations. During this development time, the GCPS Media Services team was working with the human resources department and gathering feedback about the process. Once the standards were finalized, they were presented to the school board, and the GCPS Media Services department was granted permission to begin a pilot.

Training was offered in August 2014 to all evaluators (principals or assistant principals) through both face-to-face and online training. Even though 2014–2015 was considered a pilot year, the majority of Gwinnett's schools used

the new system to evaluate their school librarians. During the school year feedback was gathered from school librarians and evaluators. A focus group of principals was convened to participate in more-intensive discussions about both the standards and the evaluation process itself. Additional input from the Georgia school library leader consortium (described below) was considered as well. The feedback went to the media leaders who made final adjustments to the standards. The finalized MSEM will be the evaluation instrument of record for all school librarians in Gwinnett for the 2015–2016 school year.

Great Minds Think Alike

The work in Gwinnett County was proceeding at the same time that Georgia guidance counselors created their own document that aligned with TKES, and many of Georgia's library leaders and practitioners were feeling and hearing the same concerns that had been expressed by GCPS school librarians. Phyllis Snipes, associate professor in the Library Media/Instructional Technology degree program at the University of West Georgia, contacted these leaders and began floating the idea of creating a consortium to take a look at TKES and how it could be applied to represent school librarians in a way that was meaningful and appropriate to the expected job functions. During the course of these conversations, it became clear that Gwinnett was already ahead of the curve with its evaluation instrument, and GCPS Media Services agreed to join the consortium and use the GCPS document as a starting point for developing a statewide instrument. As a result, a consortium of Georgia school library leaders was formed to take the pilot document from Gwinnett County and transform

it into a document that could be used throughout the state in any system. Members of the consortium included university faculty from three of the state's school library education programs, media coordinators from county school systems, and K–12 school librarians who were members of the Georgia Library Media Association (GLMA), which is the state AASL affiliate.

The consortium first met at the University of West Georgia in September 2014 to look closely at the school librarians' version of TKES that Gwinnett County Public Schools had created and began working as a team to modify and adjust the standards to make them universally applicable to all K–12 school librarians in the state. That first meeting raised many more questions than answers as the group discussed the evolving role of the school librarian and the factors driving that evolution. The group wrestled with questions about the instructional role and how to measure the impact of that role in the currently accepted forms of standardized tests. Among the questions were:

- How could an instrument be written that would fit both the high school librarian, who is on a flexible schedule and primarily involved in research instruction, as well as the elementary school librarian, who is locked into a fixed schedule with prescribed curriculum over which the librarian in the field has no control?
- How could the instrument accurately reflect professional practice in a school without adequate funding and with the resulting aged collection?
- How could we write a document that could be fair to both the fully funded, professionally

staffed libraries in our state and those schools that had chosen (through charter or other status that allowed personnel waivers) to hire noncertified librarians and withhold funding?

As the group that became known as the Georgia School Library Media Specialist Consortium began its work, we realized early on that we had to make sure we addressed things that administrators need to see when they come in to observe the person who serves in the role of the school librarian. Since Gwinnett had already created a working document that was faring well in their pilot, the decision was made to compare it with other instruments currently in use and apply the best of them to Gwinnett's evaluation tool. The group met in face-to-face meetings and also worked asynchronously on a shared Google Doc to edit Gwinnett's work, transforming it into a document that could be universally applied throughout the state. The instrument that was written was designed to align closely with TKES so as to prevent the need for intensive professional development for evaluators, while still addressing the unique functions of the school librarian. The final face-to-face meeting was held prior to the GLMA Summer Institute. The group worked at that meeting to provide a glossary and artifacts for evaluators and to put the finishing touches on the final evaluation instrument. The ten standards included in the final document are:

1) Instructional Leadership:

The media specialist fosters the success of all students by serving on decision-making teams in the school, providing professional development, and contributing to a shared vision of teaching and learning that leads to school improvement.

2) Instructional Partnership:

The media specialist collaboratively plans instruction and develops the media program using state and district curricula and standards, instructional calendars, effective strategies, resources, and data to support teachers and address the differentiated needs of all students.

3) The Role of Reading:

The media specialist promotes reading as a foundational skill for learning, personal growth, and enjoyment.

4) Information and Technology Literacy:

The media specialist plans and provides instruction that addresses multiple literacies, including information literacy, media literacy, and technology literacy.

5) Effective Practices for Research:

The media specialist teaches and models developmentally appropriate best practices for learning and research.

6) Program Planning and Administration:

The media specialist develops and implements a strategic plan and vision for continuous improvement of the media program and to support the learning goals of the school community.

7) Positive Learning Environment:

The media specialist provides a well-



The "Media Specialist Keys Effectiveness System" is available on the KQ website at <<http://knowledgequest.aasl.org>>.

Through this process, relationships and ties were strengthened between district leaders and preparation program faculty, and trust was built. This process has assured district leaders that the preparation programs around the state are *aligned in philosophy & mission* and are producing young professionals for the field who will help lead their schools in the development of 21st-century learning environments.

managed, safe and welcoming environment that includes flexible and equitable access to physical and digital resources, is conducive to learning, and encourages respect for all.

- 8) **Collection Development:** The media specialist supports the curriculum through selection and management of resources that meet the needs and interests of patrons.
- 9) **Professionalism:** The media specialist fosters the success of students by demonstrating professional standards and ethics, engaging in continuous professional development, and contributing to the profession.*
- 10) **Communication:** The media specialist fosters the success of all students by communicating and collaborating effectively with stakeholders in ways that enhance student learning.*

**Standards 9 and 10 carry the same title and contain similar wording as standards 9 and 10 in TKES.*

In June 2015 that media specialist evaluation instrument, "Media Specialist Keys Effectiveness System," was presented to the Georgia Department of Education for approval.

Collaboration in Action

In the field of school librarianship, collaboration is more than just our catchphrase or latest buzzword. Collaboration is at the very core of what effective school librarians do (Bush and Jones 2010; Moreillon and Ballard 2013). As such, it was only appropriate that we would embrace collaboration across multiple aspects of practice, including not only school librarians themselves, but also school

library educators, school district leadership, and the state's school library professional organization. Having all of these points of view represented in the consortium strengthened the value of the end product.

One important group to include in the conversation was school library educators. All initial preparation programs for school librarians that are accredited by NCATE (now CAEP) must align their curriculum with the *ALA/AASL Standards for Initial Preparation of School Librarians*. At the national level the preparation standards and the practice standards are highly aligned. It was important that we continue this alignment at the state level. While AASL's *Empow-*

ering Learners: Guidelines for School Library Programs and Standards for the 21st-Century Learner were the foundational standards for the in-service school librarian point of view, *ALA/AASL Standards for Initial Preparation of School Librarians* provided an important perspective to incorporate into the new instrument. This inclusion was important to make sure that new school librarians who are entering the field can seamlessly transition from their initial preparation into practice.

Collaboration between K–12 practitioners and higher education faculty is especially beneficial to school library educators who are in constant need of staying connected

to the realities of practice. While these educators are highly aware of the importance of assessment and evaluation of their own students in terms of the standards that must be addressed in preparation programs, it is important to make explicit connections between preparation and practice.

On the flip side of this relationship, the collaboration provided a tremendous benefit to district leaders who are in regular need of highly qualified, well-prepared school librarians. Through this process, relationships and ties were strengthened between district leaders and preparation program faculty, and trust was built. This process has assured district leaders that the

Georgia School Library Media Specialist Consortium members at 2015 GLMA Summer Institute.

FRONT ROW: Michelle Easley, Craig Coleman, Jennifer Helfrich, Eden Clark, Susan K. S. Grigsby, Stephanie Jones, Phyllis Snipes, and Lucy Santos Green.
BACK ROW: Rosalind Dennis, Christa Harrelson Deissler, Warren Goetzel, Valerie Ayer, Beth Miller, and Mary Barbee. (Not pictured: Janelle McClure)



preparation programs around the state are aligned in philosophy and mission and are producing young professionals for the field who will help lead their schools in the development of 21st-century learning environments.

One of the benefits of having district-level leadership involved in the consortium was their close connection and understanding of what principals and other school-level leaders would need from the evaluation instrument. As was mentioned above, this new instrument for school librarians was developed shortly after a new evaluation system for teachers in Georgia was developed and implemented. It is difficult enough to make sure that principals know what quality school librarians should do; evaluating them accurately would be an even greater challenge. Therefore, the group felt that it was important for our new instrument to be aligned with the tools principals were already learning and planning to use for teachers.

Finally, at the very heart of this whole project are the school librarians themselves. The last time a state-wide common assessment instrument for school librarians was developed in Georgia was 1989 with updates in 2002 and 2006. However, use of a common assessment across the state was far from a reality. At the time this consortium was working, at least five different instruments were in use (or not in use!) across the state; these ranged from the media specialist evaluation that was over eight years old, to standard teacher evaluation instruments, to a modified teacher instrument, to no official evaluations at all. School librarians around the state were at a point of great frustration with little sense that school administrators were getting guidance from any

state entity that could have provided individual schools with information on how this new system of evaluation for teachers (i.e., TKES) would affect school librarians.

Tearing Down the Silos

When program coordinators at the university level, library coordinators at the system level, active members of the AASL-affiliated state-level organization, and building-level practicing school librarians work together, the collaboration builds a bridge from theory to practice. The consortium's creation of the media specialist evaluation instrument built just such a bridge and provided a forum in which all of these levels of service had an opportunity to be heard. Whether or not this instrument is actually sanctioned or adopted by the Georgia State Department of Education is almost secondary to the fact that these lines of communication were opened, and we now have a document that aligns with what we do and outlines the level at which we are expected to perform. Throughout this process, all of the consortium members consulted with colleagues in other areas of education, and the tool became an advocacy piece that started conversations that might never have happened otherwise. The library coordinators involved in

the process are committed to continuing the conversation with their colleagues at the district level so that if the instrument is not adopted we can still advocate for its use as both an evaluation and advocacy tool on a system-by-system basis. The work of



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K–8 charter school in Union Point, Georgia. She was program coordinator for the University of Georgia's School Library and Instructional Technology programs at the time that the work described in this article was completed and has worked with both K–12 students as a school librarian and with pre-service school librarians as a school library educator. She always told her UGA graduate students that being a school librarian is the best job in the world, and she just couldn't deny that pleasure to herself any longer, so in fall 2015 she returned to practice in the school library. She continues to work to build bridges between all levels of school librarianship and all fields of education.



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She was awarded the 2013 GLMA Distinguished Service Award and was the 2011 Georgia Library Media Specialist of the Year. She is a past president and current professional development chair of the Georgia Library Media Association. She is an ALA/AASL member currently serving on the AASL 2015 National Conference Committee. She curates at www.scoop.it/t/k-12-school-libraries.



Jennifer Helfrich is currently the coordinator of Media Services at Gwinnett County (GA) Public Schools in Suwanee.

In 2011 she was named Gwinnett County Middle School Teacher of the Year. She has served on AASL's Best Apps for Teaching and Learning Committee and Standards and Guidelines Implementation Committee.

the Gwinnett County Public Schools Media Services team paved the way for the consortium, and that system's adoption will make it easier for other system coordinators to advocate for this instrument's inclusion in their evaluation process.

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Recommended Resources:

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