

FEATURE

Framing School Library

an Urban

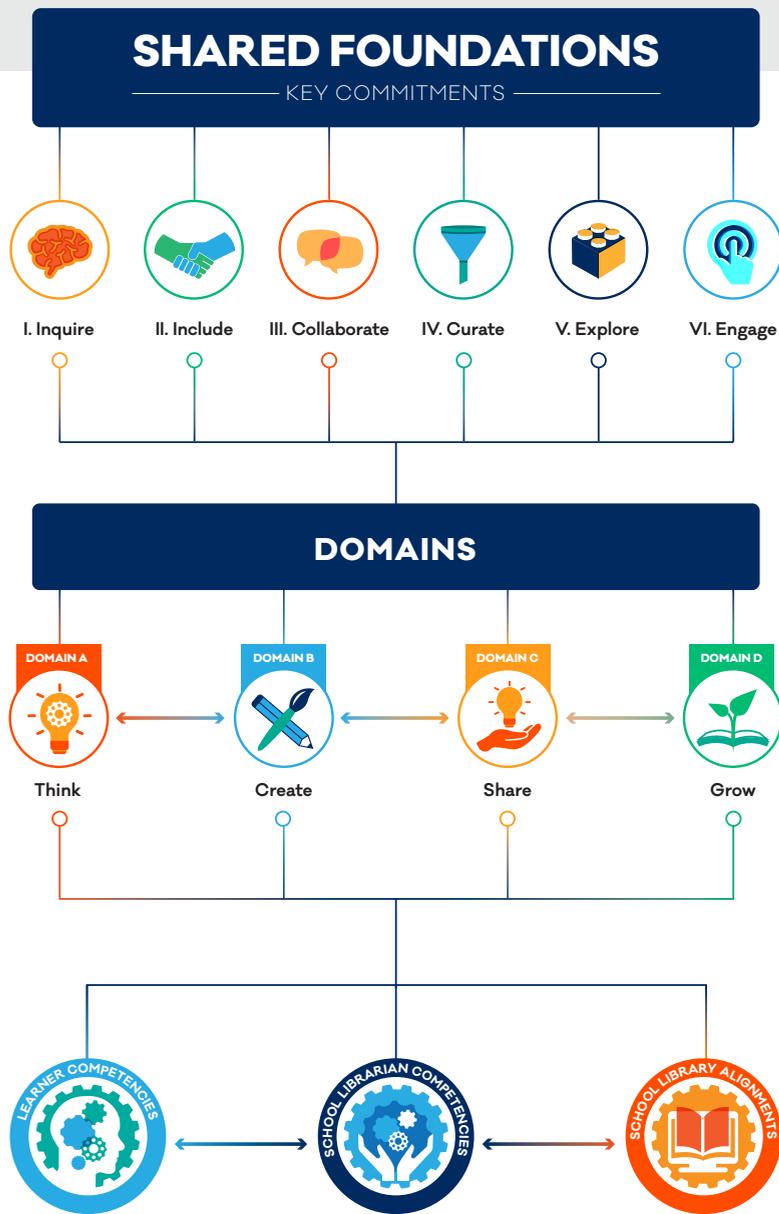
WITH THE

*National
School Library
Standards*

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Flowchart for AASL Standards Integrated Framework



What is the future of urban school libraries? AASL's *National School Library Standards* offer a framework for school librarians to reflect on how they can tailor their professional practice to serve their specific school communities. Through the lens of the standards, school librarians can refine their focus, identify how interrelated Shared Foundations point to possible strategies, and identify shifts in practice to better serve the particular needs of the learners and educators in their buildings.

A working definition of "urban" is in order. Generally, urban schools and school libraries are located in comparatively densely populated areas and serve families with relatively higher rates of poverty, cultural diversity, and limited English proficiency (Russo 2004; NCES 1996; Small et al. 2008). Urban youth are also more likely to experience health and safety risk factors, live in a single-parent home, change schools frequently, and have an out-of-work parent or family member (NCES 1996). Urban schools have been described as bureaucratic, underfunded, and under-resourced, with decision makers removed from teachers (Small et al. 2008). Although some perceive that urban youth lack family support, one study found that "urban students were equally or more likely than other students to have families... that support desirable education outcomes" (NCES 1996).

Urban centers offer a rich array of lifestyle services and opportunities: multiple broadcasting stations, museums and world-class libraries, public transportation, concentrated healthcare services, retail and design centers, ethnic restaurants and community organizations, nightlife, and more. How can urban school libraries connect with such resources? How can the urban school library become a relevant and vibrant

The AASL Standards consist of six common beliefs and six Shared Foundations: Inquire, Include, Collaborate, Curate, Explore, and Engage. Each Shared Foundation is defined by a one-sentence Key Commitment. Learners and school librarians alike develop Competencies in four domains: Think, Create, Share, and Grow. The school library facilitates the Key Commitment to and Competencies of each Shared Foundation.

part of the lives of urban youth? What guidance can we find in the AASL Standards?

Inquire and Explore

Learners and school librarians **Inquire** to “build new knowledge by inquiring, thinking critically, identifying problems, and developing strategies for solving problems” (AASL 2018, 68).

Learners and school librarians **Explore** to “discover and innovate in a growth mindset developed through experience and reflection” (AASL 2018, 103).

When school librarians teach an authentic inquiry process, they scaffold difficult procedures for the purpose of guiding students to internalize methods involved in a complex learning sequence. Authentic inquiry is an open-ended pursuit of a question or potential solutions to a problem; it teaches students that knowledge creation is an uncertain, recursive process (Donham 2014). Inquiry is important for urban children because it provides a mental model for authentic learning and a structure for developing voice and agency. “The bottom line is to give students choice and as much control as is feasible and age-appropriate in their information-seeking project, then keep feedback on the functional rather than on the controlling level...emphasizing better ways to accomplish learning goals rather than...grades, competition, and rewards” (Crow 2011, 30).

As they develop Competencies in the School Librarian Framework, urban school librarians help learners develop voice and agency by:

I.A.I. Encouraging learners to formulate questions about a personal interest or a curricular topic. (AASL 2018, 68)

—and—

I.D.3. Enabling learners to seek knowledge, create new knowledge, and make real-world connections for lifelong learning. (AASL 2018, 68)

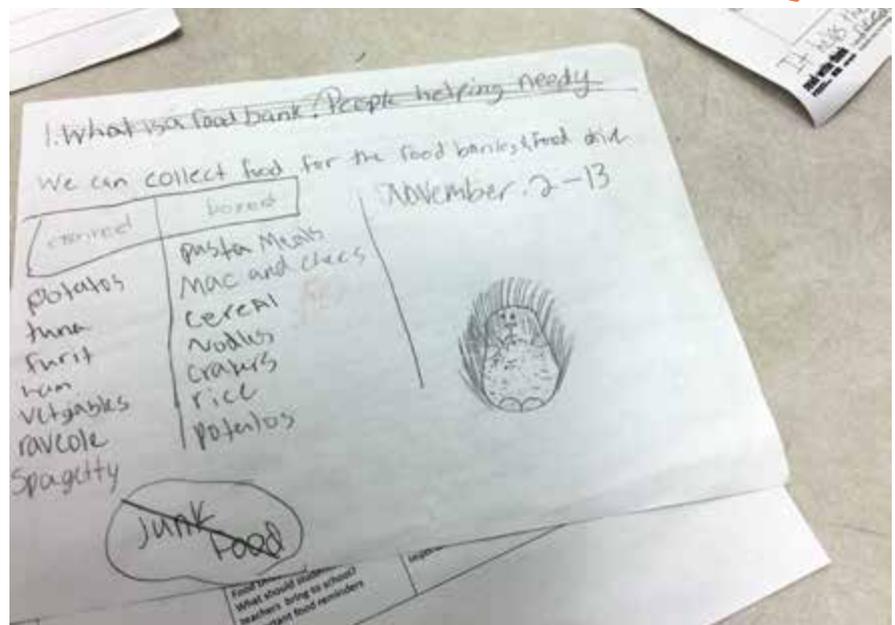
A focus on the student’s personal interest will empower her to develop a sense of competence and intrinsic motivation (Crow 2011). In addition, inquiry allows for collaborative, social learning. For example, Guided Inquiry Design provides for students to develop background knowledge, identify topics of personal interest, and refine their focus through conversation with their Inquiry Circles (Kuhlthau, Maniotes, and Caspari 2012). When curricular topics allow choice of subtopics, the student’s freedom to choose increases autonomy, also intrinsically motivating. Delia Neuman and colleagues reported that kindergarten students experienced deeper learning and developed a more expansive understanding of information sources when allowed to choose their focal topics (2015). Kafi Kumasi has recommended that

school librarians “guide youth in inquiry projects that help them answer questions about some of the larger social issues that directly affect their community” (2012, 35).

Service learning is a curricular approach that engages students in identifying and addressing community needs (National Youth Leadership Council n.d.). It leverages community service against the curriculum, and the urban school librarian can be guided by School Librarian Competency V.C.3 and “prepare learners to engage with the learning community by structuring activities for learners to collaboratively identify innovative solutions to a challenge or problem” (AASL 2018, 104).

As students deepen their interests and develop competence as self-directed, independent learners, school librarians engage learners in “projects and activities that allow them to take personal, social, and civic actions related to [their own] educational outcomes” (Hughes-Hassell and Rawson 2011, 17).

In Newport News, Claudine guided fifth-graders’ inquiry as they developed a service learning project to support the Food Bank of the Virginia Peninsula.



Include and Collaborate

Learners and school librarians

Include to “demonstrate an understanding of and commitment to inclusiveness and respect for diversity in the learning community” (AASL 2018, 76), and **Collaborate** to “work effectively with others to broaden perspectives and work toward common goals” (AASL 2018, 85).

Guided by the *AASL Standards Framework for School Librarians*, the urban school librarian can:

II. B. Establish opportunities for learners to adjust their awareness of the global learning community by:

1. Providing opportunities for learners to interact with others who reflect a range of perspectives.
2. Devising learning activities that require learners to evaluate a variety of perspectives. (AASL 2018, 76)

—and—

III.A. Facilitate collaborative opportunities by:

1. Challenging learners to work with others to broaden and deepen understandings.
2. Scaffolding enactment of learning-group roles to enable the development of new understandings within a group.
3. Organizing learner groups for decision making and problem-solving. (AASL 2018, 83)

School librarians have traditionally supported and provided access to a wide range of perspectives. The commitment to respect diversity now extends to a respect for and celebration of students’ home cultures. To fully understand and appreciate the cultures of others, school librarians need to develop their own cultural competence and to approach students and families from an assets-based model, recognizing that “through mutual respect, shared power, and collaboration, professionals become partners with the communities they serve” (Montiel-Overall, Nuñez, and Reyes-Escudero 2015, 29). Specific actions to address the needs of Latino youth include maintaining social interaction between English-

speaking and Spanish-speaking students, developing bi- or multilingual signage, involving parents in social and informational programs, and using library instructional time to build background knowledge in content areas (Montiel-Overall, Nuñez, and Reyes-Escudero 2015).

Culturally responsive instruction uses strategies that create inclusive learning environments to nurture all students—but it is difficult to implement fully because of its complexity (Powell et al. 2016). One cultural feature represented in urban schools is a preference for social interaction and spontaneous, lively expression (LAUSD n.d.; Hughes-Hassell and Hitson 2013). School librarians can embrace this preference and take steps to create more-inclusive learning environments by using response and discourse protocols to ensure all students have access to instructional conversations and opportunities to learn in social settings (Hughes-Hassell 2017). Such protocols emphasize that all students are responsible members of the group (LAUSD n.d.).

Accountable Talk practices help students learn how to have academic conversations; in so doing they become accountable to the learning environment, knowledge, and evidence (University of Pittsburgh 2015). Through using practices such as these, “school librarians explicitly lead learners to demonstrate empathy and equity in knowledge building within the global learning community by creating an atmosphere in which learners feel empowered and interactions are learner-initiated” (School Librarian II.D.1, AASL 2018, 76) and “foster active participation in learning situations by creating a learning environment in which learners understand that learning is a social responsibility” (School Librarian III.D.2, AASL 2018, 84).

CULTURAL COMPETENCE IS THE CAPACITY TO:

- **RECOGNIZE** the significance of culture in one’s own life and in the lives of others;
- **ACQUIRE** and respectfully use knowledge of diverse ethnic and cultural groups’ beliefs, values, attitudes, practices, communication patterns, and assets to strengthen LIS programs and services through increased community participation;
- **BRIDGE GAPS** in services to communities by connecting them with outside resources;
- **RECOGNIZE** socioeconomic and political factors that adversely affect diverse populations; and
- **EFFECTIVELY IMPLEMENT** institutional policies that benefit diverse populations and communities. (Montiel-Overall, Nuñez, and Reyes-Escudero 2015, 21)

Curate

Learners and school librarians **Curate** to “make meaning for [themselves] and others by collecting, organizing, and sharing resources of personal relevance” (AASL 2018, 94).

Inspired by the School Librarian Framework, the urban school librarian can:

IV.A. Challenge learners to act on an information need by:

2. Designing opportunities for learners to explore possible information sources.
3. Guiding learners to make critical choices about information sources to use. (AASL 2018, 94)

This Shared Foundation extends traditional collection development practices into the arena of curation and includes learners as well as librarians in this act of meaning-making. Marcia Mardis defines curation as “an ongoing process of skillfully selecting resources that meet the school community’s needs and creating an experience with those resources through organization, description, promotion, reflection, and engagement” (2017, 15). Urban school librarians can curate resources by focusing efforts on providing access to enabling texts and materials that reflect and celebrate the cultural heritage of their learners. Patricia Montiel-Overall and her colleagues have recommended that school librarians develop Spanish-language and bilingual collections and highlight language and culture in resources, displays, and performances (2015). Alfred Tatum advocated using enabling texts to give voice to black adolescent males; inspire healthy identity development, resilience, and engagement; and build capacity (Hughes-Hassell and Rawson 2011). School librarians should also engage learners in book clubs or discussion groups using these materials (Hughes-

Hassell and Rawson 2011) and design experiences to engage young people in curating resources that have meaning for them (Boone, Rawson, and Vance 2010; Hughes-Hassell and Kumasi 2017).

In addition to curating informational resources, school librarians can use curation strategies to discover, organize, and describe the assets of newcomer immigrant groups as well as the resources of the larger urban community, conducting surveys to identify individuals with specific capabilities as well as institutions, landmarks, and other cultural features. This essential first step to map community assets can help the school librarian develop partnerships with local and regional organizations, businesses, and other institutions (Hughes-Hassell et al. 2012; Montiel-Overall, Nuñez, and Reyes-Escudero 2015). It can also help the school librarian connect young people with sources to help them with information needs in their everyday lives and help “teens understand the world and their positions in it...and to contemplate who they aspire to be in the future” (Agosto and Hughes-Hassell 2006, 1399).

Engage

Learners and school librarians **Engage** “in a community of practice and an interconnected world” (AASL 2018, 113).

Urban school libraries can be the most interconnected of all school libraries, and school librarians should make every effort to help learners understand how they can participate in larger scholarly and social communities. As school librarians explore community resources, map community assets, and develop community partnerships, they can help learners connect with resources beyond the school and engage in social action projects to improve their communities. Such community engagement is supported by the alignments in the *AASL Standards Framework for School Libraries*:

V.C. The school library prepares learners to engage with a larger learning community by:

2. Encouraging families and other members of the community to participate in school library activities.

—and—

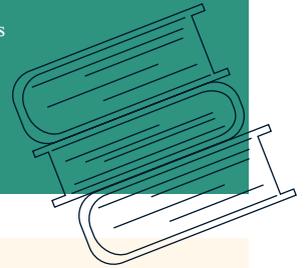
3. Building and advocating for strong relationships with stakeholders who recognize and support an effective school library. (AASL 2018, 105)

Recent projects demonstrate the impact that community partners can have on learning through partnerships with the school library. In 2011 the Weinberg Foundation initiated a project with Baltimore City Public Schools to renovate school libraries (appropriately staffed with professional librarians and support staff) to foster 21st-century skills, use emerging technologies, and provide access to information in multiple formats and from multiple platforms (Falkenberg et al. 2017). MyLibraryNYC, a partnership between the New York City Department of Education and New York City’s three public library systems, provides educators and learners with fine-free access and delivery of materials (Wilson and Ellis 2014). Limitless Libraries (LL) provides students with borrowing privileges at the Nashville Public Library through their student identification numbers. Positive test outcomes correlated with use of LL services, and three out of five learners associated LL use with academic success (Lance and Barney 2016).

These partnerships emerged because community leaders saw the school library as a viable locus for positive change. Encouraged by these developments, urban school librarians can reach beyond our walls as we cultivate our own cultural competence, learn about the assets and strengths of our learners’ home cultures, and improve our services through partnering with our communities.



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