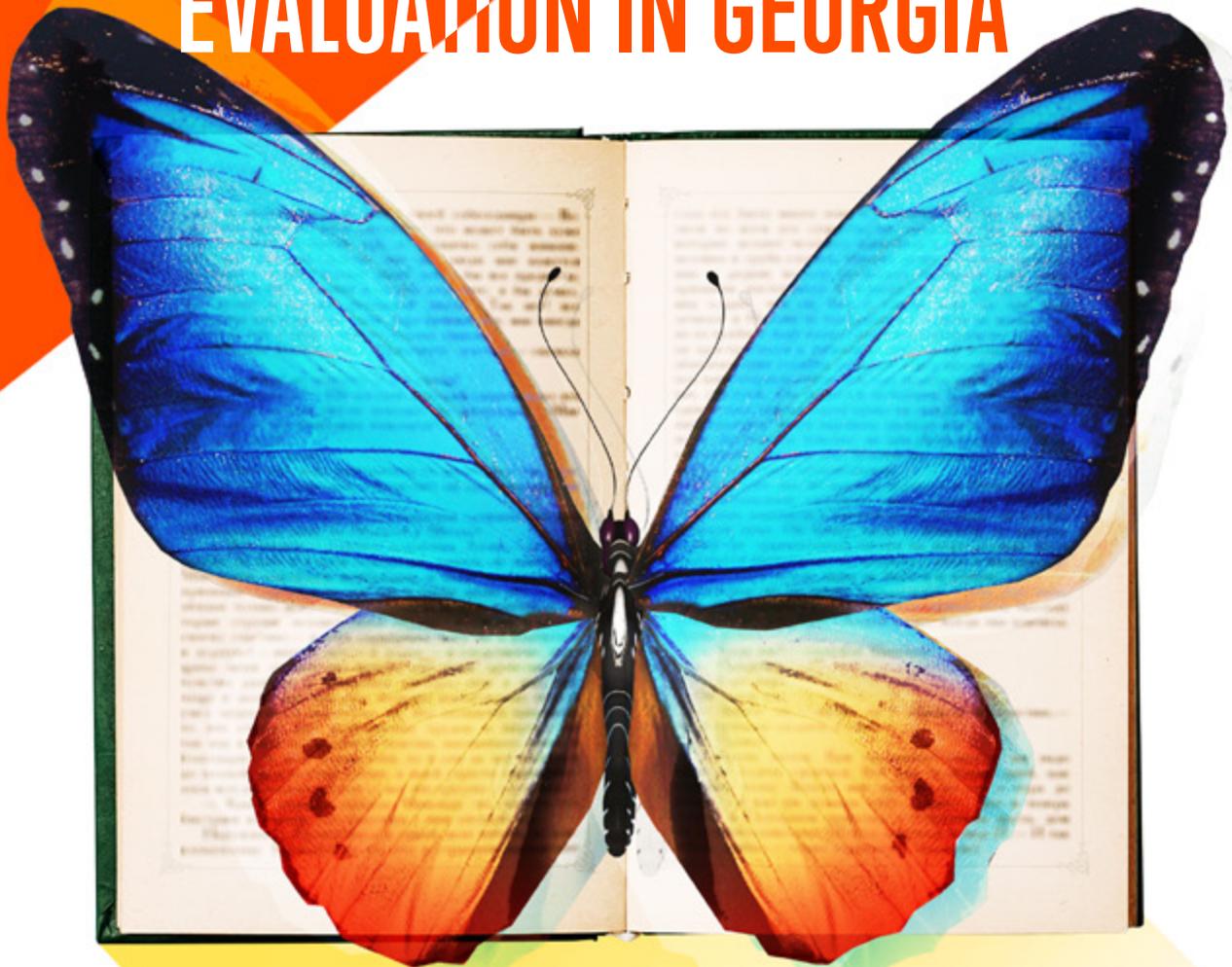# EVOLUTION OF EVALUATION IN GEORGIA

EXPLORING SCHOOL LIBRARIANS' RESPONSES

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What Does a School Librarian Do?

As a school librarian, you work hard. You are an expert at multi-tasking, and you rarely find time to spend a few leisurely moments enjoying a short break from your duties. You serve a diverse multitude of students, teachers, administrators, parents, and community members. Time is precious, and your professional calling consumes your day. You know the impact of your work; students read more, achieve more, and are actively engaged in future-ready learning because of you. Still, sometimes you wonder:

- Are your peers and colleagues fully aware of the vast extent of your contributions to the school network?

- Do your administrators or evaluators know your essential role in the preparation of all students to be college, career, and community ready?

- Is an up-to-date evaluation instrument available that truly captures the scope of your unique skill set?

In the November/December 2015 issue of *Knowledge Quest*, Susan K. S. Grigsby, Jennifer Helfrich, and Christa Harrelson Deissler wrote a feature article about the Georgia School Library Media Specialist Consortium's development of ten AASL standards-based, future-ready evaluation standards for school librarians (see figure 1). That article provided insight on the impetus for designing AASL-based evaluation standards, the process followed by the Georgia Consortium in

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the development of meaningful standards, and the importance of collaboration partners in the effort. The authors' stated goal of bringing players to the table to collaborate on library issues to turn theory into practice now has been realized.

Both Gwinnett County's early work with the Media Specialist Effectiveness Measure (MSEM) and Cobb County's present implementation of the finalized School Librarian Evaluation Instrument (SLEI) have laid a firm foundation for successfully launching the system in other districts inside and outside Georgia's borders. The design of the instrument mimicked the format of Georgia's Teacher Keys Effectiveness System and the state's Leader Keys Effectiveness System so that the process for evaluating school librarians would be similar to processes already familiar to

evaluators in the state. During the past two years administration of the SLEI has generated opportunities for conversations among school librarians, principals, teachers, and an array of patrons and has also promoted the impact of school library services across Georgia.

Perceptions of School Librarian Roles and Standards Alignment

In many locales—in many states— early conceptions of the school librarian's job have not evolved over the years even as the duties have expanded exponentially. The fact that in some districts outdated evaluation tools, such as Georgia's 1990 system, are still used to rate 21st-century school librarians is an obvious sign of the misconceptions others have about the duties and performance of the school librarian today. The roles of school librarians and the assessments used to evaluate their performance are often incongruent.

Two factors seem to contribute to this incongruence. First, various stakeholder groups view the roles of the school librarian inconsistently; therefore, members of the public do not always apply the AASL roles of leader, teacher, instructional partner, information specialist, and program administrator when they define the roles of the school librarian (AASL 2009). Second, assessments that have been developed to evaluate school librarians' effectiveness are either outdated—and therefore, do not reflect the actual roles of today's school library professionals—or they lack a consistent focus on credible school library guidelines. In his

dissertation on school librarian standards, job descriptions, and performance evaluations in Florida, Aaron Elkins described this incongruence:

> School librarianship has evolved as the nature of education and society's access to and use of information has changed. Perceptions of the roles of school librarians have evolved more slowly, where some pursue the future of the role while others have yet to turn their gaze from the past. The findings from this study suggest that pattern continues to this day, with the existence of 101 incongruences among job descriptions, professional evaluations, and national guidelines. School librarians may be most effective in environments in which they and their administrators are clear about the purpose of the school library program, and when school librarians' efforts are recognized as making important contributions to the learning community. (2014, 100–101)

In light of these mixed concepts of role definitions and assessment inconsistencies, and in an effort to address these obstacles, the Georgia School Library Media Specialist Consortium developed the School Librarian Evaluation Instrument (SLEI). The ten standards that form the basis for the system were built using the *AASL Standards for 21st-Century Learners* (AASL 2007), *ALA/AASL Standards for Initial Preparation of School Librarians* (AASL 2010), and the *ISTE Standards for Coaches* (2011). Content of the Future Ready Librarians webpages (Alliance for Excellent Ed. n.d.) was also considered during development. A full description of the development process can be found in the 2015 Grigsby, Helfrich, and Deissler article (available at <https://files.eric.

ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1079854.pdf>). It should be noted that, with the 2018 update to the earlier AASL standards, members of the Georgia Consortium did a thorough review of the SLEI standards. This review revealed that the ten SLEI standards are in full alignment with the 2018 AASL Standards, as the five roles of the school librarian were unchanged.

After crafting the ten standards, Holly Frilot, the supervisor of library media education for the Cobb County (GA) School District (and one of the authors of this article), developed ancillary materials to support the evaluation process for school librarians. The result was a seamless, meaningful system for evaluation that served to educate administration and faculty about the role of school librarians and provide a solid framework for evaluation of that role. The system was rolled out for the Cobb County School District in the fall of 2017.

Case Study: Vision to Reality

Process

In the 2016–2017 school year, the Cobb County School District began using the SLEI with a pilot group of seven librarians and six administrators. After gathering feedback and receiving guidance from the Cobb County Human Resources Department, the decision was made to distribute the evaluation to the entire district of 111 school libraries for the following school year. Under Holly's leadership, the Cobb County School District Library Media Leadership Team developed ancillary materials designed to support the implementation of the ten SLEI standards (see figure 1).

A timeline, guidelines, and remediation plan were established, along with a self-assessment, formative assessment, and summative evaluation forms. Formative

and summative assessments were prepared so evaluators could rank school librarians on the ten SLEI standards. In addition, criteria were set for evaluation of novice librarians, requiring two walkthroughs beyond the one required thirty-minute teaching observation of veteran librarians. An appeal process was developed defining parameters for objections; this process would be used in the event of an appeal about a designated score on any of the standards. Based on the timeline, the following deadlines were set:

- July–August: School librarian's and evaluator's familiarization with the SLEI and school librarian's completion of the SLEI Self-Assessment Form.

- August–September: School librarian's establishment of professional learning goals. Pre-Evaluation Conference is held with evaluator; conference includes identification of specific evidentiary resources to be used to document that standards were met and a discussion regarding evidence that is not documentable.

- August–January: Formative assessment by evaluator (thirty-minute observation) is completed.

- January–February: Mid-year conference (school librarian and evaluator) is held to review progress.

- January–April: Documentation collection continued.

- April–May: Summative conference and assessment. Documentation signed and submitted.

As the timeline demonstrates, the final SLEI system consisted of one self-assessment requiring establishment of goal(s); three conferences including pre-evaluation, mid-year, and summative; one formative observation; and one final written

summative assessment to be signed by the school librarian and evaluator and submitted to the school district's human resources department. For school librarians with three or fewer years of experience in the district, two additional ten-minute evaluator "walk-throughs" were required for informal observations, as well as the creation of a professional development plan that outlined how goals would be met.

Face-to-face training for 117 school librarians and 109 evaluators was developed and conducted early in the school year by Holly. Evaluators were trained to look for key focus points in the teaching observation. In addition, they were informed of essential topics of discussion to include for the three conferences. Since no set number of artifacts were required for documentation, examples of various artifacts that could be included to address each of the ten standards were shared.

Response to SLEI implementation was very positive at the beginning of the 2017–2018 school year, partially due to the strong favorable response from the previous year's pilot group. An additional factor contributing to the positive reception the new system received was the widely held view—among librarians and evaluators—that the previous evaluation tool did not accurately assess performance of school librarians, indicating the new tool was needed.

Librarians' Reflections on SLEI

To gauge the impact of the SLEI, the school librarians' experiences after implementation of the system were investigated. An anonymous survey instrument was developed based on the content of the ten standards; the questionnaire included demographic information in addition to both open- and close-ended response questions

Figure 1. Georgia's School Librarian Evaluation Instrument standards.

10 STANDARDS
School Librarian Evaluation Instrument

1 Instructional Partnership
The school library media specialist collaboratively plans instruction and develops the library 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.

2 Role of Reading
The school library media specialist develops a culture of reading and promotes reading as a foundational skill for learning, personal growth, and enjoyment.

3 Information & Technology Literacy
The school library media specialist plans and provides instruction that addresses multiple literacies, including information literacy, media literacy, and technology literacy.

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

5 Effective Practices for Research
The school library media specialist teaches and models developmentally appropriate best practices for learning and research.

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

7 Positive Learning Environment
The school library media specialist provides a well-managed, safe, and welcoming environment that supports personalized learning, includes flexible and equitable access to physical and digital resources, ensures a well-rounded education, and encourages respect for all.

8 Collection Development
The school library media specialist supports the curriculum through selection and management of resources that meet the needs and interests of patrons.

9 Professionalism
The school library media specialist fosters the success of students by demonstrating professional standards and ethics, engaging in continuous professional learning, and contributing to the profession.

10 Communication
The school library media specialist fosters the success of all students by communicating and collaborating effectively with stakeholders in ways that enhance student learning and engagement.

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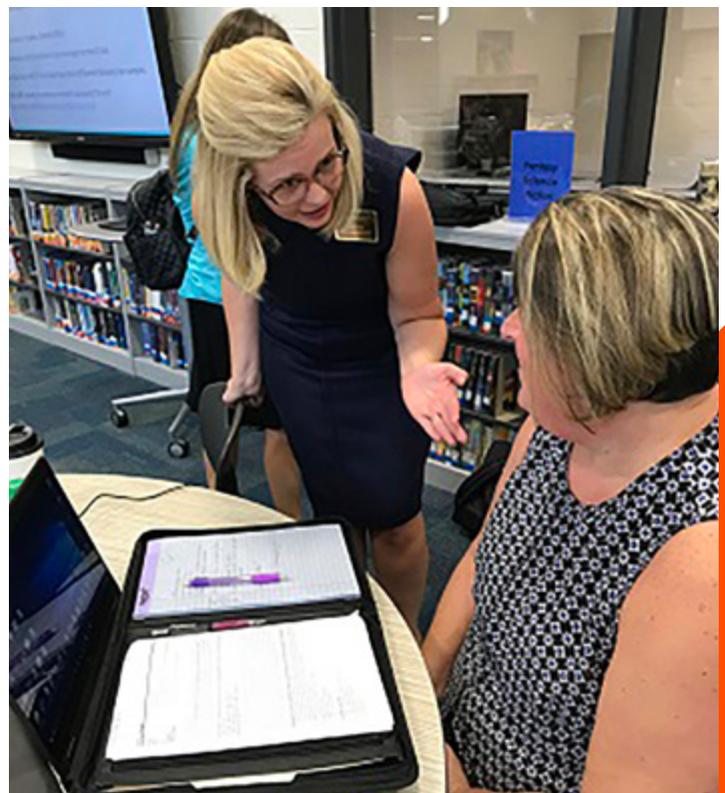*Figure 2. Holly Frilot providing professional development.*

Table 1. March survey data.

SURVEY QUESTION	RESPONSES (AS PERCENTAGES)			
	YES	SOMEWHAT	NO	N/A
Was your SLEI training effective?	60	40	0	
Was your EVALUATOR's training effective?	49	36	1	14
Was the Pre-evaluation Self-Assessment positive?	77	21	2	
Was the Mid-year Formative Assessment positive?	83	12	3	2
Was the Observation positive?	80	20	0	
Was the Professional Development Plan appropriate?	21	10	4	65

to gain feedback from all levels on the SLEI process. Input for the survey design was gained from the librarians themselves through focus group discussions and district-level feedback. The decision was made to administer two surveys using Google Forms. One survey was sent out to all school librarians in March 2018 with the hope that most participants would have completed their formative assessment. A second survey was sent out in late May 2018 during post-planning after all summative assessments should have been finalized. Responses to both surveys were optional.

The March survey had a 44 percent response rate and reflected very positive experiences with the SLEI standards and processes. A few school librarians commented that the evaluator was lax in following the timeline closely, but the large majority reported a very positive experience with their observations and conferences. Some example comments:

"The SLEI instrument is working fine for me. My admin and I talk about it frequently and have an open relationship regarding the evaluation process. If she requests something specific, I

WILL do my best to provide documentation. I ask her if there is anything she wants to see and will make this happen. It all starts with a good relationship with your evaluator and clear expectations."

"My evaluator observed me teaching in December and completed the Formative Assessment Form (which she rated me very highly on). That is all that has happened so far."

"Principal did not adhere to time-line."

Data from the first survey questions in March are in table 1.

The May survey had a 53 percent response rate. These responses about respondents' interactions with their evaluators were extremely positive. Over 90 percent of the responding librarians indicated favorable reflections on the summative conference and the SLEI system (see table 2). These favorable reflections, especially during the first year of implementation, indicated to us that the evaluation process was indeed a success. Sample comments:

"I had the most reflective, interesting assessment conference that I had ever had."

"I had a good hour-long conference with [my administrator] for my Summative and we mostly looked ahead at what we want to accomplish in the upcoming school year. I walked out of her office feeling positive and uplifted."

"Again, allows [school librarians] to show admin all of the ways we impact students and staff."

Of those who responded negatively, some commented that evaluators did not adhere to the timeline or failed to follow the process for observation and conferencing. Several statements were made that evaluators still do not fully understand the roles of the school librarian and what the school librarian does, so even with a strong evaluation system and good documentation, administrators can miss a lot of what the school librarian does behind the scenes. Sample comments:

"We are being evaluated on things our evaluator knows nothing about. Collection development is one example that I had to fully

Table 2. May survey data.

SURVEY QUESTION	RESPONSES (AS PERCENTAGES)	
	YES	NO
Was your Summative Conference a positive experience?	91	9
Is SLEI a positive method of evaluation?	91	9

explain this year, and I still don't think she understood how much time this can take."

"I don't believe that administration fully understands our job and how to evaluate it."

"Have not had one."

"Didn't have one…yet."

Another issue often raised was that of duties and responsibilities of the school librarians. The instrument cannot address the extra duties that some respondents were required to conduct. The amount of time available to meet the ten standards at an exemplary level was limited when some of the day was spent completing duties outside of school library responsibilities. Sample comments:

"I would like a way to discuss other roles we must fill. I also think there is a big difference with what can be accomplished when you have a para and when you do not. Not really a fair comparison."

"There are a lot of things that fall under 'other duties as assigned' so in a way it is all a part of the job description. It's all enjoyable and for the benefit of

our students. I am invested, but to do all of this often requires being here for an average of 9- to 10-hour days…Being here, makes me a part of a team and someone has to do it. The alternative is to leave my colleagues hanging."

Data from the second survey responses in May are in table 2.

Putting It All Together

According to Grigsby, Helfrich, and Deissler's 2015 article, one of the main goals for the establishment of the Georgia Consortium was to make explicit connections between librarian preparation requirements and practice in the field. As mentioned earlier, the ALA/AASL *Standards for Initial Preparation of School Librarians* document (AASL 2010) was used to maintain accurate content for librarian preparation requirements for SLEI standards, and the 2007 and 2018 AASL and 2011 ISTE standards were consulted to ensure the Georgia standards were based on realistic content regarding practice in the field. Since these guidelines were used to develop the ten standards and the rollout of the full system received very positive feedback, the Georgia Consortium

> *One goal for the development of the SLEI system was to advocate and demonstrate the powerful contributions the school librarian can make when in a position to fulfill the roles set forth in the instrument.*

asserts that a viable system that correlates what is taught in preparation programs with what is actually needed in practice was developed. The authors of the 2015 article concluded with the focus on school librarians themselves, who have been at a "point of frustration" due to a need for guidance in the area of school librarian evaluation (Grigsby, Helfrich and Deissler 2015, 22). The SLEI system, built upon the ten SLEI standards, directly addresses this frustration from the field and provides a consistent, current, viable method for evaluating school librarians.

One goal for the development of the SLEI system was to advocate and demonstrate the powerful contributions the school librarian can make

when in a position to fulfill the roles set forth in the instrument. While the SLEI system implementation in the Cobb County School District shows evidence of success, it appears that there continues to be a disconnect between what constitutes professional duties of the school librarian and assignment of other duties that fall outside areas of training. Many school librarians reported that they still spend a substantial portion of their work day dealing with non-library-related duties. It is understood that educators must sometimes conduct certain tasks considered to be outside the regular realm of teaching, leading, etc., but consistent assignment of tasks that detract from the ability to perform specialized duties impacts opportunities to provide professional services for patrons. Furthermore, as the comprehensive roles and duties of the profession continue to consistently expand, evaluation instruments and methods must accommodate the shift in definition and responsibilities.

Moving Forward

The SLEI system has been transformative for school librarian evaluation in the Cobb County School District. It has brought about a more-thorough understanding of what the specific roles of the school librarian are, and has provided a platform for strong advocacy for the profession in that district. As more district leaders in the state inquire about the SLEI system, a need to train additional personnel in implementing the system has arisen. As a result, thirteen of the sixteen Regional Educational Service Agencies (RESA) in Georgia have received SLEI train-the-trainer instruction. Therefore, a network

is now in place for distribution and use of the evaluation throughout the state. Further feedback from districts of all sizes is needed as the system is implemented. Likewise, constant review for revisions to keep the system relevant and reliable for districts of all sizes and locations must be conducted.

The School Librarian Evaluation Instrument system represents the evolution of strong collaboration among school library leaders in the state, and was born out of a serious need for a redefinition of the roles and responsibilities of the school librarian. The Cobb County School District's successful implementation of the SLEI system provided that updated definition and brought about a more-realistic understanding of the countless contributions that can be made by a qualified, equipped, supported school librarian.

SLEI documents, including the SLEI itself, complete with rubrics, can be accessed at the Georgia Library Media Association website at <www.glma-inc.org/slei>.

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