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**W**e are closing in on one hundred years of standards for school libraries! In that time, school library standards have gone through a number of iterations, and expectations for student learning have evolved. While the school library of today looks and functions differently from the school library of the early 1900s, the vision surprisingly is still very similar. The goal of today's school library is to provide access to a wide range of information in a variety of formats and to offer opportunities for students to become effective library users and to discover the love of reading. All of this should happen under the guidance of a professional school librarian working with and for teachers. What has changed over the years is how this vision is accomplished.

To get a true picture of how far we have come in our expectations of school libraries and student learners, it is helpful to look back at how the standards have evolved over the last one hundred years. In the beginning, what students needed to know about using the library was a small part of the school library standards. With each revision, the focus on student learning increased in scope and became more complex. However, only in the last twenty years have we as school library professionals clearly defined what students need to know in order to be successful users and creators of information.

### **The First School Library Standards**

In 1915, the Committee on Library Organization and Equipment of the National Education Association and of the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools was created. The committee was charged with investigating the

conditions of high school libraries and in obtaining the aid of school administrators to improve those conditions. Led by C.C. Certain, the committee released the report *Standard Library Organization and Equipment for Secondary Schools of Different Sizes*. The report, which became known as the *Certain Standards*, was adopted by ALA and published in 1920. It made six recommendations concerning school libraries for high schools:

- High schools should include space for a school library with storage for equipment.
- High school libraries should be staffed by professionally trained librarians.
- High school libraries should use scientific selection, proper cataloging, and care of books and other materials.
- High schools should provide instruction in the use of books and libraries as a course in the high school curricula.
- High school libraries should be provided adequate budgets for salaries, maintenance, and purchase of materials and supplies.
- A trained librarian should be employed as a state supervisor of every state education department. (Committee on Library Organization and Equipment of the National Education Association and of the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools 1920)

Sound familiar? We are still working on convincing school administrators that every school needs a qualified school librarian, an adequate budget, and opportunities for students to learn how to access, use, and share information. Some states

still struggle to have school library representation in state departments of education.

Mary E. Hall, one of the first trained school librarians in the United States, was an influential member of the committee that wrote the *Certain Standards* report. The school library that she established at Girls' High School in Brooklyn served as a model for excellence in the early 1900s and formed the basis for this first set of standards for school libraries. The Girls' High School Library included a reading room, library classroom, browsing area, storage for equipment, moveable tables, glass cases for displays, and bulletin boards. Mary Hall's responsibilities as a professional librarian included providing access to materials for leisure reading and curriculum support and working with teachers in developing a scope and sequence of instruction. She viewed the school library as a means of self-education, leisure time, and for participation in a democracy. She believed it was important to teach students how to secure information from books and other printed material and to develop a love of reading (Alto 2012, 12).

Even in the early 1900s, school librarians thought it was important to instruct students in how to use the library. However, the focus was on working with teachers to enrich the curriculum, which took the form of suggesting resources and encouraging teachers to provide opportunities for students to use the library. Instruction for students centered on creating good reading, study, and library habits. An observer in a school library during this time would see students quietly reading or studying. A student working on a research project could expect the school librarian to help locate useful books.


The guidelines set forth in the *Certain Standards* influenced the development of school libraries into the 1940s. In 1945, the ALA Committees on Post-War Planning, chaired by Mary Peacock Douglas, published *School Libraries for Today and Tomorrow: Functions and Standards*. Among the purposes of the school library, several focused on services to students:

- provide students library materials and services appropriate and meaningful to their growth as individuals
- increase enjoyment of reading

- provide opportunities to develop helpful interests and desirable social attitudes
- help students become skillful users of libraries
- introduce students to community libraries for lifelong library use (ALA Committees on Post-War Planning 1945)

The 1945 standards gave more guidance on the school librarian's role within the school program. School librarians were expected to help students learn to read and improve their reading skills by assisting in the development of personal reading interests through recommended bibliographies, displays, exhibits, and access to a wide selection of materials. They worked with guidance counselors on students' social and occupational development by encouraging personal investigations, cultivating good work habits, and providing opportunities for students to become library assistants. Reference services to students included a systematic and thorough training in the use of books and libraries. Students were expected to acquire the ability to use books as tools for locating specific information and finding answers for themselves. This required planned periods for class instruction and teacher-led research in the library, as well as selecting materials for special projects. School librarians were encouraged to work with teachers to select and use library materials and to participate in professional growth activities.

Even though there was more emphasis on interactions between the school librarian and students, the image of the library was still one of a great repository of resources. "Teachers and children go there [the school library] to read what the best minds have written. They seek in the library contact with the treasures



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produced by the artists of all time. They like to find in the library the calm and quiet associated with study and research” (ALA Committee on Post-War Planning 1945).

### **Standards Shift Focus to Students**

In 1958, AASL responded to the increasing number of requests to revise the national standards for school libraries by creating a committee, which was co-chaired by Frances Henne and Ruth Ersted. Based on data collected by the committee and input from more than twenty organizations and numerous individuals, the committee submitted *Standards for School Library Programs* for publication by the ALA in 1960. At 130 pages, it provided more details on the purposes of the school library program and the role of the school librarian. Yet, it still followed a familiar theme. The school librarian provided access to a rich collection of materials with input from classroom teachers. Students should be offered library experiences that developed helpful interests and built skillful library users. School librarians were encouraged to participate in the professional development offered to teachers.

However, what separated this set of national standards from the previous versions was the growing emphasis on what students should be taught. The school library was seen as a laboratory for research and study. There was a need for library skills to start in kindergarten and expand in breadth and depth each year thereafter. “The librarian teaches the library orientation lessons, and introduces appropriate materials and suggests avenues of approach to classes starting work on special projects or assignments” (AASL 1960).



## **THE SKILLS A LIBRARIAN MIGHT TEACH IN A STUDENT-CENTERED ENVIRONMENT:**

locating specific information

analyzing, evaluating, and interpreting information

using information accurately, efficiently, and in bibliographic form

using specific reference tools

listening, viewing, and study skills

understanding library organization

transitioning to public and academic library use





**DESPITE THIS SHIFT IN FOCUS FOR THE SCHOOL LIBRARY, THE ACTIVITIES ONE MIGHT OBSERVE IN THE MEDIA CENTER WOULD NOT APPEAR THAT DIFFERENT FROM THE SCHOOL LIBRARY OF THE EARLY 1900S. STUDENTS WOULD STILL BE QUIETLY READING OR STUDYING.**



The skills a librarian might teach in these situations included:

- locating specific information
- analyzing, evaluating, and interpreting information
- using information accurately, efficiently, and in bibliographic form
- using specific reference tools
- listening, viewing, and study skills
- understanding library organization
- transitioning to public and academic library use

While the school librarian had a growing responsibility for instruction, the expectation was that the classroom teacher would receive in-service training in the development of effective techniques for using resources and teaching library skills. Because a class's use of the library was an extension of classroom work, the teacher was expected to work with the librarian in assisting students. The key to this partnership was the extent to which teachers motivated their students to use the library for their assignments. If classroom teachers did not design instruction that required the use of the library, then the student had little need to use its resources.

### Advances in Technology and a Shift in Terminology

The 1960s saw significant changes in society, education, and technology, which prompted AASL and the Department of Audiovisual Instruction, a division of the National Education Association, to jointly develop a single set of standards that addressed both school library and audiovisual programs. The title of the standards indicated a paradigm shift, *Standards for School Media Programs* (1969). These standards recognized

that the expansion of types of resources required a change in the terminology used to describe the school library and the school librarian. Thus the school library became the media center, and the school librarian the media specialist.

*Standards for School Media Programs* emphasized the effect of increasing access to a variety of formats on the ability of students and teachers to select the media best suited to their needs. The media specialist was expected to build a collection that included a wider range of media and to become an expert in the use of these resources. In addition, the media specialist was expected to be active in shaping the learning environment and work with teachers to design instructional experiences that helped students develop competencies in listening, viewing, reading, inquiry, and critical evaluation.

At this time educational programs stressed more individualization and self-directed learning. This new emphasis focused on ideas and concepts rather than isolated facts, which required a shift away from locating resources to becoming effective in using those resources. The standards did not give a lot of guidance on what or how this should be accomplished, only that the media specialist take on the responsibility of providing instruction in the use of the media center and its resources. It was assumed that most of the instruction would happen with individual students in the media center. The media specialist was encouraged to provide teachers information about student progress based on observations.

Despite this shift in focus for the school library, the activities one might observe in the media center would not appear that different

from the school library of the early 1900s. Students would still be quietly reading or studying. The media specialist would still be helping individual students locate resources and occasionally helping a student use those resources.

### The Importance of Planning and Instruction

In 1971, AASL and the Association for Educational Communications and Technology (once the Department of Audiovisual Instruction of the National Educational Association) continued their collaboration. The 1975 *Media Programs District and School*, adopted by both organizations, advocated the importance of a systematic process for planning the media program. It also stressed the importance of a district media program in supporting the building-level media program. Previous standards always promoted the idea of the school librarian/media specialist working closely with teachers. However, in this document, the media specialist was encouraged to become fully involved in the process of instructional design. This approach moved the media program from a support service to an essential part of the total instructional program.

In this new capacity, the media specialist was seen as the expert in matching a variety of information sources and teaching/learning styles to the needs of the individual user. The term "user" expanded to include all learners: students, teachers, noncertified staff, administrators, parents, and community members. In addition to providing a collection consisting of a wide variety of materials, the media specialist assisted users in the actual production of learning resources. The media specialist continued to provide instruction in finding, evaluating, and using

information. This might mean instructing a small group, a class, or providing in-service. However, these activities were still dependent on the teacher's willingness to bring students to the library.

Once again, AASL and AECT came together to begin the revision process in 1983, and in 1988 published *Information Power: Guidelines for School Library Media Programs*. This publication greatly expanded the concept of the library media specialist's role in instructional design and as an information specialist. *Information Power* differed significantly from the previous sets of standards in its identification of specific objectives within the mission of the library media program. These objectives were to provide:

- intellectual access to information
- physical access to information
- learning experiences that encourage users to become discriminating consumers and skilled creators of information
- leadership, instruction, and consulting assistance in the use of instructional and information technology
- resources and activities that contribute to lifelong learning
- a facility that functions as the information center of the school
- resources and learning that represent a diversity of experiences, opinions, social and cultural perspectives

In addition to more specifically defining the mission of the library media program, the responsibilities of the library media specialist were more clearly defined. *Information Power* identified three roles for the library media specialist: information specialist, teacher,

and instructional consultant. The information specialist's focus was on providing easy access to the library media center and its resources through collection development, an effective retrieval system, and flexible policies for the use of those resources.

As a teacher, the library media specialist was "responsible for ensuring that skills, knowledge, and attitudes concerning information access, use and communication were an integral part of the school curriculum" (AASL and Association for Educational Communications and Technology 1988). The idea of students coming to the library as a class was becoming more prevalent, but skills were taught in isolation. The instruction was not always tied to what was happening in the classroom. Instruction in the access and use of information was not limited to students; instruction should also be available to educators and parents.

The library media specialist acted as instructional consultant through active participation in curriculum development and the instructional design and use of technology. The library media specialist was expected to participate on committees and collaborate with teachers to design instruction. At this time, computers were appearing in schools, and library media specialists were encouraged to take leadership roles in determining how teachers and students would use them.

### **Defining Student Outcomes of School Library Instruction**

Although the importance of the role of the library media specialist as a teacher was stressed in *Information Power: Guidelines for School Library Media Programs*, what students needed to know was still not clearly defined. It was not until AASL and AECT

published *Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning* in 1998 that standards for student learning were addressed. The information explosion, growing advances in information technology, and the shift from teacher-centered instruction to student-centered learning prompted the need to define the concepts, skills, and processes students must master to become information literate and lifelong learners. The authors of *Information Power II* identified nine information literacy standards for student learning:

- access information efficiently and effectively
- evaluate information critically and competently
- use information accurately and creatively
- pursue information related to personal interests
- appreciate literature and other creative expressions of information
- strive for excellence in information seeking and knowledge generation
- recognize the importance of information to a democratic society
- practice ethical behavior in regard to information and information technology
- participate effectively in groups to pursue and generate information (AASL and AECT 1998)

Each of these information literacy standards was further developed by providing supporting material that included indicators, levels of proficiency, standards in action, and examples of subject content connections. The indicators for each of the broad standards described what the student





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needed to be able to do to meet that standard. The levels of proficiency aided in determining the level of a student's mastery. Standards in action were examples of situations in which information was used to solve a problem specific to a particular standard.

The document also provided examples of content-area standards to illustrate the connection between an information literacy standard indicator and a curricular area. This tool was provided to help library media specialists and

teachers collaboratively design learning activities that integrated information literacy into the subject-area content. Library media specialists were encouraged to initiate collaboration throughout the school. They could no longer wait for the teacher to come to them.

In 2006 AASL held a summit to identify the challenges and opportunities facing a 21st-century school library media program. Out of that summit came a commitment to provide standards and guidelines that defined and supported the

future course of school library media programs. As a result, three documents were created: *Standards for the 21st-Century Learner*, *Standards for the 21st-Century Learner in Action*, and *Empowering Learners: Guidelines for School Library Programs*.

*Standards for the 21st-Century Learner* shifted instruction from the narrow focus of information literacy to include multiple literacies (digital, visual, textual, technological). The four standards were very broad and emphasized the learning process:



- Learners use skills, resources, and tools to inquire, think critically, and gain knowledge.
- Learners use skills, resources, and tools to draw conclusions, make informed decisions, apply knowledge to new situations, and create new knowledge.
- Learners use skills, resources, and tools to share knowledge and participate ethically and productively as members of our democratic society.
- Learners use skills, resources, and tools to pursue personal and aesthetic growth. (AASL 2007)

These four standards were extended through the four strands (skills, dispositions, responsibilities, self-assessment strategies) with indicators under each strand. These indicators describe what the learner could do to demonstrate competency. *Standards for the 21st-Century Learner in Action* added grade-level benchmarks and action examples to help school librarians working with teachers to design learning experiences appropriate for the age and skill level of the learners.

*Empowering Learners: Guidelines for School Library Programs* addressed the total school library program in meeting its mission to ensure that all learners are effective users of information and ideas. These guidelines focused on the role of the school librarian as a leader, instructional partner, information specialist, teacher, and program administrator. Central to each of these roles was its impact on learning.

## Conclusion

Interestingly enough, although our expectations for student learning have evolved to meet the needs of a rapidly changing world, the

vision for school libraries remains essentially the same. "Implicit within every standard and indicator is the necessity of a strong school library program that offers a highly-qualified school library media specialist, equitable access to up-to-date resources, dynamic instruction, and a culture that nurtures reading and learning throughout the school" (AASL 2009b).

The difference lies in how the best school library programs have achieved this vision. The 1945 *School Libraries for Today and Tomorrow* "recognized the importance of moving steadily forward so that the library may truly become a community center of the world's best thinking to which citizens and children may have access" (ALA Committee on Post-War Planning 1945). Today, we see school libraries that have flipped the idea of a community center. The school library is no longer a place where students consume "the world's best thinking"; it has become the place where the best thinking happens.



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