



# Beyond the Four Walls

MINGLING WITH THE  
AASL STANDARDS

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The AASL Standards are not the rules for “how” or “what” to learn in school libraries. They are an invitation to explore the endless possibilities of “why.” The standards are our permission to take risks, to step beyond the comfort of our four walls to truly stretch ourselves and grow.

The AASL Standards provide a common language for school library stakeholders that bring into focus the competencies of engaged, persistent, and adaptive learning communities.

### Strengthening Connections between School and Public Librarians

You have most likely heard the encouraging statistic that there are more public libraries than McDonald’s restaurants in the United States (ALA Public Information Office 2003) and that younger generations are using public libraries more than older generations (Geiger 2017). So collaborating with your local public library should be easy, right? Yes and no.

Partnering with your public library, by its very nature, will take you beyond your physical four walls, but it will present unique challenges. Many of these issues were discussed during a Twitter chat hosted by the members of the AASL/ALSC/YALSA Interdivisional Committee on School-Public Library Cooperation and the organizers of #KyLChat (a Kentucky-led Twitter chat that occurs on the second and fourth Tuesday of every month). You can read the responses in the compiled blog post by Campbell County (KY) Middle School Librarian, Melissa Gardner, at [www.kasblog.com/school-and-public-library-collaboration](http://www.kasblog.com/school-and-public-library-collaboration). It was great to see public librarians and school librarians both so eager and excited to work together, and the AASL/ALSC/YALSA Public Library and School Library Collabo-



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ration toolkit provides many practical ideas that you could implement in your own community, along with some tips to help you be successful. (You can download the kit at [www.ala.org/alsc/publications-resources/professional-tools/school-public-library-partnerships](http://www.ala.org/alsc/publications-resources/professional-tools/school-public-library-partnerships).)

What the toolkit does not address is how to apply the new AASL Standards to these partnerships. Our fellow public librarians serving children and youth might be aware that AASL released new standards, but the responsibility of applying the learner standards will most likely fall to the school librarian. If your collaboration partner is unfamiliar with the new standards, make time to explore them in one of your initial meetings. Does your public library have a copy of the *National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries*? If not, help your public library get a copy. If that is not possible, direct the public librarians to the resources on the AASL Standards website to help them understand.

Explain the six Shared Foundations—Inquire, Include, Collaborate, Curate, Explore, Engage—and the four Domains within each Shared Foundation—Think, Create, Share, Grow (AASL 2018b). These will make perfect sense to your public library partner, and he or she can help you apply the learner standards to your project. In November 2018, Bookie Wilson, Youth Services Librarian for the Woodford County (KY) Public Library, told us that she supports her county schools by curating print and digital resources and by providing safe, inviting collaboration spaces for students to gather and work after school. Bookie says that she and the Woodford County High School Librarian are working together this year to enhance classroom learning outside of the physical high school classroom, which may include augmenting classroom studies with speakers, films, and titles not in the high school collection. Partnerships such as these will strengthen both library programs, foster a stronger community, and ultimately better prepare our students for the future.

## Strengthening Connections between School Librarians and Administrators

Beyond the partnership opportunities that can be developed in the local community, the school librarian has meaningful opportunities to foster alliances and coalitions within the whole school district.

There is a perceived divide to be bridged between school librarians and administrators. Although some may see crossing this divide as a big leap, it is a leap of faith that deserves to be explored. The timing is right to leverage the *National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries* as a tool to connect with administrators beyond the four walls of the school library.

What problem is my administrator trying to solve? That's the question school librarians have to ask themselves. It is in this "space" where a school librarian's roles (AASL 2009) of teacher, program administrator, information specialist, and instructional partner meld to support the librarian's role as leader.

Without even stepping outside your library doors, you can be confident that the academic achievement of students most certainly falls at the top of the list of administrators' concerns. School librarians can offer several solutions.

### *Support Administrative Initiatives*

AASL's "Guide for Administrators: Your School Library in the Learning Community" (2018a, 1) notes that school librarians have a "school-wide perspective on literacy and technology learning." With this global view of learning, the school librarian is positioned to support school- or district-wide initiatives. Just two of many possible examples follow.

Professional learning communities (PLCs) are based on the premise of shared gathering and analysis of data to ensure students' academic achievement. PLCs provide a perfect opportunity for the school librarian to capitalize on her expertise. The librarian can interact with both administrators and classroom teachers to develop a laser-like focus on the competency of gathering and using evidence to investigate the questions around student learning (Inquire's Create Domain) and help other educators achieve this focus. The school librarian can also focus interactions to enhance teachers' abilities to collaboratively identify innovative solutions to academic achievement challenges (Explore's Share Domain).

Blended learning provides students and teachers with the flexibility of space, place, and time to learn part of the time in a traditional classroom setting and part of the time in a virtual setting. Because blended learning is a fairly new trend in K–12 education, the school librarian can help teachers recognize the need for learners' skilled curation of resources using the competencies in the *AASL Standards Framework for Learners* (2018b). Without these competencies, an overload of materials in the learning management system may distract and overwhelm learners. In a blended learning environment, performing ongoing analysis of and reflection on the quality, usefulness, and accuracy of curated course resources is critical to students' success. Librarians can also help teachers learn about ways to broaden and deepen their understanding of best practices in blended learning through collaborative activities (Collaborate's Think Domain).

### *Set the Bar High for Instruction and Assessment*

To address the administrator's concern about student success and academic achievement, the school

librarian has an opportunity to work with individuals or teams of classroom teachers to help them set the bar high for instruction and assessment. Beyond supporting the curriculum with curated resources and co-designing instruction, the school librarian can be partnered (by administrators) with classroom teachers to ensure that instruction and subsequent assessment are not only addressing the content in courses but are also supporting learners' development of critical competencies necessary in our global society found under each of the six Shared Foundations in the *AASL Standards Framework for Learners* (2018b).

School librarians can help ensure that instruction includes opportunities for students to adopt a discerning stance toward points of view and opinions expressed in course materials and classroom discussions (Include's Think Domain). Encouraging instruction around problem-solving through cycles of design, implementation, and reflection is also one of a librarian's areas of expertise (Explore's Create Domain).

Guiding the work to enhance assessments to ensure that students are involving diverse perspectives in their own inquiry processes is another place in which school librarians can support fellow educators (Collaborate's Share Domain). In addition, librarians are able to review assessments to support the competency of using evidence to investigate questions (Inquire's Create Domain).

### *Create Professional Learning Opportunities*

Every administrator is responsible for the professional learning of the faculty. School librarians can help in these efforts by encouraging a spirit of curiosity, community, and critical literacy.

When a school librarian provides classroom teachers with explicit instruction about the legal and ethical use of intellectual property, both the teachers and the students benefit. Armed with their new knowledge gained through professional development led by the school librarian, other educators are positioned not only to model for students the acknowledgment of authorship and to demonstrate respect for the intellectual property of others, but they are also prepared to teach or coteach these transferable skills to students (Engage’s Think Domain)

If school librarians assist administrators in developing competency-based professional learning opportunities for classroom teachers through vehicles such as micro-credentialing or badging, other educators would have a platform to enhance their skills and reflect on their own place as learners within the global learning community (Include’s Grow Domain). Designing differentiated and personalized professional experiences reinforces a mindset that educators are learners. These professional development opportunities would also provide teachers with the expertise they need to help their students Think, Create, Share, and Grow.

When school librarians leverage the AASL Standards as a framework for professional learning and administrative initiatives, educators are supported in pedagogy and learners are better situated to experience academic success.

### **Strengthening Connections between School Librarians and Learners**

The AASL Standards are a foundation upon which to build relationships between learners and school librarians. Through common

language and out of common beliefs central to the profession (AASL 2018b, II) we reach beyond ourselves to create transformative connections.

#### *School Librarians as Leaders*

The AASL Standards characterize learning as a complex and evolving journey marked by the cultivation of competencies. The school librarian is a notable leader on this journey. Learning experiences are enriched when the school librarian prioritizes learners’ development of responsive strategies and the growth mindset to apply them to inquiries beyond the four walls of the classroom. The school librarian, as leader, is responsible for developing individual dispositions and a school learning environment in which all learners and educators can exercise their intellectual freedom. “Intellectual freedom is every learner’s right” (AASL Common Belief 5), though the skills needed to effectively navigate personal curiosities must be explicitly taught. The school librarian prepares all learners to exercise their freedom to pursue self-directed inquiry.

#### *School Librarians as Lead Learners*

School librarians are unquestionably lead learners, actively gaining experience and resources for the benefit of their communities. Empowered by the AASL Standards, the school librarian guides the advancement of key learner dispositions for making collaborative, inclusive, and carefully formed decisions. Learners in our school libraries are enabled by the diversity of resources available within the four walls of the library, as well as by the range of perspectives accessible when equitably accessible, appropriately integrated information technologies (Common Belief 6) take us beyond its walls. Through differentiated and continual exploration learners develop empathy and knowledge.

### **School Librarians as Connected Learners**

The school librarian recognizes opportunities to structure skill-building practice with mindfulness and reflection, both for herself and her students. We learn when we communicate and play. The AASL Standards frameworks emphasize the interdependence of the Domains as we Think, Create, Share, and Grow. Do you pause to reflect? Do you have a network of support? Do you need time and space to tinker and explore? The school library is the unique and essential part of the learning community (Common Belief 1) that empowers learners to go beyond the walls of traditional learning spaces. School librarians can also build personalized pathways of challenge and celebration—for themselves and for learners—to ensure that our 21st-century learners will thrive.

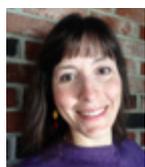
The AASL Standards give voice to the students, teachers, and school librarians as learners who strive for new knowledge through the skillful pursuit of curiosities. The standards recognize the core competencies inherent in such pursuits, and the inclusive environment necessary to eventually succeed. The school librarian models inquiry and grit; the spaces within the four walls of the school library support and foster curiosity, resiliency, and wonder. We are connected as learners in common practice, seeking connections and perspectives. Let us use this connection to strengthen our school libraries.

When school librarians reaffirm the Common Beliefs at the foundation of our practice we set a course for ourselves and our learning community to flourish in the future. The AASL Standards and the growing network of professional engagement for their effective implementation provide us with

opportunities to extend our roles, build new relationships, and promote our shared commitment to put Common Belief 3 into practice and prepare all learners for college, career, and life.



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