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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Your school has a library media center, but are you using the library program to its full potential? As the “heart of the school” your library and teacher-librarian can provide information fluency instruction for students and staff, offer curricular and pedagogical support, and promote a collection of learning resources. These three roles, as well as national learning standards are seen in the American Association of School Librarians’ (AASL) Standards for the 21st-Century Learner.

School libraries do work - this can easily be seen in a review of more than a decade of studies from 16 different states available online from Scholastic1. Many of the studies reveal a correlation between strong library programs and increased student achievement; in some cases as much as a 10% to 20% increase in some cases. Successful programs in the studies were well funded, fully staffed by certified teacher-librarians, and had teacher-librarians that worked in collaboration with classroom teachers to support learning.

This guide, compiled by a certified school administrator, provides resources to help you explore, evaluate, and energize your library program.

An American Library Association Emerging Leader in 2007, Christopher Harris is the coordinator of the School Library System for Genesee Valley BOCES, an educational service agency supporting 22 districts in Western New York. In addition to keynoting and presenting at conferences around the country, Christopher writes a technology blog and column for School Library Journal. His personal library reflections can be read at http://schoolof.info/infomancy.

In the updated 2008 edition of *School Libraries Work!* Scholastic publishing compiled the results from more than a decade of library research studies conducted in 16 different states. In state after state, the research revealed that successful library programs were more often found in schools that also enjoyed higher levels of student achievement. For example, a 2000 study in Colorado found that students in elementary schools with the most collaborative teacher-librarians scored 21% higher on state tests than students from schools with the least collaborative library programs (p. 10). Another 2001 Texas study revealed that 10% more students passed state exams in schools with librarians as compared to schools without (p. 15).

The critical elements of a successful library program were explored in an Illinois study published in 2005. Researchers were able to find a statistically significant correlation between the library program and increased student achievement in schools with

- flexibly scheduled access to the library resources and instruction
- fully staffed libraries with certified teacher-librarians and support staff
- larger collections enriched by electronic resources and other technology
- information literacy skills instruction for students (p. 19)

From this, we can see that the secret to success in a school library is a complicated mixture of three primary ingredients: the library program, the library itself, and the teacher-librarian. While very familiar with evaluating the instructional capabilities of the professionals in their libraries, school administrators also must remember to assess the other aspects of a successful library. Is there an information skills curriculum in place? Is the library an inviting place with a collection that provides materials for all types of readers? Answering these questions requires an evaluation of the librarian that goes beyond the role of teacher.
What do Librarians Do?

According to *Information Power* (AASL, 1998), guidelines for library programs published by the American Association of School Librarians, teacher-librarians must take on three distinct roles.

I. Teacher-librarians are **instructional partners** that help students and staff reach information fluency - i.e. the mastery of traditional and digital information skills. Ideally, this happens through collaborative instruction, though in many cases the teacher-librarian delivers information skills instruction as a special area class.

*You can help by recognizing the importance of the instruction that takes place in the library. In a sense, librarians are teachers you should encourage to “teach to the test” as information skills help students evaluate and answer questions.*

II. Teacher-librarians are **information specialists** available to help students and staff locate, evaluate, and make use of information resources. Examples of this include helping students find recreational reading materials, assisting with individual or class research projects, or helping a teacher locate curriculum-aligned instructional resources.

*Remember that the teacher-librarian is available as a resource to help you as well. Need an article to share with teachers to stimulate conversation on a topic? Looking at starting a professional book club? Have a question about copyright? The librarian is there to help!*

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**Library Glossary**

- **Flexible Access**: Considered best practice for library classes, flexible scheduling is an open plan with no regularly occurring classes. Flexible access promotes collaboration and point-of-need access. For this to work, the teacher-librarian needs to be an active marketer. [http://www.ala.org/aasl/resources/flexible.html](http://www.ala.org/aasl/resources/flexible.html)

- **Fixed Access**: In a fixed schedule, classes come to the library as part of a regular special class rotation. While this has benefits - the librarian sees every student regularly - the instruction can be less effective as collaboration during a fixed schedule is a challenge.

- **Collection Development Plan**: Librarians build collections for curriculum needs. This plan identifies what areas will be addressed each year to ensure an up-to-date collection.

- **Weeding**: Old, damaged, or inaccurate materials must be removed from the library’s collection. The goal is not to save everything, but rather to ensure that everything is accurate! [http://www.sunlink.ucf.edu/weed/](http://www.sunlink.ucf.edu/weed/)

- **Information Fluency**: Another term for information literacy; competence with a set of print and digital information skills for locating, evaluating, using, creating and publishing information.
III. Teacher-librarians are **program administrators** responsible for managing much larger budgets, spaces, and collections of resources than their teacher colleagues. The librarian should have a Policies and Procedures Handbook that compiles relevant sections of Board policy (e.g. Selection of Materials, Reconsideration of Materials, Copyright, Internet Use, etc.) and library procedures (e.g. circulation, collection development, weeding, etc.).

*Encourage the teacher-librarian to form a Library Advisory Board that can help recommend policies and develop procedures. A great way to review is for you and the librarian to run a tabletop drill for a book challenge - an angry parent shows up to protest...what next?*

### EVALUATE

#### Assessing Librarians

Teacher-librarians often exist in a state of educational limbo. In most states, they are certified teachers, and yet they are not currently recognized as teachers by the Federal government’s definition. This means that teacher-librarians are not reviewed for “highly qualified” status under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act. *School Library Journal* regularly reviews certification requirements for each state; their 2006 review is available online[^3]. This can often lead to confusion when it is time to observe and evaluate librarians as regular teacher observation forms may not address the multiple roles of a teacher-librarian.

Some states and districts around the country have developed new observation tools that better assess the whole library program:

- North Carolina Media Performance Appraisal Instrument  
  [http://www.ncwiseowl.org/IT/MCPAI/MCPAI.htm](http://www.ncwiseowl.org/IT/MCPAI/MCPAI.htm)

- Alabama Media Specialist Observation Toolkit  

- Maine Association of School Libraries Evaluation Kit  
  [http://www.maslibraries.org/resources/slmseval/slmseval.html](http://www.maslibraries.org/resources/slmseval/slmseval.html)

- Standards and Guidelines for Texas School Libraries  
  [http://www.tsl.state.tx.us/ld/schoollibs/](http://www.tsl.state.tx.us/ld/schoollibs/)

- Tennessee Framework for Evaluation and Professional Growth  
  [http://www.state.tn.us/education/frameval/](http://www.state.tn.us/education/frameval/)

Learning Standards

Math teachers teach math, and social studies teachers teach social studies, so what do library teachers teach? Teacher-librarians are in a somewhat unique situation when it comes to curriculum development. The ideal learning standards for information fluency are not built around content - an equilateral triangle has three equal sides and the Civil War ended in 1865 - but rather around skills. A library that places the focus on memorizing the Dewey Decimal System is not preparing students for the future. Instead, the information fluency skill is learning how to navigate classification systems to locate resources in a hierarchical organization system. This prepares students for college libraries that use an entirely different system of classification as well as for using an online index for auto repair manuals.

One way to explain the difference in curriculum approach is to view school librarians as teachers of teachers. Not only must the librarian collaborate with and provide professional development for classroom teachers to help them make better use of the library resources, the successful teacher-librarian must use the same approach with students. In an economic sense, the traditional relationship between a teacher and a student is that of producer and consumer. Given an information fluency curriculum that seeks to develop lifelong users of information, students must be taught the tools that will let them be their own teacher. The classic high school term paper is really about a student being set free to test his or her ability for independent teaching and learning. How does a teacher-librarian become a teacher of teachers?

In *Standards for the 21st-Century Learner* (2007), AASL identified nine common beliefs:

1. Reading is a window to the world.
2. Inquiry provides a framework for learning.
3. Ethical behavior in the use of information must be taught.
4. Technology skills are crucial for future employment needs.
5. Equitable access is a key component for education.
6. The definition of information literacy has become more complex as resources and technologies have changed.
7. The continuing expansion of information demands that all individuals acquire the thinking skills that will enable them to learn on their own.

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*http://www.ala.org/ala/aasl/aaslproftools/learningstandards/standards.cfm*
8. Learning has a social context.
9. School libraries are essential to the development of learning skills.

The document goes on to explain how students must use skills, resources and tools to

1. inquire, think critically, and gain knowledge;
2. draw conclusions, make informed decisions, apply knowledge to new situations, and create new knowledge;
3. share knowledge and participate ethically and productively as members of our democratic society;
4. pursue personal and aesthetic growth.

Curriculum Documents

Drawing from the baseline of the broad learning standards identified in *Information Power*, many states and districts have developed their own local curriculum documents to guide library and information skills instructional practices. Since information skills are embedded throughout the entire school curriculum, it is critical that districts work to align instruction. To better understand the importance, consider these questions: What is the citation style for the ELA department? Is it the same for the social studies department? How should students write a research paper, and is it the same in every grade and classroom? A quality information skills curriculum can help align practices related to information, research, and resource use throughout a school and district.

As with all curriculum writing, the final document must be carefully crafted by a local team of invested practitioners. There are, however, many examples for review available from *Resources for School Libraries* at [http://www.sldirectory.com/libsf/resf/infoskill.html](http://www.sldirectory.com/libsf/resf/infoskill.html).

**ENERGIZE**

**The Future of School Libraries**

After exploring and evaluating school libraries, what are the next steps for an administrator who wants to work to energize his or her school’s library program? One idea that is emerging in the larger library profession is that of Library 2.0. A communal definition of this concept has been developed on Wikipedia:

> The key principles of Library 2.0 are not just about access to books and information. It is about innovation, about people, and about community building, enabled through the participation that social computing brings. It achieves this through trust and encouraging users to share
ideas through writing, rating, and commenting against everything in the library’s collection [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Library_2.0]

The problem for school libraries is that while we can certainly embrace innovation and access, it is much more difficult to allow the sort of radical trust that Library 2.0 calls for. Schools must instead work towards the idea of “moderated trust” that allows students to participate and interact with the library, but only in a staff-monitored environment5. For administrators who are still concerned about the idea of social networks and online involvement - i.e. for those who have read the negative stories about MySpace or seen Dateline NBC’s online predator shows - it is very important to note that the National School Boards Association recently released a report reviewing online dangers. The NSBA found that reports of online danger have been greatly exaggerated and that the benefits of online collaboration far outweigh the risks6. The report encourages schools to embrace the Internet and social networking for learning.

School Library 2.0 continues to develop as a movement towards more open school libraries that place an emphasis on participation from the entire community. More information can be found in *School Library Journal* at [http://www.schoollibraryjournal.com/article/CA6330755.html](http://www.schoollibraryjournal.com/article/CA6330755.html).

**Moving Forward with Your School Library**

School libraries are currently in a period of change. Perhaps a better word would be renaissance. Gone are the days of card catalogs and the librarian staunchly defending books from the grubby hands of children. Or at least they should be. As the research from 16 states has clearly shown, libraries are a hub for learning that can have a great impact on student achievement. This can only happen, however, in a library that is well-funded, fully-staffed with certified teacher-librarians and support staff, and a curriculum for information fluency. This guide has provided examples and tools for exploring, evaluating and energizing your school library, here are more:

- Selected School Library Blogs - [http://libraryblogs.suprglu.com](http://libraryblogs.suprglu.com)
- The American Association of School Librarians - [http://www.ala.org/aasl](http://www.ala.org/aasl)

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http://www.schoollibraryjournal.com/article/CA6330755.html

Scholastic Research. *School Libraries Work!*

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An Administrators’ Guide to

School Libraries

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