# american libraries

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2014
DIGITAL SUPPLEMENT
ON SCHOOL LIBRARIES

THE MAGAZINE OF THE AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

# SCHOOL LIBRARIES *TRANSFORM* LEARNING

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*Produced in partnership with the American Association of School Librarians*

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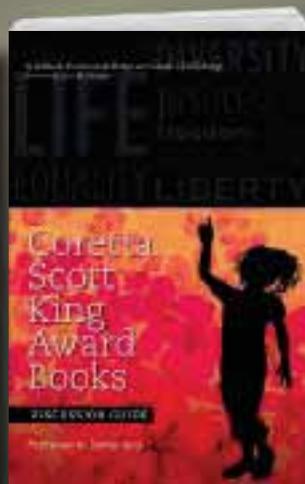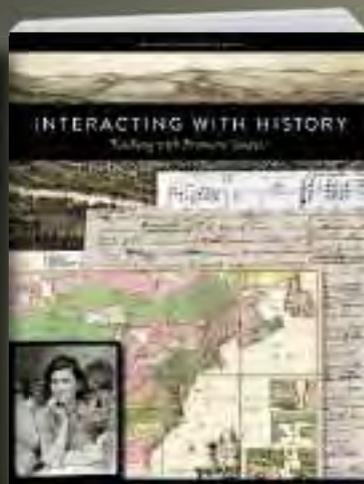*All episodes begin at 2:00 pm Eastern and last for one hour.*

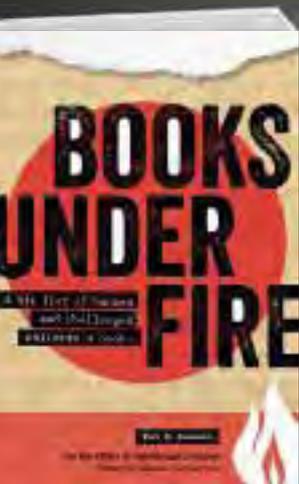**americanlibrarieslive.org** ▶

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September/October 2014 Digital Supplement on School Libraries   |   ISSN 0002-9769

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# School Librarians: Leaders Transforming Teaching and Learning

## by Courtney L. Young, Keith Michael Fiels, Terri Grief, and Sylvia Knight Norton

This *American Libraries* digital supplement on the value of school librarians in improving every child's education is for librarians, educators, parents, administrators, and anyone who cares about students. School libraries are loved and valued by millions of students and teachers who use them every day.

In too many schools, school library budgets and school librarian positions are being cut. This puts our children's education and workforce readiness at peril.

Schools with a strong school library program—and a certified school librarian—ensure their students have the best chance to succeed. School libraries are places of opportunity, learning hubs where students use technology and find the latest resources in a safe and nurturing climate. Strong school library programs foster critical thinking, providing students with the skills they need to analyze and create new ideas in compelling ways. School librarians instill confidence in reading in multiple formats, which is fundamental to learning, personal growth, and enjoyment.

A good school librarian teaches students how to learn and helps teachers and administrators drive student success. School librarians work with every student, teaching him or her to think critically, providing the resources and support needed across grade levels and subject matters and nurturing a student's creativity. School librarians connect other educators to current trends and resources for teaching and learning. The school librarian is an essential partner for all teachers, providing print and digital materials that meet diverse needs and collaborating to deepen student learning.

> Schools with a strong school library program—and a certified school librarian—ensure their students have the best chance to succeed. They foster critical thinking, providing the skills students need to analyze and create new ideas.

In short, school librarians are leaders who make the whole school more effective. The American Association of School Librarians (AASL), a division of the American Library Association, has worked in conjunction with *American Libraries* to develop this digital supplement as part of ALA's School Library Campaign. The School Library Campaign is a call to action to ensure excellence for every student by demanding a school library—with a certified school librarian—in every school.

The future of our children is at stake, and your voice matters. Talk with others in your community—parents, teachers, principals, and the school board or superintendent—about the importance of strong school library programs with certified school librarians. In the following pages you will learn more about:

■ The origins of ALA's School Library Campaign;

■ ALA's and AASL's efforts to advocate on behalf of school librarians;

■ How school librarians impact student development, including information literacy and access to information;

■ How students and parents are fighting for school librarians in their local schools;

■ How one school librarian is making her library the hub of the school;

■ How parents, teachers, administrators, and school librarians can get involved in the fight to keep school librarian positions in their local schools.

We hope you find inspiration from the hard work and dedication of the many school librarians and advocates featured in this supplement. ■

*—Courtney L. Young is ALA president; Keith Michael Fiels is ALA executive director; Terri Grief is president of AASL; and Sylvia Knight Norton is AASL's executive director.*

# "I'M AN EXPERT"

## School libraries build enthusiastic learners

By Barbara K. Stripling

It is October. Community members, parents, school administrators, and city officials have gathered in the newly renovated library of a large urban elementary school to celebrate the transformation of the library. While waiting for the festivities to begin, a 2nd-grade boy begins an earnest conversation with the visiting library director. "Ask me anything about US presidents," he says.

At the somewhat startled expression on the director's face, he continues, "You can ask me anything you want to know. I have read every book in this library about American presidents. I'm an expert!"

In those few words, that young man captured the vision and impact of school libraries on the intellectual, social, and emotional development of every student. The vision of school libraries is to enable all students to become independent readers and learners—in other words, to develop into individuals who love to read; critically evaluate ideas as they read and view; form their own opinions based on evidence; collaborate with their classmates to build new understandings together; create products to share their ideas through multiple formats; and develop attitudes of success like self-confidence and perseverance. Every student should be able to proclaim "I'm an expert!" based on the inquiry and discovery made possible by a vibrant school library program.

School librarians bring that vision into reality by building effective programs around a core of essential action areas:

**Fostering Independent Reading.** Research verifies that children learn to read by reading. By providing reading guidance and connecting students with the right books at the right time, school librarians develop both the motivation to read and the reading fluency that translate into higher literacy levels and the desire to read for a lifetime.

**Teaching Critical Information Skills and Dispositions in Collaboration with Classroom Teachers.** School librarians are responsible for teaching the skills of learning. These include determining the main idea of a piece; gathering evidence to support a conclusion or opinion; evaluating information; seeking multiple perspectives; constructing new understandings; and maintaining safe, ethical, and responsible behavior online. Librarians also take responsibility for helping students develop attitudes that enable them to set high standards for themselves and persevere until they complete projects successfully.

**Ensuring Equitable Access to Resources and Technology.** School libraries are a force for equitable access to resources and technology for all students. Students who do not have ready access to books, learning materials, or computers in their own homes can use library resources to equalize their chance at learning. Librarians transform resources into powerful learning tools by gathering and organizing the best websites, primary sources, and resources aligned with classroom learning. Librarians teach students the technology skills to be able to use computers, social tools, and production tools to accomplish their best work.

**Creating a Safe and Nurturing Climate.** School libraries offer a risk-free, comfortable space in the school. Libraries invite students to discover, have conversations about ideas and interests, pursue their own interests, and "become experts." The school librarian is a caring adult who attends to each student's needs and interests while gently pushing him or her to achieve more and think more critically.

**Providing Schoolwide Instructional Leadership.** School librarians are masters at leading from the middle, helping colleagues implement standards and new ideas. Because the librarian has a whole-school perspective, he or she can connect teachers to the principal's vision and to one another, strengthen learning in each classroom by integrating the teaching of information skills and the use of technology, and foster connections between the teaching and learning in the school and the outside world.

The opportunities school libraries provide and the actions school librarians take have a profound impact on the learning and development of all students. Every young person has a right to build a pathway to success, which starts with a vibrant school library staffed by a professional school librarian. ▮

> School libraries have a profound impact on the development of all students. Every young person has a right to build a pathway to success—and that starts with a vibrant school library that is staffed by a professional school librarian.

BARBARA STRIPLING *is immediate past president of the American Library Association and an assistant professor of practice in the School of Information Studies at Syracuse University. Previously, in her 35-year library career, Stripling has been director of library services for the New York City schools, a school library media specialist and school district director of libraries in Arkansas, a library grant program director in Tennessee, and director of library programs at a local education fund in New York City. She received a doctorate in information management from Syracuse University in 2011 and has written or edited numerous books and articles.*

# School Librarians Transfo

"The internet makes doing research easier—easier to do well and e...

Increasing amounts of information demand students acquire the skil...

**STUDENTS**

*Equate research with Googling*

..............................

*Use search engines instead of more traditional sources*

..............................

*Lack the ability to judge the quality of online information* [III]

*Today's Digit...*
*Teachers Rep...*

..............................

**83%** inform... is over...

**60%** digita... for stu... source...

**71%** digita... stude... a wid...

Sources students are "very likely" to use in a research assignment:

Their peers **42%**

**16%** A librarian

**18%** Print or electronic textbooks

**94%** Google

**75%** Wikipedia

**52%** YouTube/ social media

**17%** Online databases

**25%** News sites of major news organizations [xII]

*Number of Google searches per month:* **12.**

**73%** of teachers believe education-al technology has the potential to "respond to a variety of learning styles" [x]

**49%** of teacher... that students' ac... technology at hom... of the "biggest barriers to incorpora... technology into their teaching" beca... the students are "often not digitally... literate enough" [XI]

*School libraries provide equitab...*
***access to the resources and too...***
***warm, stimulati...***

# orm Learning

**School librarians ensure their students have the best chance to succeed.**

asier to do poorly." [I]

ls to select, evaluate, and use information appropriately and effectively." [II]

*"Your school librarian can help you co-plan and co-teach lessons that focus on the evaluation of sources and information, providing your students with the discernible eye they'll need to survive in college and the workplace."*

— Kimberly Shearer, [IX]
*2012 Kentucky Teacher of the Year*

## al Technologies
## port:

................................................

ation available online
rwhelming for most students [V]

l technologies make it harder
udents to find and use credible
es of information [VI]

l technologies discourage
nts from finding and using
e range of sources [VII]

### TEACHERS

Self-described "tech savvy" teachers are more likely (65%) to use media and technology in the classroom "a lot" than teachers who are "comfortable" (33%) or "uncomforatble" (12%) with it. [XIV]

School librarians are enabling and empowering teachers' skills with digital content:

### SCHOOL LIBRARIANS

**85%** answer questions about technology tools

........................................

**66%** participate with teachers in professional learning communities

........................................

**33%** train teachers how to locate and evaluate digital content. [XV]

## 050 BILLION [IV]

s report
cess to
e is one
ating
ause
y

**56%** of teachers of the lowest-income students say that a lack of resources among students to access digital technologies is a "major challenge" to incorporating more digital tools into their teaching [XII]

le physical and intellectual
*ls* required for learning in a
*ng, and safe environment.* [XIII]

### NOTES

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## AASL
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**TRANSFORMING LEARNING**
AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL LIBRARIANS

# Reimagining
# ADVOC

By Barbara K. Stripling

# ACY for School Libraries

Creating a strategy for getting out your message

The mildly amusing question, "If a tree falls in a forest and no one hears it, does it make a sound?" has much more serious implications if considered in light of advocacy for school libraries. For years, school librarians have pleaded, cajoled, publicized, and even demanded that administrators, teachers, parents, and school boards recognize the value of school libraries and support them accordingly. If no one has heeded our pleas, then have we really made a sound?

That very issue confronted the American Library Association (ALA) in 2011 as school libraries across the country were being shuttered and school librarian positions were being eliminated, despite national, state, and local advocacy efforts. The looming crisis called for a thoughtful reappraisal of our advocacy work and a new and hopefully more effective campaign that would dive deeper into the impact of school libraries on preparing all students to pursue paths to academic and personal success.

A number of ALA units have been engaged in this reimagining effort: a task force on school library advocacy with broad membership from across ALA; the Office for Library Advocacy; the Committee on Library Advocacy; the Public Information Office; ALA and American Association of School Librarians (AASL) executive directors; and ALA and AASL presidents over the last three years. The following is my personal perspective, as the 2013–2014 ALA president and a lifetime school librarian, on this critical work, with both driving questions and lessons learned.

The questions underlying our reimagining initiative are organized under a framework of action steps that can be useful for the whole spectrum of advocacy efforts—from a single school to national and international campaigns: clarifying the characteristics of effective school libraries; identifying evidence of school library impact; crafting the message; developing partnerships and delivering the message; and evaluating the advocacy impact.

## Clarifying the characteristics of effective school libraries

The fundamental first question for any school library advocacy is "What are the critical features of a 21st-century school library?" School libraries should be learning organizations, constantly realigning their priorities as the needs of the students, teachers, curriculum, and future pathways change. One program might emphasize reading and building a culture of literacy; another program might

focus on integrating technology throughout teaching and learning.

But there is an essential component that enables every school library to adapt and deliver effective services. *All school library programs must be led by a school librarian who builds the program around the pillars of library service.* Those pillars include reading guidance, instruction, access to resources and technology, a library environment (both physical and virtual) that is conducive to learning, and support for teaching and learning throughout the school.

Within those parameters are seemingly endless permutations, just as the schools themselves are infinitely variable. National and state program guidelines and rubrics offer guidance about the possibilities, but the specific areas of focus for each school must be a local decision based on the school's needs and priorities. Every school librarian must be a strategic and visionary instructional leader and must take responsibility for developing an individualized program that specifically aligns with the changing instructional climate of the school.

The fact that each school librarian must design his or her own unique program poses an interesting dilemma for state and national advocacy. A national campaign might emphasize the instructional role, while a local school librarian may structure his or her program on a recognized need to build a schoolwide culture of reading motivation. I have wrestled with the conflict between knowing that national advocacy should present a picture of the highest expectations for all aspects of a school library and realizing that no program could possibly fulfill those expectations in every area. From my struggles to present pictures of effective school libraries, I have learned a number of lessons that are applicable at both the local and national level:

■ **Draw from research, state rubrics, and national standards.** These documents have been developed by some of the best thinkers and researchers in our field. They present a vision of excellence and aspirational goals for program planning.

■ **Streamline the characteristics.** Our audience needs simplicity; they do not want to hear all the complexities about each aspect of a school library program. That need for clarity shaped the main advocacy tool of my presidency, the Declaration for the Right to Libraries, and the Declaration for the Right to School Libraries adapted from it. By defining the major areas of impact of a library program and describing them in simple language, we were trying to open a conversation between librarians and their communities about the values that a library brings to the community it serves.

■ **Highlight instruction and reading guidance, not collections and computers.** Many conversations with school librarians begin and end with resources. That's partly because some school librarians have not accepted their primary responsibility to be teachers and partly because they constantly have to battle with administrators to secure the budget funding to acquire any resources at all. A focus on resources, however, does not sell the library program or the role of the librarian to teachers, administrators, students, parents, or school boards. They want to know how the school library helps students learn, and they do not really care whether information is gathered from books in the library, the internet, or another source.

■ **Think about the unique values that libraries add to the school environment.** In this age of budget reductions and accountability, school librarians must be able to articulate the unique and essential added values of the school library. These impacts vary by school, but I have found certain ones resonate well with many different constituencies: the teaching of critical and creative thinking skills, the teaching and fostering of grit and perseverance, the development of a schoolwide culture of reading, the nurturing of social and emotional development in all students, and the connector/leadership role of the school librarian.

## Identifying evidence of school library impact

Questions that help identify evidence of the impact of school library programs include: (1) What is the trajectory for kids who have a school library? (2) What is the trajectory for those who have no school library? (3) How do we measure and provide evidence of the value of school libraries? (4) What research do we have and still need to provide evidence of the impact of school libraries?

A number of correlational studies have been conducted in states across the country about the impact of school libraries. These form a strong backbone for our evidence gathering. Additionally, AASL has received grant funding from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) to kick-start causative school library research. Other studies and anecdotal evidence from an array of related fields are readily available about the importance of critical thinking skills, the use of technology by children and teens, the necessity of soft skills like grit and determination, access to technology in rural and urban areas, the development of reading, and other areas relevant to school library programs. Beyond research, AASL and numerous library publications have captured examples of best practice and stories of impact.

To my dismay, I have found that library research and literature on best practices rarely persuade someone to change his or her mind about the impact of the school library program. Administrators and school boards easily dismiss the studies that school librarians eagerly press upon them.

That does not mean that research evidence is unimportant, but it needs to be couched in certain ways to permeate the hard shell of financial and testing accountabilities that administrators have been forced to use to determine the effectiveness of any program. To accomplish this, advocates can:

■ **Back up national and state research with local action research.** The most powerful research-based evidence I ever saw was a class-based analysis of student literacy test scores in comparison to the number of times each class had been in the school library for instruction and research during the year. The almost perfect correlation between high library usage and high test scores persuaded the principal to make collaboration with the school librarian a requirement for every teacher in the building.

■ **Develop qualitative measures of impact.** The hardest aspects of a school library program to measure are the changes in attitude, motivation, culture, and independent learning that occur as a result of library instruction and experiences. Active collection of qualitative measures through surveys, conversations, interviews, and self-assessment instruments will add depth to the local advocacy messages.

■ **Collect stories.** The biggest lesson I have learned this year is the power of story to make an impact. Collect stories on a regular basis and learn to tell them with punch at appropriate times to accompany data-based evidence.

## Crafting the message

Developing a powerful message is one of the trickiest aspects of advocacy. The tendency is to revert to tried-and-true messages that seem to have limited effect. A focus on two questions helps move our thinking on messaging beyond the usual: (1) What is the compelling message about school libraries that cannot be denied? (2) What message about the impact of school libraries on learning will change the mind-set of teachers, administrators, parents, and legislators?

Messaging must be nuanced and compelling, but librarians are not typically trained in developing advocacy messages. Lessons I have learned in the course of developing powerful messages include:

■ **Connect messages to the priorities of the person to whom the advocacy is addressed.** Rule number one of advocacy is to make sure that we understand the goals and priorities of the person who is going to receive the message. School librarians get nowhere by trying to persuade others to change their goals. Connecting the school library program to their goals and showing how the library helps them achieve those goals are powerful ways to gain support.

■ **Craft the message around children and learning, not around the school library itself.** Amazingly, our messages are often more similar to "support the school library because it's a library" than "support the school library because it enables all children to develop the skills they need to learn on their own." It is important to build these messages around data gathered in the previous step so they can be based on authentic evidence.

■ **Develop a two-pronged message containing both data and stories.** Neither data nor stories are completely effective on their own, but in combination, they present a convincing message that moves people to change their minds.

■ **Advocate _for_ something rather than _against_ something.** Presenting a positive message to an admin-

Neither data nor stories are completely effective on their own. But in combination, they present a convincing **MESSAGE**.

istrator about the impact of the library program will enable him or her to envision what benefits will result from his or her support. For example, showing how dedicated time for collaborative planning in the schedule enhances learning in social studies is much more convincing than simply protesting the lack of collaborative planning time.

■ **Advocate with punch.** The most surprising lesson I have learned is that it is much more effective to take a stand with high-impact statements than it is to deliver a simple, heartwarming story. I've found that op-eds tend to cause people to listen to arguments and rethink their positions.

■ **Call for action.** Effective advocacy must ask its audience to do something. The Declaration for the Right to Libraries called for people to stand up for libraries and sign their names to it in support. Effective local advocacy may ask parents and students to speak to the school board about the impact of the library on the reading lives of students, enable teachers to send letters to the state Department of Education in support of the teaching in the library, or prepare local community members to speak to legislators in support of school library legislation.

## Developing partnerships and delivering the message

Once powerful messages have been developed, the next step involves building relationships and creating products that communicate your ideas most effectively. Partnerships are essential. When parents, students, administrators, local community members, or public and academic librarians have been empowered to recognize how their goals are fulfilled through an effective school library program, they can often deliver the school library advocacy message in a more authentic and compelling way than school librarians themselves.

Both the message and its delivery format should be tailored to be most convincing for each specific audience. School librarians and their partners can use their creativity and technological expertise to prepare visuals, infographics, videos, brochures, op-eds, and elevator speeches that the partner advocates can use.

The following questions can guide this delivery phase:

■ Who will be our advocacy partners?

■ How can school librarians be enabled to work with their partners to deliver the messages?

■ What is the role of our professional associations in advocating and training school librarians to advocate?

■ What formats for delivering the message will have the greatest impact for what audiences?

School library **ADVOCATES** can often help deliver the advocacy message in more authentic and compelling ways.

■ What visual images, hard data, and stories will add punch to advocacy messages?

Developing partnerships and delivering the message must be seen in a long-term context. Relationships are built over time. Partners will step up to deliver heartfelt messages on behalf of school library programs when they feel they have contributed to the formation and success of the program and they have been able to achieve their own goals through the program. Those messages will likely resonate with those who listen, if the partners work with the school librarian to deliver them at appropriate times. The most important lessons I've learned about building partnerships are centered on the sustained nature of advocacy:

■ **Develop relationships with those who have an interest in student success and empower them to be active partners in advocacy.** Partners can be individuals, groups, organizations, and officials. They will not come to us; we need to identify potential partners and actively engage with them. When we discover their goals and aspirations for the students, we can show them how the library program will help them fulfill those goals. Once we have built strong relationships, our partners will be easily persuaded to share the positive impact of the school library that they have seen.

■ **Give partners something specific to do and the messaging and tools to do it.** We cannot expect our partners to know all the data and stories that will convince others. By gathering evidence and preparing the tools and products that convey it effectively, school librarians empower partners to back up their personal commitment with specific examples and facts.

■ **Conduct sustained advocacy, not sporadic reactions to crises.** Regular communication with parents, teachers, and administrators is the only way to advocate effectively. The difficulty is to maintain steady, positive messaging despite the continual crises that seem to hit the educational environment.

■ **Conduct multi-tiered advocacy.** Advocacy must be a continual process of positive messaging at the local, state, and national levels. Each level is essential to ensure that each school library program has a chance to thrive.

■ **Use multiple formats to deliver advocacy.** Many options are available for delivering advocacy messages: email messages, videos, podcasts, photos, blogs, tweets, brochures, presentations, articles, op-eds, infographics, newsletters, library websites, and much more. The receiving audience and the nature of the message determine the most effective format. Librarians must recognize that their preferred method of communication may not be the audience's preferred way to receive it.

## Evaluating the advocacy impact

The final phase in any advocacy initiative is evaluating its impact. If the goal of advocacy is to produce a change of attitude or behavior, then measurement strategies must be designed to assess those changes. The following questions can guide the evaluation: (1) What changes can be seen and measured as a result of the advocacy? (2) What are the next steps, the gaps to be filled?

We have not yet fully accepted our responsibility to measure and analyze the impact of advocacy, probably because it is so hard to evaluate. A couple of lessons learned may guide our measurement efforts:

■ **Collect both pre- and post-advocacy data.** Strategies will vary depending on the purpose of the advocacy. For example, if the advocacy is designed to change students' attitudes about the value of independent reading, then school librarians should focus on qualitative methods to assess student attitudes toward reading before and after the advocacy campaign. These results can be added to circulation data in order to provide a holistic picture of the change in student attitudes and behavior.

■ **Invite partners to collaborate in assessing the impact.** Conversations about the effectiveness of advocacy efforts will strengthen buy-in from partners and encourage creative thinking about what the results really mean.

■ **Use assessment data to identify gaps and next steps.** Advocacy is a continuous process that must be integrated into regular school library operations. No advocacy campaign will reach all its goals, because there is always room for improvement. We must use the insights that we gain from assessing advocacy's impact to identify potential future impacts and set goals.

The road to library advocacy during my presidential year has been a story of positive trajectory. ALA members and staff have worked together to develop an advocacy approach that offers strong support to local and state school library advocacy efforts, develops effective messages, and delivers them in multiple formats. Future plans include increased ALA and AASL support for school library advocacy. Our voices are becoming increasingly strategic and multifaceted, and decision makers at all levels are beginning to hear them. ∎

**BARBARA K. STRIPLING** *is immediate past president of the American Library Association and an assistant professor of practice in the School of Information Studies at Syracuse University. Previously, in her 35-year library career, Stripling has been director of library services for the New York City schools; a school library media specialist and school district director of libraries in Arkansas; a library grant program director in Tennessee; and director of library programs at a local education fund in New York City. She received a doctorate in information management from Syracuse University in 2011 and has written or edited numerous books and articles.*

# Quoted

Notable authors share why
school libraries matter

"I don't know where I'd be
without my school library. Our
librarians were passionate
about putting great books in the
hands of kids and making us into
lifelong readers. School libraries in-
troduce kids to whole new worlds and new
perspectives and are so important in broadening
kids' minds. It's crucial that we support our school
libraries, especially in times of tightening budgets.
I'm so grateful for the well-stocked libraries and
knowledgeable, dedicated school librarians who
were a part of my childhood. It was the library at
my elementary school in Fort Washington, Mary-
land, where I discovered hundreds of great au-
thors, including Judy Blume. I tore through her
catalog, but the book I reread was *Tales of a Fourth
Grade Nothing*. Without Peter Hatcher, I'm not sure
there would be a Greg Heffley. I'm very grateful to
my school for placing such a value on books!"

—**JEFF KINNEY** is an online game developer, designer,
the creator of Poptropica.com, and *New York Times*
bestselling author and illustrator of the wildly popular Diary
of a Wimpy Kid series. In 2009 Kinney was named one
of the 20 artists and entertainers in "The Time 100," the
magazine's list of the world's most influential people.

"The school library is the
heart of a school's communi-
ty. It serves as a central space
where students not only devel-
op a love of reading, but a space
where their imaginations are fos-
tered. As a child, budget slashing forced my
school library into a small corner of the school,
located between the boys' bathroom and the boil-
er room. The pitiful environment aside, I was in-
troduced to so many of my future friends, like
Ralph S. Mouse and James Henry Trotter."

—**JARRETT J. KROSOCZKA** has been passionate about
storytelling through words and pictures since he was a kid.
He has authored 23 books—11 picture books, 10 graphic
novels, and two chapter books in the new Platypus Police
Squad series. Krosoczka was a finalist for a 2010 Will Eisner
Comic Industry Award, and two books from his Lunch Lady
series have won the Children's Choice Book Award in the
3rd-to-4th-grade Book of the Year category.

"School libraries are the founda-
tion of our culture, not luxuries."

—**LAURIE HALSE ANDERSON** is a
*New York Times* bestselling author who
writes for kids of all ages. Known for tackling
tough subjects with humor and sensitivity, her work
has earned numerous national and state awards, as well as
international recognition.

"The school library was my refuge. Beyond the reach of clattering lunch trays, thorny math problems, and playground bedlam, the library was a refuge of silence and solitude. It was the Hundred Acre Wood of my childhood. May we continue to work diligently to preserve this haven for the generations of school children to come."

**—CARMEN AGRA DEEDY** has been writing for children for more than two decades. Her book *The Library Dragon* received various children's state book awards and has sold nearly half a million copies. In 2003, the book was her home state's choice to represent Georgia at the Library of Congress's National Book Festival. An ardent supporter of libraries, Deedy was the 2008 national spokesperson for AASL's School Library Month. She has spoken before Nobel laureates and Pulitzer Prize winners, CEOs of major corporations, and heads of state. Deedy has told stories to hundreds of thousands of schoolchildren. They remain her favorite audience.

"You don't have to care about books to love school libraries. You don't have to give a ding-dang about funny stories, true stories, or the world beyond your home to think they matter. You don't even have to love that school libraries are both a refuge and gateway to discovery. All you need to care about are the kids they serve. School libraries are as important as the children who need them."

**—MO WILLEMS** knows a "good idea" when he sees one. A three-time Caldecott Honor winner (for *Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus!*, *Knuffle Bunny*, and *Knuffle Bunny Too*), he has also won two Geisel medals and four Geisel Honors for his Elephant and Piggie books. His books are perennial *New York Times* bestsellers, including *Knuffle Bunny Free*, *Hooray for Amanda & Her Alligator!*, and the Cat the Cat series. Before he turned to making picture books, Willems was a writer and animator on *Sesame Street*, where he won six Emmys. He lives with his family in Massachusetts.

"A great school library becomes the heart of the school and the center of the larger community. A great school librarian understands that kids can't succeed without the support of parents, teachers, business partners, and 21st-century research and writing skills."

**—CAROLINE KENNEDY** is an author, attorney, and the current United States ambassador to Japan. She is the daughter of the late US President John F. Kennedy and First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis.

# "DO KIDS EVEN USE THE LIBRARY ANYMORE?"

Parents discover the importance of school libraries

BY KAY WEJROWSKI

**D**o kids even use the library anymore?" This is the question posed to me by a couple I met at a recent charity trivia night fundraiser. Before I could even open my mouth to answer, a teacher from my school jumped in: "Are you kidding me? The library is the busiest place in our school. Kids beg to go to the library. It's packed an hour before school, and throughout the day, and even after school."

"What do they do there?" was the next question. That made it clear: Even though this couple knew the answers to almost every trivia question that evening, they were uninformed.

What was even more surprising is that they were parents of a student from our school. In fact, their daughter spent a great deal of time in the library. She had been featured on a giant READ poster as a winner in a reading contest.

My colleague and I explained how our library is the hub of the school. Teachers come in with ideas and questions, and the school librarian and student aides help them plan lessons—from creating templates for World War I Facebook assignments to pulling research and book excerpts and developing probing questions to help students compare historical slavery with human trafficking today. The school library helps teachers create databases and formulate spreadsheets that track student achievement data and identify strengths and weaknesses. Library lessons for all incoming freshmen lay the groundwork for their success in high school, teaching them about the resources that are available; about internet safety; and about how what they post online as a teen may follow them through their adult life and may inhibit educational and career opportunities.

We didn't even finish our conversation about what our library offers to our students, teachers, and community before the next round of trivia questions, but it caused me to think about what would happen to our school without the library.

The library in our school provides significant experiences and learning for our students. It is entrenched in the total school curriculum and community activities. The tentacles of its network serve as the foundation for learning.

Students cut off from the school library would be separated from vital services that enhance their educational experience. Just as shutting off electricity would leave students in the dark, shutting off school library services would leave students in the intellectual dark.

Of course, that includes basic, front-line academic assistance. When students are struggling in chemistry, calculus, or any other class, they come to the library for help. Meanwhile, students who are learning English as a second language know that they can come to the library to tell their immigration story.

The school library also strives to enhance classroom work. We bring in authors every year to work with students on programs directly related to their classroom learning. Students use the library to videoconference with authors, Holocaust survivors, and people from other parts of the world. And every spring, library staff members assist with senior projects, help students create PowerPoint and Prezi presentations, and provide constructive criticism on their speeches.

When staff members need an ad designed for a program, they call the school library. When students need a place to partner with others, they come to the school library. Student needs may be more basic—a pencil, pen, calculator, flash drive, laptop, or e-reader—and the school library can help them out. The school library is also there for more sensitive issues. Students understand that when they need information on teen pregnancy, what to do when a parent is in jail, or eating disorders, we will help them with no questions asked, guarding their privacy in a nonthreatening manner.

## Building community spirit

A colleague once told me that "teachers become what their students need them to be." The same can be said of libraries, because each year our library morphs itself into what the school needs. Certainly that includes providing services and resources for our school community. But school librarians also serve as facilitators to teach the importance of community service and provide opportunities for students to make a difference in their school and their community.

If not for our school library, who would sponsor programs to teach students about the dedication of veterans or hold blood drives that provide a significant amount of the blood used by local hospitals?

When the Swan Valley School District cut bus funding to take preschoolers to the public library, our district created an early childhood center in our high school library. Teens in our library develop and teach weekly lessons to

these young readers. The school library also coordinates a group of cadet teachers who assist with curriculum and lesson planning in elementary and middle school classes.

We've turned our facility into a makerspace that provides students the space and equipment they need to create masquerade masks for school projects, paint chairs for community charity events, build sets for school plays, and create databases for school record books. Library students set up labs and troubleshoot technology problems. The library design team paints sports signs and provides decorating advice for floats and classroom showcases.

A few years ago, several parents came to us for help with fundraising ideas for their annual after-prom party. The library now sponsors an annual assembly to raise money for that program, offering entertainment such as flash-mob dancing contests, the opportunity to toss a pie at a favorite teacher, and Nintendo Wii competitions. The spring activity afternoon is a hit with the students, staff, and local press.

In the library, volunteers prepare for disaster drills, to serve as youth coaches, and to provide service at the Special Olympics. Other community partnerships include parks and recreation endeavors, walking trail improvements, and even building initiatives. Library students help to facilitate schoolwide safe-driving programs, healthy living initiatives, and Habitat for Humanity building projects. They also mentor freshmen and at-risk students. This service is so valuable that one teacher at our school recently commented, "The media studies students are the only reason half my at-risk students are passing."

## The center for tech skills

As a school librarian, I often urge students to talk to their parents about some of the issues we teach in school. I ask them to think about when they were in kindergarten and couldn't wait to get home from school to tell their parents everything that happened that day. I remind them about when they were in middle school and the only things they talked about when they got home were what they needed for the game or when the next dance was. I finish by asking them what they do now that they're in high school and their parents ask, "What did you do at school today?" The answer they give is always the same: "Nothing."

But that's simply not true: They formulate spreadsheets, calculate mortgage interest, participate in live open-heart surgery teleconferences, animate films, learn to understand

> It is our library that often serves as a think tank for evolving ideas and programs and finds solutions to local challenges.
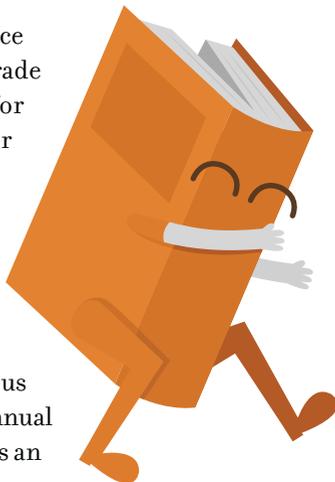
Shakespeare, and do yoga. Even the students who directly benefit from these programs don't realize that the library secured grants for classroom materials and a Shakespeare festival, set up the labs, arranged for the yoga program, and served on the technology team that leads advancements in technology education.

As part of the technology team, school library staff members have been working to provide our students with cutting-edge tools for learning. Swan Valley School District recently announced that it will implement 1:1 learning next year and will provide a tablet device to every student from kindergarten through 12th grade. K–2 students will leave the tablet in their classrooms, and 3rd–12th graders will take it home every day. This week our library students reorganized half of the library office and started transforming a library workroom into a technology troubleshooting and repair station. We are investigating the idea of offering library classes before and after school to train students as repair technicians, and we hope to set up a community service center for computers and tablets in the library. We're also looking at summer training programs and have been meeting with engineers about updating projection and sound systems. We are searching for new solutions to servers and paperless assignments and are continuing to train staff in how to make the most of the Michigan eLibrary resources and ebooks, including services that offer unlimited lifetime access.

In short, it is the school library that often serves as a think tank for evolving ideas and programs and finds solutions to local challenges.

And while our trivia team did not win the tournament that night, parents left realizing that their children would never lose in a school with an active library program. We left feeling like winners, because we know that the next time these parents ask, "Do kids even use the library anymore?" they will understand that the answer is an unequivocal YES!

KAY WEJROWSKI *is library media specialist at Swan Valley High School in Saginaw, Michigan. Swan Valley High School Library is the recipient of the 2013 AASL Library Program of the Year award. Wejrowski was named the Saginaw County 2014 Teacher of the Year and was one of three 2014 state finalists for Michigan Teacher of the Year.*
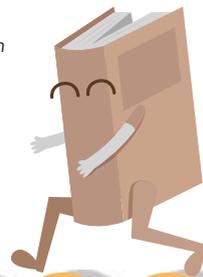
# Perfect for your School Library

ala graphics
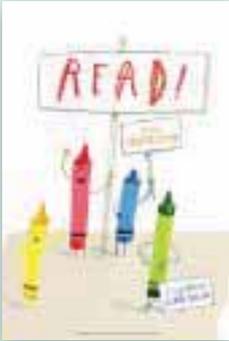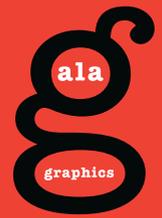
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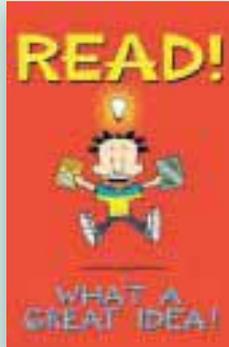
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### Taylor Swift Poster
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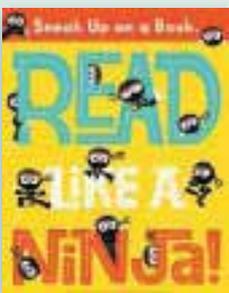
### Read Like a Ninja Poster
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### Dinosaur Vs. Reading Poster
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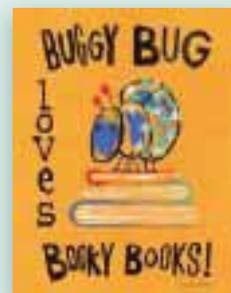
### Buggy Bug Poster
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### Amulet Poster
22" x 28"
Item #5020-1447

### Teen Read Week Poster
22" x 28"
Item #5040-1431

### Read Something Spooky Poster
28" x 22"
Item #5020-1445

A bookmark version is also available for each poster.

# CREATING COALITIONS

**School librarians partner with parents, teachers to forge new path**

As a second-year librarian, Daniel Mauchley wasn't sure what he'd bring to the classroom, especially for only an hour a day, two or three days a week, floating from school to school.

"It's been a maturing vision for me," says Mauchley, one of seven school librarians tasked with serving the 15 elementary schools, three junior high schools, and three high schools in the city of Ogden, Utah. Nestled against the Wasatch Mountain Range, about 35 miles south of Salt Lake City, Ogden is a "town on the upswing," as one resident suggested, but also a modern mix of new economic development and old inner-city problems.

"At first, I was really nervous," he says. "I'm going into veteran teachers' classrooms, saying, 'Hey, I've got something to offer you.'"

Then, he spent four weeks with 3rd graders studying the moon.

"Just showing them a video, they soaked it up," Mauchley says. "They wrote a class song and free-verse poetry."

And, on family night, more than 400 parents pressed into one of the district's Title 1 schools to see what their kids had been raving about.

"It was their biggest family night in a long time," Mauchley says. "And teachers told us, 'We probably wouldn't have done all that without the extra help from the librarians.'"

It also wouldn't have been possible without infuriating about 550 parents in the Ogden School District, which blindsided the community last year with a proposal to eliminate certified school librarians in 20 of the 21 district schools. Instead, the district proposed hiring two certified school librarians to manage all the district's libraries and two part-time staff assistants for each of the 20 schools.

"As parents, we were so frustrated. It was such an obvious blunder," says Heather Turner, a work-at-home mom, whose children, Joseph, 7, and Joshua, 6, attend Bonneville Elementary, another Title 1 school in the district.

For Turner and the scores of other parents who objected, the plan didn't make sense, even if (as the district argued) it would save $930,000 of a $2.7 million budget shortfall.

"All of the data points to the fact that schools with certified librarians have students who perform better on their test scores than students [in schools without librarians]," Turner says. "I don't understand how they chose to ignore those facts in favor of a budget line. It's so obvious to all of us. We said, 'This is not okay. What can we do to support our librarians and make a change?'"

Parents flooded school board meetings and held a bake sale. They also started a petition on Change.org, gathering signatures by sending it to friends on Facebook, spreading the word at school pick-ups, and talking about it with people at church.

"Most [people in the community] didn't know what was happening," Turner says. "And they were really sad to hear that Ogden was giving in and letting go of its librarians, because we had stood out in the state by keeping our librarians. They say it comes down to the funding, but I think it comes down to allocating those funds. You fund your priorities."

## INSTRUCTIONAL PARTNERS

Ogden's school librarians have considered themselves instructional partners for years, district librarian Shelly Ripplinger says. But plans to decimate the district's school libraries motivated them to become advocates—for themselves.

The Ogden school librarians stood shoulder to shoulder with parents at standing-room-only board meetings. They spoke to parent-teacher associations and reporters for local newspaper articles. And ultimately, they won a "one-time" money allotment to fund a staff assistant and seven certified school librarians, who would float throughout the district to maintain a skeleton school library staff.

"We were left to decide how to configure that," Ripplinger says. "We chose to design our plan around certified librarians as instructional partners to show the value of certified librarians." Specifically, it was decided that the seven remaining school librarians could best be used in the classroom,
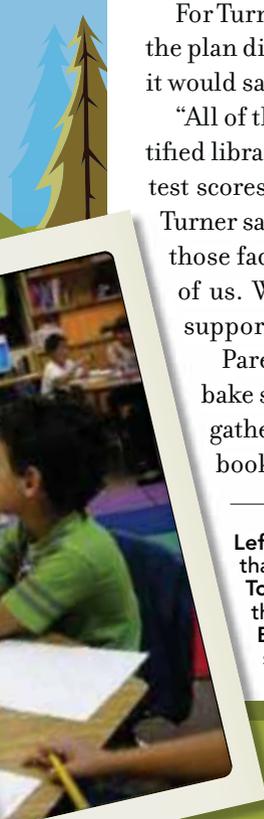
**Left:** School librarian Dan Mauchley works with 3rd graders at James Madison Elementary on a project about the moon. More than 400 people came to family night when the students presented their projects. (Ogden School District)
**Top:** Parents of students in the Ogden School District held bake sales, distributed a petition through social media, and spread the word to other parents at school pick-ups and community gatherings. (*Standard-Examiner,* standard.net)
**Bottom Right:** School librarian Katie Kilts (right) and classroom teacher Jacilyn Durtschi co-teach Ogden High School students in a mock Congress activity. (Ogden School District)

rather than stocking shelves and checking out books. "We also came to the conclusion that the role of a certified librarian is essential at all grade levels, from kindergarten through 12th grade," Ripplinger adds, so all of the schools get time with the librarians.

The approach might seem radical for some, especially those who question the need for elementary school librarians at all. But, Turner argues, that would be a mistake. "For me, elementary school is the most critical time," she says. "It sets the tone for all future learning. Our kids, either they have certified librarians who know how to explain the process of seeking out books that match their interest and reading level—which takes more than a teacher's aide, quite frankly—or they're missing that part of the foundation."

Vincent Ardizzone, principal at James Madison Elementary, agrees.

As beginning readers, Ardizzone argues, elementary school students need more support from school librarians than people realize. By having the floating librarians in the classrooms for the past year, more of his 560 students got "crucial one-on-one time" with teachers and school librarians than ever before—a huge asset at a school where Spanish is the primary language for at least 80% of the students.

In fact, Ardizzone says, he sees opportunities for more than librarian-assisted reading development, particularly with writing, which Ardizzone argues would bolster reading comprehension.

"We're going to grow the relationship based on that need," says Ardizzone, who was already at work in summer 2014 to devise a writing program with librarians as co-teachers. "I'm excited to see it. I want to be part of it. I want to see the impact. I know this year it has had an impact, and it will continue to have an impact. We have seen some huge changes already."

One of those changes was reported by Jessica Namovicz, a teacher at James Madison Elementary, who says that working with school librarians took her ability to teach writing to a whole new level last year. "They can be used as teachers and as collaborators to help us and reinforce whatever we're doing in the classroom," says Namovicz, who worked with school librarians on a new research writing workshop for her 6th-grade students. "They can actually be in the classroom with us, and maybe they can teach us something that we haven't even touched on. I wish we could get more than 30 minutes once a week."

## REAPING THE BENEFITS

In the middle grades, Ripplinger says, teachers found that their collaborations with librarians helped students develop and reinforce essential skills, like researching beyond Google and effectively presenting and expressing their results.

That's an exciting development for parents like Turner. "Information technology is such a focus in our society now," she says. "It's critical that our students understand how to identify and know what a reliable source is for their information." School librarians are uniquely qualified to teach that.

At Ogden High School, school librarians worked with teacher Jaci Durtschi on a mock Congress and model United Nations. That challenged the nearly 200 students in her regular and Advanced Placement classes to use their reading, writing, and researching skills, and it also pushed them to develop new skill sets like using Google Drive. "I never thought of using that," Durtschi says. "The librarians suggested it, and they've been able to teach it. It's really kind of creating new ideas."

It's also laying the foundation for a transition from the classroom to the workplace. "I feel really strongly that the skills we teach the kids have to be transferable into jobs," she says. "Students can't get away with just knowing facts anymore; the jobs they have won't be just facts. They need skills like working in a team, writing, and analyzing and presenting ideas. Those are skills the librarians have been helping me develop."

Durtschi hopes to collaborate with librarians on a project-based learning model to help high school students better prepare for work in the real world. And Ripplinger says it seems like the district is on board. Earlier this year, the school librarians were asked to develop a five-year strategic plan for the district.

It's an opportunity Ripplinger never expected, especially after her team was torn apart. But, she says, the transition to a floating, flexible library system has been a good thing for her district.

"Working with teachers and co-teaching is better for students," she says. "And doing what's best for the students, that's really what it comes down to."

*Please email* [aasl@ala.org](mailto:aasl@ala.org) *with questions or for more information.* ∎

**Top Right:** Superintendent Brad Smith listens to public comment during the Ogden School District board meeting. A compromise was reached and funding was allocated to retain seven floating district positions for the following year. (*Standard-Examiner,* standard.net)
**Top Far Right:** Parent Margit Lister speaks at a packed Ogden School District board meeting to object to proposed budget cuts that would eliminate certified school librarian positions in the 20 district schools. An overwhelming response from the community helped to overturn the school board's decision. (*Standard-Examiner,* standard.net)

# SCHOOL LIBRARIAN AND PARENTS COLLABORATE TO MEET STUDENT NEEDS

When Thanksgiving rolled around last year, Karen Haggard knew exactly why she was grateful.

"I am so appreciative of your time and energy and enthusiasm," Haggard wrote in a letter to the team of parent volunteers who unexpectedly saved her school year. "Your presence has made all the difference in the way this school year is going, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart."

It wasn't what she anticipated just months earlier, when Haggard learned her only aide had been cut and she would be the sole school librarian at Arlington Middle School, just outside Memphis, Tennessee.

It wasn't the first time Haggard had been left alone in the library. In 11 years at the school, she worked solo one other time. But enrollment was far lower back then.

"If this were a school of 300 students, that would be one thing. But with 1,250, and we're encouraging them to read, and they need guidance and help with research—I can't do that and check in books and get them back on the shelves. I was really dreading it."

Enter Jennifer Nelson.

A married mother of three, including a son in 6th grade and a daughter in 8th at Arlington, Nelson used her PTA ties to organize a group of about 15 stay-at-home parents, or parents with flexible work schedules, to help check out, process, shelve, and repair books. They come in every week or every other week, most for an hour or two at a time.

"It was real easy to set up," Nelson says. "The parents could choose the days they want to work. They get reminders before their shift, and if I see a shift isn't filled, I make a call."

Haggard offered some training to the volunteers. But most parents learned on the job, guided by a spiral-bound notebook on library procedure Haggard put together to fill in the blanks. "There's no way I could keep up without them," Haggard says. "It made the difference between me dreading this year and being glad to be here."

Nelson is just glad she could help.

"We know we're making a difference," she says. "Karen can do the things as a librarian she needs to do, like spend time with the kids—that's the important thing."

# STUDENTS MAKE THEIR VOICES HEARD TO INCREASE ACCESS TO SCHOOL LIBRARY

When Keegan McKnight decided to ask for more time in the school library, he did what any modern 5th grader might.

"He pulled out his smartphone," says Cece Fuoco, school librarian for the Genesee Valley Central School District in Belmont, New York. "I was thinking, 'Oh my gosh! Talk about organized.'"

It shouldn't have been a surprise.

After Keegan and classmates William Scholes, Dalton Baker, and Riley Gordon learned that 5th and 6th graders were losing their scheduled library time during the 2013–2014 schoolyear because of library downsizing, they used those smartphones to start a petition, with the prospect of a meeting with Principal Brian "Mr. Ed" Edmister if they could get enough signatures.

Despite their organizational instincts, campaigning for more time for reading, research, and one-on-one study with the school librarian was an initiative that surprised the boys as much as their teachers. "I said, 'You can try to do something about it.' And they looked at me with shock on their faces, like, 'Wow!'" Fuoco says.

In November, McKnight and company came up with their petition plan. "We were kind of experimenting with this. We had never done something like this before," Keegan says.

They visited every 5th-grade homeroom, and ultimately, "We got the whole 5th grade to sign the petition," Scholes says.

Meeting with Mr. Ed took a bit more courage.

"I was pretty nervous just because I didn't know if it would work. And I really wanted it to work," Keegan says.

Mr. Ed wasn't sure what to expect either. But, he says, "They came in with a list of reasons. They had me sold within a couple of seconds."

They gave the boys the responsibility of working out a schedule with their teachers. The result? Since January, 5th graders have been able to visit the library twice a week, on Tuesdays and Fridays, at the end of the day.

And while it's too soon to tell if the extra library time has improved test scores or study habits, Edmister says it has had a definite effect on how he and other administrators see students.

"I want kids to challenge me, and I want them to feel comfortable coming to me. These kids did that," Edmister says.

The experience has also changed how Scholes, McKnight, and other students see themselves. "I just wanted to help. It feels pretty good to know that I helped make a difference," William says.

And, Keegan says, other kids can do it, too. "Just let people know that you want to have a library class."

**Left:** Students explore and identify shells in the library. School librarian Cece Fuoco leads a variety of hands-on activities, accompanied with nonfiction books, to promote inquiry and investigation. In the past, students have grown germs and have even studied ants constructing tunnels in an ant farm. (Genesee Valley Central School District)
**Bottom Left:** Keegan McKnight (right) and Dalton Baker, two of the students who led the 5th-grade petition for more library time. (Jessica McKnight, parent)
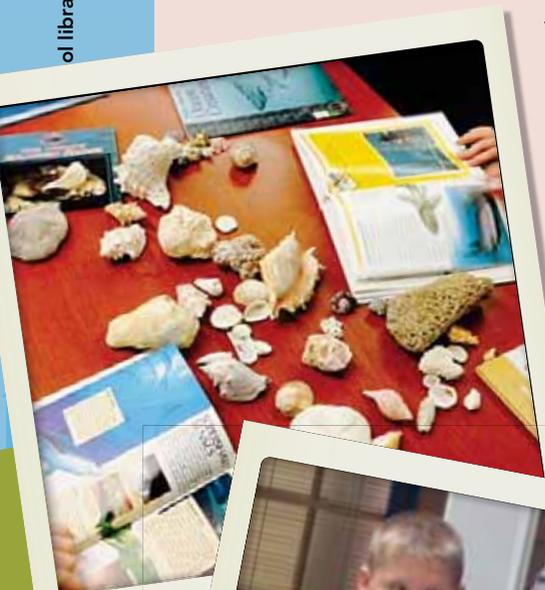
# GRASSROOTS EFFORTS HELP ENSURE STUDENTS REAP BENEFITS OF CERTIFIED SCHOOL LIBRARIAN

The upside of raising $40,000 in just under two months for your school library is that once you've done it, you know how.

"I feel like if, God forbid, we need to absolutely go to DEFCON mode again, we'll be able to come up with a less frantic strategy," says Marjorie Ingall, a PTA mom, writer, and unabashed advocate for The Neighborhood School library in New York City. That's a good thing, since the battle to save the library may not be over.

It started in April 2012, when parents learned the bright and airy school library shared by The Neighborhood School and PS363, another elementary school in the same building, was threatened by budget cuts.

"It was like, 'Holy crap!' We had to raise $40,000. We had until the end of the school year, and the school year ended at the end of June," Ingall recalls as she flips through her "Save the Library" folder.

It was a huge sum for a school where an estimated 40% of its 300 students get free lunch. "We don't have a lot of stay-at-home parents for whom PTA is their job," explains Stephanie Dolgoff, a magazine editor, whose twin daughters, Vivian and Sasha, attend the school. "The people who do it have many, many demands on their time. And given how small we are, they make heroic efforts."

"They didn't have any more money to give just because the library was in trouble," Dolgoff adds. "That's what was particularly cool about this. People came up with creative and innovative ways of community outreach."

It started with the kids, who collected coins in crayon-shaped containers in every classroom, offered $1 manicures on the playground, and sold "library lemonade" on the street.

"I wanted to help," says Dolgoff's daughter Vivian, a 3rd grader at the time, who donated money saved for an iPod while her sister Sasha made bracelets to sell. Parents and the community

quickly followed. They sent letters and made YouTube videos. They also organized an art auction through BiddingForGood, a nonprofit online auction house used by schools around the country, and asked dozens of children's book illustrators to donate art.

A local coffee shop donated a portion of profits to the library. A bookstore held a fundraiser. So did a local chef. "Basically, anybody who knew anybody, whether that was someone who could give a sizable donation or someone who knew a celebrity even slightly, asked for help," says Ingall.

The money raised saved the school library for two years. And it empowered The Neighborhood School community, including Principal Dyanthe Spielberg, to keep up the fight. "I am committed to the library. If we're not able to get the funding, we'll do it another way," Spielberg says.

And finding a way is what the campaign was all about for Cheryl Wolf, the school's founding librarian. "The lesson learned is that our profession has to continually make its value known to our school communities," says Wolf, who made a "constant effort" to communicate with families about the situation at the library.

"Institutional memory is short; the parents who helped build our library in the first place have graduated, and new families are coming in every year," she says. "The library could easily be taken for granted by those who didn't know what it was like before, when there was no library. It's a sad reality that part of the work of school librarians is to continually justify their very existence."

At least, Ingall says, parents are becoming more aware of that sad fact. And they can help, which is an empowering lesson for parents—and an invaluable example for students, like Spencer Berg, who was in 3rd grade when he hosted a lemonade stand, raising about $300 for the library in three hours.

"I learned just because you're small doesn't mean that you can't make a big difference," Spencer says. "And something small really helps. Even pennies really add up to a big number."

**Top:** Students began the effort with fundraisers to save the library, including $1 manicures offered on the playground. (The Neighborhood School) **Left:** Students created artwork for sale at a lemonade stand that students and parents managed outside of a local coffee shop. The coffee shop and other area businesses donated a portion of their profits to the effort. (Marjorie Ingall, parent)
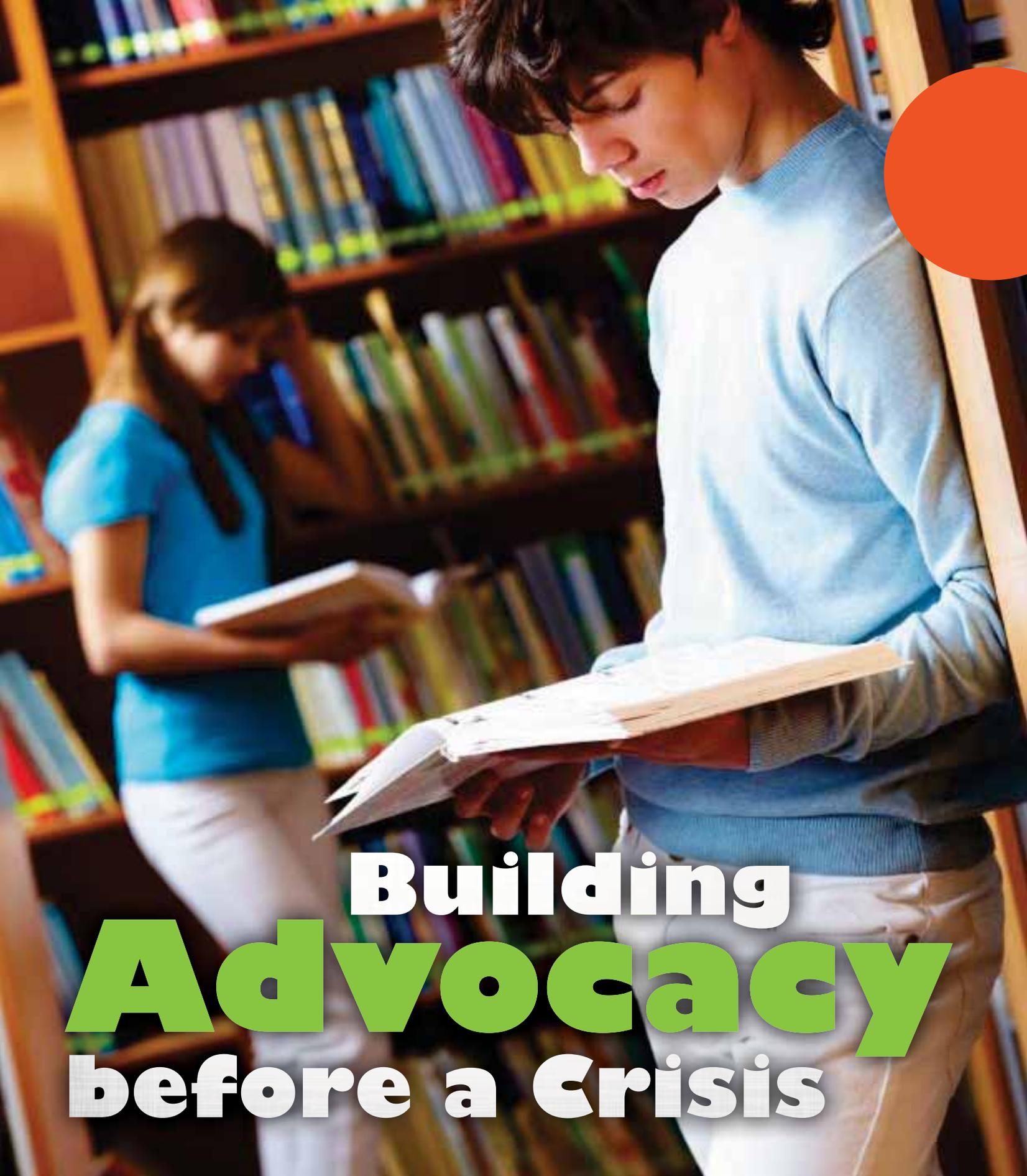
# Building Advocacy before a Crisis

Lessons from the Pennsylvania school library study

By Nancy Everhart and Marcia A. Mardis

**M**ore than 60 studies have shown that strong school library programs led by certified school librarians are linked with higher student achievement levels. However, that research has rarely been well disseminated beyond the profession. When it has, administrators, policymakers, parents, and the general public have often ignored or dismissed the results.

This lack of knowledge about (or concern for) the impact of school librarians is critical because as those jobs disappear, students are denied access to the 21st-century skills required for college and career readiness. The professional outlook for many school librarians is grim at a time when their efforts to foster information and technology competencies and multiple literacies are increasingly viewed as an essential aspect of quality education.

School library cuts are often announced at the end of the school year. That can thrust school librarians into a crisis mode to persuade administrators and school boards to protect their positions. When it happens, advocacy—in the form of presentations, social media campaigns, press releases, and research sharing—must be hastily executed with time running out and when stakeholders are difficult to reach and unreceptive.

Advance planning, instead of simply reacting, can be the key to building support. As the American Association of School Librarians' School Library Crisis Toolkit says:

> True advocacy is when stakeholders stand up and speak out for you on behalf of a cause, idea, program, or organization…. As librarians, we need to plan ahead and focus our efforts on building support from stakeholder groups. Ideally, you want students, parents, teachers, and other stakeholders to carry the message that school libraries make a difference to stu-

dents. But this won't happen without careful planning and action. We need to educate and mobilize our stakeholders to advocate for school libraries. The voices of school librarians are most effective when we join our voices with others to advocate for students and student learning.

To enable school librarians to be prepared to advocate, an interdisciplinary group of researchers (including us) and practitioners in Pennsylvania planned and implemented a project called "Supporting the Infrastructure Needs of 21st Century School Library Programs," funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services. The goal was to identify and understand what stakeholders—teachers, administrators, parents, school and community leaders, and other education associations—expect from school library programs to educate tomorrow's citizens. In order to advocate for school library programs and school librarians, the project team educated nonlibrary stakeholders by holding four disparate focus groups in which participants reacted to school library research presented in understandable and meaningful ways. The project team wanted to determine the effect of building stakeholder support at times when there was not an imminent funding or staffing crisis. Several months after these outreach sessions, we followed up with 10 of the focus group participants who volunteered to reflect on

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what they valued about school librarians and libraries. Their comments appear in the table below.

## Perspectives gained

Most of the interviewees were unaware of the information discussed at the focus groups and were both surprised and moved by the presentation. In particular, they said they learned about the instructional role of the school librarian—a role with which they had previously been unfamiliar. They also found the information about the impact of a school librarian on student achievement to be enlightening. Participants exited the focus groups seeing school librarians in the roles prescribed in AASL's *Empowering Learners* professional guidelines—as leaders, instructional partners, information specialists, teachers, and program administrators.

Common themes among all four focus groups concerning program infrastructure were staffing and resources. The participants came to realize that a quality school library program could not exist without a certified full-time school librarian. And while resources were important, participants discovered they were substantially less effective if not promoted and integrated into the curriculum by a qualified school librarian.

Some differences among the four focus groups did exist, however. Participants from urban areas emphasized the school library as a center of information access for all learners regardless of socioeconomic status, learners' abilities, and English-language ability. In suburban areas the emphasis leaned toward the contribution of instructional partnering and technology leadership.

Focus group participants also received print materials, including a copy of PowerPoint slides, summary findings from the 2011 Pennsylvania School Library Study conducted by the Pennsylvania state board of education, the four versions (for parents, administrators, policymakers, and teachers) of the advocacy brochure School Library Programs Improve Student Learning from AASL, and a copy of AASL's 2007 *Standards for the 21st-Century Learner*. Several participants used these materials as starting points for conversations with colleagues and members outside their immediate circles. They proactively sought out educators with whom they had not interacted before about school libraries. One person shared the materials with her child's school librarian and her public librarian and was surprised to learn they were unaware of the research surrounding school libraries. None of the participants mentioned not valuing the material or discarding it after the focus group. This willingness to retain the information

## Focus group participants' most valued school library program components

| COMPONENT | SUPPORTING PARTICIPANT COMMENTS |
| --- | --- |
| Resources | All the components connect.<br>If you have a good librarian, it creates a snowball effect that grows into a love of learning in everything. |
| Staffing | There is a perception problem of librarians that they just check out books.<br>School librarians should do orientation sessions with parents so they understand.<br>For immigrant or refugee families where English is not spoken in the homes, the library is the only place where kids are reading in English.<br>I am profoundly concerned about the inequity of the relationships in the classroom. I hope the library can be a place where we can move away from these inequities. |
| Collaboration | [We] need digital citizenship.<br>It is the responsibility of the librarian to teach students how to use the internet and information.<br>[We] need to get teachers thinking, "How did I live without library collaboration?"<br>Collaboration with public libraries benefits the community.<br>[We] need to not focus on test data. [I] caution you not to build everything around that. |
| Technology | It's important to have librarians who can do many things. |

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suggests that some participants require time to digest the contents and think about how best to apply their new knowledge.

## Building your own advocates

Although this project took place at the state level, the results can be applied to school library programs nationwide. Our interviews were conversations with library "champions" who, as a result of the focus group activities, are now willing to take action to support school libraries. Their enthusiasm included a number of recommendations that school librarians can use to build an army of local advocates in any state:

1. **Utilize toolkits.** AASL's Parent Advocacy Toolkit is a useful advocacy resource that can be employed by stakeholders. Participants in this group also pointed to a desire to have outreach and advocacy materials available online for download as a continuing resource to raise awareness among policymakers and other audiences.

2. **Expand the outreach.** School library advocates can come from any of a school library's many audiences. For example, one interviewee stressed the importance of school libraries for children with disabilities and said that she would have liked to see information about their needs addressed in the presentation. Parents of children with disabilities are often a vocal and organized group and may be another audience that can be approached for future participation in follow-ups to this study. This type of outreach should be expanded to include the full range of a school library's audiences.

3. **Train the trainers.** A "train the trainers" approach that includes specific strategies on how to engage various diverse groups of stakeholders may prove beneficial in cultivating library champions and mobilizing grassroots advocacy. Administrators, Parent Teacher Organization presidents, civic group leaders, and other groups each

have a different perspective but could speak with a unified voice on behalf of school library programs to their constituents.

4. **Focus on policymakers.** Efforts to engage the public to support school library programs will go much further if policymakers such as superintendents and department of education officials are included. Some of those interviewed noted that in the small-group discussions individuals who already have good libraries in their local schools are satisfied with the status quo and are not interested in being involved in advocacy for others. Participants who held higher-level administrative offices at a statewide level expressed more of an obligation to ensure that all Pennsylvania students have access to an effective, dynamic school library program that has the support of the community.

5. **Follow up with participants.** Advocacy is an ongoing effort. The evaluators in this study spoke to participants several months after the focus group sessions and found that they remembered and were still persuaded by the information presented. Turning that understanding into regular advocacy activity, however, requires follow-up to encourage them to apply their new perceptions and understanding.

Our interviews with the focus group participants from the Supporting the Infrastructure Needs of 21st Century School Library Programs project have led us to conclude that reaching out to stakeholders in an organized, purposeful way has great potential to garner substantial support for school libraries and school librarians. The fact that stakeholders were invited to learn about the profession when it was not in a crisis-mode—such as when positions or programs are being cut—allowed for thoughtful reflection and the creation of school library champions. ▪

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