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STILL THE ONE

**Reflections on Sixty-Five Years
of Resilience and Relevance**

2016 marks an important milestone for AASL. Despite the ever-changing and always-challenging economic, political, and societal landscape, for nearly sixty-five years our association has grown and prospered within the structure of the American Library Association (ALA) and remains “the only national professional membership organization focused on school librarians and the school library community” (AASL 2014c). AASL is the standard bearer for our profession, and our star continues to rise.

Humble Beginnings

When the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) achieved division status in 1951, its primary source of income was membership dues and subscriptions to its journal. Its staff consisted of an executive secretary (now executive director) and one person in a clerical position. With these limited resources, the association was able to offer programming only at the ALA Annual Conference and had minimal resources to recruit new members. These comments from a survey of prospective members conducted by AASL confirm how these constraints inhibited the growth of AASL:

“I don’t know anything about you.”

“I never had any kind of membership information sent to me.” (Lawrence-Leiter and Co. 1984, 31)

With time and additional resources, AASL has made much progress, and educators—especially school librarians—are aware of who we are and what we do.

Continuing Education: National Conference, Fall Forum

When ALA divisions were given the opportunity to hold national conferences, AASL began to have the resources to provide programming other than at ALA Annual Conference and to begin a publishing program. AASL’s first conference was held in Louisville, Kentucky, in 1980. Since AASL had no additional staff or new resources, much of the planning and organization of the conference was done by members. Registration was done on a desktop computer by the registration chairperson. Exhibitors were approached by the exhibits chairperson. The Jefferson County School System provided the audiovisual equipment needed for presentations. The number of attendees and exhibitors was small at this first conference, but it was considered a success because of the opportunities attendees had to share knowledge. The second conference was held in Houston, Texas, in 1982 and duplicated the 1980 major sessions with members again handling most of the tasks required to hold the conference. Not until the 1989 conference in Salt Lake City was AASL able to hire a professional company to handle registration and exhibits. The number of attendees and exhibitors has grown with each subsequent conference, providing AASL with the resources to eventually bring about the recognition of AASL as the national voice of school librarians. National conference has become the primary continuing education activity of the division. AASL will hold its 17th National Conference and Exhibition November 5–8, 2015, in Columbus, Ohio.

In 2004 AASL launched Fall Forum, a multi-day national

institute held during years between AASL National Conferences. The first AASL Fall Forum was held in Dallas, Texas. Each Fall Forum focuses on a single timely topic such as assessment or transliteracy.

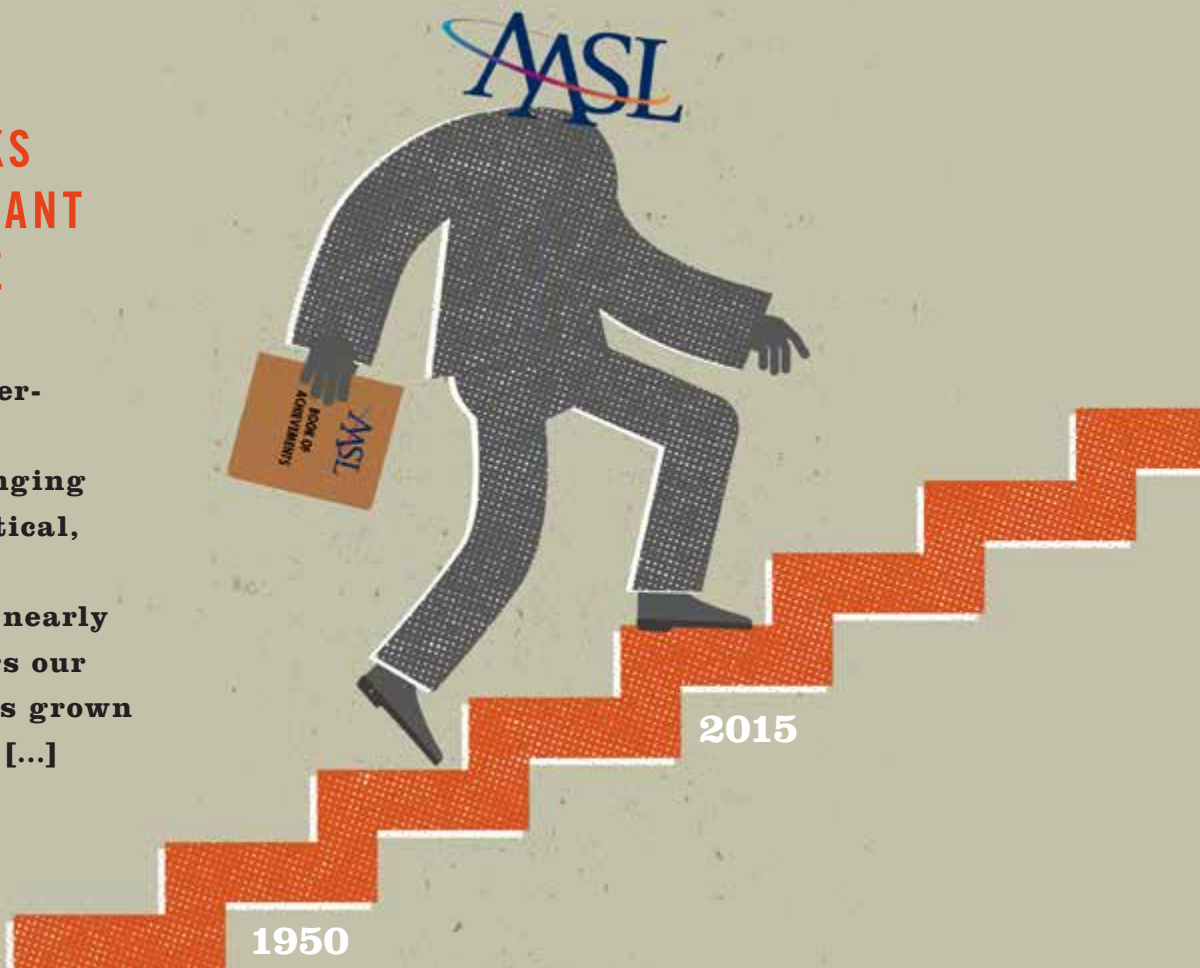
AASL has also ventured into anytime, anywhere learning through the inception of eCOLLAB. This repository of AASL professional development and resources is intended for AASL members and subscribers to eCOLLAB. Many times, in the interest of the profession, free webinars are made available to the greater learning community.

Standards and Guidelines

A preliminary report of the Commission on Library Organization and Equipment of the National Education Association and the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools chaired by C. C. Certain, principal of Cass Technical High School in Detroit, Michigan, was published in 1917. The final report, *Standard Library Organization and Equipment for Secondary Schools of Different Sizes*, became the first school library standards and was published by ALA in 1920. In 1925 a joint committee of the National Education Association and American Library Association, chaired by C. C. Certain, coauthored *Elementary School Library Standards*, which established standards for elementary school libraries. The next set of standards for school libraries, *School Libraries for Today and Tomorrow*, was published in 1945 by ALA. In 1960 ALA published the third set of school library standards, *Standards for School Library Programs*. AASL prepared these standards in cooperation with the American Association for Colleges for Teacher Education. *Standards for School Media Programs* published in 1969 were the first

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standards jointly developed by AASL and the National Education Association Department of Audiovisual Instruction (DAVI), now the Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT). The 1979 standards, *Media Programs: District and School*, were jointly developed by AASL and AECT and published by ALA. In 1988 AASL and AECT jointly prepared *Information Power: Guidelines for School Library Media Programs*. In 1998 AASL and AECT again collaborated to develop *Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning*, a new edition of the guidelines, published by ALA. In 2007 AASL prepared and published *Standards for the 21st-Century Learner*; these standards for learners were followed in 2009 by *Empowering Learners: Guidelines for School Library Programs* and *Standards for the 21st-Century Learner in Action*.

Publications

AASL publishes one print journal, *Knowledge Quest (KQ)*; one electronic journal, *School Library Research*; and an electronic newsletter *AASL Hotlinks*. The *Knowledge Quest* editor works with a guest editor on developing the content of the magazine. The guest editor is selected by an advisory board consisting of members of the association. On the other hand, *School Library Research* has an editor appointed by the president and an advisory board consisting of members of the association. *Knowledge Quest*, published bimonthly September through June, is devoted to articles that address the integration of theory and practice in school librarianship and new developments in education. *School Library Research* <www.ala.org/aasl/slr> is AASL's peer-reviewed research journal published online

and available free to educators world-wide. *School Library Research* promotes and emphasizes research on instructional theory, teaching methods, and critical issues relevant to school libraries. *AASL Hotlinks* is the monthly e-mail newsletter composed primarily of brief summaries with links to in-depth content and highlights of new products and services. *AASL Hotlinks* is sent to AASL members with valid e-mail addresses on file in the ALA member database. AASL also publishes pamphlets, brochures, small monographs, and resource guides designed to assist school librarians in establishing and operating school library programs.

Other "publications" include AASL's website <www.ala.org/aasl>, which is maintained by AASL staff; the *Knowledge Quest* website <<http://knowledgequest.aasl.org>>, updated

under the auspices of an advisory board of AASL members; and the annual—and eagerly anticipated—selection and publication by member committees of AASL's Best Websites for Teaching and Learning <www.ala.org/aasl/standards-guidelines/best-websites> and Best Apps for Teaching and Learning <www.ala.org/aasl/standards-guidelines/best-apps>, which are aligned to AASL's learning standards. The Essential Links wiki <http://aasl.ala.org/essentiallinks/index.php?title=Main_Page> is a working bibliography of resources for school librarians. (Member contributions to the wiki are welcome!)

Awards

AASL's oldest award, the National School Library Program of the Year, began in 1962. The purpose of the award was to recognize the progress being made by an elementary school library program toward meeting the 1960 *Standards for School Library Programs*. The award was funded by Encyclopaedia Britannica. An AASL advisory committee selected ten finalists from the eighty-four applications and sent information about the finalists to Britannica to select the award recipient, Anne Arundel County. The school district was awarded \$2,500 and a commemorative plaque. Britannica was so pleased with the response that the company wished to continue to sponsor a grant for 1964 (Gaver 1963, 2). Over the years, when new national guidelines were adopted, the applications changed to align with the contemporary description of an exemplary school library program, and all school buildings and systems were eligible to apply for the award. The partnership between AASL and Britannica continued until 1996. In 1996 Follett Library Resources became the sponsor of the award. Winners of the award

now receive a crystal obelisk and \$10,000.

Over the years the AASL awards program has added ten more awards and grants that recognize excellence in school librarianship; currently, more than \$50,000 in awards and grants are given each year.

Certification of School Librarians

Certification standards for school librarians rest with certification boards in each state. However, one organization influences the content of these standards: the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), which, with the Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC), has evolved into the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP).

Many school librarians are prepared in colleges and universities in programs that are not eligible to be

accredited by ALA. In 1988 ALA joined NCATE and gave AASL responsibility for the development of guidelines. Joining NCATE gave ALA/AASL the opportunity to identify entry-level competencies for school librarians and to evaluate the programs preparing school librarians. An AASL committee developed a framework of competencies for school librarians based on the 1988 and 1998 AASL national guidelines for school library programs. A task force used the framework to develop the NCATE program standards for preparation of school librarians. These standards were reviewed by the AASL Board, Affiliate Assembly, and AASL membership before they were submitted to the NCATE Specialty Area Board for approval. Only institutions offering a Master's degree are recognized by ALA/AASL (AASL 2003, 4).

AASL held training sessions for school librarians interested in reviewing portfolios submitted to NCATE as part of the accreditation



process. AASL also conducted orientation sessions for faculties preparing portfolios as a part of the accreditation process. Recently, NCATE and its counterpart, TEAC, merged to form CAEP, the new, sole specialized accreditor for educator preparation. AASL, through the ALA Office of Accreditation, will continue to provide opportunities for training related to program application and review and will also continue to develop frameworks and competencies for accreditation.

National Board for Professional Teaching Standards

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) was established in 1987 as an independent nonprofit, nonpartisan, nongovernmental organization. The organization is governed by a board that is composed of working classroom teachers. The board receives its funding through grants from private foundations and federal funds. In 1997 the NBPTS asked AASL to submit the names of school librarians, school library educators, and library supervisors for consideration as part of a group to be selected to write the certification standards for school librarians. The majority of those selected were working school librarians from urban, suburban, and rural communities in all parts of the country. The first draft of the standards was available for public comment at AASL's National Conference in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1999 (Coatney 1999).

Partners

AASL benefits from a variety of organizations and vendors who have funded awards and grants that recognize school librarians'

contributions to the profession. There have also been organizations that have made contributions to fund projects that do not recognize individual achievements but are designed to benefit school library programs and the profession. Two examples are the Dewitt Wallace–Reader's Digest Foundation and the Dollar General School Library Relief Fund.

DeWitt Wallace—Reader's Digest Library Power Program

From 1988 through 1998 the DeWitt Wallace–Reader's Digest Fund provided major funding, through a grant to ALA for AASL to coordinate the National Library Power Program. Ann Carlson Weeks served as the national coordinator of the project from its beginning until she left AASL in 1996. Donald Adcock was named to fill that position until the conclusion of the project. This \$41 million initiative provided nineteen communities with three-year grants to improve school library programs. Funding to the local communities was made to local education funds rather than directly to the schools. AASL coordinated the national program, providing administrative and technical assistance to the Library Power sites and collaborated with the Public Education Network (PEN), which provided technical assistance to the local education funds. The initiative was based on *Information Power: Guidelines for School Library Programs*. The initiative's purpose was to "create a national vision and new expectations for public elementary and middle school library programs and to encourage new and innovative uses of the library's physical and human resources" (National Library Power Program 1994). Library Power provided funds for professional development

for teachers, administrators, and school librarians; to renovate school libraries; to match local funds for library books and other library resources; and to hire project staff. To participate in the program, the local school agreed to provide a full-time certified school librarian, keep the library open throughout the school day with schedules that provided for open access to the library, support release time for staff to attend Library Power professional development activities, and cover labor costs for renovation and remodeling of school libraries. In 2001 AASL and PEN collaborated with ALA to publish *The Information-Powered School*. Each chapter of the publication deals with a specific aspect of Library Power and was written by a member of one of the Library Power sites (Adcock 2009, 6–7).

Dollar General School Library Relief Fund

Dollar General in collaboration with ALA, AASL, and the National Education Association (NEA) sponsors Beyond Words, a school library disaster fund for public schools in the states where Dollar General has stores. The disaster fund provides money to public school libraries that have had substantial damage due to a natural disaster such as a tornado, flood, hurricane, or fire. The grant provides funding to replace books, media, and equipment in the school library. In addition to an initial grant of \$10,000 to \$20,000, an additional grant of up to \$50,000 is available as a catastrophic grant if the school library has a 90 percent or greater loss. It is expected that a certified school librarian at the school, district, or regional level will be involved in the selection of the material or equipment to be purchased (AASL 2014a).

Affiliate Assembly

The Affiliate Assembly is a more formalized version of the old State Assembly, which had its roots in the AASL Council. The council originated with a practice Ruth Ersted began during her presidency in 1947, a practice that was continued by Frances Henne in 1948–1949. To establish a forum to communicate with state school library leaders and get feedback from them, Ersted and Henne invited state leaders to attend AASL Executive Board meetings (Koch 1976). In 1977 at the ALA Annual Conference in Detroit, the AASL Board of Directors in collaboration with representatives of the state associations formalized a structure and the role for the Affiliate Assembly. The assembly is composed of two representatives from state or regional school library associations affiliated with AASL. The Affiliate Assembly was established to provide a mechanism for the affiliates to communicate the concerns of their members to the AASL Board of Directors and to report the actions of AASL to their members. To be eligible for affiliation, the president of an organization must be a member of AASL, and twenty-five members or 10 percent of the association members, whichever is smaller, must also be members of AASL (AASL 2014b).

The assembly meets at ALA Annual Conference to conduct business and at the ALA Midwinter Meeting to hold a caucus for the leaders of the affiliates to discuss mutual problems or attend training sessions to improve the leadership skills of the affiliate representatives. Originally, the assembly had an executive committee that met at the ALA Midwinter Meeting and Annual Conference and consisted of its officers and the

regional directors–elect (Adcock 2009, 20). However, a recent restructuring of AASL eliminated the positions of directors–elect; the Affiliate Assembly also required restructuring, and the former executive committee is now embodied in the Affiliate Assembly Coordinating Team, which consists of elected officers and a representative elected by each of the nine regions of AASL.

Community and Communications

The AASL community is diverse and connected through a variety of means. In addition to the representative Affiliate Assembly, a governance aspect exists; members elect four officers (president, president–elect, past–president, and treasurer) and a board of directors, which includes nine regional directors, two at–large directors, and three directors who represent the three sections of AASL: the Independent Schools Section, the Educators of School Librarians Section, and the Supervisors Section. In recent years, AASL has added two special interest groups representing students and retirees.

AASL welcomes the active participation of all its members, including vendor and publisher members, through a variety of committees, task forces, editorial boards, and working groups, and provides opportunities for all of these groups to connect and work both face–to–face at the ALA Midwinter Meeting and the ALA Annual Conference, as well as virtually through ALA Connect. Connect is an online virtual collaborative workspace. AASL also provides access to all members who choose to subscribe to AASL Forum, the association’s electronic discussion list. Sections also

have active discussion lists for their members. Information on association activity, events, and areas of interest is also communicated via AASL’s Facebook page, Twitter feed, and LinkedIn presence.

Research

Throughout the years AASL has recognized the need to provide evidence of the value of school librarians and school library programs, and has endeavored to provide resources in this area. In addition to maintaining an active Research and Statistics Committee, the association has curated a number of items of interest at <www.ala.org/aasl/research>. A recent undertaking is AASL’s involvement in causal research through the Institute of Museum and Library Services grant for Causality: School Libraries and Student Success (CLASS) National Research Forum. As a result of this endeavor a white paper has been published and follow–up activities are under way.

Advocacy, Legislation, and Influence

AASL is definitely “still the one” when it comes to advocacy, legislation, and influence. While others may stand on the sidelines and offer advice, it is AASL—with the assistance of the ALA Office for Library Advocacy, ALA Washington Office, and the support of various sponsors—that ensures that the positive effects of school library programs on student achievement are known beyond the school library profession. These advocacy efforts have the fortunate secondary effect of elevating the status of the school library profession. Through the efforts of the Advocacy and Legislation Committees, a variety of resources provide assistance to practitioners—resources such as brochures, infographics, and

posters are available at <www.ala.org/aasl/advocacy/tools> and various toolkits are available at <www.ala.org/aasl/advocacy/tools/toolkits>.

Additional efforts to expand influence include annual participation by AASL—in coordination with the other ALA Youth Divisions—in Library Legislative Day. Facilitated by the ALA Washington Office, AASL member leaders and staffers visit congressional and senate leaders, as well as Department of Education officials, and work to strengthen partnerships with other organizations such as NEA and the National Parent Teacher Association.

Among a number of other inroads made by AASL were involvement in the Laura Bush White House Conference on School Libraries and a meeting of the AASL Board with Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, and not to be forgotten was the successful effort to bring attention to a White House petition submitted by then AASL President, Carl Harvey (2011–2012). The

petition requested that the administration “Ensure that every child in America has access to an effective school library program.” AASL was able to demonstrate the power of working together with other ALA divisions to bring attention to this important issue.

ALA has stepped up to focus more energy on delivering this message—first through the establishment by Molly Raphael (ALA President 2011–2012) of a special Presidential Task Force on School Libraries, work that continued during Maureen Sullivan’s presidency (2012–2013) to craft a campaign that would later align with ALA 2013–2014 President Barbara K. Stripling’s “Declaration for the Right to Libraries” initiative.

Onward

Though AASL has accomplished much in the past sixty-five years, important work remains, and here’s hoping that all of us will have a part to play in reaching the next milestone. Stay connected, stay involved, and stay tuned—there’s definitely more to come!



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of AASL and is serving on the ALA Peter Lyman Memorial Sage Scholarship Committee and a member of the Beyond Words Dollar General School Library Relief Fund selection jury. He also served as the coordinator program support and interim executive director of AASL and director of the Dewitt Wallace Library Power Program. Don was an instructor and director of the School Library Program, GSLIS, at Dominican University.



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is a school library, media, and technology consultant and educator. She is

currently developing a school library preparation program at Granite State College of the University System of New Hampshire. A member of AASL, Susan is a past president of the organization and is currently serving as the chair of the AASL Policy Review Working Group and a member of AASL’s 65th Celebration Task Force. She is also a member of the ALA Nominating Committee for the 2016 election.

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