

FEATURE





BUILDING *the* STRONG FOUNDATION

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Looking back on my term as AASL President 2005–2006, I feel that particular year brought many things into focus for AASL and school library programs and laid the foundation on which AASL built for the next ten years. As school librarians, we have always faced critical issues, and they often seem to be the same ones; slowly, very slowly, if at all, did we get anywhere. We had achieved small successes, but not nationally and not sustainably. Almost twenty years after the publication of *Information Power: Guidelines for School Library Media Programs* (ALA 1988) and almost ten years after the second edition, *Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning* (ALA 1998), we were still dealing with many of the same issues, in addition to new ones. Our standards and guidelines were not widely accepted by the educational community, and the role of school librarians was often misunderstood or given no credibility.

During the previous year, AASL had stepped back and had taken a serious look at the issues then facing us as we began working with a consultant to develop a strategic plan that would address our most-immediate concerns. The strategic plan was approved by the AASL Board of Directors at the 2005 ALA Annual Conference, just before my term began. The plan provided focus by identifying goals for the next three to five years. The goals were in five areas: Guidelines and Standards, Advocacy, Professional Development, Influence within ALA, and Community. Objectives within each goal area were established, and strategies for achieving each objective were identified. The AASL Board looked at the association's current structure and determined how we needed to restructure committees, sections, and the Affiliate Assembly

to best carry out the strategic plan. With renewed energy, the AASL Board had the determination and road map to address the critical issues facing our association and our profession.

What were those critical issues, and did the results of the efforts then accomplish a positive change and lead to future improvements?

AASL's Guidelines and Standards

The school library profession will recognize AASL's guidelines for school library media programs and information literacy standards for student learning as the model of excellence for the profession (AASL 2005, 7).

For several years, the currency and relevance of our national guidelines, *Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning* and the "Information Literacy Standards for Student Learning," contained within *Information Power*, had been sources of concern. The role of the school librarian was constantly changing. A task force studied both documents to determine their relevance and whether they reflected the current practices and vocabulary of the profession. No reference to technology had been included in those documents. Any updates, though, would need to address technology use, as effective use of technology was becoming a major part of our evolving role. The need for change also caused writers to reflect on new methods of instruction and their impact on school library programs.

The recommendation presented to the AASL Board was to rewrite—not just revise—the document. AASL took a completely new approach to developing our standards and guidelines. The new standards document, *Standards for the 21st-Century Learner*, published

in 2007, shifted the focus from what school librarians and other educators should teach and do. Instead, the focus became the students and what they need to know and be able to do to be information literate. This fresh approach has evolved into the current AASL standards and guidelines, which can truly make a school library program a model of excellence.

Advocacy

All stakeholders will understand and recognize that [the school librarian] and school library programs are essential to teaching and learning (AASL 2005, 7).

The area of advocacy needed a lot of attention because overcoming some stakeholders' outdated view of the value of school library programs was a major hurdle for school librarians. How could we change the education culture so everyone would understand and agree that the school library program and school librarian are an essential part of the instructional process?

The AASL Advocacy Committee addressed this issue by providing preconference and regional institutes on advocacy, training members on how to be involved in national, state, and local advocacy efforts and providing additional educational opportunities in this important area.

An effective, long-lasting strategy for advocacy has been to gather hard data to support a cause. In response to this need for data about the effectiveness of school library programs, the AASL Board approved a longitudinal survey that would create a process to collect, on an ongoing basis, relevant national data points that members could use in national, state, and local advocacy messages. The survey would be completed annually and provide

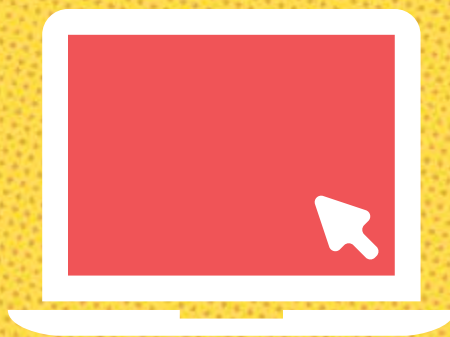
continuing data on the same topics. This survey, in addition to specific state surveys done by leaders in the field, gave us the very valuable hard data we needed. The longitudinal survey also provided data for comparison within and between states and local districts. While the survey has been discontinued, it did bring to the forefront the need for data and research in the field and has sparked many of the current AASL research initiatives.


Legislative issues were also included within the Advocacy goal area in the strategic plan. Immediate and specific attention was needed; a number of issues within the school library community revolved around national policy and legislation. These included:

- The non-instructional classification of school librarians by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).
- The “65 percent solution”: regulations that required schools to spend at least 65 percent of their funding on direct classroom instruction, which, under currently prevailing NCES definitions, did not include spending on school libraries.
- No Child Left Behind (NCLB), which did not include school librarians in the “highly qualified” teacher classification.
- The need for full funding for the Improving Literacy through School Libraries program.

These issues were interdependent. The National Center for Education Statistics classified school librarians as instructional support; therefore, as they were not identified as instructional, no funding for school libraries was available and school librarians were not included in the “highly qualified” teacher category in No Child Left Behind.

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The AASL Task Force on Instructional Classification was formed to develop a position statement in time for states to use before the legislative session ended. The statement clearly defined the issues and clarified AASL's support for the inclusion of school librarians in the NCES "instructional" classification so that their purchases of library materials would be considered instructional expenditures. The task force also developed a toolkit for use by state affiliates to address the issue. Additional support for our concerns was expressed by the ALA Council through the Resolution on the Instructional Classification of School Librarians, passed at the ALA Midwinter Meeting in 2006.

With help from the ALA Washington Office, during the 2006 ALA Legislative Day the AASL President, the chair of the AASL Task Force on Instructional Classification, and the chair of the AASL Legislation Committee met with representatives of NCES and the Department of Education to begin a dialogue regarding the classification and definition of school

librarians as instructional support staff, as identified in the NCES financial accounting structure. The reporting format in use at the time had required every state to spend at least 65 percent of operational budgets on instruction expenses. But, as libraries were not considered "instructional," they could receive none of the money earmarked for instruction expenses. A proposed revised reporting format was presented by NCES; the revised format allowed instruction and instruction-related expenses to be in the same category. The proposed revised reporting format was included in a future edition of the financial accounting handbook, and school librarians were classified as instruction-related, but not before we battled these issues for several years after 2006.

The ALA Washington Office staff and the AASL President also met with the Deputy Secretary of Education and staff of the Improving Literacy through School Libraries program. An AASL-generated draft document was presented; it identified proposed

amendments for the 2007 reauthorization of No Child Left Behind. The recommended changes would include school librarians in the "highly qualified" teacher classification. As the only federal funding specifically designated for school libraries was the Improving Literacy through School Libraries program, which was part of NCLB, the need for full funding of this program was also included in the AASL draft and discussed. Full funding was never achieved. However, we continued to work toward higher funding levels and increasing our advocacy efforts for school libraries and librarians.

As we all know, the NCLB movement evolved into the Common Core initiative with a separate set of concerns. Experience has shown that advocacy cannot take place only when an issue arises; advocacy must be constant, so when the issues do arise, we already have an established presence and decision makers already have an understanding of the role school librarians and effective school library programs play in student success. Without all the training, knowledge gained, and hard work, which began with advocacy for

these issues, and then used again to advocate for the 2015 SKILLS Act and continued for the 2015 ESSA (Every Student Succeeds Act), ESSA would never have been passed. Maintaining the support and hard work took a lot of effort, but the effort certainly paid off.

Influence within ALA

ALA will understand and support the issues important to [school librarians] and school library... programs.

Our major concerns were:

- Low voter turnout in ALA elections
- Insufficient involvement of AASL members in ALA

In response to the AASL Board and Affiliate Assembly's concern over the low voter turnout in ALA elections, AASL developed a "Get Out the Vote" campaign, designed in response to the strategic plan to increase the number of AASL members voting and AASL members' involvement in ALA leadership.

There was a significant increase in the number of AASL members voting in the 2006 election: an increase of 39 percent from the previous year. Though voting percentages do vary by years, AASL members' voting rate has remained better than it was prior to the campaign. Another result of the campaign was that, of the fifteen AASL members running for ALA Council in the 2006 election, eleven were elected.

At the 2006 ALA Midwinter Meeting, the AASL President, Immediate Past President, and President-Elect met with the ALA President-Elect to discuss our concerns regarding how ALA committee appointments were made and the need to have a balanced representation of all types of

libraries within ALA. Several very good strategies were discussed and taken back to the AASL Board for follow-up and implementation.

AASL began to track the involvement of its members in ALA through appointments to ALA committees, election to Council, and nominations for office. The AASL volunteer form was revised to include ALA committees to determine members' interest, and a database was developed for the AASL President-Elect to use when suggesting people for appointment to ALA committees by the ALA President-Elect.

The AASL representative to ALA Council identified councilors who were school librarians and created an e-mail list to provide support and encourage the number of postings regarding school libraries on the ALA Council's electronic discussion list. These efforts were intended to create an awareness and understanding of school library concerns and gain support for issues affecting school librarians and their students. The efforts succeeded.

AASL identified the three most-influential ALA committees to which we wanted an AASL member appointed. Within the first year we had a member appointed to two of those committees, and the following year a member was appointed to the third committee. It is no longer unusual to have an AASL member serve in any ALA capacity: on Council, an ALA committee, or the ALA Executive Board. Several times in the past ten years we have had three AASL members on the ALA Executive Board at the same time, and in the past eight years we have had three AASL members nominated to run for president of ALA. We have made our presence known and forged partnerships with the other divisions, roundtables,

and ALA leaders, gaining their support and an understanding for our concerns.

Looking Forward

While these were critical challenges at the time, they do not seem so significant when compared to some of the challenges faced today. Twenty-first century students have an ever-increasing need for the skills that school librarians bring to the school setting. As always, to ensure that the school library remains an integral part of the educational process, school librarians must work collaboratively with teachers and administrators. School librarians must also continue to take action to further stakeholders' understanding of school librarians' roles, actively advocate for their profession within their school communities, as well as at the state and national level.



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her retirement. She served as AASL President 2005–2006 and is also a past president of the Maryland Association of School Librarians. Active in the University of Maryland Alumni Association, she is currently a member of its Board of Governors, has been president of the iSchool Alumni Chapter, and continues to serve on the chapter's board. She also previously served on the ALA Executive Board and ALA Council.

Work Cited:

American Association of School Librarians. 2005. "AASL Strategic Plan." <www.ala.org/aasl/sites/ala.org/aasl/files/content/aboutaasl/aaslgovernance/aasldocuments/aasl_strategic_plan.pdf> (accessed June 11, 2016).