



SEAT RESERVED
for the librarian

Two Future Ready Librarians



In and Outside of the Library

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We have the ability to empower others with this energy so they know how to

SHARE THEIR VOICES, CREATIVITY, AND PASSIONS TOO.

Editor's Note: As part of the national Future Ready Librarians initiative at the Alliance for Excellent Education, Mark Ray and Shannon McClintock Miller serve as national advocates for school library programs and librarians. Mark and Shannon began their library advocacy careers in school libraries. For eight years Shannon was the district librarian in Van Meter (IA) Community School District, working with all grades K–12. For twenty years Mark was a school librarian in Vancouver (WA) Public Schools, working in elementary, middle school, and high school libraries. For the last five years, he has been a district administrator serving in a variety of roles. In this exchange between Shannon McClintock Miller and Mark Ray, they explore the topic of advocacy and lessons learned both in and outside the library.

MARK RAY: Shannon, you developed a strong library program in Van Meter. How was advocacy part of that success?

SHANNON McCLINTOCK MILLER: Advocacy was such an important and special part of our successful library program. To start, I was very lucky to have an extremely supportive

superintendent and principal. Over the years, I had a lot of crazy and big ideas on how we could build and cultivate the best library and school we could for our students and community. I had a vision for what we wanted to do and how we could create this change. [My] hanging out with my superintendent at the coffee shop on a Saturday, sharing a fun Friday night with teacher friends at our house, or chaperoning school dances and events were all common occurrences in my life. The relationships and friendships I had with my administrators, teachers, families, and others in our community were key to the success of the library program and in my role as the [school] librarian. I wanted to make a difference.

MR: I also developed strong friendships and partnerships with administrators. I think advocacy is DOA if you don't have an authentic relationship with your principal or colleagues. In my second year as a librarian, a planning principal came to me out of the blue to help solve a problem for a new middle school that was being built. Terry and I became good friends, literally working side by side designing not only the library, but the entire school. I remember

a meeting when he and I had to convince our then-superintendent of a proposal we had. Together, we managed to convince our superintendent that our idea was his all along. Talk about Jedi mind tricks! We prepped for days for this one meeting.

SMM: Being prepared is very important. Every time I went to talk to my administrators, I was armed with the information and tools I would need so they just couldn't say no. I made a seat for myself at the table and made sure I was involved in every meeting and conversation that I could. By doing this, they knew that I cared and had an interest in everything that was going on within our school district.

MR: I have a dear colleague who uses that seat analogy. He always says that for most educational conversations, there should always be a librarian at the table. Nod to you, Steve Coker! I think some librarians see advocacy as passive. I believe you need to seek out the opportunities.

SMM: Advocacy to me means the process of always sharing our message and vision with our students, teachers, parents, community, and the world. We need to build these



partnerships and invite all stakeholders to be involved in building a plan for the school library program. As librarians, we can't share our passion and stories enough. We have the ability to empower others with this energy so they know how to share their voices, creativity, and passions too.

MR: I've spilled a lot of pixels writing about advocacy. I think advocacy comes down to simply operationalizing your strategic plans. You define what you want the future to look like and then seek ways to make it happen. The AASL Advocacy Committee describes advocacy as "[beginning] with a vision and a plan for the library program that is then matched to the agenda and priorities of stakeholders" (AASL 2017). A clear and aligned vision must be defined before the ask.

SMM: Mark, as an administrator, how have your perspectives on advocacy changed?

MR: I think many of my previous assumptions about advocacy have proven themselves to be on the mark. I've been a district administrator for a while now. I spend a lot of time with both building and district leaders

across the U.S. I think it's important that librarian advocates let go of the "us versus them" mindset. At the 2015 AASL National Conference, I sat on the same panel as my superintendent Dr. Steve Webb and two other nationally recognized superintendents. I cowrote an article with Dr. Webb for *School Administrator* magazine. There is no dark side. Everybody wants what's best for kids. Admins don't hate libraries. In some cases, they simply prioritize other areas of educational need.

SMM: I remember that presentation at the AASL conference and thought to myself... "We sure do have a lot in common when it comes to our superintendents being such amazing advocates to us as librarians and for our school libraries." When I first started presenting and working with other school districts around the country, it was with my superintendent and principal. My very first speaking gig was actually in Nashville, and the three of us drove there in a school van to speak to a large group of educators, including several [school] librarians. I knew at that time we all had the same goal...to make a difference for students and advocate for education everywhere. In fact, that next year

we were a featured presentation at the School Administrators of Iowa National Conference, and three years later I keynoted, along with five students, the Iowa Association of School Boards Annual Convention. Can you imagine what all of the administrators, educators, and school board members took back to their districts and communities after hearing a librarian speak with her administrators and students about the importance of libraries and education? It was awesome! We made a difference.

MR: Having gone from a librarian to a district administrator, I think there are some key secrets to success. Librarians need to learn to manage up. That means [school] librarians must do their homework and understand what educational leaders dream about. It means listening and empathizing with their principal or district leaders. It means building rapport both interpersonally and professionally. And you need to align library goals with school and district priorities.

SMM: That's why I'm so excited about Future Ready Librarians! As school districts around the country become Future Ready, librarians are

The Future Ready Librarians Framework and the "gears" within the framework

OPEN UP A CONVERSATION

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the ones who are taking the role to lead, teach, and support the school and district Future Ready goals in a variety of ways. The Future Ready Librarians Framework and the "gears" within the framework open up a conversation that we can have with our administrators and others within the district. As the framework states, we can talk about empowering our students as creators, cultivating community partnerships, facilitating professional learning, leading beyond the library, and so much more. We can provide the connections, strategies, and resources our school and district need to create innovative learning opportunities for our students (Alliance for Excellent Education n.d.). As librarians, we are the ones who can lead our schools as we become more Future Ready every day.

MR: In Vancouver strategic partnerships and alignments have changed the conversation about libraries and librarians. I trace the library renaissance in VPS to an unlikely partnership more than a decade ago. Our chief technology officer wanted to implement a new textbook-management solution. Out of the blue,

she reached out to me for help. We worked together and went from being antagonists to partners. At the same time, librarians became part of the solution to a district-wide challenge. This successful partnership changed perceptions and assumptions on both sides of the aisle, and we never really looked back. Now, our [school] librarians are supporting our tablet deployment, leading students' toward better digital citizenship, promoting coding and making—their successes build legitimacy and credibility in the eyes of both building and district leaders. Most importantly, the conversation is less about what's best for the library and more about what's best for kids.

SMM: Absolutely! Our conversation should always focus on what is best for kids! Through my library advocacy, I was always thinking and working to make a difference for our students, teachers, and community in so many ways. Just as your [school] librarians did, I was one of the key players in our 1:1 laptop initiative, integrated and led coding efforts, created makerspaces, supported project-based learning, modeled and taught digital citizenship, and worked at connecting our students globally

through experiences, digital tools and projects, and literacy. As Future Ready Librarians, this is what we do. We do anything we can to move our schools and education to where they need to be. We change the way we have done things and make a difference for our community, schools, libraries, and—most of all—our students.

MR: As library advocates, I think we are always extending a metaphorical hand. I often tell librarians to be mindful about the way they orient that hand. Is it extended palm up as if asking for a handout? Or is it extended like a handshake? I think the Future Ready Librarians Framework helps school librarians make strategic connections and find meaningful ways to extend a helping hand.

So Shannon...as a library advocate, how do you feel about the future of school libraries?

SMM: I am so excited and optimistic about the future of school libraries!

[School] librarians are the ones who can lead, foster, and create the change that is needed throughout libraries, schools, and education. We, as Future Ready Librarians, will be



the ones who do this. And we must empower others around us to do the same—administrators, teachers, families, and, most important of all, our students. They are counting on us. Together, we can be the best advocates for school libraries, education, and for our young people as they embrace the future too. Mark, what about you?

MR: I've never been more optimistic about the future of school libraries. Kids, teachers, and principals need Future Ready Librarians. We'll keep telling that story at the national level. It's up to librarians to make that case in their schools!

Works Cited:

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Shannon McClintock Miller is a spokesperson for Future Ready

Librarians. She is also an author, speaker, and teacher librarian consultant. She is a member of AASL and AASL's Best Apps for Teaching and Learning Committee. She is the author of the award-winning *The Library Voice* blog and enjoys writing for various blogs, journals, and other forums, including *ISTE*, *School Library Journal*, and *Publishers' Weekly*. She recently published her first four children's books about library skills with *Cantata Learning*.



Mark Ray is the Director of Innovation and Library Services in the Vancouver (WA) Public Schools and a

long-time advocate for strong school libraries and innovation in education. In 2011 the Washington State ASCD affiliate gave him the Washington State Individual Award for Influencing Instructional Leadership and Professional Growth of Educators. In 2012 the State of Washington Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction named him Teacher of the Year. In the April 2012 issue of *Teacher Librarian* he was among those recognized as visionary leaders of the learning commons concept. In 2015 he was included in the National School Boards Association's list of "20 to Watch" as emerging technology leaders.