

SCHOOL LIBRARIANSHIP:

A Profession in 4 Acts

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Although school libraries—and indeed our world—have changed greatly since the publication of the first set of school library standards in 1920 (National Education Assoc. and North Central Assoc. of Colleges and Secondary Schools 1920), each subsequent iteration of the standards has sought to define the next incarnation of a profession undergoing continual evolution. In this article, four professionals who have transitioned into different phases of their school library careers offer reflections on how the professional standards influence their work.

Act I: Transitioning to Librarianship

Mary Nevares, school librarian, South Texas Independent School District, @BLA_Librarians

As a school librarian I answer many questions from students, teachers, and staff. Problems need solutions, and people in school settings often go to a librarian for assistance.

As a school librarian new to the profession, I am not always sure that what I'm doing is best practice; that's why it is essential for me to use the *National School Library Standards* to guide me in my profession.

I worked as a classroom teacher for eighteen years before becoming a school librarian. In my role as department chair I was in charge of leading our department through its curriculum-writing process. The process included confirming that the curriculum documents reflected all of the required standards such as Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), College and Career Readiness Standards (CCRS), and

English Language Proficiency Standards (ELPS). At the time I believed that going through this curriculum-writing process would ensure student success. While the documents we created reflected the standards to a significant degree, the student outcomes were always a toss-up. One thing I noticed is that our standards focused only on student actions. We were missing critical components such as the beliefs and actions of the educators.

AASL's *National School Library Standards* are designed to deal with this problem. The standards are an integrated framework that works to demonstrate the connections between learners, school librarians, and school libraries. As a result, three sets of standards work together to provide a quality learning experience for students. The first chapter of the *National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries* contains statements of Common Beliefs that represent the foundation for the framework of the AASL Standards (AASL 2018).

When the *National School Library Standards* book was published, the first thing I did was examine my own beliefs and compare them with the Common Beliefs in chapter 1. I saw this as a first step toward developing my own set of professional principles that I could strengthen and build upon throughout my career as a school librarian. These beliefs govern my day-to-day activities, and I look for ways to demonstrate that reality in my work. I see the Common Beliefs as a way to connect to a broader community of school librarians through our shared principles. If we all start from the

same viewpoint, we can work toward the same goals.

Understanding the new *National School Library Standards* can seem like a daunting task, but some things I'm doing now are helping me. For example, I am working through—and reflecting on—"Where Do I Start? Six Action Steps for Getting to Know the *National School Library Standards*," a helpful and thought-provoking infographic available at <https://standards.aasl.org/project/six-steps>. These action steps mirror those found in the *AASL Standards Framework for Learners*. In essence, to understand the standards, librarians taking the action steps are modeling the actions of the learners. The action steps can be taken in a way that doesn't seem overwhelming to me. You can go as fast or as slowly as you need. At the time of this writing (July), I plan to gather colleagues in my district during the school year to go through the six action steps with me. Together we can discover the ways the standards can work for us.

Another thing I'm doing is staying connected via social media. By using the Twitter hashtag #AASLstandards, I can keep up with the latest developments, ideas for implementation, and challenges. AASL shares videos, information about webinars, and helpful infographics to break down the content of the standards in easy-to-understand ways.

As a person new to the library profession, the *National School Library Standards* guide me on the path I need to follow to become an effective leader in my school community. The AASL Standards are the perfect tool to help me develop my craft as I transition into my school library career.

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Act 2: Trailblazing School Librarian

Renee Dyer, school librarian, Weslaco Independent School District; EdD student, Sam Houston State

University, @WEHSLibrary

When I started my journey as a school librarian twenty-five years ago I was fresh out of graduate school. I had passion, conviction, and the misconception that the classes I had taken and the theories I had learned would provide me with every resource I needed to blaze a trail in my journey to becoming the best school librarian the world had ever seen. Of course, that wasn't the case. I would need many more tools and guides to chart my path as a librarian.

Like most of you, I have sought direction from professional publications along my journey: *Booklist*, *VOYA*, and *School Library Journal* to name a few. I have also sought guidance from professional organizations including the American Library Association, the Texas Library Association, the Texas Computer Education Association, and the International Society for Technology in Education. More recently, I have looked to my social media-based personal learning network (PLN). These have all been important sources of guidance for me, but the resources that have always served as my compass for research-based best practices in the library have come from the American Association of School Librarians. For me, those best practices were introduced with the 1998 edition of *Information Power: Guidelines for School Library Media Programs*.

With the knowledge I could access in *Information Power*, I could go anywhere and show my students and teachers the route to technology proficiency and out-of-the-box thinking. That trail led me to build partnerships for learning on my campus, in my school district, and throughout my community and state. I was the trailblazing librarian I had always dreamed of being—for a while, and then my trail became a little less clear. Alternate routes appeared on the map as new resources and new ways of accessing information emerged.

I realized that AASL was once again supporting me when they issued me a new map in 2007, *Standards for the 21st-Century Learner*. These standards held tips for navigating the uncharted trails, so I could once again explore new terrain. The updated paths on the map lead to leadership, inquiry, and integration. When I hiked down the leadership trail, I found many others there that I could teach and learn from. The inquiry and integration trails seemed familiar but different, as if their routes had been lengthened with new and challenging terrain that required me to dig in and traverse the trail one step at a time so I wouldn't slip off of the path. But, eventually, those trails, too, began to fork and switch back, making me question the validity of my map. AASL also saw the paths changing and handed me a new map last year, the *National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries*. This new map contains some familiar trails as well as trails that are unfamiliar to me. I am eager to explore them. I know I won't get lost along the way with the AASL Standards there to point me back in the right direction, and to build upon my past experiences and knowledge.



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Ultimately, my goal in using the professional standards is to guide the growth of the next generation of school library professionals by creating curriculum that fosters the development of the values and practices advocated by the professional standards.

I still haven't reached my destination, but in truth, my travel was never about the destination; it has always been about the journey. AASL's guidance has ensured that it has been filled with adventures, challenges, and opportunities. I hope each of you enjoys the journey—it's more important than reaching the destination.

3 Act 3: School Librarian Leadership

Len Bryan, Library Technical Systems Manager, Denver Public Schools, @lenbryan25

After teaching English and coaching for eleven years, I served as a campus librarian for five years: two in a middle school and three in a high school. I was lucky to be in Texas, which has a strong school library presence, largely thanks to the amazing professionals there, and the *School Library Programs: Standards and Guidelines for Texas*, which have been recently revised. I was also lucky to have colleagues across the district and the state to support me and inform me of best practices in school librarianship.

My good fortune continued as I transitioned to the Texas State Library and Archives Commission in 2014, where I became the program coordinator for school libraries, and served as a consultant for campus and district librarians across the state. Along with our strong state standards, AASL's 2007 *Standards for the 21st-Century Learner* served as a national benchmark by which we could measure our progress as a state. Many of the checklists, reference documents, and other materials that

are now in the appendix of AASL's *National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries* existed on the AASL website; they had not yet been curated into a single resource, so they required some searching to locate and use with librarians. The new book has made looking up relevant information much quicker and easier!

On the road again, I transitioned to Oregon in 2016—a new state for me, with new state standards. In Oregon I served as the only librarian in a district, working with 20,000 students and 1,500 teachers across 35 campuses. The AASL Standards served as an anchor point between state standards, as I learned about my new state and where our school library programs could best serve the needs of students, teachers, and our school communities. The AASL Standards, newly revised and released in 2017, gave me a national lens through which to view my district role, and helped me focus on the work that made the most impact: teaching students (and teachers) information literacy skills. I lived in the learner standards as I taught students and teachers to inquire, include, collaborate, curate, explore, and engage with library resources, most notably our state databases. I also referred to the standards in my communication with principals. This district has not employed campus librarians in quite a long time, and most of the teachers and administrators were unaware of what licensed school librarians can do for them and, more importantly, for their students. AASL's *National School Library Standards* gave me a place to begin those conversations.

As I write this in July, I will be moving again in a few weeks, this time to Colorado, where I will definitely be using the AASL Standards to inform my assessment of the department I will be managing the Central Library Technical Systems in Denver Public Schools. Connecting the important functions of this department to district goals as well as to AASL and state standards will be one of my many new opportunities in this role. I hope to utilize the *AASL Standards Framework for School Librarians* to help us ensure we are providing campus librarians with the tools and knowledge they need to create teaching and learning cultures where students can innovate, collaborate, explore, and create new learning products. I also hope to use the tools in chapter 14 of the standards book to assist us in developing an in-district school library evaluation similar to the building- and district-level checklist on pages 174–180.

Our AASL Standards are especially helpful for school librarians, who may have a bit of wanderlust and are willing to change positions or move from state to state. The standards provide a nationwide framework within which we can operate. If our state library associations have created standards and have done the work in connecting their state standards to AASL Standards, we can use these crosswalks to see how our practice is similar across settings, regardless of our roles.

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Act 4: Faculty Perspectives

Dr. Aaron J. Elkins,
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In his book *Scholarship Reconsidered*, Ernest Boyer (1990) describes teaching, scholarship, and service as the three aspects of the work of academics. Although the priority and balance of each of these aspects varies by institution, the professional standards influence each of these three aspects of my work as a school library faculty member.

Teaching

Perhaps the most obvious way the standards influence my teaching is by shaping the development of my curriculum. As a school library faculty member working to prepare the next generation of school library professionals, I have used the professional standards as a foundation for my curriculum, a base upon which I add my experience as a school librarian, and a crosswalk to the state professional standards. The publication of the new standards gives me the opportunity to review my existing curriculum and identify areas where there may be gaps and opportunities for growth. Ultimately, my goal in using the professional standards is to guide the growth of the next generation of school library professionals by creating curriculum that fosters the development of the values and practices advocated by the professional standards.

Scholarship

The professional standards have been a particular interest of mine in my research. In my dissertation (Elkins 2014), I examined how the performance responsibilities in *Empowering Learners* (AASL 2009) compared to the performance responsibilities from the job descriptions for school librarians in Florida (not well, in case you were wondering). Along with two colleagues, I surveyed school librarians to see which roles from the professional standards they felt were most important and in which they most frequently engaged (Elkins, Wood, and Mardis 2015). I discussed how the professional standards may inform role perceptions, and how the contrasts between those role perceptions may affect school librarians' willingness to engage in extra-role behaviors (Elkins 2015). Most recently, I revisited the data I collected during my dissertation research to see how factors like the age of the job description, the number of performance expectations in the job description, and the source of the job description affected the rate of agreement with the performance expectations from the professional standards (Elkins 2018). I am eager to begin new research with the new set of professional standards and am most interested to see how school librarians are fulfilling the professional standards in their work lives.

Service

For faculty members, service work typically means working on committees at the departmental, college, and university levels but can also include work in the community or for professional organizations.

I work to communicate with my colleagues the intersection between the professional standards and our curriculum. Additionally, I currently serve on AASL's Standards Implementation Committee and am excited to be involved in facilitating the rollout of the new standards.

Conclusion

While we are each in different "acts" of our school library careers, the professional standards have meaning to each of us, whether as a guiding document, compass, foundation, or lens. We are confident that our relationship with the professional standards will continue to grow and deepen as we continue to develop as school library professionals.

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Standards Implementation Committee and AASL's Intellectual Freedom Award Subcommittee. Among his recent publications is "Mind the Gaps: School Librarians' Job Descriptions and the Professional Standards for School Librarians in the United States," published this year by School Libraries Worldwide.



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Len Bryan is the library technology systems manager for Denver Public Schools. Previously, he served the children of Texas for ten years in the classroom, teaching middle school and high school English. He earned his MSLIS from the University

of North Texas in 2009 and served as a middle school librarian. He then took on the opportunity to open a new high school, where he served as librarian, webmaster, and National Honor Society advisor, among other roles. He later served as the school program coordinator at the Texas State Library and Archives Commission and the district librarian for Hillsboro School District. He is a member of AASL and serves on the AASL Standards Implementation Committee and is chair of the AASL Social Media Committee



Renee Dyer is librarian at Weslaco (TX) East High School. She is an AASL member. In 2014 she was the first recipient of the Bonnie Baker Thorne Award for Outstanding Service in Education.

In 2013 and 2011 she was among the top three librarians honored by the Texas Computer Educators Association. Renee wrote a successful grant proposal that resulted in the Sprint Foundation awarding her school district \$2.5 million in services and devices through the foundation's 1Million Project.