



# “LIBRARYING” OUTSIDE THE LIBRARY

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## What We Know

As a librarian for eighteen years, I've seen firsthand how school library spaces and school librarians have evolved to keep up with the ever-changing educational landscape. The 2018 AASL Standards emphasize Collaborate—one of the standards' Shared Foundations—that speaks to the Key Commitment "Work effectively with others to broaden perspectives and work toward a common goal" (AASL 2018, 36). Collaboration can also offer unique programming opportunities that can build relationships and show stakeholders that school librarians are unique, specialized support instructional professionals who can impact the greater school community and district.

How can relationship building and demonstrating impact on learning be done? As professionals, school librarians must seek out opportunities to lead or work with others in the area of programming. Much can be done in the library space but when the programs occur outside the school library, a librarian's willingness to be adaptable is leveraged and the result can be a huge win for students and staff. Oftentimes, many are surprised because the idea of a program not taking place within the library space is new to them. Mobility and flexibility are key and offer school librarians the opportunity to leverage their expertise and role while introducing the concept of "librarying" outside the walls of the library space.

Our library spaces in the Leander Independent School District (ISD) are busy, active learning hubs in all our elementary, middle, and high schools. Nonetheless, programming opportunities happen outside our library walls to provide students and adult learners rich, engaging learner experiences, as well as showcase how school librarians can be critical

allies in lesson design or professional learning. Students and classroom teachers benefit from the programming that is happening outside the library. These programs also have the unintended outcome of creating a culture of "yes" when school librarians ask to collaborate with other educators in the schools.

### Case in Point: Vandegrift High School

Vandegrift High School (VHS), a newly minted International Baccalaureate High School within our district, has a very busy library. Students congregate before, during, and after school, but much of the programming and instruction occurs outside the library. Zandra Lopez has been the campus librarian since VHS opened and is a critical partner on the Vandegrift leadership team. Building a learner-centered culture of cooperation is critical for this growing campus, and creating new-teacher orientation via the use of a Breakout EDU immersive learning activity is the first of many programming ideas she leads throughout the school year. The goal of the breakout activity is to create a customized learning experience that will engage new staff in all things Vandegrift through this engaging culture-building exercise. After reviewing rules about the activity, such as everything must be done together and boxes must be left in designated rooms, new teachers come together to figure out the many puzzles and be the first to break out. The activity is interactive and promotes teamwork and camaraderie while also taking the staff on a tour of their new campus after a full day of other learning. There is also the added benefit of their meeting Zandra while being introduced to a unique activity to consider for future lessons in the new instructors' content areas (see figure 1).

Zandra and Dee Porter, the newly hired second librarian, have also led additional Breakout EDU activities, partnering with foreign language, government, physics, and English teachers. These activities have taken place in the classrooms and included themes like Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead), Día de los Reyes Magos (Day of the Three Kings), reviews of constitutional amendments, application of physics skills, a Harry Potter anniversary celebration, and an introduction to dystopian literature. So many great ideas centered around student learning have been implemented through collaboration between school librarians and other educators at the school!

Another unique idea centers around AP Seminar and Research Class projects that take place during the summer. A key foundation of both courses is for students to have cross-curricular understanding of current events, ideas, and perspectives.

To ensure that students gain a rich set of experiences and understanding as they get ready to use that understanding within capstone projects, Zandra and Katie Kendall, AP Capstone and Theory of Knowledge Teacher, have created a summer scavenger hunt assignment, housed on the Vandegrift Library libguide <<https://goo.gl/KNYiNW>>, tasking students to create a portfolio reflecting their understanding from experiences centered around the verbs *read*, *listen*, *watch*, *experience*, *create*, and *learn*. Examples and details on each verb are shared, but both teachers specifically allow students to be creative in seeking additional suggestions so long as they stay within the scope provided. The final product shared is also left to the discretion of each individual student; product examples shared have included posters, personal journals, videos, Instagram stories, Google slide shows, and scrapbooks.

What starts as a teacher-librarian collaboration morphs into a self-managed, student-centered-choice assignment (see figure 2) to be completed between June and August, all outside the library and school. Students are reflective about the work they've done, and parents provide positive feedback on the scope of the assignment. The work completed is authentic and creative, and pushes enrolled students out of their comfort zone, especially since they are not used to dealing with ambiguity and choice. For the AP Seminar and the Research Class, the teacher-librarian partnership is interdependent, and this summer assignment showcases the powerful partnership. To see more examples of this collaboration, check the @ViperLibrary Twitter handle and the #VandyCapZone hashtag.

### Literacy-Based Programming

Books and libraries are connections that quickly come to mind to many in our community. Much of the literacy work in our district *does* happen within our school library spaces, but some literacy-related events happen outside the school libraries. These events are led by school librarians that have built strong relationships with key partners on a campus and in the school district's community. The challenge of coordinating large events might feel a bit daunting, but these collaborative partnerships can lead to some amazing programming that any librarian would be proud to be connected with.

Another added challenge is the fact that our elementary librarians are in the "specials" teaching rotations, a change that occurred three years ago due to budget cuts and that reduces the time the librarians have available for library point-of-need collaboration. While not the most ideal situation, the change forced our elementary team to seek different



Figure 1. @ViperLibrary Tweet showcasing EDU locks for new-teacher breakout exercise.



Figure 2. Collaborating educator's own worksheet for a student-centered summer project.

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ways to take on events and has led to some unique programming that has benefited students and forged connections between our school librarians and families and administrators.

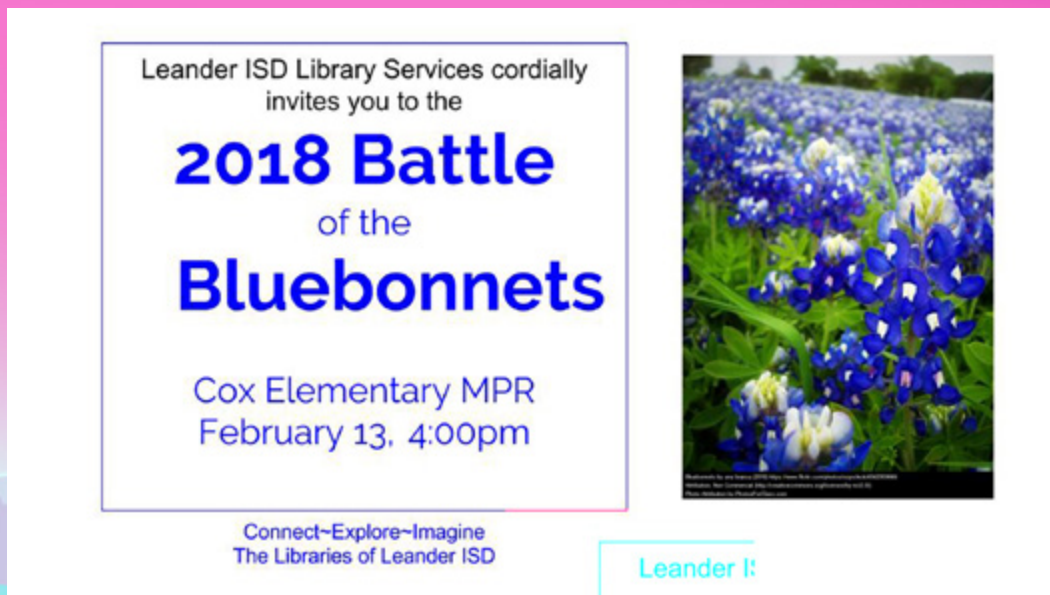
An example of such an event is our Battle of the Bluebonnets. This is a district-wide event to which every elementary campus—twenty-seven in all—brings a team of three to five students to answer forty questions about the books on the current school year's Texas Bluebonnet Award (TBA) master list (see <https://txla.org/tools-resources/reading-lists/texas-bluebonnet-award/about>). The charge of the TBA Program is to encourage students to read a minimum of five books from a list of twenty titles. In January students across the state of Texas vote for their favorite book, and the final vote is announced in early February with the award ceremony held in April at the Texas Library Association Annual Conference. Every school library

in Leander is registered for participation in this state-wide event so coordinating and coming together for the Battle of the Bluebonnets event is a culminating activity with all school librarians pitching in to help.

The Bluebonnet Battle is held in an elementary school multipurpose room (MPR) in a central part of the district. An invitation (see figure 3) is distributed to all elementary campuses via our district-wide newsletter that reaches families, teachers, administrators, and school board members. Tables and chairs are set up in the MPR for the twenty-seven teams. The district's set-up crew also places chairs for the many families and students that attend to cheer on their campus teams.

Students from the host campus welcome all teams, families, administrators, and school board members. Our superintendent also welcomes everyone and reiterates the importance of literacy. Our emcee, typically a campus principal,

Figure 3.  
Invitation to a  
district-wide  
literacy-related  
event.



launches into questions developed in advance by all elementary school librarians. These questions have been preloaded into Kahoot and are answered by each team. At the end of the event, scores are tallied and a winning team is recognized, but throughout the preparation and the event the focus is on celebrating literacy, having read some great titles, and coming together to celebrate as a school district.

Another event centers around an author visit. Though many librarians already host author visits—in person or virtually—in their school libraries, a district-wide event is a new idea for us. This past fall, we hosted a district-wide literacy event with Scholastic author Dav Pilkey. This visit landed on our laps via our partnership with our local independent bookstore BookPeople. As the library coordinator, I made a request to host by submitting a proposal that was done collaboratively with our ELA coordinators, sharing details about the venue and how we would market this event, specifically highlight-

ing how we wanted to provide event tickets along with a book to one hundred of our economically disadvantaged students. Our Leander ISD Educational Excellence Foundation (LEEF) funded the one hundred tickets for books, and we were able to secure a venue that would hold twenty-three hundred attendees.

To select sponsored students, librarians from four dual-language campuses were asked to meet with their leadership team to determine which students to invite as guests of the district. Selected students received a letter with information and a request to RSVP so that we could ensure they had transportation and would be able to attend the author event. Some selected students were unable to attend, but the author-signed books were delivered to them later that week.

The remaining book tickets were sold to families in our school district via the Eventbrite link created by a BookPeople staff member. Our Canva poster promoting the Dav

Pilkey event (see figure 4) was e-mailed—along with the Eventbrite ticket information—to all district students and staff. The tickets sold paid for a signed book for each ticketholder. Attending the event was



Figure 4. Poster for author visit hosted by the whole district.

free, but attendees were required to have tickets for the book purchase to ensure that there were enough seats for everyone.

The coordination of this event was a true team effort; designated team leaders each had a committee to help with ticket-taking, activity-area help, room ushering, and managing the greeting line to meet Dav Pilkey. Communication among all teams before and during the event was key, but having BookPeople staff with experience truly made a difference in the smooth running of the event. Scholastic also had a team on hand; its members were invaluable in their experience with managing the large group of attendees in a very efficient manner.

Did this event take time to coordinate? *Yes*—many hours in the weeks before the event, and, on the day, many of our team stayed past 9:00 p.m. However, seeing the many excited, happy students with parents connecting with Dav Pilkey and screaming in excitement all in the name of literacy makes the investment in time worth it!

### What's the Return on Investment?

So why consider doing programming outside the school library? Benjamin Franklin is often credited with saying, "When you are finished changing, you're finished." I know we have not finished changing, and our profession will need to continue to evolve to keep up with our ever-changing world. Seeking creative ways to make an impact on learners

and our communities is imperative. Coming from a place of "yes" instead of "no" can make a huge difference as we each consider any programming opportunity.

The events listed above definitely caused us to go above and beyond what we normally do, but to quote the title of one of Oprah Winfrey's books, this is "what I know for sure":

- Our school librarians are passionate about what they do, seek to continually improve, and put students first.
- Our school libraries and their programming are vibrant, busy, and evolving.
- Our district and community understand the impact school librarians can have.

How do I know this? At Vandegrift High School, parents shared their excitement and love for the summer assignment. At the Battle of the Bluebonnets, school board members

and administrators took time to attend and share in the literacy excitement of seeing 135+ elementary school students actively engaged in answering questions about books they read. After the Dav Pilkey author event, I heard countless attendees of all ages thank us for hosting this event and ask when the next one will occur. A parent sent me an e-mail that truly touched me. Along with offering thanks for putting on a great family event, she shared a personal story about overcoming adversity and an immense challenge—all in



an effort to meet Dav Pilkey; this affirmation alone is priceless. I'm happy for the parent and confident she went on to share this experience with friends and community. Now that's advocacy!

These are just a few of many great programs happening in Leander ISD; I know we aren't alone. As users of social media, my colleagues and I are inspired by fellow school librarians on Twitter and Instagram who share daily about the great things happening in their libraries. We hope we inspire them. Sharing what we do helps makes us all better, and what we share invites everyone into the work we do. School library advocacy online and in person helps learners in our own districts and beyond.



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currently the Region 6 Director for AASL and past chair of the Texas Association of School Librarians (TASL), the school library division of the Texas Library Association (TLA). Becky represents TASL on the TLA Legislative/Advocacy Committee and was recently appointed to the ALA Center for the Future of Libraries Advisory Group. She is a connected librarian and co-moderator for #TXLChat, a weekly Twitter chat for Texas librarians. Follow Becky on Twitter @becalzada and Leander ISD libraries @LeanderISDLib #leanderisdlib.



### Work Cited:

American Association of School Librarians. 2018. *National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries*. Chicago: ALA.

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# GET OUT THE VOTE

## AASL/ALA Election

Polls Open March 11 - April 3

Ensure that the largest library association's voice includes the vital role of school librarians in K-12 education!

ALA IS A POWERFUL VOICE FOR ALL LIBRARIES

As school librarians have seen, that larger voice is critical when ensuring school librarians are part of federal legislation, that the intellectual freedom of our students is kept at the forefront, and that school librarians are recognized as a unique and critical role for developing lifetime library users. It takes school librarians involved in ALA leadership to keep this at the top of everyone's minds.

American Library Association

American Association of School Librarians  
Representing Librarians

Advocate for the election and share the AASL "VOTER" Twibbon.

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