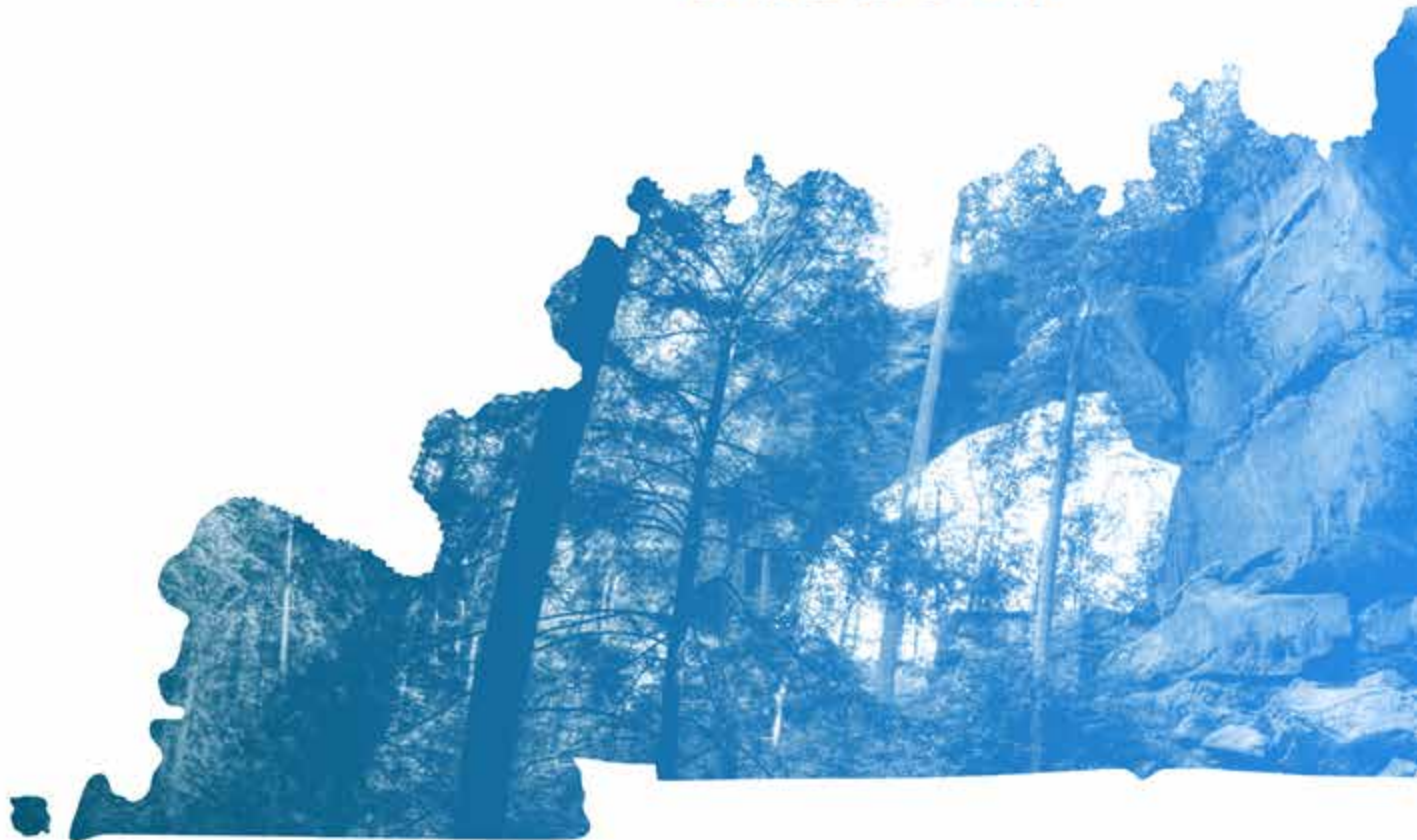# ONE COMMONWEALTH, ONE COMMON VISION

Sam Northern
samjnorthern@gmail.com

Melissa Gardner
melissa.gardner@campbell.kyschools.us

Each year half a million planes fly over Kentucky (Champion Traveler n.d.). During the crossing passengers see an assortment of colors, shapes, patterns, and textures. In eastern Kentucky ruggedly scenic mountains ripple westward toward 2,000 miles of shoreline at Kentucky Lake. Travelers fly over meadows of bluegrass and towering oak trees that hide an extensive system of caves. One cannot help but appreciate the uniqueness of Kentucky's geography, especially from 35,000 feet. However, the true beauty of Kentucky is found when you experience it firsthand. You can learn all about Mammoth Cave, but nothing compares to standing at its entrance and peering inside.

Just like the cave systems wind beneath Kentucky, so do the school libraries wind within Kentucky schools. In Kentucky the school library is regarded as the hub of the school community and integral to teaching and learning. The power of the school library lies in the programming, resources, services, and instruction it provides educators and learners to support learning. Stakeholders come to appreciate Kentucky's school libraries because

of their experiences using the space, accessing materials, and learning-through-doing. With the release of the *National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries* (AASL 2018), Kentucky school librarians are using the standards to transform the science of school librarianship and inspire the enhancement of school library practice.

Before heading to Louisville for the 2019 AASL National Conference, we wanted to give you a peek inside Kentucky school libraries and the support networks undergirding the state's school librarians.
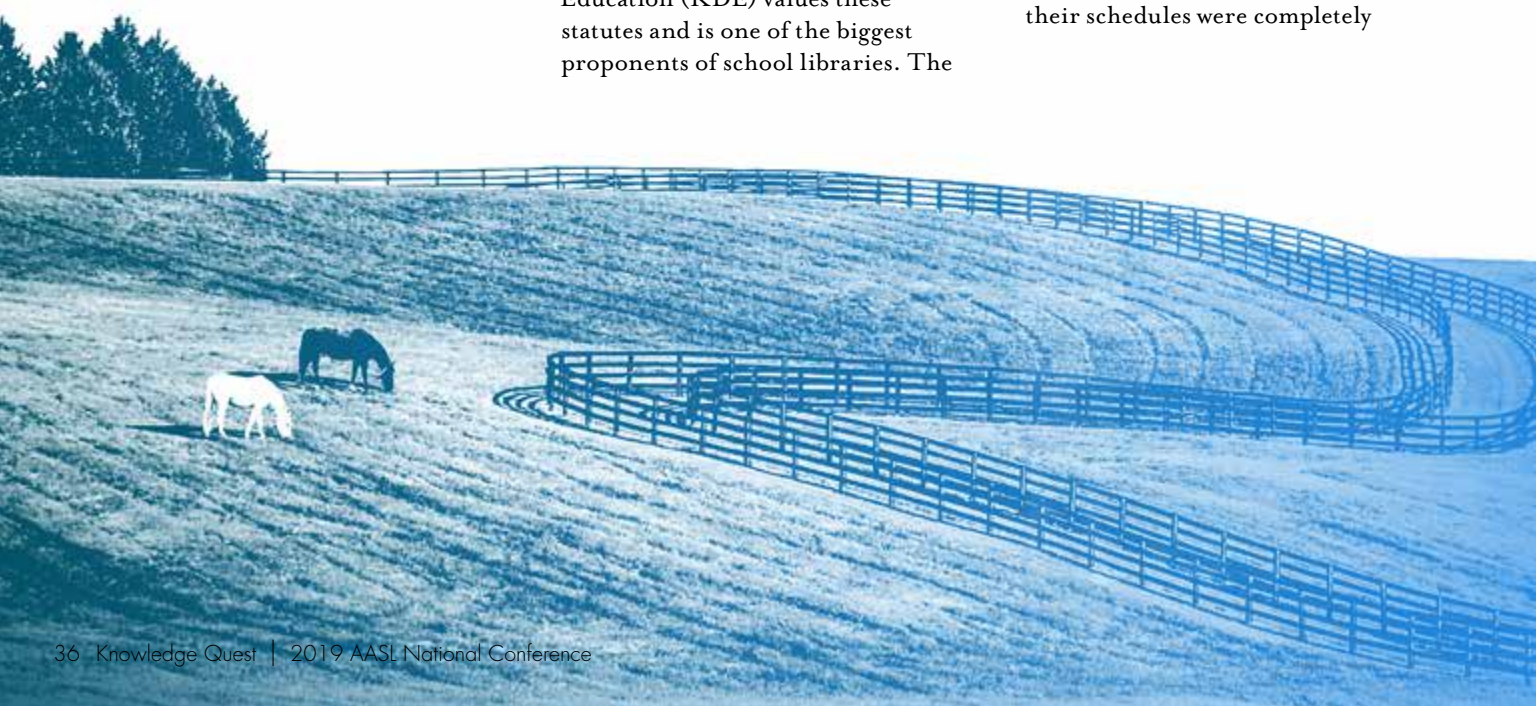
Kentucky Supports School Libraries

The Kentucky Revised Statutes (KRS) guide the state's school libraries. KRS 158.102 requires the employment of a certified school librarian in each school to organize, equip, and manage the operations of the school library (Kentucky General Assembly 2000). Furthermore, KRS 158.791 requires each elementary school provide high-quality school library programs (Kentucky General Assembly 2000).

The Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) values these statutes and is one of the biggest proponents of school libraries. The

department makes this clear on its website, where it states: "Success in life and work includes the use of higher-order thinking skills, collaboration, innovation, and information and media literacy. Quality library media facilities, with appropriate resources and certified librarians, are key components to success in these areas, as well as to success in implementing content area standards" (2018).

KDE understands that the school library should be fully integrated into the educational program. The "Library Media" section of KDE's website declares: "A school library with a flexible (or open) schedule provides an opportunity for classroom teachers to participate in co-teaching and collaboration with the certified librarian" (2018). A flexible schedule means learners and educators are able to access the school library throughout the day to use information sources, read for pleasure, and meet and work with other library users. The most recent "State of Kentucky's School Libraries Report" found that only 30 percent of the 223 responding Kentucky school librarians stated that their school libraries had a totally flexible schedule (KASL 2018). Unfortunately, 21 percent stated that their schedules were completely

OPEN ACCESS TO A QUALITY SCHOOL LIBRARY IS ESSENTIAL FOR LEARNERS TO DEVELOP THE VITAL SKILLS NECESSARY TO ANALYZE, EVALUATE, INTERPRET, AND COMMUNICATE INFORMATION AND IDEAS IN A VARIETY OF FORMATS

fixed. Even though the Kentucky Department of Education supports flexible scheduling, the individual school's Site Based Decision Making Council makes the ultimate decision on scheduling the school librarian's time and setting the schedule for the school library.

Open access to a quality school library is essential for learners to develop the vital skills necessary to analyze, evaluate, interpret, and communicate information and ideas in a variety of formats (AASL 2019). When space and resources are readily available school librarians become partners in learning. Kentucky school librarians regularly collaborate with classroom teachers to design, implement, and evaluate instruction.

Professionals Supporting Professionals

Professional learning networks empower change, encourage growth, and make schools a better place. For school librarians membership in AASL and state affiliates is part of our identity. The Kentucky Association of School Librarians (KASL) is the professional organization of all Kentucky school librarians. The association is a state affiliate of the Kentucky Library Association and a national affiliate of AASL. "KASL is organized and divided into seven regions across the state.

Those regions are subdivided into 13 districts, which function under their own constitutions and bylaws. Libraries in independent school systems, colleges, and universities are included in these districts along with public school libraries" (KASL n.d.).

One never stops learning, and no occupation understands this better than school librarians. To support the evolution of librarianship, KASL organizes an annual two-day professional conference that is held in the president's home region. For many school librarians in the state this annual Summer Refresher conference is their preferred means of professional development. By attending the Summer Refresher

attendees can earn six hours or more of professional development credit. The conference is made up of sessions delivered by practicing school librarians. Sessions range from reading promotion to STEM education to makerspaces, project-based learning, media literacy, and graphic design. In 2017 KASL introduced half-day workshops the day before the Summer Refresher. Workshop topics can include policy writing, website design, digital storytelling, and app smashing. There is something for everyone at Summer Refresher, and the best part is networking with other Kentucky school librarians.

In Kentucky a school librarian does not have to wait until summer break for professional development opportunities. We stay connected and up to date on a variety of topics with just a smartphone and a Twitter account. Our professional Twitter chats are public discussions focused on bimonthly themes with the hashtag #KyLChat. Each #KyLChat is led by a designated moderator who asks questions and facilitates the one-hour discussion. This virtual collaboration began in 2013 as a grassroots effort by Heidi Neltner, former KASL board member and current digital learning coach for Fort Thomas Schools. Neltner says, "Through the years it has been a great source of learning and inspiration for me personally, and I'm proud of the work our librarians do around the state" (2019).

#KyLChat inspired the creation of other virtual professional learning networks. #KYGoDigital began as a hashtag used during events by the Kentucky Department of Education, and it has now become the identifier for educators wishing to share digital innovations or to learn more about them (Marsee 2018). School librarians and other tech-savvy educators lead #KYGoDigital by recording webcasts of new educational technology that are posted to the movement's YouTube channel. The Kentucky Department of Education now sponsors the #KYGo-Digital Summer Tour where digital leaders get together at five regional events. These professional development events have tracks for primary, elementary, middle, and high school educators, with tracks for school librarian content areas.

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Collaboration from the Inside Out

For years school librarians have presented at non-library-specific conferences. In 2018 KASL began offering educational outreach grants to its members. If a grant application is approved, KASL pays for the member's registration fee for the non-library-specific conference. KASL members have presented on gamification to environmental educators, geo-tools to social studies councils, and virtual reality applications to science teachers. Recipients of the grant are encouraged to highlight school librarians' professional organization during their presentations. At the 2019 Kentucky Society for Technology in Education Spring Conference thirty-two presentations were led by school librarians. Kentucky's school libraries are leading the charge on bridging the gap between subject areas.

One hundred and eighteen Kentucky school librarians are national board certified in Early Childhood through Young Adulthood/Library Media (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards 2019). National Board Certification is the most respected professional certification available in education and provides numerous benefits to educators, learners, and schools. It is no wonder

content-area educators and administrators regard school librarians as instructional leaders. In addition to collaborating with classroom teachers on instruction, Kentucky school librarians coordinate unique programs for their school communities.

For example, school librarians often facilitate FIRST LEGO League (FLL), a program that challenges elementary and middle school students to think like scientists and engineers. Each year, FLL introduces a scientific and real-world challenge for teams to focus on and research. This program gives younger students the opportunity to investigate real-world issues such as food safety, water conservation, and energy using STEM concepts. Teams of students design, build, and program a LEGO robot to perform functions in relation to the problem. The 2019 Kentucky FLL Championship tournament was held at Northern Kentucky University where students presented their research and robots to a live audience. FLL aligns with AASL's Standards Integrated Frameworks (2018). The school library supports the program by embedding the inquiry process; implementing technology as a tool for learning; focusing on the effective use of a wide range of resources to foster information skills; and partnering with other educators

and experts on presenting topics and strategies (AASL 2018).

The Kentucky Department of Education's Student Technology Leadership Program (STLP) "uses project-based learning principles to empower student learning and achievement through the utilization (and creation) of technology to solve school and community needs. STLP provides a means for students to design, make, connect and learn" (KDE n.d.). Teams of students present their projects at regional and state competitions. STLP is a perfect fit for school librarians who are information experts and champions of inquiry-based learning. According to Jeff Sebulsky, KDE's STLP Program Manager/Digital Learning Coach, 20 percent of the 509 STLP coordinators who registered for the 2019 state competition were school librarians.

School librarians support STLP students' creation of technology products, which are submitted for online judging. Categories for STLP's Digital Product Online Judging include student-generated book trailers, digital storytelling, multimedia content, and screen-capture tutorials. School librarians guide students on the use of open-source software and other web applications when creating their products. Not only do students

become adept at using single-lens reflex cameras and other video recorders, they also learn how to customize their work using programs like Adobe Spark and iMovie. Regardless of the technology tools students use, the school librarian is there during the entire process. The school librarian teaches students how to access Creative Commons-licensed content, when to apply best practices for attribution, and why intellectual property should be protected.

Beyond Professional Development

School librarians in Kentucky are fortunate to have the Kentucky Virtual Library (KYVL) available to them and to their staffs and students. KYVL provides access to more than sixty research and other databases, a courier service offering interlibrary loan, and the Kentucky Digital Library from which Kentucky libraries may share their digital archives throughout the world (Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education 2019a). KYVL first became available in November 1999. It was developed by the Council on Postsecondary Education, Kentucky's statewide postsecondary and adult education coordinating agency. The council was established as part of the Postsecondary Education

Improvement Act of 1997 (Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education 2019a). Currently KYVL has 115 member schools: 14 private schools, 99 public schools, the Kentucky School for the Blind, and the Kentucky School for the Deaf. Beyond the school setting most public libraries and many college libraries are also members (Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education 2019b). Membership in KYVL provides school libraries in Kentucky numerous benefits that many would not be able to provide to their patrons otherwise due to costs. KYVL is a common factor throughout libraries in the state. For learners searching for information at school, at the public library, or later in a post-secondary institution, KYVL is a common resource available at most libraries.

School librarians in Kentucky are also very proud of the Kentucky Bluegrass Awards. The Kentucky Bluegrass Award (KBA) program was established in 1982 and has grown each year. Dedicated school and public librarians, educators, and university professionals comprise the committees set with the task of choosing ten outstanding books in each division for students to read and vote on in the coming year. A winner, based on the number of votes received, is selected from each age division. Kentucky school and public librarians have these and many other great books for readers of all ages. They often have bookmarks, digital presentations, book trailers, and other information about the KBA books. According to KBA chair-person Renee Hale, "373 schools and public libraries submitted votes,

and 56,264 total votes were cast this year" (2019). Master lists for 2019–2020 are now available and school librarians have already begun planning how they will promote them to their readers. For more information about the Kentucky Bluegrass Awards, visit <www.kasl.us/kentucky-bluegrass-award.html>.

Waterfalls, sandstone arches, and rock bridges are not Kentucky's only

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Sam Northern

is a National Board Certified school librarian at Simpson Elementary School in Franklin, Kentucky. An AASL member, he blogs for the Knowledge Quest *website. He also serves as president-elect for the Kentucky Association of School Librarians. In 2014 Sam was selected for the Fulbright-Hays Summer Seminars Abroad Program, enabling him to spend four weeks in China. Since then, Sam has voyaged to Antarctica as a National Geographic Grosvenor Teacher Fellow and worked aboard a research vessel on the Atlantic Ocean as a NOAA Teacher at Sea. From January to April 2018, Sam studied in Finland as part of the Fulbright Distinguished Awards in Teaching Program. To learn more about his research on inquiry-based learning, go to his website <www.pbltoolkit.weebly.com>. Connect with him on Twitter @Sam_Northern and Facebook @themisterlibrarian.*

phenomena. Natural wonders can also be found inside our schools. With the guidance of the school librarian, learners discover the world through innovative resources and engaging instruction. The school library is a place where learners are encouraged to investigate interesting topics, pursue curiosities, and solve problems. School librarians prepare students for life beyond states' conceptual boundaries. Our students' boarding passes read, "Ready to explore."

Melissa Gardner

is the school librarian at Campbell County Middle School in Alexandria, Kentucky. She is a member

of AASL and is currently a member of the Knowledge Quest *Editorial Board and the AASL Inspire Disaster Recovery Fund Jury. She was guest co-editor of the September/October 2018 issue of* Knowledge Quest. *She also serves as the constitution/handbook chair for the Kentucky Association of School Librarians (KASL) and is a past-president of KASL. In 2017 she was awarded KASL's Barby Hardy Lifetime Achievement.*

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