

# ESTABLISHING SCHOOL LIBRARY LEADERSHIP AS A FIRST-YEAR SCHOOL LIBRARIAN

**S. Michelle Dooney**  
michelledooney@gmail.com



## Being a First-Year School Librarian during a Pandemic

Most school librarians can think back on their first year and reminisce about the exciting experience, as well as how stressful that time was. Now, imagine how a new school librarian felt during a worldwide pandemic! Many beginning school librarians like me are attending graduate school to obtain their Master's in Library Science, and while this may have added another layer of stress, my classes are preparing me to take a leadership role in my school as a trusted colleague who can create and collect data from needs assessments, present professional development sessions, mentor new teachers, and promote materials and programs that our school library provides.

### Needs Assessments

Several of my classes from East Carolina University's library science graduate program have prepared me to create and plan a needs assessment that will help me support the faculty and staff at my middle school. This past fall I distributed an electronic Google form to my school's teachers, student support staff, and administration that focused on the use of technology at our school. The survey asked various questions centered around seven of the eight major key indicators in a needs assessment. A comprehensive needs assessment includes eight major key indicators (O'Reilly 2016):

1. **Self-assessed skill level.** I asked staff to rate their skill level with the use of technology. Over 80 percent of the staff rated their instructional technology ability at proficient or accomplished.

2. **Technology use and integration.** I asked teachers how they integrate technology into their instruction. More than 60 percent of participants stated that they mostly utilize technology to present information to students.

3. **Teacher beliefs.** Faculty and staff were asked how they believed technology was best utilized in the classroom as well as their beliefs regarding learning about new technology to apply in the classroom. Again, more than 60 percent of participants stated that technology should be used to present information to students. More than 30 percent stated that technology should be used to present a problem or brief description and students should use technology to find solutions or complete projects.

4. **Barriers to access.** The faculty and staff members answered questions regarding what barriers impeded students' access to technology. More than 80 percent of participants believed that parents' ability to use technology was the greatest barrier to access to technology.

5. **Professional development resources.** Participants were asked how open they were to learning more about technology and what topics for professional development they'd most likely attend.

6. **Leadership.** Participants were asked how much emphasis and support the leadership at the school put on technology. Most answered "a moderate amount."

7. **Needs and wants.** Faculty and staff were asked what topics in which they'd like to receive professional development. Participants stated that they wanted to learn how to use technology to ensure more student engagement.

Most needs assessments include demographic questions that ask about each participant's years of experience/teaching, grade levels, or subjects taught, etc. (O'Reilly 2016). However, I wanted the administration, teachers, and staff to feel like they could be completely honest with their responses and that the needs assessment was entirely anonymous. Therefore, I chose to not ask demographic questions.

After I analyzed the responses from the needs assessment, I looked for trends that could help me determine where I could begin supporting the staff at my school. One trend I noticed was how many teachers believed that technology is best used to present information to students, and I wondered how this affected student engagement during remote learning. Student engagement was mentioned during a previous school improvement team meeting.

At the same time, one of my graduate school course assignments focused on presenting a tech tool as a professional development session, and I had been assigned Padlet for a tech tool. I asked my assistant principal if I could give a mini-professional development on how to increase student engagement using Padlet. To my surprise, the school principal asked me to put together a twenty-hour professional development segment for the entire school staff! I was nervous because I was a new faculty member, and I knew that the sessions would need to be conducted online via WebEx.

## Presenting and Leading Professional Development

I quickly called on one of my professors from East Carolina University, Laura Mangum, and asked her to help me turn a one-hour session into a five-session professional development course. I communicated to Mangum that I wanted teachers to use Padlet in a way that wasn't just to present information: I wanted students to use the technology to become more involved in their learning. We divided the multiple components of Padlet into five categories:

1. **Overview of Padlet.** The first session focused on showing participants how to set up an account, introduced the various layouts, and demonstrated how to create a simple Padlet that allows students to use GIFs to respond to a bell-ringer style question.
2. **Exploring the Eight Padlet Features.** This session focused on the eight different layouts to choose from when creating a Padlet: wall, canvas, stream, grid, shelf, backchannel, map, and timeline. Before presenting I collaborated with an eighth-grade math teacher and a sixth-grade social studies teacher to see which Padlet feature they thought would be most beneficial to use with their prospective subjects. During the second session, I showed teachers how a shelf layout Padlet could help students find real-life examples for geometric terms; I also dem-

onstrated how a timeline feature could be used with sixth-grade students who were learning about ancient Mesopotamia. Teachers pretended to be students of each class and added information to the Padlets that had been created. Participants seemed to enjoy the feature that allowed them to use a GIF to answer the questions. They were also given time to work in breakout rooms to create a Padlet for a topic they were covering in their classes.

3. **Using Padlet with Other Online Tools.** Teachers learned how to effectively use Padlets during a lesson. Our district had just adopted Canvas as a learning platform, so I also showed teachers how Padlets could be embedded into Canvas for students to access rather than sharing a link in the chat feature of WebEx.
4. **Student and Teacher Collaboration Opportunities.** This session focused on ways teachers could provide cross-curricular learning opportunities for students using Padlet and how students could collaborate in small groups to complete a learning artifact in Padlet. I paired teachers off into groups of two and challenged them to create a Padlet that offered a cross-curricular opportunity for students. It was amazing to watch our orchestra teacher and our adaptive physical education teacher collaborate and make a Padlet that had students

performing exercises that mimicked the way students play their instruments.

5. **Using Padlet for Assessment.** Given that many participants used technology for presenting information to students, I wanted to show teachers how they could use Padlet as a formative or informal assessment tool. I demonstrated how I used a Padlet as an assessment tool by using the shelf layout in Padlet after I completed a unit on the four factors of fair use with my students. I showed participants how to archive Padlets and how to export and/or print Padlets to save for artifacts or grades.

Overall, the professional development was well received, and several faculty members were able to obtain one CEU credit for completing the course sessions and homework. I received follow-up feedback from several faculty members who continued to use Padlet to engage students in the classroom. Our adaptive P.E. teacher used Padlet features to engage students in lessons during the school year because more of his students opted to learn virtually for the remainder of the school year. Our visual arts teacher utilized Padlet for bell-ringer activities where students shared their critiques, questions, or thoughts about discussion topics at the beginning of class. She was able to save the Padlets to verify student participation.

## Mentoring Beginning Teachers

I was an elementary school teacher for thirteen years prior to becoming a school library media coordinator, and I've been a mentor teacher for the past eight years. My assistant principal asked the staff to consider volunteering to be a mentor teacher to a new or beginning teacher at our

---

*I agreed to mentor this year in hopes that I would become better acquainted with teams and grade levels as well as learn more about the standards that were taught in middle school.*

---



## eBooks

These books are currently available through our LNJMS Destiny site. These are pictures of the books. You will have to access them via Destiny.



Figures 1 and 2: Our school's Destiny page and the Google hyperdoc e-book menu.

---

*The opportunity has kept me abreast on learning objectives and standards in middle school, and I have been able to assist her with student engagement. We've even collaborated on a few social studies lessons using Pear Deck.*

---

school. I was hesitant to step up because I am a new media coordinator and new to the middle school world. However, I agreed to mentor this year in hopes that I would become better acquainted with teams and grade levels as well as learn more about the standards that were taught in middle school.

I meet weekly every Monday with my assigned beginning teacher for thirty minutes during her planning time. The opportunity has kept me

abreast on learning objectives and standards in middle school, and I have been able to assist her with student engagement. We've even collaborated on a few social studies lessons using Pear Deck.

### **Promoting the School Library's Materials and Programs**

One way I have been able to promote the school library and its relevance is by attending school improvement

team meetings. Attending these meetings allows me to stay abreast of the school's goals and objectives, and I'm able to create lists of topics or materials to consider when purchasing materials for our collections next year.

Our school improvement plan has a goal that is aligned with the positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) program at our school. In considering how the school library could align with this goal, I remembered a teacher-friend of mine who had posted on social media how she was able to obtain a book vending machine for her school. I approached my principal and mentioned the book vending machine idea to her. I explained how programs such as AR sometimes cause students to lose interest in reading and classroom curriculum doesn't encourage students to read

---

*Our book vending machine should arrive at our school by the end of the school year, and we plan to allow students to cash in their PBIS points for tokens to select a book or gift card from a local bookstore.*

---

for enjoyment since many of the books are pre-selected. My principal had stated that she had seen many students and even family members lose their love of reading by the time they left elementary school. Being an avid reader and supporter of the school library, she gave me the green light to request quotes from companies.

Our book vending machine should arrive at our school by the end of the school year, and we plan to allow students to cash in their PBIS points for tokens to select a book or gift card from a local bookstore. Where will the book vending machine be located? Right beside the doors of the school library! My principal and I are planning on holding a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the vending machine at the beginning of the next school year.

---

*Let your principal and leadership team know that you are willing to support the school's curriculum, faculty, and students.*

---

Our school system operated on a remote learning model until March; therefore, it was impossible for students to access physical copies of books in our school library this school year. After reaching out to another middle school librarian in our district, Craig Wilson, I learned how I could use our Follett Destiny system to link URLs to a Google hyperdoc (figure 2) that gives students access to our e-books. I linked the Google hyperdoc to our school's Destiny page (figure 1), and from there, students can view our e-book collection. This has given our students more access to books and reading opportunities. Several students expressed their disappointment about not being able to physically check out books once we returned to school; however, they were excited to learn about the e-books we offered once I showed them how to access the Google hyperdoc.

### **When Considering How You Can Lead in Your School...**

1. **Communicate with your school leaders.** Ask the administration what they envision for the school library; however, let them know that you have aspirations and goals as well! Sometimes, there are misconceptions that school librarians only deal with books and some technology. Let your principal and leadership team know that you are willing to support the school's curriculum, faculty, and students.

2. **Think about your own knowledge and skill set.** What do you have to bring to the table? Do you strike up conversations easily with others? You could start with attending grade-level planning sessions! Are you a natural host? You could set up an area in the school library that welcomes faculty and staff with a refreshment. Do you enjoy writing? Research grants that you could write to obtain needed furniture or materials for your school or library.
3. **Challenge yourself.** Perhaps you aren't the mingling type. Set a goal to get to know one faculty member better each month. Maybe there isn't an area for teachers to interact in the school library. How can you get them interested in visiting the school library more? Set at least one goal and challenge yourself to meet it within a set amount of time. You'll be glad you did!

### **Work Cited:**

O'Reilly, Erin N. 2016. "Developing Technology Needs Assessments for Educational Programs: An Analysis of Eight Key Indicators." *International Journal of Education and Development Using Information and Communication Technology* 12 (1): 129-43.



**S. Michelle Dooney**  
(she/her) is the school library media coordinator at Luther "Nick" Jerald Middle School,

Cumberland County Schools in Fayetteville, North Carolina. She graduated from the MLS program at East Carolina University in May 2021. She is a member of AASL.