

DO YOU KNOW YOUR ADMINISTRATOR'S PRIORITIES FOR THE SCHOOL LIBRARY?

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School librarians today are in a pivotal position to be leaders in schools due to dramatic changes in information technology, educational landscapes, and concerns over equitable access to information, resources, and instruction. When we lead, student outcomes improve, and equitable access to information, resources, and instruction increase. It is essential school librarians understand and demonstrate how they impact the school culture, implement school and district goals, and form positive relationships within the school community. However, some school librarians have difficulty understanding the connection between advocacy, leadership, and acting in a leadership role. More worrisome is the frightening decline in the number of school library positions around the country (Lance and Kachel 2021).

We believe if administrators understood the school librarian's roles and responsibilities and school librarians were meeting administrators' needs then there would be fewer positions eliminated. In the SLIDE Perspectives Report Keith Curry Lance and Debra Kachel state: "If school librarians (regardless of job title) are to have a long-term future in U.S. public education, the school library community needs to better understand the perceptions, values, and priorities of those who make staffing decisions" (2021, 83). As school librarians, we need to work with our entire school community, especially our administrators, to share our personal and professional perceptions, priorities, and values as leaders in our schools.

To better understand the relationship between administrators' priorities for school librarians and their grasp of our *National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries* (AASL 2018a), we examined statements from

school administrators discussing school librarians during an AASL Town Hall meeting (AASL 2020). Our goal was to better understand administrators' priorities for the school librarian's roles and responsibilities.

Research Background

The AASL School Leader Collaborative (Collaborative) was the central focus of AASL President Kathryn Roots Lewis's presidential initiative. The initiative was sponsored by AASL in collaboration with OverDrive Education

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with the goal of forging new understandings of and avenues for disseminating "the profound impact school librarians and school administrators wield as they work together to impact all learners" (ALAnews 2019). AASL members nominated administrators who had advocated for school librarianship in their districts. Three school superintendents and four school principals were selected to join the collaborative. Members of the collaborative were featured speakers for the AASL Town Hall on

November 18, 2020. A transcript of the town hall was the primary source of data for this study.

The purpose of this study was to investigate how collaborative members' understandings of the *National School Library Standards* connected to their advocacy for the school librarian's roles and responsibilities. We wanted to determine these administrators' understandings of what school librarian leaders do in their practice. We also wanted to see which of the AASL Standards the administrators noted during the discussion.

Did these administrators mention the five roles of school librarians as instruction partners, information specialists, leaders, teachers, and program administrators (AASL 2018a)? And finally, how did this video specifically support the leader role of school librarians?

Methodology

For this study, we used both qualitative and quantitative content analysis as our research methods. This allowed us to gather data from multiple perspectives and provided robust and useful results that helped answer our research questions. Content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts in the contexts of their use.

We developed the coding scheme based on the research questions, the five roles, and the six Shared Foundations from the AASL Standards. We analyzed the video and then met to discuss themes, key concepts, and patterns that emerged throughout the data. We achieved a 75 percent interrater reliability, which supported the validity of our findings (Harland, Moreillon, and Cellucci In press).

Question #	Question
Q1	What does teaching look like for your school librarians during the pandemic?
Q2	How are school librarians and students interacting during the pandemic?
Q3	What can school librarians do in the future to remind administrators that we foster exploration for students?
Q4	How can a school librarian convince a reluctant administrator to appreciate their librarians?
Q5	How did your librarian open up the channel in the first place so that you became such a supporter of school librarians and school libraries?
Q6	What can we do to help Joe Biden and whoever he chooses to lead the department of education to include librarians in their education initiatives?
Q7	In what ways are your librarians collaborating with classroom educators to address learning loss during this pandemic and how do you help make that collaboration an expectation?
Q8	How have you encouraged leadership among your school librarians? What have you done to help them build those skills they need to be better leaders in their buildings?

Table 1. Eight questions asked during the town hall.

Category	Indicator	Frequency	Quotes
Leader	Takes Action (responds to challenges and opportunities to increase effectiveness)	25/32	The librarian... "was in all the PLC meetings at the beginning of the year, helping teachers realize how the resources in the library and the technology that we've had can be beneficial to them."
Collaborate	Collaboration with Principal/Connection to School Vision	14/32	When the principal first started his job his librarian asked "what do you want me to focus on?" And so she presented herself as someone who is going to act on whatever initiative I had before we even knew each other."
Explore	Leader, Change-Maker, Thought-Leader	15/32	"She [the librarian] is an influencer. So like all the librarians in our district they're leaders. They influenced me, the teachers, students, the parents. And I think that title [school librarian] needs to go along with leaders."

Table 2. Cross-question themes.

Research Findings

The following findings are based on an analysis of the transcript of the video recording of the town hall. This virtual meeting included school librarians, AASL hosts, and six members of the collaborative. In response to eight questions (see table 1), the collaborative members shared their perspectives about the roles and responsibilities of school librarians during pandemic learning conditions. They also suggested how school librarians could work alongside administrators through the pandemic and into the future.

Table 2 summarizes the findings organized by the three themes that emerged most frequently. The table is organized by category, indicator from the coding matrix, the frequency of comments in that particular category based on the number of times the collaborative members addressed that particular category (out of thirty-two quotes during the town hall), and sample quotes that further indicate their perspectives on school librarian's roles and responsibilities. The indicators cited in the tables were noted by three or more collaborative members.

Take Action

The most noteworthy theme from the findings is that these administrators expected school librarians to take action in response to challenges and opportunities to increase effectiveness. Out of the thirty-two quotes by administrators in the town hall meeting video transcript, twenty-five of them mentioned this leadership role for school librarians. One of the administrators said: "Our librarians haven't been waiting for people to tell them what to do. They've been saying, 'Okay here's the problem we need to solve and then here's how we're going to make it

happen.'" School leaders, including librarians, were forced to respond to unique challenges throughout the pandemic. These administrators repeatedly emphasized that a school librarian's willingness to take action without direction leads to increased opportunities for all. They were not asking school librarians to work harder; they were asking them to do what they could to change a circumstance by identifying the ways they could lead improvements in specific situations.

Collaborate

The administrators also expected school librarians to collaborate with principals to connect the school libraries with the school's mission, vision, and goals. Out of the thirty-two quotes by administrators, fourteen of them were coded within the Collaborate Shared Foundation. The administrators asked school librarians to share solutions with principals in response to school and district-wide initiatives and to let them know about the AASL Standards because they can serve as a foundation for the work schools are doing, especially surrounding literacy, equity, diversity, and inclusion. One of the administrators said, "Share the AASL Standards and make sure that your principal knows what they are. If principals see how those standards connect with the larger scope of what's really important to us as leaders they're going to buy in."

Explore

The leadership, change-maker category of the Explore Shared Foundation was also found in the video. This finding is connected to taking action and collaborating with principals on a shared mission. Out of the thirty-two quotes by administrators, fifteen of them mentioned aspects of this Shared Foundation by describing how they expected their

school librarians to serve as influencers, especially in the areas of inclusivity and equity, and to monitor and respond to benchmark data, specifically around literacy skills. One of the administrators stated: "As a leader, it's really important that we make sure that we're tapping into every voice to make sure that we're thinking about everybody and there's an inclusivity that's important and librarians bring that."

These administrators know that we have a unique voice, so we need to step up to the table and speak on behalf of all learners and educators. Collaborative members highlighted the school librarian's unique role as one of the only educators in the school who understands what classroom educators are teaching and students are learning across content areas and grade levels. School librarians are curriculum experts and collaborative partners in instruction and academic support. This schoolwide impact necessitates that school librarians communicate with the principal about how the school library touches everyone and extends learning through additional access to information and resources.

Implications for Practice

Collaboration

School librarians collaborating with principals to meet the goals, mission, and vision of the school appeared in answers to five of the questions. These administrators noted the value of school librarians and principals working closely together to find solutions to challenges. One principal said, "Coming to us and letting us know what you can provide in these times is really helpful." This quote illustrates the need for school librarians to take the first step in reaching out to the school principal while also sharing solutions to problems faced by the entire school.

Continuing these conversations will lead to an increased understanding of what the school librarian and library offer and how school librarians are collaboratively contributing to the school's goals. One of the administrators said, "You're the rocks that we need to move with connecting to the school goals and saying, 'This is how I can contribute to making these goals actualized.'" These administrators are looking for their school librarians to not only connect what is happening in the library to the school goals but also to clearly explain how they are independently and collaboratively meeting the school's outcome targets.

If school librarians are teaching students and supporting classroom educators through equitable access to information and diverse resources and collaboratively designed and implemented projects, their reputation will grow. School librarians who actively participate in professional learning communities, examine student benchmark data, and collaborate with other educators to integrate needed skills across disciplines become valuable members of the academic program. Additionally, when they share current innovations with administrators and educators alike, school librarians serve as leaders. Keeping those communication, relationship, and collaboration channels open will be important long into the future.

Leadership

The school librarian's leadership role was reinforced throughout the findings. During the town hall, indicators related to acting as a leader and change-maker emerged in responses to five out of the eight questions asked; this clearly shows a repetition of the theme. The words *lead*, *leader*, and *leadership* were spoken by collaborative members thirty

times throughout the hour-long meeting.

One administrator stated, "Becoming an instructor and becoming an academic leader in the building is what I would encourage." Another administrator shared, "I think it's important to have those direct conversations and to present it in a way that this is an opportunity for us to be different and better." With a focus on solutions and improvement, these administrators encouraged school librarians to intentionally take action and serve as change agents for the entire school community through communication and collaborative instruction.

These administrators described their school librarian leaders as influencers and connectors throughout the town hall. School librarians, before and during the pandemic, were leading through instructional collaboration across content areas and grade levels. They influenced the school when they provided professional development for the staff, communicated intentionally beyond the school community, and designed initiatives that impacted all learners.

Conclusion for Practitioners

As practitioners, this research gives us much to reflect on regarding the importance of developing a strong, collaborative relationship with the building principal. It has long been said that the way to understand the needs of the school is to know what keeps the principal up at night.

Here are some ideas to get started:

Meet regularly with your principal during the school year, strive for monthly but realize that this may not be possible initially. Bring ideas, student evidence, and successful collaborative work that shows how your contributions are critical to

achieving school and district goals. If you haven't already done so, share the AASL administrator one pager "Your School Library in the Learning Community" (2018b) to begin the conversation about the AASL Standards.

Develop data sheets that quickly show the value of collaborative activities with other educators; city or town entities such as the public library (i.e., youth and family services, social service groups); and grant applications from educational groups, cultural councils, library boards.

If you're not already a part of a district initiative, leadership team, school or district committee(s), **discuss with your principal how to become a valuable asset to the school and community by representing the unique perspective of a school librarian.**

Listen wholeheartedly to the concerns of staff, other educators, and the administration and brainstorm with others ways that you and the school library can be part of a solution to these issues and challenges.

Continue to learn the most-current educational and school library practice, lead professional development in these areas, and create ways to collaborate with these skills.

As school librarians, we know the importance of working directly with administrators to clearly articulate how the school library can play an important role in solving the challenges that exist within the school. Through thoughtful and intentional trust-building and leadership, the school librarian must take action. The time is now.



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