

Supporting
ARTICLE

A young woman with curly hair, wearing a white halter top, is smiling and holding a stack of three books. The background is a soft, out-of-focus library setting with bookshelves.

MVG AND THE POWER OF THE SCHOOL LIBRARY LADIES

*OUR LEGACY/
THEIR VISION*

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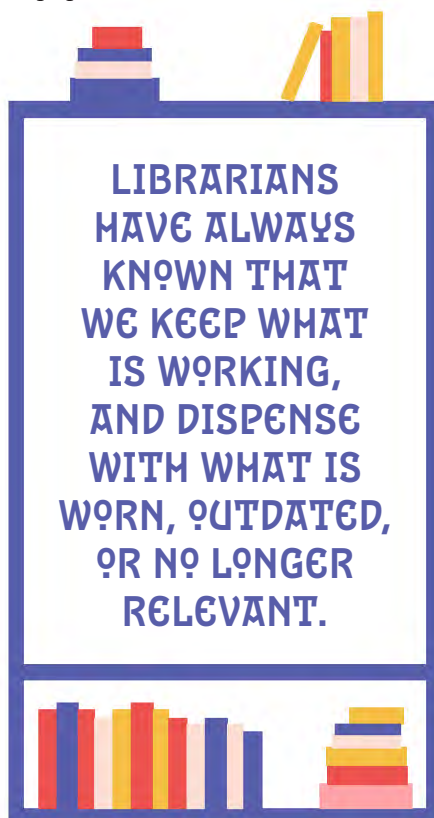
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In the first weeks of my first year as a school librarian, the new district superintendent who was visiting my library commented that libraries had really changed. In response I protested that libraries had not fundamentally changed—and watched in dismay as my principal standing behind him raised her eyebrows at me for my contradiction. But we went on to have a conversation about what had changed and what had not.

In my library a large section of shelving had recently been removed and replaced by tables with office chairs to house a laptop lab and a SMART board so that large classes could come to the library to work on projects in a digital environment. While this space within which the students were working had changed, the lessons being learned fundamentally had not. Students were still learning to find source materials, researching, writing, constructing projects, creating reference lists, and completing assessments as they had prior to the renovations. But they were also learning new skills to work effectively in the new environment: using the online catalog and library databases, using word processing to write papers, creating digital presentations, making digital charts and graphs, communicating via e-mail, and

selecting credible sources from the myriad available on the Web.

Librarians have always known that we keep what is working, and dispense with what is worn, outdated, or no longer relevant. We weed our science sections, purchase new materials for diversifying school populations, and replace old equipment with new.



But the fundamental role of the school librarian as instructional partner, teacher, leader, information specialist, and program administrator does not change. We continue to empower students to think, create, share, and grow. We share our foundational values to inquire, include, collaborate, curate, explore, and engage (AASL 2018).

Our Legacy

20th-Century Visionaries and Influencers

Three women come to my mind when discussing role models in the development of school libraries (Sullivan 2013). Mary Virginia Gaver (1906–1991) was an early school library researcher, professor of librarianship, and president of both AASL and ALA. In 1960 Gaver's pioneer study *Effectiveness of Centralized Libraries in Elementary Schools* (updated in 1963) showed the correlation between higher student achievement and the presence of a school librarian with a certified school librarian. Her study set in motion a new field of research in school librarianship and resulted in many correlational studies (Soulen 2016). Gaver's work has led to the use of strong research design to demonstrate the influence

of school librarians on teaching and student achievement (Soulen 2020; Wine 2020).

The work of two other important figures complemented the achievements of Mary Virginia Gaver. As a staff member of the American Book Publishers Council, Virginia H. Matthews (1925–2011) worked with AASL leaders to bring attention to exemplary school libraries and to garner support from a major foundation. Matthews was instrumental in telling the story of model school libraries to a broad audience. Alongside Gaver and Mathews, Frances Henne (1906–1985) demonstrated leadership in the development of standards for school libraries. Henne was also a library professor and an early advocate for school libraries as media centers that included films, filmstrips, and recordings in the collection. Her legacy continues to be demonstrated through AASL’s Frances Henne Award, which provides travel stipends to early career school librarians who demonstrate leadership qualities so they can attend AASL and ALA conferences (AASL 2022b).

When these ladies put their heads together, anything could happen. Together they collaborated with project director Peggy Sullivan to develop AASL’s Knapp School Libraries Project. The team used \$1,130,000 provided by the Knapp Foundation to create eight model school library media centers across the country. Educators from all over the U.S. visited these schools to see the best of the best, and had their perspectives changed. The project sparked state and local efforts to improve school libraries according to the AASL standards of the time. The team members were “delightfully balanced, each with special strengths and personal charm, each with different backgrounds and career paths, but united in their

commitment to school librarianship especially” (Sullivan 2013). Their vision demonstrated the value of school library programs.

21st-Century Visionaries and Influencers

In 2010 another set of women put their heads together to write a grant for \$353,760 from the Institute of Museum and Library Services, this time with the emphasis on leaders in school librarianship. University professors from across the country envisioned a force of NxtWave scholars disseminating the good news of school librarianship as visible and engaged leaders to articulate a vision of the profession and to contribute to the knowledge base of the profession. Dr. Audrey Church (AASL President 2016–2017), Dr. Gail Dickinson (AASL President 2013–2014), Dr. Jodie Howard, and Dr. Rebecca Pasco recruited sixteen practicing school librarians to pursue doctoral studies. The aim was to develop library leaders for teaching new librarians at the university level, to lead and manage committees at local, regional, and national levels, and to write and implement curricula and policy (Branyon and Dawkins 2018). These scholars, including me, continue to influence the profession through teaching, research, and service.



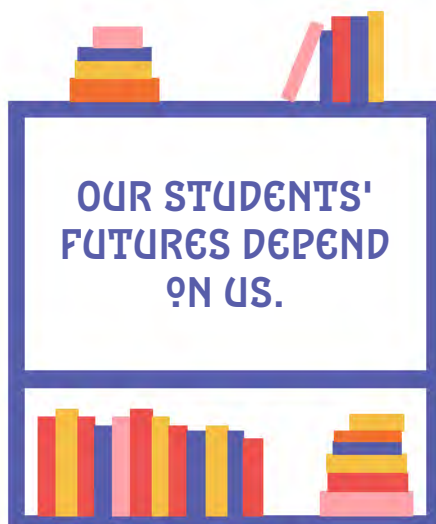
Dr. Rebecca Pasco and NxtWave Scholars, Rita Soulen and Lois Wine at AASL 2019 National Conference.

As a NxtWave Scholar, I internalized these guiding principles:

- Develop a depth of knowledge about the school library profession.
- Be visible and engaged leaders in the professional community.
- Articulate an informed vision for the profession.
- Create and contribute to the knowledge base of the profession.

While these principles were developed for the NxtWave program, they apply to all current and future members of our profession, whether practitioners, researchers, or district leaders. These principles build on the early work of our predecessors and provide a bridge to the future of our profession.

Through another burst of collaborative innovation, the Lilead Project (established in 2011), led by director Dr. Ann Carlson Weeks, provided opportunities to study, support, and build community among school library leaders, specifically district library supervisors. In this national effort, the Lilead Survey (Weeks et al. 2017) collected empirical data, the Fellows Program offered professional development, and the Leaders Program provided professional education to all school library leaders. Mary Keeling, author of “A



Complicated Legacy Defines School Librarians as Teachers” in this issue, was a 2015–2016 Lilead Fellow. She went on to serve as AASL President (2019–2020), and currently teaches at the university level, a tribute to the success of the Lilead Project.

Our Moment and Our Future

As time moves forward, the vision becomes our moment and the portal to our future. Kathy Lester, our current AASL president, exemplifies this vision. Working collaboratively to develop empathetic critical thinkers and to build equitable, diverse, and inclusive school libraries, Lester serves as a role model to the entire profession. When elected in April 2021, she could not have foreseen the unprecedented surge in book challenges and book bans that we are currently experiencing nationwide. As part of her leadership role, Lester continues to develop and disseminate resources for school library professionals, with advice for action and safety during these difficult times. Her most recent blog addresses the need for school librarians to support each other and our essential work when faced with book challenges and polarized communities (Lester 2022).

Where Do We Go from Here?

We each set out on the path of school librarianship from our own home place, following the divergences

that present themselves in our own professional environment. We continue to exemplify AASL’s vision statement: “Every school librarian is a leader; every learner has a school librarian” (AASL 2022a). This fundamental role of the school librarian remains unchanged, yet it continues to be expressed in innovative ways as we share our foundational values to empower the young people we teach. Our students’ futures depend on us.



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