

ARTICLE

The **WHY,** **WHAT,** **& HOW**

of AASL
National
Conference

Your AASL National Conference committee is planning for another one-of-a-kind experience and sharing the what, why, and how of AASL National Conference.

In a little over six months, the school library community will come together for the 2023 AASL National Conference in Tampa.

This conference is dedicated solely to the educational needs of teacher librarians and school library staff working at every grade level. Since meeting in Salt Lake City, many of us have had some of the most challenging years of our careers. Being able to share not only our concerns and challenges but also our triumphs and successes will help strengthen our practice and serve as a reminder of the support available through a national network of school library professionals.

Your 2023 National Conference committee has been working hard to put together a slate of dynamic sessions, keynote speakers, and fun activities. As co-chair of the committee, I can attest that conference attendees will be inspired by innovative lessons, hear from amazing authors, and have much to explore in the exhibit hall. My fellow committee members can tell you *why* you should attend, *what* you can expect while attending, and *how* you can make the most of your conference experience. To paraphrase Louisa May Alcott, I can tell you I am untroubled by the storms that are facing our profession because my colleagues are showing me how to navigate those rough seas and providing guidance to reach shore.

Looking forward to learning and celebrating alongside everyone in The Big Guava!

Paige Battle

Conference co-chair
Grant High School,
OR



I flew to Kentucky to attend my very first AASL National Conference in 2019, and at that conference I decided I would attend every future AASL conference. There were so many informative sessions, opportunities to meet authors, and school librarians from across the country to network with. I enjoyed it so much that I wanted to be a part of the next conference. I was fortunate to serve as the Social Media co-chair for AASL21 in Salt Lake City, and am thrilled to be able to support Florida school librarians in Tampa this October as AASL23 National Conference co-chair. I could spend all day talking about why my favorite conference (by far) is an AASL conference—there are so many things to say—but the number one reason that I will never miss an AASL conference is the chance to spend several days surrounded by colleagues and friends whose passion in life is school libraries. We have the best job in the world, and getting to attend a conference and share our love of what we do at a conference with thousands of others is just icing on the cake. I hope to see you there!

Amanda Jones

Conference co-chair
Live Oak
Middle School,
LA



WHY

WHY DO YOU ATTEND THE AASL NATIONAL CONFERENCE?

WHAT RECOMMENDATIONS DO YOU HAVE FOR FIRST-TIME ATTENDEES?

Professional growth is why I attend AASL. Learning is what librarians do. We are the ultimate collaborators and life-long learners. I bring so many great ideas back to my school. When

I look through the sessions and meetings, I consider the growth goals I have for myself and look for sessions that will help me with my goals. Attending the AASL National Conference is also about connections. How great is it to see and learn from librarians that are part of your professional learning community?

My recommendation for first-time attendees is to make connections. Whether you are traveling with a group from your district/state or solo, be social. Sign up for social events. (Check your e-mail while at the conference. There may be additional opportunities.) Use the AASL conference page or app, check out the concurrent sessions, and see who else is attending. Think about that favorite article you read in *Knowledge Quest* or other trade publication; often that author is attending the AASL conference and possibly presenting.

Donna Mignardi

Authors co-chair
Calvert High School,
MD



The AASL National Conference is absolutely the highest quality professional development available for school librarians. Whether you're just starting out in the field or you're a seasoned veteran, you'll find a wealth of robust offerings to inspire and inform your work. You'll meet authors, gain insights on trends and current issues, and network with others who really understand your world.

Amanda Moss Struckmeyer

Authors co-chair
West Middleton
Elementary, WI



Every time I go to a conference—whether local, state, or national—it is usually to network and learn. My reasoning for attending this year's

AASL conference is a little different. I do plan on networking, and I do plan to learn a lot, but I am going to AASL this year primarily because libraries and librarians are under attack. Florida librarians need our support, and what better way to support them than by showing up in their state and proving how knowledgeable, helpful, and caring librarians are?

Arlene Laverde

Program co-chair
Townsend Harris
High School/
Queens College, NY



My why for attending is learning new things and continuing connections with others. As an educator of school librarians, my work can be a bit isolating. Therefore, attending the conference offers me an opportunity to spend time with others who have similar interests. It is a great opportunity for school librarians and others who support school libraries to connect and learn more about the profession. I attend to increase my professional knowledge and to connect with others. It's like a reunion. I am excited to learn from and catch up with old friends in the field, and make new friends while learning with and from them. As a bonus, Tampa is a beautiful city. What a great place to learn and connect!

Pamela R. Moore, EdD

Research
Empowering
Practice co-chair
University of South
Alabama, AL



WHAT

WHAT IF NO ONE ELSE FROM MY DISTRICT IS ATTENDING?

If you feel like a solo librarian because you are alone in your district, don't have a travel buddy, or are new to the profession, there are many ways to make connections if you're willing to reach out to make new friends. Many librarians make conference connections and then room together for future events. Before the conference, start following #AASL23 on Twitter and Instagram. Don't hesitate to use the hashtag to look for a connection or to DM a conference committee member with questions. On Wednesday evening of conference week, set aside time for Dinner with a Local Librarian. You'll meet a group of ten to twelve other attendees, and the reservation is already made so it's easy-peasy. The group will include a wide variety of librarians, and you'll be welcome and sure to meet some interesting people! During the conference, some state chapters will have a meet-up or dinner out. Also look for "Conference Committee" ribbons on name badges and stop one of us to say "Hello!"

Carolyn Vibbert

Program co-chair
Sudley Elementary
School, VA



Opportunities to meet and talk with other school librarians are everywhere. Even if it is outside your comfort zone, start conversations with librarians sitting next to you in sessions. You already know you have one thing in common. Ask if they want to have lunch with you. Make it a point to meet and greet people, and you will find the experience career changing. Who knows? You could meet a new friend and create your own professional learning community.

Karen Scott

Program co-chair
Thompson Middle
School, AL



WHAT ARE YOU MOST EXCITED ABOUT FOR AASL NATIONAL CONFERENCE IN TAMPA?

I come to AASL to connect, learn, grow, and visit a new part of the country. School librarianship can be a lonely field, but the conference helps you make connections with people who share your interests and concerns, and helps you realize you have help from all around the country. Come enjoy a few days with your librarian friends and enjoy beautiful Tampa!

Blake Hopper

Social media
co-chair TNT
Primary School,
TN



Well, I am from Nebraska. We had a very cold and snowy winter. So I'm excited about Tampa's warmth and sun. I love that we're meeting in Florida, supporting their school librarians and showing our solidarity. Being in a room full of school librarians allows me to take a deep breath, shed the outside world, and focus on what I love: being the best school librarian I can. It is a whole room full of people experiencing that same moment. We support each



other, and we're all there to make our corners of the U.S. the best places that we can.

Mandy Peterson

Social media co-chair
Shelby-Rising City
Public Schools, NE



I am so excited for the energy that AASL National Conference attendees bring! I attended my first AASL in 2005, and in the many National Conferences I've attended since, each event introduces me to new people, perspectives, questions, and goals for many dimensions of school librarianship. From the knowing glances at the airport—Are you going? I'm going!—to the fast friends we make in line for coffee or in the keynote audience, there is a shared curiosity that drives our participation in the first place, and sustains us through all those conference events and all the way home. Something that adds to that energy is the unexpected moment: an encounter with someone you admire, an amazing session you found your way into because another was full, or a connection that turns into a beautiful collaboration, a new job, or a valued friend.

Rebecca Morris

Research
Empowering
Practice co-chair
University of
Pittsburgh School
of Computing and
Information, PA



I am most looking forward to making connections with people! This is the first in person national conference since I became an LMTS three years ago. I hope to make new friends and learn new ideas from the great wealth of information that will be shared.

Bonnie Halprin

Local Arrangements
co-chair
School District of
Osceola County, FL



HOW

HOW CAN I FUND MY CONFERENCE ATTENDANCE?

There are a number of funding opportunities to attend library conferences for professional development. For instance, the Bound to Stay Bound, Inc. Travel Grant is offered specifically for first-time attendees of an AASL conference. I received one of these grants to attend my first national conference. While the deadline for this grant has passed this year, look for other organizations offering travel support. Consider educator grants and scholarships from educational organizations and foundations such as the Association of American Educators Foundation and the National Education Association Foundation.

Mitzi Mack

Local
Arrangements
co-chair
Hillsborough
County Public School,
FL



My strategy is one of long-term planning. I use a financial service (SmartyPig) that tracks individual savings goals. My conference funds don't get mixed up with my fund for a

new laptop or for new skylights. Each month money transfers automatically into my conference fund so that I can pay to attend AASL every other year.

Carolyn Vibbert

Program co-chair
Sudley Elementary School, VA

HOW SHOULD I CHOOSE MY SESSIONS?

Look through the session book carefully and pick sessions that can help you on your journey to become a better school librarian. Pick more than one for each timeslot in case there is a cancellation or a session is full. If you travel with others, split up and head off to different sessions and then at dinner talk about all the amazing things you learned in yours and hear about all the amazing things they learned in theirs. It will energize you and have you excited about going back to your school and implementing some of what you have learned.

Karen Scott

Program co-chair
Thompson Middle School, AL

