Role of the School Library

POSITION:

The American Association of School Librarians (AASL) supports the position that an effective school library plays a critical role in preparing learners for life in an information-rich society. As defined by AASL, school libraries are "dynamic learning environments that bridge the gap between access and opportunity for all K–12 learners" (AASL 2016b, 1). Grounded in standards and best practice, school libraries are an integral component of the educational landscape. The school library provides access to a wide array of resources and an environment in which teaching and learning are the primary emphases. The school library provides a space and place for personalized learner success; learners are encouraged to explore questions of personal and academic relevance. Under the direction of a qualified school librarian, school libraries are instrumental in fostering literacy and teaching inquiry skills to support lifelong learning (AASL 2018, 54).

Instruction and services provided through the school library are developed around six essential Shared Foundations—Inquire, Include, Collaborate, Curate, Explore, and Engage:

- **Inquire:** Inquiry and investigation are at the core of the school library. Through scaffolding the use of an inquiry-based model of learning, the school library offers multiple opportunities for learners to integrate new and existing knowledge (AASL 2018, 54).

- **Include**: An effective school library includes diverse and inclusive resources, programs, and services that meet the needs of all learners; represents various points of view on current and historical issues; and provides support across a wide range of interest areas with opportunities for learners to recognize themselves (AASL 2018, 54).

- **Collaborate**: An effective school library encourages broadening personal knowledge and creating interconnected learning opportunities through collaboration. Users of the school library collaborate effectively, sharing ideas and information in a responsible and ethical manner (AASL 2018, 54).

- **Curate**: The effective school library includes a professionally curated collection of resources selected based on their authority, currency, relevance, scope, and relationship to other items in the collection. Using this selection model, users of the school library are encouraged to examine the authority and bias of authors or producers of information when curating resources for personal and academic use (AASL 2018, 55).

- **Explore**: An effective school library provides learners with a venue to explore questions that arise out of personalized learning opportunities and out of individual curiosity and interest. The school library focuses on the development of a culture of reading, supports reading for learning and personal enjoyment, and provides opportunities for learners to read for pleasure. To meet the needs of all learners, the school library provides a wide variety of resources in multiple formats (AASL 2018, 55).

- **Engage**: Effective school libraries help learners engage with the principles of safe and effective information skills and provide opportunities for learners to develop competencies in a space that allows learners to share and disseminate information (AASL 2018, 55).

Learners require well-managed access to technology and print, digital, and online resources, including openly licensed educational content. Effective school libraries have adequate, up-to-date instructional and learning technologies and resources. As part of the school library, the school librarian provides leadership and instruction to both educators and learners on how to use all of these resources constructively, ethically, and

safely. To ensure learners are successful, it is essential for school librarians to have opportunities on a continuing basis to update their own knowledge about emerging and new technologies. They may then provide the support and training required to assist learners and staff on how to best use resources (AASL 2018, 56).

In an effective school library resources are available to all before, during, and after the school day. Scheduling classes in the school library should allow for responsive, open, unrestricted, and equitable access to collections and technology, and to the services of a certified school librarian. Scheduling should be thoughtfully designed to ensure learners have access to library spaces and resources at the point of need for an integrated school library. Additionally, the school library is not confined to the physical library space. Through the use of technology and online resources, the effective school library provides continuous access to resources, whether in the library, the classroom, the learner's home, or other remote locations (AASL 2018, 56–57).

The school library's value is demonstrated through the close alignment with the school librarian standards and the activities of a certified school librarian within the school community, such as representation on key decision-making committees. Representation on school-wide and district committees such as the curriculum, technology, budget, and leadership committees that align with the school mission and strategic plan strengthens relationships for the school library and provides opportunities for library issues to be heard among decision makers (AASL 2018, 57).

An effective school library is continuously assessed and evaluated based on the results of the assessments to ensure that it meets the needs of all members of the learning community. An effective school library is fully integrated into the curriculum through ongoing, sustained efforts and a strategic plan that serves the school's mission, educational goals, and objectives, and school community stakeholders. In addition to evaluation based on conducting ongoing formative assessment to measure progress toward short- and long-term goals, the development of evidence-based outcomes and the incorporation of research and best practice are part of a well-developed school library plan (AASL 2018, 170).

For learners, the school library represents one of America's most cherished freedoms: the freedom to speak and hear what others have to say. Learners have the right to choose what they will read, view, or hear and are expected to develop the ability to think clearly, critically, and creatively about their choices, rather than allowing others to do this for them.

BACKGROUND:

Citizens of this information world and knowledge-based economy must have the skills and dispositions to access information efficiently and to critically assess the content and sources they rely upon for decision-making, problem-solving, and generation of new knowledge. The effective school library (AASL 2016b) program plays a critical role in schools in instructing students on how to access information efficiently and critically assess resources.

DEFINITIONS:

- **Assessment:** Process of "collecting, analyzing, and reporting data" (Coatney 2003, 157) about learner accomplishments and understandings throughout a learning experience. Forms of assessment may include tests, observations, self-assessments, conferences, logs, graphic organizers, surveys, checklists, rubrics, and interviews (Wiggins and McTighe 2005; Harada and Yoshina 2010).

- **Collaboration:** Working with a member of the teaching team to plan, implement, and evaluate a specialized instructional plan (AASL 2016a; Montiel-Overall 2006).

- **Curation:** Curation is the act of continually identifying, selecting, and sharing the best and most relevant content and resources on a specific subject to match the needs of a specific audience (Handley 2012).

- **School Library:** An effective school library has a certified school librarian at the helm, provides personalized learning environments, and offers equitable access to resources to ensure a well-rounded education for every learner (AASL 2016b).

- **Information Technologies:** Modern information, computer, and communication technology products, services, or tools, including the Internet, computer devices, and other hardware, software applications, data systems, personal digital devices, and other digital and multimedia content and data storage (AASL 2016b).

- **Learning Environment:** The diverse physical locations, contexts, and cultures in which people learn. Since learners may learn in a wide variety of settings, such as outside-of-school locations and outdoor environments, the term is often used as a more-accurate or preferred alternative to "classroom," which has more limited and traditional connotations—a room with rows of desks and a chalkboard, for example (Abbott 2013).

- **Personalized Learning:** The process of using a diverse variety of educational programs, learning experiences, instructional approaches, and academic support strategies that are intended to address the distinct learning needs, interests, aspirations, or cultural backgrounds of individual learners. Learning personalization may take the form of using online and/or in-person learning experiences tailored specifically to learners (Abbott 2015).

- **Virtual Resources:** Resources that are not physical in nature, such as computer hardware platforms, operating systems, storage devices, computer network resources, electronic databases, e-books,apps, student information systems (SIS), and learning management systems (LMS).

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DISCLAIMER:

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