



American Association of School Librarians  
Midwinter Meeting 2006  
San Antonio, Texas

**Topic:** Mega Issue – How does the profession remain viable in the future?

**Background:** As part of the strategic planning process, the Board of Directors identified several key issues needing to be addressed.

**Action Required:** Exploration

Mega Issue: How does the profession remain viable in the future?

What do we know about members' and stakeholders wants, needs and preferences related to this issue?

- Advocacy is high priority for members.
- Members are concerned about budgets and funding shortfalls.
- Members are worried about diminishing support from the community, from states, from parents, etc.
- Members want materials and resources that help promote the vital role the school librarian plays in teaching and educating schoolchildren.
- Members want assistance with public relations, including grassroots efforts to educate their peers, supervisors, and parents on their important role as an educator and resource.
- Members are concerned about potential consequences of No Child Left Behind.
- Members are concerned about the perception of the Internet as a reliable information resource that could replace books.
- Members are worried about their future place in education and library services.
- Members are concerned about a possible shortage of educated and qualified library and media specialists.

What do we know about the current realities and evolving dynamics of our members' profession that is relevant to this issue?

- Borrowing print books, researching specific reference books and getting assistance with research are identified as the top three library activities.
- Libraries increasingly rely on information resources not physically located at the library, such as databases and e-journals.
- Users value self-service, ease of use, convenience and availability as much as information quality and trustworthiness.
- OCLC study respondents were more familiar with search engines than libraries.

- Students consult analog, text-based resources (the school library) second, if at all.” (Fryer, 2006)
- NCES reports the first decrease in number of public schools with library media centers (1999-2000).
- Most believe school librarians play a support role—finding information and resources needed in the most efficient way. Many, especially parents and students, do not see librarians as educated professionals who play an active role in the academic community.
- Many education journals retain stereotypical images of libraries and librarians.

What do we know about the “capacity” and “strategic position” of our organization that is relevant to this decision?

- ALA/AASL developed a tailored “@ your library” campaign for school libraries in 2003 in an effort to change perceptions of target audiences.
- Advocacy efforts are hampered by a lack of a stream of current, relevant data about school libraries and public perception of their value.
- AASL will begin conducting a survey to collect longitudinal data on school libraries this year.
- AASL is active in a number of coalitions including the Alliance for Curriculum Reform, the Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, the National Forum for Information Literacy and the National Adolescent Literacy Coalition.
- AASL has an active Affiliate Assembly that reaches members and prospective members throughout the states.
- AASL has limited staff and resources to expand advocacy efforts.
- “Advocacy/value of the profession” is a goal of the American Library Association, identified in its strategic plan, ALAhead to 2010.
- AASL’s strategic plan envisions universal recognition of school library media specialists as indispensable educational leaders.

What are the ethical implications of our choices?

- SLMS have self-interest in maintaining school libraries.
- AASL depends on SLMS as members.
- Results may be intangible.
- AASL is in unique position to advocate for school library media centers and to promote of information literacy.

For additional information, see:

Perceptions of Libraries and Information Resources: A Report to the OCLC Membership, 2005 (<http://www.oclc.org/reports/2005perceptions.htm>)

Summary of Findings and Detailed Reports: ALA Focus Groups Conducted during the 2003 AASL National Conference (<http://www.ala.org/ala/ourassociation/governingdocs/aheadto2010/aasl2003.htm>)

AASL Strategic Planning (<http://www.ala.org/aaslstrategicplanning>)