

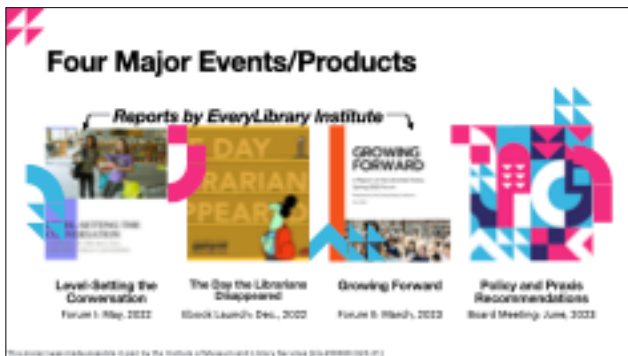
Welcome and Introductions



This is a story of capacity. Why did this IMLS National Leadership Grant project originate from a rural area of Western New York in a regional educational services agency serving 22 districts with a total student population of about 20,000? Capacity is the answer. New York's unique School Library System structure embeds state funded agencies into each BOCES and large city school district with the basic mission of making school libraries more awesome. In my 18 years as director of the GVBOCES SLS I have worked to build capacity through staffing, innovation, technology, and excellence. We are now one of the largest teams of certified school librarians in the country working in a district or regional administrative role to support school libraries. We have the capacity to take on work that benefits our local member libraries but can also spread to impact school libraries across the country.



The project website at <https://libraries.today> contains all of the videos from our two forums, the ebook developed during the grant, and the grant reports. All of these resources are freely available for use as local professional development.



There were four major events with associated products developed during this project.

The first forum was held in May, 2022 as an opportunity to look back at school libraries during the pandemic. The intent was to gather the stories of how school libraries met the challenges of a turbulent time. In recognition of turbulence, the first day explored some book challenge issues that were continuing to spread across the country. The primary focus, however, was on how school librarians pivoted and extended services within space utilization, collection development/deployment, and instructional delivery during the pandemic. The intention of these sessions was level-setting the conversation and recording the history of this time. This allowed us to begin to look forward at the future of school library programs for different levels in a post-COVID environment. One key takeaway from the first forum was a lack of awareness about

how school library services during the pandemic were a natural extension of our regular work due to a lack of understanding about the work of school librarianship. To explore this further and attempt an innovative solution, the grant project itself pivoted slightly to hold an interim symposium gathering details on the story of school librarianship. This effort, undertaken in collaboration with Gaping Void, a cultural design/ marketing firm, resulted in the development and publication of “The Day the Librarians Disappeared.” This ebook is released under a Creative Commons license that allows libraries to make free usage of the contents to tell their story to their administration, colleagues, school boards, and others.

The second forum was held in March, 2023 to explore the future of post-COVID school libraries. We explored themes such as building stakeholders and support networks for school libraries and school



A huge thank you to these amazing folks who gave so generously of their time and expertise to make this project a success. Unique opportunity to welcome school library leaders from around the country including the two biggest school districts by land size and population to talk about a wide range of lived experiences. Thank you also to Andy Austin, Andrea Fetterly, Julie Hengenius, and Emilee Williamson on the GVBOCES SLS team who helped make this work possible.

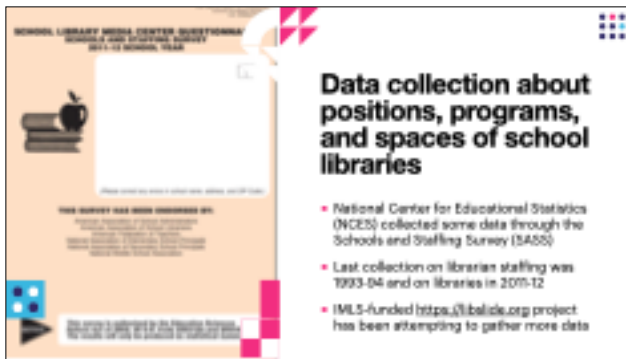


As we turn to the recommendations resulting from the advisory board meeting earlier this month, we begin with some high level policy items.



When looking at Federal funding for, actions around, and even awareness of school libraries there is often a disconnect. School libraries fall into a gap between the worlds of libraries and K-12 education and indeed between IMLS and the US Dept. of Education. We are librarians, but unlike our colleagues in public or even academic libraries, our day-to-day is much more entrenched within the larger ecosystems of the schools we inhabit and serve. This means it is difficult to directly impact school libraries with Federal funding or other actions because it must funnel through the larger school system. At the same time, school libraries are but a small part within the much broader school ecosystem and are often overlooked from that perspective.

Bridging this divide is one of the most important recommendations to come from this project. As you will see, it will be a constant theme throughout many of the other recommendations shared this morning.



The Library Media Specialist/Librarian Questionnaire as part of the SASS of NCES was administered one time in 1993-94 and not since. The School Library Media Center Survey that asks about collections, services, and technology but not staffing, has been administered periodically in the past decades, but not since 2011-12. There have been some data collected via the NCES Common Core of Data, but it is not totally viable for understanding the real situation. The IMLS-funded SLIDE project has been attempting to collect additional data since 2020 regarding school librarians, school library leadership, and other aspects in order to create a more meaningful understanding of current library staffing. We would suggest that other ways of collecting data about library spaces should also be explored.



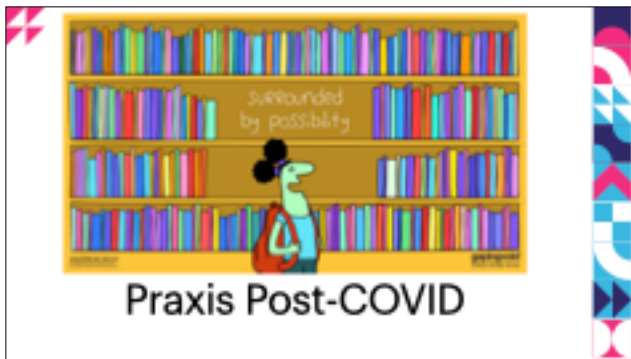
School libraries are actually included in many of the different Title funds from the Federal government, but they may not have been included in state authorizations of ESSA. For example, school library services and staffing can be directly funded under Title I Part A. Additionally, Title II Part A funding could be used for recruiting and training school librarians and Title IV Part A funding could support school library programs that are working with students and technology. The real issue is that, going back to the disconnect between IMLS and DOE, school libraries often fall into a gap at state levels also. If the school libraries are under the same state organization as public libraries, then state education departments may not think about them.

School librarians and school districts need more specific technical assistance at the federal and state levels to guide funding questions. Because of our small footprint within the big ecosystem of education, it is

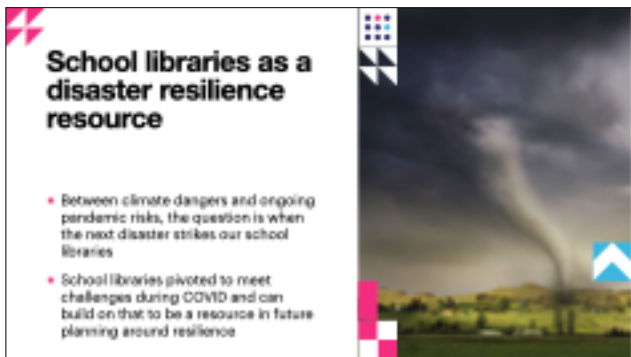
very difficult for Federal programs to directly target school libraries. School libraries do not have individual capacity to apply without support from the district structure that may not understand the opportunities available.



MTSS, the multi-tiered system of supports framework, continues to drive conversations in the education sphere. Despite the importance and attention given to MTSS, there is little to no evidence of MTSS conversations within library research and journal articles. I found one article in SLJ from 2018 that positions school libraries within the concept of universal design for learning. However, much more can be done to discuss how school libraries function as Tier 1 literacy support or how they provide Tier 2 and Tier 3 supports for specific students with special needs. For us to be recognized as experts within educational conversations, we must make sure we are speaking the same language as our school colleagues. MTSS is the language right now in schools, and so school libraries must catch up and join in to the ongoing discussion.



Those four items are big pieces. They will require national attention and involved state and national partners for what will likely be longer term work. There are also some praxis recommendations that can be addressed both nationally and locally. These are things each of us can think about in our school libraries.



In local disasters, schools often become shelters for displaced people. What role can the school library play as an information hub during those times of disaster? Public librarians are recognized by FEMA as essential service providers during an emergency. Could school libraries and/or school librarians be considered for this designation as well in order to open up some new funding sources? We showed our ability to pivot to meet challenges and continue essential learning services during the pandemic.



Education, like many other sectors, is currently grappling with the sudden emergence of generative AI. Schools are worried about the use of AI and how it will impact learning and assessment. I would suggest that school librarians are well qualified to lead these conversations in schools and districts. Information seeking, processing, analysis, and usage are kind of our thing. We regularly talk about information literacy, evaluation, and related topics. AI prompt generation is simply an extension of question generation and search terms. This is our wheelhouse.

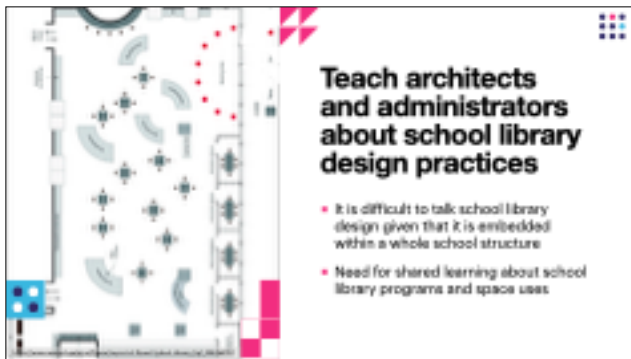
During the pandemic school librarians were recognized for our ability to rapidly pivot to continue providing expert services in our newly virtual school libraries and the new online schools at large. In many districts, school librarians were and are recognized as instructional technology leaders and professional developers. The challenge is for us to solidify that impression and make it the standard across the education sphere so that we are seen as ongoing experts in emerging fields.



A further example of the need to further expand our discussions and positioning within school conversations can be seen in the area of school library design.



AIA and ALA have annual Library Building Awards, but they are for libraries “open to the public” and don’t really include school libraries. Similarly, Library Journal has an annual focus on design and architecture that focuses on public and academic libraries. School library design needs additional attention and study to help us understand emergent best practice following the pandemic. How did our spaces need to shift to accommodate exigent needs, and what can we learn from those experiences for designing or redesigning school libraries?



From a lack of instructional spaces to an unhealthy obsession with curved shelves, there are many challenges with modern school library designs from architects. We recommend the creation of spaces for shared conversations between school librarians, administrators, and architects to discuss best practices and explore actual lived experiences in school libraries.

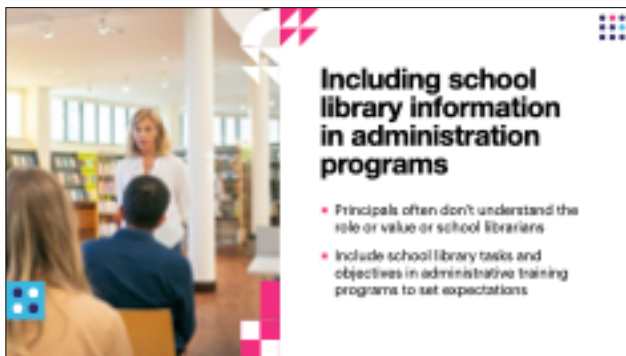


To extend that idea of teaching about school libraries, we have some additional recommendations to address other particular areas of misunderstanding.



St. John Fisher University in Rochester New York mandates that all pre-service teachers have at least one experience working with the school librarian during their clinical time or student teaching. This reinforces the importance of the school librarian as an instructional collaborator and technology and resources consultant in the school. The inclusion of this signals to both the pre-service teachers and the in-service cooperating teachers that the university and the school of education value the contributions of a certified school librarian. It also means that pre-service teachers receive some instruction about what school librarians do and how they can enrich all practice of all teachers.

Schools of Education can also work with their academic libraries to include school library resources as a special collection to train pre-service teachers on the idea of going to the library for resource consultations.



There are pervasive misunderstandings about modern school libraries amongst many school administrators. Principals and others end up perceiving school library programs and school librarians differently than other instructional departments. For example, a principal with a poor-performing math teacher would either replace that teacher or work on improving that teacher. More often than not, when faced with a poor performing school librarian, the position is eliminated and the program closed. This is not typical with any other position in the school and is indicative of the need for additional training of principals and administrators on school libraries.

The replacement of school librarians often involves other more specialized positions like literacy teachers or STEM teachers. Both of these are prominent roles for the modern school librarian but are not seen as such. Additionally, the move from librarians to additional literacy teachers is a

movement from a MTSS Tier 1 position to a Tier 2 position reinforcing the need for school librarians to be more aware of and vocal about our positioning in MTSS.



All of which points to the need for marketing, telling the story of school librarianship. These images that have been appearing on the section slides all come from the Libraries.Today attempt to tell part of that story. They were developed by Gaping Void, a cultural design (i.e. marketing) firm that wrote “The Day the Librarians Disappeared.” That book, and these images, are all Creative Commons licensed to allow wide usage in school libraries as posters, t-shirts, and more.



We will be pursuing additional funding to try and tell an additional part of the story of school librarianship in America. "The Day the Librarians Disappeared" is a cautionary tale addressing the point of loss or as a preventative tale against the removal of school librarians. Additional stories are needed to address situations in states and communities where school librarians are gone and need to be restored. In those places, it is a different story that helps communities address a past decision and helps them see what they are missing. We greatly enjoyed working with Gaping Void and appreciate the time they dedicated to learning about and understanding the values of school librarians.



Another aspect of marketing moving forward is the need to reframe the image of school librarians in a variety of sectors. This image was the most discussed in the book. It presents a simple but compelling message. Yes, we have books but we are way more than just books.



Awareness among wider educational stakeholders

- How do school libraries get to the table at state and national discussions in the education sector?
- Outreach to other groups within education to build relationships
- What evidence of our efficacy and impact can we bring to the table?

In order to build efficacy and impact within the larger educational sector, school librarians are going to need to build relationships and coalitions with other players in the field. We can certainly see how school libraries should be a part of current conversations around topics like AI, student wellness, and more, but too often we are overlooked. This is a bigger picture recommendation, but there are also things that we can do in our individual settings to make progress.



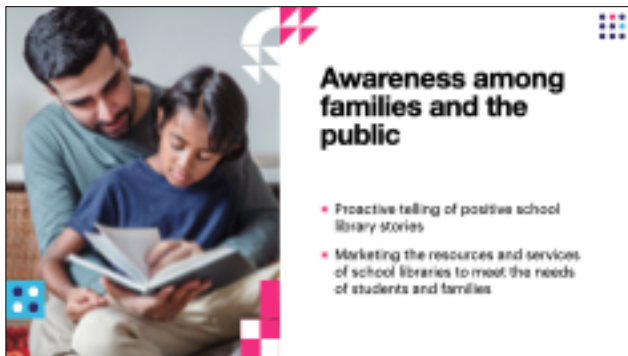
Awareness among administrators and teachers

- Share local evidence of school library impact and successes
- Publish more broadly in educational and administrative journals
- Show up as an expert with a library-shaped solution to emerging issues

One of the biggest things you can do as an ambassador for school librarianship is simply to continue being awesome. What the Libraries.Today forums showed us is that school libraries are doing amazing work across the country. The next step is simply to share the work. Tell your colleagues and administrators what you are doing. If you don't tell them, you might as well have not ever done the work. As a profession, but especially those of us who are library administrators, need to do more publishing in school administration journals to raise awareness of exemplary school library program elements.

Another way to build awareness is to simply do the great work of school librarianship with respect to life-long learning in our professional capacities. The emerging conversation around AI is a great example of an opportunity for school librarians to do some research, play around with the technology, and then help colleagues and administrators understand

how it might fit in to schools.



There it is again, that marketing word. It isn't something dirty, we aren't pushing some miracle cure-all or selling promises on which we cannot deliver. Marketing is simply informing customers how you can meet their needs. Advocacy often addresses what we need an outside group to do for us, like more funding would be nice! But marketing goes the other way. It tells the story of how we add value to people's lives by solving their problems. We did a lot of this during the pandemic. School librarians were often the source of effective technical support for teachers and families engaging with online learning for the first time. Those are the stories we need to tell.

Another benefit of telling marketing stories about school libraries is that it is a proactive way to try and counteract mis- or dis-information about school libraries. If you are in a situation where book challenges are the focus of conversations about school libraries, you can instead redirect

attention by focusing on other resources and ways that you solve problems. Is the school library used for tutoring? Is student artwork displayed in the library? Did students benefit from college and career exploration resources in the library? How can you shift the story to something that builds awareness around the full picture of what we do?



Of course, if we are going to build up school libraries as the next rediscovery in education, we are going to have to be able to deliver. Our final recommendations address pipeline issues in school librarianship.



There is a serious shortage of all teaching staff in the country right now. The reasons for that are numerous and certainly beyond the scope of this project or presentation. What we can attempt to address, however, is the specific need for more school librarians in places where programs are either being sustained or are growing. In the short-term, we probably need to look at identifying in-service or pre-service teachers with the right attitude and soft-skills for success in school librarianship. Thank you, but we don't need more teachers who are looking for an easier assignment where they can "read all day." This pathway actually benefits from AASL/CAEP accredited school library programs more than ALA accredited library schools. In most cases, these folks are looking to move from an existing K-12 background or certification into school librarianship specifically, not the wider field of library work. It is important that ALA continues to uphold the value and importance of AASL/CAEP accredited programs as equitable to ALA accreditation.

In the longer term, a possibility to explore is the idea of planting a seed in #diversebooks readers that they could one day become a school librarian who stocks diverse books on the shelves of a school library to continue providing access to stories for the next generation. When Google researched the impact of different factors on young women entering STEM programs in college, they found that the most positive impact came from some adult letting the young woman know that STEM was a possible career path. Is this something school librarians could work towards as well?



School library leadership positions are an oddity. In most cases, these are district or regional school administrative positions filled by school librarians. But they are not really school library positions. They are administrative positions that often require similar training or certifications to principals or superintendents. NY School Library System Directors have the same certification as school superintendents for example. While this is not the only way to express leadership in school libraries, it is an important way to have someone working at a district or regional level on behalf of school library programs. These positions can provide a voice in the room and a seat at the table when higher level decisions are being made. Filling these positions with high quality and highly effective leaders is critical for the profession.

Unlike other types of libraries or even the schools within which we exist where there are internal leadership pathways and pipeline, school library leadership pipelines are seriously lacking. Existing school library positional leaders should focus on succession planning within their organizations as well as the potential identification of future positional leaders to help ensure the continuation of those positions.

One way to accomplish this is to encourage the development of leadership skills and qualities in more school librarians. This has traditionally included participation in local, state, or national school library organizations like AASL, but can also be expanded to include other library and educational organizations like educational associations and ALA at large. We have advanced a strong set of recommendations as a part of the Libraries.Today project and reports, and we will certainly need strong school library leadership to carry them forward across the profession and around the country.



Next Steps

1. Continued work by the Libraries.Today advisory board on emerging topics
2. Build awareness around Libraries.Today forum and recommendations reports
3. Seek additional support to engage more school library stakeholders around issues
4. Build capacity within the profession for engaging in ongoing work and messaging

So what are our next steps? The Libraries.Today advisory board is going to continue working on some emerging topics and recommendations that are suitable for a small, focused leadership group to tackle. We will be reaching out within our professional networks to gather more participation in the ongoing work.

One of the biggest steps will be to continue building awareness about the Libraries.Today website resources including all of the amazing forum videos, the ebook, and these recommendations. As an extension of awareness building, the obvious follow up is engaging more stakeholders around the recommendations and issues discussed in the project reports. There are both short-term and longer-term recommendations that will need to be addressed at a wide variety of levels including local, state, and national. For this to work, we also need to build additional capacity within the school library profession so that we have more school library leaders willing and able to engage in the ongoing work and messaging that will make success possible.



To that end, we encourage you to stay connected and follow our work on the Libraries.Today website. You can also email me directly at cgharris@gvboces.org.

Time for questions/comments.
