



LEVEL-SETTING THE CONVERSATION

A REPORT OF THE MAY 2022
LIBRARIES.TODAY CONVENING

Prepared For :
Libraries.Today

EveryLibrary Institute
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Aims and Goals

The May 2022 Libraries.Today National Forum was presented in three distinct online segments over three days. The National Forum included pre-recorded sessions and live events to encourage and support interactions and reflections between attendees and presenters. This design approach was intended to help encourage attendees to be more than passive participants. The first day, May 16, was structured to capture the current experience of school librarians facing book bans, censorship, and attacks on the structure of education. The second day, May 18, was intended to bring together diverse voices from across the profession to tell stories of their lived experience as school librarians during the COVID shutdowns and pivot. Day three, May 21, was designed to encourage a deep reflection and evaluation of individual and shared experiences that will continue through the rest of the National Forums.

As Dr. Christopher Harris, Director of the Genesee Valley BOCES School Library System and Project Lead for Libraries.Today, outlined in his opening remarks, this structure was intended to encourage sharing and discussion about often difficult topics. “Over the past few years of the COVID pandemic, things happened, changes occurred in school libraries, school librarians took on new roles. Our libraries, the space and places changed. Our instructional roles changed. And we need to document that. We need to have a conversation about what took place. We need to record it for history and for our profession. What changed during the pandemic when libraries were suddenly thrust into a new environment, a new normal that we are still existing in? We had to take on new responsibilities. We had to fill new roles, things that we thought we never could do. We figured out how to do. And I think that’s interesting, and I think it needs to be recorded. These stories need to be told.”

The Libraries.Today project was designed by project leadership with three complimentary goals in mind. Each one recognizes that the impact of the COVID-related disruptions to schools, family life, and society is only beginning to be felt by the education sector and school libraries. The first goal is to provide a context to investigate and reflect on the changes to school library programs and the practice of school librarianship during the pandemic. The second goal is to provide a context for evaluating the efficacy of the COVID-impacted changes and create a framework for either integrating changes into the praxis or discarding practices that are inappropriate to the profession. The third goal is to see the National Forum discussions, reflections, and evaluations widely disseminated to the profession in a way that encourages the integration of best practices into

school library programs across the nation. Taken together, all three goals of the Libraries.Today project are intended to improve the effectiveness of school libraries in the post-COVID era.

To realize these three goals and ensure that the Libraries.Today framework is reflective of the broad experience of the school library sector, the steering committee committed to a framework for the National Forums and project reporting that embodies three core ideals. The first ideal is to use a collective impact model for all discussions, reflections, and recommendations. A collective impact approach should allow for the evaluation of both positive and negative changes in a way that embraces the complexity of the issues while honoring the authenticity of the experiences that inform the discussion. The second ideal is to plan and execute each Nation Forum within a framework of diversity, equity, and inclusiveness. A DEI lens will be applied to identify steering committee members, presenters, topics, and approaches throughout the project. The third ideal is to acknowledge the competency of the profession and embrace a certain boldness in making recommendations to sustain or correct praxis. With a focus on collective impact, a framework for inclusive design, and an alignment to actively engaged with the profession, the project should highlight legitimate pathways for the profession to grow and succeed.

Every school and district have been impacted by COVID-related disruptions to its systems and structures. Every school librarian has their own authentic experience of these disruptions and a telling of the ways they adapted. Every student and every family were affected in different individual ways, but collectively education and learning have suffered because of the disruptions. Coming through these disruptions, the decisions that we can make as a profession would systemize new ways of being school librarians in a positive way. However, if these disruptions are not properly considered, synthesized, and integrated into policy and practice, the disruptions will ossify into unintentional systems that neither encourage nor support educational outcomes and the future of the profession.

Role of the Advisory Board

The advisory board played a central role in the development of the May 2022 National Forum topics. The Libraries.Today project plan envisioned convening an advisory board that would embody and authentically represents a wide range of experiences and skills across the geographic and demographic breadth of school librarianship. As stated in its application to IMLS, “The hope is that every school librarian will see someone who looks like them and has a job like theirs represented in the call for participation from the national advisory board.” To ensure a diversity of viewpoints and a strong voice for communities of color throughout the forums, Libraries.Today leadership intentionally recruited members from BIPOC communities. To go beyond the practice of school librarianship and focus more broadly on the systems in which school libraries operate, it was important for the advisory board to include roles in school administration, curriculum, and instruction, as well as representatives from school library graduate programs.

Advisory Board Members for the May 2022 National Forum:

- Dr. Jen Cannell, St. John Fisher (NY) College Graduate School Library Program
- Kathy Carroll, Lead Library Media Specialist, Richland 2 (SC) Schools
- Priscille Dando, Coordinator of Library Information Services, Fairfax County (VA) Public Schools
- Erin Hollingsworth, District Librarian, North Slope Borough (AK) School District
- Melissa Jacobs, Director of the New York City School Library System
- Amanda Kordeliski, Director of Libraries for Norman (OK) Public Schools
- Julie Miller, Librarian, Clay County (FL) Schools
- Craig Seasholes, Elementary Librarian (Retired), Seattle (WA) Public Schools
- Alicia Thompson, Director of the Erie 1 BOCES (NY) School Library System

The advisory board met virtually from March to May with the task of setting the agenda for the May 2022 event. They considered the topic and presenters with the three ideals of collective impact, DEI, and respect for the profession in mind. The advisory board was intentional in soliciting speakers from both large and small school districts, from tribal schools, and from other diverse groups. They agreed that the first National Forum be retrospective but not punitive. The advisory board crafted a statement that would be read out by moderators before every live event: “We want to try to focus on positivity as much as possible. All of us have experienced some profound changes in our professional and personal lives over the past couple of years, but at this point, you want to try and look forward as much as possible.” As Dr. Harris set the stage for the May 2022 National Forum with his welcoming session. “We have to talk about libraries today so we can ensure that we are around to talk about libraries tomorrow. [E]ven though we faced a lot of challenges and are continuing to face challenges, we need to stay focused on positive messaging, as much as possible, not to diminish the challenges and not to make light of the situations that we were forced to take on, but to look ahead at what can we learn from them.” This helped ensure that keynotes, panelists, and speakers would share frankly and authentically about past experiences while being committed to being encouraging and forward-looking in their remarks.

Additional Project Staff

The Libraries.Today project is managed by the School Library System of the Genesee Valley BOCES located in Le Roy, New York. Genesee Valley BOCES is an educational services agency supporting roughly 20,000 students across 22 small, rural districts in western New York.

- Dr. Christopher Harris, School Library System Director, Genesee Valley BOCES
- Julie Hengenius, Specialist of Library Technologies, Genesee Valley BOCES
- Emilee Williamson, Specialist of Library Technologies, Genesee Valley BOCES

About the Report Writers

This report was produced by the staff of the EveryLibrary Institute, a non-profit public policy, tax policy, and education policy think tank for libraries. The EveryLibrary Institute creates research on a number of library-related and librarian-impacted topics including school librarianship. Recent school library-focused publishing includes research and policy papers on post-COVID school librarianship and the role of school librarians in supporting reading and literacy. The EveryLibrary Institute, alongside its companion organization EveryLibrary, hosts training for school librarians, supports policy development by state school library associations and facilitates communications and outreach to the public and to policymakers about school libraries. Please visit everylibraryinstitute.org for more information.

This report attempts to capture and relate the substance of each speaker's comments accurately. The accountings of the May 2022 Libraries.Today National Forum in this report are taken from the contemporaneous transcripts of each session and are verified against the archived video of each session found at <http://libraries.today>. Speaker comments and quotes are edited for clarity and brevity. The EveryLibrary Institute was invited by the Libraries.Today leadership team to provide its commentary, insights, reactions, and recommendations alongside a recounting of each session. This commentary is a core component of the report and is intended to encourage further reflection and consideration of key topics and themes by the Libraries.Today community.

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Proceedings and Insights

Day 1 – Censorship, Book Bans, Policies Presented on May 16, 2022

Keynote – The Moral Quagmire of Censorship

By Roger Rosen, Chairman of the Board, Rosen Publishing Group

Archive: <https://forum.libraries.today/talks/day-1-keynote/>

Freedom itself is a dangerous way of life, but it is ours. I know you librarians and teachers in this audience and throughout the country will fight shoulder to shoulder with me and my colleagues to protect these rights in the face of all upheavals. I know that the library will remain the last redoubt.

- Roger Rosen

As Dr. Harris said in his introduction, Roger Rosen was invited to address the “elephant in the room” of censorship, book bans, and attacks on school libraries and librarians that have been roiling education and libraries this academic year. While the goals of the Libraries.Today project are to reflect, evaluate, and comment on the experiences of school librarians during COVID, the advisory committee felt that it was critically important to explore, name, and engage the impact of the recent and dramatic rise in censorship activity across schools and districts

Rosen brought a well-researched and sweeping historic perspective to this discussion. His description of censorship as an injurious immoral political action was powerful and well thought out. He noted that “Parents and community members deserve a voice in shaping what is taught in our schools, but the embrace of book bans as a weapon to ward off narratives that are seen as threatening represents a troubling retreat from America’s historic commitment to the First Amendment rights of students.” He described his concerns over the current cadence and intensity of censorship efforts as two-fold. First, that “These bans raise serious concerns in terms of constitutionality” concerning students’ rights, and second “[the bans] represent [an] affront to the role of our public schools as vital training grounds for democratic citizenship which instill a commitment to freedom of speech and thought.” He went on to remind listeners that in writing the majority opinion in the Pico case, Supreme Court Justice Brennan outlined the moral and legal hazards that school boards create when being censors who limit access for students to books in their school libraries: “Local school boards have broad discretion in the management of school affairs, but such discretion must be exercised in a manner that comports with the transcendent imperatives of the First Amendment.”

The most famous line from Pico is, arguably, that students do not “shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate”. While emphasizing a framework of rights, Rosen also honored the concept of those transcendent imperatives of the First Amendment for his audience. “I love the use of the word transcendent because there’s a broad and generous, dare I say spiritual, interpretation of free speech here. It is so vital to our personhood, not just for transactional reasons of good and honest communication but [because it] provides a guarantee of the freedom to go anywhere that mind and heart and soul might take you, and to empower the expression of those same conceptions without fear of punishment, truly transcending the bounds of everyday restrictions.” In this keynote, Rosen makes a clarion call to school librarians to take up a robust defense of the rights of students enumerated in the First Amendment and to embrace the transformational role that this freedom provides to the individual and society.

Rosen described the disconnect between the censor’s actions and the perceptions and beliefs of the majority of Americans about free expression and free access. “As a recent CBS poll indicated, Americans overwhelmingly reject the idea of banning books about history or race. One reason for that, is a big majority also say teaching about the history of race in America makes students understand what others went through. Large majorities, more than 8 in 10, don’t think books should be banned from schools for discussing race and criticizing us history for depicting slavery in the past or more broadly for political ideas they disagree with.” An appeal to this majority opinion is important precisely because the books that are being targeted are largely the stories of minority populations and writers. Rosen highlights the PEN report findings that book challenge “[S]pecifically books by non-white male authors are happening at the highest rates we’ve ever seen... We are seeing the same books removed across state lines. Books about race, gender, LGBTQ+ identities, and sex. Most often, this is an orchestrated attack on books whose subjects have only recently gained a foothold on school library shelves. And in classrooms, we are witnessing the erasure of topics that only recently represented progress toward inclusion.”

Rosen spent time lifting up several school library and public library champions who have been fighting to preserve and protect access to these stories for their students noting that “[B]rave resistance [to censorship] is happening all over the country”. Martha Hixon, a school librarian in New Jersey, succeeded in activating the community and aligning her union to lobby the school board to retain all five challenge books. “One of her most effective tools” according to Rosen, “was organizing students in the school to speak before the board. She said, and I quote, most compelling were the LGBTQ+ students who spoke passionately about the need for a school library that represents their lived experience.” Carolyn Foote and Nancy Jo Lambert were noted for their work creating the FReadom Fighters initiative in Texas. Kent Oliver, the recently retired director of the Nashville Public Library, was singled out for a media and marketing campaign he launched after a member of the Tennessee House sponsored legislation to police school libraries. The Representative was on record saying he would burn books that he deemed inappropriate. Oliver’s campaign encourages Nashville residents to trade in their current library cards for a new one that says “I Read Banned Books”. It may be tempting to think that book bans and book burning are

limited to a particular political geography or attitude in this country, but this current spasm of censorship efforts shows that there will always be individuals and movements aligned against the principals that school libraries and public libraries represent.

He closed his keynote with a reflection on the role and responsibility that publishers like himself have in protecting the right to read and encouraging a culture of reading. Reflecting on a quote by Supreme Court Justice Ginsberg about moving to New Zealand as a last resort for the politically frustrated, he said “No publisher I know of is making plans to set up shop there. We simply have too large a responsibility to our authors and readers, our staff, our librarians and teachers, our children, and our fellow Americans. Far from allowing ourselves to become emigrate publishers in another land, we are going to live by the words so beautifully crafted in a joint statement by the American Library Association and the American Association of Publishers [in 1953] on the freedom to read. ‘We here stake out a lofty claim for the value of the written word. We do so because we believe that it is possessed of enormous variety and usefulness worthy of cherishing and keeping free. We realize that the application of these propositions may mean the dissemination of ideas and manners of expression that are repugnant to many persons. We do not state these propositions in the comfortable belief that what people read is unimportant. We believe rather that what people read is deeply important, that ideas can be dangerous, but that the suppression of ideas is fatal to a democratic society.’” (see <https://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/freedomreadstatement>).

Speaker Biography

Roger Rosen is Chairman of the Board of the Rosen Publishing Group after having served as President and CEO for 42 years. Rosen Publishing is a leader in creating curriculum-correlated titles and ancillaries for grades PreK-12 in the areas of social studies, health and guidance, science, art, fiction, Spanish and bilingual, biography, civics, mathematics, computer science, and social and emotional learning. Rosen Digital is the company's Edtech division which creates databases, interactive ebooks, and the foundational literacy platform, LevelUp. Together with its affiliated companies, Gareth Stevens, Greenhaven, Lucent, Kidhaven, Enslow, Cavendish Square and Jackdaw, Rosen publishes more than 1,000 titles each year as well as hundreds of learning objects and digital resources.

Recommendations for Reflection

The Libraries.Today community should continue to focus on the evolving nature of book bans and materials challenges. More conversation and support are needed to educate and inform school library stakeholders about the underpinnings of Intellectual Freedom. Likewise, school librarians need to be conversant in the philosophical, legal, and political frameworks of Intellectual Freedom and the First Amendment to reach beyond our own networks to inform and activate policymakers and the public.

PEN America Banned Books Report

Jonathan Friedman

Archive: <https://forum.libraries.today/talks/pen-america-banned-books-report/>

I think it's very easy to imagine a situation in which book bans and the desire to enact them are pushed on schools from all corners. And inevitably, once you start to give into these things, once you make exceptions for particular books, then you've opened to the floodgate for people to make more demands on you.

- Jonathan Friedman, PEN

Jonathan Friedman was invited to speak about the work that PEN America has been doing around the uptick in censorship and book bans, particularly in schools across the United States. PEN America is a national non-profit whose mission is “to unite writers and their allies to celebrate creative expression and defend the liberties that make it possible”. He began his talk with a proffer of information from PEN’s extremely well-researched April 2022 report “Banned in the USA”. This report is unique among free expression groups because goes beyond self-reported instances of challenges, bans, removals, and other forms of censorship to include active monitoring of news and social media.

Friedman took pains to point out that despite the data collection methodology used to create the Banned in the USA report, there are still significant gaps in our awareness of challenged and removed books. This is because instances of soft-censorship and self-censorship are common but under-reported. These removals are often couched as a “review” of the book. Other times, books are removed over unnamed “concerns” about the topic or content. Soft censorship and self-censorship are chronically under-reported; information about it is sometimes only as reliable as a rumor.

According to Friedman, self-censorship is the most pernicious manifestation of the chilling effect that happens when book bans are so pervasive. When so many challengers are attacking school librarians and educators personally, it is natural that people will act in a way that looks to avoid trouble. As Friedman notes, “I think it is somewhat inevitable... when it comes to the next time anyone is making one of these decisions, they’re going to be in this climate... and they’re going to be thinking with every book, less and less, how does this book serve my students and, more and more, how is this book going to enrage or pacify the members of our community who are most upset?”

If book challenges are not actively engaged and soft- or self-censorship takes over, our book selection policies will run into what Friedman describes as a “concerning rubric”. Rather than “[S]electing books for schools, which are supposed to be student-centered institutions, it’s supposed to be about learning and growth and exposing students to a diversity of ideas. Unfortunately, the climate right now is very intimidating for many teachers, for many librarians, for

many school administrators. So even though we may see less hard forms of censorship, I think it's undeniable that this is having a ripple effect."

Friedman is very frank in his assessment that book challenges, book bans, and attacks on educators and school librarians are politicized and political. Book selections are becoming deeply politicized. As PEN notes in its "Banned in the USA" report, the political nature of the attacks is undeniable. "We're talking about a situation where politicians are running campaigns on their position on school libraries," says Friedman. "In some cases sending lists of books to school libraries, or even emails or phone calls pointing out specific books that they want removed. That is a violation of the First Amendment, which is supposed to protect our public institutions from politics, from the threats of government." Politicians and political actors are using book bans to identify and activate their political base. In this climate, the legitimacy or sincerity of the book banners is certainly questionable.

The most startling statistic from the PEN report is that the "vast majority of... banned [books] list in the index did not seem to follow the best practice guidelines for handling challenges. In many cases, school board policy may have been violated." School board policies about book selection should be clear in their intent to support student reading and educational outcomes while book challenge policies should be designed to ensure that parents' concerns can be addressed without disrupting the educational climate in the process.

As Friedman points out, "I think it's very clear that the legacy of Pico is meant to tell school boards and school administrators that they aren't supposed to remove books through ad hoc or highly irregular processes... That is not happening all over the country. Administrators are deciding to [remove] of their own volition, or in some cases, school board members remove books." If the official policy is that a parent must file a complaint or that a complaint must originate in writing from a local citizen, then the policies must be followed. Policies in schools are intended to protect students and the integrity of the educational system. If school boards abrogate or willfully abrogate or violate their responsibilities, we need to look at the courts and legal remedies. Ignoring or disregarding how policies are followed and implemented is, in effect, breaking the law.

Friedman closed with some advice for the school library community. He observes that "free speech can be a really uniting concept for people who might disagree on politics. And so, getting allies around the concept of intellectual freedom, academic freedom, the freedom to read, can be something that doesn't have to be a political issue in the traditional notion of the term. It can be something where people with different ideas come together and stand up for a core principle that should guide schools." While school librarians may feel isolated and under scrutiny or attack now, it is important to "try to make their school boards aware of their constitutional obligations, aware of the societal ramifications of engaging in different forms of censorship."

In the end, Friedman sounds a cautionary note. He reminds us that “[I]t is perhaps a matter of standing up for policies and processes and for these principals and weathering the storm until it passes.... I think it is only going to be a matter of time before a whole bunch of other demands from other parts of society are made on schools to remove whether we’re talking about perhaps books that are, or people are demanding or be re removed because they have the N word or racist stereotypes, or raise difficult questions for one minority or another... Some of this is indeed legal. If you go through the committee process, if they decide to remove a book or restrict it, there isn’t much that librarians can do in terms of suggesting that foul play was at hand. So I think the best that they can do is try and avoid that situation by encouraging districts, to at least engage in the proper committees, to follow their policies, to stand for their principles and hope that that works.”

Speaker Biography

Jonathan Friedman is the director of free expression and education at PEN America, where he oversees advocacy, analysis, and outreach concerning educational communities and academic institutions. In this role, he drives forward PEN America’s efforts to catalyze a more informed, civic culture through education and advocacy for the rising generation and the general public. Friedman oversees the Free Speech Advocacy Institute for youth and leads advocacy related to academic freedom, campus free speech, educational gag order legislation, and book bans in schools. He served as lead author on PEN America’s reports, *Educational Gag Orders: Legislative Restrictions on the Freedom to Read, Learn, and Teach* (2021) and *Chasm in the Classroom: Campus Free Speech in a Divided America* (2019), as well as on the production of the *Campus Free Speech Guide*. He regularly provides commentary for news media and has published op-eds for CNN, The Washington Post, and the New York Daily News. Friedman has facilitated workshops and conducted advisory meetings with senior leaders, faculty, and students at dozens of colleges and universities, and was a 2019-2020 fellow of the University of California’s National Center for Free Speech and Civic Engagement. He holds an MA and Ph.D. in international education from NYU, and has received awards for his teaching, research, and leadership.

Recommendations for Reflection

For the Libraries. Today community, there are several potential takeaways from Friedman’s talk. The primary one is about vigilance for the role that school librarians play in education. Soft-censorship and self-censorship are not acts of cowardness; they are potentially self-preservation. The strength and conviction of any individual school librarian is only bolstered by the rest of the professional community joining together and moving in the same direction. The second take-away may be that school librarians and educators not only need to understand the political origin of the attacks, we also must engage and name them. Without describing and naming the source, we are allowing ourselves to be labeled as the political problem. The third is to remember and renew our commitment to educational policies. These policies are all that we have to rely on for our collection development choices. School board policies need to be followed not only to support and extend the First Amendment but to safeguard the dignity of every student.

Trends About Book Challenges

Kelly Jensen

Archive: <https://forum.libraries.today/talks/trends-about-book-challenges/>

I'm not being dramatic when I say that the end goal [of book banning] is the destruction of the public education system.

- Kelly Jensen, *Book Riot*

Kelly Jensen was invited to share her perspectives and understanding of book bans and challenges through her unique lens as a journalist and as a librarian. Her articles on the topic and her weekly Censorship column in Book Riot are must-reads for their currency, accuracy, and depth of coverage of the issues. She has never wavered in naming that the source of the book bans and challenges is political in its origin. She has seen and described how these challenges are driven by an agenda and often instigated or supported by organizations outside of a local school community.

She began by observing that we need to understand that a belief system is driving book bans. It is a politically powerful one. "This isn't about what they (the book banners) deem is correct for their own personal family or personal beliefs, but rather what they think the beliefs for everybody should be." The individuals and groups who are activated to become book banners are targeting "[P]rimarily titles that are by, or about, queer authors or people of color. These are books that they are choosing to call obscene or pornographic and trying to use those terms. And, and to be very specific in their use of obscenity laws, to challenge many of these books, to create fear around these titles for library, workers and educators." In naming this source and motivation for book bans, she is not departing from a concern about the First Amendment but rather discussing how the right to read is being successfully challenged by the concept of parental rights.

Jensen goes on to say "What they're doing is twofold. It is both to remove these books and to have them unavailable for everybody. And it is also to create a culture of fear to keep books like these from entering the library or entering the curriculum overall. It is all tied into wanting far more control over curriculum, more oversight over what's in the school library. It is all packaged up nicely under the term 'parental rights', which is quite misleading given that parental rights have always been available. This is much more about parental control. I think it's even disingenuous to call it parental because many of the people who are filing these complaints, who are showing up to school board meetings, who are going through the process are not even parents. They are people who do or don't live in the community and simply want to feel like they're a part of something bigger."

Her thesis is, fundamentally, that any specific book that is being challenged is secondary to the overall social and political agenda. "I am not sure it's about the books at all," says Jensen. "I think the books are a convenient tool right now. It was [previously] masking [during the pandemic]. And

then it turned into critical race theory, and then it turned into social-emotional learning. Then it turned into comprehensive sex education.”

In Jensen’s opinion, there is a systematic reason for book challenges beyond a social agenda. She suggests that the end goal of these efforts is to dismantle and destroy public education as we know it. The way that book challenges are weaponized is not only by attacks on content but also by delegitimizing the structure of education. “[U]ltimately their end game though is not about getting the books out of the library, but creating a backlog of paperwork, creating incredible administrative headaches and, and really draining the time of people within these institutions and thereby finding a convenient way to say that their tax money’s not being used.” To Jensen, these attacks on books are used to attack public education. “[U]ltimately what they want do is to be able to get money that would otherwise go to funding public institutions and, and be able to use it for private schooling for homeschooling. It seems like a really out-there thing to say, but this is literally the conversations that they’re having in these groups. These are leading to more states proposing bills where funding would be able to be diverted from public education, into vouchers for private schooling, for homeschooling.”

If this is a long game about the future of education systems in the United States, then it is very important for the school library community to understand how the current book bans fit into an anti-education agenda. Looking ahead to the 2022-2023 school year, Jensen points out that “It is important I think that the big thing that we need to keep an eye on... is school board elections. Not every state has them in the fall this year, but those that don’t have them in the fall of 2022 will have them either in spring 2023 or fall 2023. And the reality is school board elections for the most part in most states are nonpartisan. There are a few exceptions. But we’re seeing these become more and more partisan. And we’re seeing people running for these positions on platforms that are about them about they’re going to get the pornography out of schools. They’re going to get the obscene books out of schools. They’re going to make sure that no teacher wears a rainbow sticker because that creates division.” Therefore, the goal of any book campaign to retain a challenged book is two-fold. One is to validate that the book is a legitimate part of the school and school library. The other is to protect the integrity of the educational system from damage or harm.

Jensen goes on to describe a micro- and macro-approach to finding allies for school library programs as well as for the ideals of school librarianship. She cites the example of Gavin Downing, a middle school librarian outside of Seattle she featured in Book riot recently. “I wrote a piece earlier this year with a school librarian in Washington. His administration removed some books. He didn’t know who to talk to. And, and we talked for a long time, and he has just been a tireless advocate for queer books in his middle school library and has developed so many really valuable connections and alliances by simply speaking out, and people were able to find him and, and work with him. And you know, it’s months and months later, he’s still repealing decisions that have happened. And he still [is dealing with] an administration who is not supportive of his work, but he continues to do it because he has the support of a professional community.”

Jensen is an advocate for an active-voiced campaign. “[G]et to know your administrators, get to know your school board members, get to know your community, show up to those school board meetings. See who's talking see who on that board is championing, championing what you're doing and, and let them know that you appreciate that, that you feel seen.” As a journalist, she speaks with particular authority when she says “I think there's this divide that happens where the national library organization is a strong believer in not getting the media involved in book challenges that come up or any intellectual freedom challenges that come up. But there is actually a lot of power in bringing the media in, particularly local media.” Telling your true story should always be a part of the campaign.

Speaker Biography

A former librarian, Kelly Jensen has found a passion for writing to teen audiences, as well as those who work with them. She works as an editor for Book Riot (bookriot.com), where she runs the weekly "What's Up in YA?" young adult newsletter, the biweekly "Check Your Shelf" newsletter for librarians, cohosts the "Hey YA" podcast about young adult literature, and writes weekly columns and other features. Her books include (DON'T) CALL ME CRAZY: 33 VOICES START THE CONVERSATION ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH and HERE WE ARE: FEMINISM FOR THE REAL WORLD, both from Algonquin Young Readers. She's also a well-known and long-time co-blogger at STACKED (stackedbooks.org). When not writing or reading, Kelly teaches classical vinyasa-style yoga, as well as practices photography. She lives in the Chicago area with her husband, three cats, and rabbit. She is on Twitter and Instagram as [@veronikellymars](https://twitter.com/veronikellymars).

Recommendations for Reflection

The school library community cannot remain self-isolated if we want to see the systems supporting school library programs survive these attacks. We need to look beyond the library world to organizations that are involved with free speech and First Amendment rights as well as groups focused on the rights of LGBTQ+ populations and BIPOC communities.

Fighting Censorship by Finding Common Ground

Julie Miller

Archive: <https://forum.libraries.today/talks/finding-common-ground/>

I care about your choice as a parent. You have the right to limit what you want your child to check out from the library, and what you want them to read. What you don't have is that you shouldn't be able to then tell everyone else what their kids can and cannot read.

- Julie Miller

For Julie Miller, the question of how personal beliefs inform, influence, and impact a book ban or materials challenge issue was at the center of her talk. As a profession, school librarianship is an interesting mix of individuals who work in public schools or private non-sectarian settings along with school librarians who work in specifically religious or faith-based schools. Like any other American profession, people of many different belief systems work in school libraries. At the outset of her talk, Miller identified herself as a Christian who is a public-school librarian in Florida to contextualize her experience and observations.

“I am a wife of a music minister in a church, and I lead worship every Sunday alongside him,” says Miller. “It's not something that I often advertise about myself at work, not something a lot of my students know because I want make sure that they all feel comfortable with me regardless of whether they are religious or not.” She roots her work as a school librarian in the veracity of the stories she reads and shares. “I know that my perspective has only been enriched by reading books, from the perspective of gay kids, trans kids, people of color, people with disabilities. Reading a book with a neurodivergent main character helped me understand my older son a little bit better. So, I would argue that rather than banning books that feature the reality of marginalized people, we should actually be requiring more people to read them, especially adults.” However, policymakers in Florida do not share Miller’s perspective. As she notes, “[O]ur lawmakers would rather hide these stories in the shadows.”

She is concerned that recent legislation in Florida like the Stop Woke Act and the so-called Don't Say Gay bill are attacks on public education. She identified HB1467 as legislation that is specifically targeting school libraries. HB1467 alleges that pornography and obscene materials are in school libraries. It opens librarians and administrators to be charged with a felony for the distribution of books and reading materials that someone may feel is obscene. As Miller notes, “What is so scary about all of this is that sensational unfounded claims about public education made by extremist groups have now been made into laws. Librarians and other educators have been painted as groomers, pedophiles, and are indoctrinating [students with] pornography.”

Miller relates a story that is eerily like the cautionary described by Jonathan Friedman at PEN. “When my principal came to me to let me know that there was a challenge to the book... All Boys

Aren't Blue by George M. Johnson, I read it as soon as I was alerted of the challenge. Long story short: we went through the [challenge review] process and the committee did not even read the book and yet they voted to remove it from my library in the review meeting. There was no review. They simply read the statutes [that students] were exposed to five pages of the book that contained the offending material. And despite my protestations, they decided to remove it from the library."

This failure to follow policy was compounded by personal attacks on Miller's character by colleagues. "[S]hortly after the meeting... I received a voice memo from another teacher in the school who also identifies as a Christian in which she proceeded to chastise me on the basis of my faith said that we are supposed to be gatekeepers and that she was going to be praying for me. And that she hopes that I will be also praying about this issue and how I feel about books, about gay people moving forward." Miller never wavered in her support for her students. "Here's the thing. We have gay kids in our school, and I think they're awesome and I support them, and we need books that reflect their experiences. We need books that make them feel seen and make them feel cared for." For our profession to weather this storm of challenges, we need to renew our discussions and dialogs about the role of personal belief in school settings. Without a common ground about the integrity of our work and respect for our students and families, the chilling effects will eventually paralyze the profession.

Statutorily, this is already happening in Florida. As Miller notes about HB1647, "Over the last several months, all professional trust [in school libraries] has eroded substantially. They have frozen our book funds so we cannot purchase any books at this time. We're also not allowed to add new titles to Destiny [catalog]." School administrators are concerned or fearful to the point that collection development work has been canceled. "If we don't have a copy of it in the county," continues Miller, "Then we cannot catalog it... Our district administrator said that context is immaterial. Basically, if there's anything descriptive in [the book] about sex or any profane language, then it would not be allowed."

Miller returned to her theme of common ground by relating a way to approach people who disagree about content from a religious perspective. She suggests that we approach the issue with a frame that there are "[G]enuine concerns over their children's wellbeing that are valid and important. [Challengers] deserve to be heard. And even if they're misguided in the solutions that they are seeking, we need to try to come to them with an open mind and hear what they have to say, try to meet them where they are with their concerns. See if we can deal with it on a one-to-one basis before it becomes 'let's take this book away from everyone'. We need to start the dialogue on this instead of just reacting." Any attempt to establish a common ground should be rooted in what is best for a particular student or groups of students. "We need to remember, and we need to stress to parents, that we're all on the same team. We all want what's best for the kids. We want them to be healthy, to be educated, to be cared for. And so that is certainly some common ground that we should all be able to agree upon." Her hope within this approach is that localizing the conversation to your school and your students can deescalate the conversation.

That said, Miller's perspective on finding common ground is not naive to the political nature of these attacks. "This is not about finding common ground with the organizations that are at the root cause of all of this. They are well funded. They are motivated by political agendas, and I doubt they have any interest in anything I have to say - other than to discredit me. This is about finding that common ground with the parents of our students in our schools." She offers advice to other school librarians about how to start a dialogue using more active outreach and engagement. "It helps to humanize yourself, talk about your interests, talk about what brought you into being a school librarian and what it is that you love about the job and some great things that are going on in your library."

Speaker Biography

Julie Miller is a Library Media Specialist at a Florida high school. She has been a public school educator for 15 years. She presents at regional and state conferences, was a 2020 graduate of the Sunshine State Library Leadership Institute, and her library achieved Florida Power-Library status in 2017. She has served multiple years on the Florida Teens Read state book award committee and is currently on the Board of Directors for FAME (Florida Association of Media in Education). Julie is proud to be part of the Libraries.Today advisory board!

Recommendations for Reflection

For the Libraries.Today community, it is important to remember that a common ground framework is only possible when all parties are engaged in the discussion in good faith and sincerity. Miller is right that there are some opportunities to reframe a challenge as a discussion. More school librarians could benefit from formal de-escalation training. But Miller is also correct that the library sector is facing problems from well-organized, agenda-driven organizations. Bills like HB1647 are significant threats to the professional integrity and future of school librarians. As a sector, we must do more than monitor these types of bills.

Some Thoughts from a (Censored) Native Point of View

Dr. Debbie Reese

Archive: <https://forum.libraries.today/talks/some-thoughts-from-a-censored-native-point-of-view/>

The current challenges are many. They include colleagues, your colleagues who reject native points of few who censor native voices, these current challenges point us to future opportunities.

- Dr. Debbie Reese, Activist/Author

Dr. Debbie Reese was invited to speak about her experiences facing organized challenges against her book “An Indigenous Peoples’ History of the United States”, co-written with Jean Mendoza, and her insights running the blog American Indians in Children’s Literature. Dr. Reese is well-respected for her powerful critiques of how the Big Five publishers continue to publish stories of Native Americans written by white authors and her observations of the inaccuracies of depictions of Native Americans in children’s literature. Dr. Reese began with a recounting of how her book, “An Indigenous Peoples’ History of the United States”, was included as one of the 850 books on the now-infamous October 2021 letter from Texas state Representative Matt Krause to school superintendents and school boards across the state.

As Chairman of the Texas House Committee on General Investigating Committee, Rep. Krause noted that several Texas school districts had removed books from libraries or classrooms after receiving objections from students, parents, and taxpayers. Rep. Krause, who was running for Texas State Attorney General at the time of the letter, asked schools to review a list of books that “might make students feel discomfort, guilt, anguish, or any other form of psychological distress because of their race or sex.” As Dr. Reese shares, “I pulled up that addendum and sure enough, ‘An Indigenous People’s History of the United States for Young People’ is on page two.”

Then in February 2022, the McKinney (TX) Independent School District experienced a mass-challenge event when parents and taxpayers objected to 282 different books. “An Indigenous People’s History of the United States for Young People” was on their list. McKinney ISD’s book challenge policy requires people who make an objection to enumerate their problems with the titles. As Dr. Reese describes that “An Indigenous Peoples’ History” was cited as objectionable for espousing Marxism, incest, sexually explicit material in written form and or visual pictures, pornography, Critical Race Theory, immoral activities, rebelliousness against parents, and materially contradicts the ISDs student handbook. She adds that “They also included that this [book was] told the history from the perspective of indigenous people revealing how native Americans actively resisted expansion of the US empire. If you look this book up in your local catalog, that is probably the description that you’re going to see there. These, these parents were doing a pretty intensive cut and paste job when they submitted their objections to 282 books.”

While the illegitimate nature of the objections is important to understand, Dr. Reese wanted to name and highlight a very important question for the library community: How do we track that a book was ever challenged, banned and removed? How do we know and track that the book had once been in a school library catalog and was now removed and therefore suppressed or silenced? “I got to wondering what would I find if I went to the McKinney [ISD] and did a search on the book? There are eight middle and high schools in this district. I was able to search six of their library catalogs. What I found the book is not in the libraries there.” Dr. Reese goes on to ask the profession if those removals are being documented. “I started asking librarians [what happens]. Here are some of their replies: when a book record is deleted it is entirely gone, completely gone. A record will show the book as withdrawn, and there is no place to document the reason in Destiny [catalog]. If a librarian clicks ‘track’, as we did, the book will show up on a weeded report. That’s a list can generate a list of books that were removed. But a librarian can choose not to click track, as we did, and the book in that case disappears completely.”

There are deep implications for the school library community from her information and insight. If so many books are subjected to challenges, how do we make accounting or record of what is lost when the bans succeed? She continues with a challenge for the Libraries.Today project and to library associations: what guidance will enable librarians to document these book challenges and bans in their libraries? “This is an important and significant moment in us history,” says Dr. Reese. “People like me who study trends and moments historically with regard to children’s books want this information and we document this.”

“I also have responses reactions to this on a personal level. Who is it exactly that is disappearing... [When] I share critiques of Native representations in children’s books several years ago on a state library listserv, a librarian shared instructions on how to set your email program to delete my emails. More recently, a state library association published an article in its journal that disparaged me and my work. That association subsequently apologized for that article... But what I want you to think about is the irony of disappearing, a book by a Native woman and encouraging others to ignore the point of view of a native woman in a country that developed an educational system to kill the Indian and save the man.” Her insistence that the profession and our institutions properly document these removals is informed by tragic history of erasure experienced by Native American and indigenous communities.

Speaker Biography

Tribally enrolled at Nanbé Owingeh, Debbie Reese’s research articles, book chapters, and blog (American Indians in Children’s Literature) are read widely and used in university and college courses in Education, Library Science, and English in the US and Canada. In 2019, the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC) selected her to deliver the 2019 Arbuthnot Honor Lecture.

Recommendations for Reflection

As mentioned above, Dr. Reese specifically asked the Libraries.Today community to support new policies and practices that help school librarians actively and accurately track when a book is removed from circulation because of a successful challenge. What does it mean for our profession to retain institutional memory of what has been purged for political reasons?

This would require building consensus on the policy along with training and guidance from standard-setting organizations and associations. Are we interested in keeping this record in honor of the populations and people who are being silenced by the ban?

Proactive Approaches to Book Challenges – Panel and Breakout

Holly Eberle, Carolyn Foote, Amanda Jones & Steve Tetreault

Moderated by Christopher Harris

Archive: <https://forum.libraries.today/talks/proactive-approaches-to-book-challenges/>

This panel was designed to solicit best practices as well as new thinking about ways that the Libraries.Today community can engage with policy issues around book challenges, and the political and social climate that is encouraging book banning. The panel format was a live online event and included synchronous breakouts for participants. This accounting of the panel's discussion attempts to capture and summarize each panelists' advice and recommendations rather than a transcript.

Reflections on Carolyn Foote's Best Practice Recommendations

- Highlight the Intellectual Freedom wins. We often tweet and highlight the shocking situations or difficult problems. But we can build pro-library and pro-First Amendment momentum by sharing incremental wins.
- We must prepare our administrators and boards for what may be coming, especially when the challenges are not coming from a single parent but are part of an organized and strident effort.
- Administrators and boards need to be better oriented about the work of school librarians and that orientation should be done by school librarians.
- It is very important to tie the school library collection and programs to your district DEI statement and policies, otherwise, your program is isolated.
- In states that require a certified school librarian, it is useful and important for the certification requirements to reflect the central role of Intellectual Freedom to the job.
- State library standards should be reviewed and updated to reflect the current fights over Intellectual Freedom
- Student-driven protests and events are authentic and necessary. They are doing things like rallies and banned book hand-outs. We need to encourage more art and music in our protests and organizing.
- Be mindful of statements that shame other professionals who are facing problems in their districts or who have lost a material challenge. We need to stand together and support each other.

Reflections on Amanda Jones' Best Practice Recommendations

- Personal contact between the school librarian and a concerned parent or resident is often the best way to address legitimate concerns and to diffuse tensions. Personal phone calls (rather than emails) cut through hearsay and are less likely to be misconstrued.

- Even at this point in the challenge era, school policies are still terribly out of date in some places. We must systematically update the policies to reflect current DEI practices and curriculum needs.
- It is important to educate administrators and boards on the differences between professional book reviews vs. crowd-sourced places like Good Reads or even the organizations that are challenging books themselves.
- A strong social media presence from the school library can show how you support and appreciate the kids while (re)building trust among parents.

Reflections on Holly Eberle's Best Practice Recommendations

- It is important to remember what a lot of librarians already know: one reason books are under attack is because books have power and words have power.
- Librarians need to spend time familiarizing themselves with the book ban groups and the book ban websites to anticipate where the challenges can come from and who is doing the challenge.
- It is very important to report when a challenge happens, and it is very appropriate to do so anonymously. Without visibility to the scope and size of the problem, we are less effective in countering it.
- A proactive media outreach posture can effectively fight a politicized book challenge. Likewise, authoritative blogs and statements matter.

Reflections on Steve Tetreault's Best Practice Recommendations

- Be inspired by Martha Hixon's crosswalk between a school librarian's job description and her reasoned argument about "why a particular book belongs in the library".
- Don't be hesitant to show up for librarians in trouble or books under attack in places outside your own district or state. It is part of the national dialog about education, reading, and the First Amendment and provides accountability to the administrators in that other district or school
- Consider changing your vocabulary about books and material from "age appropriate" to "age relevant". One can always argue the appropriateness of a book for any one student. Relevance is a more accurate descriptor for groups of students by age.

Observations from the Panel/Moderator Discussions

- School librarians are closest to Principals – even more than teaching colleagues. The school librarian can almost be considered Vice Principal for Learning.
- The Louisiana Association of School Librarians (LASL) is working with the state Board of Education to create a uniform proactive challenge policy
- The New Jersey Association of School Librarians (NJASL) has created a reconsideration policy handbook for members to use.

- NJASL also has set up a Rapid Regional Response team with NJLA and the state union to quickly show up in districts where challenges happen to correct bad policy issues and to support the school librarians.
- The library sector needs to keep its eyes on the lawsuit in Wentzville, MO. where the ACLU has sued on behalf of several students to overturn a book ban and reinstate access to the books. This case could be the next Pico. (<https://www.aclu.org/cases/ck-w-v-wentzville-r-iv-school-district-0>)

Takeaways from the Breakout Sessions

Dr. Harris asked Caroline Foote to identify the most critical need right now for the school library community. She responded by saying that because book bans are a national problem with a lot of local fights that are being fought, what the school library sector needs is clear, targeted messages and language that is more than just describing the school librarians' experience but also helps articulate what students, parents, educators and allies and partners are experiencing.

In moving to the Breakouts, Dr. Harris assured participants that the sessions were not being recorded and that the transcript of the sessions would be anonymized. This is to encourage a frank and honest sharing not only of experiences but also observations and critiques of the profession. This is consistent with the aims and approach of the Libraries.Today project.

- You may not 'win' the challenge. You may need to forgive yourself. But standing together is critically important right now regardless of the specific outcome.
- We need to start collecting stories about what happens 'after a challenge succeeds' to understand and correct the long-term negatives of this era of challenges.
- Local, state, and national organizations are powerful because there is power in consensus-building. Administrations and boards look at these processes, understand these processes, and, for the time being, respect them. Likewise, there is power in unions because unions provide a contractual and agreed-upon level of protection.
- This is the year to join a professional association, especially an education association or union, for nothing else but legal protections.

Unanswered Questions and Comments in the Chat

- "I believe that a lot of this [bans and challenges] is a direct result of the decrease in library media specialists hired in school libraries. Many of our school libraries are being managed by aides. What do you think of this assessment?"
- "Considering that these challenges are part of a concerted effort to undermine public education as a whole, how do we fight challenges while also revealing the terrifying endgame?"
- "In Georgia, they just passed a law that completely overrides our reconsideration and challenge policy. Now it is up to the building principal - so one person - or someone designated by the principal who makes the decision, and they only have 7 days to do it. My

principal is supportive, but I'm not sure how much he will be if challenges start rolling in. I don't know how to fight a new state law.”

- “I am concerned that after what happened with Roe, we might see a challenge to Pico.”

Panelist Biographies

Holly Eberle is the Teen Librarian at the Algonquin Area Public Library District in Illinois. She has been writing for the American Library Association (ALA) Office of Intellectual Freedom Blog since 2020 and was an ALA Intellectual Freedom Committee member from 2019-2021. Before her time in teen services, she was a children's librarian, but has always been passionate about intellectual freedom & censorship.

Carolyn Foote is a rewire/retired Texas librarian, who focuses on library advocacy, library design and technology. She is a recipient of the 2019 AASL Library Collaboration Award for an art history library collaboration and along with her team at FReadom Fighters, she is a recent recipient of this year's AASL Intellectual Freedom award. She believes in librarians as leaders and in students' right to read.

Amanda Jones is the 2021 School Library Journal Co-Librarian of the Year, a 2021 Library Journal Mover and Shaker, and the 2020 Louisiana SLOY. Amanda is the Vice President of the Louisiana Association of School Librarians, an AASL Social Media Superstar, and was named a 2022 K-12 IT Influencer to Follow by EdTech Magazine. Find out more about her at librarianjones.com.

As a monthly contributor to AASL's Knowledge Quest blog, Steve Tetreault has been writing about school library issues since 2018. He's been published in School Library Connection and the NJEA Review. In addition to his Master of Information, he achieved a terminal degree in Educational Administration and Supervision. He is a Member-at-Large for the New Jersey Association of School Librarians. See what else he's up to at DrTLoveBooks.com or SchoolLibLearning.Net.

News Literacy - Panel

Laura Saunders, John Silva NBCT, and Hannah Waltz

Moderated by Andrea Fetterly

Archive: <https://forum.libraries.today/talks/news-literacy/>

We need to be doing so much better in terms of how they take down hate speech and disinformation related to hate. Disinformation can fuel extremism, we know that, and that's why media literacy is so important to you know address the climate that we're in right now.

- Hannah Waltz, *PEN America*

Defining News Literacy

Laura Saunders: When I am teaching, especially when I'm teaching in a library setting about mis- and dis-information I usually do try to separate those two terms. I typically use a definition that as put forth by Claire Water: misinformation is the first draft of news. She differentiates misinformation ... being information that has been shared by accident, so the person who is sharing it. Maybe [someone] made a mistake and didn't know that the information was false. And this can happen in a lot of environments where news is unfolding rapidly, and people are trying to share information quickly, so they're sharing what they understand at the time. Dis-information, on the other hand, is fake information or false information that is shared with the purpose to mislead, so this is more like what we typically think about when we use the term fake news or propaganda even or things like that.

John Silva: When it comes to news literacy, the way we think of it is that news literacy is a foundational approach to media literacy. There are a couple of important points about users' education. One is that we want to emphasize that news literacy is about fostering skepticism not cynicism and it's also about the importance of understanding. The role of a free press and the importance of that to the health of our democracy there's an important point I want to mention about the term misinformation, though. One of the things that we have to understand, in the current situation we're in is that misinformation has become a weaponized and politicized term, much like "fake news" was. People are calling things misinformation because of a political strategy. They are using it as an "I don't like that" or "I don't agree with that that" moment. It has nothing to do with whether the information is true.

Hannah Waltz: The terms are falling short right now. We are struggling with the language, the way that we talk about mis- and disinformation...Our partners at the National Association of Media Literacy Education have a definition of media literacy, which is the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and act using all forms of communication.

Andrea Fetterly: [Librarians would] much rather students have the skills that they need to understand the difference between information literacy and media literacy and because all of those have different aspects of what you're trying to have students.

Cognitive Bias in Information Seeking

John Silva: Cognitive biases are ways that our brains can be used against us. And the ways in which we process information that can go off the rails. One of the most common examples is confirmation bias. Most of the time when people fall for something when they see misinformation, they believe it's true. This is because it [the information] confirmed some existing beliefs that they have. It happens to all of us. The other, which is an extension of it, is motivated reasoning. This is one of the huge problems we are trying to confront: the fact that so many people are out there, doing their own research. A librarian colleague of mine once described it as a "belief in search of confirming evidence".

Hannah Waltz: There is also a side that leads us to reject information that challenges what we believe. You need to approach difficult conversations with a little bit more empathy as you're looking towards why somebody might believe what they believe. And kind of come at it from that angle.

The Dunning-Kruger Effect

Laura Saunders: The Dunning-Kruger says we tend to overestimate our own abilities. In fact, the lower our abilities the higher our own overestimation [of our abilities]. A lot of research has shown that we just aren't very good at identifying mis- and disinformation, and yet we may think that we are pretty good at it. But the flip side of that is the third-party effect, which is that we tend to think other people are going to get fooled more easily than we are. If people are already motivated to believe things that confirm what they already think or reject things that challenge what they don't believe, and if they are also believing that other people are more easily fooled it reinforces these beliefs.

New Literacy Pedagogy

Laura Saunders: I think it's especially helpful for Librarians if we can learn a little bit about pedagogy, learning theory, and what motivates people to learn. We tend to fall back on this idea that if people aren't evaluating news well that it's because they're being lazy. But getting back to this idea of cognitive bias, this is how our brains develop. Our brains develop this way because it was efficient and so it's not necessarily laziness. One cannot possibly stop and evaluate every piece of information that comes our way every single day. So what we need to do is kind of find that balance between efficiency and effectiveness.

Empathy as a News Literacy Skill

Laura Saunders: I think empathy is really important. In particular, when I teach intellectual freedom courses, it is one of the things I try to teach my students. For myself, I try to approach

every conversation by giving the other person the benefit of the doubt, that they're coming into this with an open mind, that you know that they believe what they believe for good reasons, or at least what they believe are good reasons.

Algorithms of Hate

Hannah Waltz: It is always important to look for human centered data reporting or human centered reporting and to recognize that the [social media and search] algorithms are not going to take humanity into account. Knowing that mis-information targets communities of color and other marginalized communities in a very specific way, and this is intentional, to preserve certain inequities. It is no coincidence that political disinformation in Spanish skyrockets during election cycles. Spanish language communities represent one of the largest voting blocs in the US. The platform side falls short. I work for a free speech organization, and we try to stay away from over-regulation, but hate speech is hate speech. We need to be doing so much better in terms of how they take down hate speech and disinformation related to hate. Disinformation can fuel extremism, we know that, and that's why media literacy is so important to you know address the climate that we're in right now.

John Silva: When we talk about misinformation, there are two things to always keep in mind: a lot of mis- and disinformation is designed to target, to us manipulate us, and to have us act against our own best interests.

Speaker Biographies

Laura Saunders is a Professor and Interim Director at Simmons University School of Library and Information Science. Her teaching and research focus on the areas of information literacy including mis- and disinformation, reference services, and academic libraries. She also teaches a course on intellectual freedom and censorship. Her most recent books include *Reference and Information Services: An Introduction*, 6th edition, co-edited with Melissa Wong and the open access textbook *Instruction in Libraries and Information Settings: An Introduction*, co-authored with Melissa Wong. Her articles have appeared in a variety of journals including *College & Research Libraries*, *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, and *Communications in Information Literacy*. Laura has a Ph.D. and a Master of Library and Information Science, both from Simmons College, and a Bachelor of Arts in English Literature from Boston University. She is the 2019 recipient of Simmons University's Provost Award for Excellence in Graduate Teaching.

John Silva is the Senior Director of Professional Learning at the News Literacy Project and is a National Board Certified Teacher. Prior to joining NLP, he was a classroom teacher for 13 years teaching middle and high school social studies in Chicago Public Schools. Before becoming a teacher, he worked in a variety of positions in corporate telecommunications mostly focused on cellular and wireless networking and served as a United States Marine. @NewsLitProject

Hannah Waltz is the U.S. Free Expression Programs coordinator at PEN America. Previously, she was the media literacy training coordinator at PEN America, supporting the initiative “Knowing the News,” a nationwide media literacy training program. Before moving to New York, Waltz lived in Pittsburgh. There, she worked on the programming team at City of Asylum, where she helped to produce events and acclimate international writers-in-residence to new lives in the U.S. She worked at local bookstores and magazines, and was also actively involved in ReelQ, Pittsburgh’s LGBTQ+ film festival as an events coordinator and board member. A native of Indiana, Waltz received her bachelor’s degree in English and creative writing from Indiana University Bloomington, where she also interned at the Indiana Review and IU Writers’ Conference and worked as a radio DJ.

Recommendations for Reflection

If news and information literacy are primarily about confronting or avoiding biases, and that empathy is a necessary component of anti-bias training, it stands to reason that the school library sector’s focus on social-emotional learning should be as centered in the professional literature and praxis as diversity, equity, and inclusion training.

Self-Censorship – Panel

Ashley Hawkins, Samantha Hull, and Jennisen Lucas

Moderated by Julie Miller

Archive: <https://forum.libraries.today/talks/self-censorship/>

The concept of soft censorship and self-censorship was mentioned throughout the first day's Libraries.Today sessions and panels several times. Several presenters spoke about the chilling effect that so many strident and politicized book banning campaigns have had on the psyche of the profession. There is a human tendency to avoid conflicts and to attempt to de-escalate problems through avoidance or aversion behaviors. For school librarians, everyday practices like weeding and collection development need to be looked at with a deep understanding of implicit and explicit biases. Julie Miller moderated the live panel with speakers Ashley Hawkins, Samantha Hull, and Jennisen Lucas to discuss these topics, which also included breakout rooms for discussions in real-time with attendees.

Question: Defining Soft-Censorship

Samantha Hull defined self-censorship in two ways. The first is, for example, not acquiring a book when it's against your personal beliefs. The second is not acquiring a book out of a self-protective instinct. The former may be explicit and intentional. The latter is often implicit and may be an unconscious bias. To illustrate, she mentions the example of the vegetarian who overcomes her personal belief to buy a BBQ cookbook. Likewise, there may be moments when discomfort or aversion to selecting a title because of sexual content, diversity issues, or controversial topics. Hull states, "We just need to make sure we're intentional... so we're not self-censoring, just like we need to be aware of our implicit bias, we should be aware of our personal beliefs and decisions that way we're purchasing with intention."

Ashley Hawkins highlighted that implicit biases also creep into school library selection process around the perceived quality or legitimacy of a story or genre. She and Jennisen Lucas discussed how colleagues dismiss manga as a valid form of literature and that dismissal is, in a certain respect, a side of the censorship discussion as well.

Question: How do you distinguish between deselection and self-censorship?

Lucas questioned if it is possible to have a deselection process, one where you identify that a book is not in fact appropriate for your collection, and not have it be a moment of self-censorship. She adds, "[My colleague] doesn't think it should be in our library and I selected it erroneously. So, it's an interesting thought that as we select books for our collections, we are, in some ways deselecting what else we could have purchased." However, Lucas takes a different and more practical look at weeding as a process. "When it comes to weeding, I tend to not pay as much attention to the content, as I do the copyright dates and what I know about what has changed in that field... [If] nobody has checked it out, and you know it's been here since I graduated from high school, which

was you know more than a couple of years ago.” The process of weeding should be dispassionately disconnected from the content of the book. Hawkins observes that self-censorship “is usually based on emotions. Whether those emotions are your personal feelings [about a topic], or if these emotions are fear or hesitation or uncertainty. Self-censorship comes from a much more emotional place whereas selection is more of a [professional] process.”

Question: What do we do in our school library when we know there is a book or series that has been challenged or banned someplace else?

Lucas reminded attendees of the quote that “Once you know better, you do better”. She relates that she has moved books around in the library and across schools in her system to find the right place. “I have moved books from elementary to middle school or middle school to high school because of that kind of content.” It is collection management and the professional acumen of a school librarian to know if it belongs in a middle or high school setting. “You have to read and think about where does that fit into what is normal behavior with the age group?” Ashley Hawkins discussed the age relevance issue (which was also brought up in the Proactive Approaches panel), especially around Manga. She indicates that “Depending on where your population is... there are so many factors that determine by your individual place that you also have to take into account. That's why when those sorts of challenges pop up you do have to you're going to have to sit down and read the book, even if you know [a genre] is not your thing.”

Question: What advice would you give librarians in states like Florida and Texas where we're seeing new legislation making it difficult to develop diverse relevant collections?

All the panelists stressed the importance of finding and cultivating a professional learning network that extends beyond your immediate geography. The need for mutual support during this time is profound. There are onerous and offensive requirements being instituted on teachers and school librarians. Panelists encouraged those in “safer areas” to be engaged, supportive, and active for their colleagues. It is also important to interface on both professional and personal time with organizations outside of the library space who are concerned with the issues or people represented in banned and challenged books.

Question: Self-censorship sometimes takes the form of a “book vacation”. What do you think is the risk of doing something like this and what might be a more productive approach?

Lucas makes a bold suggestion: “This is a fantastic time to be a librarian because people are listening right now to what do librarians do and how do we make those decisions. If we're hiding from [the responsibilities], it's not going to make us look like good professionals.” Hull affirmed this frame and said “Mistrust [of school librarians] already there from some extreme groups. So how do you build it back? Not by hiding books but being transparent.” Hawkins concurred strongly.

Takeaways from the Breakout Sessions

In moving to the Breakouts, the moderator assured participants that the sessions were not being recorded and that the transcript of the sessions would be anonymized. This is to encourage a frank

and honest sharing not only of experiences but also observations and critiques of the profession, which is consistent with the aims and approach of the Libraries.Today project. The Moderator asked the panel for a salient question for the breakouts and the panel arrived at “Are there some proactive steps that I can take in my library without self-censoring that can help me be more resilient in the face of challenges?”

Breakout Observations and Feedback:

- Information sharing and transparency with administrators is key. One suggestion was to do unboxing videos to show what is coming into the library in a fun and engaged way.
- Use the summertime to recharge and refill emotionally and professionally. Next semester will continue to be difficult.
- Administrators are only now waking up to the issues around book bans and challenges. They do not know or understand the role, work, and importance of school librarians.
- The mis- and disinformation ecosystem should be as concerning to administrators as book bans and challenges are. This is a unique time for school librarians to educate peers and administrators on their unique and multifaceted roles.
- Reach out beyond your immediate school community to LGBTQ+ and BIPOC community organizations, concerned parents, and other groups who are aligned around students and their families.

Panelist Biographies

Ashley Hawkins is the campus librarian at the Samuel J Tilden Educational Complex in Brooklyn, NY. Ashley has a BS in English Language Arts Education from UCF, and an MA in English Literature from the Bread Loaf School of English as well as an MSLIS from Pratt Institute. Currently, she runs the site Manga Librarian, which serves to provide collection development support to school and public librarians wishing to expand their knowledge of manga and anime. She also runs the Animation & Illustration Collection for the New York City School Library System’s Cooperative Collection Development Initiative. Ashley is an AASL Knowledge Quest Blogger. She also has been a guest on multiple podcasts including School Librarians United and Shojo and Tell.

Samantha Hull is a parent of two young children and board director for the Pennsylvania School Librarians Association. She is also a high school librarian and district supervisor. Her work is rooted in lifelong learning and accessible resources.

Jennisen Lucas is the District Librarian for Park County School District #1 in Cody, WY, and currently serves as the President of AASL (American Association of School Librarians). She has been a school librarian for 20 years, has achieved National Board Certification, and been an active member of the Wyoming Library Association and AASL by serving on a variety of committees.

Proceedings and Insights

Day 2 – Collecting the Present Moment

Presented on May 18, 2022

Keynote - ALWAYS #BetterTogether

Amy Hermon, Podcast: School Librarians United

<https://forum.libraries.today/talks/day-2-keynote/>

“I see the podcast not so much as a form of education for others so much as a way to bring us together in a very intimate setting of a conversation that we’re sharing with others about topics that resonate with us on some level every week,”

- Amy Hermon

Amy Hermon was invited to help mark and record the present moment of school librarianship, particularly as we transition over the summer of 2022 from the depths of COVID to an emerging post-COVID framework for education and society. In his introduction, Dr. Harris sets the frame for this keynote. “There were changes to our staffing and space in places we’ll talk about in, in later sessions today, definitely changes to instruction, and we need to make sure that we record that so that we can learn from it so that we can look back upon this from the future and, and study it and understand it.” As a noted podcaster and working school library, Hermon is positioned at the crossroads of a lived experience of pandemic-era school librarianship while being in constant contact with practitioners from around the world. Her perspectives tell a story of deep challenges faced by colleagues and the remarkable resilience of the profession in the face of difficulties.

Hermon began her keynote with heartfelt thanks to the friends and colleagues who have made the show possible. In particular, she took time to single out Amanda Jones and K.C. Boyd as early adopters and consistent supporters. She shared about the process of producing the podcast. The work of writing and hosting an episode is about four days. School librarians from around the world regularly pitch ideas. Many guests share content that they first delivered at a state or national conference which extends the professional development reach and impact of their work. It is a mutually supportive community and can be a model for a functioning professional learning environment.

Like many school librarians on the speaking circuit in 2020, the pandemic-related shutdowns affected Hermon’s ability to share and collaborate. For Hermon and her collaborators, the shutdowns encouraged the switch to digital while providing professional connections and a degree of personal solace in the face of disruptions and uncertainties. “If you were on library Twitter [in

early 2020],” Hermon relates, “If you were on library social media, you recognized the absolute fear, the very genuine realization that... spring was sort of a wash and we all just sort of went home and did the best we could teaching remotely.” The shared experience of many school librarians shifted over the summer of 2020. “Starting in the fall, a lot of us were not going to have our spaces because our spaces were being repurposed or they’re becoming extended learning spaces, lunch space, or glorified storage. Because those are libraries.”

Many school librarians like Hermon were unable to staff their libraries or circulate materials. Public libraries, likewise, were substantially curtailing or pausing circulation and patron contact at that point. But in schools, the library space was viewed by some administrators as extra space able to be repurposed. “So, they said, well, that’s fine. We’ll just turn it into another classroom. And oh, by the way, you are going to become a teacher, or you don’t have a job next year. There was this very real palpable concern that affected everyone around the country and around the world.”

Hermon detailed that her own mid-pandemic work included using book carts to push into classrooms and for hallway checkouts. “We did curbside checkout for three days a week till five o’clock at night... but we, we’re not allowed to bring the kids into the libraries where they would be touching everything.” The difficulties were a shared-experience for other teachers, students, and families. “I will say here’s the silver lining, Says Hermon”. “We (school librarians) were visible. We were very visible. You couldn’t ignore me. My coworkers were walking past me... sitting out there in my snow pants and hand warmers because it’s Michigan and they’re going home, and I’m going to be there till five. And, and it was wonderful.” Hermon received her district’s Teacher of the Year citation for her work during the pandemic. “[I]t was a wonderful way to make something good out of a terrible situation.”

Over the course of the pandemic shutdowns, the podcast connected Hermon with hundreds of colleagues. “None of us had taught asynchronously. None of us had taught remotely. None of us had done curbside checkout... I’d never pushed into the classrooms. A lot of us could be librarians, but we had to do so in the classroom. It was so disorienting to remove us from the [library] space.” What Hermon and others began to recognize, however, was that “we are the resource”. There was a pre-pandemic path dependency on the spaces, with the library itself being considered the key resource. As Hermon notes, “The materials we have are the resource. So if you take that away, you’re left with us and we’re going to have to make sure people realize that we can be so incredibly supportive of our staff and our school community and our parents, but we need to start to pivot.”

The podcast also connects with people who volunteer in school libraries. “I do have quite a few parents and community members who work in the school libraries because there is no one else to open those doors... If the district can get parents for free, then what’s the point of this, right? We should be fighting for school librarians. And trust me, when I talk to these parents and community members who are volunteering in their space, nothing would make them happier than being replaced by a certified school librarian, but the community and the district has not prioritized that.”

During the pandemic, many non-profits and community-based organizations lost significant volunteer support. In certain school districts, volunteer-run school libraries do not have the people available post-pandemic to stand in the staffing gaps. “There are those who control the budget. [They need to hear] just how vitally important it is to have certified school librarian in all of our spaces.”

While Hermon is not a fan of the word pivot, she acknowledges that the action of pivoting represented school librarians at their best. This pivot away from space-dependent librarianship that she described demonstrates how “Incredibly inventive we could be with the skills we had, and building upon them to made us even more accessible to our school communities at a time when it was so vitally important that we be there to make sure they know we haven't abandoned them.” This concept that a school library program can be independent of its library space, or not entirely dependent on having a library space, is perhaps one the most significant points for the Libraries.Today community to reflect on.

Hermon closed the keynote with an invitation to school librarians around the world to be a part of the podcast to share their experience and make connections. “I love recording and every day is something new. And I do not see an end in sight. I tell people because the content of the podcast episodes are dependent on these amazing things that school librarians do in their spaces every day. I will never run out of content, so I am having a great time.”

Speaker Biography

Amy Hermon has been podcasting “School Librarians United” (now in Season 4) since August 2018. With downloads across all 50 states and 129 countries, this podcast reaches a global listening audience every day. Amy is a graduate of the University of Michigan and Wayne State University School of Information Sciences. Weekly 175 episodes and counting, Amy has interviewed school librarians in more than 27 states, Canada, UK and New Zealand. Always free, customizable and convenient, this podcast averages 50-90 different episodes downloaded every day, each with show notes full of online resources and free materials.

Recommendations for Reflection

Amy Hermon and Dr. Harris describe the school library in terms of three aspects: the person, the space, and the resources. The pandemic showed us how the person could step up to deliver resources even when our physical collection and space were partially or wholly inaccessible, how does our understanding and development of library programs moving forward change when we consider them in terms of these three interlinked concepts of person, space, and resources?

EBooks and Digital Content During COVID - Session

Steve Potash

<https://forum.libraries.today/talks/ebooks/>

We are in the middle of R and D where machine learning is going into the digital book content, the eBook, the audio book, the magazines, manga graphic novels and comics, and – for the librarian - starting to extract additional data points to enable you to better appreciate the materials you're considering for your collection.

- Steve Potash, CEO, OverDrive

Steve Potash was invited to talk about the opportunities and challenges of digital books for school libraries. As the CEO of OverDrive, he is uniquely positioned to see the dramatic rise in eBook and audio book utilization during the pandemic and to chart the ways that these changes may become permanent in school library and classroom library services. He was interested in sharing about three themes: access, advocacy, and always advancing. There are tremendous opportunities for school libraries through digital learning that were revealed in the challenges of the pandemic. “How do we fill the gaps of access to materials that students need for their curriculum assigned reading, or how can we supplement access and inspire them to self-select materials for their own interests and their own enjoyment?”

To Potash, access means availability as well as adaptability. He asks “How do we make the content on the page or within the audio even more valuable for students as they are using the books? [D]igital has some advantages, whether it's exporting passages from the page, the ability to access outside resources in context, while they're looking at a word or a term that may be less familiar. And of course, whether it's in an eBook or audiobook, they always have a [native] ability to take notes, annotate, and use those materials for other school purposes.” The adaptability of eBooks and audiobooks to students with different learning challenges and modalities is also important to Potash. “We want every title to feel welcoming to every student...” For those with visual impairments or print disabilities, accessibility is key

Potash also stressed several policy points for school libraries. He recognized the need for proper funding for school library programs and school librarian positions. He also emphasized how important it is that we “[advocate] with the authors, the agents, and the publishers to enable fair, flexible terms so that every student can have access to all the books they need when they need them.” This framework of a negotiated arrangement between libraries and copyright holders to establish fair and flexible terms is consistent with OverDrive’s position for the last 20 years. Potash identifies that advocacy with the publishers “represents one of the greatest challenges the school librarians face today. As you are looking in your collection development plans, all materials are not always available under the most optimized models.” He describes the five most popular models for students to borrow, discover, and benefit from as One Copy / One User, Metered Access, Cost Per

Circulation, Simultaneous Use, and On-Demand Class Sets. “We are constantly seeking to have the variety and the best cost per student to access the book for as little or as long as they need for the school year.”

Pre-pandemic, eBooks and digital audiobooks were not a significant component of the school year planning. As Potash identifies, “That all changed in the last two years... [We] must continue to provide you - the librarian, the educator, the parent, the academic administrator, and of course the student - better insights and data on how the books are being used and seeing where that could be correlated to a student's reading progress or comprehension tools.” Potash continued to describe how OverDrive is investing in “additional tools where educators and your librarians at the classroom level will have access to get a deeper dive into how the materials are being used” while respecting student privacy. “This data is something that is becoming more and more critical for you to do your job or to inform the teacher educator and students. These kind of data points are going to even help us correlate for additional academic achievements and constantly find ways to make access to the book more valuable for your students and your district.”

Potash closed with a reflection on the rise in artificial intelligence that is coming to smart devices and the potential impact AI has on students and learning. “These are the kind of tools that OverDrive is in the midst of [research and development] on. As students are engaging with the book real-time, are there going to be librarian-curated routines and solutions in the future? I believe there will be.” He describes a future of collection management and curriculum where “Machine learning is going into the digital book content, the eBook, the audiobook, the magazines, manga graphic novels and comics, and - for the librarian - starting to extract additional data points to enable you to better appreciate the materials you're considering to select for your collection.” Ultimately, Potash is describing an AI-augmented application that helps educators and librarians curate for specific interests and individual readers.

Speaker Biography

Steve Potash is President and Chief Executive Officer of OverDrive, a company that he founded in 1986. As CEO, Steve leads an Executive Strategic Team focused on OverDrive's vision to create a world enlightened by reading. Under his leadership, OverDrive has become the leading digital reading platform for ebooks, audiobooks, and other digital media for libraries, schools, government agencies, corporate learning centers and colleges and universities worldwide. A true pioneer in the digital content and distribution industry, Steve was among the first to develop useful applications for digital books in the 1980s. He began his career offering innovative floppy diskette, CD-ROM and print-to-digital conversion services, and introduced early versions of digital books to the law, accounting and healthcare industries.

Recommendations for Reflection

For the Libraries.Today community, his advocacy and advancement frameworks bear some reflection. While Potash describes a model for eBook advocacy that faces publishers and therefore looks to establish favorable terms and conditions from beneficent publishers, several state library associations are exploring legislation that would attempt to enshrine the concept of favorable terms into law. States have a well-established and compelling interest in education to set conditions for doing business in the state. It remains to be seen what pathways those eBook legislative initiatives can and should take, but this type of legislation could be a significantly different approach to eBook advocacy. Likewise, the topic of interactions with students being moderated or mediated by Artificial Intelligence could be explored in future Libraries.Today convenings. As our earlier conversations about books and First Amendment protections uncovered, robust school district policies are necessary to preserve individual rights alongside educational integrity. Libraries.Today may be in a good position to discuss the benefits and challenges of AI augmented school librarianship.

Reading Before and After COVID - Session

Dr. Stephen Krashen

Archive: <https://forum.libraries.today/talks/reading-before-and-after-covid/>

I read this a lot in the news and in people's comments about libraries online. They say that "libraries are more than just books", as if books were kind of unnecessary but painful evil that we must put up with. Of course, many of us don't think that's true. I certainly don't and have the opposite view.

- Dr. Stephen Krashen

The role of school libraries and school librarians in reading achievement and comprehension is often quoted within the library community but rather under-appreciated outside of library circles. Dr. Stephen Krashen was invited to present a high-level overview of research about these topics. Most recently, Dr. Krashen and his colleagues Christy Lao, Sy-ying Lee, and Jeff McQuillan, looked at literacy levels in children longitudinally in several countries. Their research showed that school libraries are the only thing that matters when it comes to closing the literacy and reading gap even when poverty comes into play.

Dr. Krashen began his session by outlining three areas of that demonstrate the important role of reading on individual development. These include language and developing literacy, language and developing subject matter knowledge, and reading to develop more sophisticated habits of mind. Dr. Krashen describes it this way: "Language and literacy and reading - we didn't know this a few years ago - reading for pleasure, self-selected reading, is one of the major sources of language competence. This is a major breakthrough probably in the last 30 years or so, building up to the discovery that our ability to write, spell, use complicated grammar, and a lot of our knowledge of vocabulary is the result of reading – and reading what we want to read. This leads to a major point: the value of self-selection. When we select our own reading, of course, there's a much better chance it's going to be interesting. And it's no surprise that the more self-selected reading people do, this is according to the research, the more literate they become. It is a good predictor of reading ability, vocabulary, all these things."

Dr. Krashen related two stories about the role of self-selection in this process. One was a student he and a research assistant tracked over time. This student saw more significant gains in reading ability and acuity during individual summer reading than she did during the school year. In fact, the pressures of standardized testing and a proscribed curriculum conspired to limit her self-selected reading time and her scores fell during the school year. Likewise, Dr. Krashen relates a story from his own biography. While in secondary school in the Midwest, he took a standard battery of American and British literature courses. Unfortunately, he cannot recall a single story that was assigned reading. He can, however, recall the self-paced reading he did including science fiction and

baseball stories. “The informal evidence for self-selection, I think is very powerful,” says Krashen. “What happens when someone gives you a book as a gift, especially a novel, and then you run to him two weeks later and he says, how'd you like that book I gave you? And of course, you haven't read it. It's sitting up there on your shelf, staring down at you, making you feel guilty. Gift books are assigned reading.”

“People who read more know more.” According to Krashen “There are [several] direct studies on the power of libraries and these studies are done by the people I consider to be the Master of Library Research, Keith Curry Lance and Debra Kachel. High school students and elementary school students who attend schools with quality school libraries - and that means a really good collection and the help of a credentialed librarian - have higher scores in reading comprehension.” To Krashen, this makes good sense. “School librarians know what books to order. They know what the kids want to read. And they can talk to the kids and make sure the connection is made between the book and the reader.”

Reading engenders several positive habits of mind including empathy and an understanding of the complexity of the human experience. In the academic literature, novels and popular reading materials are the most efficacious ways to build those skills. There is a direct line for school librarians to follow here. It is one that school librarians have been doing for generations. School librarians (and their partners in public libraries) do more to encourage independent self-directed reading, especially reading beyond the curriculum, in school settings than any other educator.

Speaker Biography

Dr. Stephen Krashen is an Emeritus Professor of Education at the University of Southern California. He has written numerous articles and books about second language acquisition, bilingual education, and reading. He is a passionate promoter of free student reading.

Recommendations for Reflection

There are tremendous potential benefits to individual students when reading scores rise. Literacy rates are tied to educational attainment and educational attainment is tied to success in life. The Libraries.Today community may want to review and pursue ways to systematically support conversations with policymakers about these insights. The impact and importance of this unique role is likely under-appreciated and misunderstood by other educators and education stakeholders. What can we do as a sector to change that?

Staffing Changes - Panel

K.C. Boyd, Dr. Keith Curry Lance, and Suzanna L. Panter

Moderated by Craig Seasholes

Archive: <https://forum.libraries.today/talks/staffing-changes/>

Panelists were invited to share insights on the ways that staffing of school libraries was trending prior to the pandemic and how it was disrupted during the COVID-related shutdowns and pivot. K.C. Boyd discussed the shift between traditional advocacy to retain school librarians into a more structured policy conversation with the City Council of Washington, D.C. Suzanna Panter related how her school librarian community retooled their skills to better serve their students and families during the pandemic while retaining their headcount to fight another day. As with other panels, the Libraries.Today framework looked for honest assessment but also asked panelists to share bright spots in their stories. Keith Curry Lance provided a substantial overview of SLIDE project findings that demonstrated the changes between the 2016-17 school year and the 2020-21 (with finer detail between the 2018-19 and 2020-21 school years). Before proceeding, readers of this report would be wise to visit <http://libslide.org> to review the extensive findings across the SLIDE project. The project website includes national information, state-by-state insights, and district-level comparison tools that are unmatched elsewhere. Likewise, please consider viewing the video archive of this panel for a deeper understanding of the information we discuss below.

Keith Curry Lance kicked-off the panel with an overview of the findings of the SLIDE project. SLIDE is a multi-year effort funded by IMLS to determine trends in school library staffing, to understand administrator views of school librarians, to review and understand the school librarian job in the present moment, and to understand the landscape of certifications and requirements for school librarianship by state across the country. The aims of the SLIDE project include encouraging the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) to produce more robust surveys of the profession and to make relevant recommendations to policymakers about the future of school librarians and school library programs in the education ecosystem.

Lance detailed the SLIDE findings on top-level workforce data:

- In the 2-year period of 2016-17 to 2018-19 school years, the headcount of working school librarians across 46 states fell by 530 positions.
- In the next 2-year period of 2018-19 to 2020-21 school years, the sector lost an additional 1,812 school librarian positions in those 46 states.
- This represents a 4.9% decline in the number of working school librarians between the beginning of 2018 and the end of 2021.
- Four states are not reportable because of significant flaws in the NCES source data.

Lance noted that cuts to school library positions are often framed as a symptom of a local budget problem or an overall lack of funding for education. Conventional wisdom says that school librarian positions suffer alongside other educator roles. However, the SLIDE project's analysis of NCES data shows that during the same periods when nearly 5% school librarians were being eliminated, administrative positions grew:

- District administrator jobs grew by 5.9%
- School administrator jobs grew by 1.8%
- Other teaching and instructional positions grew by less than 1%
- Of the districts which reported a loss of school librarian jobs, nearly half added teacher positions, over a third added administrators at the building or district level, and just over a third added instructional coordinators.

This indicates to Lance and his SLIDE collaborator Debra Kachel that the decline in school library jobs is not being forced by budget issues. The decline in school librarian jobs is being driven by priorities and policy. This means that advocacy to restore school librarians needs to be reframed as a policy and systems conversation rather than a budget fight.

Lance takes pains to note that the loss of school librarians is not evenly distributed across schools and districts. In fact, some schools and districts gained school library positions during the 2018-19 to 2020-21 reporting period. The SLIDE team analyzed the characteristics the districts that both added and lost school librarians. These characteristics include size of the district, the location of the district, and the makeup of race and ethnicity of the district. The meta-analysis reveals several significant equity issues in the distribution of those gains and losses:

- Majority White districts lost the fewest school librarians over the study period. Only 22% of majority White districts cut school librarians.
- Majority Black districts lost the most school librarians. Over 45% of majority Black districts cut school librarians during the study period.
- Overall, when viewed by race and ethnicity, fewer than 20% of all school districts added school librarians to their staffs.
- By enrollment, large school districts both cut and hire school librarians at a much higher rate than small districts. However, there is a net loss across all districts regardless of their enrollment.
- Likewise, urban and suburban districts have a higher percentage of hires and fires than towns and rural districts, but there is a net loss overall.

Lance glosses, however, that by the 2018-19 school year, many small and rural districts may already be past the point of having any school librarians left on staff. His final datapoint showed that net losses persist across districts regardless of their per-pupil expenditures, but that less-well-off districts see proportionally more hires and fires overall. In education, decisions about hiring and

firing decisions are generally made at the most-local level, the school or school district, through a framework of local control. However, local control can be superseded by state mandates. According to Lance, states with mandates about school librarians fall into two camps: those that follow the mandates and those that do not. In states that follow the law (mandates) we see a much more robust headcount of school librarians. It is important to note that in states who have but do not follow mandates, their headcount of school librarians is also higher than in no-mandate states. The influence of mandates is significant on the stability of the profession.

Lance closed his presentation with a reminder that the data shows that the workforce is making gains in some areas, but the losses are troubling because of their inequitable distribution. He also reminded the Libraries. Today community that education policy priorities appear to be driving the decision to hire or cut school library positions rather than budgetary explanations. This is an important finding and bears more discussion about the ways to properly engage policymakers and decision makers.

K.C. Boyd was invited to speak next about her experiences with advocating for positions within DC Public Schools. In Washington, D.C., the school librarian community with the help of EveryLibrary, the national political action committee for libraries, and the active participation of their teachers' union, WTU Local 6, has successfully reframed the discussion about school librarians away from local control into a larger policy conversation. Boyd related how stakeholders refocused their advocacy efforts away from a rearguard action to save individual positions to a systems-focused conversation with policymakers about funding for positions at every school. This shift in their advocacy strategy had two components. First, they redefined the school librarian as both a position and a department, so it should not be subject to principal level staffing decisions. Then, they encouraged the City Council use pandemic relief funds to restore school librarians to each and every school in the District. That redefinition meant that school libraries need to be staffed by certified school librarians and not only by paraprofessional or aids. The City Council was persuaded to fund positions with relief money because advocates could clearly demonstrate that the work of school librarians was aligned with policy priorities. The next step in their campaign will be to secure permanent funding for those positions within the regular city budget.

Suzanne Panter then spoke about the experience of school librarians in Tacoma, WA. schools leading up and through the pandemic period. The district had cut eight elementary positions since 2018-19 school year. The remaining elementary positions are certified school librarians but are only part-time. Secondary schools have full-time librarians. Panter described that their approach to preserving positions was to encourage and support the remaining librarians to acquire additional instructional technology certifications. This was intended to help Tacoma schools ameliorate an identified shortfall in that area and tie librarians more closely to student success. Pre-pandemic, these additional certifications helped administrators and parents recognize the value of these librarian positions in new ways. As the pandemic hit and school shifted to being completely remote,

Tacoma school librarians were already the resident experts in instructional technology and were well utilized by the district.

Panter noticed that many school librarians around the state were being reassigned away from their libraries into classrooms. She was particularly concerned, however, that if school librarian positions were lost during the pandemic they would not be brought back when instruction returned to normal. Her focus was to engage in new trainings personally and for her cohort of colleagues. This pivot enabled school librarians to fulfill key roles despite the school libraries being inaccessible while, crucially, not losing their identity as school librarians. Panter was happy to report that between the pandemic and today they have not lost any more positions.

Moderator Craig Seasholes asked the panel continued to reflect on the reputation that school librarians have, as Boyd suggests, of being do-ers. During the pandemic, DCPS school librarians, like their colleagues in Tacoma, adapted their work to meet the social emotional as well as instructional support needs of their students. Boyd discussed that DCPS librarians had been called Media Specialists for a time and they chose to return to being called librarians to help administrators and policymakers more easily understand their role. Panter highlighted the lack of district-level school library coordinators or administrators in her state and around the country. This shortfall in professional support and coordination is both a data and development shortfall. Lance mentioned that the SLIDE project will be looking at whether the loss of 1,800 school librarians during the pandemic was due to reassignments or permanent reductions in force. Finally, he emphasized the need for NCES to produce more robust surveys about school librarians.

The breakout session for this panel had a smaller roster than necessary, so the conversation simply continued in a less structured environment. Topics included the professional toll of the pandemic, questions about the shift by schools and districts to using paraprofessionals rather than certified librarians to staff school libraries, and brief discussions of instructional and support roles adopted by librarians during the pandemic.

Speaker Biographies

K.C. Boyd is currently a school librarian with the District of Columbia Public Schools System. She has previously worked as the Lead Librarian for the East St. Louis School District #189 in East St. Louis, IL., an Area Library Coordinator for Chicago Public Schools and a District Coordinator for the Mayor Daley Book Club for Middle School Students. She is a second-generation educator and holds Master's degrees in Library Information Science, Media Communications, and Education Leadership. Boyd currently serves on the executive boards for the District of Columbia Library Association and the Black Caucus of the American Library Association. She is an active committee member for the American Library Association Chapter Council representing Washington D.C., American Association of School Librarians Digital Tools Committee, and the EveryLibrary Institute/Advisory Board. Boyd is also a member of the District of Columbia Public Schools Library

Corps and is a representative of the Washington Teachers' Union Equity Collaborative. Boyd currently is a National Ambassador representing the Washington D.C. area for Checkology Virtual Classroom and The News Literacy Project.

Keith Curry Lance, Ph.D., is the principal investigator for SLIDE: The School Librarian Investigation—Decline or Evolution? This three-year project is funded by a Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian grant from the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services. As part of this study, he is analyzing district and state level data about school librarian employment from the National Center for Education Statistics. Prior to this project, he has been best known to school library audiences as the principal investigator of 15 state-level school library impact studies between 1993 and 2014. In 2018, he and Debra Kachel, SLIDE project director, joined forces on a series of articles about the status of school librarianship for Phi Delta Kappan, School Library Journal, and Teacher Librarian. That collaboration served as the catalyst for the SLIDE project.

Suzanna L. Panter is the Program Manager for School Libraries in Tacoma Washington. She has over 18 years of experience as a National Board-Certified educator, award-winning school librarian, and district library administrator. Suzanna is a Lilead Fellow and has published articles in Knowledge Quest, School Library Journal and School Library Connection, as well as presented at numerous state and national conferences. Suzanna has also spoken at SXSWedu, TxLA, and has been featured in Publishers Weekly as an expert in school librarianship.

Recommendations for Reflection

If hiring, retaining, or firing school librarians is based on policy priorities rather than funding scarcity, the implication for the Libraries.Today community may be that our traditional narratives about the role and impact of school librarians is fundamentally disconnected from the policy conversation. Another area of reflection is if credentialed librarians were indeed moved to classrooms rather than being eliminated during the pandemic, the Libraries.Today community should lean-in to help policymakers understand the positive impact of restoring those librarians to their libraries. Libraries.Today should consider convening another dedicated discussion of the SLIDE findings to help educate and inform our sector while preparing us for new policy conversations with relevant policymakers.

Space & Place Changes - Panel

Andrea Bono-Bunker, Shannon Isom, Diana Rendina, and Lauren Stara

Moderated by Emilee Williamson

<https://forum.libraries.today/talks/space-place/>

Andrea Bono-Bunker and Lauren Stara opened the panel with observations on pre-pandemic library design choices that benefitted library services during the pandemic. Exemplar public libraries during COVID were able to anticipate and adapt their spaces to evolving needs quickly and easily. In many places, pre-pandemic design choices like flexible shelving, wheeled units, and adaptive surfaces were advantageous during the pandemic. Features like self-checkout and self-service kiosks were utilized in school libraries upon a return to in-person instruction. A key consideration during the pandemic, and an ongoing need for public and staff health, is ventilation. Many libraries do not provide adequate ventilation. Outdoor spaces became a priority for those health and mitigation reasons. But the need for better ventilation and fresh air exchange will persist as the pandemic mitigations end. The pandemic alerted people to the need to improve indoor air quality in schools, libraries, workplaces, and other public settings.

Diana Rendina discussed the ways she had to adapt her school library space to in-person hybrid learning. Administration needed the space for classroom work. Pre-pandemic design choices about flexible shelving meant that Rendina could continue to make parts of the collection accessible to students during out of class time while accommodating the social distancing-driven need to convert the space into a classroom. She also used book carts to meet students in different parts of the building. This is a practice she is continuing post-mitigations. Likewise, her Maker Spaces were adapted to accommodate distancing requirements while serving instructional priorities.

Shannon Isom shared how her library was converted into an overflow lunchroom. Pre-pandemic, the library was used for instruction as well as browsing, but during the pandemic the space was used for three periods plus prep and cleanup for lunch. After lunch, students had access to the collection, Maker Space activities, and other library resources. Isom pushed into classrooms while the library was being used for lunch. Many students share that they enjoyed lunch in the library and would like to see it remain an option. Interestingly, while other school libraries around the country saw a significant uptick in the use of digital resources during the pandemic, Isom's library maintained a heavy use of print collections. The average age of her collection is 2004 and there are about 8 titles per student.

The moderator, Emilee Williamson, posed a question asking how dependent a school library program on is having an open and accessible space? The consensus response was that digital resources are a component of reading and learning, but the built environment, access to the print collection, opportunities to do interactive learning and creation – as well as the importance of informal and formal gatherings – are all crucial aspects of a physical library space. Bono-Bunker

identified that the space itself is a type of service. Likewise, the social and emotional aspects of non-instruction in-school time and self-directed reading are key.

Williamson asked the panel to identify pandemic-impacted changes that should continue beyond social distancing and hybrid learning. The panel agreed that the most crucial element is to make design and fixture choices that allow for maximum flexibility. Air handling and ventilation will continue to be a priority. But the pandemic also revealed that the location of the school library – its isolation or adjacency to other instructional or administrative spaces – should also be reconsidered. Interior spaces need to be enhanced as well for different distinct uses. From individual reading to group collaborative work and spaces for both formal and informal learning are key. Likewise, storage and backroom workspaces. Acoustics matter within the library space but also in the relationship to its academic neighbors.

Panelists were asked to provide cautionary tales about furniture and design that colleagues should avoid. Consensus was that study carrels, standard computer desks, curved shelving, bean bag chairs, wobble stools, booths, and odd-shaped furniture were all mentioned. There is always a balance between aesthetics and functionality. And the need for more outlets.

Panelist Biographies

Andrea Bono-Bunker has been a Library Building Specialist with the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners since 2018. Prior to joining the MBLC, she worked in almost every role in a public library from circulation assistant to director. As the Director of the Woburn Public Library in Woburn, MA, she oversaw a major renovation and expansion project, and, as the Head of Reference of the Newburyport Public Library in MA, she was involved in a redesign of the reference and teen spaces. A former high school English teacher, librarianship is her second career.

Shannon Isom, the Media Specialist at Orange Park Junior High School in Clay County (2015-), has taught in public schools for 19 years in Florida and Georgia. She holds a B.A in Business Administration, an M.E in Secondary Education, and a Specialist degree in Instructional Technology. Shannon's library earned Florida Power Library status in 2019. Since joining FAME in 2015, she has co-presented at several conferences on topics from Flipped classroom concept to genrefying your library collection. Locally, she supports school libraries by being a member of the NEFLIN Board of Directors after serving for several years as the focus group facilitator. At OPJH, Shannon collaborates with teachers across different subject areas and has established a student led book club. Shannon's vision is for the library to be a welcoming place for all, readers or nonreaders. For students to know that if they need help, the library is one of the places they can come.

Diana Rendina, MLIS, is the teacher librarian at Tampa Preparatory School, an independent 6-12 school. Previously, she was the media specialist at Stewart Middle Magnet School where she transformed their library. Diana has received several awards including the 2016 International

Society for Technology in Education Outstanding Young Educator Award and the 2015 American Association of School Librarians Frances Henne Award. She coauthored *Challenge-Based Learning in the School Library Makerspace* and authored *Reimagining Library Spaces: Transform Your Space on Any Budget*. You can find her at RenovatedLearning.com

Lauren Stara is a registered architect and a professional librarian, specializing in library building design. Her library experience includes everything from front desk clerk to director, university lecturer, and consultant across the US and Canada. She is a WELL Accredited Professional and the coauthor of *Responding to Rapid Change in Libraries: A User Experience Approach* (ALA Editions, 2020).

Recommendations for Reflection

In the main, school library redesigns post-COVID will not be done independently of other needs in the school. School librarians and library space consultants will have real-world experiences for how library spaces should be properly configured. However, if the observation by other presenters and panels that administrators are under-informed and unfamiliar with the work of school librarians there is no reason to assume that our space redesign needs will find a properly attuned ally with administrators. The Libraries.Today community should consider ways to inform and influence architects, designers, space planners, administrators, and boards about the unique needs of a school library within a school project.

Proceedings and Insights

Day 3 – Looking Ahead (Collective Impact)

Presented on May 21, 2022

WTP?!? What's the Puck? – Keynote

Mark Ray

Archive: <https://forum.libraries.today/talks/day-3-keynote/>

Mark Ray was invited to help move the Libraries.Today conversation from a retrospective view of how school libraries reacted and adapted to COVID-influenced pressures into a more forward-looking mode for reflection and planning. He began with a cautionary moment of reflection that suggests that any effort to forecast the future needs to first understand who is doing the forecasting. He then shared a framework of an After-Action Review that was developed by the US Army to help it assess the effectiveness of training and real-world experiences. After Action Reviews ask three questions: What did we do? What did we learn? And what can we do differently?

Ray then posed a library version of those questions to the audience. The first question was “Why did we need to have libraries in the past?” Ray’s answer was “Libraries enjoyed a monopoly information and literacy was literally bound in books magazines and newspapers and librarians largely defined and managed how you got to it, access to these resources required space, taxonomies, access systems, and specialists going to the library was like going to Denmark information was a destination. And once we arrived, its use required understanding a language and processes that were both foreign and necessarily learned.” His continued to develop a thesis about the perception of libraries based in that framework. “This historical reality is increasingly forgotten or overlooked by generations younger than mine. Yet it is part of the shared memory and life experience of the generation that constitutes the current majority of educational and political decision makers as such. It is part of the current mental model for libraries.” According to Ray, we need to understand the mental model of decisionmakers, especially in education settings, whether we share it or not.

Ray then shared unofficial insights from his work as a volunteer member of the SLIDE project interview team. The SLIDE team is currently interviewing school administrators about their perceptions, their mental models, of school librarians and school library programs. This qualitative research is designed to inform the NCES analysis about the state of the profession.

Several themes have emerged for Ray from 15 early SLIDE interviews:

- A perception that ubiquitous technology and online access has decentralized information access.
- Absence of data and clear connection of library impact on measurable student learning outcomes.
- Lack of administrator training and insights into modern ways of thinking about school library programs.
- Zombie Librarians or stuff-centric library programs.
- Librarians unable, unwilling, or overlooked as instructional Partners.
- Libraries and Librarians competing with other Educators and priorities.

Ray voiced several concerns about these themes. One is that supervisors and administrators may not perceive the library as necessary. Another is that there may not be a clear connection between library impacts and student learning outcomes. Another concern is that administrators, supervisors, and principals do not receive any formal training or orientation to what school librarians do or are capable of. In general, the current mental models may hamper our ability to reposition the sector. Likewise, if school libraries and librarians are not perceived as a priority, competitive pressures may lead to cuts.

In Ray's assessment, many of the perceptions voiced by his SLIDE sample interviews are also troubling because they place school librarians on the side of school librarians and not on the side of students and other educators. He is concerned that we are being perceived, rightly or wrongly, as an inward-focused profession. He would like to encourage a change in behavior and attitudes among librarians in order to advance the perception of the profession among decision-makers.

Ray suggests that school librarians need to lean into our instructional roles, culturally responsive pedagogy, and look at ways to help students succeed in social-emotional settings. In short, we should be more people-oriented and less stuff focused. While school librarians have ongoing management responsibilities, effective school librarians are

Speaker Biography

Mark Ray is a former teacher librarian, district administrator, and 2012 Washington State Teacher of the Year who is leading, teaching, and supporting school librarians at the national and regional level. He has helped lead the Future Ready Librarians initiative since 2016 and is currently part of the IMLS-funded SLIDE research project examining national school library staffing. In Washington State, he teaches in the teacher librarian certification program at Antioch University Seattle and has led grants focused on instructional partnership, instructional technology, media literacy, and

educator professional learning. In addition to his 2016 TEDx Talk, he has presented internationally and has written for a dozen professional publications and blogs.

Digital Distress - Session

Dr. Roberto Gallardo and Benjamin St. Germain

Archive: <https://forum.libraries.today/talks/digital-distress/>

Educators need to understand the home environment of their students in order to anticipate what barriers to learning may exist outside of the school day. Dr. Roberto Gallardo and Benjamin St. Germain were invited to provide a high-level overview of a relatively new informatics tool designed to help educators understand a critical component of at-home learning: the digital and online capabilities of their students' residential settings. Their Digital Distress Metric accounts for the presence or absence of four at-home digital capabilities aggregated at the census tract level.

Gallardo contextualized that the use of the term "Digital Distress" is to clarify and concretize the concept of the digital divide. Prior to COVID, the concepts of digital inclusion or exclusion were more abstract and not in common use. The inspiration for a digital distress metric came from well-known economic distress metrics that typically look at unemployment and income levels. However, a similar metric for digital distress was not available. According to Gallardo, "Until 2017, there wasn't really any internet data available from the US Census. There were some datasets here and there, but nothing consistent until 2017 when the census started publishing indicators that we felt could help us tell the story about digital distress." Pre-pandemic variables looked primarily at broadband access and speed tests. While these metrics provide insights, digital distress provides a different picture of the digital inclusion landscape.

In addition to broadband infrastructure, the index looks at four metrics to measure and map digital well-being or digital distress:

- Percent of homes with a cellular data only internet subscription
- Percent of homes with no internet access (not subscribing)
- Percent of homes relying on mobile devices only
- Percent of homes not owning a computing device

The digital distress resources are hosted by Purdue University and include a sophisticated mapping tool that shows a digital distress score on over 80,000 census tracts in all 50 states. Each census tract includes eight attributes of information: household cellular data only, no internet access, mobile-only, no computer device, race, educational attainment, and percentage of poverty. The digital distress indicator for each census tract is reported as low, moderate, or high.

For educators and school librarians, it is very useful to understand the levels of digital distress your students are experiencing at home. If families do not have internet access at home, they are more than likely only using cellular data, which has limited data plans and, typically, devices with smaller screens. Homes that only rely on cellular data may run out of data halfway through the month. If a household is using only mobile devices (no computers, no desktops, no laptops) it could also place a home in digital distress because it's harder to use more sophisticated applications online.

Readers can find a longer discussion of Digital Distress by Roberto Gallardo on Medium at <https://medium.com/design-and-tech-co/digital-distress-what-is-it-and-who-does-it-affect-part-1-e1214f3f209b>. The mapping tool is found at <https://pcrd.purdue.edu/ruralindianastats/broadband/distress.php>.

Speaker Biographies

Roberto Gallardo is the Director of the Purdue Center for Regional Development and an Agricultural Economics associate professor. He holds an electronics engineering undergraduate degree, a master's in economic development, and a Ph.D. in Public Policy and Administration. Gallardo has worked with rural communities over the past seventeen years conducting local & regional community economic development, including use of technology for development. He has authored more than 100 articles and reports including peer-reviewed and news-related regarding rural trends, socioeconomic analysis, industrial clusters, the digital divide, and leveraging broadband applications for community economic development. He also has assisted the state of Indiana implement their broadband programs acting as their Next Level Broadband Connections Director for six months. He is also the author of the book "Responsive Countryside: The Digital Age & Rural Communities", which highlights a 21st century community development model that helps rural communities transition to, plan for, and prosper in the digital age. Dr. Gallardo is a TEDx speaker and his work has been featured in a WIRED magazine article, a MIC.com documentary, and a RFDTV documentary.

Benjamin St. Germain is a GIS Analyst for the Purdue Center for Regional Development, joining the staff in 2015. Benjamin uses a variety of data collection, data analysis, and GIS spatial tools to help create a variety of reports, visualizations, and websites such as: housing, socio-economic, agricultural, forestry, fiscal, and broadband. Benjamin is also a member of the Purdue Economic Gardening team. Benjamin also oversees Rural Indiana Stats, which is a two-time award winner for excellence in GIS. Benjamin received his B.A. in Geography from Indiana University in 2013. Prior to working at PCRD, Benjamin was the GIS Technician for the Elkhart County Auditor in 2014 and completed his internship at the Michiana Area Council of Governments (MACOG) in 2013. He has authored more than 10 articles and reports including peer-reviewed and news-related regarding rural trends, socioeconomic analysis, industrial clusters, the digital divide, and leveraging broadband applications for community economic development.

Situational Awareness on State/Federal Legislation - Session

John Chrastka

Archive: <https://forum.libraries.today/talks/situational-awareness-on-statefederal-legislation/>

We must understand where these [legislative] attacks are coming from in order to make a good fight against them. School librarians need to articulate a comprehensive and cohesive philosophy of education, a philosophy of government, and a philosophy of public funding.

- John Chrastka

EveryLibrary is the national political action committee for libraries and the EveryLibrary Institute is a non-profit public policy, tax policy, and education policy think tank for libraries. John Chrastka was invited to present on legislative initiatives that are both hot spots and bright spots for school library programs and the future of school librarianship. In the main, most of the activity in the 2021-2022 school year has been in the states rather than in Congress. The terms positive and negative are themselves politically loaded. In Chrastka's view, positive legislation adds to the ability, authority, or funding for libraries and librarians while negative legislation seeks to limit or curtail the ability of librarians to serve or the public to access library services or collections.

Chrastka outlined eight characteristics of negative state level legislation that targeted school library programs and collections, the role of school librarians, and the structure of education. These include legislation that:

- Creates strict requirements regarding the materials that are allowed in class or in school libraries, often directly opposed to current state education standards.
- Requires school districts to post instructional materials online so parents can object.
- Claims that library databases contain materials that are harmful to minors.
- Removes the "defense from prosecution" (defense to criminal prosecutions from librarians and others for providing access to so-called "harmful materials").
- Defunds schools and public libraries that allow access to so-called "harmful materials".
- Prohibits discussions relating to race and sex in ways that they consider "coercive".
- Prohibits discussions that are LGBTQ positive.

While several other Libraries.Today speakers and panels have discussed the current political climate and its impact on book bans and campaigns to censor materials, Chrastka identified four different "vectors of attack" where negative legislation or performative censorship attacks originate. Chrastka stated, "We have to understand where this is coming from in order to make a good run against them when they come at us to have a co comprehensive and cohesive approach to our philosophy of education, our philosophy of government, our philosophy of public work as well as public funding for the common good." These are anti-educator groups, anti-access movements,

anti-public or anti-tax organizations, and anti-person campaigners at work sponsoring and advancing negative legislation in the states.

Anti-educator groups have a broad agenda to de-professionalize education and discredit educators. Some of the worst legislation would criminalize librarianship by removing librarians from defense from prosecution of obscenity statutes. Anti-access movements work to limit access to the collection through legislative initiatives that target state educational databases and content. Book bans and content censorship live here but so do stop words and over-filtering. Anti-public or anti-tax organizations include long-established think tanks like the American Enterprise Institute and the Heritage Foundation that work to defund public services and shrink government. Anti-person campaigners are actively using legislation to silence LGCTQ+ voices and eliminate BIPOC stories. The books and content are a proxy for these anti-personhood campaigns.

Chrastka highlighted several negative legislative initiatives coming from each of these vectors. Readers should visit https://www.everylibrary.org/2022_legislative_attacks to look more at dozens of bills in numerous states that took aim at school and public libraries. “There are nuances to these bills,” says Chrastka, “and there are also commonalities. If your state has not yet seen something like these bills, they are coming.” Politicians and activist have seen how effective these bills are in identifying and activating their base. Even solidly “blue” states have had some of these bills introduced in order to connect with a base of voters and donors.

Chrastka then pivoted to more positive legislation, again mostly at the state level. “We need to work in states to anticipate and cultivate success, not just monitor bills. We need to bolster success in ways that build up our ethical framework for school librarianship and public education. The action in the states. Congress has a role, but over the last 20 years Congress's role over has really been to authorize block grant funding while the states have to figure out how to spend that money in appropriate ways.” The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) is an example. State Education Agencies were required to write their own ESSA plan through a process of stakeholder engagements after the law was passed in late 2015. The plans were required to meet a certain set of federal goals, but each plan was allowed to be different because each state is different. Today, federal education funding is allocated in the states according to the plan.

Many library organizations celebrated that school libraries and librarians were included in ESSA. But there were no mandates that state education plans allocate funding to school libraries. School libraries were eligible to be funded but could only be authorized for funding if they were part of the state plan. Unfortunately, at the time, stakeholder engagement by school library associations was uneven or absent so very few gains were made to embed school libraries or librarians into state plans. Chrastka stressed that this low-level of stakeholder participation by state school library associations must change to see more positive policy and funding improvements for the sector.

Chrastka highlighted that the next opportunity for school librarians to influence the funding formula within the ESSA framework is coming. ESSA reset the national discussion on failing schools. A rubric to measure failing schools was established, but states had several years to experiment and implement their ESSA plans before measures of success and therefore measures of failure could be applied. That rubric is coming, and states will be required to make a new plan about how to turn around failing schools. Chrastka believes that school library stakeholders should be working now to inform and orient policymakers to ways that effective school libraries staffed by certified school librarians are core to fixing failing schools. “Is the presence or absence of a school library program an indicator of success or failure? It is mission critical for library stakeholders to actively participate in these stake level stakeholder policy discussions or we will not gain ground.

One positive Congressional initiative this session is the Educators For America Act which was introduced to help improve teacher and educator training and formation programs. School library masters and certification programs are in the draft of the bill currently being considered in the House Committee on Education and Labor. Keeping our programs as authorized programs in the bill is essential for funding to flow in the future. It is important to note that numerous state library associations are trying to advance “mandate bills” that would require states to employ certified school librarians. Without a pipeline of new school librarians, state legislators are less inclined to advance pro-librarian legislation.

At the state level, there were several positive pieces of legislation that Chrastka wanted to highlight, both to thank school library advocates but also to perhaps inspire others. Positive legislation has been introduced and even enacted this session. In Tennessee, they passed legislation that adds new a position at the state Departments of Education dedicated to school library issues. In Kentucky, the Read to Succeed Act will fund a new program for educator and school librarian preparedness. The New Jersey School Librarians Association sponsored an Information Literacy bill that is advancing, and a newly enacted Media Literacy bill in Delaware includes school librarians in the standards writing process. Readers should visit https://www.everylibrary.org/good_bills_this_session for a more comprehensive analysis.

Chrastka closed his talk with a forecast about the budget pressures that will be on schools and education that school librarians must consider, understand, and engage with. Pandemic relief funding from ARPA and ESSER will end soon. Federal relief funds are filling huge budget gaps in thousands of school district budgets. When it ends, school districts will make cuts. As Keith Curry Lance identified in his talk, budget cuts are often used as an excuse to eliminate school librarian positions. We need to be working now in policy-focused ways to inoculate ourselves against this future problem.

Speaker Biography

EveryLibrary's founder is John Chrastka, a long-time library trustee, supporter, and advocate. Mr. Chrastka is a former partner in AssociaDirect, a Chicago-based consultancy focused on supporting associations in membership recruitment, conference, and governance activities. He is a former president and member of the Board of Trustees for the Berwyn (IL) Public Library (2006 – 2015) and is a former president of the Reaching Across Illinois Libraries System (RAILS) multi-type library system. Prior to his work at AssociaDirect, he was Director for Membership Development at the American Library Association (ALA). He is a member of ALA as well as the Illinois Library Association (ILA), and the American Political Sciences Association (APSA). He was named a 2014 Mover & Shaker by Library Journal and tweets @mrchrastka.

Recommendations for Reflection

If states are the place where the most legislative and rules-making activity takes place about education, the Libraries.Today community should reflect on whether our sector's focus on a national library advocacy agenda has been useful. If a state-by-state or multi-state policy strategy is more useful, systems of mutual support among school library stakeholders may need to be realigned. State-level policy work does not need to be isolated. State education agencies are eager to see school librarian-enacted solutions to problems, but we need to bring them to the table.

Elementary: Moving Forward - Panel

Eryn Duffee, Jelicia Jimenez, Leticia Kalweit, and Robin Robarge

Moderated by Emilee Williamson

Archive: <https://forum.libraries.today/talks/moving-forward-elementary/>

This panel of elementary school librarians was invited to reflect and share about lessons learned during COVID dislocations and ways to move forward into a post-COVID educational landscape as effective school library programs. As moderator, Emilee Williamson used a combination of pre-prepared questions and questions from the live chat. The answers shared below are aggregated and summarized across the panelists to minimize duplications.

Question: What individual actions can school Librarians take to improve matters during these trying times?

- Take care of ourselves so we can take care of others.
- Really listening to the needs of the people I'm serving.
- Being realistic about what we can do and where the students are at.
- Rebuilding and maintaining strong connections with families and staff.
- Making sure our collections reflect and support the diverse student population.
- Get to know your collection through a project like generifying or weeding.

Question: What are some things that you have done or are continuing to do to support the social and emotional health with your students?

- Helping students whose experience of elementary school has only been during COVID to learn the social-emotional skills to self-regulate otherwise disruptive behaviors.
- Being aware that the pandemic isn't just about learning loss. It is a loss of social interactions.
- Having the personal patience to understand that a return to normal may not happen quickly for our youngest students and the institutional awareness that we may not want to return to such a ridged pedagogy.
- Finding pathways for elementary students to have a sense of personal ownership to the library as a shared space.
- Simplifying instructional designs to allow students to be more self-paced in their learning.

Question: Can we talk about ways of including diverse titles and anti-racist topics without traumatizing our BIPOC students?

- Find ways of highlighting black and brown joy and empowerment, highlighting the stories of triumph really makes our students feel like they can see themselves in that light.
- Make sure that you have LGBTQIA books that promoting joy and not only coming out stories, which are needed and wonderful, but we also need stories with LGBTQIA people leading normal lives.

- Do collection development with a “mirrors and windows” approach because for majority White communities the books are a window to the wider world.
- Not every Black and Brown student will be a victim of a shooting, but every Black and Brown student will be a victim of institutional racism in school.

Question: What have you done to support DEI efforts in your library, and have you seen a recent push back against them?

- Do what you feel comfortable with to brand the library as a welcoming and safe place.
- Actively question if books by authors like Dr. Seuss still deserve space on the shelf when so many other more inclusive titles are now available.
- Find titles that reflect the wide experiences of BIPOC children and lead with person-first language. Helping teachers to learn this skill as well.
- The ways that libraries and catalogs assign subject headings need to be evaluated, understood, and corrected.

Question: How did you work to rebuild and build a culture of reading and the general school culture as students returned to in-person learning?

- Restorative practices encourage self-directed and self-paced learning.
- Incentivized reading with games and rewards, especially to help diversify their reading away from digital-only.
- Arranging the collection in a way that supports browsing and readers advisory.
- While the state standards are very important, talking with students about their own reading interests is key.
- Encouraging teachers and administrators to model good reading behaviors to their students.
- Bring authors into the schools to humanize the experience of reading and writing.
- Use a tool like Destiny Engage to help student recommend books and read to each other.
- Keep the collection current (weeding) and model your browsing on bookstores.

Question: What are some useful tools or strategies or programs that you found that were necessary during pandemic or remote learning that you're still finding useful now that we're back to in person learning?

- Building out the library’s online presence with both advice and inspiration.
- Create a social media presence for the school library to connect with parents.
- Library newsletters that include parenting supports as well as reading advice.
- Finding ways to continue engagement with the whole family.

Question: As we're looking forward to these increasingly digital interactions and schools and libraries, how do we address the concerns with screen time, especially with our primaries in elementary school?

- Set the stage for future information literacy success by focusing early and consistently on critical thinking and cognitive skills building.

- Promoting that the use of screens and technology should be informative and engaging and not as passive. Encouraging ways of thinking about screen time are like the differences between healthy food and junk food.
- Bring an SEL framework into the discussion to help children recognize the signs that screens are having a negative impact on them.

The breakout session was small enough to host in one virtual room. The main question for the room asked about ways to bridge the gaps that were caused or reinforced by distance learning. Solutions included integrating more games and gaming into the curriculum, using art as a means of engaging different learning styles, and finding additive projects like puzzles that encourage cooperation. The discussion also included observations about administrators and teachers who attempt to limit the number of books a student can check out, perhaps in a misguided or misunderstood approach to ensuring access or moderating expectations. There was universal interest in putting more books into more students' hands.

Panelist Biographies

Eryn Duffee is the librarian at Edmonds Heights K-12, a public school offering classes to homeschooled students in the suburbs of Seattle. She was previously a school librarian in Tennessee, where she was heavily involved in state-wide library advocacy efforts, especially regarding intellectual freedom challenges. Eryn is a proponent of genrefied library collections, graphic novels for reluctant readers, and self-selected reading for all students. She is preparing to teach coding and information literacy classes in the Fall. Eryn was the Legislative co-chair and Board Secretary for the Tennessee Library Association. She founded the Tennessee Library Ecosystem Coalition (TLEC) and helped solidify collaborative advocacy among different library types in Tennessee. The group notably created several position statements opposing legislative actions to restrict intellectual freedom in Tennessee schools that were then signed by the boards of all three major library organizations in the state. TLA, TASL, and TLEC recently won the Gerald Hodges Intellectual Freedom Chapter Award from the Intellectual Freedom Round Table.

Jelicia Jimenez is a Library and Media Specialist at Elmwood Village Charter School in Buffalo, NY. Most of her childhood was spent lost in a book, and she hopes to inspire a future generation to fall in love with reading as much as she did. Jelicia has a bachelor's degree in Secondary English Education and a Masters of Science in Library and Information Science. She recently co-founded a nonprofit in Buffalo, NY called Black Boys Read Too with the mission to address access to information by getting books in kid's hands by any means necessary. She is also the winner of the 2022 Outstanding Librarian Award given by Senator Sean Ryan and represents Western New York in her accolade. Jelicia is a 2022 Excellence in Education Award Finalist and graduate of Open Buffalo's Emerging Leaders class of '20. She enjoys finding ways to get involved in and around the Buffalo community and hopes to continue inspiring a generation of emerging readers and inquirers.

Leticia Kalweit is the library media specialist at Cobbles Elementary School in Penfield, NY serving grades K-5. She has previously held library positions in Hilton, Greece, and Gananda school districts. She holds a Master's in Library Science and a Bachelor of Music. Leticia was drawn to libraries for their power to be a place in which all students can discover and build on their own unique interests as well as experience a sense of wonder and see the connections among all subject areas. Leticia has served as a book reviewer for School Library Connection, presented at the BOCES 2 Tech Camp on the subject of a combined fixed/flexible library program and accompanying curriculum to support that, and is currently pursuing a Certificate of Advanced Study in Educational Leadership. She also remains actively involved in local arts organizations and has presented at Finger Lakes Community College's Honoring the Muse series and collaborated on a song set, "Silent Observer," based on her poetry performed at The Tank in New York City. Leticia credits her unique background and circuitous pathway to librarianship with giving her broad perspectives and building resilience. In her current role, she strives to create an environment in which all disciplines are equally valued, all students' perspectives and experiences are honored and in which students are comfortable to express themselves and experience the interconnectedness among all disciplines and individuals.

Robin Robarge is an educator with over twenty years of working with children ages 4-20, the past 15 years as a library media specialist. Robin's primary focus centers around the belief that books and creative exploration lead to happier and more productive humans. Three years ago, she left a school district where she had over twenty years of experience teaching, to move to a small, rural district where she would be the only librarian for all grades, preK-12th grade. It was the best career decision ever! She has been working harder, making an impact with kids who are sharing their love and excitement for books and reading, making and doing!

Secondary: Moving Forward - Panel

TuesD Chambers, Molly Dettmann, and Elissa Malespina

Moderated by Julie Hengenius

Archive: <https://forum.libraries.today/talks/secondary-moving-forward/>

To open the panel, moderator Julie Hengenius asked the panel what they love about their role in a Secondary School? The panelists are all very motivated by their relationships with students and by how dynamic the school library program is for this age group. They enjoy their students as people and appreciate their unique role. Hengenius continued with questions on several broad topics. The answers shared below are aggregated and summarized across panelists to minimize duplications.

Challenges with Secondary School Libraries

- Getting students to want to read is more difficult than in elementary and middle schools. Try to get teachers to understand the value of independent reading.
- Getting colleagues and teachers to understand what school librarians' capabilities are and to see school librarians as collaborators
- Positioning the school library as a place that is attractive, interesting, and a dynamic destination.
- Training the administration that libraries are not quiet because a library supports the ability of kids to be kids.

Collaborations with Teachers

- Set up independent reading clubs that support reading and learning across the curriculum.
- Because teachers are so overworked right now, it's ok to forgive ourselves for a slow restart after the COVID pivot.
- Integrate math and not just reading into the library space.
- New teachers are often required to do inter-departmental collaborations, so a school librarian is an ideal partner for early career teachers.
- Create systems that ensure collaborations are institutionally validated and legitimate.
- Find out what your teachers are passionate about personally and professionally and focus your collaborations on those passions.
- Rebranded the library as the literacy and learning lab for teachers.

COVID Silver Linings

- The pandemic forced us to become one-to-one district.
- The district needed to roll-out a system-wide learning management system and the library was the tech support and instructional design support for that roll-out.
- Pedagogical challenges encouraged teachers to experience the school librarian as a co-teacher and not only a "helper".

- Cultivating good supports from principals and central administration means focusing on collaboration with the principal in similar ways to collaborations with teachers and encouraging administrators to engage and promote library data and statistics as a cohesive part of district learning goals.

Social and Emotional Needs

- Students need to feel safe and welcome in the library space. Books on LGBTQ, race, culture and non-majority viewpoints need to be in the space.
- Children are struggling, and they need a space to unwind. Our spaces need to be what the children say they need.
- Invite student clubs to use the library as their meeting space and activity venue whenever possible.
- Intentionally craft social experiences that help kids to interact with each other without screens mediating the interactions. This includes puzzles, Lego walls, and gaming events.
- The library has rules and expectations. This is beneficial to students who need a kind of supportive comfort that comes from structure.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

- Diversity audits need to happen and purchasing needs to be proactive.
- School library policies need to be reviewed and updated. This includes the collection development policies and challenge review policies.
- School library policies should extend beyond the library by referencing and integrating district educational goals and standards.
- Look at your own biases and read widely. Then weed smartly.
- Encouraging students to read outside of their own race and class.
- Consider and renew your commitment to ensuring that the library collection and practice align with the district mission and values and state standards.

In the small group session, the conversation continued about ways to incorporate new learning tools like Virtual Reality headsets into the library. People offered advice on programming as well as important topics like cost and safety concerns.

Panelist Biographies

TuesD Chambers serves as a teacher librarian at Ballard High School in Seattle Public Schools. She has been an educator for over twenty-two years and earned her MEd in Professional Development and Leadership with a media library endorsement. She teaches digital leadership, literacy, and 21st Century skills to students and was chosen as the Washington State Teacher Librarian of the Year for 2019. She has presented at ISTE, SXSW EDU, and OC6 about the intentional use of technology to impact the learning and culture of a school. She is a firm believer in the power of collaboration and works with teachers and librarians to create student-centered classrooms in her role as a Content

Library Specialist. Find her on Twitter @BeaverReaders, or Instagram at @beaverreadersbhs as she loves to connect with other passionate educational leaders.

Molly Dettmann began her library career at the Moore Public Library as a Teen Librarian for 4 years before starting at North during the 2018-2019 school year. She has served in several library leadership roles including chairing the Oklahoma Library Association's (OLA) Intermediate Sequoyah Reading Team, Sequoyah Administration Committee, Children's and Teen Services Roundtable, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Intellectual Freedom Roundtable, and Oklahoma School Librarians (OKSL) as Secretary. She also coordinated the Young Adult Library Association's (YALSA) 2021 and 2022 Quick Picks for Reluctant Readers Blogging Team. She was named the 2021-2022 Teacher of the Year for Norman North High School and a 2022 finalist for Norman Public Schools Teacher of the Year. Molly is married to a fellow teacher, and they have a dog named Coco, who is her mom's favorite reading buddy.

Elissa Malespina is a Teacher Librarian at Verona High School in Verona NJ and is also a member of the South Orange - Maplewood Board of Education. Elissa has been an educator for over 20 years in various roles such as History Teacher, Technology and STEM Supervisor, and teacher-librarian. She is Past President of the ISTE Librarians Network, NJ Future Ready Librarians Chairperson, and was recently named one of the Top 100 Ed Tech Influencers by EdTech Digest. You can find out more about her at elissamalespina.com and @elissamalespina. *The Views are her own and not that of the South Orange Maplewood Board of Education

District/Regional: Moving Forward - Panel

Blake Hopper, Michelle Jarrett, and Lindsey Kimery

Moderated by Priscille Dando

Archive: <https://forum.libraries.today/talks/districtregional-moving-forward/>

Moderator Priscille Dando opened the panel by acknowledging that the role of school librarians has changed during the pandemic and asked a question the panelists how they see things moving forward and what changes would they like to see persist. Answers have been summarized for length and edited for readability.

Blake Hopper: Overall, I feel that my librarians have become more flexible and have come up with innovative ways to make sure in those books get into kids' hands and making sure that we keep our online resources up to date, so students have access all the time.

Michelle Jarrett: When everything started two years ago, I saw such a huge need right away for my media specialist to pull out their technology tools to remind themselves of all the technology [resources] that they knew and to share them with their staff members and all their students. I think moving forward what I am seeing is they've become even more confident with the technology tools that they have. But now I'm seeing a shift back to traditional literacy tools. As they're moving forward that traditional collection development [role] that librarians have and that shift in focus back to librarians as literacy leaders.

Lindsey Kimery: In August of 2020, the focus was on the distribution and management of [one-to-one] devices in our district. The library played a huge role in that, and we are kind of in the growing pains of adjusting to it. One-to-one is such an important tool to have. It's a vehicle for learning and it opens up so many more opportunities for our students to access the different resources that we have in our libraries. But [we are] seeking some balance in that, too, so that our librarians are not too heavily tasked with the troubleshooting and keeping those devices up and running, and they have the time to support the literacy focus and learning and provide opportunities for students that nourish and nurture their curiosity and set them on the path to becoming lifelong readers.

Priscille Dando: As cases are surging in Virginia right now, [the problem] is that we do not have enough substitutes. When you talk about being flexible, our superintendent has said "all hands on deck". Librarians are being called in as classrooms substitutes, more than ever. It's been interesting from my perspective to see when we have this all hands on deck mode that we've had for these last few years is how some librarians have really had their role spotlighted and elevated. They have become part of the leadership team that they weren't in before, or they've creatively found solutions that now are really going to move forward.

Michelle Jarrett: I think this year has been the hardest year that they have had... because of exactly what you're saying. That increased demand because of the lack of personnel. Almost all of my elementary media specialists are not only teaching, often on the block, but they're also the testing coordinators in their schools and they are textbook coordinators. They are serving for recess duty they're serving for lunch duty. They are doing substitute courses. We went one-to-one this year so they're helping with that distribution (even though we have technology people at every school) it's been massive, the number of requirements that they have had.

Question: How do you support your librarians and build community, especially in a large district?

Lindsey Kimery: Over the course of the [pandemic], anytime we're able to be in the same space together it just feels different. We may not have loved professional development in the past, but we appreciate that we are together now. We have been building in more time in our professional development session to just spend time talking with each other, allowing librarians to visit with each other, to talk and laugh and share and connect. Getting into groups and talking about what it's been like and supporting each other and listening and helping to problem solve and provide suggestion, because it was very hard.

Michelle Jarrett: My people feel very comfortable with me, so they call me and say what are you thinking? Why would you send us an email or call me like that? So that level of comfort can be good, and sometimes can be bad. But I do appreciate that they can say to me, Michelle, we are not well, and we need you to recognize that I need to concentrate on their mental health, a little bit better, and I can tell them when they need to concentrate on my mental health too.

Blake Hopper: [The pandemic] has also highlighted how important it is to have a librarian in the leadership... So it's been really good. I think the librarians feel more appreciated now, so that has been another positive out of this. They had felt like they were left out all the time, but I don't think they feel left out like that anymore.

Question: From a library leader's perspective, how do you see students' perception of the library changing, and are you able to track those changes?

Lindsey Kimery: [We have] expanded digital options for our students and new ways to engage with digital content. We've worked to increase our eBook and digital audio offerings. Then there is asynchronous learning that our librarians are putting together and making available for students who are quarantined, or who are ill, or are learning from home, or just need support.

Blake Hopper: One of my hospital librarians made up maker space packs that the students could check out... We set up Little Free Libraries up around outside of the school and areas around the school... We work with our public libraries to make sure that they have our records, and our kids can access the resources they have.

Michelle Jarrett: Looking at our student experience, we had a very robust eBook collection [before the pandemic]. At some schools, students were very familiar with how to use it, but others weren't as experienced. I feel like district-wide our students are now very experienced at how to get eBooks. They know how to use our public library. We have a cross [relationship] with our public library so that every student has a student library card. I think the one student experience that has been interesting is the mental health piece. Because we are in the shadow of Disney World we have had families that have experienced the loss of income and mental health struggles much longer than some other places across the country. Our students are still not Okay.

Panelist Biographies

Blake Hopper is in his ninth year in education. He the librarian at Tazewell - New Tazewell Primary School in New Tazewell, TN. He is a Past President of TASL and past chair of AASL Chapter Assembly. He is passionate about collaboration, student voice, and getting books into students' hands. Keep up with Blake on Twitter @pvslibrarian and Instagram @travelingguybrarian.

Michelle Jarrett has served as the Library Supervisor for the School District of Osceola County, Florida for the past six years. She was previously a middle school library media specialist for 11 years. Michelle has been integral to creating new library spaces in both new and redesigned buildings, in addition to creating and advocating for a robust shared digital library for all of Osceola's 60,000 students. She has served in many capacities within the Florida Association for Media in Education (FAME), including the legislative chairperson and president in 2014-2015. Michelle is again serving as FAME president through December 2022. Michelle is a member of ALA, AASL, and is a member of the Elementary Advisory Board for Penguin/Random House Books.

Lindsey Kimery is Coordinator of Library Services at Metro Nashville Public Schools in Nashville, Tennessee, Chair of the 2021-2022 AASL Chapter Delegates, 2021 President of the Tennessee Association of School Librarians, AASL Supervisors Section Chair-Elect, and serves on the board of Future Ready Libraries. In her not-so-spare time, she works as an author assistant. She lives in Franklin, TN, with her sons. Connect with her on Twitter and Instagram: @LindsKAnderson

Closing Reflections

The May 2022 National Forum was conceived as a moment to capture stories, level-set the profession on common experiences, and start to look ahead to integrating best practices across schools and districts alongside substantive policy conversations. In general, the May 2022 National Forum met those goals. The keynotes, sessions, and panels surfaced a set of common concerns for the future of school librarianship and a set of common causes that school librarians could rally around. These types of challenges are fundamentally destabilizing to school librarians and require these new, more situationally aware responses. Future National Forums should continue to reflect on and explore the validity and veracity of these themes.

One theme was a discussion and understanding of the differences between legitimate and illegitimate book challenges. Legitimate challenges and concerns by parents were generally accepted by the speakers as being a normal, necessary, and even welcome part of being a school librarian or First Amendment activist. The dialog about age relevance, content, and overall appropriateness is a healthy part of civil society, and likely improves the conduct of education. It is situations where the challenges lack legitimacy either in their origin (i.e., when no one in the local school is a party to the challenge and it is coming from an outside and coordinated organization) or in their execution (school boards abrogate their responsibilities to policy or administrators put books on vacations).

A second theme was a deep understanding that performative and politicized book challenges and legislative attacks will target the structure of education, integrity of school librarianship, and the dignity of the students. This means that these issues extend far beyond the defense of the freedom to read. Speakers touched on the need for school librarians to build skills, networks, and a vocabulary to address these meta-alignments. There was a consistent awareness among speakers and panelists that this is a unique moment for school librarians to articulate their value and worth to administrators, parents, educators, and society at large. But it is also a singularly urgent moment to go beyond our traditional spaces to build the relationships we need to not only defend but to extend our work.

A third concern was that without active engagement about policy issues, school librarianship will always be in a defensive advocacy posture. There is no evidence that remaining quiet in the face of a challenge or attempting to accommodate unreasonable legislative will succeed. There was an acknowledgement across presentations that we may not succeed quickly, and that rebuilding a policy framework which aligns with our educational values will take time, but we must be involved in the fight for ideas and ideals.

Several speakers reminded us that there is a profound and useful role for school libraries beyond instructional support. It should be important for our community to refocus attention on supporting

a culture of reading and practice of reading. But this refocusing needs to be integrated into a larger education policy conversation for it to have a true collective impact.

There were significant common experiences for school librarians during COVID that this report intended to capture and record. Several topics and themes reverberated across panels and sessions. One was a reflection on the disruptions to the identity of being a school librarian when there is no physical space to be occupied by the library itself. While there are very practical ways to accommodate and anticipate layout and design changes of any space, there is an important philosophical discussion about the identity of school librarianship in a digital era that Libraries.Today should continue to support.

Likewise, it will be important for this project to keep its eyes on the students our community serves. Many panelists and speakers discussed the deep social and emotional impact that the pandemic-related disruptions have had on individual students and families, educators and administrators, and our profession as well. Stresses like these are either plastic, where the negative mindsets become permanent, or elastic, where we can rebound from stress. The Libraries.Today project can play an important role in supporting more elasticity through mutual aid.

In the Evaluation Plan, Goal 1 is to “identify changes made to school library programs as a result of exigent circumstances during the COVID-19 public health emergency”. Indicators of success are that the Libraries.Today community will identify and describe how COVID pressures on education changed school library programs, school librarian positions, and other aspects of school libraries. The May 2022 National Forum appears to have accomplished this goal.

Goal 2 is to “Facilitate community conversations during each national forum using a collective impact model to evaluate the impact of changes to school library programs during the pandemic.” The project plan states that indicators for success are “Through reflective conversations, participants of the forum evaluate and describe the positive and negative impacts of and propose recommendations to address the changes made during the COVID pandemic.” Likewise, it appears that the indicators of success are being met through the May 2022 National Forum and should continue into subsequent ones.

As the project continues, the Libraries.Today leadership and advisory board appear committed to Goal 3, which is to “Identify, publish, and widely distribute a series of school library forum reports establishing best practices and policy recommendations for post-COVID school libraries” with indicators of success being that “Best practices for addressing positive and negative changes initiated during the pandemic are distributed to and implemented by school librarians and stakeholders for successful post-COVID school libraries.” With the learning, discovery, and discussions from the May 2022 National Forum in hand, the Libraries.Today project is poised to realize its aims and hopes for collective impact solutions to the challenges and opportunities facing school librarianship.

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