It’s early September, and school librarians across the country are back in school. Some of us are returning to programs that benefit from strategic planning initiatives, with clear goals and objectives for the year created by a library advisory committee (LAC), a group of educators, students, and parents who support our school library programs. Those of us without strategic plans are prioritizing our tasks and attempting to meet the needs of our school communities based on our own knowledge, beliefs, and experience. In both cases, we are guided by a vision of what we want our programs to be. We imagine the future, and we make plans to get there.

School librarians work with a variety of media and tools, including new technologies, to reach our goals for student learning. To guide us, we have various documents from AASL, including Empowering Learners and Standards for the 21st-Century Learner, plus state and national standards, including the Common Core State Standards. This issue of KQ is all about the benefits of collegial strategic planning that seeks to clarify the role of the school library program with the goal of increasing student learning.

The issue kicks off with the article “Plan for Success: The AASL Planning Guide for Empowering Learners.” It leads us through a process of planning for the school library program through this online tool from AASL.

Essential to this planning process is the establishment of an LAC. This issue features a trio of articles on the use of LACs in planning. Janie Pickett shares her experience of establishing an LAC in a new school, and Nancy Cravey details how her school library’s LAC helped implement the Common Core State Standards. If you are among the 90 percent who reported in a recent survey that they don’t have an LAC (One Question Survey Results 2008), you will want to read Meghan Harper and Jennifer Schwelik’s guide to creating one.

Numerous authors in this issue talk about having a vision and goals to guide planning. Mary Keeling shares the story of how school librarians in one school system worked collaboratively on a mission statement for school library programs that supported the educational mission of the school system.

School librarians’ plans are imbued with our best hopes for our libraries, our programs, and, most importantly, our students. Through engaged, inquiry-based learning, access to high-quality relevant literature and information, and use of the latest technologies, school library programs help prepare students to become literate, informed citizens and lifelong learners. An award-winning team of a school librarian Kay Wejrowski and her principal Mat McRae shares examples of a vibrant collaborative effort focused on student reading and learning. Jennifer Robins and Patricia Antrim discuss Response to Intervention (RtI) and the role school librarians play in planning and supporting interventions for individual students. The activities involved in collaboratively planning lessons and units with a teacher team are the subject of “Pass the Chocolate: Planning with Teachers.”
The work of bringing imagination to reality and undertaking the steps to a desired future requires making designs to get there. Frances Bryant Bradburn shares the steps involved in Design Thinking and challenges us to consider both the spaces where we work and our evolving roles in those spaces. IdaMae Craddock offers a means of bringing the real world into school through community assessment of students’ work as we help students imagine and plan for their futures in our communities.

As we imagine the future, we are always cognizant of new technologies shaping our work spaces, our roles, and our students. Sylvia Knight Norton outlines a process for technology planning, underscoring the leadership role of the school librarian, while Melissa Johnston reminds us of the necessity of incorporating and supporting other technology leaders in today’s schools.

Four online exclusives (available at <www.ala.org/aasl/aaslpubsandjournals/knowledgequest/archive/v42no1>) offer additional insights into planning. In “Strategic Planning and AASL: Envisioning Our Future and Remaining Relevant,” Susan Ballard, immediate past president, shares AASL’s strategic planning process to help advance the school library profession. In “Makin’ It Real: Building a Bright 3-D Future for Planning,” Bob King introduces three tools from instructional design and architecture and suggests we look for the added real-world dimension in our work. In “Making Time for Professional Development When There Is None,” Michelle Luhtala shares how technology tools were used in a planning and assessment process that also served as professional development. Wendy DeGroat and Steven Yates, guest editors of the January/February 2012 issue of KQ on futurecasting, revisit their view of the future and invite us to make wise plans for collection development and technology as we look ahead to the future and imagine what kinds of literacies our students will need.

The features in this issue explore how to plan effectively for meaningful school library programs. A constant theme that emerges is that of collaboration in program planning. To create highly effective programs that meet students’ and colleagues’ needs—resulting in improved academic achievement—we, as school librarians, must solicit the input and assistance of the greater school community and the support of the building principal. As educational leaders, we work closely with our school communities to articulate the library program’s mission, providing the foundation for program development. Our tasks are to assess the current program, address the changes confronting it, and clearly understand and define users’ needs. This information is critical to create realistic and attainable goals and objectives that identify our school’s teaching and learning priorities and provide direction for the school library program as we help students learn and grow.

The school year starts with such promise for the full year ahead. It’s easy to have big dreams and to see the potential for growth in our students and our school library programs. But soon the school year sweeps us up in its momentum of schedules and quarterly expectations, and our lofty dreams are replaced with daily tasks and demands. An artist friend of one of us recently posted the following as her status on Facebook: “Arg. Having ideas for art and having none of them work when you try to put them on paper is terrible.” Her post aptly captures the tension inherent in the theme of this issue, the pull between imagination and the reality of making, implementing, and re-evaluating plans.

School librarians are artists. We work with tools and resources to create opportunities for student learning. We imagine futures for our students, our school libraries, our programs, our schools, and ourselves. Imagination requires work and planning to put ideas on the drawing board, ideas that will eventually lead to innovation and positive results for our students. The most important resource we have in this endeavor is collaboration with our stakeholders and colleagues.

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Work Cited: