



Grassroots task forces have the potential to change what we do and how we teach.

Connections, Communication, Collaborations . . . Are We There Yet?

Sara Kelly Johns, 2007–2008 AASL President

As the swiftest year of my life nears an end, it's time for reflection about and recommitment to the AASL Big Hairy Audacious Goal: "To achieve universal recognition of school library media specialists as indispensable educational leaders." Are we there yet? Or are we gaining on it?

I think we are.

"BHAG," a term familiar to many who work with organizations and comes from Jim Collin's books, *Built to Last* and *Good to Great*, the latter a "group read" for the AASL Board when Dawn Vaughn was AASL president in 2004–05. The AASL BHAG was developed as part of the strategic planning process that resulted in the plan adopted by the AASL board in 2005. Our strategic plan has guided the work of the organization and is available on our website.

At the AASL conference in Reno, the general session opened with an engaging video, a "wow" moment, which ended with the message "Are you ready . . . for what comes next?" The clip highlighted the concepts of connection, communication, and collaboration and has reverberated through my head all year www.ala.org/ala/aasl/conferencesandevents/aaslconferences.cfm.

What came next? At that session, the new *AASL Standards for 21st Century Learners* was released and began a stimulating discussion among the profession on what the future means for learners and for our teaching. But they are hardly all that is moving AASL and the profession forward through connecting, communicating, and collaborating—the work

of our members and the AASL staff makes a difference for what comes next.

It was another "wow" moment for me when I walked into the all-committee meeting at ALA Midwinter Meeting in Philadelphia. I was drawn into all the important work going on there by so many dedicated AASL committee members, task force members, and AASL staff, who, supported by virtual members, were using their talent and energy to move AASL closer to reaching our BHAG by jetting AASL into the future. The video's refrain swam back into my mind again.

Connection

AASL makes "connections" for its members and the profession as it strives to meet its core purpose of providing leadership for excellence through professional development to improve practice and through promotion, public relations, and advocacy for excellence. This year, AASL accomplished the following:

- We presented our thirteenth National Conference and Exhibition, the largest professional educational event for school library media specialists in the country, in Reno, with programs and exhibits aimed at the future. As part of this commitment to the next generation of professionals, ALA Spectrum Scholars are given scholarships and training. AASL provided scholarships for attendance to four Scholars www.ala.org/ala/diversityspectrum/spectrumscholarsb/spectrumscholars.cfm.
- We launched our first-ever Digital Institute, available as part of the AASL e-Academy online offerings, the Minding Your Students' Future institute offered a rich continuing education experience through multiple media, including podcasts, vodcasts, and video from sessions presented at the AASL conference in Reno.

The eAcademy www.ala.org/ala/aasl/aasleducation/onlinecontinuing/onlinecontinuing.cfm provides a variety of very affordable facilitated and self-paced courses to help school librarians keep current.

- We released the first-year results of the “School Libraries Count!” longitudinal study and initiated the survey’s second year data collection. Findings from the study are already being used in advocacy efforts, painting a picture of the state of the nation’s school libraries.
- We revived School Library Media Month (SLMM) with Abigail Breslin and Carmen Agra Deedy as national spokespersons. Promotional materials included a poster with suggested activities supported by a portal of links to valuable resources, public service announcements, sample press releases, and sample proclamations. Two Second Life events were included in the celebration—a “dance” on April 25 was led by Doug Johnson, and a discussion of the importance of school library programs followed a podcast by AASL executive director Julie Walker. SLMM is a great opportunity to promote the value of what we do for students and staff; we can start planning now for next year.
- We planned the AASL programs for ALA Annual Conference, including the President’s Program with Susan Patron and a panel with high school librarian Cassandra Barnett, elementary librarian Catherine Beyers, and author David Levithan. AASL is offering excellent preconferences about the new AASL standards and reading at the secondary level (see below).
- We increased the number of licensed institutes available for districts or state affiliates; the newest AASL licensed institute, Reading and the Secondary School Library Media Specialist, will premier as an AASL preconference at Annual Conference in Anaheim presented by Pam Berger. The institute is designed to address critical topics in reading for library media specialists serving grades 7–12. Other institutes available are the new AASL Advocacy Institute for School Librarians, Collaborative Leadership, and Reading and the Elementary School Library Media Specialist www.ala.org/ala/aasl/aasleducation/aaslicensedinstitutes/licensedinstitutesI.cfm.
- We planned the 2008 AASL Fall Forum, “Assessment, Part II: Constructing and Interpreting Viable Tools for Effective Student Learning in the Library Media Center.” It will be held October 17–19 at the Image Oak Brook Hills Marriott Resort, Oak Brook, Illinois, near Chicago. Registration is now open! www.ala.org/ala/aasl/conferencesandevents/fallforum/fallforum.cfm.

Communication

- AASL staff and a consultant conducted a full communications audit as a baseline strategy for achieving AASL Strategic Plan’s community goal to “Increase SLMS’ understanding and value of AASL [by assessing] the current communication’s channels and identify effectiveness in communicating products, services, and resources to members.” www.ala.org/aasl/Aboutaasl/aaslgovernance/aaslstrategicplanning/strategicplanning.cfm. The report will go to the board at Annual Conference and will guide the future of communications for and by members.
- The AASL blog has grown and flourished—and we migrated this year to a more user-friendly WordPress format. What? You didn’t know we had a blog? Go to <http://aasblog.org> and sign up for the RSS feed (sign up for the comments feed to really keep informed!). AASL news, a MEET AASL column (get to know the committees and then volunteer!) and a newly launched book club are a few of the reasons you should make this your first stop daily. If you have something to say about our professional issues, contact blog editor Laura Pearle at aasblog@gmail.com and sign on to our growing list of committed bloggers. We also encourage you to comment on what you read; when we share our thoughts and ideas, we become stronger as a profession.
- *KQ’s* themed issues have been of exceptional quality this volume. The “Visual Literacy” issue (January/February 2008) was recognized for its outstanding quality outside our field by the Alliance for a Media Literate America.
- *AASL Hotlinks* monthly e-mail continues to be every members’ “must read” of AASL news, member spotlights, and links to the latest education-related stories that are so easy to miss.
- The AASLForum electronic discussion list has reached members for calls to legislative action, discussion of concerns and issues, and sharing of information and celebrations. Other AASL discussion lists and wikis have been used for committee, task force, and Affiliate Assembly business, making communication and collaboration easier for members. When congressional sponsors were needed for the SKILLS Act, phone calls, faxes, and e-mails went to Washington and home offices from all over the country, sparked by messages from our Legislative Committee on the AASL website, blog, and discussion lists, as well as the LM_NET discussion group, and thus from school librarians and our advocates in all states through state affiliate discussion lists. The SKILLS Act has not been adopted yet, but, when it is, its success will be due to our ability

to use online communications tools effectively.

- We have continued updating resources available on the website, providing toolkits for advocacy (especially needed in crisis situations), marketing (the @ your library school campaign is filled with timeless good advice), and other issues. For instance, an updated “Intellectual Freedom” brochure, the work of Helen Adams’ AASL Intellectual Freedom Committee, will debut at Annual Conference and will be an invaluable resource to guide practice and to help when there is a challenge.
- We have created a Promotion and Marketing task force to highlight all the work done on members’ behalf by AASL’s committees and task forces. Members in the field need this information but much of their important work is invisible unless it is spotlighted.
- We have honored excellence in the profession by the active promotion and careful selection of the awards offered through AASL www.ala.org/ala/aasl/aaslawards/aaslawards.cfm. The opportunity to highlight best practices is valuable to all who are marketing their own programs. For the recipients, the celebration is a public acknowledgement of their hard work for their students. AASL welcomes more applicants for each award; the applications for the next round of awards will be available in August for January or February deadlines. Check out the list of awards *now* and target a few that can bring recognition for your program. Make it your goal for the 2008–09 school year to apply for at least one and bring your application to the attention of your administration (even if it’s to brainstorm with them on how to meet the criteria soon). The awards provide an easy way to promote your good work.

Collaboration

- In addition to existing partnerships with the Alliance for Curriculum Reform, Partnership for 21st Century Skills, Dollar General, the National Education Association, Cable in the Classroom, National Forum for Information Literacy, National Adolescent Literacy Coalition, and National Council for Accreditation Teacher Education, we have added new collaborations. These include the Children’s Book Council (CBC) to create a new regular column, “Meet the Author/Illustrator,” in *KQ*, *KQWeb*, and online at *CBC Magazine* www.cbcbbooks.org/cbcmagazine; the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) to feature select articles from *KQ* on the PBS Teachers website www.pbs.org/teachers in exchange for a Resource Roundup of PBS resources in *KQ*; Picturehouse and American Girl for School Library

Media Month; and the cybersafety organization PointSafeClickSmart.

- We debuted the *Standards for the 21st-Century Learner*, which provides a framework to preparing students for productive lives in the twenty-first century. The hard-working Learning-Standards Writing Task Force worked collaboratively with the school library field, inviting and using input from the profession via a wiki and a forum.
- We rallied on the steps of the Washington State legislature with “Spokane Moms” Lisa Layera Brunkan, Denette Hill, and Susan McBurney, members of the Washington Library Media Association, ALA president Lorlene Roy, and many others as the dedicated moms secured substantial funding for school libraries in Washington. The Spokane Moms (recipients of the 2008 Crystal Apple Award) started the Fund Our Future Washington organization, website, and blog to spearhead their efforts and are working with other states to develop their own parent advocacy networks to support school libraries.
- We created the Diversity in the Organization Task Force, the Parent Outreach Task Force, the Library Media Specialists’ Role in Reading Task Force, and the International Relations Task Force, suggested by Affiliate Assembly, for increasing diversity in AASL, for a position paper and tool kit on school librarians’ role in teaching reading, for online resources for local parent advocacy, and to involve AASL members in the development of students as global citizens.
- We tackled the mega issue: How do we maximize our influence and collaboration with the educational and professional community? This issue was from a list developed as part of the strategic planning process that focuses the work of the association for the year. The AASL board spent a morning at Midwinter Meeting narrowing down the types of organizations AASL could approach for partnerships (subject-area organizations like social studies or English organizations, administrative organizations, or parent organizations), and their list was the focus of an Affiliate Assembly World Café discussion. After considering the comments from both the board and Affiliate Assembly discussions, the executive committee decided that AASL would approach parent organizations first. We were all influenced by the power of the Spokane Moms’ advocacy efforts when making the decision to approach parent organizations; the Moms are an inspiration to maximize our influence and to reach our BHAG by partnering with parent groups.
- In addition to collaborating with Washington’s parent

advocates, the members of AASL answered alerts from AASL leaders to support efforts to save school library positions and programs around the country. School board members knew that their decisions were being scrutinized on a national stage as well as locally. This effort to be involved in what is happening locally to school library programs is a new initiative for AASL and one that will likely be refined and increased. Previously, AASL has provided the tools and training for advocacy, and the new level of cooperation between the Advocacy, Legislative, and Intellectual Freedom committees will mean even better support for the improvement and retention of strong school library programs, grounded in the core values of our profession.

This list of the year's work done by AASL is a quick overview of the connections, communications, and collaboration that will make sure that AASL is ready for what comes next. This was the year that the new structure of fewer committees and more task forces was implemented; appointing volunteers was never done. Committees are charged with the ongoing work of the organization, task forces with a particular task or issue within a designated time frame. Hundreds of people participated in the task forces: AASL 2.0, the Best List for Teacher Resources, School Library Media Month, Qualitative Measures, State Department Inquiry, as well as Learning Standards Writing, Implementation, Guidelines Editing, and Learning Indicators and Assessment. These grassroots groups have the potential to change what we do and how we teach.

One of AASL's essential functions is to maintain an association that is fast focused, friendly, flexible, and fun. It's not easy to be fast and flexible with an organization of ten thousand members whose work situations, credentials, and missions are often different in adjoining districts, even in different schools within districts, but 2.0 tools made it easier this year and will continue to help speed up reaction times. AASL has no problem being the national voice for school librarians, and the friendly and fun parts make the work we do together worth the time and effort it takes to be excellent. The friendliness I found with the people who gathered in Reno was replicated across the country as the "presidents" (president-elect, president, and past president) visited state (and one regional) conferences from Alaska to Alabama. And there is nothing like the thrill of calling the winners of the National School Library Media Program of the Year. Or hearing that, after standing in the rain and cold on the steps of

Olympia, the bill proposed by the Spokane Moms came out of committee—a crucial step—later that day while we were still at the summit. Or meeting Representative Raúl M. Grijalva at the SLJ Summit and Senator Jack Reed at National Library Lobby Day, the cosponsors of the SKILLS Act. Or being recognized at a state conference as the author of an article defending the Captain Underpants series. Or dancing with school librarians at the National Auto Museum closing gala in Reno. Or maybe it was . . . well, it's time for what comes next.

Let me introduce you to the smart, savvy woman with a twinkle in her eye, 2008–09 AASL president Ann Martin, whose first column as president will be in the pages of the September/October issue of *KQ*.



Thank you for the privilege of representing you as president of the American Association of School Librarians.

As we transition from one officeholder to another, two straws can sometimes help keep our organization fast, friendly, and focused.

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