At the Affiliate Assembly discussion on Saturday morning of ALA Midwinter in Dallas, delegates had the opportunity to share their expertise in a variety of ways by participating in a roundtable conversation about four school library scenarios. Delegates moved from table to table and considered the possibilities of successfully easing the burdens of the school librarians working in trying conditions. Here are the scenarios and the comments of the delegates:

Session 1: A few districts in state have closed elementary school libraries citing necessary budget cuts for support staff and specialists. Volunteers are replacing the staff by circulating materials, but not teaching. Local newspapers carrying the story are lauding the volunteers for their creativity and, within the year, six more school districts are following suit because the publicity is positive. How would you address the flood of change that seems to be sweeping the region? Consider all the stakeholders: students, parents, teaching colleagues, school administration, district leaders, and state legislators, as well as the news media.

On the Role of Volunteers:

- Appreciate volunteers—but understand their role
  - Try to identify some volunteers who can speak about why they are place holders and not replacements for librarians (e.g., “I can check out books, but I cannot…..”)
- Educate the public about the difference between volunteers and professional librarians
  - They are not teachers
  - Our role may be opposite of the public assumption about our role
  - Do people want volunteers (who are not accountable) spending taxpayers’ money
  - Most stakeholders understand that we help match students and books, but they do not understand the Common Core curriculum and information literacy pieces
  - In some instances, you may be required to have a certified person (e.g., high school accreditation)
  - Volunteers are not trained in classroom management, special education (e.g., knowing and understanding IEPs), minimum educational level (e.g., even substitute teachers are typically expected to have some college credits)
  - Can volunteers be counted on to manage and use a very expensive resource
    - Volunteers do not have expertise to order and process materials with an eye toward acquiring excellent, challenging materials that support all student needs
    - Volunteers do not understand how to support the curriculum with the materials in the library (e.g., differentiation, need to provide different media to support all learners)
Some Advocacy Ideas:

• Work with educational leaders, including board of education/teachers’ unions
  o Provide award for administrators and school board members at their conferences for keeping librarians and supporting strong programs
  o Point out that we are certified teachers—can other certified teachers be replaced with volunteers
• We need to present at principals and organizations and conferences. They need to know what an excellent school librarian looks like, what they should expect, and what they should demand.
  o Know and use good data—can you compare scores for a school without a library program to a school with a strong library program?
  o Work to create a national and/or state level document for administrators that tell them what to expect from their librarians. If they aren’t getting it, they need to make a change.
  o Explain that a library without a librarians is not the point—the facility may be beautiful but the program is more important
  o Is the school librarian taking care of a warehouse of actually making school library program
• Find ways to make new teachers aware of what the librarian can do for them because they are not getting it in college.
• Make friends with media and let them know about the statistics AASL has already collected. Invite media to special events in your libraries.
  o Snapshot days are great publicity
  o Be prepared to send well-reasoned response to any publicity about benefits of volunteers in library; use your data
  o Ask the media to highlight a really good program
• Make yourself indispensible to your principal and other teachers.
• Explain why school librarians are more than support staff
• We need to be able to advocate for yourself before you are going to be replaced
  o Once a position is cut, it is too late to advocate—advocacy needs to start when things are fine!
  o Libraries need to focus on advocacy and data collection BEFORE a problem occurs
  o It is important to collect data because then scores from before the librarian left and after may lead to the re-instatement of the school librarians.
• Target those who have not closed elementary libraries and work with PTO/PTA organizations to be advocates for us. Make sure parents become the spokespeople for what school libraries are doing.
  o Work with those groups outside your school so they can advocate for you
  o Put an ad in your local free parent magazine—“do you know who is in your library?” so that parents will begin to question this and think about how it can make a difference

• Make yourself an instructional leader

And....

• As a profession, we need to find a way to police ourselves
• Interview teachers and parents to learn what is now missing and to determine what was lost with the loss of the librarian
• What about the information literacy curriculum? What happens to that curriculum—are other teachers going to take that on?
Scenario 2: Your state organization has been showing a decline in membership for the past five years. Attendance at your conferences is also steadily declining. While feedback is generally positive, and the economy is usually a factor, your executive board has not been able to come to an agreement about recruitment.

How would you go about assessing non-members, reviving drop-outs, and enticing new members? How long will your plan take in order to show results from your efforts? Consider all the stakeholders: recent graduates, retirees, attendees, and exhibitors at conferences, board electees.

On Recruitment:

- Contacts!
  - Use regional contacts
    - Regional presidents or directors can recruit dropped members
  - Make contacts with direct contacts and email
  - Use personal treatment, personal contact and personal communications
- Hold focus groups to connect and address the needs of school librarians in your state
  - Maybe people don’t need Professional development time—what do they need?
  - Survey your members fairly regularly
- Target some of the other staff members
  - Lower fees for non-library workers
  - Is one of the reasons we are losing members, that we are actually losing certified librarians?

Membership costs

- Reduce the cost of your membership
- If you recruit a new member, you both get a discount on your membership costs that year
- Offer a new member bonus
- Bundle membership and conference costs together—join and you get to go to the conference
- Can you get regional membership as part of your state membership
- Let members join with credit card—it may become an impulse buy if it is easy to join
- Offer a drawing for a free conference registration or free membership
- Offer discount for retired members
- Offer free membership for library school students
  - College members are key
  - Ask preservice instructors to require membership
Conference:

- Hold one-day regional events because they are less expensive
- Offer an exhibits-only pass
- In geographically large states, offer 1 day miniconferences in different locations
- Make sure to offer professional development credit for attendance
- Reduce conference costs for presenters
- Go from conference held on 2 weekdays to a 1 weekday-1 weekend day conference so members miss less school
- Hold joint technology/library conferences
- Go to other organizations’ conferences
  - Present at other educational association conferences
  - Promote the research aspects and training that the other associations can give
- Join other organizations for conferencing
  - ASCD
  - IRA (International Reading Association)
  - ISTE
  - Public librarians

Professional Development

- Become an ISTE affiliate
- Offer more virtual learning
- Use technology for your professional development and communication
- Affiliate with a college or university so you can offer some credits for PD
- Run some unconference sessions
- Set up mentoring programs where new librarians can connect with professionals to help them problem-solve, also some people can offer a particular expertise (e.g., technology, administration, etc) to the group

Other membership benefits:

- Be able to explain: “What’s in it for me?”
  - Be flexible and address questions quickly
  - Stress professionalism—helps your resume
- Create webinars to show members what they get for their membership
  - Use listservs
  - Use blogs
• Offer more social networking for younger members
• Give retirees a reason to stay in the group—create mentoring roles they can play in your organization
• Use technology to allow members to attend meetings
  o Hold virtual meetings
  o Skype
  o Use Google docs
Scenario 3: Your state Board of Education is in the process of instituting a new evaluation system where school librarians are classified as support staff. However, school librarians must still be certified as teachers.

The evaluation process will combine all teaching and administrative duties to align with the new system being implemented statewide. In addition, the Board of Education is also reconfiguring certification testing for new school librarians. Your organization has not been invited to serve or comment on any of these decisions. How can your organization gain a “seat at the table” and act before it is too late? Consider the time, effort, and legislative involvement necessary to act quickly.

On Defining Your Needs and Role:

- What should your role be—are you a teacher? Compensation? Status?
  - Explain why you cannot be replaced by the public librarians
  - Make sure school librarians in your state understand your position and are educated to speak about it
  - Create a position paper for your members
- Create a national model—base on what AASL considers a highly-qualified school librarian
- Create an “ask”—how should you be classified and treated?
- Propose an alternative evaluation instrument
  - NY apparently has a model (Danielson?)
  - Be sure it is student-centered
- Collect evidence to prove that you are a teacher
  - Librarians need to teach, so they can prove they are teachers

On Your Connection with Educators/Parents/Stakeholders:

- Network until you have a seat at the table
  - Get involved, stay involved
- Partner with administrators
  - Provide presentations from forward looking districts-- show them good solutions
- Create a grassroots campaign with your stakeholders
- Be clear about what you want
- Approach parent groups (e.g., PTA, PTO)
  - Have them demand good library programs
- Find support within the Department of Education
- Get university education programs to work closely with associations and school librarians
o Teachers need to hold librarians accountable
  o Jump in with other issues outside librarianship (e.g., help design teacher standards)
• Ally with other affected teachers and professionals

On Legislative Action:
• Consideration filing legislation
• Go to the media and explain your case and your proposed solution
• Lobby to create a library caucus in your legislature—legislators who are willing to go to bat for library
• Circulate widely the research about the impact of a good library program
• Pay a lobbyist
• Attend legislative breakfasts or other events where legislators are present
  o Have STUDENTS explain what libraries mean to them and what they use them for
• Talk with legislators on a regular basis
  o Invite them to come and see librarians in good programs TEACHING a class
  o Create a brief video or other product that can show them what a good program looks like
• Get a point person to address your needs at the state level to spearhead efforts and get on the agendas
  o Create some leaders
  o Advocacy or legislative chair for your state organization
  o Get librarians involved in state/local politics
    ▪ Encourage members to run for office—school board, union leadership, state legislature, etc
Scenario 4: Your state has adopted the Common Core, the Partnership for the 21st Century, and is working on the PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Reading for College and Careers) Frameworks. Everything is looking proactive for school children. However, costs for new materials, technology, and professional development look precarious. Districts plan to use these initiatives to evaluate school librarians and student achievement to create new pay scales based on performance. (The teacher unions have not spoken for school librarians specifically.) How can you prove that school librarians cannot be assessed fairly if they do not have the proper funds, schedules, and materials? To whom do you present your results?

On Gathering Data:

Compare scores on mandated tests to other districts that properly fund libraries

- Use correlation between student achievement and money, schedule, resources, staffing; show the data that exists
- How do you account for differences from district to district when some districts are well supported and some districts have one certified person for the whole district?
- L4L should develop an evaluation tool
- Districts without technology are at serious disadvantage
- Can you teach without technology—how do you show this?
- Talk to civic and business and other private funding to get technology
- Follow the money—get the ear of your funding source—state and federal decision makers, local (county, city, town) decision makers to explain the impact of no funding and make a case for equity in how librarians are evaluated (what you need to do the job you’re expected to use)
- Develop great relationships with parents and teachers their voices are louder than yours
- Show the correlation between student achievement, our resources, and schedules
- Get in right away at the district level to show how we teach the Common Core
- Make sure that school libraries are part of the collaborative teaching of the Common Core. Note: the feeling is that, at district level, administrators are not always following state guidelines so you must push hard at the district level—“grassroots”
We hope that you find these suggestions helpful and know that your regional delegates and directors are ready to discuss any concerns you may have about your current school library issues. Please feel free to offer your thoughts. Keep the conversation going!