

Fight for School Libraries

An Executive Summary

The American Library Association, as part of an initiative by 2017-2018 ALA President Jim Neal, brought together in May 2018 a group of members from academic, public and school libraries to review and discuss the status of school libraries, and to develop an Association-wide strategy for supporting school libraries, school library workers, American Association of School Librarians and the students and communities that they serve.

In his presidential column, [“Fight for School Libraries” in the March 2018 *American Libraries*](#), Jim Neal stated:

“Libraries constitute an ecology of educational, research and community services. In this environment of interdependency, we, as a family of libraries, must embrace advocacy for school libraries as foundational to the success of our collective work for students who love to read, as we prepare them for college, career and life.

We must all fight the closing of school libraries, the reductions in professional staffing, the erosion of budgets for resources and technology, and the consequent weakening of the librarian-teacher partnership in the classroom. We must advocate for the federal funding that supports network access in schools. We must continue to document and demonstrate the powerful link between student success, educational enrichment, and well-supported school libraries.”

The American Association of School Librarians (AASL), a division of ALA, recently published with ALA Editions the *National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries* (2018) that advanced inquiry learning, collaborative practice, and the ethical use of information and technology. The Learner, School Librarian, and School Library integrated frameworks recognize that everyone, of any age, is a learner. The AASL Standards are based on Common Beliefs central to the school library profession that resonate with librarians of all types:

- The school library is a unique and essential part of a learning community.
- Qualified school librarians lead effective school libraries.
- Learners should be prepared for college, career and life.
- Reading is the core of personal and academic competency.
- Intellectual freedom is every learner’s right.
- Information technologies must be appropriately integrated and equitably available.

Steven Yates, 2017-2018 AASL President, in his January/February column for AASL’s journal *Knowledge Quest*, called for expanded and robust collaboration to advance and enrich the work of

school libraries, including strengthening relationships with other ALA divisions as well as working more closely with the ALA Washington Office.

The attendees at the summit focused on the present state and future opportunities for school libraries, the impact on the work of public and academic libraries, and on the essential responsibilities of ALA and the profession for supporting school libraries. Active participation are keys to success. The following strategies were identified:

1. Collect quality data on school libraries and on standards and policies regarding their staffing, funding and accreditation. We must inventory, influence and implement. We must work with the U.S. Department of Education and the Institute for Museum and Library Services, and with state library and education agencies to gather current, accurate and actionable data.
2. Develop and communicate compelling stories and messages for national and local community and professional audiences. School libraries transform students, teachers and communities. The ALA Communications and Marketing Office working with the state library associations, school library associations, and ALA advocates must create opportunities to communicate the school library story in local and national print, radio and television, and social media.
3. Build understanding and support for school libraries and strengthen the partnership with public and academic libraries by creating opportunities for new collaborations as ALA proceeds with its comprehensive review and refreshment of its organizational structures. We must expand the involvement of school libraries in ALA governance, policy development and initiatives.
4. Build a strong commitment for school libraries into ALA's political advocacy work on legislation and funding. School librarians and K-12 stakeholders must fully participate in the work of ALA's new Policy Corps and its focus on the recruitment and preparation of national library spokespersons on key library policy topics, and in the work of the proposed national advocacy network and its focus on library advocates in every congressional district.

We expect ALA membership and ALA staff, including all divisions, to demonstrate support for school libraries as possibilities arise within the Association. ALA's advocacy for all types of libraries is strengthened by this systematic approach for inclusion. As we move forward as an organization to examine organizational effectiveness, school libraries are an integral part of the planning and future of the Association. This inclusive approach empowers ALA to remain the premier association for our profession.