It is October. Community members, parents, school administrators, and city officials have gathered in the newly renovated library of a large urban elementary school to celebrate the transformation of the library. While waiting for the festivities to begin, a 2nd-grade boy begins an earnest conversation with the visiting library director. “Ask me anything about US presidents,” he says.
At the somewhat startled expression on the director’s face, he continues, “You can ask me anything you want to know. I have read every book in this library about American presidents. I’m an expert!”

In those few words, that young man captured the vision and impact of school libraries on the intellectual, social, and emotional development of every student. The vision of school libraries is to enable all students to become independent readers and learners—in other words, to develop into individuals who love to read; critically evaluate ideas as they read and view; form their own opinions based on evidence; collaborate with their classmates to build new understandings together; create products to share their ideas through multiple formats; and develop attitudes of success like self-confidence and perseverance. Every student should be able to proclaim “I’m an expert!” based on the inquiry and discovery made possible by a vibrant school library program.

School librarians bring that vision into reality by building effective programs around a core of essential action areas:

**Fostering Independent Reading.** Research verifies that children learn to read by reading. By providing reading guidance and connecting students with the right books at the right time, school librarians develop both the motivation to read and the reading fluency that translate into higher literacy levels and the desire to read for a lifetime.

**Teaching Critical Information Skills and Dispositions in Collaboration with Classroom Teachers.** School librarians are responsible for teaching the skills of learning. These include determining the main idea of a piece; gathering evidence to support a conclusion or opinion; evaluating information; seeking multiple perspectives; constructing new understandings; and maintaining safe, ethical, and responsible behavior online. Librarians also take responsibility for helping students develop attitudes that enable them to set high standards for themselves and persevere until they complete projects successfully.

** Ensuring Equitable Access to Resources and Technology.** School libraries are a force for equitable access to resources and technology for all students. Students who do not have ready access to books, learning materials, or computers in their own homes can use library resources to equalize their chance at learning. Librarians transform resources into powerful learning tools by gathering and organizing the best websites, primary sources, and resources aligned with classroom learning. Librarians teach students the technology skills to be able to use computers, social tools, and production tools to accomplish their best work.

Creating a Safe and Nurturing Climate. School libraries offer a risk-free, comfortable space in the school. Libraries invite students to discover, have conversations about ideas and interests, pursue their own interests, and “become experts.” The school librarian is a caring adult who attends to each student’s needs and interests while gently pushing him or her to achieve more and think more critically.

**Providing Schoolwide Instructional Leadership.** School librarians are masters at leading from the middle, helping colleagues implement standards and new ideas. Because the librarian has a whole-school perspective, he or she can connect teachers to the principal’s vision and to one another, strengthen learning in each classroom by integrating the teaching of information skills and the use of technology, and foster connections between the teaching and learning in the school and the outside world.

The opportunities school libraries provide and the actions school librarians take have a profound impact on the learning and development of all students. Every young person has a right to build a pathway to success—which starts with a vibrant school library that is staffed by a professional school librarian.

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