The Researchers' Perspective: For and By the Community: Processes and Practices from the Development of National School Library Standards

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In this study, we describe the innovative and rigorous phased process used to compose the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) National School Library Standards (AASL, 2018). We begin by recounting previous standards iterations and compared their development processes to the most recent process used during the development of the AASL Standards. After we detail the development timeline and process phases, we conclude with implications for best practices in standards development for school librarians, professional leaders, and practitioners

Introduction

The American Association of School Librarians (AASL), a division of the American Library Association (ALA), is the national professional association for school librarians in the United States. Since the early 1900s, AASL has provided the school library and education community with professional standards to guide school library professionals; the standards have been updated on an ongoing basis to reflect changes in education policy, advances in technology and pedagogy, and dynamic shifts in roles and circumstances many school librarians experienced in their practice. In November 2017, AASL released the *National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries* (NSLS), its most recent set of standards.

The extensive process used to generate these standards was unique and intentionally designed to engage NSLS users in prevailing trends, community needs, and future growth opportunities. The NSLS development process began in 2015, when AASL began a multilayered, research-based approach to capture changes in school librarians' place within the school culture as well as their use of their current standards. The process of creating standards through environmental scans and direct community feedback, including surveys and focus group data, was rigorous, thorough, and in-depth: an editorial writing board and a contracted research group systematically gathered input from the school library field; a separate but linked Implementation Task Force developed implementation plan to bring use of the new standards into action by those in the profession. In this paper, we (two members of the NSLS editorial board) detail the complex NSLS development process and propose is as a model for professional organizations to use to update or establish standards.

Historical Review

In the United States, school libraries are common parts of public schools. The original school library space was a room designed to house resources. To establish priorities for these spaces, in the early 1900s, the National Education Association (NEA) and the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools released the *Standard Library Organization and Equipment for Secondary Schools of Different Sizes* (NEA et al, 1920) and *Elementary School Library Standards* (NEA & ALA, 1925). These documents provided guidance on what school libraries should look like and the types of services the school librarian should provide. A revised vision, placed in a single document and emphasizing the school librarian role in teaching and learning, was published in 1945 as *School Libraries for Today and Tomorrow: Functions and Standards*. (ALA Committee on Post-War Planning, Post-War Planning Committee of the Division of Libraries for Children and Young People, & Planning Committee of the AASL, 1945).

Between the years of 1960-1998, school library programs expanded in response to federal funding reforms and implementation practices initiated by new national standards for school libraries (AASL 1960; NEA & ALA, 1969; AASL & AECT, 1988, 1998). With the increased attention to school reform brought about by national legislation, school library programs expanded their resources. These initiatives required implementation of curriculum and fueled further standards revision and expansion (AASL 1960; NEA & ALA, 1969). The 1960 release of *Standards for School Library Programs* reflected a significant change to the school librarian's role emphasizing student services and the school librarian's responsibilities as an instructor and teacher. The 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), an omnibus education bill credited to the President Lyndon B. Johnson administration, further sought to ensure quality in school libraries. ESEA funds were initially used to purchase books, but later this was expanded to include various other media. Reflecting this addition, the name of the school library was changed to "school library media center" with the publication of the 1969 jointly published the *Standards for School Media Programs* (NEA & ALA, 1969). This set of standards also included collection development policy and procedures as well as established the need to teach information literacy skills to students. School libraries, as is common of many types of libraries, mirror changes in society and other institutions.

The publication of *Media Programs: District and School* (AASL and AECT 1975) reflected a greater emphasis on media creation and information use. Elkins (2014) noted that this set of standards stipulated that school librarians were expected to more fully integrate the school library program. Over a decade later, in 1988, school library standards were again updated by *Information Power: Guidelines for School Library Media Programs*. *Information Power* (AASL & AECT, 1988) was pivotal in establishing an influential role for school librarians within the school environment. These guidelines portrayed the school library as an environment of learning that supports the learning goals of teachers and faculty and creates an environment conducive to academic support and success. It is within this set of standards that the roles of the school librarian are defined to include teacher, information specialist and instructional consultant. The duties of the school librarian were therefore specifically designated as supporting learning within the library program.

The revised *Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning* (AASL & AECT, 1998) further outlined components of a successful school library program. In this document, as Elkins (2014) pointed out, though the roles were not significantly different, the instructional partner role was added to those (teacher, information specialist, and program administrator) in *Information Power* (1988), to highlight the integrated work the school librarian conducted among a variety of teaching peers both within and outside the school community. Through the promotion of building partnerships for learning collaboration, leadership and technology were emphasized as integral to building effective school library programs (AASL & AECT, 1998). By becoming a leader and

interacting with others in leadership positions (school administrators, those on school improvement teams, curriculum leaders) in the second *Information Power*, the school librarian was urged to promote the school library program as a central resource for the learning community by connecting with stakeholders and garnering their support. This advocacy imperative provided an opportunity for school librarians to express the importance of information literacy across the curriculum and to advocate for an increased role for the school library serving the needs of all students in a diverse manner at a variety of levels within the district (AASL & AECT, 1998). With a focus on standards-based reforms in education, the role of school librarians incorporated more teaching duties. The library standards established and implemented through *Information Power* (1998) clearly identified the roles of school librarians to be that of teacher and instructional partner, along with manager of the library program. They provided an opportunity for school librarians to articulate the responsibilities of their position as facilitators of student achievement to the school community in such a way as to build an influential place in the educational setting and raise awareness for their program.

In the next set of updates, AASL placed the learner at the center of school librarians' practice by first releasing the *Standards for the 21st Century Learner* (AASL, 2007). These standards emphasized the diverse learning needs of students and the iterative learning process students entered when seeking information in the library setting. Accompanied by *Empowering Learners* (AASL, 2009), the guidelines for school libraries that followed two years after the student learning standards, together these linked standards and guidelines further situated the school library as a central learning destination in an increasingly technological and globally connected environment. *Empowering Learners* (AASL, 2009) further established the school librarian as a leader within the school building and within the profession.

Current Education Standards Development

Situated within the school building and designed to be integrated with other content areas as best practice, school libraries must be examined alongside other education programs. Several other educational standards have been developed and adopted in recent years. The process of developing the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) was extensive. Like the *National School Library Standards*, these standards were developed from research based best practice (2018). The CCSS drew on the collective knowledge of expertise in the field and input was gathered during the drafting process. To ensure students were equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to be productive global citizens and active users of information, teachers from a variety of content areas made up the work groups that drafted the content of this standards set. Different from the new AASL library standards, the CCSS benchmarked standards across grade levels (CCSS, 2018).

Other information organizations have used various processes to refresh and gather support and input on their standards. The International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) had a core staff develop new content, but then requested public input on the content from each stakeholder group (teachers, students, administrators and parents). During the review period the association requested stakeholders share ideas and input as well as complete available surveys to provide feedback on standards drafts (ISTE, 2017).

Recent updates to the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) standards allowed for the exploration of the revision of standards within another division in the ALA. The ACRL has a formal revision and adoption policy written that discusses the process for standards, guidelines, and frameworks for the Association. Through this policy document, ACRL describes the process for new standards revision to include assessing previous versions, creating a draft, then disseminating a complete draft for to those affected by changes to provide ample opportunity for comment. The draft is published on the ACRL website as well as through community distribution

listservs. Revisions are then made based on comments and a final draft submitted to the ACRL Board for vote (ACRL, 2016).

Though various forms of stakeholder input were solicited in the revision process of other standards from other organizations, a systematic process was used in the latest refresh of the AASL standards. This process allowed for research-based decision-making and widespread input from the school library community.

Engaging the Community

The two-year revision and writing process began in early 2015 and culminated with the release of the new standards in 2017. The NSLS project was completed without release of content until the official launch at the AASL Conference in November 2017; however the AASL community was involved in the project throughout the process. Community input was intentionally included in each phase of the development process, as well as into its implementation strategy. This long-range, unique approach had multi-layers of community input, as shown in the Figure.
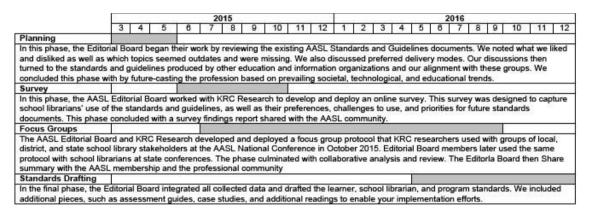
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Planning																						
In this phase, the Editorial Board began their work by reviewing the existing AASL Standards and Guidelines documents. We noted what we liked and disliked as well as which topics seemed outdates and were missing. We also discussed preferred delivery modes. Our discussions then turned to the standards and guidelines produced by other education and information organizations and our alignment with these groups. We concluded this phase with by future-casting the profession based on prevailing societal, technological, and educational trends.																						
Survey																						
In this phase, the AASL Editorial Board worked with KRC Research to develop and deploy an online survey. This survey was designed to capture school librarians' use of the standards and guidelines, as well as their preferences, challenges to use, and priorities for future standards documents. This phase concluded with a survey findings report shared with the AASL community.																						
Focus Groups																						
The AASL Editorial Board and KRC Research developed and deployed a focus group protocol that KRC researchers used with groups of local, district, and state school library stakeholders at the AASL National Conference in October 2015. Editorial Board members later used the same protocol with school librarians at state conferences. The phase culminated with collaborative analysis and review. The Editorla Board then Share summary with the AASL membership and the professional community																						
Standards Drafting																						
In the final phase, the Editorial Board integrated all collected data and drafted the learner, school librarian, and program standards. We included additional pieces, such as assessment guides, case studies, and additional readings to enable your implementation efforts.																						

Figure. National School Library Standards Process Timeline

Throughout the process, despite its commitment to not providing content until the National Standards formal debut, AASL released key progress indicators to the community. A summary report of the national community survey and focus groups, published infographics and blog posts that summarized research finding as well as magazine articles in *Knowledge Quest* (AASL's professional journal) that oriented school librarians to the process and high-level standards content were made available throughout the two-year time period.

Practice, Research, and Education: Editorial Board Composition

AASL principals selected the Editorial Board through a competitive application process. The selection criteria were aimed at ensuring a broad perspective in the writing process and to capture the school library voice through a range of experiences, the writing process began with the selection of a seven-member editorial board. AASL used a selective application and interview process to determine not only expertise within the field, but also to ensure that editorial board members represented a range of school librarianship experiences, levels of practice, and geographic regions. Each member of the editorial board brought a unique expertise and skillset. The board included elementary and secondary school librarians, experienced school library educators, school library researchers, and district and state school library supervisors. Additionally, the Editorial Board included a diverse geographic representation which allowed for the Board's work to reflect a range of local circumstances.

AASL leadership sought a chair who could lend a variety of skills to the project was selected to oversee the writing group. As the Board member tasked with researching foundational content, guiding discussions, and crafting the final text into a cohesive document, the chair needed to have school library expertise, standards writing experience, and skills in data collection and analysis, technical writing, project management, and school library research.

A parallel Implementation Task Force. A separate Implementation Task Force was assembled to disseminate and garner support for the new Standards. Comprised of leaders in school librarianship, professional development, and advocating for the profession this group was tasked with developing a comprehensive action plan to assist the larger membership in understanding and implementing the new standards in their personal and professional use. The Implementation Task Force, convened six months after the Editorial Board began its research, developed background knowledge of change management, adult learning theory, and marketing principles to develop a national implementation strategy for the standards. During this early period, the group had access to the editorial board's research findings. Access to this information shaped the priorities of the implementation effort, namely to provide resources for a variety of users and multiple entry points for personalized learning. The goals and objectives of the plan are simple and straightforward, but detailed action steps are organized to facilitate future evaluation and adaptation in response to changes in the educational landscape. The Implementation Task Force has planned ongoing professional learning and support to take place through 2020. This group had their own working timeline.

Planning, Scanning, and Analyzing

The Editorial Board began their work by planning the project ahead. The planning phase depicted in the Figure, reflected a three-fold approach. First, Editorial Board members gathered canonical documents representing current school librarianship in the United States. We then conducted a content analysis of these many documents to ensure that we honored and understood situate the context and evolution of previous standards. The Editorial Board conducted a deep exploration of the current AASL standards, *Standards for 21st Century Learners*, and guidelines, *Empowering Learners*, as well as the companion volume *The Standards in Action*. Editorial board members compared the language of these current standards documents using an open coding content analysis. From this exploration, we found that while the common beliefs stated in these standards were important, the language needed refreshing to reflect current parlance. Though the content was still sound, we realized that the references and some of the information were becoming dated making it less relevant to today's learners and school librarians. Additionally, we found that the format of the documents was difficult to navigate in both the *Standards in Action* and *Standards for 21st Century Learners*, making these less useful to practice. Finally, many of the additional components of the documents were heavily used, such as the glossary and the further readings list. These addenda were noted as resources that may be beneficial to sustain.

Next, we explored literature on future trends. In pairs, Editorial Board members conduced literature searches of published peer reviewed research current issues in education, libraries, and technologies, well as policy and positioning documents synergistic organizations such as ACRL, Future Ready, and Partnership for 21st Century Skills (P21). We used a future forecasting discussion process to capture the elements of these organizations' work that had implications for school librarians. We identified trends in education such as personalized learning, digital resources, and online education as topics of growing attention that aligned with school librarians' concerns.

Finally, the we reviewed compatible standards documents from educational technology, science, and social studies organizations. We also explored complementary standards such as Coalition for

School Networking (CoSN) *Framework of Essential Skills for the K-12 CTO[1]*, the P21 *Framework for 21st Century Learning[2]*, and the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) *Whole Child[3]* approach. The Editorial Board examined these documents' language, format, and structure and identified several elements that they wished to incorporate into the National Standards. Some examples include the format and structure of the ISTE Standards for Teachers and the C3 Framework for Social Studies. From the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), the Editorial Board adapted the idea of explicitly including a growth philosophy that would clearly express process goals in addition to learning outcomes.

Representation by the School Library Community

National survey. In the fall of 2015, KRC Research, a research consulting firm hired by AASL, initiated a multilayered research process to include member voice in the standards revision process. KRC worked closely with the Editorial Board, first on the creation and conduct of a national survey and later on national focus groups.

Over 1000 participants responded to AASL's national call for participation on a 56-question survey about current attitudes and insights about school library professional standards. Of those participants, 659 respondents were AASL members; the remaining participants were school librarians who did not belong to AASL. The survey was initially deployed to the AASLforum and state affiliate email lists with the request to share it broadly through personal networks and social media to reach a broad audience. As a commitment to the intentional inclusion of many voices in the process all responses were included, both AASL member and non-member. Because of the broad distribution, it is difficult to determine response rates. Survey questions included primarily closed response questions with several opportunities for participants to provide open responses about what their perception and use of the current (*Standards for 21st Century Learners* and *Empowering Learners*) standards and guidelines documents.

KRC's survey analysis most strongly suggested that while participants valued and found the 2007 *Standards* relevant, 41% felt these standards needed updating, considering closer alignment to other national standards both in content and language and including a means to appeal other stakeholders in education, such as administrators and teachers in the school community. KRC researchers also found that survey participants most familiar with current AASL standards described them as relevant, well organized and practical for use. The survey findings influenced the Editorial Board's work by helping to focus their efforts and providing focal points for discussion in forthcoming focus groups.

National and state focus groups. Based on the survey results, KRC researchers and Editorial Board members collaboratively created a focus group protocol and conducted 20 focus groups were in 8 states. These focus groups included approximately 160 participants who were asked not only to debrief the survey results but also to share their own feelings about, priorities for, and challenges to using school library standards. Because affiliate leaders within the states took responsibility for requesting and selecting members to participate in each of the focus groups, the diverse participants included pre-service and practicing school librarians at all levels and school types, district and state level administrators and library coordinators and information and technology education partners.

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[1] See http://www.cosn.org/framework-essential-skills
[2] See http://www.p21.org/storage/documents/docs/P21_framework_0816.pdf
[3] See http://www.ascd.org/whole-child.aspx

Focus groups at the national conference also included school library educators, vendors, practitioners, and researchers in the library field.

One the focus groups were completed, KRC researchers transcribed and analyzed the focus group recordings. The Editorial Board reviewed and validated these analyses and used the findings to guide the final drafting and writing stages of the NSLS text.

Standards Drafting

The research phases consumed well over half of the time the Editorial Board had to create the National School Library Standards. With five months left of their appointed timeline, the Editorial Board set to work distilling their preparatory work and new efforts into the final document. The Editorial Board worked in pairs to complete the majority of the writing, but often Board members were grouped and individually tasked to complete additional features of the National School Library Standards.

The resulting AASL standards are grounded in common beliefs that 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; and information technologies must be appropriately integrated and equitably available. These common beliefs support six shared foundations of current school librarianship and learning: inquire, include, collaborate, curate, explore, and engage. Each of these shared foundations manifests for learners, school librarians, and school libraries in four domains: think, create, share, and grow. The frameworks for learners, school librarians, and school libraries are centered on competencies that mirror and reinforce each other.

The resulting document, released in November 2017, is extensive, evidence based, forward looking, adaptable, and flexible. The NSLS support in- and out-of-school learning, can be personalized, and serve to coordinate the efforts of all school library stakeholders. The U.S. school librarian community is already inspiring so much learning, practice, research, and advocacy with the document that it is already in its second printing! Find out more about the *National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries* at http://standards.aasl.org

Final Thoughts

In this paper, we aimed to detail the AASL NSLS development process with enough detail that school library professionals who were considering drafting or revising standards could consider to in-depth and successful process used in the United States. research driven approach both confirmed and validated the decisions driving standards documents. Community input allowed for multiple voices that may not otherwise be represented in in the drafting process.

The NSLS are truly standards for and by the community. The range of feedback and documented experiences gathered brought valuable insight to this critically important standards revision project. The participants in this process have had an impact on the direction of the work in both the final format as well as on its the intellectual content. This new, and admittedly challenging and time consuming, approach to standards writing honored well regarded elements of prior standards and complemented them with efforts to produce extensible standards that reflect contemporary values, innovative practices, and reinforcing frameworks.

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