Editorial: Standards: How Do We Measure and How Are We Measured?

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It's been a tremendous pleasure and a true privilege to co-edit this issue. Our focus for this issue was on standards in their many varieties. Standards hold a certain fascination for me, and I thought about this topic in some depth while preparing to write this editorial. It occurred to me that our school librarians may be working with at least two types of standards: performance standards and professional standards. Performance standards can be represented by student achievement goals that are established by the governing agency for schools or by the performance measures that appear in school librarians' evaluations. However they are represented, performance standards are tied to some form of accountability measure, such as a school ranking or performance rating, that can affect school operations or professionals' careers. An impetus for establishing performance standards is the desire to increase the quality of our schools but critical analysis of performance standards is necessary to ensure that the standards reflect the complex and contextual work in which educators are engaged (Tuinamuana, 2011). The establishment of performance standards may collectively and individually affect practitioners (Sachs, 2003), and create tensions for individuals in the organization (O'Dwyer & Unerman, 2008) as they seek to complete sometimes conflicting directives.

Another type of standards school librarians may be working with are professional standards. Professional standards may originate from professional organizations or other bodies that have an interest in specifying the types of behaviors in which they expect professionals such as school librarians to engage, yet professional standards rarely have an external accountability measure: it is up to the discretion of the professionals to determine whether and how well they met those standards. Although professional standards may not have associated high-stakes accountability measures, they should still reflect the contexts in which school librarians work, and the complexities of their roles.

In the United States, the first set of professional standards for school librarians arose from an effort to survey the status of secondary libraries around the country, and to then use those results to advocate school administrators for help in improving the conditions of the school libraries (National Education Association, Certain, North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, & American Library Association, 1920). Those first professional standards

were created as a framework for developing libraries, and specified details like acceptable types of flooring, paint colors, and woodwork finishes, while also addressing the role of a librarian in the school setting, providing the germ for the vibrant flower into which the profession has blossomed. In the nearly 100 years since the publication of the first standards, the subsequent iterations of the professional standards for school librarians have grown and evolved as the profession has, reflecting the new contexts and complexities of the roles of school librarians as new types of media entered our schools (American Association of School Librarians & American Library Association, 1960; American Association of School Librarians & Department of Audiovisual Instruction of the National Education Association, 1969), as our dedication to intellectual freedom deepened (American Association of School Librarians & Association for Educational Communications and Technology, 1975), as computers entered our schools (American Association of School Librarians & Association for Educational Communications and Technology, 1988), and then as those computers connected our students to the world (American Association of School Librarians, 2009; American Association of School Librarians & Association for Educational Communications and Technology, 1998). With the release of National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries, the American Association of School Librarians' newest set of professional standards for school librarians, I think about the survey of secondary school libraries that was conducted before the initial set of standards were crafted, and wonder how (to paraphrase William Gibson) the uneven distribution of the future is shaping the current school library landscape. For while the professional standards can inspire and inform practice, school librarians may not always believe those standards are achievable (McCarthy, 1997), perhaps due to the contexts in which they work. Insights into the varied contexts in which school librarians are working can be used for advocacy and connect with practitioners to help them elevate their levels of practice.

In September 2015 AASL began a multi-layered survey, data, and research process to revise and remodel its learning standards and school library guidelines. This research and community-input process allowed AASL, through an editorial board chaired by Marcia A. Mardis, to make measured, informed decisions about how and where the U.S. school librarian community wanted to update its recognized, respected, and widely used standards. Throughout 2015 and 2016, AASL held 15 focus group discussions at seven state affiliate conferences, including Alaska, California, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Texas, and Wisconsin.

The survey and focus group responses reflected the value school librarians have for their standards but feel they are underutilized. The resulting document, National School Library Standards (NSLS) (AASL, 2017), is not a curriculum; rather, the NSLS provide school librarians with guidance and structure to develop a curriculum tailored to your local priorities and needs. The AASL standards frameworks are composed of Shared Foundations, explanatory key commitments, competency domains, and competencies. These core components are presented first as individual frameworks for learners, school librarians, and school libraries; these individual frameworks provide an overview of the standards' content. The core components are then presented in integrated frameworks for each of the shared foundations. The contents of the standards are designed to be used two ways:

1. As personalized guides: Learners and school librarians can enter the standards at the point most appropriate to the learning task or professional activity and use the standards to guide decisions about actions to develop specific competencies.

2. As progressions: Learners and school librarians first engage with the standards at the level of Think, and once mastery of the competencies related to Think domain are achieved, progress through Create, Share, and Grow domains.

This community driven model that builds and extends what has been working in previous sets of standards with improvements and innovations to best serve today's learners may become a model for school librarian, learner, and school library standards worldwide.

In This Issue

In this issue, researchers from all over the world provided us with a range of papers that explore the ways in which standards shape and guide school librarians' work.

We lead this issue of eight exciting papers with Joo & Cahill's (USA) in-depth exploration of school library research topics; their text mining approach aims to set a research standard for others to follow. In *Professional Standards: A Framework for Distance Learning Instructional Design*, a team of researchers led by Barbara Schultz-Jones (USA) examine design standards as they relate to online school librarian education. Keeping with the topic of preservice education, Using Karla Collins and Audrey Church (USA) explore using *Professional Portfolios as an End of Program Assessment*. Yuriko Nakamura (Japan) confronts an opportunity to ground and distill school library standards where they don't yet exist in *Possibilities of Modern School Libraries in Pesantren in Indonesia: A Case Study with Two Young Muslim Women*. In *Ethics, Values, and Intellectual Freedom in School Libraries*, Shannon M. Oltmann reflects on how deeply these guiding documents are actually woven into school librarians' daily practice and professional identities. Aaron J. Elkins (USA) then examines whether school librarians' job descriptions actually match their evaluations and professional standards in *Mind the Gaps: School Librarians' Job Descriptions and the Professional Standards for School Librarians in the United States*. Sabrina Carnesi looks at standards in action in *A Platform for Voice and Identity: School Library Standards in Support of YA Urban Literature's Transformative Impacts on Youth.* Finally, AASL Standards writers Elizabeth Burns and Marcia A. Mardis (USA) detail a research-based approach to standards development in *For and By the Community: Processes and Practices from the Development of National School Library Standards*, the latest edition of our occasional column The Researchers' Perspective.

We hope these papers inspire you to take use standards as a way to begin a conversation with fellow educators in all areas as well as with administrators, parents, community members, and other stakeholders.

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