ROLES of the SCHOOL LIBRARIAN

EMPOWERING STUDENT LEARNING and SUCCESS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Northeast Comprehensive Center's 2011 informational brief Impact of School Libraries on Student Achievement analyzed a collection of impact studies to examine relationships between school libraries and student achievement with respect to demographic data, technology, budgeting, staffing, professional development, and collaboration. Since that year, 6 statewide school library impact studies have been conducted in 5 states: Colorado (1), Kansas (1), Pennsylvania (1), South Carolina (2), and Washington (1). The Northeast Comprehensive Center also reviewed research conducted from 2011 through 2019 on a range of topics, including the evolving roles of school librarians; the transformation of the school library with growing digital demands of technology integration in teaching and learning, to the rise of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education, 21st century learning skills for college and career readiness; and requirements for effective and evidence-based practices under more rigorous national and state legislation and learning standards. Across the studies included here, the primary indicators used to measure student academic achievement are standardized test scores in reading, math, and writing, and 4- to 5-year high school cohort graduation rates.

The integration of technology into curricula and emergence of new areas of practice for school librarians that promote equity and access, such as culturally responsive-sustaining education, are expanding the school librarian's influence beyond the school walls as they connect the school to the global community of learners. In its 2018 *National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries*, the American Association of School Libraries (AASL) recognizes and defines 5 roles of school librarians that are crucial to the development and significance of effective school library programs: **Teacher, Leader, Instructional Partner, Information Specialist, and Program Administrator.**

At the request of the New York State Education Department, this brief delves into these 5 roles of the school librarian by identifying key aspects of each role and discussing how school leaders can ensure they are making the best use of their librarians' expertise. Based on the findings and promising practices outlined in the research analyzed here, we summarize some ways in which administrators can support professional learning and institutes of higher education can prepare school librarians to effectively take on these new roles.

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SCHOOL LIBRARIAN AS
TEACHER

"As teacher the school librarian empowers learners to become critical thinkers, enthusiastic readers, skillful researchers, and ethical users of information. The school librarian supports students' success by guiding them to read for understanding, breadth, and pleasure; use information for defined and self-defined purposes; build on prior knowledge and construct new knowledge; embrace the world of information and all its formats; work with each other in successful collaborations for learning; constructively assess their own work and the work of their peers; [and] become their own best critics" (AASL 2018, 14).

A few takeaways from impact studies and research outlining promising practices:

- Developing students' reading and comprehension skills through literacy instruction led by the school librarian and access to a wide range of grade, level, and age appropriate materials tailored to their interests improves student performance on statewide assessments and reinforces literacy development in and out of school.

  Gretes, 2013; Lance & Hofschire, 2012; Lance & Schwarz, 2012; Radlick & Stefl-Mabry, 2015

- Collaborating with other educators to design and implement literacy instructional strategies enables the school librarian to have a sustained impact on students' literacy skills beginning with early learning.

  Reed & Oslund, 2018

- Teaching students to develop research skills and encouraging them to access the school library collection and resources in different formats and for different purposes, the school librarian empowers students to engage in the inquiry process.

  Lance, Schwarz, & Rodney, 2014

- Coteaching between school librarians and classroom teachers positively impacts student achievement by engaging students with rich and robust learning experiences.

  Loertscher, 2014

- Adapting the school library space to meet a variety of purposes enables the school librarian to offer innovative programming that promotes creativity and learning.

  Small, 2014

SCHOOL LIBRARIAN AS
LEADER

The school librarian is "a teacher and a learner who listens to and acts upon good ideas from peers, educators, and learners. Leadership also requires increased professional commitment and thorough knowledge of the challenges and opportunities facing the profession. By becoming an active member of the local and global learning community, the school librarian can build relationships with organizations and stakeholders to develop an effective school library program and advocate for student learning" (AASL 2018, 14).

In the AASL's position statement, *The Strategic Leadership Role of School Librarians*, the leadership role is described as follows: "The American Association of School Librarians supports the position that full-time certified school librarians provide effective leadership in areas of curriculum development, instructional design, technology integration, professional development, student advocacy, information literacy instruction, and collaboration. This is demonstrated by active involvement in and through school and district-level leadership teams, technology teams, strategic planning, literacy development, curriculum development, and initiatives that impact student achievement" (1).

A few takeaways from impact studies and research outlining promising practices:

- Providing leadership in technology integration across discipline areas requires school librarians to apply their knowledge of the specific needs of the school population to ensure effective implementation of new technologies.

  Ennis-Cole & Smith, 2011

- Working with other educators and school administrators to develop curriculum materials makes the school librarian an integral member of the school's instructional design team.

  Kimmel, 2012

- Leading schoolwide initiatives allows the school librarian to oversee the successful implementation of innovative learning, in addition to supporting teachers and school administrators.

  Johnston, 2012; Kang, 2015

SCHOOL LIBRARIAN AS
INSTRUCTIONAL PARTNER

"The school librarian collaborates with classroom teachers to develop assignments that are matched to academic standards and include key critical-thinking skills, technology and information literacy skills, and core social skills and cultural competencies. The school librarian guides instructional design by working with the classroom teacher to establish learning objectives and goals, and by implementing assessment strategies before, during, and after assigned units of study. . . . Communication with classroom teachers and learners now takes place virtually, as well as face to face" (AASL 2018, 14).

Furthermore, the AASL defines this role in its Position Statement on the Instructional Role of the School Librarian, "The school librarian plays a prominent role in instructing students, faculty, and administrators in a range of literacies, including information, digital, print, visual, and textual literacies. As leaders in literacy and technology, school librarians are perfectly positioned to instruct every student in the school community through both traditional and blended learning."

A few takeaways from impact studies and research outlining promising practices:

- Collaborating with teachers to adapt existing curriculum materials to integrate technology and be more cross-disciplinary allows the school librarian to support students at all levels and with diverse learning needs.

    > Green, Kennedy, Chassereau, & Schriver, 2013; Latham, Julien, Gross, & Witte, 2016; Subramaniam, Ahn, Fleischmann, & Druin, 2012; Subramaniam, Ahn, Greene, Druin, Fleischmann, & Walsh, 2013

- Promoting the value of STEM education through library programming helps teachers to find resources to support students.

    > Subramaniam et. al, 2012

- Leading and providing professional development aligned to learning standards and other initiatives that require new knowledge, such as introducing new technologies, can boost student learning in the classroom.

    > Hunt & Luetkehans, 2013

SCHOOL LIBRARIAN AS
INFORMATION SPECIALIST

"**As an information specialist, the school librarian uses technology tools to supplement school resources, assist in the creation of engaging learning tasks, connect the school with the global learning community, communicate with students and classroom teachers at any time, and provide [continuous]access to school library services.** The school librarian introduces and models emerging technologies, as well as strategies for finding, assessing, and using information. He or she is a leader in software and hardware evaluation, establishing the processes for such evaluation to take place. . . . [The] school librarian must be versed in the theoretical grounding and practical application of [copyright and fair use] laws in order to teach the ethical use of information to the learning community" (AASL 2018, 14).

A few takeaways from impact studies and research outlining promising practices:

▪ Improving equitable access to learning with technology positively impacts student achievement.

  Lance & Schwarz, 2012

▪ Supporting teachers in integrating technology leads to improvements in student learning.

  Green et al., 2013

▪ Providing students with resources to build their skills around online news helps them become better consumers of information.

  Will, 2016

▪ Connecting the school with the global community helps students engage in critical thinking, collaboration, and authentic, real-world problem solving.

  Donham, 2014; Kuhlthau, Maniotes, & Caspari

▪ Teaching ethical use of information ensures that students are able to generate their own insightful questions and are more motivated to be more inquisitive and discerning in the future.

  Kreuger & Donham, 2013

SCHOOL LIBRARIAN AS
PROGRAM ADMINISTRATOR

"As program administrator, the school librarian ensures that all members of the learning community have access to resources that meet a variety of needs and interests. The implementation of a successful school library program requires the collaborative development of the program mission, strategic plan, and policies, as well as the effective management of staff, the program budget, and the physical and virtual spaces. To augment information resources available to the learning community, the school librarian works actively to form partnerships with stakeholders and sister organizations at local and global levels. The school librarian also addresses broader educational issues with other teachers in the building, at the district level, and at the professional association level" (AASL 2018, 15).

A few takeaways from impact studies and research outlining promising practices:

- Ensuring equitable access to the school library, collection, and resources can raise student achievement and are reinforced by the presence of a school librarian.

  Coker, 2015; Krashen, Lee, & McQuillan, 2012

- Supporting diverse student learning with a library collection that reflects the characteristics of the school community and collaborating with specialized educators are necessary for school librarians to best address students' needs.

  Subramaniam, Oxley, & Kodama, 2013

- Engaging all members of the school community in promoting the school library as a learning hub, the school librarian can build partnerships that facilitate learning interventions and enrichment opportunities.

  Knapp, 2013; Whittingham, Huffman, Christensen, & McAllister, 2013

CHALLENGES

All these studies show how impactful school librarians can be on student achievement through innovative educational intervention programs they create and provide, especially if an intervention brings together classmates and community members alike with the goal of improving the learning process. However, several studies also highlight the challenges that school librarians face in being able to do more within the school community.

- **Increasing Librarian/Teacher Collaborations for Greater Student Learning Gains**

  > Everhart, Mardis, & Johnston, 2011; Green, Jones, & Burke, 2017; Green, Kennedy, Chassereau, & Schriver, 2013; Johnston, 2012; Kang & Everhart, 2014; Latham, Julien, Gross, & Witte, 2016; Subramaniam, Ahn, Fleischmann, & Druin, 2012; Subramaniam, Ahn, Greene, Druin, Fleischmann, & Walsh, 2013; Subramaniam et. al, 2012; Varlejs, Stec, & Kwon, 2014; Will, 2016

- **Expanding Professional Development**
  Professional development for school librarians should be expanded to focus more on school librarian leadership and teaching and learning.

  > Weeks, Carlson, DiScala, Barlow, Massey, et al., 2017

- **Clarifying School Librarian Roles in Support of Student Learning**
  Administrators and teachers must be well informed about the different ways in which school librarians can support learning.

  > Adkins, 2014; Reed & Albakry, 2017

CONCLUSION

Given the vast range of research that has emerged over the past decade, we chose to organize the information around the 5 roles of the school librarian as outlined by the AASL. The school librarians' contributions, whether direct or indirect, are consistently shown to be of positive value to not only students and teachers, but the wider school community. The rapid pace of technology and automation are valid concerns regarding how they alter the dynamics of early childhood through postsecondary learning and expectations for the changing trends in employment opportunities. However, the underlying skills for inquiry and cross-disciplinary literacy that school libraries aim to cultivate and support in how teachers can more effectively teach students and how students can more effectively learn will still be necessary even when their application to future tasks may be different.

Therefore, it is important to consider the sustainability of school libraries for the success of all students in New York as well as across the country for generations to come, because school libraries and the role of school librarians have and will continue to evolve to meet the conditions of the world and time in which they exist. By taking certain measures, outlined throughout this report, the State and administrators within school buildings can improve this existing infrastructure for learning and in shaping the greater role of the school library within the community as a resource for all learners and uses.