
Principals and Librarians: Partners for Quality Education

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Abstract: *Librarians understand that the impact of the school library on student achievement and well-being is influenced by the leadership of the school principal. Both librarians and principals need to appreciate each other's domains and understand how they might collaborate for the benefit of their students and their communities. A new book, *School Librarians and Principals Leading Together: International Perspectives*, forthcoming in August 2025, focuses on principals' perceptions of librarians, the ways that principals can support libraries, and how librarians and library programs can be evaluated. In this paper, five contributors to the new book share chapter highlights.*

Keywords: *school principals; school librarians; leadership; evaluation*

Introduction

IASL and Libraries Unlimited (now Bloomsbury Libraries Unlimited) are co-publishing the third book in the International Perspectives series, *School Librarians and Principals Leading Together: International Perspectives* (Marquardt & Oberg, in press). The first two co-publications were: *Librarians and Educators Collaborating for Success* (Mardis, 2017) and *Social Justice and Cultural Competency* (Mardis & Oberg, 2020). The development of the new book in the series has been guided by the IASL Publications Advisory Committee (PAC) and the Commissioning Editor from Bloomsbury Libraries Unlimited, Jessica Gribble. Current PAC members come from around the world: Australia, Canada, Italy, Singapore, and USA.

Five of the contributors to the new book presented highlights from their chapters at the 2024 Virtual Conference of the International Association of School Librarianship, October 26-29. Their panel presentations focused on principals' perceptions of librarians, the ways that principals can support libraries, and how librarians and library programs can be evaluated.

1. **Principals and School Librarians: Finding Common Ground**,
by Audrey P. Church

The Challenge

Numerous studies demonstrate the positive impact that school librarians have on student learning (Lance & Kachel, 2018). However, principals are often unaware of this research (Morelan, 2024). Educational leadership preparation programs, conferences, and journals typically do not address the roles that school librarians play in their schools (Church, 2008;

2010). Yet when we examine professional standards and school roles, goals, and priorities, we find much common ground.

Professional Standards -- Principals and School Librarians

The International Council of Professors of Educational Leadership (ICPEL) serves the interests and needs of professors of educational administration and of practicing school leaders, providing professional development opportunities and publications for its members. For the United States, the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBA) leads standards-based and research-informed policy, preparation, and practice for school and school system leaders. In 2015, the NPBA issued the *Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL)* that guide the work of principals and assistant principals in relation to relationships, leadership, teaching, and learning.

When we look at professional standards for school librarians, the IFLA *School Library Guidelines* (2015) highlight library services that include providing professional development for teacher colleagues, promoting reading for learning and for enjoyment, fostering inquiry-based learning and information literacy, and collaborating with other libraries. These guidelines focus on the moral purpose of school libraries, making a difference in young people's lives, and the educational purpose of school libraries, improving teaching and learning, two areas also critically important to principals. AASL's *National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries* (2018) unpack librarian competencies for each of the six shared foundations: Inquire, include, collaborate, curate, explore, and engage.

Professional Standards -- Common Ground

Comparison of the standards for educational leaders and school librarians reveals much common ground (see Table 1.1).

Table 1.1 Professional Standards: Common Ground

PSEL Standard 6: Professional Capacity of School Personnel	IFLA's <i>School Library Guidelines</i> : Professional Development
PSEL Standard 3: Equity and Cultural Responsiveness	AASL's Shared Foundation: Include
PSEL Standard 4: Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment	AASL's Shared Foundation: Inquire

Drilling down, for example, PESL Standard 6 and IFLA's school library guidelines both emphasize the importance of professional development for teachers with the PESL calling for it and IFLA outlining the librarian's role in providing it. PESL Standard 3 and AASL's Shared Foundations include a student-centered focus on inclusive learning spaces and experiences. PESL Standard 4 and AASL's Shared Foundation: Inquire both require learner focused instruction and assessment.

Roles, Goals, and Priorities -- Principals and School Librarians

When we examine the roles that principals and librarians play within the school setting and the goals and priorities that they set, we again note extensive common ground. A systematic synthesis of two decades of research (Grissom et al., 2021) on how principals affect students in schools found that principals as instructional leaders are responsible for the teaching and learning that takes place in their buildings and as administrators are responsible for managing budgets, creating and implementing schedules, overseeing school facilities, and representing their schools in the larger community. PESL Standard 1 states that effective educational leaders develop, advocate, and enact a shared mission, vision, and core values of high-quality education and academic success and well-being for each student.

The roles, goals, and priorities for the professional school librarian are identified in IFLA's 2015 *School Library Guidelines* in the areas of instruction, management, leadership, and collaboration, and community engagement. AASL's 2018 *National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries* identifies five interconnected professional roles for school librarians: leader, instructional partner, information specialist, teacher, and program administrator.

Roles, Goals, and Priorities -- Common Ground

When we look at roles, goals, and priorities, within a school setting, the librarian and the principal play very similar roles and have similar goals and priorities. Both perform instructional, programmatic, administrative, and curricular responsibilities (Ellis, 2024).. Both have a comprehensive view of the school, awareness of all grade levels and all subject areas, and knowledge of content across the curriculum (Celluci & Harland, 2022). Sokol et al. (2015) note that both principals and librarians have an obligation to promote academic achievement and moral purpose in school, reinforcing IFLA's 2015 *School Library Guidelines* call for librarians who make a difference in young people's lives and who improve teaching and learning.

Implications for Practice -- Principals and School Librarians

Success and well-being for all is the goal. What then are the implications for practice for school librarians? School librarians must communicate clearly with their principals, align the mission and goals of the library with those of the school, demonstrate commitment to student learning, and document the impact that they have on students' learning and on students' lives. What are the implications for practice for principals? Principals must recognize their librarians' professionalism and areas of expertise, communicate with their librarian to align visions and build trust, and capitalize on the librarian's unique knowledge and skill set.

Benefits of Finding Common Ground

The benefits of finding common ground are maximized potential, the provision of the best possible environment for learning, establishment of a strong student-focused school culture, and improved teaching and learning for all.

2. Principals as Catalysts for Collaboration and Change, by Lesley S. J. Farmer

Principals are the main decision-makers in schools, and so they have the power to really be great catalysts for collaboration. However, they have lots of roles and responsibilities, not only related to the management of the school, but addressing the bigger picture of a healthy school culture and of leading learning. Principals bring many assets to their work, including their academic background, professional standards, and accountability, but collaboration is key to their successful implementation of the multiple demands of their roles and responsibilities. Collaboration is also key to the success of teacher librarians.

Principals' Perceptions of Teacher Librarians

In general, however, principals do not understand a teacher librarian's role. Although they value the library as a positive environment, as a source of information texts, and as a resource for reading promotion, they do not see teacher librarians as central to student achievement. These perceptions are based on principals' past personal experiences with teacher librarians, as students and as teachers. They are also influenced by their districts' systems and expectations, the budget situation, and outside forces and events such as the pandemic.

Conditions for Collaboration

Collaboration involves the interdependence of knowledge and skills in order to reach a mutual goal. The conditions for collaboration include trust, collegiality, a sense of community, and a willingness for sharing (Montiel-Overall, 2005). Collaboration also depends on the environment in which people are working, the purpose of the collaboration, who the collaborators are and what they bring to the table (Mattesich & Johnson, 2018).

The necessary conditions for school collaboration include:

- Principal promotion and support with resources -- the principal really does set the tone.
- School-wide commitment to collaboration.
- Structures to facilitate collaboration: shared planning time, teacher teams, collaborative professional development, site-based decision-making, and shared leadership.

Affective Domain for Collaboration

Another important part of collaboration is Bloom's affective domain: reception; response; value; organization; and value complex. The affective domain can be a helpful way for a teacher librarian to think about in developing the principals support for collaboration:

Reception: Get the principal's attention through collaboration evidence. In order for the principal to receive the information, the librarian has to get the principal's attention and provide evidence of that collaboration.

Response: Get the principal to experience successful library collaboration. Invite the principal to see successful library collaboration.

Value: Get the principal's commitment to library collaboration through providing monies for resources, encouraging teachers to collaborate with teacher librarians, and having a teacher librarian lead professional development.

Organization: Get the principal to require new teacher orientations to the library and to require teachers to infuse the curriculum with information literacy concepts and skills.



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Value complex: Ensure that the principal gets public recognition for library collaboration support (e.g., resources, staff, curriculum) from the teacher librarian and from others involved in library-related collaborative activities.

Teacher Librarian's Collaboration Strategies

As teacher librarians, we can work to enhance collaboration throughout the school community. Here are some strategies that can enhance collaboration.

Focus on student achievement, aligning the library mission with the school mission. Align with the school mission (and help build it). Emphasize the knowledge that we as teacher librarians bring to the table about resources, curriculum, research processes, technology, the school community, and the larger community including public libraries. Emphasize how technology fits into the curriculum.

Conduct research on administrative issues such as changes in scheduling or improving students' social emotional learning. Providing the background work will facilitate the decision making of administrators and contribute to staff development on the issues. Volunteer to serve on decision-making committees. Watch for opportunities to collaborate on curriculum development and implementation.

Identify effective collaborators, especially those who see the library as part of the big picture and want to be part of that picture as well. Finally, we need to do our job well, assessing our effectiveness, particularly in terms of collaboration, and figuring out ways to improve it.

- 3. What Principals Need to Know about School Libraries: A Survey of Charter School Leaders,**
by Katherine E. Klein

Background

There are about 7400 charter schools in 44 states in the USA. These K-12 schools receive public funding but are under private management. The sector has been growing since it started in the 1990s, but it grew quickly during the pandemic when a lot of families were not happy with their local public districts. State governments approve each school's charter and reauthorizes or revokes the charter, based on outcomes. In general, parents express high satisfaction with charter schools.

I surveyed US charter school leaders (principals and heads of school) to find out about charter school libraries. The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) reports that 90% of US traditional public K-12 schools have a school library and that 62% of US K-12 charter schools have a school library. A higher percentage of charter schools serve majority Black and majority Hispanic student populations than do traditional public or private schools (NCES,). For this reason, school library programs are especially important to establish and maintain in charter schools.

This study was looking at the services in K-12 charter schools that school libraries typically provide in relation to literacy, technology, and research. Students who attend schools with the library have better outcomes in areas such as academic achievement, college readiness, and socio-emotional learning. Charter schools are much less likely to have school libraries than traditional private or public schools, so the survey was designed to discover what it is that charter schools are currently providing around school library services. The problem statement for the study was: What library services are charter schools currently providing?

The survey was sent out to US charter school leaders in spring of 2022. I emailed invitations to around 1,200 random charter school leaders in 11 states.

Findings

Of the 87 participants who completed the entire survey, 57 % reported that they had a physical library (close to the NCES statistic of 62%). Of those with a physical library, 58% had a librarian and 14 % had a library assistant. None of the schools without a library had a librarian; there was no evidence of virtual school libraries. Across the board, most schools were doing reading promotion. More than half of the schools were holding book fairs, and almost half of them were doing summer reading programs.

Schools with a librarian or library assistant were more likely to host author visits and to put on book fairs than schools without library staff. In schools with a library, there was more teaching about online safety and digital citizenship, coding and programming, and quoting and citing sources, and copyright.

The most popular ways of promoting academic honesty across the 87 schools were teaching students how to quote and cite sources (69%; n=60) and academic consequences for plagiarism (66%, n=57). A key difference around academic honesty emerged, when comparing charter schools with and without a librarian. Schools with school librarians were doing more to prevent plagiarism by skill building. Schools without a library (and without a librarian) seem to be leaning more on policy and consequences.

In summary, school librarians did make a difference. They were doing more to promote reading. They were doing more to promote information literacy and to teach information literacy skills. A lot of charter schools have partnerships with organizations in their communities, but not usually partnerships with public libraries.

Implications of the Study

Charter school leaders should assess their school's services around promoting reading (literacy), technology, and student research. School libraries are valuable, but more so if staffed by a librarian. Advocacy is needed to help charter leaders understand the value of libraries. Policy and funding make it difficult to establish libraries in charter schools, but school libraries are important for improving educational equity. Many charter schools partner with other organizations, but partnerships with public libraries are rare and underused in the charter school sector.

4. Teacher Librarians and Instructional Coaches: Administrator Views of Instructional Leadership, by Melanie Lewis Croft

Teacher Librarians or Instructional Coaches: The Study

In 2017, I conducted a study to address the 2010 adoption of the California Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts and Literacy in History, Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects, also known as the CCSS-ELA. This adoption created a need for public school leaders to identify and deliver intensive professional learning to their teachers. School districts, in return, hired large numbers of instructional coaches to assist site administrators with this instructional leadership task. However, teacher librarians, who are teachers who have been specifically trained and certified to provide instructional leadership in the CCSS-ELA and are

mandated by California Education Code to be employed in California school libraries, were not generally considered for this task.

I designed a collective case study of six school districts throughout California to develop an understanding of why California K-12 public school administrators distribute instructional leadership responsibilities to either instructional coaches or teacher librarians and how the two roles compare within the context of the implementation of the CCSS ELA. A key finding of this study was that administrators' personal values influenced their decisions to select and utilize either instructional coaches or teacher librarians to provide instructional leadership. Principals considered instructional coaches to be extensions of themselves as instructional leaders in ELA, while they considered teacher librarians to be resources that they might call upon to provide occasional support in ELA.

Prior experience with either role has both positively and negatively impacted administrators' ability to understand and work with individuals in these roles. Administrators in both cases had much more experience with the role of the instructional coach, having either served as one or having worked closely with one in a positive manner in the past. Except for one district administrator, none of the administrators had prior experience serving as a teacher librarian. Many shared that they had little to no experience with the instructional role of the teacher librarian. A few had only encountered the traditional role of keeper of the books, and two of them had no knowledge of the teacher librarian position at all.

The Follow-up Study

In 2020, I conducted a follow-up case study to explore how school district leaders can foster the development of an effective school library in which school librarians serve as instructional leaders in multiple literacies. The study setting was a school district in the southeastern United States that didn't have an official district administrator of teacher librarians (otherwise known as a school library supervisor). A key finding in this study was that a lack of clarity in role definition was the primary barrier to the provision of instructional leadership by teacher librarians, particularly in technical or digital literacy. The teacher librarians in the study were used as a resource to provide basic tech support, but they were not embedded in instructional support, that is, they were not assisting students with using technology to meet higher order learning goals.

Implications for Practice

Four implications for practice emerged from the two studies.

1. First, embedded instructional support provided by site-based teacher leaders is the best form of professional learning. Given this, administrators should prioritize hiring and supporting this type of teacher leaders. If the focus is on ELA or literacy, they should consider hiring or fully utilizing an existing teacher librarian to fulfill this role.
2. Secondly, districts need to set the standard for how instructional leadership will be distributed at the site level. They should seek to employ district administrators that have knowledge of and experience working as a teacher librarian or with teacher librarians. In this way, they'll be better able to develop a vision and provide appropriate support for teacher librarians and the site-based administrators, teachers, and students with whom they work.
3. Thirdly, administrators need to determine how the teacher librarian can best impact student achievement at the site level. The main need is full-time support staff so that the teacher librarian is free to collaborate with classroom teachers, engage with the instructional program, and interact with students in the classroom learning environment. Without this, teacher librarians are restricted to serving solely as manager of resources.
4. And finally, administrators need to set clear expectations for teacher librarians. Job descriptions and evaluation forms align to current standards. They need to include teacher librarians in strategic and site improvement plans and provide ongoing professional learning opportunities to assist them in meeting defined goals.
5. **Evaluation: Towards a Model of a School Library Walkthrough,**
by Nancy Everhart

Principals are collaborators, leaders, and innovators, but another thing that the principals are is 'the boss.' And the boss of the school has the responsibility for evaluating the school librarian.

What the Research Says

First, let's consider the current state of school librarian evaluations. According to recent research by Ellis (2024), 66% of school librarians are evaluated using rubrics designed for

classroom teachers. While this approach provides some structure, it may not fully capture the unique responsibilities and contributions of school librarians. Only 19% of school librarians were evaluated with librarian-specific rubrics, and 15% were not evaluated at all.

My research has shown over the years that principals often rely on their own observations and conversations rather than written reports (Everhart, 2006). While informal methods can provide valuable insights, they may not offer a comprehensive view of a librarian's performance. However, there is a powerful tool designed for teachers which I have adapted for school librarians, the three minute walkthrough.

The Three-Minute Walkthrough

The three-minute walkthrough is a brief, opportunistic, unscheduled and informal visit. Unlike traditional observations, these visits are designed to be quick and non-intrusive, allowing administrators to gain a snapshot of the library environment without disrupting the flow of teaching and learning. The beauty of this approach lies in its simplicity and frequency. These brief visits create a culture of ongoing support and professional growth. School librarians can feel seen and supported and students can benefit from enhanced instructional quality.

Based on the teacher walkthrough (Downey et al., 2004), research findings, school librarian evaluation instruments, and my own experiences visiting 36 outstanding school libraries throughout the United States when I was president of the American Association of School Librarians, I've constructed an instrument that could be used for a three-minute walkthrough for school librarians. The walkthrough focuses on student engagement, educational environment, and adherence to the curriculum. It works best when it includes quick post-observation feedback.

Dimensions and Observable Item Examples

The School Library Three-Minute Walkthrough (see Table 5.1) has four dimensions: reading; school-wide support; climate/atmosphere; and student engagement. Examples of observable items are provided for each dimension. Additional or different examples can be added to the walkthrough. Walkthroughs can be tailored to the unique environment of each school and each school library.

The first category on the instrument is reading. Promoting reading for personal enjoyment is crucial. Observational elements support the concept of creating a reading culture and fostering a sense of belonging and understanding. Believe it or not, the organization and appeal of our shelves play a vital role to principals. Shelves should be orderly and stocked with new and appealing materials. An organized library makes it easier for students to find books that interest them while fresh and exciting titles keep them coming back for more.

Table 5.1	
Three-Minute Walkthrough for the School Library	
Dimension	Observable Item Examples
Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading is promoted for personal enjoyment through bulletin boards and displays. • Books reflect the diversity and inclusivity of the student body, encompassing various languages, races, and orientations. • Shelves are orderly with new and appealing materials. • Evidence of book fairs, author visits, reading contests or clubs. • Visible librarian, teacher and student book recommendations.
School-wide Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher collaboration is demonstrated by displays of student work and projects. • Resources align with the school curriculum. • School pride is evidenced via displaying school news, mascot, and colors. • Assistance is provided to students and faculty in using resources.
Climate/ Atmosphere	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The space feels warm, inviting, and safe. • There is evidence of student ownership. • There is a positive learning environment where students can succeed. • The facility is organized and clean. • Signage is clear and positive.
Student Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students are actively engaged with books, technology, or other materials. • Students are doing what teacher/librarian wants them to do. • There are various noise levels depending on the activities being performed. • There are clear routines and procedures evident. • Librarian interactions with students are respectful, reflecting genuine warmth and sensitivity.

The second dimension is school-wide support; it is being part of the team. Teacher collaboration is a cornerstone of school-wide support. This collaboration is vividly demonstrated through displays of student work and projects. When we showcase these achievements, we not only celebrate our students' hard work, but the collaborative efforts of our dedicated teachers. School pride is an integral part of creating a positive and inclusive school culture. Symbols of school spirit, such as school colors and a school mascot, foster a sense of belonging and unity among students in the wider school community. Assistance provided to students and faculty in using resources is also crucial. Whether it's helping a student find the right book for a research project or guiding a teacher in using new technology, this support ensures that everyone can make the most of the resources available to them.

Climate is the third dimension; it is a characteristic with the highest of importance for school principals. Firstly, the space must feel warm, inviting, and safe. When students walk into a school library that exudes warmth and safety, they're more likely to feel comfortable and ready to engage in learning. A welcoming environment is the foundation upon which all other positive experiences are built, and it is essential for student success. This means creating a space where students are encouraged to explore, ask questions, and take intellectual risks. Additionally, the facility must be organized and clean, which promotes physical health but also enhances mental clarity and focus. When students and staff can navigate the space easily and find what they need without hassle, it contributes to a more efficient and pleasant learning environment.

Let's take student engagement, the fourth dimension, a little bit further because it's also a key indicator of a successful library. When students are actively engaged with books, technology, or other materials, it shows that the library is a vibrant hub of learning and exploration. When students are doing what the teacher or librarian wants them to do, it indicates that library activities are well structured and aligned with educational goals. This alignment ensures that the library is an integral part of the school's instructional framework. It also demonstrates the school librarian's skill as a behavior manager. A dynamic library will have various noise levels depending on the activities being performed. Quiet reading areas, collaborative workspaces, and interactive zones each contribute to a balanced and productive environment. This variety allows students to engage in different types of learning experiences. Clear routines and procedures are also essential for an effective library because they create a sense of order and predictability, which makes students feel comfortable and focused.

In Conclusion

Effective evaluation of school librarians is essential for the success of library programs. Continuous feedback and collaboration enhance the overall library experience. Tailored walkthroughs provide a more accurate and comprehensive assessment of the library's effectiveness. Walkthroughs designed specifically for school librarians can capture the unique aspect of library operations, such as student engagement with resources, the organization of materials, and the atmosphere of the space. Walkthroughs should be tailored to the unique environment of school libraries.

Final Remarks: New Initiatives in Italy

At the end of the panel presentation, Luisa Marquardt, co-editor of the new book, *School Librarians and Principals Leading Together: International Perspectives*, forthcoming in August 2025, announced that the Italian National Ministry for Instruction and Merit (formerly Education) has agreed to organize national two-full-day training on school libraries specifically addressed to school principals. The first session, held in Rome at the ministerial headquarters, on November 19-20, attracted 60 principals from 18 out of 20 regions/states in the country (the remaining two are autonomous). Applications for participation in the training were so popular that the training, including school library visits, was repeated on December 15-17 for a further group of 70 principals from different parts of the country. During the training course, Luisa delivered the part focusing on the school principal's leadership, sharing research and practical evidence about the impact of school libraries and the role of principals in supporting school libraries, and chairing focus groups on the topic. She also spoke about the new book which she hopes will be translated into Italian. One of the book's contributors, Franco Francavilla, from Turin, who chairs a well-established school library network, TorinoReteLibri Piemonte, and coordinates a national school library network, CRBS, attended the course.

It is worthy to mention the fact that, during the seminars, the different school levels (from kindergarten to senior high school) were represented and each of the school institutions coordinates a local school library network. Therefore, the outreach of the training (through sharing the seminar resources, for instance) has been expanded to the whole system; the publishing of the webinar proceedings will be also useful to a wider audience. The opportunity for school principals to meet and discuss, both in pairs and with experts, the several issues that



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affect the school library development was particularly valuable and helpful, also in terms of sharing practice, solutions, ideas, and projects, and establishing new collaboration or reinforcing the existing ones. One of the most urgent issues is the need for professional staff, properly trained and full-time dedicated (not just on a voluntary basis, as currently happens in most cases). The face-to-face meeting proved to be particularly effective also in terms of increased awareness of the crucial role that school libraries and librarians play in education and the crucial role that a school principal plays in supporting them for a better impact on learning and well-being.

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