

# School librarians are rising school leaders

Librarians play an important role as schools make the digital transition

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School librarians are shaking off the decades-old stereotype that they are isolated from a school's teachers, students, and classrooms. Today's school librarians, according to a panel discussion that took place during October's Connected Educator Month and on Connected Librarians Day, are being tapped as influential school leaders with the power to help support the digital transition.

"I see school librarians as school leaders, and I think it's time for us to step up and be counted," said Susan Ballard, former president of the American Association of School Librarians (AASL).

This offers great potential for interconnected partnerships.

"School librarians have the unique position, in school, of being school-wide and curriculum-wide—that really makes for a powerful partnership with school administrators," said Gail Dickinson, AASL's current president.

"I think there are a lot of people who view the digital shift as a threat to librarians, and I really just think it's a call for reinvention," said Mark Ray, the 2012 Washington State Teacher of the Year. Schools' increased reliance on digital resources and content leads to different "thinking about the way libraries function and the ways librarians work with students and teachers."

In fact, as more schools move to using digital tools or digital resources with more regularity, school librarians "have an opportunity to play a bigger leadership role within the school and district. The lack of expertise that exists in many settings, associated with digital content or with educational technology, provides another opportunity for library professionals to step in and provide more leadership," Ray added.

"We can't continue to look at school libraries or education in traditional ways—we have to take a page from those people who are making the most

of how socially-connected kids and people are today, and build more user-friendly environments for people to work in," Ballard said.

"I think there's a high degree of agreement that school libraries need to be digital learning spaces and fully take advantage of the kinds of opportunities offered by digital learning," Dickinson said.

The call for school libraries and

empower teachers and maintain strong working relationships with teachers.

"Great school librarians can empower a school, and forward-thinking school districts really maximize that," Dickinson said.

"We're part of a profession that has had an 'image' for such a long time—part of the challenge is getting people to understand that school libraries have



Librarians are taking charge of connecting teachers with digital resources.

librarians to become more integrated within their schools also means that school libraries will change as schools change to align with digital learning practices.

This means "maximizing the strength of library programs to reach and teach each child," Dickinson said.

"It's a brand-new world, and people have to continue to evolve their practice," Ballard said. "They have to look at the exemplars we have and make sure their practice meets what students' needs are, today and in the future."

An investment in teacher librarians, who help students and teachers use digital technologies and resources to their fullest, is essential, Ray said.

In addition, teacher librarians are in the unique position of having leadership skills while being able to work openly with teachers, receiving honest feedback, which enables librarians to

evolved, and that we are part of the conversation on new learning environments and knowledge delivery," Ballard said.

Ray added: "More and more people are saying that if you want to be a successful 21st-century school, you need to think long and hard about what you do in your school libraries and what role your libraries play."

"As librarians, we should model connectedness, and truly be that empowered, engaged school-wide leader," Dickinson said.

The panelists are all members of Project Connect, a Follett initiative that aims to raise awareness of librarians' increasingly important roles in digital learning and the digital transition in schools.

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