





# NOT CHECKING OUT YET

*Librarians are key to education's digital transformation*

---

By Jennifer Snelling

It's a syndrome seen at so many schools. As school districts face shrinking budgets, some are tempted to find savings by cutting library staff. After all, the reasoning goes, with so many resources available via laptops, tablets or phones, who needs librarians anymore?

We all do, argues a new breed of librarian.

The no-nonsense librarian with a cardigan and reading glasses, stamping dusty stacks of books and ssshhing giggling teens is a relic of the past. These days, librarians are more often found showing students how to use a Makey Makey kit, helping someone detect whether an article is trustworthy or facilitating schoolwide teacher training on the new learning management system.

While librarians are still likely to be the ones who lead story time programs, share a book series that ends up a favorite or help find just the right article for a senior research

## NOT CHECKING OUT YET

“Librarians often serve as technology leads within their school building and they provide invaluable learning on how to find relevant resources, evaluate the credibility and usefulness of information, and be thoughtful digital citizens.”

paper, many libraries are also makerspaces or flexible student learning spaces where librarians facilitate future-ready skills and bring schools into the digital age.

### Librarians 2.0

Digital age librarians are equipped with traditional librarian skills, such as research, curating sources and media literacy, which are more important than ever, as well as the skills to lead their districts in digital transformation.

“The idea of a librarian has evolved greatly to be the one who is talking about digital citizenship, the difference between fake news and real news, good sources of

information, all of those things we are seeing are greatly lacking in today’s society,” says Elissa Malespina, outgoing president of ISTE’s Librarians Network and Future Ready New Jersey’s task force leader. “Librarians are uniquely positioned to be the leaders in teaching all that. Our jobs have evolved, and we have to evolve with it.”

To help librarians and media specialists with this evolution, ISTE, Future Ready Librarians and Follett Learning have created a crosswalk ([goo.gl/i8g8T8](https://goo.gl/i8g8T8)) connecting the Future Ready Librarians framework to the ISTE Standards for Educators, as well as creating an ISTE librarians webpage ([iste.org/learn/librarians](https://iste.org/learn/librarians)) and an ISTE U course to help librarians become future ready.



(Future Ready Librarians is an expansion of the Future Ready initiative aimed at raising awareness among district and school leaders about the valuable role librarians can play in supporting the Future Ready goals of their school and district.)

In the overview of the crosswalk, ISTE acknowledges the vital role librarians play in future-ready schools. “Librarians often serve as technology leads within their school building and they provide invaluable learning on how to find relevant resources, evaluate the credibility and usefulness of information, and be thoughtful digital citizens.”

The school librarian’s job is in some ways the same as it always has been: connecting students and staff to information, whether print or digital, and promoting literacy, whether that’s reading or coding.

The person who can guide students and teachers through information overload and fake news is more valuable than ever. The librarian’s expertise in cutting through the clutter, organizing information, tools and experiences is something that isn’t taught in most teacher training programs, yet these are skills that students, indeed all of us, use every single day. And the curation skills to organize information and make it accessible to a wide variety of people is also vital.

Mark Ray, director of innovation and library services for Vancouver (Washington) Public Schools, says that while media literacy is a hugely valuable part of the job description, the library space is becoming less a place of consumption and more a place of creation.

### From librarian to teacher librarian

Pennsylvania’s Elizabeth Forward School District is one district that has taken to the concept of library as makerspace. Elizabeth Forward High School had a traditional 1950s library: The furniture couldn’t be moved because it was so heavy, and there



were tons of dictionaries, encyclopedias and other reference books not used since the 1970s.

The district decided there was a better use for that space and worked with Carnegie Mellon University to create the Elizabeth Forward Media Center. The school now has a K-12 makerspace, a Dream Factory that integrates art and computer science, a sound studio built in a closet that formerly stored magazines and a Mobile Fablab that takes technology projects to elementary schools.

Assistant Superintendent Todd Keruskin, Ed.D., concedes that while some of the equipment was expensive, most of it was not. “We wanted it to be used in any classroom for project-based learning,” he says. Now there are 50-60 kids in every space and we have created a schoolwide maker culture.”

This maker culture has evolved into an entrepreneur program that continues from elementary through high school. For example, third graders showed an interest in photography so their teacher taught them about perspective, the rule of thirds and other concepts. The class took a field trip to photograph downtown Pittsburgh, then students brought back their photos and turned them into puzzles using a laser cutter.

As students progress through the grades, they create their own businesses, including

The person who can guide students and teachers through information overload and fake news is more valuable than ever.



Not only do students have the opportunity to become a media intern and assist other students and teachers with the equipment and apps, students can also pilot new technology.

things like T-shirt printing and making and selling bath products and blankets. Cross-curricular projects like these not only teach a range of academic skills, students also learn to be accountable and to be leaders and entrepreneurs. Sometimes the projects require the equipment, but they all benefit from the maker culture that Elizabeth Forward epitomizes.

That said, as Elizabeth Forward schools added more equipment, teachers became overwhelmed with learning how to use everything. Quickly, says Keruskin, students became the experts. The school created media internships where kids familiar with the equipment help students and teachers.

Not only do students have the opportunity to become a media intern and assist other students and teachers with the equipment and apps, students can also pilot new technology. They're asked what apps inspire them to learn and which are boring, and they're tasked with noting glitches and programs that just don't work well.

"The right media specialist doesn't get overwhelmed and is comfortable letting kids lead," he says. "The new media special-

ists will continue to learn new technologies, sit down with teachers and promote their space by showing teachers how to make their lessons come to life with project-based learning."

Keruskin's description of the new librarian mirrors Mark Ray's idea of the ideal teacher librarian.

After all, as schools redefine themselves, school leaders face new needs and challenges. The teacher librarian has expertise in education, works effectively with students, has the system view and takes on leadership roles in the school. Librarians have the training, and the opportunity, to lead beyond the library.

The librarian can play an integral role throughout the school, not just in the library. We know that librarians have a huge impact on literacy. Librarians are not just specialists that students go to, but assets in their community.

To accommodate traditional as well as more innovative uses, flexibility in design is key. Ideally, there are production and design areas where students and teachers can collaborate around digital media. The spaces

should be dynamic so they can be quickly and easily altered to create group or individual work spaces. Instead of heavy tables and chairs set among stacks of books, take a cue from bookstores or Starbucks and look for moveable furniture that can be easily reconfigured.

Many ISTE librarians have been doing this for a long time, says Casandra Woodall, ISTE's senior director for business strategy. "A lot of initiatives start in the library. The maker movement, flexible use of space, providing an area for educators to receive additional professional learning are examples," she says. "Librarians sit in a unique place and their role is relevant to the work ISTE is doing. We want to honor the dynamic position of the librarians."

Of course, change is hard and it can be overwhelming if librarians feel they have to do all these things at once and do them perfectly. But there are many resources to help.

Shannon McClintock Miller, the K-12 teacher librarian at Van Meter Community School District in Van Meter, Iowa, says many schools and districts are already taking the Future Ready pledge to collaborate with educators to ensure all students are future ready, so librarians don't have to be on their

own. Also, the American Association of School Librarians has standards that coordinate well with Future Ready Librarians standards and the ISTE Standards.

### Advocate to be future ready

Malespina's story has a familiar feel for many librarians and parents. In 2016, New Jersey's South Orange-Maplewood board of education proposed cutting three district librarians and all library funding. Malespina, a parent in the district, attended board meetings to argue against the cuts and started a change.org petition and social media campaign to rally support.

When the cuts went into effect a month later, eliminating two middle school librarians and a high school librarian, Malespina increased her efforts. She decided it was time to raise her voice and speak out, as professional librarian, and as a parent. After two years of fighting, all three librarian positions, as well as funding for books and supplies, were restored.

She has some practical advice for other librarians who are feeling that their positions are in danger. She recommends contacting EveryLibrary, a nonprofit organization



"A lot of initiatives start in the library. The maker movement, flexible use of space, providing an area for educators to receive additional professional learning are examples."



## NOT CHECKING OUT YET

The democracy of the library is perhaps its most important aspect. The library serves everyone in the building.

that helps schools with funding, legislation, referendums and fighting cuts. Then, they need to make sure they are communicating effectively about the many amazing things teacher librarians do for a school and district.

“USA Today said by 2026, libraries will be done,” Malespina says. “When that’s the perception in society, we have to fight against it. They continue to cut government funding for libraries, but libraries are one of the few democratic places left. “We don’t judge, right-leaning, left-leaning, we have information for you, and we will fight to protect your right to privacy and for information.”

The democracy of the library is perhaps its most important aspect. The library serves everyone in the building. Schools may have a class on digital citizenship, makerspaces in a wing or room, but the library is historically available to everyone and provides equity of access to these tools and opportunities.

It is vital that librarians share their stories, says Thomas Murray, director of innovation for Future Ready Schools. “We have to be storytellers of the learning opportunities that happen for kids every day in our libraries. Bring the outside in by sharing student work. The more we can get parents and community members into the library on a regular basis, the more their eyes will be open.”

While library newsletters are a good method, social media is generally more effective these days. Take time to learn how your school community communicates with the outside world. Sometimes it’s hard for librarians to toot their own horns, but sharing the amazing work of students can really demonstrate the power of the library.

Few do this better than McClintock Miller, who shares ideas, resources, links and student projects with her nearly 60,000



PHOTO BY ELISSA MALESPINA


Twitter followers daily and on her blog, The Library Voice, which is read by 100,000 people a month. On top of that, she and her students share on school accounts – the Van Meter Library Facebook page and @vmlibraryvoice on Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat.

“These are places where we can share with our community, students, teachers, parents and even others around the world all of the amazing things that are happening in our library and school community,” she says. “And the best part is Van Meter students help us with these postings. To see the library and school through their eyes is one of the things that draws our community to these places to see what is happening, and what students are learning, creating and celebrating.”

In fact, she’s so prolific and engaging on social media that she was honored with the Social Media Superstar Leadership Luminary Award by the American Association of School Libraries for 2018.

Becoming partners with administrators is another way to demonstrate the value of librarians to the people who make decisions. They’re trying to make difficult decisions and run a building or a district. If the librarian can offer solutions by being knowledgeable about the budget, then so much the better.

It’s not a question of money, says Mark Ray. It’s a question of prioritization. In the midst of the recession, Vancouver Public Schools decided librarians were key to getting kids future ready and kept them in place.

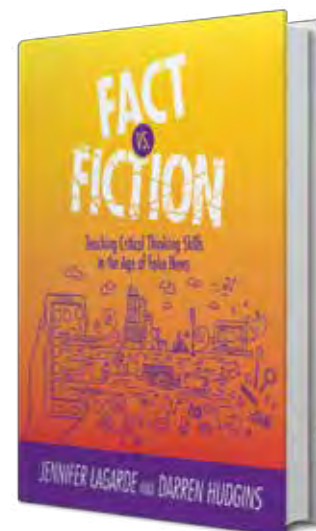
“Digital citizenship, making and educational technology. Those are the things future-ready schools need to do. Who is going to do that work?” asks Ray. “Amplify those stories of success, talk to building leaders and articulate what the future could look like. Ask them to give students the opportunity to become future ready.” 

JENNIFER SNELLING IS A FREELANCER WHO WRITES FOR A VARIETY OF PUBLICATIONS AND INSTITUTIONS, INCLUDING THE UNIVERSITY OF OREGON. AS A MOTHER TO ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN, SHE’S A FREQUENT CLASSROOM VOLUNTEER AND IS ACTIVE IN OREGON SCHOOLS.

## Can your students tell **FACT** from **FICTION**?

Help students navigate today’s information overload with guidance from *Fact Vs. Fiction: Teaching Critical Thinking Skills in the Age of Fake News*

**Pre-order today!**  
[iste.org/FactVsFiction](http://iste.org/FactVsFiction)



**ISTE**