Leah Gregory: Welcome to Can’t Shelve This, the podcast where we hammer home the importance of school libraries. I'm Leah Gregory, and I'm joined by my co-host, Janette Derucki.

Janette Derucki: Hey everybody.

Leah: And our producer, Ola Gronski.

Ola Gronski: Hello.

Leah: So we are talking about rivalries this morning. And I know it's March and we should probably be talking about like basketball, but we're not. We're not going to be talking about that.

Janette: There’s rivalries in basketball, right. Like, let’s not talk about it. I haven't really watched a lot of college basketball and I don't really know why except for, my husband and I will say, like, I think it's because like the college football season was so much longer than it normally is. So it was like just very easy to ignore basketball. I don't know. Normally we're like full on March Madness crazy at our house. But this year, like.

Leah: Ola and I are both like, no sports. Like Janette had to message us and like, just so you know, there's this thing called the Super Bowl and [..]

Janette: It wasn’t that condescending. Wow, you make me sound so terrible.

Leah: No, it was just funny. You're just like, I just want you to know that this, and she had to frame it in terms of Taylor Swift so I would understand it. So we're getting down to the rivalries that really count. And I think this one is all about vampires.

Ola: I mean, it has to be right?

Janette: Okay, so paranormal, any kind of paranormal fiction right now is like, what's getting me through everyday life. Because I can't, I've tried to pick up a million different contemporary books and I can't read about the real world right now, like, there's just so much going on.

Leah: Absolutely not.

Janette: It’s like I need to really completely disassociate, so like, paranormal is where it’s at, right? So vampires, I do love to read about some vampires. I don’t know. How about you guys? Do you read vampires?

Leah: Oh, I read all the vampire stuff.

Ola: Always.

Leah: And I just thought of another one. We have two on our list to talk about here, but I just thought of Stefan and Damon. Do you know that vampire rivalry?

Ola: Oh, yes.

Janette: Oh, yes. Vampire Diaries. Okay, so first I have to tell you this kind of funny story. Ola’s already laughing because she knows what happened. So have you ever watched True Blood?

Leah: I have watched all of True Blood, yes.

Ola: I made a valiant effort to watch it from the beginning, and I think I only got through about a season, but it's on my to do list this year, especially after this story you're about to tell to rewatch it.

Janette: Okay, so like I, Alexander Skarsgard is one of my favorite actors. Like, I will watch anything that that man is in, right? And he is from a very, he’s from a very talented family, let's put it that way. Right. So I don’t even remember how this started, Ola, like [..]

Ola: You sent me an Alexander Skarsgard thing on Instagram.

Janette: Exactly. Okay. So I shared a, I think it was a TikTok or a YouTube video of Alexander Skarsgard with Ola. And she said, her only reply is I'm kind of, I'm more Team Bill. I've always been more Team Bill or something like that. And me thinking Charlaine Harris, Sookie Stackhouse, [..]

Leah: Sookie Stackhouse.

Janette: [..] True Blood. I’m like, oh, like, who’s Team Bill?

Leah: Nobody's Team Bill.

Janette: I’m like, oh. Well I’m like, I guess this is the one case where I prefer the blonde hero. Literally nothing about this conversation ever leads me to believe that I’m on the wrong track, right?

Leah: You guys were not having the same conversation.

Ola: Because why would you be? It wasn't until several days later.

Janette: I was really going to Leah for the tiebreaker, thinking like, I'm Team Eric, Ola’s Team Bill, like Leah can be anything except Team Sam. Sorry Actual Sam who writes our music. Like he's amazing. You can be that team, That Sam, but you cannot be Team Sam from True Blood or I guess you could anyway, whatever.

Leah: There might be a few out there that are Team Sam.

Janette: Well, if you know how that series ends, somebody is Team Sam, but it’s not me.

Leah: Yeah.

Janette: But okay, so thinking that Leah is going to be like the tiebreaker, right? Like Leah is like, Team Eric all the way. I'm like, see, I'm like, Ola’s Team Bill. And she's like, did you think I meant Vampire Bill? She's like, never did I imagine that she would mean Vampire Bill. And I was like, what Bill do you mean? She's like, I meant Bill Skarsgard.

Ola: I'm sorry. I frequently have Bill Skarsgard on the mind, like, to me there’s no other Bill in existence.

Janette: Right. So, like, I did go back and look at our conversation. I was like, yeah, there's nothing about that, that made her think I was talking about one or the other.

Ola: Neither of us clarified anything.

Janette: No.

Leah: And for days you guys were having two separate conversations.

Janette: Right. The whole time thinking, me judging her the whole time for being Team Bill, like [..]

Ola: I was like, wow, her opinion of me was really low for about two days there.

Leah: Janette’s like, wow, you think you know someone, right?

Janette: I was like, wow. Okay, but you can be Team Bill Skarsgard like, that's a good team to be on.

Ola: Maybe we need to start a whole other podcast of me and my rewatch journey of True Blood so that I can update you all on where I stand.

Janette: So I will be honest, like, I did finish that series, I did not watch every episode. Like, I watched pretty religiously until I got to, I can’t remember what season it was. It ended with them dancing around a meat tree. Did you remember that?

Leah: Yeah.

Janette: It was like some kind of a ritual thing. And I was like, wow, this is really different than the books. So then I kind of stopped. But I did finish like the last, I think two seasons just because I wanted to see what happened and how they wrapped it up.

Ola: That's like when shows get so absurd. Like, I think of Riverdale and the fact that, like, I’m pretty sure Archie fought a bear not once, but twice.

Janette: Yes, for sure.

Ola: And I think that’s when I was like, I just simply, we have diverted from the main plot line here and I think this needs to end.

Janette: Riverdale was another show that I watched very religiously the first several seasons. And then I stopped when Mark Consuelos joined. Like I was like, soap opera characters joining this show? Like, hm, how is this going to go? He was a good bad guy, like, I thought, and then, no, the real dealbreaker was when Chad Michael Murray showed up and I was like, nope, I'm out of here.

Ola: Yeah.

Leah: Okay. I can't join this. I've never seen it. I do agree that many times that television series based on books go off the rails and you just cannot tolerate it anymore. And True Blood was kind of like that. There's so many more. Like Outlander, I'm like, I quit watching Outlander.

Janette: I did too.

Ola: I fell off.

Leah: I quit watching Game of Thrones, and I went back to Game of Thrones. But [..]

Janette: People are always amazed when I tell them that I didn't watch all of the seasons of Outlander. It's a great show and it's very well made and very well done. But I am, I guess a purist as far as Outlander goes. And like I watched two seasons of that and I was like, these are not the way I view these characters in my head. And I kind of had conflicting opinions over like what I already believed about them and what the show was telling me. And I wasn't willing to revise my beliefs, I guess, and like rewrite those characters in my head. So I was like, I'm going to be done here. And, you know, really, truly, like, I guess I should have stuck it out to see more of Roger Mac's story because he’s really my favorite Outlander character.

Leah: I didn't love their casting choice for Roger.

Janette: Oh.

Leah: So I'm just I mean, I don't dislike him, but he's very good. But it's just, yeah, for Outlander I had such high expectations that they were never going to meet them, so.

Janette: I agree with that. Yeah.

Ola: Well, I've still got vampires on the brain, so I need to ask. I mean, we would be remiss if we didn't bring up Twilight, right?

Leah: Of course.

Ola: Team Jacob or Team Edward?

Leah: First of all, I have to address the elephant in the room, which is that everybody's like, so anti-Twilight now. And I have to admit, I loved Twilight from the beginning and I still do. And I will frequently rewatch at least movie one and two.

Ola: Listen, we acknowledge that it's bad. I think for me, it's a big piece of nostalgia.

Leah: Yes.

Janette: Right.

Ola: I was definitely the target audience when it came out. And also I will say, though people think the movies didn’t age well, the soundtrack? Perfection.

Leah: Yes.

Ola: Perfection. That will hype me up to this day.

Janette: It's one of the best soundtracks for sure.

Leah: It is.

Janette: I will admit, like, I don't love the Twilight movies, I don't rewatch those like I did have a core group of people that I would go see every movie with when it came out. And it was funny. I had even moved from Atlanta to Dallas during that series and I flew back to Atlanta to go to the movies with these people.

Leah: Wow.

Janette: Like, that's some hard core dedication, but [..]

Ola: That’s commitment.

Janette: It is like one of those things, right, where the books like, really, I was consumed by those. Like I fell into that hard and I didn't resurface for days and people were like, hey, I haven't seen you. What have you been doing? I'm like, oh, I was just, you know, reading. They’re like, what are you reading?

Leah: Reading this vampire [..]

Janette: Yeah, like, how do you explain well I’m reading this book, it’s about a girl who falls in love with a vampire. And they’re like, what? And I’m like, yeah, like, I don’t know.

Leah: I can’t explain it.

Janette: Okay, back to Ola’s question, Team Edward or Team Jacob?

Leah: I’m Team Jacob.

Ola: Me too.

Janette: No!

Ola: Yes!

Leah: Jacob's just such a nice kid. I just loved him.

Ola: Janette, where the hell you been, loca?

Janette: Let me just way, when I'm reading a vampire book, I don't want to be with the nice boy next door. I want to be with the vampire. Like, I want him to be mysterious. I want him to be dark and brooding like that's what I want.

Leah: Well, Jacob was dark and broody after he [..]

Ola: He was.

Leah: [..] became the werewolf.

Ola: Yes. I was Team Jacob until he imprinted on Renesmee. Spoilers.

Leah: Oh my gosh, we're not even.

Janette: Amen.

Leah: We're just pretending that did not happen, okay. So we have this thing in my house and we call it the Spousal Movie Date Covenant, and you invoke it when you want to go to a movie that your spouse doesn't want to go to.

Ola: Oh, I love it.

Janette: Oh, okay.

Leah: So my poor spouse got drug along to all of the Twilight movies. And then I have to go see things like The Fifth Element or whatever, you know what I mean?

Janette: Right.

Leah: Like movies that I'm not interested in.

Janette: I do like vampire stories, but I do prefer, like, shifters, werewolves, like those kind of stories. So it kind of surprised me that I wasn't more Team Jacob. I really wanted to be Team Jacob like, but there was something about the way she felt about Edward that I was like, she doesn't really want Jacob. Jacob, it's like The Hunger Games all over again. Like, you can tell there's a clear favorite. At least it felt like that. But okay, so I will admit it's creepy when Edward watches her sleep, like that part I had a hard time with. I was like, why is this supposed to be romantic? He's basically stalking her, right?

Leah: He was. And also the thing I don't like about Edward is he's just like, I'm just so complicated, Bella. You know what I mean?

Janette: I mean, vampires are very complicated.

Leah: Yeah, he's just like, I'm just like, I'm just so complicated. Have you seen, there's this crazy movie called The Eagle and The Shark. It's a Jemaine Clement movie from a long time ago. He plays this [..]

Janette: I haven’t seen it.

Leah: [..] this total tool, and he's like, mistreating a woman. And he's like, I'm just so complicated. I'm just like, I hate it.

Janette: I just like, I don't know. It made it worse, I think, when the movies came out, because I am definitely Team Edward, like, in the books, but it was easier to be Team Jacob in the movies. Aside from the fact that Taylor Lautner will forever and always be Sharkboy.

Leah: Sharkboy.

Janette: Like, I can’t get past that. And the fact that he married someone named Taylor.

Leah: Taylor.

Janette: So it’s also Taylor andTaylor and I'm just like [..]

Ola: I kind of love that because of that, he's like, resurfaced, right?

Janette: Right. Anyway, okay so I loved Robert Pattinson in the Harry Potter movies. Did not love him in Twilight.

Ola: Cedric, yes.

Leah: Yeah.

Janette: Cedric Diggory. Don’t touch the portkey.

Ola: I will say, literally just about a month ago, I discovered Vampires Suck on HBO.

Janette: Yes.

Ola: The parody movie of Twilight.

Janette: Yes. I love it.

Ola: It’s hysterical.

Leah: Oh my gosh. I have to, like, make time for this.

Ola: And so, Leah, if you are like a die-hard, or actually aren’t they called Twi-Hards.

Leah: Twi-Hard, yes.

Janette: Twi-Hard.

Ola: If you are a Twi-Hard, you need to watch the movie because they like recreate the scenes so accurately. But obviously it's a parody, so it's even more ridiculous. But it's so funny.

Leah: Let's go briefly to Vampire Diaries. Team Damon or Team Stefan?

Ola: Damon, hands down.

Leah: Damon.

Janette: Okay. I'm team Damon, too.

Leah: And see, it's kind of the opposite.

Janette: And it’s not just become of Ian Somerhalder.

Ola: Oh, for me it's because of Ian Somerhalder.

Leah: It is. Smolderhalder is what they call him. And also, Vampire Diaries had a great soundtrack.

Janette: Yes, agree.

Ola: Any CW show, really. Like, it started with [..]

Leah: Yes.

Ola: [..] One Tree Hill.

Leah: I also loved Teen Wolf on The CW.

Janette: Oh, yes.

Leah: That was a good one.

Ola: I was a huge Teen Wolf fan.

Leah: It was really good and it also has a good soundtrack, so.

Ola: More vampire movie soundtracks, please. That’s all I’m asking for.

Janette: I mean, for real, it's always got that, like, kind of angry music, right? The Twilight soundtrack I love because it has a lot of Muse in it.

Ola: Yeah.

Janette: Muse is hands-down my favorite band.

Leah: Really?

Janette: Because people are like, what? And I'm like, [..]

Ola: I mean, that iconic baseball scene. I have never been more interested in sports in my life.

Janette: So funny. Well, everyone's like, okay, so were you a fan of Muse before or after Twilight? And I am proud to say before.

Leah: It came after for me, but yeah.

Janette: Was it?

Leah: That's how I find new music is I hear a song in something that I also loved.

Janette: Yeah. Thank you for indulging my vampire paranormal phase that I'm in right now. I appreciate that.

Leah: Today, we are talking about getting school library certification. And we're joined by School Librarian Licensure Coordinator at the University of Illinois, Lauren Ochs.

Lauren Ochs: Hi.

Leah: And recently certified school librarian Hanna Fiedler.

Hannah Fiedler: Hi.

Leah: Before we get to the really important stuff, we're going to do something fun. This is our icebreaker. What kind of reader do you consider yourself? Are you a physical book reader, an e-book reader, or an audiobook reader?

Lauren: I'm definitely an e-book reader, but recently I've really started to get back into being a physical book reader. So I'm kind of both right now, which is exciting.

Hannah: Yeah, I have to say, I'm, it depends on the season. Because during the school year I am 100% audiobook. I need it for the commute. I need it on a 1.5 speed [..]

Janette: Yes.

Hannah: [..] versus summertime I'm like, give me my stack of books. I want to sit outside and read the pages. It's great. So it really depends. But right now I'm audiobook all the way.

Leah: The season of your life impacts the, yeah.

Janette: I was going to say, it’s so hard. Like, I’m trying to get more into audiobooks, but I am like, I'm the person, I'm not an audiobook’s like main, best audience because [..]

Leah: Me either.

Janette: [..] I tune out. They're telling me this wonderful story. And I'm like, wait, what happened?

Lauren: I do the same thing, yeah.

Janette: Yeah. Like I just completely, like, just ignore it. So that's not great, but so I can listen to audiobooks generally of books I've already read, which seems counterproductive, but it is nice to be entertained.

Leah: And you also, I always say, like rereading in any form is awesome because you get more out of it the next time around.

Hannah: Yeah. And that's why I speed it up because I'm like I need to be able to focus. If you talk faster I will follow with you.

Janette: That is true. You do have to try really hard to follow what they're saying when they're talking that fast. If you're reading a physical book though, do you prefer paperback or hardback?

Hannah: Hardcover.

Janette: Yes, hardcover.

Hannah: I like a hardcover.

Leah: Now see, I like paperback so I can read in the bathtub and if I drop it in, it's not a tragedy.

Janette: It’s still paper, Leah. It’s not like.

Leah: I know, but like it only costs a few bucks.

Janette: That's hilarious.

Leah: Yeah, I don't want to drop a $30 or $40 book in the bathtub, [..]

Lauren: Right? That’s true.

Leah: [..] But like an $8 book, I'm okay.

Janette: That is true. What paperback are you buying that's only $8? That’s what I want to know.

Leah: I know, well, see, I've switched mostly to e-books, and I do not take the e-books into the tub, so.

Janette: I mostly need e-books now because I can't see anything, so that’s fine.

Leah: Yes.

Janette: Although I am reading this like great, like it’s kind of like a horror mystery book right now, and it feels nice to have it as a hardcover. Like, being able to hold it and like you’re in those really like gripping, scary kind of scary scenes. There’s something really nice about the tactile experience of that. Anyway.

Hannah: Yes.

Janette: Now that you think I’m really weird, let’s get into this episode.

Leah: Well, I have to say, e-books are for the instant gratification person in me because, like, with an e-book and if it's on your phone, for example, which mine are, you can read wherever you are. So like, I'm getting more reading done because like if I'm standing in line or if like I'm waiting for something to happen, so.

Janette: Right. For sure.

Leah: I find it so fascinating. Every time somebody comes on, we ask them this question and it's so fascinating to hear the reasons why they are doing what they're doing. And it's basically because we all love to read and we're trying to do as much of it as we can, and we're doing whatever works in our lives, so.

Lauren: Absolutely.

Hanah: Exactly.

Leah: Let's shift into talking about how you got into the field. So let's start with Lauren. Lauren, how did you become a librarian and end up where you are?

Lauren: So I became a librarian because I always, and I became a school librarian, because I knew that I always wanted to work in schools since I was little. That's just, I loved school and I loved doing school, and that was just very intriguing to me. So at first I thought I was going to be in elementary school, and then I was kind of graduating high school and one of my English teachers was like, I think you need to be an English teacher. And I was like, oh, and I thought about that all summer. And so like the first day of classes my freshman year of college, I went and changed from being an elementary major to being an English teacher or an English with teacher certification, which was the best choice for me at the time.

But I was a little, I loved reading, I loved books, I loved all of the literature stuff that English teachers do. I loved preparing students to write. I loved the research process. At that time, we were very big into learning how to integrate tech into classrooms and things like that. I loved all of those pieces but I was really intimidated by the grading, writing. And so I had a good school librarian growing up, and I knew people who were school librarians and knew people who were in the master's degree, getting a master's in library and information science. And all of a sudden that just clicked in my head and I was like, oh my gosh, I can do the reading. I can buy books with other people’s money. I can, you know, do the tech integration, I can do instruction with teachers, I can teach students, but I can also teach faculty and things like that. And it just clicked that that was the right move for me to make.

And so I did do my student teaching in English. So I had a teaching license coming out of undergrad and went straight in to get my master's in library and information science and the endorsement that you need to be a school librarian. And then my first job, straight out of school, I was looking for English teacher jobs and librarian jobs, and I happened to find a school library job that I really loved. And then I was a school librarian for 16 years after that, before I started my current position as the School Librarian Licensure Coordinator at U of I.

Leah: Hannah, what about you?

Hannah: So I have to go back to when I was a little kid and I love this story because it's so vivid in my mind. And I went to my mom one day and I was probably about 12 and I said, did you know that there is a degree in library? And she was like, yeah, yeah. That’s a thing. That’s exactly what I have to do, the library my favorite place. Books are my favorite thing. And she said, honey, with the best of intentions, in about 20 years, libraries are probably going to be obsolete. Not a good idea, like, I wouldn’t recommend it. Let’s find something else for you to do. And so I took that to heart, I said, okay, I’ll put that somewhere else.

And I ended up, as I know a lot of your guests, kind of doing the roundabout journey, right, where I studied psychology, I got a job in public health. I did that for six years. And I was doing a lot of education in schools, teaching health programming with high school, middle school, elementary school. And then about three years ago, I was like, I did a lot of introspection and it brought me right back to the thing that I loved all along, which was library. And realizing how much I loved working with students as well, combining those things. And here I am today, school librarian. I couldn’t be happier.

Janette: That's so cool. I think of all of the guests we've had so far, Lauren has had the most direct path to the library. Like, it's nice to know that there's at least someone, but most of us have not come that way. That's definitely not been our norm. So that's amazing.

Lauren: I always tell that to people when they introduce themselves in classes and things like that, that one of the benefits of this profession is there's so many different backgrounds to get into it and it just makes the profession more rich as a whole, I think.

Leah: I remember when I was applying to the U of I when I decided to go back to get my library degree, I had gotten a business degree because my father, like your mother, Hannah, had said, like, don't be a teacher. Don't be a librarian, you know, get a business degree. And so I listened to him and regretted it for a really long time. But when I was applying, I was thinking, there's no way I'm going to get in because I do not have the background. And I remember talking to someone at that time and they were like, no, no, no. This degree specifically is looking for people with a diverse set of backgrounds.

Janette: I mean, librarianship touches a lot of different fields, right.

Leah: It does.

Janette: You really can't go wrong. Yeah.

Leah: So let's talk about what does it mean to be certified. We get a lot of questions about this and when we talk about the library world, we're talking about certification in a lot different ways. Like right now is certification season, which means that every library in Illinois has to certify that they still meet their system requirements. So I'm talking about certification there, and then we're talking about certification there. I tried to switch to licensed school librarian instead of certified school librarian. So let's talk about what is school librarian licensure.

Janette: And keep in mind, this will be different for every state. What we're going to talk about here is going to be the requirements for Illinois. That's where we all live and work. So it may be different in the state if you're listening from somewhere outside of Illinois.

Lauren: Really, school librarianship is the only area of librarianship that I know of that you need a license for. And that license is a teaching license. So you need, in Illinois it's called a professional educator license. We abbreviate it PEL. So you need a PEL and then you need, for any subject area, you need an endorsement for that subject area on your teaching license. And so that, in Illinois we call it the library information specialist endorsement. So to be a licensed school librarian in Illinois, it means you hold the PEL and the library information specialist endorsement. You have to have both those things.

Janette: And so what does someone have to do? And I guess that's going to be for either of you. What does someone have to do to get that endorsement? I think there's a lot of misconception, and this is the reason I ask, that you have to have an MLIS to be a licensed school librarian in Illinois. So I want to kind of clarify what that, what's required.

Lauren: It depends where you're starting. If you're starting without the PEL, you need to do an educator prep program. So that's what our School Librarian Licensure Program is at U of I. So our program leads to the MSLIS degree, so the master's degree. It leads to the PEL and it leads to the library information specialist endorsement, if you successfully complete all components of it. So then you are fully licensed to be a school librarian in Illinois, you have a teaching license that you could also then add other subject areas on to if you wanted to, with different endorsements, but you also have that MSLIS degree as well. So you have the flexibility of that degree too, to be a public librarian, to be, you know, an academic librarian and all of those kinds of things as well.

If you're starting with the PEL, you just have to get the endorsement and the rules for the endorsement for the library information specialist endorsement are the same as all subsequent endorsements, whether you're getting science or English or anything like that. And it's 18 credit hours of coursework in the subject with a C-minus or better in each course. And then passing the library information specialist content test. And then just applying for the endorsement in your ELIS account. So you can do that in various ways. There's several places in Illinois you can just get the endorsement or you can do a full master's degree in a library and Information science if you want to.

That was the route I took. I did the full master’s because there were so many classes I wanted to take that that worked out for me. But there's flexibility in that, too, in just getting the endorsement versus getting the full master’s.

Janette: I'll say, even in getting my master’s like, there were still classes I wanted to take, right, even that wasn't, the 36 hours. I was like, can I take? And they’re just like, you can stay here as long as you want. You just have to keep paying for it. And I was like, well, I don't want to keep paying for it, so.

Leah: If money was no object, I would stay in school for the rest of my life, honestly.

Janette: I would, too.

Leah: Yep.

Janette: People think that that is the wildest thing, Leah. But literally I would, too.

Leah: Especially library school. Because I loved it. I remember walking in on my first day. I was really nervous and I was like, I shouldn't really be making like, I just felt like it was a big change and I shouldn't be doing it. But I walked in and then like an hour in, I'm like, oh yes, I'm home. This is where I’m meant to be.

Janette: Yeah. I really appreciate you clarifying all of that, Lauren, just because, like I know Leah and I have been in groups of librarians recently where there are still people who are surprised at what the requirements are for licensure, like they do think that you have to have a master’s and it's like, you really don't, especially if you're already an educator and you're just looking to make that switch. You know, it doesn't mean taking on the full expense of getting that master's unless it's something that you want to do for, you know, salary goals or something like that.

Lauren: Yeah, we have people contact or I have people contact me talking about becoming endorsed or getting the master’s. And we know sometimes teachers have multiple master's degrees and so sometimes at certain points of your career, it may not make sense to get a full master's degree depending on your pay scale and what you maybe get reimbursed or anything like that from your district if you're lucky enough to have that, so.

Janette: Right.

Lauren: Yeah, I think there is flexibility in being able to just do the endorsement or do the master's degree.

Hannah: I have a colleague who's doing that exact thing where she's already got her English degree, teaching, all that. It’s great, and she's working in the library and just focusing on taking those classes to get that content area test and get that endorsement so she can do her current job, which is as a school librarian. So that kind of worked out for her to do that. Versus for myself, it was the same thing where I wanted to do the full master’s and have not only the flexibility to move between different libraries if I wanted to, but I wanted to take all those classes. Yeah, I still have so many classes that I'm like, oh, but what if I went back and did that one, too.

Leah: I keep going, I keep thinking like things that I want to take classes in that have nothing to do with school librarianship or my job. But just like data, like Janette is a data science librarian, and I'm like, I wish I had done more of that. But I find I am glad that we're clarifying because I feel that so many people who are doing this job like they're a reading teacher or a reading specialist or a technology teacher, and they're getting stuck in the library. And we're going to talk more about that in a minute. I shouldn't say getting stuck. They have the privilege of being put in the library, let's put it that way.

Janette: They're working in the library.

Leah: But becoming licensed if you already have a license is pretty doable, I think. Eighteen hours and a test is much more doable than an entire master's, although many, many people I've talked to end up getting their master’s once they’re started.

Janette: I will say, too, like, I want to also clarify, when you're talking about licensure, though, I say this just because I'm involved in the data collection effort to collect information from all the school districts in the state, and I will get districts that will report to me that their parapros are licensed. And it's like, yes, in Illinois you can have a paraprofessionals license, but that is not the same thing as a PEL from what Lauren was describing earlier. So, you know, it's a little bit tricky when you start asking them, well are they licensed? Well, yes, they're licensed, but it's not the same as a full teaching license.

Leah: Or they have a substitute license is what I get all the time.

Janette: Right. Yeah.

Lauren: I think that’s where a lot of the confusion is, because there is a paraprofessional PEL, but we, to be a licensed librarian, you need the teacher PEL and the endorsement.

Janette: Right.

Lauren: And the teacher PEL I believe is the only one you can actually add endorsements to.

Leah: Well, let's talk a little bit more about what we are seeing in Illinois schools. And Janette and I work with a lot of different schools. And we're seeing, of course, and you're probably hearing about this, too, that basically they are replacing school librarians with paraprofessionals. And this is where we have to put our disclaimer, because we are not saying that the paraprofessionals are not doing a great job. They are out there killing it every day. And I would never say that they should not be in a school library, and especially the ones who really love it and really take it to heart and are doing 100% of what a certified or licensed school librarian would do. My problem is that they're not getting paid for that.

Janette: Right. It's like there's a little bit of an exploitation there. Like, you do worry. And I feel like in librarianship, we're all a profession of people who are do-gooders, like, for lack of a better word. Right? Like, our hearts are all in the right place. We're, you know, public servants. We, especially when you're working in schools, you know, kids first, right? So you want to do whatever is best for the students. And if you can see that something's going to make a difference or make an impact, you 100% want to give it your all. But for a paraprofessional, you know, like it's unrealistic for a district to expect them to do all the same things that a licensed school librarian is trained and equipped to do. Bless them for wanting to get that knowledge and learn those skills. And like, that's amazing because you do need, there's nothing worse than being in a job where you don't know what you're doing, right. And no one has taught you what you need to do to go into work every day and take care of your library. But I mean, we want to keep them from being exploited in that way and we want them to be paid for the services that they're providing.

Leah: So I'd like to ask you, do you think that this blurring of that line is detrimental to administrators understanding and identifying the need for licensed school librarians?

Hannah: I mean our support staff, I know paraprofessionals are so crucial, like they are vital to helping the library run and there's so many tasks from circulation to shelving, to helping process our books that I'm like, we can't run without our paraprofessionals and our support staff. However, if there is someone that's in a position where they are then jumping into the roles that, you know, your librarian is the educator and the person that is doing curriculum integration, information literacy, helping with collection development, and really fostering the love of reading with students. And our paraprofessionals do that as well. Like they talk to students about books and they love that.

But like you said, you should be getting paid for those tasks if that's what you're doing. If you're doing the job of a librarian, a school librarian, then you're running the library, you are a librarian, and you should be getting paid for that.So if you can get that actual license to do that, that's what I would really encourage people to go for that and really make sure that they are being respected for if they're going above and beyond that paraprofessional role.

Leah: If I won the lottery, I would endow a fund to move paraprofessionals into the certified licensed library world because I meet so many of them that are doing such a great job.

Lauren: We have people in our programs right now who are paraprofessionals and they're seeking to get that license so that they can be officially on the teacher pay scale instead of the paraprofessional pay scale. And, you know, I think it's great that they're able to take what they're learning in classes and apply it right away to their jobs and what they're doing. And they're also able, they do so much of their own professional development and learning how to do their jobs on their own already. And then they're able to like sort of figure out maybe what blind spots they have, things they haven't thought of. Because I always tell teachers, especially, when they're coming into the library like you have your teacher brain but you also need to have library brain as well and they need to coincide together. So you kind of build all of that up together in getting that licensure.

Janette: I think that, too, like there's a difficult kind of flip side to what you're describing. So we've talked to a few paraprofessionals recently who've expressed a little bit of fear over losing their job if their district were to value having a licensed school librarian. So, you know, what would your advice be to those people who are feeling that fear of kind of wanting to cling on to the job that they have because they don't want to be out of work, right. And we want them in the library if they love it there. So what would you say to those people?

Lauren: So I think advocacy is a huge part of being a librarian in a variety of ways. And so continuing to advocate for a licensed position in the school to open is a way to kind of figure out if your district is open to that or not. But also just to talk about all of the things you are doing to everyone, to parents, to administrators, to teachers. Sometimes teachers will jump in as your biggest advocates for things like this and be able to push in ways that you can't. And I totally understand that fear. I don't want anyone to lose their job because they got more education. Right. That seems silly. But yeah, I think advocacy is a huge piece of that. And to work with places that are doing advocacy as well, like the library systems, like AISLE, and all of those kinds of things that can help you advocate for positions as well.

Hannah: I think that it's scary to be in that position because, like you're saying, especially if it's a school district where maybe they don't have that position available to you and they don't have the budget available to you. So I feel like if you can, like Lauren is saying, try to talk about the value that you know that a school librarian can bring and have those conversations with the board or people that you trust in administration. I don't know. And really trying to say that you are bringing this value to the school, but this is the greater value that can be brought if you would have a licensure and you would have the opportunity to learn those extra skills and bring them into the school. It's a tough thing, though, right? I feel like people can be in those scary situations, like you were saying, Janette.

Janette: Right. Well, and it's hard too because, like I mean, if you have people who are doing all these tasks and they're not licensed, you know, your administrators are kind of like, well, why would I hire a licensed librarian? I already have someone in there who's willing to do all of that, and on this other pay scale, right, on a lower pay scale. And I feel like that's where the exploitation comes in. Like people need to understand their own worth, right?

Lauren: And I think it's important to do those comparisons. Like you said, Hannah, I think it's important to say this is what I can do as a paraprofessional, but this is what librarians, what licensed librarians do, and also tie that in to goals for the district and goals for the school. Administrators have goals for their buildings and for their districts. So any way you can tie your goals into their goals, I feel like gives you a little bit of power to play with a little bit. But definitely making all of those connections is helpful in advocating for positions.

Leah: So let's say that we have the ear of every administrator in Illinois right now because they all decided to tune in. What's the number one thing you would say to them to convince them to hire a licensed school librarian? Not over a paraprofessional, but in conjunction with a paraprofessional?

Hannah: I would really want to highlight the changing role of librarians in our schools and in our community and the fact that, because for me it goes back to my mom saying libraries are going to be obsolete in 20 years, and now we see you know, 20, 30 years later, our libraries are growing and adapting and they are, I think, more useful and important spaces in our community than ever. And so especially in the school, those spaces, they are for helping students with, you know, learning information literacy, learning their media literacy, helping them become informed and responsible citizens. And going back to speaking the administrator’s language, we actually, we've talked about it before on this podcast, I know. But we see improvement in our standardized test scores and our reading and our math scores. And those librarians make a difference in the school. And it's also about that emotional and mental safety that students experience in their libraries, that this is not just, it's not just about, you know, oh, we’ll see improvements in our scores, but we will also see improvements in their mental health, which helps with students’ education and how they flourish in their community, in their school space.

So I think it's just understanding that these libraries are not stagnant places. Your librarians are constantly growing and evolving and adapting and trying to bring in new technologies, new data analysis, new information curation. And they're here with the best interests of your students in mind. And this is, I've heard it before, but it's not just about like budgeting and staffing. It's an equity issue. When you look at schools and how some have school librarians and some don't, and you see the differences in those school districts. So it's equity, right? Trying to make sure that everyone has that access to the resources that they need to grow in their schools.

Janette: Wow. Okay, this episode's over now because how do you follow that?

Leah: Yes, exactly.

Janette: Like, that was amazing. But I think that you got it. You really got to the heart of what is at stake here. Right. And I say this a lot in presentations and discussions I have with librarians, there's this mindset of like one library, one librarian, and that is not really realistic, especially in today's day and age, when librarians are required to do so much. You know, like, I mean, not just that we're able, but we are I mean, we have like a professional kind of code, and there are things that we know we're entrusted to do for students, and that's what we want to be able to do.

And, you know, I really feel like there are parts of the state level kind of governance of school libraries that get it. Like if you look at the administrative code in the school code, it says very clearly like there's a librarian who's in charge of the curriculum and teaching all the lessons and the literacy education. And then there's, you know, support staff who basically facilitates the operation of the library while the teacher is teaching. Right. So it takes both kinds.

And in the SLATE project that I work on at RAILS, you know, we every single year find that school districts are calling their librarians 300 different titles, you know, like, and that's all just you're the librarian, you're running the library. I feel like that really kind of gets to the heart of the fact that they don't really know what anyone's doing. They're calling you this thing and you're in the library, running the library, whatever that means to them. I feel like you have to really understand that it does take a couple of different people to do the work of this large and really integral part of your school.

Lauren: And I think too, for if we're talking and focusing on administrators, you know, librarians are mentioned in the Illinois Comprehensive Literacy Plan as partners and experts in their field. So that's important because we know districts are focusing on literacy and making their own literacy plans and things like that. And it's so multifaceted. Like Hannah said, you're teaching information literacy, you're teaching technology, you're working with students, you're working with faculty. And you really have when you're given the flexibility to do so, you can really build library programs that benefit your specific community and your specific community's goals.

Leah: Something that I didn't really realize and that I think it's important that we address when we're talking to administrators is that, school librarians, I mean, it sounds very like science-y, and I'm not saying that the next part that I'm going to say isn't science-y, but we're like, [..]

Janette: It is library science, Leah.

Leah: [..] it sounds very cut and dry, like we're teaching literacy, we're teaching this, but we are also a huge part of social emotional learning. And I didn't realize that until I got in a school library. And I don't think administrators realized that their library collection and their library space and their library staff are all part of improving students’ social emotional well-being. So I just always like to add that little caveat.

Janette: We talk a lot about how, like, there are very few teachers in the school that see every student or who have the ability to impact every single student. But librarians are one of them.

Lauren: And year after year. So I worked in a high school, so I saw kids for four years and saw them grow from freshmen to seniors, sometimes teachers don't get that opportunity. They just have them at their like one moment in time, kind of.

Janette: Yeah. Well and, too, it goes back to, I feel like I say this on every episode at some point. But like, to me, sometimes the library is a feeling, right? It's the feeling you get when you walk through the doors. It's me going to a new town and knowing as soon as I walk into their library what I'm going to find and how I'm going to feel when I get there, regardless of whether I've been there before or not. So I want kids to have that connection.

Leah: And I worry when I meet adults who have never had that and they have no idea what a library offers them. And it just makes me sad that they never had that. Learning about being and using a library as an adult citizen, it starts when they're in school, so what better place than to put it right in front of them.

Janette: People ask me all the time, they're like, why should everyone care about their school libraries? I'm like, well because that's where you learn to be a library person, right? Like library kids turn into library adults, to use the words of Mychal Threets.

Leah: Who vote.

Janette: Yeah. Who vote, for sure.

Leah: Alright, so let's say that somebody wants to get certified, Lauren, and they call you. What are the first steps? What are the first things you're going to suggest that they do or that they need to do?

Lauren: So it really depends on their backgrounds. If they have a bachelor's or not, those kinds of things. So if they already have a bachelor's because library classes are housed in master's level programs, that's the first requirement, is to have a bachelor's degree. And then we work on kind of their goals, how, you know, soon they want to be licensed, all of those kinds of things. So time frame and what we can offer them in terms of doing that.

If it's a teacher, sometimes they want to start just with maybe taking a class or two via continuing education to get their feet wet and kind of see if it's the direction they want to go. And then they kind of decide, do I want to just get the endorsement? Do I want to get the master's degree after that? If people don't have the license, obviously their only path through is the master's degree and the licensure program, as part of the master's degree because we have to fit in all of those requirements from the Illinois State Board of Education, as well as all of the library courses as well. So we kind of start talking about goals and how things would work for them and things like that.

Leah: And Hannah, as a recently certified librarian, what would you say was like the biggest challenge of getting certified, or getting licensed, I should say.

Hannah: I mean the classes were all great and like I loved going through that and I was able to do it all online while I was working at my old job too. For me, it was tough to go from a position where I had a lot of expertise in my old job, I had been there for many years. And then, even starting my student teaching, I would have days where I would be going home crying. It doesn’t take a lot for me to cry, but I would be like driving in my car, like, I’m a failure, I don’t know what I’m doing.

Janette: I've so felt that sometimes.

Hannah: Yeah.

Leah: Student teaching is brutal. Student teaching is brutal.

Hannah: And I had the most amazing mentors, actually, Beth Kovacic, who was here from Dryden Elementary School, [..]

Leah: Oh, yes.

Hannah: [..] was one of my student teaching mentors. And she, I couldn't say enough good things about her. Jen Sutton, Lake Park High School. Kori Wentzloff at Edison Middle School. All just, shout outs to all of the amazing people that mentored me during my student teaching. And Lauren as well, Dr. Kristen Mattson. I mean, I couldn't thank these people enough for guiding me and helping me through that process because I think that was the most challenging thing, right? Trying to, jumping in and being there every day and trying to take over the role of a school librarian when I hadn't done it before. But ultimately that was the best thing about doing my school librarian program with U of I, was doing those student teaching hands-on experiences and the networking that comes with that.

I mean, that's, that's what I say, like, it's the hardest thing, but the best thing that I did and like, I still have those connections now. I mean, I'm here because of Lauren, right? Like, reaching out to me, that was like, an awesome way to get connected to more things. And I can still message those people. You know, I'll text Beth or I'll email her, I'll be like, okay, I need to figure out this thing on Follett, you know, can you help me figure this out? Or with Jen at Lake Park, where I'll say, oh you're having an event in March, I want to come and stop by and be there with you for that. So for me, that's when I'm like, do it. Like, go do it. Get your connections, get your networking. Like if you haven't done it before or if you're considering it, getting connected with those other librarians is one of the best things you could do.

Leah: I 100% agree. The more librarians I meet, the more I realize that everybody should know hundreds of librarians. And it just makes your life so much better.

Hannah: Yes.

Janette: But it is hard to make those connections though, right. Like I mean, it's scary, it's, you know, like sometimes you're just kind of in your own little world thinking like nobody's going to understand, how do you reach out? You know, there's that fear that you have in any kind of social interaction, even if it's online or in person, doesn't really matter. Leah and I have talked about discussing that in a completely separate episode of this podcast, because I feel like that type of networking, how you approach it, is different for everyone. Some people start like at local level and work their way up. Some people start at like the national level with like AASL and then work their way down into their kind of like local networks. So it's a little bit different for everyone, but once you're connected, it's the best thing ever. But getting connected can be really scary.

Leah: And I did it backwards. So I got, I went and got a master's degree in library science, and then I realized I am in no way qualified to be a school librarian because I did not have a teaching license. So I went through a teaching licensure program and did that separately. And so when I student taught, I just student taught in first grade, I didn't do it in a library. So then I ended up in a job where I was the only librarian in my building, and I never got to talk to any other librarians. And I did not realize what I was missing at the time. So another big plus for getting certified is that you're going to meet other librarians. And I cannot tell you how that has enriched my life. And it sounds like Hannah feels the same way.

Hannah: Absolutely.

Leah: So is there anything that you would have done differently, Hannah, about getting certified, knowing what you know now?

Hannah: When I first started, so during this first year of my job working there, I think that I've had moments where I'm like, I wish that I had more experience in the library before this. And so when I had first started my master's, I considered that, where I thought about maybe I should go volunteer at the library or get a job somewhere where I'll know like, I can test the waters, maybe. And maybe a question for all of you, it's like how do people do that? How do people try to test the waters when realistically, I didn't really have time to do that when I was working full time and taking grad school and doing all this.

And so jumping in, I was like, thankfully I had the student teaching experiences, but I'm still trying to figure out how to run reports on Follett, and I'm trying to figure out how to do inventory and the weeding process, which, like thankfully some things are easier than other things. But I think that that's something that I've had to sort of trial by fire sometimes, where you're like, I am still learning all this and I don't want to mess it all up the first year that I'm working in a school. So yeah, how do people get some of that experience before they do it? It's tough.

Janette: It's hard because I feel like when you're in library school, at least this was my experience. It was like there were a million different opportunities for practical experience, but none of them really applied to me. Like I was like, oh, a law library, but I'm not going to be a law librarian and I don't have a JED and I don't have all these things, right. And so it was like there just never seemed to be a good fit. So sometimes finding those opportunities is just as hard, even if you wanted one. I'm amazed that you worked full time and got your master's degree because I definitely did not do that. I was a full time student and that was enough, right. I can't even imagine juggling both and then trying to get practical experience on top of that. That would be a lot.

Lauren: I would say most of our students are working full time and trying to do library as well. We have a few that are full time students, but it’s one of the reasons that a lot of our required licensure courses are in the evenings or at least after 4 p.m. and things like that, so people can take them. But it's a lot to manage. I know I took classes when I was in the school library just for continuing education purposes, and sometimes I was like, wow, I don't know how I made it through that semester. And then, and I don't have kids or anything. And I'm like, people do this with kids and all of these other [..]

Janette: Right?

Lauren: [..] factors that, you know, suck their time and all of that kind of stuff. And it's just, it's always amazing.

Janette: Yeah, I will completely recognize my privilege in being able to go to school full time. Like that was, I was very fortunate to be able to do that.

Lauren: Yeah, I did the same.

Leah: I did attend the U of I both as a full time worker, so I started when I had not quit my other job, and then I quit my job and I was like three months maybe where it was great, and then I had a newborn. So I've done it both ways and I can say they're both hard. There's just no way. So obviously anybody who does it is working very, very hard. And that's why I think it's so important to really stress to those administrators, they are working so hard to learn these amazing things that if you allow them to, they can transform your school. And I'm very insistent about that. I feel like the library is a magic place where it makes huge differences in people's individual lives and in the culture as a whole, and in the nitty gritty details of getting better reading scores. So I'll get off my soapbox. I have to remind myself every time we do this podcast to get off my soapbox.

Janette: Instead, our soapbox keeps getting taller and taller and taller.

Leah: I know, I know.

Janette: We have more of them and they’re very big now.

Leah: Yes. And we just like, and we haul them around with us and we're like, okay, we're going to get on our soapbox now.

So any other advice to teachers or non-certified library staff besides get certified? I really want to encourage people who are not certified to get certified, and I think they will find it very rewarding. We were talking about getting experience, like you didn't have a lot of basic library experience, but those paras who are doing it do have that nitty gritty library experience. And I just want to stress that getting certified would expand that so much.

Lauren: I would emphasize making connections. We, oftentimes when we are interviewing people for the school librarian licensure program, we'll sort of give them homework and that is if you have time in your schedule, find a library to volunteer in. School library, public library, get, you know, experience where you can. If you don't you know, find a group of librarians on social media. Whatever platform you prefer, there's probably librarians there. So find them and interact with them. Librarians are great about sharing. We want to share our passion for our libraries and for librarianship and for our students and all of those kinds of things.

And we understand how hard each other is working and that a lot of times we're solo librarians in our buildings or in our districts. And so we want those connections, too, and I think we're really good about learning from each other. So follow a Facebook group, follow, you know, a Twitter, whatever, hashtag, that you can find and learn what you can learn from the people who are in the field doing it so that you can, you have those connections for later and you can make those, you know, educational things work for you in your specific role.

Janette: And I'll add to that, for the online groups that Lauren's talking about, like don't ever hesitate to join something even if you're like, they're going to feel like I don't fit here. They're going to, maybe I don't know anybody in this group. Like, definitely just put yourself out there, even if it's uncomfortable because sometimes, like just being a fly on the wall, you learn a lot, right? And you will connect with people who are having similar experiences. You'll probably have a lot more organic reasons to engage than you think you will.

Hannah: I know I'm a big lurker.

Janette: Yes.

Hannah: I’m lurking all the time on, you know, a Facebook group or whatever

Janette: Same.

Hannah: And I’m like, oh okay, that person had the same question I did about their book displays and, like, why isn’t it moving? So like, what’s some advice that people have on there for me? And I also think that for paraprofessionals, people considering it, look for classes that might help with blind spots that you have, where maybe there’s a class that talks about grant writing or a class that talks about like the reference and information services. Because I think that when you take those classes, I remember, like, doing my reference class and I was like, yeah I understand how to do this, and then I was in the class like, oh there’s a lot of things that I don’t think about. Like, I need to remember that I should develop this skill. So that helps a lot with those, those blind spots that you might not realize that you have.

Lauren: And PD, PD through the library systems, professional development through AISLE, professional development through other organizations related, like media literacy, things like that. Look for those free PD sessions where you can and ask your district to pay for your PD if you can't. I mean, they have PD money somewhere.

Janette: I think this is a good time to talk about one of the PD events the systems in Illinois host in conjunction with the Association of Illinois School Library Educators is the Illinois School Library Workers Symposium. And that was an event that was devised specifically for what you're describing, right. To give non-licensed, non-trained library staff the ability and a venue to learn some of those skills.

And I know like one of the things recently that people have been talking a lot about is readers’ advisory. Like people think that working in a library is just recommending books and it's like, well, that's great if you've read all of the books and you know how to recommend them and you know how to pick them for the right reader. And I think that that's an untapped skill set that people don't realize that librarians develop, right? Like you learn how to pair readers with books in some way, shape or form. It's not just like intuitive, and some people are better at it than others, right? And some age groups are easier than others. But it's definitely one of those things that you do have to learn.

Leah: I just taught a class about readers’ advisory for our member day that we just held, and I was like, when you do it right, it looks like magic, but really there's a lot of skills behind it.

Janette: It’s also why you have like those professional magazines or the journals with all the lists and the recommendations, the professional reviews, and then also NoveList Like, shout out to NoveList for being like literally every librarian’s, like, secret friend that can tell you about all the book recs.

Leah: And shout out to the Secretary of State to providing the database package, which includes NoveList.

Janette: Yes, that is true, so every library in Illinois has access to NoveList now, which is amazing.

Leah: It is amazing. So we're going to address the next elephant in the room, which is that it is expensive to become certified or licensed. So what advice do you have for people who maybe want to become licensed but see it as a, you know, a financial burden? We obviously have, we can refer them to the Association of Illinois School Library Educators, which offer scholarships. So I always start there. Just if you guys have any other advice, I'm sure people would love to hear it.

Lauren: So you also have flexibility in how long you take to complete it. So it's something that you can do slowly, one course or a couple of credits at a time, as you're able to do it. So that's something to consider as well. But I always refer people to AISLE as well. If you're a teacher, maybe hosting a student teacher and getting a tuition waiver to a school that has a program. I know I was able to get my technology specialist endorsement through U of I because I hosted student teachers in the library and I got a tuition waiver back for that work.

If you're not hosting, sometimes if your school is in an area where there is other people hosting student teachers, sometimes if your school has enough or your district has enough, they get like extra tuition waivers. So check with your district about things like that. Ask about professional development money if it can be used for coursework or if your contract includes coursework as part of, you know, a benefit for you. Places like that. Obviously AISLE and other organizations, sometimes there's local teachers organizations that give out scholarship money. So check in with places like that as well.

Janette: Those are all really good suggestions. One of the things we've heard a lot recently are that districts are more reluctant or less likely to pay for advanced degrees, depending on, you know, the area that they're in. And I think it's like that tuition assistance is kind of drying up compared to what it used to be, maybe. And then also, I would always just say as part of this discussion, make sure that the position is going to be there before you, you know, pursue the degree, because I think that there have been a number of people who have found themselves in a situation where they now have a licensure, but they're not going to be compensated for it because the district isn't creating the position of a licensed librarian. So, you know, there's a lot of moving parts before you take on that kind of financial risk.

Leah: So outside of state mandates, what's your opinion on how to get the number of certified librarians in Illinois to grow?

Janette: Can I preface this with something?

Leah: Yes.

Janette: Just from a data perspective, like we know that we only have about one out of every three school librarians that’s licensed. That's whether the position exists for a licensed librarian or not. But there's only enough licensed librarians who have that endorsement to cover about 30% of all the schools in the state. So there’s not, like how do you increase the pipeline too, I guess, I'm not sure if that's where Leah was going with that question, but I'm curious to know, how do you grow that number? Not just the number of positions that are available, but also the number of people who exist with this endorsement to the point where we would have enough or a large enough workforce to even you know, accomplish that goal of having a licensed librarian at every school.

Leah: The chicken and the egg.

Janette: Right.

Lauren: So the pipeline is interesting because it's a concern across the country. I've actually submitted a proposal, I don't know if it'll accepted, for AASL with, we run a program with Chicago Public Schools where we are trying to get Chicago Public School teachers to be licensed librarians and open up schools and take positions in Chicago Public Schools. And so they do have a tuition assistance program. So they're able to use that and we are able to use some scholarship money from some donors that we have, that, and we were able to kind of work in conjunction with them to pay for their tuition, to do the 18 credit hours. But that's, you know, just a start. And that's just one location and one district. So that's something to consider.

But I'm interested in this proposal that we had for AASL, if it goes, there are other districts doing some different things as well and I'm eager to learn from them and what they do in their states to create that pipeline to create more licensed librarians. I think it is a lot of advocacy work to create those positions, and that's something, we talk about advocacy all the time in all aspects of librarianship, but this is a big one to actually have the positions available for us to take. And I know that AISLE is doing a lot, Gail Meyer with the AISLE advocacy team is doing amazing things in promoting school librarianship. So I think finding those people and working on those advocacy pieces is huge, not just for your specific district that you're in, but overall in general. We should have more positions open in Illinois and finding ways to do that and the correct people to work with on that is huge.

Leah: I just want to add here that recently the House and Senate bill were introduced based on that AISLE task force that has been working towards getting a school librarian in every school, where we are going to ask the Illinois State Legislature to form a task force to study this problem. So hopefully that will be moving us forward towards this goal as well.

Janette: Yeah. And I'll just say just for perspective, like I'm very excited about and interested in the project the University of Illinois has in conjunction with Chicago Public Schools, because right now, if you put a certified librarian in every school in CPS, that's half of the licensed librarians in the state. So it's going to take a lot to ramp up their workforce to have that. And like, think about that. If there were only roughly like 700 licensed librarians for all the other schools in the state, that would be over 4,000 schools to be served by 700 people. That's ridiculous. Like, that's not anywhere near enough. So it's just like the idea, like, we're working from such a deficit and there's, you know, you've got to find different ways to get at this problem.

Hannah: And speaking as someone who's kind of new and doesn't have a lot of expertise necessarily, I think from my end it's that the mentorship piece was so huge and I think it's something, it's just for anyone who is in this field already to think about how do you support new people coming into it? How do you, I mean, if I know someone, like I know a librarian, Mariela Siegert, she's at Downer’s Grove North, and she will constantly say she wants to bring in great people into this field, right. Like, so I just think about her saying that all the time is that she's like, if she sees someone great, she's like, come be a school librarian with us. It’s like, try to convert everyone, but I think that that is a big like, for boots on the ground, just thinking about your day to day as librarians, how do you try to support other people coming into this and make them feel like they can do it, that they have the means and that community to do it.

Leah: I can add in here that I just recently saw that ILA is starting or enhancing their mentorship program. So if you were interested in being a mentor or are interested in having a mentor, look into that. Every time I go to click on it to say I'll be a mentor, I like change my mind. I've been very scared about doing it, so maybe I will like finally go ahead and jump in, because I do agree with you, Hannah, that that is very important.

Hannah: And I think that sometimes people have not great experience, like I had amazing experiences, but I know I've talked to people that they didn't always have the best mentorship experiences for whatever reason and who knows why. But that's why I think it's so important to have people that, you know, if you trust yourself, that you have good intentions and you want to help people, like, go for it because people need that. Like I needed that. I needed people that were supportive and kind and welcoming, and that made a huge difference.

Leah: So one last bit of guidance for administrators when making hiring decisions? And kind of to tie in with this, I think my advice would be like they need to get creative because they may not have a librarian. I've heard multiple times we would hire a librarian if anyone applied. Part of that, though, is like a little secret, you do have to post the job. We were remarking like, it's a little hard to apply for a job that is not posted. So maybe you guys should get on that first.

Lauren: And advertise. Send it out to places that have people coming out who want jobs. Send it to AISLE, they post jobs. You know, all of that kind of stuff, too.

Janette: Is there anything in this conversation so far, like, that we haven't touched on that you really were hoping we would share?

Hannah: One thing that I think about with teachers, because I work, one of my colleagues like I said, she was a teacher and now is becoming a librarian. And I am amazed by how well she's able to merge into her role because she understands teachers and what they need. And so I'm just like, if there's teachers out there that are thinking about this, I'm like, you will have a lot of skills to bring to the table that are going to be so amazing for your role as a librarian. Because for her, integrating with curriculum? Easy as pie. Like she knows what she's doing, she knows how to talk to the teachers, she knows the standards.

So it's super great for her to have that. And then she's like, she just gets to bring a whole new facet and get to hone in on different things like the research and, saying, okay, I'm going to try this new thing. And there's definitely challenges because she's like, I don't get to, I don't have as much control over curriculum and the unit as a whole, so I have to come in for like one or two lessons at a time or something. So there's challenges to it, but she has so many things that make it really easy for her to connect to the teachers in the school. So just as an encouragement to people.

Janette: I think that's an important part of this whole pipeline discussion, right? Because, you know, we keep talking about people who were already in the library and how they get licensed. But I think that a large component of the workforce for libraries, like if this AISLE task force moves forward and is successful in like eventually resulting in a mandate for a certified librarian and a library aide for every library, you know, you're going to have to really ramp up and expand the workforce. And I don't know how you scale it fast enough if you don't bring in outside, like, classroom teachers, other educators who already have their PEL and just need to add the endorsement because, I mean, it's unrealistic, I think, to expect everyone to go and get like their teaching license and, you know, this endorsement or the master's or all at once, like you've already got people who have those classroom management skills, the curriculum skills. And a lot of that is the very foundation of what you need to be a school librarian. So I think that's a really great point.

Lauren: And if you're looking for how to become a school librarian in Illinois, like programs that are available to you, if you go to the AISLE website, aisled.org, and click on their tools and resources tab, there is a document that says become a school librarian, and it talks about the different programs available in Illinois, if it's just an endorsement program, if it's the whole full educator prep program. So that's a place to start in gathering information about how to go about it.

Janette: So here's a question people are going to ask, because I know when I was searching for library schools, like, there's a million things you think about, right? Facets for making those decisions. Are there advantages or disadvantages to being in an iSchool versus another program that maybe is just endorsement only? Like can you talk about that side of it when you're making a decision?

Leah: iSchool.

Janette: I mean, I say iSchool only because there's so many more opportunities and other options for you. But like for some people, if they want an on-campus experience, they might be limited to their geographic area.

Lauren: Yeah, I would say in terms of iSchools, it is that general piece of it as well. Because we have people who come through and they're like, I want to be a school librarian, but they're thinking retirement in, you know, ten years as well and then they’re like, and then I'd like to move into the public library realm as well after I retire. So sometimes it's just kind of your individual situation, I think, and it depends on that and what you, what your ultimate goals are coming out of it, which direction to go.

Leah: I did mine backwards, as I said. So when I went through my teaching program and got my PEL, I don't think anybody mentioned the library in any class that I was in. So I had an incredible experience in my library school journey, so I can strongly recommend the iSchool. So I just, I kind of did the best of both worlds, I guess, but nobody would be insane enough to do it the way that I did it. So I think if you have to choose and you have the option I would recommend an iSchool, because it just really gives you thecutting edge of library skills and instruction.

So this brings us to the final part of our podcast that we do with every guest. We like to call it Shelf Care, because we know that being a librarian is amazing and everybody should go out and become a licensed school librarian right away. But it also can be kind of difficult and kind of lonely sometimes. So we always like to give everybody like, what are you doing to take care of yourself right now?

Hannah: I have been literally taking care of my shelves and I got one of these little book nooks that’s like, that you build this, from Anderson’s.

Leah: I love it so much. Did you make it?

Hannah: I just finished building this last week, I got this at Anderson’s Bookshop and I loved it so much. I’ve gotten really into building these little models, I put on an audiobook. And I built a pirate ship before this, however, the cat did dive through the middle of it so now I need to go and repair the several sails. But that’s been great. I just love to like, it’s like high stakes Legos, right? Where I’m piecing things together. So that’s something I do, I just do a little crafting and listen to my book or I put on a show, but I like watching K-Dramas so I can’t really watch those while I’m building because you need to read the subtitles.

Lauren: Well I think I'm going to have to do what Hannah just suggested. That looks amazing and I want to do that. But just blocking time for myself to do something other than work, and, not just for myself. I just ordered some fabric. It's a book set, it's called Between the Pages. So I'm excited to get it in and maybe start making a little quilt for myself. So I haven’t sewed in a really long time, but I want to get back into it. So I thought if I would get cool fabric with books on it and other things, that would maybe, like, kickstart a new project.

Janette: I love that. Now, have you made a lot of quilts in the past?

Lauren: I've only made two. My grandma helps teach me how to. We made t-shirt quilts out of my junior high and high school t-shirts and [..]

Janette: Yeah. Fun.

Lauren: [..] it was really fun. And so I got a little kit a few years later and made a little quilt top thing that I liked. But you know, it's one of those things where you have to get stuff out to work on it. So I've been trying to clear a spot just for sewing where I can leave stuff so it's out when I want to work on something and I don't have to get all that prep stuff done. So I'm excited to do like a real quilt, is what I keep saying.

Janette: That's exciting.

Leah: Having the space and the tools to do something makes it so much easier to do.

Lauren: It does.

Leah: And you definitely have to share the quilt with us when you're done. So that's what we love.

Janette: Yeah.

Lauren: It might be a while.

Leah: This is a podcast, but like, it is available on YouTube because we’ve had several people share very cool things that they've been working on. So find us on YouTube as well.

Lauren: You'll have to keep asking me about it so that I keep working on it.

Leah: A little positive peer pressure,

Janette: That's amazing though. But I also love with projects like that, you can pick them up and put them away as you need to, right, because also, like, you don't want to get to the point where the thing that's relaxing you now becomes stressful or demanding, right? It's supposed to be leisurely.

Leah: Supposed to be, key word. Well, I would like to thank Lauren and Hannah for joining us today. We appreciated having you and it's been lovely to chat with you about this topic, and our listeners will hopefully find lots of good advice here from both of you.

Hannah: Thank you so much for having us. I feel like we made some new friends, right?

Leah: Oh, definitely,

Janette: Yeah, of course.

Leah: That's the best part about this podcast is meeting people and that like, hopefully be seeing you out some place.

Hannah: Yes, yes.

Leah: So to our listeners, let us know if you have any questions or topic ideas that you want us to cover, and you can now leave us a voicemail on our hotline at 630.734.5015 or you can always find us on the web. Until then, stay legit. Don't quit.