Welcome to Sparks this is Deirdre Brennan I'm the executive director of rails the Reaching Across Illinois library system cesare podcast and we started this spark conversation and discussion and debate about Library issues and Trends today my guests are done scuderi who is the library director at Lemont High School in Lemont Illinois and karalyn kinsella who is the incoming Executive Secretary of Isle the association of Illinois school library Educators the professional association for school librarians and media specialist in Illinois welcome Don and Carolyn thank you thank you thanks for having us we're glad to have you so we have I said we're going to talk about school libraries and the important role that school libraries and school librarian in particular play in the ecosystem that is that is libraries of all types so I think I'll start off with you Don do you want to open this up by just talking about from your point of view what it is what's the main role that school librarians play that you play in your school sure absolutely yeah I really feel that school librarians kind of bring that piece of collaboration and engagement and literacy most school librarians that I Know Myself included the kind of come along with this tool kit that help students to interact with technology and find good very good online resources collection building is really important and I think that piece that kind of brings teachers in together to collaborate and work together and keep kind of a consistent message to students with regards to finding information and accessing it so Carol and I think that most of my career has been as a public library in but it seems to me that school ever is play many different roles in the school library would would you say that that is that is absolutely true so many different hats you are first to teacher just like every other teacher in the building you are collaborator you are disciplinarian and you teach every single student in the district or at least in your building and you get along with every single teacher support staff administrator because you are the one Hub where everybody comes together so it's not like oh well you just have to get along with your English Department or science department or only the third grade teachers you as the the librarian and a building or District need to encourage everyone and get along with everyone and support everyone and that is a really big job along with your students let's not forget that the students with all their with all their different grade levels and and individuality so the library and a school is the place where everybody can come and be on equal footing and have equal access and that's the joy and thrill of being a school librarian absolutely I think it's the heart of the school almost certainly I actually just spend many many many afternoons meeting with departments all over my building reminding them that I'm here for support asking them if they have any upcoming projects in the next year I'm already planning my calendar for next year what things are going to be looking like what kind of resources they have now that they're not what kind of resources that they might be interested in in the coming months ahead and already we're only in March and getting ready for the next year and making sure that everybody's needs are met which is a really big part of being a school librarian and very rewarding part of being a school librarian also so I refer to it as an ecosystem and I really believe that I I when we did our strategic plan hear a Trails we heard from every type of library and not just school librarians by any means how important school librarians are to the success of librarians and users of of the public library the academic Library the special or corporate library that maybe people is it when they're at work the people that can't be good users of those libraries if they don't have the grounding the foundation that school librarians and school library Q I feel like school librarians are kind of like that very first taste of what libraries in general for a lot of kids who know there's a lot of kids out there who aren't lucky enough to get the opportunity to visit the public library of small children and that school librarian is kind of that first taste of that person that go to that access point and that role cannot be understated in terms of what that means for students once they leave the school system and go onto an academic 4-year college or join the workforce and then need to rely on their public library and so I feel like it's that very strong advocacy piece for libraries across the board to have a really good school librarian in your building that's kind of building that good base for the understanding of how libraries work and what kind of important tools Librarians provide and please provide if a student doesn't get that early on it I mean they may never actually really realize the importance and role of libraries in their life and what that can do it's that equal access point that I said before but in a school library it like I said and they don't get it somewhere else what you've already mentioned on but we then as a school librarian are able to send those students out with the tools to understand how to find information how to access information how to use it and how to discern what is fake news that comes from the school librarian we thank all the time o l Any teacher can do that but they don't have the training and the understanding and the concept in the background to teach it plus they're so curriculum driven with their own testing standards that they need to meet that the standards of the school library are the ones that give that Foundation from from kindergarten through 12 that makes a student or understands I let that student understand how that Library can help them forever and ever and ever distance arches to ask me oh I miss is K I bet you have just a ton of books at home and I would smile and go know I had to deal with them all at work here I don't because I use my public library every week I said I don't buy I said I'm a teacher I don't have that much disposable income and they would laugh and then I would say so I don't need to and then go all the new ones you can't get an interlibrary loan I'm not going to get it read that we in that week anyhow so you know I would try to encourage that relationship of that ongoing adults finding outside of your school when you graduate and then I sit here all the time about students who go to the academic setting and they are like sophomores or whatever and all of a sudden they realize what they've missed out on by not utilizing the support of the academic library but most of the time those students didn't have a robust teacher librarian certified in their school libraries and I don't know how I would have learned to do research when I was a kid in school if I didn't have a great school librarian to help me because that's not something that you just you're not born knowing that and you don't necessarily get it from other teachers absolutely in and I think there are a lot of teachers out there who who do great work are encouraging their students in research and that do bring that piece into their classroom for sure but I feel like maybe more so even with the school librarian does is they kind of the ensure that everyone is on the same page with that they're like that unifying piece of the puzzle that ensures that everybody's being taught how to research the same way that everybody is getting every piece of that puzzle and that nothing is getting left out now we I think it even goes kind of past, how to find good resources and and even into the realm of light Rye deal with older students and many times I feel like they need to be taught us will how to protect their own product 2 + what that means like we're really moving forward now students are there more than just learning and they're creating too and they've got product of their own a man that's a really important piece that Librarians good Librarians bring to the table and especially as you're going on in 20 academic Library where you will be a creator of your own content hopefully by the time you get out of a four-year you know be contributing and you want to make sure that your contribution is protected it's an asset you need to make sure that that pieces taken care of and school librarians do that I think that one of the saddest things is that feeling that are that worried that my students are going to leave my building and they're going to go into a four-year college or university and they're going to get that very first paper and their communications class and they going to have to research for that and they're going to open up the website for their academic library and they're going to look at those resources and feel completely overwhelmed I feel like that's going to happen to some in some respects like I don't I'm a high school librarian obviously I don't have U of I's amazing academic you know opportunities for my students but then research opportunities but I want them to at least leave and feel free to like feel familiar with it when not to be just completely Awash in the in the sea of information and so I feel like that that is another piece of that like ecosystem when I get to students from the elementary school and it's my job to prepare them for four years of high school and then sure that they're doing everything they need to do research wise and intellectual property and access and all that important information and when they leave me they should leave me prepared for their four years in their academic Library kind of understanding what to expect and how that works not just finding the information is understanding that if I'm lost there is an intermediary there is a trained person who can help me and that's the thing that if if they're going to library in a school setting that doesn't have that train person sometimes the really missing that component in an understanding again whether it's in the academic library or the public library that it's that's person behind the desk knows what they're doing ask them the question that's what they want to do and so meeting as a a school librarian one-on-one or small-group doing that instruction with the teachers and especially with the students is the thing that lets them know that oh hey this person teaches and they can teach me how to find stuff and they're all over there are people who has its information and they are all over I can go to my public library I can go to my academic Library I can go to my special I where I can go I can go to another school and there's going to be somebody there but if there isn't that person trained then we have that disconnect and that's what I see sometimes talking to two students talking to adults the adults who don't seem to use their Public Library are adults who didn't have a strong School library didn't have that idea we were too distant from their Public Library that kind of think they did not they just don't understand that there's this wealth of free information in front of them and somebody to help them find it whenever I teach the Freshman research classes I always remind them the last thing I say is you have one other resource and you need to remember and they kind of look at me and I go me where to go your next step is to come and find me like I am that person who's going to sit down with you and help you work it out and figure it out and I think that's just a really important message and by the time I get to my you know sophomores they I can start that sentence and don't forget you have one more resource and they all kind of look at me it's and they're like it's you that's it that's a great it's it's just a great place to be and I do get students on a regular basis to come in to find me I'm will say you know I started working on this and this is how far I got a kind of hit this roadblock I'm not really sure to go from here and I try to help them make sure that they've exhausted all the possibilities right that they've they've looked at everything and that you know where they are now cuz you can research and research on Research forever right days for sure or Shure solutely so we know this is her talking to the choir here but let's face it is you know particularly in Illinois I'm sure in other states too but we know about Illinois School libraries are the funding and the Staffing and the The Collection budgets are not going in the right direction so what why don't administrators get this why don't they understand do you know what can we do and it you know speed I've mentioned I'll be for which you know Carolyn is the incoming executive secretary will is the advocacy chair as well and that's kind of what we're talking here is advocacy how can we get this message out beyond the choir I have found anecdotally I haven't done you no real data-driven research hear that the administrators who seem to not really understand the importance of the library are administrators who didn't have squid School librarian this children cuz I asked I've asked them you know when they will woodcut what don't you understand about the importance of why braces and usually it's did you have you know I've asked that particular question was there a strong Library what we just had little classroom libraries are we didn't have a central library or you know they they don't have it I never went to the public library is a child we just didn't do that in my family and so I'm seeing that this is almost a generational kind of thing that you would could talk about the other thing to is in the state of Illinois superintendents talk just like Librarians talk now it's a small little group of people just like District Librarians aren't you know it's a it's a smaller group and they know that if they have to cut a budget the state doesn't require a certified School librarian and every school and so they talked this happened and you know I'll wait in particular when things crashed and then the next year when the assessed valuations were down and all that happened then you know they got together at their meetings and said oh well we can get rid of the library that's a whole teacher salary or we can make one certified librarian for 5,000 kids or whatever and it still says on our on our District web page we have a librarian but we don't have that one-on-one so a lot of it happened at that time they talk they figure this out and but they've brought back so many of the others but they're not bringing back the libraries and I that's one of the things we've we've talked about as an organization and I'll and that Association of Illinois school library Educators we need to get to the decision-makers we need you teach those and we talked to you here at rails a lot about it we need to get to those administrators and explain to them and teach them especially if they didn't get it when they were children that this is critical in the 21st century information overload means you need to be able to analyze and interpret and decide what's fake news but you can't do that unless you've been taught just like I know how to count 1 2 3 I don't need any more math well that's not right I have Google I don't need any more help finding information that's not right so when I we talk to him like that some if it only takes a few for the light bulb to go off a few I hope we'll make more Carolyn don't you find to that a lot of Administrators and superintendents they haven't actually done research themselves in a really long time and if you if you haven't really looked at what things look like online now and the amount of data that you get back when you put something into search bar and you don't have a real working knowledge of how the web works I feel like a lot of times principles and administrators they don't really understand just how much research has changed in the last fifteen 10 even five years and they don't they could because they haven't done it for so long and I really feel like maybe one of the things that we need to have a conversation about is exposing administrators superintendent to exactly what research looks like now I think a lot of times they're looking back on their own research experience many years ago and they're thinking or or the research that they are doing now which I mean it may or may not be something like you know just throwing a question out into Google and getting an answer back which I feel like we're all I'll do that as an adult as adults but they don't really understand that there's just so much information now and advertising the first thing that you see I know Google is an ad right if you don't understand like how the web works that you're just putting words out there and it's just finding every occurrence of that word and and what a dog named name means and how to how to drill down on those and get good information like if if an administrator hasn't had to do that in a long time they may or may not really understand that research has become very complex where you don't just go and ask for Time Magazine from June of 1987 and you know at your periodicals desk you really have to know how to make an adequate searchin how to analyze the results and how to make sure validate your sources and that and you know if you don't if you haven't had to do that in a long time are you really just don't know so maybe that's something we need to do we need to expose our administrators are superintendents to today's what today's research looks like they have a better understanding of why this might be so important and necessary for students to be taught by somebody is an expert at doing it and I would add not just the administration I feel like our school boards are even less knowledgeable and as decision-makers yes they take the superintendence do you know recommendation often times but even some training with them even just showing them at a small little school board meeting or at one of their work groups or something like that especially as a breakdown and curriculum because they're the ultimate ones and make the decision the superintendent recommends but that school board can say yay or nay I remember I worked for my first two years in an elementary school and they didn't have any databases and I was the district librarian and I really advocated for online resources so I went to my administrator and I said would you allow me to come into an administrator's meeting and show them what a database looks like let me give them a lesson on what that is and so all the administrators came in a couple months later and I went to their administrator meeting and I pulled the database up and we walked through it and I encouraged them to bring their own technology and once they saw it across the board all of the administrators signed on for databases in their level a selected database that I've added and like ensure that it was going to meet their needs and this is what students need and when I left that meeting my administrator my principal came to me and said well they were all fighting over you taking that step and putting yourself out there and being willing to risk is it's just it's monumentally important so I think we have to kind of put some of that on our administrators but I feel like we also have to put some of that on our current Librarians to like it's really important I us that's what's up and say this is what I bring to the table don't wait for an invitation you might not get it no no you can't wait for you have to be like you know and it I just think it's just really important to make sure that you're always kind of in there and part of the conversation and reminding people what you do and and putting yourself out there and being prepared to say this is this is what we need and this is why we need it and let me show you sometimes that speaks more volumes then you know any article I would say that that is a great story and lesson for all Library again after school library but exactly how we can we can give data till we're blue in our face and they always ask for data which we provide but the data doesn't put a person along with the information and you can't give data without giving also that anecdotal information that that this is the what the students are learning this is how it works in with the creek elem this is how it will help everyone in this district and it really does go back to being prepared with that tool box and that's what I mean when I say that like you know what that's what Librarians bring to the table always is like next thing that you need or that resource you didn't know was there or how that resource works and what it's going to do for you like it's great to have Google Google is amazing it's it's absolutely you can learn so much but if you don't know how to use that tool it's anything for you it's it's just going to spit information back out at you and so you like that's what that person does so important so what can we all do and join aisle or do you have plans for as the advocacy Guru for Aisle or we're working on it I'm a we're all in this together so nicely nicely with rails on a more consistent basis in the last few months for sure understanding that we need to support each other we have you know advocacy and an advocacy team and I'll now that we are working on trying to do this we work at our conference there are always sessions on how to advocate for yourself how to how to get up there you know how to not be afraid you know so you get sometimes you have to ask five times and eventually they'll you wear them down and go get what you need it's not always immediate so you know don't even trust you don't succeed don't go I'm never going to try that again so that kind of support because school librarians are often times in one and only so it's very hard for them to bounce ideas off of it's not like you got a team of up second grade teachers who can bounce ideas off there's just one certified District Library on and so that's why all can assist with that sure we are trying and working with rails on a meeting and getting administrators those decision-makers involved in understanding the importance of that certified School librarian who comes with that tool box who comes with that wealth of information to help our students so we want to also will try to offer professional development throughout the year we're working on that I know that you do through rails and I'll wants to partner with those things as well it's a full of wealth of information and it helps you not feel isolated as a school librarian and often times it can you can feel very isolated we're near a one and only so Isle gives you that group that support of knowing oh I have someone else weekend again who I can ask and run this idea by absolutely I I can't say enough about Island how important it is to be around other Librarians I'm the only library in my district and the only person who does my job in my building and while my colleagues are wonderful amazing people they don't always understand my role and so I very often. To remind people I mean that's always fine but I also don't always get that valuable feedback I don't always have that go-to person in my building to say like I'm going to run this past you what do you think of it Sean worth keishin should I go there like I don't always have that and so definitely having my state organization that it's a game-changer for sure I highly highly recommend that anyone who can get to a conference just really sick that conference out and seek out those sessions that are going to provide advocacy that are going to give you that team of people who are going to help you out and here in Illinois I'll has definitely done that for me like I could have done my job not have been nearly as successful and advocating for school libraries without having us support of the state other people in the state so there you go listeners join dial & up for the aisle conference go to the rails website and see everything that we are doing together with our colleagues in school libraries we the largest portion of our membership School libraries I want to thank you both so much for being here today is really important and inspiring thank you thank you thanks again for having us thanks for inviting us for sure thank you very much for listening to Sparks today Sparks is produced by the Reaching Across Illinois library system if you would like to learn more about the show or share your feedback on the topics discussed please visit rails libraries. 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