

Leading from the Library

*Help Your School Community
Thrive in the Digital Age*

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Introduction

We spoke to librarians and school leaders across the United States, and they shared a common feeling about the role of libraries in the digital age: It seems to be constantly in flux. The digital age has brought revolutionary new tools that have impacted our schools and libraries in dramatic ways. Access to devices and the internet has improved both at home and in our classrooms and we are utilizing digital content to engage students in meaningful ways. Contrary to the misguided beliefs of some, the work of the librarian is not merely reading books to kids and helping them check out materials. It never was. Modern librarians are curators of information, tools, and strategies; they see everyone who walks through the doors of their schools as a potential learner. They are masters of technology and understand the way computers and the internet have changed how we both use and value information. These are the librarians of the digital age.

Common perception may paint a picture of librarians as one dimensional, as only curators. We recognize that, to be effective, librarians must go far beyond resources and materials, finding “just right books,” and teaching research. In the digital age, librarians must respond to the challenges of the existing world and try to predict what the future will hold. In short, librarians must be leaders in the fields of education, technology, and information and be both willing and able to share their expertise. Only by embracing that leadership will we be able to begin to repaint the picture and change perceptions.

That’s why this book exists. We hope to share our insight, experience, and stories to empower change in our schools and solidify digital age library programs through the leadership of our school librarians.

Project Connect, Future Ready Schools, ISTE Standards and Librarians

In our work, we are regularly asked for advice and guidance about the changes that librarians and schools want to make in their library programs. In these cases, we point to a number of guiding documents that have helped us to pave the way for the changes that we want to see in our own programs. While not an exclusive list, Project Connect, Future Ready Schools, and the ISTE Standards provide structure for change and an understanding of the role of the digital age librarian. These three documents are the basis for the changes that we have made in our own schools and what we often point librarians to in their own work. As an administrator responsible for his library program at a district level, Bill uses these documents as a way to have common language with his librarians to make tangible change in the programming, mindset, and spaces that make up those school libraries. Throughout the book we will reference each of these documents many times, citing examples and approaches that we have seen make change to programs around the country.

Project Connect

Every career and program has defining moments that change one's thinking enough to alter the direction and approach to one's work. This happened for Bill in 2015, when he attended the American Associations of School Librarians (AASL) National Conference in Columbus, Ohio. He was in his third year serving as the district administrator responsible for the school library program, and he accidentally wandered into a superintendent panel being moderated by Britten Follett, senior vice president of marketing strategy and classroom initiatives at Follett School

Solutions. During that session, she was describing the Project Connect framework that had been put together to redefine libraries and prepare them for the realities of a modern library programs. As he was listening to the speakers, it became clear that this was the guiding document that he had been looking for to do some long-term planning for his district. He was inspired and motivated by the framework and immediately began looking for more information.

If you are unfamiliar with Project Connect, it is a framework developed by Follett “to advocate for librarians as district leaders so that students can learn digital literacy, modern research techniques and cutting-edge skills that apply across all subject areas” (Follett Learning, 2015). This framework can be used as a guiding document for schools and districts to set goals, communicate the role of a modern librarian and library program, and provide a structure for professional learning for librarians seeking to grow in their practice. More specifically, Project Connect breaks the role of the librarian into nine different facets that define and explain the role of the digital age librarian. Brigid Dolan, a high school librarian in Bill’s district, says that Project Connect

...defined the different roles we play in our schools and helped us think about how we spend our time and what we do on a daily basis. It categorizes our work and helps to give us language that we can use that is understandable by everyone. In my library, it’s helped me to communicate with my teachers and community to let them know all the ways that I can be helpful for them.

If you’re just starting with Project Connect, we suggest taking a look at the framework (found at tiny.cc/hllr2y) and completing the inventory worksheet in Table 0.1 (an editable version of this document can also be found at tiny.cc/2llr2y). This breaks down each of the Project Connect elements and helps you analyze the

work that you do over the course of a week. While some of the topics definitely overlap, this will give you a picture of how you spend your time as a librarian and where your opportunities are to redefine the work that you do.

TABLE 0.1 | Project Connect Inventory Worksheet

TOPIC	CURRENTLY DOING <i>Where do you see this in your current work?</i>	WANT TO DO <i>Where could you fit this in?</i>
Professional Development		
Instructional Partnership		
Digital Citizenship		
Curriculum and Technology Integration		
Information Literacy		
Content access and curation		
Reading and literacy advocacy		
Learning space design/ making and building (4Cs)		
Equity		

Source: Kim Lindskog, Parkway School District

Upon his return from AASL, Bill began looking further into the origins of Project Connect and eventually connected with Sara Trettin from the U.S. Office of Educational Technology, who was working on an early draft of what would become the Future Ready Librarians® Framework with the U.S. Department of Education. While this was early in the lives of both documents, the potential for change was immediately evident, and the connection to the work that many districts were doing became the catalyst that he needed to rethink how libraries could be structured and approached in his district.

Future Ready Librarians® Framework

Future Ready Schools was part of the U.S. White House ConnectED Initiative that was launched in 2014, where district superintendents from around the country came together to launch their transition to digital learning and sign the Future Ready District Pledge. That event became a catalyst for change in schools to prepare them to meet the needs of students, now and in the future. During this time, Follett and the U.S. Department of Education had partnered to develop the Future Ready Librarians® Framework.

According to Britten Follett,

The conversation started around creating a standard for a librarian's job description and revisiting the rubric by which librarians are evaluated. But we quickly determined that wasn't enough. So we created the Future Ready Librarians® Framework as a way of connecting the dots between the role of a library and a librarian to the challenges districts are facing. Every Future Ready librarian's role might look different depending on the strategic needs of the district. (Personal Communication, 2018)

With the help of Follett and a number of librarians from across the country, Future Ready Librarians® was the first framework created as a part of the Future Ready Schools Initiative. It also serves as a guiding document for library programs as they connect their work with that of their overall districts. What makes this framework so useful is the parallel structure with Future Ready Schools. Because the overarching topics are the same, it brings consistent language to schools and libraries, moving them in the same direction toward supporting each other. This structure and alignment signifies the importance of the librarian to the overall school environment and helps to further solidify the librarian as a leader in our schools. Since its initial development, the framework has undergone a second iteration and now includes the element of literacy as central to the work of the librarian.

Shannon has been involved in these initiatives from the very beginning and has been fortunate to support and provide ongoing development for librarians, as well as advocate for these guiding documents in schools across the world. In 2017, she had the opportunity to become the library spokesperson for Future Ready Librarians® and Project Connect. It was one of those opportunities she couldn't refuse, and she is forever thankful to have had a role in amplifying the message of both programs.

Throughout the book, we regularly reference the Future Ready Librarians® Framework and refer to the “wedges” that make direct ties between the categories and libraries. These wedges provide the basis for connections between what is considered traditional library work and district and administrator goals. We specifically focus on how librarians can lead beyond the library, but we also recognize that every element in the Future Ready “wheel” (Figure 0.1) includes some leadership capacity.

As you explore this Future Ready Librarians® wheel, pay close attention to the edges of each of the wedges and take note that

each one of them starts with an action. As we've already stated, opportunities for leadership abound in this framework, and those actions are where it starts. Just like with Project Connect, we recommend taking inventory of your current practice and identifying the opportunities that can come in these categories. You may have to be creative in your thinking, but opportunities are everywhere, and these are topics that administrators think about on a regular basis. If, as a librarian, you use this consistent language, your work will be crystal clear in its alignment to the work of the greater school community.

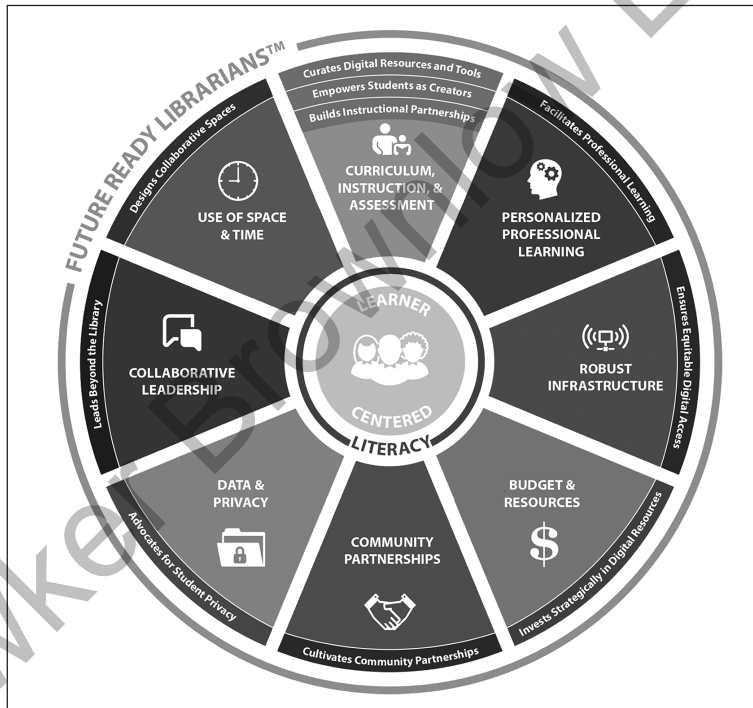


Figure 0.1. Future Ready Librarians® wheel.
 Source: Alliance for Excellent Education, Future Ready Schools, and Future Ready Librarians®, reprinted with permission.