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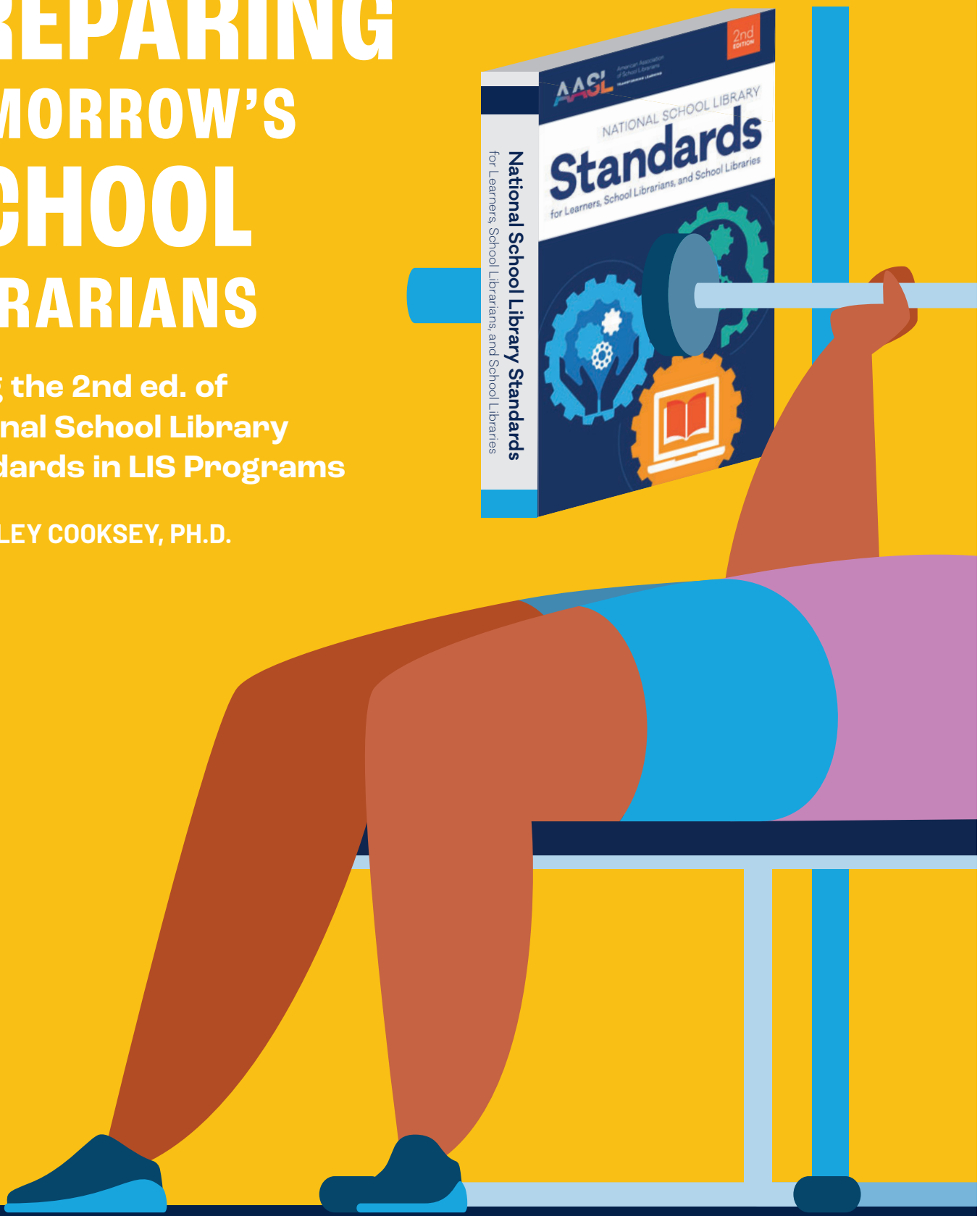
PREPARING TOMORROW'S SCHOOL LIBRARIANS

Using the 2nd ed. of National School Library Standards in LIS Programs

BY **ASHLEY COOKSEY, PH.D.**



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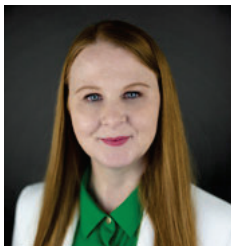

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We're living in unprecedented times for school librarianship.

SCHOOL LIBRARIANS FACE UNPRECEDENTED SCRUTINY, with book challenge attempts far exceeding pre-2020 levels and increasingly driven by organized pressure groups rather than individual concerns (American Library Association 2025). School librarian positions face elimination in districts across the country (Lance et al.). Legislative attacks on intellectual freedom escalate monthly, with state legislators introducing bills at unprecedented rates that would remove longstanding legal protections for library workers, mandate content censorship, and erode the authority of librarians to manage their collections (American Library Association 2024). And yet, amidst these challenges, the demand for skilled, confident school librarians who can advocate effectively for their programs has never been greater.

This is precisely why the second edition of the *National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries* arrives at a critical moment, and why those of us preparing the next generation of school librarians must leverage its updates intentionally in our coursework.

Why the Second Edition Matters Now

The second edition isn't just a refresh of the original standards (very minor language changes were made to the standards). It's a response to the realities facing school librarians today. The enhanced focus on advocacy throughout the text reflects what we know practitioners need: concrete strategies for communicating their value to administrators, school boards, and communities. The expanded assessment tools provide evidence-based approaches for demonstrating impact. The contemporary examples address issues like intellectual freedom, misinformation, and digital citizenship in ways that resonate with current educational landscapes.

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Perhaps most importantly for library and information science (LIS) educators, the second edition strengthens the connections among all three standards frameworks: learner standards, school librarian standards, and school library standards. A significant enhancement is the inclusion of scaffolding examples that demonstrate how to apply competency-based standards across different grade levels and developmental stages. These practical curriculum planning tools help future school librarians envision how standards translate into age-appropriate instruction, moving

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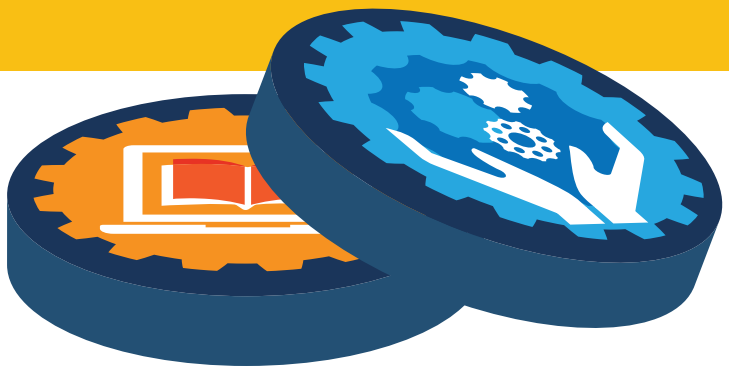

from abstract competencies to concrete lesson objectives. This interconnection mirrors the reality of practice, where effective school librarians must simultaneously develop learner competencies, maintain their own professional growth, and evaluate their programs holistically.

The Preparation-to-Practice Pipeline

Here's an opportunity worth exploring in our field: We're preparing future school librarians using one set of standards (the American Association of School Librarians [AASL] School Librarian Preparation Standards), while they'll be expected to practice using another (the AASL Standards for School Librarians). The preparation standards guide what we teach and how we structure our programs, providing excellent frameworks for curriculum design. The AASL Standards for School Librarians represent the professional dispositions, competencies, and leadership practices that define excellence in the field once graduates begin serving as school librarians.

Rather than treating these as separate entities, we can intentionally integrate both sets of standards throughout our coursework. By embedding the school librarian standards alongside the preparation standards, we help learners see themselves as emerging professionals from day one rather than waiting until they graduate to develop that professional identity. The second edition makes this integration more natural, with its enhanced connections among all three standards frameworks (learner, school librarian, and school library) and practical examples that demonstrate how they work together in practice.

Moving from Theory to Practice: Assignment Examples

So what does this look like in practice? Here are three assignments I've found effective in helping preservice school librarians engage meaningfully with the second edition.

Standards Mapping with a Collaborative Twist

In my teaching and learning course, I ask students to come to a synchronous session prepared with three of their current content-area standards—ones they find most challenging to teach, from a topic they struggle with (because we all have one subject that just isn't our jam), or that seem to beg for collaboration. We then dig into the learner standards together, looking for natural connection points.

This exercise serves multiple purposes. First, it helps future school librarians see the competency-based learner standards as flexible tools rather than rigid prescriptions. The scaffolding examples throughout the second edition are particularly valuable here, as they demonstrate how the same competency can be appropriately addressed at different grade levels and developmental stages. Second, it builds their confidence in approaching classroom teachers with collaboration ideas grounded in academic standards. Third, it demonstrates how the school library naturally supports curriculum rather than existing parallel to it. The AASL Learner Standards are designed to be collaborative, and this activity reinforces that!

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The final assignment asks learners to design and actually teach a collaborative lesson. Having wrestled with the standards alignment first, they approach this teaching experience with a stronger rationale for why the school librarian's involvement matters. They're not just teaching—they're advocating through their practice.

Building Advocacy Toolkits

One of the most powerful additions to the second edition is the enhanced focus on advocacy scenarios and strategies, organized around the school librarian roles, common beliefs, and both the school librarian and school library standards. I leverage this framework in a discussion post where learners must gather at least three evidence-based resources they could use to advocate for their future library programs. The discussion requires learners to choose a specific stakeholder group—administrators, parents, school board members, or colleagues—and align their advocacy resources with one or more of the school librarian roles and relevant standards. Learners identify which common beliefs provide the foundational "why we matter" for their audience, then select evidence that demonstrates "what we do" through specific school librarian roles and standards.

For example, a learner advocating to a principal might ground their argument in the common belief that reading is the core of personal and academic competency, then provide research evidence showing how school librarians in their instructional partner role support literacy through collaborative teaching aligned with specific school librarian standards.

This approach mirrors how the advocacy scenarios are presented in the second edition, where challenges and responses are grounded in the standards frameworks rather than generic talking points. Students learn to match their evidence (impact studies, research findings, concrete data) with both their audience's values and the professional standards that define effective school library practice. The result is strategic, standards-based advocacy rather than vague assertions about libraries being "important."

Library Program Evaluation

For learners in leadership or capstone courses, I assign a library program evaluation using the school library standards rubric from the second edition. Learners either evaluate their current library (if they're practicing school librarians taking coursework) or conduct an evaluation of a library willing to share program information. The second edition enhances this assignment by providing a four-level developmental rubric (Beginning, Developing, Advanced, Effective) rather than a simple checklist. In collaboration with a mentor or partner school librarian, learners use this rubric to assess 10 key components of the school library

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program, from instructional responsibilities and curriculum alignment to technology integration and advocacy. The school library standards, with their focus on key commitments and the shared foundations, provide concrete benchmarks for evaluation across these components.

Learners examine how well a program aligns teaching practices with professional standards, how effectively it advocates for its value, and where opportunities for growth exist. The rubric format helps learners understand that school library development is a continuum rather than a binary pass/fail proposition, which better reflects the reality of professional practice. This assignment illuminates that the school library standards aren't aspirational fluff. They're practical tools for program improvement. Learners consistently report that this evaluation process helps them envision what strong school library leadership actually looks like in practice.

Looking Forward

The second edition of the National School Library Standards offers LIS educators a timely, practical, and research-informed framework for preparing school librarians who can meet the moment. But the book itself isn't enough. We must model the intentional, standards-aligned practice we hope to see in our graduates.

This means being explicit about why we're using particular standards, demonstrating how the three frameworks interconnect, and providing multiple opportunities for learners to apply standards in authentic contexts. It means helping students see themselves as both learners and leaders, developing their professional identity throughout their program rather than waiting for graduation to flip that switch.

Most importantly, it means preparing advocates—school librarians who can articulate their value, demonstrate their impact, and lead confidently through challenges. The second edition of *National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries* gives us stronger tools for this preparation. Now it's on us to use them well.

For LIS educators interested in connecting around implementation strategies, I encourage you to join the LIS Educator community on ALA Connect and share your own approaches. Our learners, and the school communities they'll serve, deserve our most thoughtful, intentional preparation.

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