

# APPENDIX C1 - Library Services Focus Group Report

**Arlington Public Schools**  
Library Services Program Evaluation  
Focus Group Research  
with Librarians and Library Assistants  
in Arlington Public Schools

February 28, 2023 - Final

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## Background

As part of a larger evaluation of the Library Services Program, Arlington Public Schools (APS) convened five focus group discussions—three with school librarians (one each with elementary-, middle-, and high school librarians) and two with library assistants (one each at the elementary and secondary levels). This qualitative data collection complements other methods being used in the evaluation including surveys of staff, families, and students; library observations, and; assessing data such as online resource usage and circulation statistics.

## Research Purpose

This research is part of an overarching effort to assess the strengths and limitations of Library Services at APS, seeking to maximize strengths and address limitations. The overarching research question that guided focus group discussions was: How effectively was the Library Services program implemented?

## Research Method

Five focus group discussions were convened remotely via Zoom, each lasting 60 minutes. Twenty-seven APS Library Services staff members participated, specifically:

- 7 elementary school (ES) librarians
- 5 middle school (MS) librarians
- 6 high school (HS) librarians
- 5 ES library assistants
- 4 secondary (MS, HS) library assistants

The discussion guide is attached as Appendix A. The guide was developed in collaboration with APS Library Services leadership and the Department of Planning and Evaluation. In brief, the discussion guide explored:

Among both librarians and library assistants:

- Perceptions of what their role is/should be and how that aligns with daily responsibilities.
- Perceived adequacy of collections and resources.
- How library staff support technology.
- Suggestions for the APS library program.
- Any additional supports needed.
- Highlights of the program.

Among librarians:

- Level of collaboration with teachers.
- How students' research skills are supported.

In interpreting the findings presented in this report, it is important to note that focus group discussions are a qualitative research method. While the discussions produce rich, detailed information about the perspectives of those interviewed and opportunities to further explore relevant perspectives, the findings are descriptive in nature and cannot be generalized due to sampling approaches and small sample sizes. Therefore, these findings will be most meaningful when considered together with findings from other facets of APS's Library Services evaluation, such as surveys, observations, and relevant data.

# Findings

## ES Librarians and Library Assistants

### Role of the Library in ES

**In describing the role of the library, ES librarians and library assistants focused on their libraries as safe and comfortable spaces, providing equitable access to resources, fostering a love of reading, and supporting teachers.** Specifically, they mentioned:

- Being a safe space, offering a harbor for students who need respite or are struggling with friendships or their own identity, serving as a welcoming “center of the school” especially for new students, “being there for all the kids”
- Providing students with equitable access to resources and information
- Serving the whole child’s interests, including interests based on personal choice rather than academic requirements
- Fostering a love of reading and lifelong learning, offering “a book for every reader,” supporting students in finding books they like, providing fun reading material
- Providing space to mentally transition into school in the morning and out of school in the afternoon
- Providing space that can serve varied purposes such as reading, instruction, staff collaboration, or a place for students who just need a break
- Supporting/Supplementing the work of teachers, providing resources

### Defining the Role of the ES Librarian and Library Assistant

**ES librarians highlighted the multi-faceted nature of their role.** They emphasized:

- Teaching (supporting teachers and students with classroom learning)
- Running the library program (e.g., managing the library itself including the budget, ordering books both to reflect the curriculum and the range of students’ preferences in their “choice” books, ensuring library materials reflect the diversity of students/people, managing the library space)
- Being a partner within the school – to teachers and other staff
- Being uniquely positioned in that they see every student in the school
- Supporting students by providing a welcoming space, understanding them
- Instilling a love of learning
- Instilling a love of reading (e.g., book club, suggesting books that are a good fit for each student)
- Helping school leadership understand librarians, “what our role is”

*I think people don't understand that we are running an entire program. Budgets, purchasing, programming, managing volunteers, facilitating book fairs, lesson planning, teaching, reading, maintaining the collection. We're like a little department all on our own. –ES Librarian*

**In describing their roles, some began to express a wish for more collaboration with teachers.**

*[My role is] also to be a partner within the school. And that's hard to do for me...Everyone here knows that my school is huge, right? It's impossible for me to see every student every week. So...there's never enough time. But I think it's great to be able to have a partnership. I'm lucky in that I'm on the master schedule for my primary grades of pre-K, K, and 1. And, 2 through 5 is supposed to be there as support so we can collaborate. But that collaboration piece is always missing. —ES Librarian*

*I agree with [name] as far as a partnership, a collaboration. I think it's just hard to find the time to do that in the schedules that we have. From my own personal experience, there's a certain way things have been done for so long that breaking that mold is challenging. I feel like I have support at school, but joining in on meetings and things like that isn't something that's been part of the culture as much. So, having people see me as a partner and [knowing] I can help support them in their curriculum and things like that has been a little bit more challenging. There's definitely some who are more into open to that, but [others] not as much. So, I think the partnership piece would be something that I would like to see more of. —ES Librarian*

**In the ES librarian discussion group, participants spontaneously emphasized the importance of library assistants.** Although they were not asked, the moment a librarian mentioned having once been an assistant, several exclaimed that library assistants are indispensable.

*Assistants are essential to our jobs. Without assistants, the library program would not be possible in my opinion. —ES Librarian*

*I agree. I don't know how we could teach and keep the library functioning without our amazing assistants. —ES Librarian*

*Agree assistants are essential. They enable us to focus on student learning and student book choice while maintaining collection management. —ES Librarian*

**ES library assistants said their role includes:**

- “Keeping the collection running,” checking books in and out, “getting books in hands”
- Interacting with all the students at the school, giving recommendations, looking at the shelves with students
- Making bulletin boards, displays
- Brainstorming/“Tossing around ideas” with the librarian
- Attending school assistant Collaborative Learning Team (CLT) meetings
- Fulfilling specific school-based duties (arrival/dismissal, recess duty a few times a week)

- Providing ad hoc support when needs arise throughout the school (e.g., assisting with a behavior issue in the hall, standing in if the kindergarten assistant is out or a teacher has training)
- Performing other designated tasks – like supporting students with their interviews for a school news program, running the laminator, serving on the school’s Equity Committee, proctoring Standards of Learning (SOL) testing (although there was debate about whether assistants’ proctoring is still permitted)

*I think what's important to remember is that the librarians are teachers. They have lesson plans and they teach every class in the school. We **also** have a library with 15,000+ books in it. So, every day we're checking in, checking out, repairing, weeding, shelving, doing displays, doing bulletin boards, helping kids find books, pulling resources for teachers. So basically, we run the library while they teach. –ES Library Assistant*

*[English language learners find my library to be] a spot where they can connect with someone and if they need to chat [with me] in a different language or find books [I can help. I get] that opportunity to make a one-on-one connection...like, "Alright, this is your time. What makes you tick? How can we can help you reach your full potential?" –ES Library Assistant*

*And I think sometimes in the past when library assistants have been brought up as a possible [budget] elimination, they forget the fact that a librarian can't teach and manage a resource space this big at the same time. –ES Library Assistant*

**When it comes to providing ad hoc help, ES library assistants said they are happy to provide it – and such help was especially needed as students returned to school buildings amid the pandemic – but that if an assistant is being “pulled all the time” it can suggest their work in the library is not valued.** This situation was said to be improving by those who brought it up.

*I don't have arrival duty and that has helped because I can keep the library open. And, I have 5<sup>th</sup> grade library helpers who I train, and they help me in the morning. So, that's been great this year. You feel like the value of the library has been more recognized. Or things have gone back to “normal,” for lack of a better word. –ES Library Assistant*

**Library assistants emphasized their collaboration with librarians and said librarians and library assistants generally work out as a pair how they want the working relationship to function, such as how to divide up responsibilities.**

### Experiences in ES Library Services Role

**ES librarians said they are finding themselves coordinating with teachers to a greater degree than collaborating.** Collaborating would be more ideal. In lamenting the situation, several acknowledged that “teachers are slammed with new curriculum” and none blamed teachers.

*So, I used to do a lot more collaboration. Now it's just coordination. So, I'll look to see what their lesson plans are for the week...I can go into their Google Doc and look [at lesson plans and related documents] or if I see them in the copier room, I'll ask, "What are you doing this week?" That's great. But, [before] when the teacher would come in [with their class at the] library, we'd actually co-teach a lot of the lessons. So, of course, there's no co-teaching anymore. –ES Librarian*

*[Another agreeing.] You try to catch those really tiny moments, like 30 second moments, when teachers are coming in to download, "What's going on? Student behavior. What are you doing in the class? What books can I pull?" I would love more time to actually sit down with teachers to really discuss how could we create these lessons together. Some teachers are really amazing at reaching out to say, "Okay, we're going to be talking about the Harlem Renaissance and we would appreciate if you could cover these two people in a library lesson." [Or] I might hear, "Second grade is doing weather." So, I'll say, "I'm gonna pull weather books." [Overall] it's kind of like what you were saying, it's more coordinating. Yeah. And not really getting to collaborate and set these lessons up together. –ES Librarian*

*I coordinate. For example, our science teacher was doing the bird migration project. So, she asked if I would help the students research the habitat of their individual bird. Once upon a time, that might have been a co-teaching model where the science teacher would've come in and she could have used her science expertise to talk to the students. And now it's coordination. It works but a lot gets lost in translation. Like, "What day are you on? Where did you want me?" If I have a question while I'm teaching, she's not there for me to ask and immediately and get those answers for the students. So, again, it is coordination and not collaboration for me. –ES Librarian*

**According to these librarians, the need to use librarians to help ensure students are supervised during teachers' planning time can have a major impact on the librarian's role and ability to collaborate.** Some thoughts on that topic included the pervasive idea that when the Foreign Language in the Elementary School (FLES) program ended, schools "had huge blocks of time no longer covered with the Spanish program." One librarian said, "For me, that is when I went from being on the master schedule to being a special." Another speculated also that the need to fund staff to support social and emotional learning and has hindered schools' ability to fund roles that would help cover teachers' planning time.

*The scheduling stuff [that is, using library time to cover teachers' planning time] is definitely since FLES has gone away. –ES Librarian*

*APS has moved many of us into the role of resource teacher – which we aren't supposed to be. [The reason this has happened is] more for teacher planning time and filler but it's impacting our program. –ES Librarian*



*A lot of us have been here for many years and we were here before we were used as planning time. And it, it almost feels like...our program doesn't matter, that the reason we exist is to provide teachers with planning time. Whereas I used to be able to collaborate more with teachers and work with them on projects and really plan things together, I can't do that anymore because they're in CLTs while I'm covering their class. So, it's really changed the job. –ES Librarian*

*So [previously] I had the perfect experience [at a smaller school] ...I had book clubs at lunch and I did all these extras. I had special time with the kids who needed more help selecting books. I can't do any of that anymore. I don't even have the allotted planning time and my classes are now 45 minutes [to help cover] teacher planning. –ES Librarian*

**A person in the ES library assistants' group also spontaneously raised the topic of library as a special, saying that being a special resulted in a "crazy" schedule with back-to-back classes.**

*Three years ago, we were a special. It was back-to-back classes. We barely had time to go to the bathroom. It was crazy. So, we really appreciate this schedule we have right now. –ES Library Assistant*

**Principals, many librarians said, also have a major impact on librarians' role—both in terms of how the principal encourages collaboration (or doesn't) and how the principal crafts the master schedule.** One person asked who, if anyone, in APS leadership reviewed principals' schedules to perhaps notice issues like, "Hey look, this librarian has 20 hours on the fixed schedule."

- Regarding principals' impact, one librarian shared that under one principal, teachers stayed with their classes during library visits, which encouraged teacher-librarian collaboration. The librarian was part of every CLT meeting for every grade level, helped support schoolwide initiatives, and was generally actively included. In their words, "We weren't 'planning time' [for teachers]" again referring to planning time coverage as it impacts librarians' role.
- Regarding fixed schedules, the librarians agreed that schedules at different schools are vastly different—for example, one school may have created a technology lab where assistants spend time with students as a way to allow for supervised teacher planning time.

**One hope ES librarians agreed on was that APS leadership would inform principals about what librarians' role is.** Several echoed the sentiment of one participant who acknowledged that library time and exposure is not regulated in the way that specials like art are. Thus, librarians' time is one place where principals can find the flexibility they need in making a master schedule that works.

*[Scheduling] is really becoming more of an issue if you talk elementary school librarians. It's really becoming a very impactful issue. [Others agreeing, mmm-hmm.] And I think a*

*suggestion is really to help with educating principals—having a clear message, I guess from Library Services, about what our role is and how we should be used in a schedule. And also having that in a timely manner, because once the master schedule is made, it's very hard to change. It's baked. –ES Librarian*

*I feel like sometimes we're addressing principals after the horse is out of the gate...that there's not a lot of like information coming from the top down to principals about how they should be using school librarians. A lot of it is on us to inform and convince our administration about what our role is. We have to overcome those barriers that they come in with. All the principals I've had come in with a preconceived notion of what the school librarian should do and what their role is...they want us to adjust to that expectation as well as the constraints put on them. I mean they have to provide planning time and teachers need their CLTs...but, I don't think they get a lot of guidance about how they can meet those scheduling needs and there's not a really clear message from the top down about what our role should be. –ES Librarian*

*I think our programs are not valued and I feel like librarians are struggling but I don't know what to do. –ES Librarian*

*A library without a librarian is just a book room. –ES Librarian*

**ES library assistants were effusive about the joy they find in their role.** They specifically mentioned appreciating the opportunity to see all the students in the school and, in many cases, to see them grow from pre-kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grade.

### Fixed Versus Flex Schedule

**In debating the merits of a fixed versus flex schedule, librarians suggested a flex schedule can increase collaboration and opportunities for inquiry-based student learning, but also emphasized that the answer to the fixed-versus-flex question is nuanced.** For example, plusses and minuses of each depend on the schedule itself and potentially other matters such as:

- School size—pointing out that one librarian managing a 600-student school is a very different experience than one librarian managing an 800-student school.
- Whether library time/librarians are treated “as a special.” These librarians meant that putting library time on the master schedule to cover teacher planning time makes library more like PE or art. Yet, they said, library is different from other specials because in addition to teaching responsibilities, the job carries collection management responsibilities and there is only one librarian, whereas specials in large schools may be staffed by multiple teachers.

*The library has so much more than just kids coming to check out books and [as with art or PE] do lessons ...It's also collection management, collection development...that one person is doing versus some of the other specials that may have multiple teachers running that program. –ES Librarian*

*If we're going to be treated like a special, we need to be staffed like a special [for example, if the PE Department has multiple teachers to serve a large school, library should as well]. –ES Librarian*

*I was looking at people's schedules. The resource teachers usually have like a 5- to 10-minute transition between their classes so that they can set up for the next. But because we are like a factory and we have to see all the kids, [classes] are just bumping up one after the other. I mean, if we're gonna be treated [as a special], then we should be treated that way across the board [including matters like transition time]. –ES Librarian*

**Perceived positives about a fixed schedule include seeing all students every week and consistency for student routines.** Both librarians and library assistants made this point, with library assistants adding that on their current fixed schedule they get a bit more time with each class (45 minutes as opposed to 30).

**Perceived positives about a flex schedule include more possibility for collaboration and inquiry-based lessons that are more engaging.** There was consensus among librarians and library assistants that flex schedules enable better collaboration between librarians and teachers. Focus group participants were not asked what they would choose – fixed or flex – if they could choose one. Overall, because of the greater potential for collaboration, many leaned toward flex although several also articulated some benefits of fixed.

*I am on the master schedule now. So, teachers have planning during library. I've had many teachers say they wish they could come to library with their students like they used to. –ES Librarian*

*We have to grab information about what's going on in the classes since we don't have time to go to CLTs or plan with teachers. I barely see any of the classroom teachers now. I agree with the challenges of a fixed schedule. It's tricky and we have to rely on teachers to share information from CLTs and what's coming up in class. I think it makes it challenging to fully support student learning and teachers. –ES Librarian*

*In one of my previous schools, library was not on the master schedule. The librarian made her own schedule for the library and classroom teachers. There was a lot of collaborative teaching between the librarian the classroom teachers. They did a lot more teaching together. Sometimes the librarian would be out in a certain grade classroom and I would just run checkouts because she was working on an extended research project, for example. –ES Library Assistant*

**When days are crunched for time, these librarians say the program management part of their role is more likely to receive less attention as opposed to the instruction and student-interactions parts of their role.**

### Supporting Research Skills

**When it comes to supporting students' research skills, the ES librarians said they work on research projects with every grade.** Each librarian in the group gave examples such as:

- Introducing kindergartners to databases to look up basic facts.
- Teaching notetaking skills to 2<sup>nd</sup> graders.
- Ensuring 4<sup>th</sup> graders understand paraphrasing, copyrights, and plagiarism.
- Helping 5<sup>th</sup> graders with substantial research projects.

*We want to send them off to middle and high school with the knowledge of the databases we have. We have so many great electronic resources that Library Services provides to the librarians and the students. So, we want to make sure they know how to access those resources and navigate those research databases. –ES Librarian*

### Supporting Technology

**Due to time constraints in the ES librarian focus group discussion imposed by covering fixed/flex schedules, these participants spent less time discussing technology compared to MS and HS librarians.** Several ES librarians mentioned, without being asked directly, that they collaborate with the Instructional Technology Coordinator (ITC) in their building. One mentioned co-teaching in the library with the ITC, for example. Some acknowledged that the ITC is in a similar situation to the librarians in terms of trying to “get into classrooms and integrating as much as possible.” Yet, at least one person thought that the role of the ITC might have changed recently. Specifically, last year this librarian and a past ITC co-taught lessons. This year the ITC says working with children is not part of the job.

*MY ITC and I share office space. So, that's one of the main people that I'm actually able to collaborate with. IT will come into the library and we can do lessons together, which has been nice. –ES Librarian*

**Most technology matters that the ES library assistants help with are related to iPads and database access, they said.** Assistants mentioned setting up Smart Boards for meetings in the library and supporting a school news program in the past. One elementary school lacks an ITC; thus, the library assistant fills in helping with technology as much as possible.

## Adequacy of the Collection

**These ES librarians feel that their libraries' budgets are adequate, perhaps even generous.**

They expressed much gratitude at the databases they can access and the books they can get for students. One person who is at a Title I school said a "lost book fund" at the end of the year would be welcome, explaining, "...the number of books I lose a year. I take that into account when I reorder within the budget. But it's still never enough."

**ES library assistants feel similarly, describing their libraries' collections using terms like "pretty comprehensive" and "very good."**

**In general, weeding books was top-of mind for these ES library assistants.** One mentioned that the assistants' role gives them a good view of "what's on the shelf." So, the librarian will ask "Where do you think I need new 'stuff'? What section do you think we need to update?" Another's librarian had set a SMART goal of weeding to get the average age of books on the shelves down to 10 years from 11 years. Nonfiction sections, particularly sports-related books, were said to get outdated surprisingly quickly.

**Regarding the collection, one ES library assistant shared the view that students want physical books.** In their words, "Students just aren't that interested in ebooks. For example, it is common for a student who wants to read a particular book that is checked out by someone else to place a hold on and wait for the physical book rather than read the ebook that is available. Students have said repeatedly they love to hold a book in their hands. And with more and more studies coming out on how children need to limit screen time, this is a great thing. It also is good to have actual books in the hands of teachers and students because technology doesn't always work or iPads aren't always charged! Recently, I checked out a stack of habitat books for our STEM teacher to have on hand to supplement a research project the 4<sup>th</sup> grade was doing online. The day she started the lesson, however, the 5<sup>th</sup> grade had to borrow all the 4<sup>th</sup> grade iPads for an assessment. The STEM teacher and students all came to the library later that day to tell us the books had saved their lesson."

## Highlights ES Library Staff Would like to Share

**When given a chance to highlight something about their library or the library program, ES librarians said:**

- Students love coming to the library. And, they love it for many different reasons. "They love the books." "They love checking out." "We are that safe space."
- Libraries are a place in school where students have a great deal of choice—in the books they choose and in opportunities to try different activities.
- Libraries offer diverse programming, from maker space activities to coding.

*I was doing an activity the other day where they had to guess the theme of these books on the table and I heard one of the kids say, "This is actually kind of fun!" I mean, it's moments like that. That's why I've been here for 15 years. –ES Librarian*

*Students really do love the library. I mean, when I open first thing in the morning, I've got 50 "regulars," kids who come every day. It's a great way for them to start their day. –ES Librarian*

*Students love the library. At graduation last year, a child told me library was her favorite time and that our lunch book club was the highlight of her year. I agree with [name], the library gives them opportunities to explore. –ES Librarian*

**In the context of discussing their work, these ES librarians were careful to acknowledge that they and all school and central office staff are working in a context of broad societal challenges such as a lack of equity and increasing demands on teachers and schools.** They took care not to blame teachers or supervisors specifically. As one put it, "I mean, it's so difficult. These [broader societal] issues are not new [to us]. They're not new to any of our supervisors. ... And I don't know what the solutions are. I mean yeah, it's hard."

**ES library assistants highlighted that library staff and library spaces give students and staff at school the message, "We see you and we value you."** They said they get to know students as individuals and that everyone is welcome at the library.

*I guess the word is inclusion. I think everybody comes here and they feel like they belong here. They love coming here. It's a place to learn and a place to grow and a place sometimes just to chill out. –ES Library Assistant*

## MS Librarians and Library Assistants

### Role of the Library in MS

**In describing the role of the library, MS librarians and library assistants touched upon a variety of roles, including:**

- Keeping students engaged with reading for pleasure
- Teaching information literacy skills
- Getting books into the hands of students – in a way that offers students choices
- Providing a safe and welcoming space at school

*I'm here for research skills, but I'm finding that my role has been more along the lines of providing a safe space for the kids. –MS Librarian*

*We've got kids that come in before school. We have lunch crowds that come in. Yes, again, safe space. A place that people want to come. –MS Library Assistant*

### Defining the Role of the MS Librarian and Library Assistant

**MS librarians described their ideal role as having three key elements: 1) an instructor and collaborator with teachers, 2) a resource for students, and 3) a keeper of the library space.**

The ideal role, in their words:

- “A collaborator with teachers for instruction and a resource students feel comfortable and confident coming to for instruction or book recommendations or even just to step away from the chaos of a school day.”
- “A range of activities from instruction to a personal safe space.”
- “I usually call myself a ‘teacher librarian,’ although I really have not been as much a teacher in middle school.” This person explained the term “teacher librarian,” meaning a teacher with niche information (e.g., literature suggestions) and research skills in a welcoming space.
- “A teacher collaborator with information literacy skills who helps students and staff become effective, ethical users of information.”

**One librarian explained that the instructional role is more challenging in MS than in ES because in ES having an instructional program is expected, whereas in MS the librarian builds a program in almost a grassroots manner** that may require years of presence and relationship-building in the school. Others agreed, noting that another factor that makes instructional work easier at the ES level is that schools are typically smaller and the librarian gets to see all the students regularly.

*Having allies in the building takes time to build. –MS Librarian*

**The onus tends to be on the librarians to build relationships and get into classrooms, as opposed to on teachers to specifically include librarians.** In addition to the librarian who used the term “grassroots,” others mentioned that they rely on teachers. As one put it, the librarians’ role is “up to the teachers, if they invite me or make the time.”

*A lot of us try to go to as many CLTs as possible. But, depending on your instructional schedule or what else you have going on, it's not always possible...So you kind of have to rely on your relationship with teachers and hope that they will remember to call you when they're doing a research project or something else that could use your help. –MS Librarian*

*It's work to get teachers to see what we do as embedded in their work rather than extra to what they do. –MS Librarian*

*Collaborating can be sporadic – unless we already have that relationship with the teacher. We do a lot of "advertising" what we can do and trying to show teachers how we can help and that it's worth their time. –MS Librarian*

**When asked what facilitates or helps their instructional role, MS librarians mentioned having a second librarian at a large middle school and that English Language Arts (ELA) classroom teachers in particular tend to most readily see how their instruction and the skills librarians offer are related.** Nonetheless, these MS librarians mentioned that ELA teachers have a new curriculum and are busier than normal adapting to it.

**Middle school library assistants described their roles in terms of keeping the library functioning day-to-day.** They mentioned, circulation, processing books, book repair, supervising students, making spreadsheets, managing incoming students and checking out books when the librarian is teaching, ensuring that displays are inclusive of all kids, building relationships with students in book club and those in the library to create the morning news broadcast.

**MS library assistants also said, with much appreciation, that they tend not to be “pulled” from the library for other duties.**

### Experiences in MS Library Services Role

**Principals can have a major impact on the librarian’s role, these MS librarians said.**

*It's an intangible. You don't know which relationship is going to have that impact on your program. So, if you have an administrator who isn't supportive or doesn't value the library, that can have a huge impact... I've had very supportive administration and so I know that I get to have a degree of freedom that I think other people don't have. I'm not looking over my shoulder worrying, “Am I impressing this person? Am I proving my worth*



*every day?" ...Although I don't have that issue, I know that people do. So, I just wanted to acknowledge that. –MS Librarian*

**Library assistants came up spontaneously in MS librarians' discussion – both as an asset and, when an assistant does not carry out their duties, as a barrier.** One respondent said that the quality of the library assistants matters greatly. This librarian is “doing a lot of library assistant work” — such as, processing new books, shelf-reading to address inaccurate shelving — because the assistant is not performing as well in that role as others do. The other MS librarians agreed that having a strong assistant can make a huge difference in their ability to do their jobs well.

**These MS librarians pointed out disparities among APS schools.** For example, one school's PTA does not typically fund author visits although PTAs at other schools do. When pressed to share what makes an author visit so special, the librarians agreed with one who said, “It's an opportunity for students to see what it's like to be an author...There are kids that like writing or...drawing. They might have never thought that it's career path they could take... I know it can be life-changing. We took a group of students who typically don't like school and they got to see [author] before the pandemic shut down. She was a Community Reads author for the high school...Kids that never picked up a book were enamored with her [and] went back and picked up all of her books available at our library.”

*So that's something that most Arlington librarians talk about is how there's a disparity between some of the schools that get lots of authors and then some of us who only get free authors. [Another agreeing] People, like PTAs and administrators, really don't understand how expensive author visits are. –MS Librarians*

**Librarians also noted that the sheer number of students in a large school can make reaching everyone difficult.** Another difficulty is using the library for testing. One MS library was closed for a month to host testing last year.

### Supporting Students' Research Skills

**When it comes to supporting students' research skills, MS librarians say they:**

- Teach classes undertaking the science fair about research, including the research process
- Work one-on-one with students doing science fair voluntarily
- Teach vocabulary to express where the student has gotten information. (It's common for students to say, “I got it from Safari,” which is a browser.)
- Teach the difference between a website and a database.
- Teach how to navigate databases and locate key words.
- Teach note-taking skills, for example helping teachers create graphic organizers to help with these skills

- Work with students one-on-one when they are doing research
  - Working one-on-one was described as “the most powerful and the most time consuming, but not scalable.”
  - Some one-on-one time may be found by being in the classroom as students work on a project and sitting with individual students to help, they said.
  - Several librarians said that students know they can communicate with the librarian via Canvas for research support, and they do so.<sup>1</sup>

### Supporting Technology

**The librarians explained that technology is so embedded in their work that how they support their schools’ use of technology is difficult to parse.** The librarians mentioned:

- Webmaster roles (2 MS librarians)
- Maintaining and updating the library section of their schools’ websites
- Canvas courses, used to share information and lessons or self-paced work (including video and slide deck materials) with students and to communicate directly with students

**The presence of an ITC relieves these MS librarians of many technology support responsibilities.** One MS librarian with a lengthy tenure at APS said their technology support responsibilities had been “dwindling over time,” attributing that change to having a very strong ITC as well as a technician. The technician “made a huge difference” by stepping into the librarian’s previous role of supporting the ITC. Several others had the same observation about the value of an ITC. Nonetheless, they said, teachers and students know the librarian can still help and so do often ask. Librarians also remind students of the digital resources available to help them get their work done and show them how to use those.

**MS library assistants also mentioned the value of the ITC.** The technology support these assistants mentioned related to providing speakers, projectors, and cords, and helping with printing.

### Adequacy of the Collection

**These librarians agreed that budgets are adequate and enjoy the aspects over which they have control.** A couple commented that the fact that the central office has a budget for databases which they called mostly a blessing because the librarians’ budgets do not need to cover databases, but perhaps slightly a curse because the librarians have less control over database selection in this arrangement. The fact that shared e-books are covered under the central budget was also much appreciated.

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<sup>1</sup> One HS librarian emphasized the importance of students and librarians being able to access each other via Canvas’s email system. In the past, the librarian had to email teachers and ask them to pass along information to students. This direct access, they said, is critical – making students and librarians more connected and saving teachers time.

*I worked [outside Virginia] and I had like a laughably tiny budget and it's been amazing to have such a generous budget at APS and be able to fulfill students' needs and like have the books that they want. It's been great. –MS Librarian*

*I worked at a school that was similar size to where I am right now. And I had half the budget that I do in APS - and it was not only for the print materials but also for databases. So, that made it even smaller. So yes...I feel very, very fortunate. I guess the only thing I wish is that sometimes I had a little control over the databases...Always plusses and minuses. –MS Librarian*

*The central office lifting the database weight is crucial. –MS Librarian*

**Likewise, MS library assistants said they feel the collection is adequate, emphasizing its diversity.** In the focus group with secondary assistants (MS and HS together), there was a great deal of focus on weeding in the context of discussing the adequacy of the collection. At some schools, weeding does not happen as much or as readily as it should, some felt. The group surmised that it can feel difficult to anyone, including librarians, to get rid of an asset once they have it. Yet, the group emphasized how important weeding is.

*Weeding is really a key part of library services. Especially nonfiction. I can empathize that sometimes it's hard to take things away, especially in the school environment. You feel like, "I need to keep every single resource I have." [Others agreeing.] –MS/HS Library Assistants*

### Highlights MS Library Staff Would Like to Share

**Librarians' information literacy work effectively connects school learning to personal life.** "It isn't just a skill you need for school. You need to be able to look critically at the information you're taking in. You need to be questioning. You need to broaden your information scope." Librarians said this connection is especially profound for middle schoolers because developmentally they are so focused on themselves and are always looking at how everything around them relates to their own personal life.

**Librarians' personal connections to students are important, and they are purposeful about it.** One described a spreadsheet the library's assistant had created from the librarian's many, many notes about students and their interests and what books they like. This librarian and all the others order books, reassure ("You're on my list. Let's look and see if that book is in this box."), and show interest and understanding to APS students.

*I had a student a week ago following up on a book. And, I'm like, "They're sending it so hopefully early next week you'll get your book." I feel like that also shows them that reading is important. These books are important. You are important. This is something you want to read and I want you to be able to have that as soon as possible. –MS Librarian*

**Library assistants also prioritize their relationships with students.** When given a chance to single out what they would highlight for the superintendent, these MS library assistants focused on relationships.

*My relationships with the kids are the most important thing and the most special thing about having this role. We work with the entire school...and these kids are so amazing...I am so proud of my kids and I feel so mama bear about a lot of them... If I can make middle school a better experience for any one of these kids, I feel like that's my job.*

–MS Library Assistant

## HS Librarians and Library Assistants

### Role of the Library in HS

**Because high schools in Arlington vary in terms of who they serve and the programs they offer, HS librarians characterized the role of the library in varied ways.**

- At one specialized school, the library and librarian’s role serving people ages 16 to 60+ ranges from clearing up misinformation to helping a student look into how to buy a used car to literacy coaching, and writing.
- At one small high school program, because most students are college-bound, the role of the library “is to integrate into course instruction a 21st century articulated program of research skills instruction for college preparation, to encourage students’ literacy and voice through choice reading options, and to provide supports to community building and building civic life in a changing American culture.”
- At another specialized program/school, there is not a specific library space. Rather it is a common area which influences the library’s role such that it feels like a place to *be*, a comfortable bookstore-like environment or a place to hang out that happens to have books. The librarian’s role still reflects familiar themes: promoting literacy, promoting student engagement, advocating for equitable access, promoting diverse works, teaching students and staff about library technology and resources, supporting research skills, curating and developing a collection that serves academic and non-academic needs.
- Roles described by comprehensive HS librarians focused on providing print and online resources; supporting research and research skills, the curriculum, and information literacy; promoting literacy, and; maintaining a diverse collection.
- At a third small specialized school, the roles above apply with an added focus on supporting students’ social and emotional learning as well as special emphasis on literacy promotion and encouraging people who are reluctant to read.
- All emphasized that the library is a safe and welcoming space.
- All agreed with sentiments related to affirming individual students about their own intrinsic value and their value in society, ensuring they feel seen and reflected in the library’s collection.

*I would say the role for our library is to support all learners in their academic goals and also personal interests by providing an inclusive welcoming space and additionally to support the curriculum for teachers using library resources. –HS Library Assistant*

### Defining the Role of the HS Librarian and Assistant

**In talking about how their day-to-day work aligns with their ideal role, or doesn’t, several librarians noted that their instructional role is not what they would like it to be.** They said they typically do not get invited to teach or, as one put it, “[Teachers say], ‘We’ll go to the

library for 20 minutes to get a lesson and then kids can succeed at this project as I've defined it without collaborating with the library'."

**Every time issues like lower-than-ideal levels of collaboration with teachers came up, these HS librarians were very careful to share that teachers are working under very difficult circumstances.** A couple also specified that some teachers may not have research skills or may have old impressions about research in today's information world that impact their assumptions about how librarians can help students. Among teachers' challenges is dealing with multiple technology platforms, some of which have their own difficulties, which was also said to also place extra demands on them.

*Honestly, our teachers are so busy, so overwhelmed, with many teaching extra class periods. So, they're teaching six out of seven class periods. They don't even have time to think about ways that we can help or that we could push in. –HS Librarian*

*[My role] is not actualized. The demands of technology have changed teaching AND librarian jobs significantly in the past 20 years, and the tech systems used for school functioning, grading, communication, alignment, accessing resources often impede rather than enhance efficiencies. Teachers are managing so many platforms and expectations that time for collaborating on learning outcomes has diminished to near zero and they are unable to absorb library technologies in addition to all of the other platforms. –HS Librarian*

*[Agreeing] What [name] said about technology and the research skills not being assessed. It's just really, really challenging. –HS Librarian*

*Could we eliminate other problems? Could we help improve scores? Could we help improve engagement? Yes. But, even in the senior project, it's so onerous with so many moving parts that adding another resource into the mix – even though we're a tremendous resource – seems like more work... It takes forethought and planning and [meanwhile] teachers are having their whole YA curriculum yanked and having to justify every book in their classroom library and everything else. –HS Librarian*

**The perception that top-down promotion of the library and library skills would be helpful came up.** One librarian perceives that school administrators tend to worry less about Library Services because day-to-day "things are fine, we don't have parents calling screaming, no students are failing in our space, and many libraries are physically separated from classrooms." Another librarian proposed promotion of library services to APS ELA program leadership. This librarian acknowledged there may be a good deal of communication among leadership they are not aware of, but was hoping that messages about "how librarians can help" would be shared. A third said librarians "have been asking for an equitable setup for a long time," which they defined as "the recognition of being a valued teacher in the mix" and "having clarity around what we can do and how much there is to offer" as well as "recognition for the depth and breadth of what we do from senior research projects to being the safety net for students."

Others agreed. Finally, one librarian shared that they would like an understanding in their building “that the librarians’ role is more instructional.” They wanted administrators to “not tack on more [tasks] because we’re an extra body,” and one went on to say, “I find myself having to take on roles that are definitely not librarian-specific...so a lot of the day from beginning to end may look like me doing administrative-type work than being there in that librarian role for our students.”

*Again, teachers are overwhelmed, but I think in a lot of cases they also can't envision what it would even look like for us to come in and how that would even work. So, I think promotion of that and explaining it and would be helpful. –HS Librarian*

*We need someone to advocate for us. We need someone who can make clear to our school administrations, our department heads, our students, our staff, our school community and leadership that, “You have this group of people in every building who are an enormous resource. And if we were smart, we would be finding a way to incorporate them and have them help in the classroom.” –HS Librarian*

*I'm agreeing. I think that principals maybe need to advocate for us more with specificity about what they want the students to learn how to do and what to do. –HS Librarian*

**In a related point, MS and HS assistants raised the idea of giving librarians time in start-of-school-year staff meetings to help teachers understand how to use library services.**

*I think at the beginning of every year it would be helpful if we had time at a staff meeting to remind the teachers what our role is and remind them that there are things they do in the classroom to support us – like reminding teachers they have access to Destiny Discover and can search the catalog from their classrooms. Students can search the catalog from their iPads. Not that we mind helping them with those things, but they can find what they want faster and easier and they'll be more independent if they practice these skills and they're not only using them when they come see us. –MS/HS Library Assistants*

**Among HS librarians, the importance of library assistants came up spontaneously, without a question being asked about them.** The librarians used terms like “essential,” saying library assistants are a must-have in order for the librarians to be able to do their jobs.

*I am always afraid of losing my library assistant...I am able to delegate some clerical things. She's skilled...and knows all these technologies that are particular to getting us able to actually teach the classes. [Others agreeing.] –HS Librarian*

**HS library assistants said their role focuses on supporting students and other staff, particularly the librarian.** They spoke of supporting students with their research and readers advisory, and of ensuring students see themselves reflected throughout the collection and in

the library's physical space as well. Their work supporting the librarian was said to range from helping prepare lessons to managing inventory.

**Like MS library assistants these HS library assistants said they are not typically asked to perform non-library duties at the school, which they appreciated.** As one put it, "I did not sign up for that [covering lunch]."

### [Experiences in HS Library Services Role](#)

**HS librarians at very large schools described the challenges of getting teaching opportunities with one saying, "We have to fight to get into classrooms. We don't often get invited to teach" and "We do a lot of space management and behavior management."**

**In terms of space management, for two hours of the day students with free time at lunch visit one school's library**—some to use it and some to hang out, resulting in the need for library staff to manage space and behavior. At another school, students sign up to be in the library. But many arrive during their free period without a pass anyway. HS librarians and library assistants in these groups all disliked the influx of students at free period, saying for example, "It's just a mess every day. It's the worst part of the day. We find it overwhelming." Also, one librarian mentioned that their library spaces have other uses as well such as IEP meetings or small group testing, which also contribute to library staff's space management responsibilities.

**Librarians at smaller schools agreed with one another that it is easier for them to get into the classroom.** Nonetheless, they emphasized that they must be able to show teachers how the librarians' contributions will directly impact student assessments, whether standards- or performance-based.

*In a smaller setting, I find it's easier to get into the classroom...[still] I [must be] directly contributing to their curriculum standard of mastery. But, in a smaller setting, it can be a little easier. –HS Librarian*

*[Teachers are so focused on assessments]. So, they look at me like, "What you gonna do for me? Are you gonna take some of this responsibility off of me? How are you gonna help me? ... [If I can't see that], I'll get back to you when I can." I have to aggressively [appeal and make my case], "Hey, let me help, let me help, let me help." I'm so empathetic with the classroom teachers in that they don't have an ounce of space to move. I've been there. –HS Librarian*

**Still, librarians must market themselves to teachers who already have full plates.**

*I must place offers in e-mail and point people to my web pages to demonstrate what I can do for them and their students, but teachers rarely have sit-down time to take on board what it takes to get to higher level thinking skills with collaborative instruction. –HS Librarian*



**In some high schools, senior research projects reliably bring students to the library. The HS librarians say they find that seniors often do not know how to do research,** and they wish for research scaffolding – that is, a program for research – at APS. One shared the view that two factors result in teachers rewarding production of words on a page rather than demonstration of real research skills, specifically: 1) the workload teachers have, and 2) the fact that the “skills librarians can teach” are not assessed in an official way which renders them lower priority than other skills that are measured. Another echoed this view. And, the first suggested implementing freshman and sophomore year research projects—less complex than science fair and focused on a relevant topic like “career prep” that might allow students to engage their passions and provide both for college-bound and non-college-bound students.

*I’m mindful that library standards are not a DOE (Department of Education) state standard. So, they’re informal. And I feel that that gets in the way a lot. There has **also** been a massive amount of curriculum changes in classrooms and the new performance-based assessment curriculum, and that has just eliminated teacher flexibility.* –HS Librarian

**Several librarians at both comprehensive and special program high schools mentioned additional and activities outside the instructional day.** Examples include serving as a club advisor, producing yearbook and graduation photography and videos, serving as web master, judging National History Day entries, and helping with college applications.

**In terms of the activities that fill a typical day, for some librarians, instruction in the library occurs “in spurts,”** with the beginning of the school year being the busiest time due to “initial research” for research and science projects. At that time, orientations also occur as well as English classes coming to check out books for the quarter. The start of each quarter also tends to be busier than other times as well.

*Honestly, we go in spurts. First quarter we’re super busy. We’re doing science projects. We’re doing orientations. We have initial research. We have kids checking out. So, we’ll have like a ton of classes going all day first quarter, and then it drops off a lot.... they tend to come in quarterly. So, a large number of English classes are coming in this week to get books for the quarter. We had classes last week we were doing research with. There are times we may have 10 or 15 classes a week, and there are weeks we have no classes.* –HS Librarian

**At one comprehensive high school the sheer number of students who are physically in the library whether using resources or not is a prominent feature of the day.** These students need oversight and “even when we are trying to teach in the library and we have 50 other kids who are there and not necessarily working quietly, it’s a challenge.”

**The presence of a Coordinator at one school was said to have a major positive impact for the library’s visibility, connectedness to clubs and activities, advocacy for literacy, and usage of the library by unexpected people like a math teacher using the space.** The librarian said this type of activity helps the “students get into the habit of coming to the library.”

## Supporting Research Skills

**When asked how they support students' research skills particularly in the face of their challenges:**

- One approach from a special program high school also shared by others was, “one classroom at a time.” In fact, one librarian from a comprehensive high school said her approach is “one student at a time.”
- One librarian indicated that two teachers invite them in to review research skills for students dually enrolled in community college.

*When I graduated oh-so-many-years-ago, we were told “You're the agent of change and you have to get in one classroom at a time.” I feel that hasn't changed. –HS Librarian*

**In keeping with this theme, another described working with students on research skills as “catch as catch can.”** The librarian described observing two extremes—seniors coming to the library to work on a research project for the first time ever and students in a special academic program who would be shocked that someone else at school would not know how to use databases and write citations.

**The conversation about supporting research skills raised equity issues.** A couple respondents observed that “some kids such as those in IB get [exposure to research skills] constantly and some not at all,” linking that scenario to not having a regular research curriculum to build over the years.

*It's a huge, huge equity issue...the reinforcement of the cycle of the kids who are put into Advanced or Honors...I remember I talked to our one of our AP teachers and saying, “You know, we're finding these kids don't know how to do research. They haven't seen it.” And she said to me, “My kids all know how to do it.” It's a very distinct line. There are kids who know how to do it. They've always known how to do it. They have parents who went to college, they've been getting that practice...every year, all year. And there are kids who've never had it at all. It's just shameful, really. –HS Librarian*

**One librarian emphasized that all HS librarians in the discussion “do a lot of social and emotional support.”** This person says librarians are social and emotional support “for a huge number of kids,” handing out puzzles to take home, giving space to play chess or sit on the floor and read, and even taking in students who counselors send to the library when they need a pressure release or “because they can't be in class.”

## Supporting Technology

**These librarians indicated that their work is very technology heavy, so several felt they're supporting the school's use of technology throughout their entire day.** Examples include:

- Supporting students' morning broadcast.

- Writing library updates and information so they can be disseminated through the digital vehicles the school uses to communicate.
- Managing a printer for student use. Students print items like SAT test admission tickets, employment forms, sometimes materials teachers have told them specifically to print.
- Helping students one-on-one (e.g., password resets).

**One librarian indicated that their building has only a part-time ITC and a large school has one ITC serving well over 2,000 staff and students.** Librarians said insufficient ITC help costs staff time and effort as they try to use technology and problem-solve for others themselves.

**On the topic of technology, one HS librarian emphasized several points.** In the big picture, they noted the great increase in technology used in school in the last decade making the point that learning and adapting to the tools and platforms (including new iterations of them) takes time in itself – which increases the burden on teachers and librarians. And, more specifically, they said that with elementary schools using one system and secondary using another – Follett vs. Mackin – students feel confused about why the system looks unfamiliar and have less success using it at a time when they need to succeed. And, finally, these systems are glitchy and APS lacks a catalogue. These factors reduce their utility as well as their usage, in this person’s view.

**HS library assistants’ IT-support role varied with their personal capabilities.** One described handling about 10 IT requests per day ranging from helping students navigate their laptops to help with software and printing to dealing with viruses. Others found that level of support surprising, saying they could not do that work.

### [Adequacy of the Collection](#)

**Librarians described the collection as adequate, although this topic was not discussed in-depth.**

**The HS library assistants agreed with one another that the collection is robust and diverse.**

*I would say that our collection is pretty great. It's really diverse and representative of all identities, cultures, religions, beliefs.* –HS Library Assistant

## Highlights HS Staff Would Like to Share

**Librarians truly get to know students.** One librarian working in a smaller school said, “I know everybody’s name and everybody knows my name. They know where to come to get water and things like that, for a little connection during the day. The connections. There’s nothing like it.”

**Librarians show great flexibility as human beings, putting themselves out there to meet so many diverse needs.**

**“We are constantly exploring on our own and as a group of librarians, asking questions like ‘What is working there? What is working here?’** None of us ever stops trying to do more, do better. We could all just sit in our library and show books. We’re all, to a person, really trying and fighting to do better for our students.”

**“Students feel safe in the library.** You can come here no matter what, as long as you’re following the rules.”

*I had a kid come to me the Friday before they were moving and he said, “This is my last day here.” And it turns out he hadn’t even been in the school the whole year. But he was coming at lunch. He came in and sat real quiet, over in the stacks. He didn’t have any other friends, but he could come to the library. –HS Library Assistant*

*Kids come here and they want to be here and they feel okay here. At this time in the world and this time in their lives, I think it's not a small thing. –HS Library Assistant*

## Conclusions

This section of this report draws conclusions across groups. For details by group – ES, MS, and HS librarians; and primary and secondary library assistants – see the body of the report.

**The library is a bright spot at school.** All five discussion groups of librarians and library assistants spontaneously described their libraries using terms like “safe space,” “welcoming,” “comfortable,” “inclusive,” and “for all learners.” Each group described the peace and happiness they see students find in the library. Each group noted library staff’s ability to get the right books in students’ hands, which both conveys to students that they matter and honors their personal interests. Without being asked, each group also spoke about taking great care to ensure that all library materials and displays reflect and respect all people.

**Across the board, these librarians are absolutely certain they are helping students,** giving specific examples, especially of supporting students’ well-being. But they also feel like they could be doing more. Specifically, they expressed wishes for more collaboration with teachers (as opposed to mere coordination).

**As far as how to go about increasing collaboration, central ideas were related to helping others—especially principals—to understand librarians’ role.** At its core, librarians’ hands-on work was described in terms of two primary facets — teaching (e.g., literacy and love of reading, research and information literacy skills) and management (e.g., choosing books, managing lending, managing the library space). In discussing how to foster change, librarians were clear-eyed about the many challenges and demands teachers face today. In fact, one said they had heard, “We are not ok” from teachers more this year than any other. Librarians did *not* want to be force-fit into a classroom teacher model or (in ES) particularly want to be treated as “specials” like art or PE. Rather, they wanted to be *so well understood* — in terms of what they have to offer, how using their talents benefits students and teachers, and how to work together — that teachers are open to collaboration and even initiate it. As one put it, “Relevance needs to be established.”

**Ensuring librarians are understood was described as necessary, but perhaps not sufficient for achieving change. Librarians asked for habits and behaviors related to their inclusion** – such as attending CLTs or at least receiving agendas to make decisions about whether to attend. One HS librarian argued that even some basic changes like settling on one scheduling platform across APS – Microsoft products, favored by administrators’ assistants or Google products, favored by teachers – would save time and incrementally encourage collaboration by making working together easier.

**On the theme of ensuring librarians are well-understood one middle school librarian advocated for a Library Services teacher specialist position** — saying such a position had been approved a few years ago, but not funded. The librarian made this argument: “The library supervisor position requires the supervisor to handle administrative duties, attend meetings

with central office staff, and still be an instructional leader to a program of 40+ schools. This is a really tall order. The supervisor and the school library staff. The supervisor and the school library staff would benefit from having someone in the position to provide instructional supports, leadership, and materials to the librarians in the county on a regular basis. The vast majority of librarians in the county are alone in their buildings. While we network and support each other, we also teach, do readers' advisory, facilitate check out, and other duties as assigned, so we are not always timely with our support. A central office employee would have the flexibility to be supportive as needed and the ability to provide a cohesive vision for the program.”

**Librarians expressed sentiments that suggested a sense that they don't have full buy-in in their school environments to fostering the competencies students need that librarians help deliver.** For example, at the ES level, they spoke most about coordinating rather than fully collaborating with teachers. At the MS level, librarians said the onus is on them to build relationships and get into classrooms. And, some HS librarians wished for research scaffolding – that is, a program for research – at APS. One noted “research projects are used sparingly,” in their opinion because teachers “give up” on research to focus on testing. Another HS librarian speculated that school administrators pay less attention to Library Services because “no students are failing in our space” and another pointed out that library standards are not formal DOE state standards, so also less worrisome to school leadership. Librarians emphatically believe that leadership and teachers *do care and value* literacy, research skills, information literacy and the like. There are simply barriers ranging from demands on teachers to testing to equity and even to students thinking they know how to do research because they can use Internet search tools.

**The importance of library assistants to school librarians' ability to do their job seemingly cannot be overstated.** In all three discussion groups with librarians (ES, MS, HS), the value of library assistants came up spontaneously. Librarians were truly emphatic about what an important asset a library assistant is. As one put it, “If we are to have a hope of impacting students' learning, we can't lose our clerical support.” For their part, library assistants felt needed and valued and expressed great joy in their work.

**Supporting technology was said to be embedded in librarians' role, with many expressing much relief for having an ITC take on many technology responsibilities.** There was a good deal of variation among these librarians and assistants in the technology support they do. Some with strong technical backgrounds help with software and laptop troubleshooting, while others do less such as helping with distributing technology (e.g., projectors) and may minimally troubleshoot printers and such.

**Virtually all of the librarians and library assistants expressed satisfaction, even happiness, with the quality of their school library's collection.** Many specified that their budget is sufficient and they are very glad the central office budget covers databases, even if that means individual librarians yield control of the choice of database to the central office. Each discussion

group highlighted their sense that their collection reflects and respects human diversity. Some assistants felt more work on weeding was necessary. And, groups acknowledged disparities between libraries in matters like physical space, how many students one librarian serves, and whether the PTA funds activities like author visits. But, the overall message about collections was positive.

## APPENDIX A – FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

### DISCUSSION GUIDE ARLINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS (APS) Focus Group Research for Library Services Discussion Guide Elementary, Middle, and High School Librarians and Elementary and Secondary Library Assistants

February 2023

***Research Purpose: To learn about librarians' and assistants' experiences in APS Library Services roles and identify ways to strengthen Library Services for both staff and students.***

#### INTRODUCTIONS/WARM UP (10 minutes)

Welcome everyone. My name is \_\_\_\_\_. First, thank you for taking the time to join us. A word on our purpose today... Everyone here is a [librarian or library assistant] in Arlington Schools. Our purpose is to talk about your experiences in that role and learn from you in order to strengthen Library Services. Our discussion is part of a larger evaluation underway for that program. As you may know, there are also observations and survey research to collect input underway. Before we begin, let me give you a few details so you have some context and know what to expect.

- **Open, honest opinions**—both positive and negative—are most important of all. That means, if everyone's opinion is going one way, but you feel differently or had a different experience, I want to know that.
- With your permission, I would like to **record our online session**. Afterwards, I have to write a report. I want to give you my full attention and not have to take a lot of notes. All answers are **confidential**. The tape will only be available to me to help me write my report. Once my report is accepted in final, I will delete the tape. I will not share it with anyone else. When I write my report, it will not identify anyone by name. Rather, I will use phrases like, "Several [elementary, middle, or high school] librarians expressed the opinion that \_\_\_\_\_." I will keep the tape and erase it once my report is accepted by APS. [If permission given, start recording.]

Because we are taping, it is important that everyone tries to **speak one at a time**. I may occasionally interrupt if several people talk at once in order to be sure everyone gets a chance to share their thoughts and that I hear everything clearly.

One benefit of an online focus group is that you can also use the chat feature. So, for example, if you agree with someone but don't want to interrupt feel free to mention in chat that you agree. Importantly, put a couple words of context with your chat such as what you agree *with* so I'll have the context when I'm reading the chat transcript.



- This focus group is unusual in that you may know one another or know people in common. I hope that you'll feel comfortable sharing your opinions. And, I ask that you keep what is said here in confidence. That said, obviously I cannot bind anyone here to keep what they hear confidential. Therefore, you may choose *not* to say some things. If that happens or you have anything you wish to share with me later, please feel free to **reach out after the group**. I'll put my email address and telephone number here in the chat
- Please turn off your **cell phones**. The group will last only 60 minutes. Should you need to step away, please feel free, but it would help if just one person left at a time.
- I am **not an Arlington Schools employee**. I'm a professional moderator, and not an expert on teaching, school administration, or library services. My job is to listen to you and convey your input to the Office of Planning and Evaluation and Library Services.

### INTRODUCTIONS (5 minutes)

- Which school is "yours"?
- How long you've been with APS in Library Services.
- How you'd fill in the blank in this sentence: "The role of the library at a(n) [elem, middle, high school] is \_\_\_\_\_."  
[Moderator: Put sentence-starter on screen. Match the school type to the group.]

### EXPERIENCES IN LIBRARY SERVICES ROLE (20 minutes)

- Let's stay with the idea of roles. Tell me about what you see as your ideal role in your library and at your school.
  - How would you describe your role today?
  - How does the role you'd like to have align with your daily responsibilities?
- [T-scale only] How would you describe the level of collaboration you find you have with teachers?
  - And, how is that for you – too little, too much, just right, or something else?
  - [Elem T-scale only] Tell me about your experiences with fixed and flex schedules, specifically which you prefer and why.
- [T-scale only] How do you support students' research skills?
  - [Focus probes on what librarian is doing to build research capacity within the students.]
  - [Probe specifically, if needed] What opportunities, if any, do you have to collaborate with teachers for delivering instruction to students on information literacy and research skills?
- How do you support technology at your school?

### **MATERIALS (5 mins)**

- Do you feel your library's collection and resources are adequate? Tell me more.

### **PROGRAMMATIC-LEVEL THOUGHTS (10 mins)**

- Have you encountered any barriers you haven't already mentioned that make it difficult to achieve in the context of the library in the way you'd like to?
  - [If any] And what might help resolve those issues?
- How about what helps or makes a positive difference for you as a Librarian?
- What additional supports do you need?
  - [High schools: Listen/Record by type of high school, comprehensive vs. program. Ensure needs are clearly identified as being those of one or the other.]
- What if any changes to the library program would you suggest?

### **HIGHLIGHTS (5 mins)**

- Let's close with some thoughts on what is going right. If you could tell Dr. Duran about one highlight of your program, what would it be?

### **CONCLUSION (5 mins)**

- As we wrap up, do you have any concluding thoughts or advice to share with APS on the topic of Library Services specifically?

Thank you so very much for giving me your time today. The experiences and thoughts you shared will be such a big help to Library Services.

Total time: 60 minutes