

The SDSL School Library Monthly Update

October 2026

Building a Reading Culture

A strong reading culture grows through the everyday experiences that help students see reading as something meaningful, enjoyable, and worth making time for. From the books we place in students' hands to the conversations we have about what we're reading, school libraries have countless opportunities to make reading a visible and

valued part of school life. This month, consider how you can build on what you're already doing. A reading culture audit can help you identify the strengths of your current efforts, recognize opportunities for growth, and choose a few purposeful changes that make reading more inviting and accessible for your students.

Extend Your Learning

Looking for practical professional development? The **School Librarian Inservice PD Package** (SLIPP) is designed to help school librarians strengthen their practice through relevant, flexible learning.

The program explores topics such as building a reading culture, collection development, library instruction, and making the most of existing library services.

Enroll in SLIPP to explore these topics and discover ideas you can put into practice in your own school library.

SCHOOL LIBRARY RESOURCES

- ➔ [SDSL CE Catalog](#)
- ➔ [SDSL Training Catalog](#)
- ➔ [School Library Services Handbook](#)
- ➔ [SDSL Electronic Resources](#)
- ➔ [Monthly Update Archives](#)
- ➔ [Guides for School Librarians](#)
- ➔ [PD Opportunities](#)
- ➔ [School Library Scoop](#)
- ➔ [School Library Pulse](#)

SDSL School Library Services

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BUILDING A READING CULTURE: START WITH WHAT YOU'RE ALREADY DOING

A school library's reading culture is reflected in more than the number of books checked out or the number of students who participate in a reading challenge. It can be seen in the conversations happening around books, the ease with which students find something to read, the variety of reading experiences available, and the messages students receive about who reading is for and why it matters.

The good news is that building reading culture doesn't necessarily require adding another program to an already full calendar. Often, the most meaningful changes come from looking at existing practices with fresh eyes and asking: How can we make the reading experiences we already offer more purposeful, welcoming, and engaging?



WHAT DOES READING CULTURE LOOK LIKE?

Reading is visible

Books, reading recommendations, and conversations about reading are part of the everyday environment, not just something highlighted during special events.



Reading is personal

Students are encouraged to develop their own relationships with reading rather than feeling that everyone must read the same way or for the same reasons.



Reading is social

Students have opportunities to share recommendations, talk about stories, and discover what others are reading.



Reading is accessible

Students can find books that match their interests, reading identities, abilities, and current curiosities.



Want to explore this topic more deeply?

The School Librarian Inservice PD Package (SLIPP) includes opportunities to examine how school librarians can build reading culture through the work they already do.

Enroll today to continue the conversation and develop practical ideas for your own school library.



LOOK AT YOUR EXISTING PRACTICES

Before adding something new, take a closer look at the reading experiences already happening in your library. Small adjustments to familiar routines can have a meaningful impact.



Book Displays and Recommendations

Do your displays invite students to explore? Try student recommendations, staff favorites, or groupings connected to student interests.



Read-Alouds and Shared Reading Experiences

Look for opportunities to share a compelling picture book, poem, excerpt, or chapter simply because it is worth experiencing.



Conversations About Reading

Create opportunities for students to share recommendations, talk about books, and discover what others are reading.



Collection and Browsing

Are books and formats easy to find and inviting to explore? Small changes to organization or presentation can make a difference.

A Quick Reading Culture Check-In

Use these questions to reflect on your current reading culture. Choose one question that helps you see an opportunity for a small, purposeful change. Ask yourself:

- **Visibility:** How often do students see and hear adults talking about reading?
- **Choice:** How easy is it for students to find something they genuinely want to read?
- **Belonging:** Do students see a place for their interests, preferences, and reading identities in our library?
- **Connection:** What opportunities do students have to share reading experiences with one another?
- **Consistency:** What messages about reading do students encounter every day?
- **Next step:** What is one thing I could adjust this month using the time, resources, and routines I already have?

Start Small, Build Intentionally

Building reading culture is ongoing work. It is about making intentional choices that help students encounter reading as a meaningful part of their lives.

Choose one existing practice and ask how you might make it a little more inviting, purposeful, or student-centered. Then notice what happens. Over time, those small choices can become part of the culture of your library.



SIRS ISSUES RESEARCHER

[Direct Link](#) 

TIME SAVING TIPS

Use “Leading Issues” pages as ready-made lesson starters. The overview + critical thinking questions = instant mini-lessons without prep.

Export citations directly to Google Drive or OneDrive. Great for saving student time and reducing citation errors.

Assign “Viewpoints” readings for homework. SIRS provides multiple viewpoint essays per topic, which are ideal for short, structured readings.

Integrate SIRS with writing workshops. You can preselect articles for units and streamline student research.

Gives middle and high school students clear, balanced introductions to major issues using overviews, timelines, pros/cons, critical thinking questions, and articles.

IDEAL FOR CLASSROOM USE

Activity 1: Debate Prep Stations

Purpose: Helps students quickly understand both sides of an issue and prepares them to defend positions with evidence.

- Students select a “Leading Issue,” read the overview, and use the pro/con section to build opening statements for a classroom debate.

Activity 2: Evidence Hunting Challenges

Purpose: Builds strong information-literacy skills by teaching students how to find, evaluate, and cite credible evidence.

- Assign groups different issues (ex: minimum wage, gender equity, environmental topics). Using SIRS’ viewpoint essays and statistics, each group must gather three credible pieces of evidence to support an argument.

Activity 3: Compare the Conversation

Purpose: Strengthens argument writing by giving students balanced perspectives and structured evidence to cite.

- Pair SIRS Issues Researcher articles with other databases (e.g., Points of View Reference Center) to teach cross-resource verification and multiple perspective analysis.

DID YOU KNOW?

There are built-in critical thinking questions, each Leading Issue includes them.

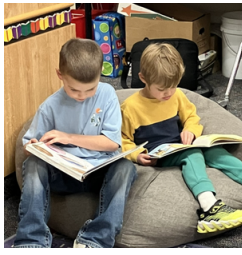
There are timelines for each major issue, which are ideal for social studies, civics, and historical context lessons



Custer Elementary, Hermosa Elementary, and Custer Jr/Sr High School Libraries



Librarian: Doris Ann Mertz



Doris Ann Mertz brings a district-wide perspective to her work as a librarian, serving three school libraries across Custer School District. Her approach is grounded in listening to teachers, to students, and to support staff and then finding ways for the library to meet those needs. From building collections around student interests and classroom curriculum to supporting Science of Reading initiatives, collaborating with teachers, and serving on the district literacy team, Doris Ann sees the library as an essential part of teaching and learning. Across three very different library spaces, she continues to create welcoming environments where students can find books they want to read, connect with others, and explore new ideas.

Collections Built Around Needs

Doris Ann lets the needs of students and teachers drive her collections. She researches titles with teachers, responds to student requests, finds materials for developing readers, and seeks out resources for Special Ed staff. A \$5,000 grant also allowed her to strengthen nonfiction collections in the elementary libraries.

Connecting Libraries and Learning

Doris Ann serves on the District Literacy Team, helping connect library work with broader curriculum and literacy goals. She collaborates with teachers on everything from information literacy and library orientations to resume writing, Canva, and research skills, while also helping the district respond to the Science of Reading.

Everyone Belongs

Across the district, Doris Ann works to make the library a place where students want to be. At the high school, comfortable seating, free coffee and cocoa, and an approachable staff create a welcoming space for all. At the elementary schools, students can check out as many books as they can manage, helping reinforce a strong culture of reading.

Leading Beyond

Doris Ann's leadership extends beyond her own schools. She is the chair of the SDLA School Section and actively supports professional learning and collaboration. Her work demonstrates how a school librarian can contribute not only to individual students and classrooms, but to literacy efforts across an entire district and profession.