
THE SCHOOL LIBRARIAN AS AN INSTRUCTIONAL PARTNER

School librarians are educators. Your instructional role is one of the most important and most distinctive parts of being a school librarian. You may teach a whole class, work with a small group, collaborate with a teacher, or help one student find the right book or information. It may happen in the library, in a classroom, or in a quick conversation with a student. What makes your role unique is that you work across the school. You connect with students at different grade levels, collaborate across content areas, and teach skills that students can use in many different settings. Your role is to bring your particular expertise to the learning process and help students become more capable, curious, and independent learners.

What Do School Librarians Teach?

SD's school library standards provide a framework for thinking about your instructional role through three areas: Textual Literacy, Information Literacy, and Civic and Ethical Literacy.

Textual Literacy

A conversation about what a student wants to read can be instruction. Helping a student understand *why* a particular book appeals to them can help them become more intentional readers. You help students:

- Discover texts that connect with their interests
- Develop reading identities and habits
- Explore different genres and formats
- Talk about and respond to what they read
- Become confident and independent readers

Information Literacy

Information literacy skills aren't limited to research projects. Students need them whenever they encounter information. You help students learn how to:

- Develop questions
- Search strategically
- Find, use, and evaluate appropriate sources
- Organize and synthesize information
- Communicate what they have learned
- Use information responsibly

Civic and Ethical Literacy

You help students consider their rights and responsibilities as they interact with information, texts, technology, and their communities. This can include teaching students to think critically about information, participate thoughtfully in conversations, and make responsible choices as information users and creators.

Your instructional program doesn't have to look the same as another school librarian's. Your students, teachers, schedule, and school community should shape what you teach.

Instruction Happens in More Places Than You Think

Not every instructional moment requires a lesson plan, a scheduled class, or even more than a few minutes. Some of the most meaningful teaching happens in the everyday work of the school library. When you help a student choose a book, you can teach them to recognize their reading interests and preferences. When a student struggles to find information, you can help them develop better search strategies. When a student brings you a source, you can help them think critically about where the information came from and whether it meets their needs. These interactions are opportunities to build skills students can use independently.

Look for opportunities to teach through:

- **Reader conversations:** helping students understand themselves as readers and make purposeful choices
- **Research support:** guiding students through questioning, searching, evaluating, and using information
- **Just-in-time instruction:** teaching a skill when a student encounters an authentic need for it
- **Individual and small-group support:** noticing what students need and providing targeted instruction
- **Modeling:** showing students how you approach a search, evaluate information, solve a problem, or make a decision

Be an Instructional Partner

Collaboration can be a short demonstration, a small-group lesson, a research conference, helping students apply a skill within an authentic assignment, or yes, even an elaborate co-taught unit. You don't have to wait for a teacher to ask you to collaborate. Start with a conversation: "*What are your students learning right now?*"

Then consider:

- Is there a skill I could help teach?
- What will students be asked to do?
- What resources will they need?
- Is there an opportunity to connect reading, research, or inquiry to this learning?
- What could I teach that would help students become more independent?

Make Your Instruction Visible

Because school librarians do so many things, instruction can sometimes become invisible. A teacher may see you helping students find books without realizing you are supporting reading identity and purposeful book selection. An administrator may see students using databases without seeing the instruction that taught them how to search effectively.

One way to make your role more visible is to describe the learning, not just the activity. Instead of focusing on what you did, such as helping with a research project, showing students a database, or helping students find books, focus on what students learned as a result. You might describe students learning to develop effective search strategies, evaluate sources, navigate a database, identify their reading interests, or select texts that meet their needs.

This language helps others see that your work is not simply about providing access to books, databases, and other resources. You are teaching students how to use those resources effectively.

Start Where You Are

If you want to strengthen your instructional role, you don't need to redesign your entire program. Start by choosing one grade level or one teacher or one upcoming unit or one student need, and then ask: *"What could I teach that would make a difference?"* And build from there.

Quick Check-In

- ☐ I can clearly explain what I teach as a school librarian.
- ☐ My instruction connects to the school library standards.
- ☐ I intentionally teach Textual Literacy.
- ☐ I intentionally teach Information Literacy.
- ☐ I intentionally teach Civic and Ethical Literacy.
- ☐ I look for authentic opportunities to teach.
- ☐ I collaborate with teachers around student learning.
- ☐ I focus on building students' independence.
- ☐ I can describe the learning that happens through my work.

Remember

You are an educator! Your instructional role isn't an add-on or something that you have to squeeze into the margins of your job. You teach students how to find books that matter to them, ask better questions, find and evaluate information, navigate an increasingly complex information environment, and become independent learners. What you are teaching is important. Identify it. Make it intentional. Create opportunities for students to learn it.