

Community Readiness

"The ability to be a productive, active, engaged member of a democratic society."

Do you recognize this phrase? It sounds like it might be a desired outcome of a civics course, or perhaps a rationale for participation in student government or a service organization. Although these scenarios share similar themes, this is actually the definition of "community readiness" included in AASL's Definition of an Effective School Library Program, wherein the effective school library program is "a fundamental component of college, career, and community readiness" (<http://www.ala.org/aasl/advocacy/resources/statements>). Through resources, instruction, and opportunities, school libraries, operating in the context of the school at large, aim to prepare young people for their next settings of learning and work (college and career), and importantly, students' day-to-day experiences and responsibilities in the world right now (community).

To meet that multi-tiered objective, school librarians plan, execute, and evaluate programs according, at least in part, to what they find works "here"—"here" being the community, defined and considered with a constantly adjusting zoom lens. In one moment, community might reflect a single class of students learning to listen and contribute to a discussion: a learning community. The librarian and teaching colleagues implement the appropriate support and materials for this learning community to be successful in this experience. Even at this micro level, the demands and diversity are great. Such a skill set embodies the art and science of teaching: using knowledge, experience, compassion, and professional judgment to zoom in on students' immediate needs, zoom out into the bigger universe for context and information, and then focus back in, perhaps with a new or deeper understanding.

Part of that bigger universe includes groups of persons drawn together by common location, experience, or interest—taxpayers, alumni, advocates, cultural groups, ethnic and racial groups, religious affiliations, businesses and organizations, professionals, supporters, experts—the interpretations of communities are nearly endless. One could draw lines to connect, or as we well know in our current era, separate communities in any number of directions. With this system comes complicated and often unanswerable questions. As adults struggle to understand problems and burdens in these spaces, the idea of making students "ready" for such a reality sounds like a tremendous challenge! And yet, educators face each day if not entirely prepared (who can be?) still generous and willing to lead students to "community readiness."

In October 2018, former Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor announced that she would no longer be participating in public life, due to the onset of dementia. She reflected in a public letter how, upon her retirement in 2006, she dedicated her professional efforts to the advancement of civic education and engagement (<https://www.icivics.org/node/2570949>). As she described,

I feel so strongly about the topic because I've seen firsthand how vital it is for all citizens to understand our Constitution and unique system of government, and participate actively in their communities. It is through this shared understanding of who we are that we can follow the approaches that have served us best over time—working collaboratively together in communities and in government to solve problems, putting country and the common good above party and self-interest, and holding our key governmental institutions accountable (2018).

Whether we're considering more formal civics education (like the iCivics program Justice O'Connor founded) or the broader community readiness described as part of effective school library programs, community stands out as prominent goal for today's learners and charge for today's educators. What does this element of your school library program look like? I'm honored to share our authors' work with you in this issue, and I hope that in their words, you find examples, inspiration, and new understandings of community readiness and responsibility.

Work Cited

O'Connor, Sandra Day. Public address (October 23, 2018). iCivics. <https://assets.documentcloud.org/documents/5017399/Letter-From-Sandra-Day-OConnor.pdf>.

About the Editor

Rebecca J. Morris, MLIS, PhD, earned her master's degree and doctorate at the University of Pittsburgh and her undergraduate degree in elementary education at Pennsylvania State University. Rebecca teaches graduate courses in school librarianship and youth library services. Rebecca has published articles in journals including *School Library Research*, *Knowledge Quest*, *School Libraries Worldwide*, *Teacher Librarian* and the *Journal of Research on Young Adults in Libraries*. She is the author of *School Libraries and Student Learning: A Guide for School Leaders* (Harvard Education Publishing Group, 2015). Rebecca is a former elementary classroom teacher and middle school librarian.

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