Independent School

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THE NEW SCHOOL LIBRARY
The Human Connection to Digital Resources

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THE GREAT DISRUPTION?
TECHNOLOGY AND THE FUTURE OF SCHOOLS

THE NEW SCHOOL LIBRARY

THE HUMAN CONNECTION TO DIGITAL RESOURCES AND ACADEMIC SUCCESS

BY
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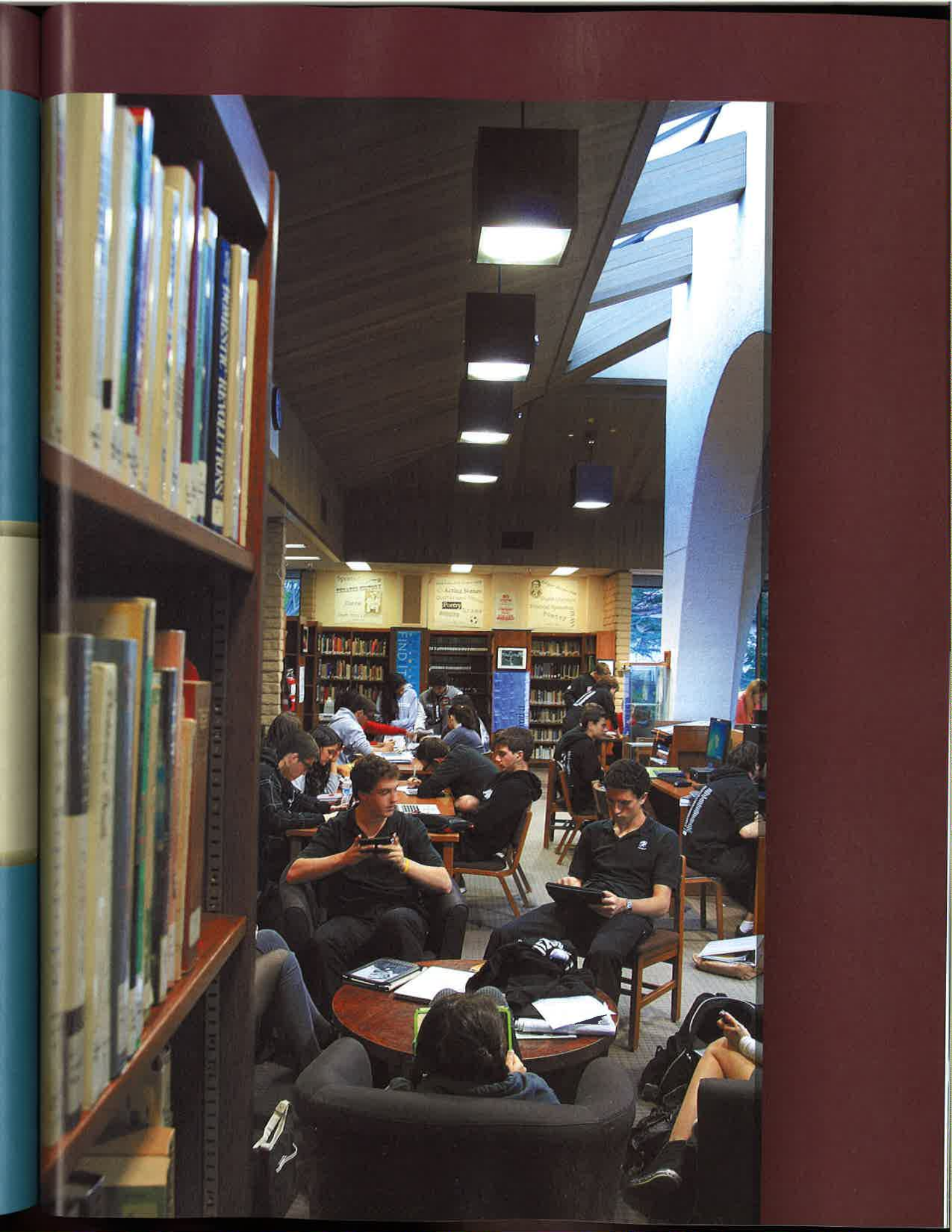SARAH DAVIS,
DORCAS HAND,
AND
MATTHEW WITTMER

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ITHOUT QUESTION, THE INTERNET has changed the way we think and learn, and will continue to do so as our technology evolves. In particular, the ability to access enormous amounts of information at any time from almost any place is forcing schools to redefine the idea of a classroom and the way we approach teaching. It is also reshaping the notion of school library services – what libraries look like and how they and librarians best serve schools.

Increasingly, we hear the questions: "Are libraries necessary today? Isn't everything on the Internet? Can't we use the library space for better purposes?" We read about prominent independent schools that have chosen to eliminate most or all of their print collections in favor of digital resources. Other schools have replaced trained librarians with technologists who are expert at connecting students with digital tools and websites, but not at maintaining and expanding the carefully curated and already owned print and digital collections. Some independent school librarians are being asked to dramatically weed their print collections to accommodate a move to a space smaller by half or more. More than a few school leaders see this as a good time to cut library funding in order to save money in the overall budget.

Clearly, a popular impression out there is that the plentiful free information on the open Internet will answer all academic needs.

We respectfully disagree — and the research is on our side.

Today's independent school libraries have an increasingly different look and function from libraries of the past, even the recent past. They continue to grow and change with the growth of technology tools (devices, applications, and information resources). But good schools know that libraries and professional librarians are still essential to their missions. Maybe more essential than ever, if excellence in education remains the goal.

A school might support a traditional library model or move to incorporate elements of either a Learning Commons or a Makerspace model or both. "Learning Commons" is a term that refers to a mixed-use space for research, study, collaboration, global connection, and more — with librarians embodying the all-important connection between resources and students. The term "Makerspace" refers to an area of a library focused on production — offering, for example, digital cameras, a 3D printer, and photo manipulation and layout software. The Makerspace idea reinforces the library's role in the entire learning spectrum from recreational reading to research to production and sharing.

A school library can be successful using aspects of either or both of these models, or the school's own interpretation of these models. Strong and successful school libraries require broad collections of resources in many formats and enthusiastic, trained librarians to support students in using and applying information resources to build new knowledge.

THE HUMAN TOUCH

"Libraries are more relevant than ever," writes Luis Herrera, the city librarian of San Francisco, in the *New York Times*. "They are a place for personal growth and reinvention, a place for help in navigating the information age, a gathering place for civic and cultural engagement, and a trusted place for preserving culture."[1]

Also writing in the *New York Times*, Matthew Battles, a fellow at the Berkman Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University, underscores Herrera's point. "Libraries are bridges, enabling people access to many of the information tools that might help them improve their lives and grow their careers," he writes. "Libraries constitute archaeologies of knowledge, reflecting not only cultural memory, but also the changing import of information, learning, and literary expression in different times and places."[2]

School librarians provide the all-important human connection between students and information, as well as between teachers and information. They promote a love of reading and learning. They curate collections that support a sense of wonder at the breadth of possibility in the world. Their human touch lifts information access from a rote and random activity to purposeful, meaningful learning.

The 2012 Pew Internet & American Life Project study, *How Teens Do Research in the Digital World*,[3] reports that while the Internet enables students to access a wider range of resources than would otherwise be available, 83 percent of teachers surveyed agree that the available amount of online information is overwhelming to most students. Seventy-one percent agree that "digital technologies discourage students from using a wide range of sources." The surveyed educators also report that the skills needed for seeking quality information "need to be taught by all teachers across the curriculum, and that library staff can be a key part of that process."

In short, professional librarians are experts in teaching the search skills that help researchers accomplish what the Pew study reports is essential: how to best "evaluate the quality of information, how to recognize what information is and is not relevant to the question at hand, and how to synthesize information from multiple sources into a coherent piece of work."

But it's not just the vast amount of information that makes research difficult — and librarians essential — today. Commercial search engines often complicate the process of finding balanced information. In an age where computers are becoming what Eli Pariser, author of *The Filter Bubble* (2011), describes as "one way mirror(s)," search results tend to provide individuals with search results based on their searching habits, which reinforce what they already believe about any given topic. Students (and many teachers) need training to find the best information because it is hidden by Internet "page ranking" and search personalization.[4] In other words, students need to be taught how to be critical researchers. Students who don't understand strong search methods will be at an increasing disadvantage as they advance in school. They need to know how to dig deeper for the varied and more interesting results that will build an academic project to excellence.

Contemporary school libraries are more than centers of information access. They are centers for learning that extend and support the work that goes on in the classroom. They are focal points of collaboration and entry points to global connection. Research demonstrates that students at schools with strong libraries — libraries staffed with trained librarians — often have stronger test scores than schools without that facility and staff. A well-supported school library is at the heart of student academic growth and integral to academic success. In short, they leverage the mission of the school.

THE "HUM" OF THE LIBRARY

While school libraries remain central to high quality academic programs, the look and feel of libraries are adapting to the times. School libraries have been and should remain welcoming places where educators work with students, where students access information and collaborate on projects. But in recent years, they've extended their reach and purpose.

A forward-looking library will include multifunctional spaces that

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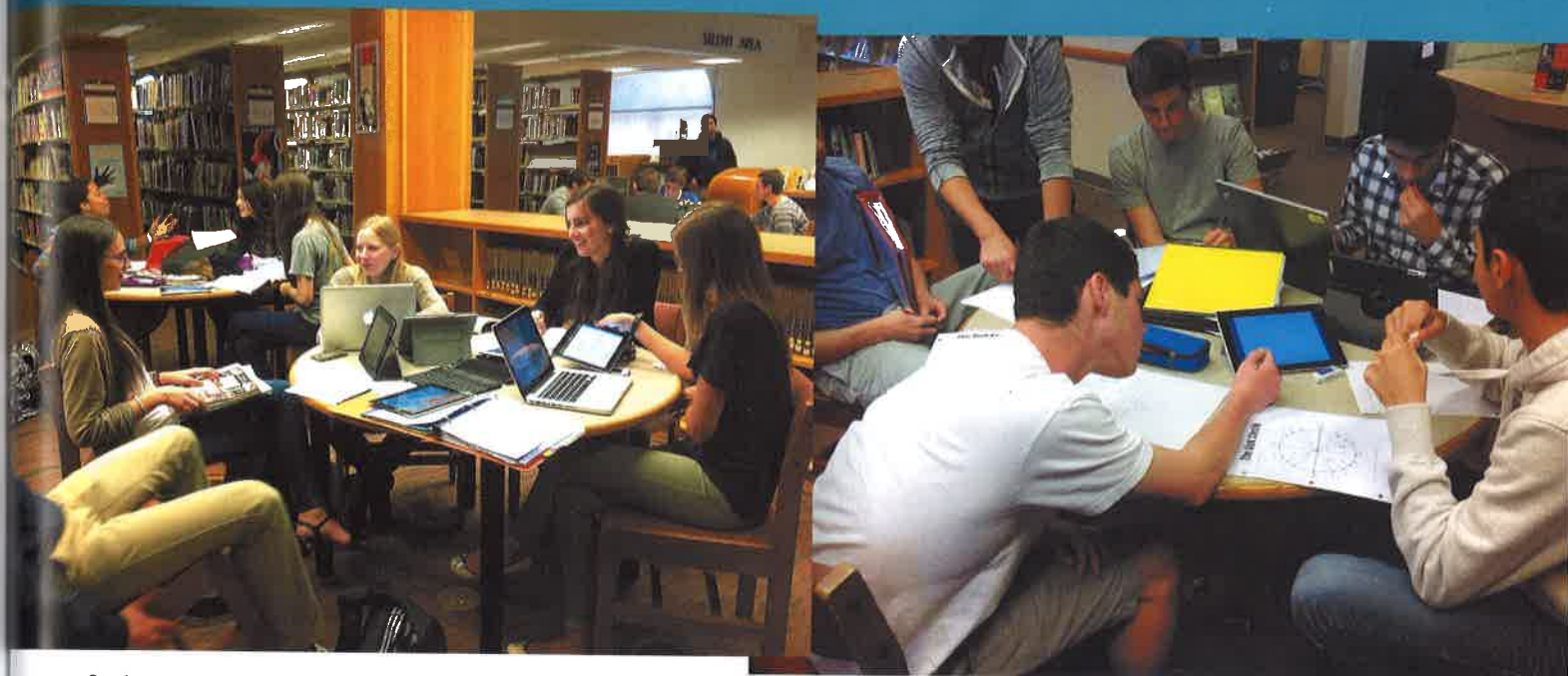
facilitate studying, researching, meeting, creating, collaborating, and sharing of final student projects. The library continues to evolve with the needs of teacher and student researchers, making flexibility of space key. It should offer a physical and virtual access point to all formats of information, whether through the existing collection of print books or the growing collection of ebooks and other digital resources, including online subscription databases and the Internet itself. Even the most traditional library is a Makerspace — a place in which students compile and assimilate information into new knowledge. It also comes with experts — librarians — to assist students and faculty with their activities.

The forward-looking library may seem different from the hushed center of scholarship we remember, but it remains a library in all the traditional definitions: a collection of resources organized for easy access by interested researchers. Derek Attig, a 2012 Google Policy Fellow and currently an OITP Research Associate at the American Library Association's Office for Information Technology Policy, argues that "reading and making actually have a great deal in common. They are both opportunities for creative, productive engagement with a wider world. The future (and the absolute necessity!) of libraries is in facilitating that engagement — whether it's with a MakerBot or with *Moby Dick* or with something we haven't yet even imagined."[5]

Librarians demonstrate their passion for the collision of interest, enthusiasm, and knowledge when they teach research skills and accurate citation as applied to the content students want and need. Attig continues, "What is reading... but precisely 'a dynamic participatory experience'? The human mind shapes and is shaped by the process of reading. Readers engage with texts [regardless of format] in unpredictably participatory ways. In short, making is not the opposite of reading. Both are opportunities for people to engage creatively with materials at hand and produce something new. Whether those materials are polymers fed into a 3-D printer or Charlotte Perkins Gilman stories fed into a mind is, well, almost *im*material."

Today, an intellectual "hum" is the new "quiet." Librarians function as instructors, coaches, teachers, and cheerleaders — while all around them students and teachers engage in multiple forms of learning. To spend a day in a contemporary school library is to witness what all the research says about quality education for the 21st century — educators and students engaged in research, collaboration, communication, problem solving, creativity, and more.

School libraries offer a variety of models from campus to campus that reflects each individual school's mission and community. In this time of transition from all print to increasingly digital, there is a persistent tension as each campus sorts out the balance that

best supports local needs. Regardless of where a school lies on the transitional spectrum, however, professional librarians are essential.

BEYOND THE PRINT VS. DIGITAL DEBATE

Why does the headlined library debate often stem back to collections being "Print or Digital?"

According to John Palfrey, head of Phillips Academy (Massachusetts), "We must redefine libraries for a digital-plus era,"[6] where the "plus" may include everything that has been included in traditional libraries, from print to realia.

The common question about going "print or digital" with library content naïvely glosses over multiple variables that significantly impact the resource availability to library patrons. There is often an assumption that digital content is less expensive than print, but that is a false assumption. Digital content can be substantially more expensive depending on content availability, methods of access, accessibility to mobile users, and the prevalence, availability, types, and cost of mobile devices. Decisions about content must take into account issues of access that are directly affected by campus infrastructure and technology standards, budget, and student use and demand patterns. A final factor is content availability: as of spring 2013, some publishers are resisting library ownership of ebooks, which means that committing to an all-digital collection could deny students access to some cutting-edge thinking. Nicholas Carr writes in a *Wall Street Journal* article, "Don't Burn Your Books — Print Is Here to Stay," that ebooks as we know them today may be just another format, like audiobooks.[7] In other words, an all-digital collection can be just as limiting as an all-print collection.

It makes sense for schools to increase their digital collection and virtual presence, but we don't believe that schools benefit by dramatically downsizing the library's space. School libraries will continue to need teaching spaces that support the increasing Mak-

erspace activities. Librarians remain the best trained to teach information and research skills. The library is, at its core, a classroom that promotes independent learning, but even the most independent learners benefit from expert guidance as they seek new resources. The actual space needed will remain substantial. Depending on the age of the students and the school's existing print collection, the arrangement of the space may change substantially to allow more class teaching areas with Wi-Fi and useful digital applications. Or it may stay about the same to house existing collections of perhaps picture books for the very young, academic books that may never be digitized but that support specific courses on a campus, and/ or continuing strong print collections because the community prefers some materials in that format.

Independent schools are known for their independence of thought. Each school — through its mission and vision — will analyze the changing terrain of the ebook and digital content conversation as it affects both budget and space decisions. Few schools can ignore e-content totally; just as few will want to eliminate all print content from their libraries. Change requires us to examine the spectrum and see where we fit within it. It requires an ongoing conversation and awareness of what other schools are doing, what devices and new formats are on the horizon, and how those facts can best be aligned for our specific situation.

THE LIBRARIAN'S ROLE IN A MULTIFORMAT SCHOOL LIBRARY

When a student discovers the perfect resource to answer a question or need — whether it is a database article, a book published in the 1880s, or a website — there is usually a librarian who facilitated that discovery, marking the path from the student search term to the discovered source. They help students to ask good questions of all resources, and to apply the answers to their continued research efforts. But finding quality authoritative information online is not the whole of the

library-technology related curriculum. Many school librarians also teach digital ethics, copyright laws, and creative problem solving. They help facilitate the increasingly important global connection between students and the rest of the world, helping students connect to an authentic audience in a broader community, arranging Skype sessions with authors or experts in other locations, and culling resources as needed from varied sources and experts outside the school walls. Many librarians are on the leading edge of social media use, modeling cyber-wisdom through library blogs, Facebook pages, and Twitter accounts and recommending new tools for specific curricular projects.

As the digital world becomes ever more pervasive on our campuses, librarians offer the human connection among campus departments. Because the library centralizes so many digital access points and ensures that teachers get the best support possible, librarians are in constant collaboration with the information technology staff and educational technology specialists.

For example, Annunciation Orthodox School (Texas) has created a technology leadership team that includes the library director, the information technology manager, the education technology coordinator, and two technology teachers. The technology leadership team coordinates a faculty technology committee to strategically plan for technology implementation at the school.

At Brentwood School (California), the librarians and educational technology specialists team up to collaborate with faculty members. Additionally, the technology specialists at Brentwood School have their offices in or next to the libraries, increasing spontaneous collaboration and collegiality. The Brentwood library supports the new upper school 1:1 iPad program in several ways — conducting teacher training, exploring and teaching how the library resources work best on the iPad, and maintaining a presence on the iPads with apps (such as database and catalog apps, pathfinders, ebook portals) that are "pushed out" to all

TECHNOLOGY AND THE LIBRARY:
WHAT'S HOT, AND WHAT'S NOT?

WHAT'S HOT	WHAT'S NOT
Physical and virtual libraries as hubs of creating new knowledge and educational innovation.	Libraries as stand-alone centers of knowledge consumption.
Regular collaboration with the technology team to ensure consistency in skills, approach to technology, and technology policies.	Librarians teaching technology in a vacuum, or ignoring the technology curriculum, while staying out of the conversation about technology policy or plans for the school.
Staffing that allows librarians to visit classrooms, to teach and accompany students on the research experience where it is happening, and to attend faculty meetings and department meetings across the curriculum.	Understaffing the library so the teaching librarian has to supervise the library and miss authentic research and collaboration moments.
Keeping a curated selection of books and digital resources that are used, and weeding and updating the collection on a regular basis.	Keeping an archive of books and resources that are rarely used.
Encouraging the librarian to experiment and play with new digital resources and tools.	No opportunities to offer ebooks and new media to students and faculty due to budget constraints.
Offering collaborative workspaces for students and noise-cancelling headphones for those who want silence.	Shushing students all day.
Lending gear from laptops to iPads, from phone chargers to video cameras, from rulers to calculators.	Advocating in-library use only for many materials.
Librarians active in their personal learning networks in order to stay aware of the rapidly changing field and to help lead the discussions about new and meaningful avenues for technology in the curriculum.	Librarians not willing (or not given the opportunity) to implement change in the library program or services offered.
Collaborating with teachers to create inquiry-based projects that seamlessly integrate research and information literacy skills into the academic curriculum.	Leaving the librarian out of the planning process and implementation in regard to research and technology resources.
Learning how to search Google effectively.	One million hits in your Google results list.
A library space with powerful Wi-Fi, numerous outlets, whiteboards, moveable furniture, and easy access to the virtual library.	Inflexible learning spaces.
A welcoming, student-centered library that supports learning and curiosity.	A library where students feel there are too many rules with no purpose.

Independent School Librarians Unite

The Independent School Section of the American Association of School Librarians — itself a division of the American Library Association — offers its members a nationwide network of colleagues who can answer questions, offer resources, and support informal research. All librarians working within independent schools are encouraged to join.

In a time when school library services are evolving in order to take advantage of new technological learning tools — for instance, using more ebooks or restructuring a library into a Learning Commons — this resource is a great benefit to the NAIS community.

To access the Independent School Section of the American Association of School Librarians, go to: *www.ala.org/aasl/abouta asl/aaslcommunity/aaslsections/ iss/iss.*

The more informal Association of Independent School Librarians (AISL) also offers librarians a strong network of colleagues and an annual conference (*www.aislnews.org*). The two organizations complement each other in mission.

student and faculty, allowing the community to virtually take the library with them wherever they go.

The Viewpoint School (California), Brentwood, and Annunciation Orthodox libraries actively promote digital resources by creating LibGuides, online research pathfinders for student projects. This is a collaborative effort between librarians and faculty. The library resources, along with project-specific LibGuides are presented both in the library and, ideally, in the classroom — and are available 24/7 online.

According to Palfrey of Phillips Academy, "We have to recreate the sense of wonder and importance of libraries, as public spaces, as research labs, as Makerspaces, and as core democratic institutions for the digital age."[8] We wholeheartedly agree. These are exciting, but complicated times. Librarians have never been as important as they are now in helping students and faculty sort through the glut of information and tools for the best resources. As institutions, school libraries continue to evolve to serve and lead their communities with curated collections, services, and programs tailored to a school's mission.

Few schools will benefit from a drastic reduction of their print collections or their library staff. Equally few schools will be able to ignore digital content in favor of fully paper-based print collections. Passionate, professional librarians' careful selection of print and digital resources, combined with strategic efforts to market and promote these resources, make librarians essential to good schools. They understand that as students learn how to do authentic, quality research, they will also need a space to synthesize and express their new knowledge in creative ways. They understand that facilitating strong student learning and achievement across subject disciplines is a necessary service for higher education and the contemporary marketplace. They encourage and assist students, in groups and individually, as the students expand their knowledge and passions in a world with ever expanding resource formats.

In short, libraries and librarians are essential to an excellent independent school education.

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