Question 1: Moderator, Lori Donovan
How has your role/function been impacted by schools/universities going to distance learning? What did you find to be challenging, and what strategies should the state consider to improve distance learning if it is necessary for the 2020-2021 school year?

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School librarians are teachers who are good at being instructional partners and leaders when it comes to blended learning and leveraging technology in both face-to-face and distance learning environments. Students, teachers, administrators, and parents can access school library digital resources 24/7 through school or library websites. These websites contain access to the library catalog, online databases, and other technology tools that aid in student learning for both personal and academic pursuits. School librarians' ability to curate resources goes beyond the physical; we are well suited to support and improve the educational experience for our teachers and students in the fall if needed.

In this unprecedented time, however, many school librarians have encountered different responsibilities when we moved to distance learning. Many school librarians have been called into action to help vet online resources, have been providing guidance on copyright and fair use, have created tutorials for accessing their division's technology applications, and have collaborated with teachers to present lessons in a LMS or through video conferencing applications. As for working with students, school librarians have adjusted their library lessons by doing online read alouds, online book clubs, homework/research hotlines, genius hours, "lunch in the library" with students, and other online learning activities such as learning to code. Though some find themselves pushed aside in favor of staff who carry the label of technology in their position descriptions, school librarians have technological expertise, a skill for finding digital resources, and a growing role as a facilitator of professional development for staff, and some of us are being utilized to do so.

What did you find to be challenging, and what strategies should the state consider to improve distance learning if it is necessary for the 2020-2021 school year?

One thing that school librarians have found once we went to distance learning is we miss seeing our students face-to-face. School librarians recognize and are concerned that not all students have homes that are literacy rich, and not having access to print books is a real detriment to learning as well as an equity issue. We are also concerned that not all students have the ability to access our online resources due to lack of a device or not having internet capability. We hope that the state will help school divisions with solutions that help support students and families so that all students in the Commonwealth have an equitable learning opportunity.

School librarians are in a unique position, much like administrators, as we work with all students, staff, parents, and community partners. Because of this we see an opportunity to support student learning. School librarians realize that students, teachers, and parents will need training and support to work in digital environments; we see the need for the inclusion of non core content to meet the Profile of a Virginia Graduate model and incorporation of the 5 C's; we see students, parents, teachers, and administrators needing real time, point of support models for librarians to provide services; and we see school librarians need for periodic access to buildings so we may continue to serve the needs of all learners with access to our physical collections to support students who need literacy rich home environments.

Finally, we want to share that school librarians are an asset in a distance learning environment. Librarians are bridge builders and equalizers between core content and resources in a digital environment; we provide support for those educators and even families with less technology experience, and we are the only academic

resource to whom every single student in a school has access. We encourage the state to support school libraries and librarians with this.

Question 2: Moderator, Audrey Church
(2) As the new academic year begins, there is a possibility that restrictions will be in place, such as limited class sizes and staggered scheduling. What challenges do you anticipate in your role/function? What strategies should the state keep in mind as it works with local divisions to prioritize staff/student safety while ensuring high quality instruction?

*As the new academic year begins, there is a possibility that restrictions will be in place, such as limited class sizes and staggered scheduling. What **challenges** do you anticipate in your role/function?*

As school librarians we serve every student and every teacher in our schools. We teach across grade levels and across content areas. As the new academic year begins, we anticipate that challenges will exist. We've attempted to categorize them into three main areas: challenges in clarifying for others our role and place in digital learning, challenges of a physical nature, and challenges to provide accessibility for all.

First, our role and place in digital learning: school librarians are teachers and instructional partners who play a key role in student learning. We teach information literacy, media literacy, and digital literacy. We cultivate lifelong reading and lifelong learning. We know that we are an integral part of the instructional program and that we aren't "extras," but other educators do not always recognize this. Clarifying our role and place in digital learning is challenge #1.

Challenge #2 deals with challenges of a physical nature. The library is a shared space which provides shared resources. In the physical environment, for example, we will need to follow CDC guidelines regarding moving about in our space/social distancing, cleaning of common surfaces, and sanitizing our collections. If children are in classrooms but are not allowed to physically come to the library, we'll need to push into classrooms for instruction.

Challenge #3 addresses accessibility for all. If instruction is provided in hybrid or fully online format, accessibility is a huge issue…devices, Internet access, quality Internet access are all concerns. Then there is access to digital resources. There is such inequity across school divisions in Virginia—from multiple subscription databases in the more affluent areas of the state too few if any subscription databases in socioeconomically challenged areas. If schools are closed, we have concerns about access to books. Will we be able to provide, for example, curbside pickup similar to what some public libraries are currently doing? Accessibility is a concern.

What strategies should the state keep in mind as it works with local divisions to prioritize staff/student safety while ensuring high quality instruction?

As librarians we are concerned about staff and student safety and how to balance this with high quality instruction. Again, we've tried to categorize potential strategies into three categories: safety and practice, data and accountability, and resources.

Our first category is safety and practice: We realize that there is still so much that we don't know about transmission of the virus. There will be a need for PPE for all staff. Schools (and libraries) are places of social and emotional learning, so we'll be working to balance the need for safety with the need for direct, face-to-face teaching and learning. Additionally we need to plan for students and staff who cannot return to school in the current climate due to health/wellness issues and for students who may need to be out for extended periods of time (which actually loops us back to accessibility).

The second area that we identified is data and accountability: we almost see this as a plus. With relief from extensive standardized testing, it may be possible to use other measures (for example, student growth, and engagement in learning) in the evaluation process.

The third area that we've identified here is resources: if children have devices and if they have access to Internet, they need quality resources. In an online or hybrid format, they need access to quality digital resources—eBooks, subscription databases, etc. that are developmentally appropriate and that meet the needs of all types of learners. School divisions with already stretched budgets will need assistance in order to provide access to these quality resources.

Librarians are ready to actively contribute in all these areas, but our essential contributions have to be recognized and utilized.