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## Congratulations To VAASL's Regional Librarians Of The Year For 2025!!

*Right, Tara Williams, library media specialist at Watauga Elementary School, in Abingdon (Washington County), is the Clinch Region Librarian of the Year. She is shown here with VAASL President Carl Harvey and her principal, Allyson Willis.*



*Above, Caitlyn Brandonisio, librarian at Herbert J. Saunders Middle School, in Prince William County, is the Potomac Region Librarian of the Year. She is shown here with Tammy Hinkle, Potomac Region Director-Elect.*

*Below, Emily Preuss-Anderson, librarian at Victoria Elementary School, in Lunenburg County, is the James River Region Librarian of the Year. She is shown here with her principal, Julie Dalton.*



## PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

# Winter Is Over, And VAASL Is Coming Into Bloom!



By Carl A. Harvey II  
VAASL President

Spring is upon us. The grass is getting greener, the trees are starting to get their leaves, and even some of my flowers are starting to pop up out of the ground.

Similarly, it seems now that the winter is over, VAASL is coming into bloom as well. There is so much going on and we are excited to see where it all may lead.

Our regional conferences all over the state wrapped up in March. I was honored as VAASL President to attend all seven of the amazing regional conferences. Here are some numbers and highlights to share:

- Seven conferences all around Virginia
- Organized by eight regional directors and countless volunteers
- Two conferences in February and five in March.
- Six Regional Librarians of the Year
- 513 attendees
- Seven fantastic keynote speeches
- Between 10 and 16 vendors at each location
- 180 presenters sharing good things happening in Virginia school libraries
- 1,472 miles driven

Thank you to all the librarians who put their time and effort into the spring conferences. It was so great to see all the amazing stuff happening in Virginia!!

The Virginia General Assembly's legislative session ended successfully, with every bill that

VAASL opposed dying in committee! The bill we did support was a study by the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission, which was passed by a legislative resolution. This requires JLARC to study what is happening in our schools in regards to the removal/banning of books.

Each school division will get a survey to complete. Reach out to your division leaders to make sure they received it. They were encouraged to work with their librarians to complete it. The data will be collected and analyzed with a report due Oct. 1 from JLARC. This is a fast turnaround, and we look forward to using that data to pass some positive legislation in future sessions. We want to thank Broad Street Group for all their help in advocating and helping us advocate this session.

We are excited about VAASL's summer professional development opportunity. We are hosting The AI School Librarian—Elissa Malespina—for a full day workshop July 15 in Salem. Registration is open, and you can find more information about it on p. 20.

Finally, as we continue to celebrate our 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, consider talking to the folks in your school division. Are they members? Share all the great work VAASL is doing on behalf of school libraries.

Let them know our voice is stronger when ALL school librarians are members. If they aren't a member, encourage them to join. We want to get as many school librarians involved in VAASL this year as possible as we celebrate a half-century of school librarianship in Virginia!

*Carl Harvey is an Associate Professor of School Librarianship at Longwood University and the Assistant Director for Graduate Faculty Enrichment in their Center for Faculty Enrichment.*

*Let them know  
our voice is  
stronger when  
ALL school  
librarians are  
members.*



## VAASL's Regional Librarians Of The Year CONTINUED



Above, Linda Yeatts, library media specialist at Tunstall High School, in Pittsylvania County, is the Roanoke Region Librarian of the Year. She is shown here with Tunstall assistant principal Dustin Echols.

Below, Julia Trammell-McGill, librarian at Stony Point Elementary School, in Albemarle County, is the Shenandoah Region Librarian of the Year. She is shown here with her principal, Maureen Jensen.



Left, Mary Sutterluety, library media specialist at Kempsville Middle School, in Virginia Beach, is the 2021 York Region Librarian of the Year. She is shown with her principal, Dr. Tamara Cornick-Leonard (on left) and her parents, Tom and Tina Lenhart.

The Rappahannock Region did not have an LOY.

# Beth Bowen's Legacy Lives On Through The Scholarship In Her Name

By Tammy Hinkle

*"Beth Bowen  
was the  
warmest and  
kindest person  
I'd met..."*

The Prince William School Librarians' Association has seen many amazing leaders through the years, including Elizabeth Bowen, who worked as a teacher and a school librarian for Prince William County for more than 17 years. Beth, as she was more commonly known to her friends and colleagues, was someone we all looked up to as a leader in school librarianship.

I met Beth for the first time at the 2016 VAASL Annual Conference. Because I was a first time attendee, she just swept me up under her wings and made me feel like I always had been a part of PWSLA and, as she called it, "Library World." After meeting her, I knew that PWSLA would not only be a dependable resource, but a home with new friends who would one day become old friends.

Debby Kelly, one of the librarians at Woodbridge Senior High School, worked with Beth for many years, first as an English teacher and later as a co-librarian. She described working with Beth as "a joy." Kelly said, "Her growth mindset—'Room for improvement'—encouraged me to fearlessly follow my creative ideas in the library." Monica Abrams, a librarian from Graham Park Middle School, said, "Beth always extended an open invitation for all to join PWSLA, saying 'I know everyone is busy and that's ok! Just join us to do small things. The small things make a difference, too.'"

When Beth lost her battle with a chronic illness in November 2018, her passing was felt throughout our organization and our school system. At the time, we had no idea just how much of a lasting impact Beth would have on all of us. Beth van Kan, then PWSLA's President-Elect, spent the year after Beth's death researching and planning to create a scholarship in her honor. "I recognized her as a leader in school librarianship, a champion for all learners, and an inspirational colleague," said van Kan.

"Beth Bowen made the library the heart of the school and cared deeply about students pursuing their education," said Kelly. [This scholarship] "continues her legacy of light to support students' educational dreams and goals.



*Beth Bowen's smile says it all.*

In 2019, when van Kan moved into the role of PWSLA president, all the pieces were in place. We had 501(c)(3) non-profit status, and we were ready to begin. She knew the "scholarship would be a significant way to tangibly support our students, and honor Beth." During that same year, van Kan enlisted Abrams to be the chairperson of the Beth Bowen Scholarship Committee.

Abrams was excited to be a part of this endeavor because Beth had such a positive impact on her too. "When I transitioned from the classroom to the library, Beth Bowen was the warmest and kindest person I'd met," said Abrams. "It was an honor to learn from Beth and a privilege to establish a scholarship honoring her and the impact she had on all she met." Creating a scholarship from the ground up was no small task. PWSLA is forever indebted to Abrams for helping achieve this goal.

*Continued on next page*



## Beth Bowen's Legacy Lives On CONTINUED



Beth Bowen and Debby Kelly at a VAASL conference



Beth Bowen making gifts for teachers



Beth Bowen and Debby Kelly on vacation

*Continued from previous page*

In the summer of 2019, the committee finalized the requirements for the scholarship. Any high school senior with a 2.0 GPA or higher in Prince William County Schools, Manassas Park, and Manassas City, could apply. Each applicant had to submit a copy of their transcript and one recommendation letter. They also had to answer this essay question: "What is your passion and how does your educational journey support it?"

"From the very beginning, the applicants have been amazing students, and the winners I have had the pleasure of meeting exemplified

the desire to serve others and continue learning," said van Kan.

Although COVID-19 would delay our efforts, in May 2020 van Kan announced Samantha Donaire, from Osbourn High School, in Manassas City, as the first winner of PWSLA's Elizabeth W. Bowen Memorial Scholarship. In her essay, Donaire wrote that she wanted to do "good in the lives of others through the creation of positive relationships."

*Continued on next page*

*... the  
applicants  
have been  
amazing  
students...*

## Beth Bowen's Legacy Lives On CONTINUED



*Nemya McGill Veloso, one of two students who received Bowen scholarships in 2021*

*Continued from previous page*

We were happy to help Donaire follow her passion for helping others in need.

The following year, as we taught from our homes, offered curbside pickup, and recorded countless books for our students, we knew, more than ever, that this class of seniors was going to need an extra hand. So, we offered two \$1,000 scholarships in 2021, one to Brentsville District High School student Jordan Brook, a student with a passion for video games, and one to Osbourn Park's Nemya McGill-Veloso, who wanted to become the first psychologist in her family and a person that youth of color can look to for guidance.

In 2022, I had the pleasure as PWSLA's president to announce Sandra Okyere as our scholarship recipient. Okyer, another Osbourn Park student, hoped to one day establish non-profit organizations worldwide that improve the quality of life for impoverished children. She was followed in 2023 by Hylton High School's Carly Hemani, who wanted to be a labor and delivery doctor.

Our most recent scholarship recipient is Tabatha Tarman, of Potomac High School. The 2024 honoree has been fascinated by history ever since she read *My Heart Is on the Ground*, by Ann Rinaldi, at age 11. She has a love for storytelling, which has led her to volunteer for the public library summer reading program. Tarman wants to be a storyteller who shares under-told stories and says her "ideal job would be to show people

*Continued on next page*



*Tabatha Tarman, the 2024 recipient of the Bowen Scholarship*

*We knew ...  
that this class  
of seniors was  
going to need an  
extra hand.*



## Beth Bowen's Legacy Lives On CONTINUED

*Continued from previous page*

the truth in history and leave them speechless.”

Every year PWSLA needs to make sure we raise enough funds for the next year's scholarship. A part of our membership fee goes directly to the scholarship fund. Thanks to Carolyn Vibbert, librarian at Sudley Elementary School, in Manassas, we run a successful t-shirt sale each year to raise funds.

For the past two years, we have done a pop-up boutique at the Spring Potomac Regional conference. The first was a purse and jewelry sale of items donated by our members. This year we collected crafts our members made by hand. For each boutique, we asked buyers to donate what they could for an item. Many people choose to just donate to the scholarship.

“Elizabeth Bowen was an incredible librarian and friend,” said Linda Mitchell, a librarian at Unity Braxton Middle School, in Manassas. “Those of us that knew her lovingly raise funds each year for this scholarship to honor her memory. One of the things that was best about Ms. Bowen was that she loved learning and friends so much that as her friend you were always engaged in some kind of learning without feeling any stress of study. We school librarians of Prince William County Schools miss her dearly.”

The PWSLA was formed in 1991 as an affiliate of the Virginia Educational Media Association, now VAASL. From the beginning, librarians throughout Prince William County, Manassas Park, and Manassas City, have worked to strengthen school libraries and empower future ready learners by promoting professional learning and collegiality. We have endeavored to meet national school library standards and strengthen library services by providing a forum for common library issues.

If you wish to donate to the Elizabeth W. Bowen Memorial Scholarship, please contact



*The PWSLA raised \$280 for the Bowen Scholarship during their Winter 2025 t-shirt fundraiser using this design.*



the Prince William School Librarians' Association at [pwsla.librarians@gmail.com](mailto:pwsla.librarians@gmail.com).

*Tammy Hinkle, the director-elect for the Potomac Region, is the librarian at Buckland Mills Elementary School, in Gainesville.*

# Concurrent Session Proposal Form Open For VAASL Annual Conference

By Katie Kier and Janice Raspen  
2025 Concurrent Sessions Co-Chairs

*We can't  
wait to hear  
from you!*

No April Fool's joke here — the Concurrent Session Proposal Form for the 2025 Fall Conference is now open! We would love for you to share your knowledge with us. Please consider applying to present a session this year in Williamsburg.

The most requested topics from the concurrent session wish list form are as follows:

- BOOKS (new, award winners, diverse, what you use for lessons, etc.)
- Lessons (all levels)
- Collaboration ideas
- Grants
- Reading Promotion
- Makerspace ideas
- Technology / Apps
- AI
- Student volunteers
- Book clubs

The deadline for proposals is July 7. If you have any questions about concurrent sessions, please email [vaasl.concurrent.sessions@gmail.com](mailto:vaasl.concurrent.sessions@gmail.com). The proposal form can be found at <http://tiny.cc/25CS>. We can't wait to hear from you!

*Katie Kier is a librarian at Tuckaboe Middle School, in Henrico County. Janice Raspen is the resource support acquisition specialist for Chesterfield County Public Schools.*



## Colleague Connect Winding Down, But Still Time To Participate

Looking for an opportunity to meet virtually with librarians from across the state and share ideas you can use immediately? Then there's still time to participate in Colleague Connect, even as the school year winds down.

Colleague Connect collaborators will be hosting two more Zoom chats in May and June, focused on a topic which can be implemented in all libraries, no matter the grade levels. And you are able to get PD points for attending each chat. Make sure you join us to get all of the details.

The Zoom link will be sent out the morning of our chat via the VAASL listserv. The remaining meetings are:

**May 20 — Advocacy Through Data**

**June 17 — Library and the Law**

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to [colleagueconnect@vaasl.org](mailto:colleagueconnect@vaasl.org).





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# CONTENT NEWS

[Capstone](#) | [Flutterbee](#) | [News-O-Matic](#)

## Capstone & Flutterbee

Free shipping and attached book processing (you may already receive these from a reseller so maybe we break even there).

98 to 100% order fulfillment rates and the shelf ready books will arrive in 10 to 12 business days (we have the edge there).

Special promotions for  
Capstone & Flutterbee

\$500 order=10 Free Books

\$1,000 order=20 Free Books

\$1,500 order=30 Free Books

You get the idea, every \$500 means an extra 10 free books.



A cure for the summertime blues: PreK-8 Take-Home Backpacks. (text me for details)

Please make me aware, if you find this information beneficial, just a quick text or email would be great: 804.337.8702 or rbeale3@mac.com



Ric Hasenyager, Vice President of Classroom Solutions for FlutterBee, discussed **how the Science of Reading mirrors the work librarians are already doing**. Then, we'll explore ways to use different types of nonfiction to spark a love of reading and build critical thinking skills. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bBuitB2Nqpo>

## PebbleGo Next Spanish is here!



Explore the exciting **new PebbleGo Next Spanish**, a comprehensive resource designed for 3rd-5th graders! This preview features one of our engaging, standards-aligned nonfiction articles that seamlessly supplement any curriculum program—all in Spanish: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7XoLKEYiUWI>

Everything starts with a conversation: Rick Beale  
VA Representative: 804.337.8702 or rbeale3@mac.com



## Growing The Love Of Reading At Margaret Beeks Elementary School



Students at Margaret Beeks Elementary School, in Blacksburg, have a book garden of painted stones depicting favorite stories, thanks to a project by New River Community College art students. Rhonda Burch, the school's librarian,

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## Growing The Love Of Reading CONTINUED

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said the garden fosters a love for reading, especially for third-grade students. Beeks teacher Jenna King pointed out that students transition from learning to read to reading to learn in third grade.

WSLS-TV, in Roanoke, did a news story on the book garden. The story can be accessed at <https://www.wsls.com/news/local/2025/03/03/blacksburg-elementary-school-holds-book-garden-with-help-of-local-college-students/>.



## Indiana University Seeks Input From School Librarians For National Study

*The goal... is to better understand current challenges school librarians are facing...*

My name is Adam Maltese, and I am a researcher at the Indiana University School of Education. My colleague, Kelli Paul, and I seek your assistance. We are attempting to conduct a national study of public-school libraries, but we are having challenges getting school librarians/media specialists to participate. The goal of the research is to learn from the librarians what their current challenges are and where they might benefit from professional development.

The text of our survey is below:

*We invite you to participate in our national online survey of public-school libraries to learn about the challenges and needs broadly, and making and maker education programming, in particular. We are reaching out because we identified you as a school librarian, media specialist, or in a related position (e.g., technology, media, etc.).*

*The goal of our survey is to better understand*

*current challenges school librarians are facing and how they are involved in maker programming at their schools. We anticipate that findings from this survey will inform the development of professional development opportunities that meet the unique needs of public-school libraries.*

*The online survey should take approximately 20 minutes to complete and includes a mix of multiple choice and open-ended questions such as: What types of programs are offered and how often?; and How do you assess any making programs you run (e.g., what approaches or tools do you use)?*

If you are interested in participating, **follow this link to the Survey: [Take the Survey](#)**. We recommend taking the survey on a computer or tablet device rather than a mobile phone.

Feel free to email Dr. Kelli Paul ([kelpaul@iu.edu](mailto:kelpaul@iu.edu)) if you have any questions or would like to learn more.



# OPALS

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### ASK FOR A FREE TEST SITE...

The best way to determine whether OPALS is a good fit for your library is to experience it in the familiar context of your library's data.

- Request a demo: **[info@opalsinfo.net](mailto:info@opalsinfo.net)**
- Export MARC records from existing system
- Upload data to the OPALS demo
- Most demos are ready to evaluate in 24hrs

During the 3 month evaluation period, you will be able to try all of the system's features and have access to OPALS support staff.



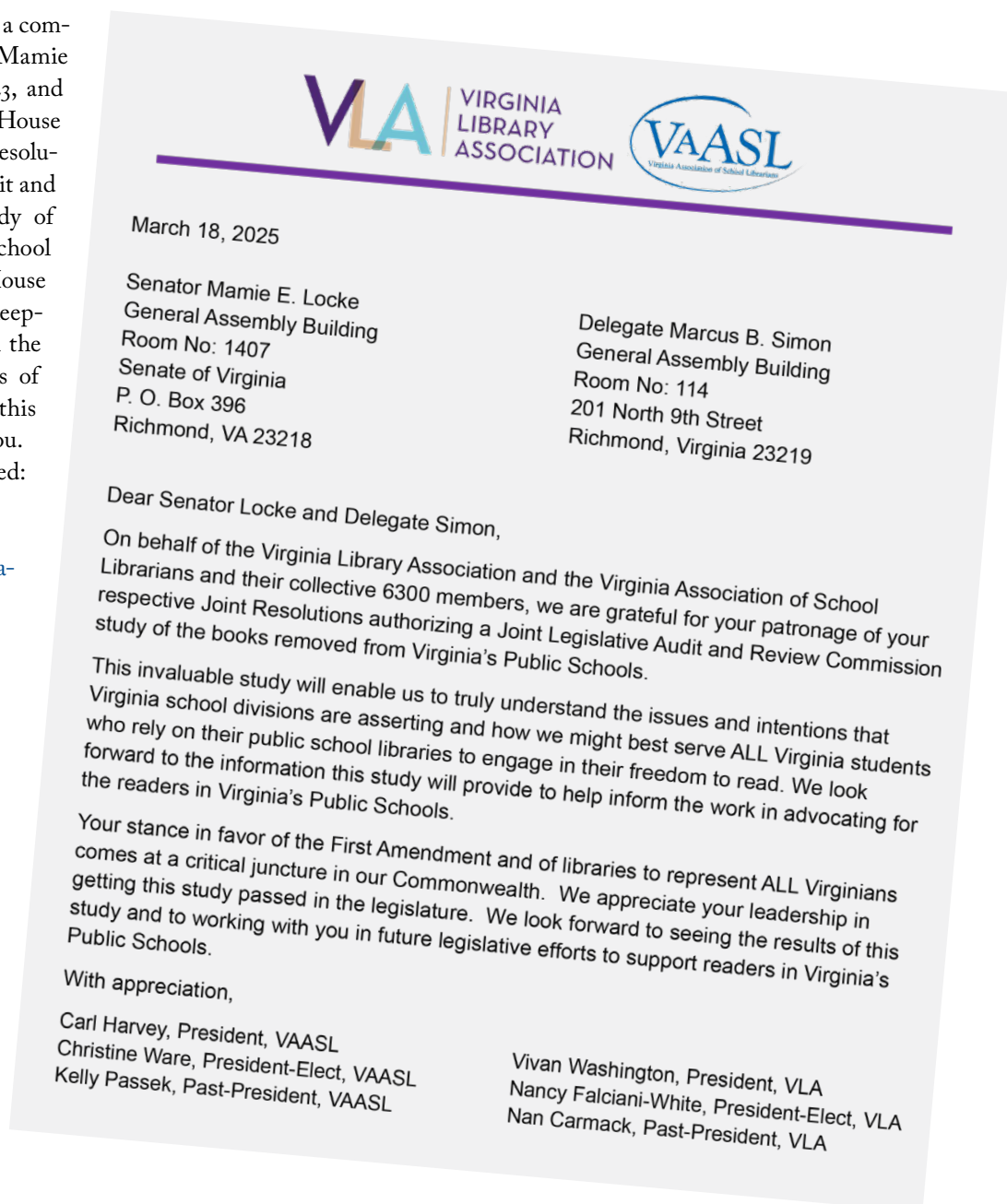
# VAASL And VLA Thank Legislators For Support

Leaders from VAASL and VLA sent a combined letter of thanks to Senator Mamie E. Locke, Virginia Senate District 23, and Delegate Marcus B. Simon, Virginia House District 13, for being patrons of the resolution to have the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission conduct a study of the removal of books from Virginia school libraries. Virginia Speaker of the House Don Scott also was instrumental in keeping the resolution moving forward in the legislative process. When the results of the JLARC study are released later this year, VAASL will share them with you.

News coverage of the study included:

- <https://www.whro.org/education-news/2025-02-14/legislators-request-jlarc-study-last-four-years-of-virginia-book-removals>
- <https://virginiamercury.com/2025/03/13/va-lawmakers-direct-researchers-to-review-book-bans-court-funding-methods-storm-risk-studies/>
- <https://royalexaminer.com/virginia-lawmakers-direct-researchers-to-review-book-bans-court-funding-methods-storm-risk-studies/>

If you would like to send your own note of thanks, email Senator Locke at [senatorlocke@senate.virginia.gov](mailto:senatorlocke@senate.virginia.gov), and Delegate Simon at [DelMSimon@house.virginia.gov](mailto:DelMSimon@house.virginia.gov).



## VLA Executive Director Varga To Manage ALA Public Policy And Advocacy Office

*At VLA,  
Varga increased  
membership  
from 900 to  
more than  
5,000 ...*

CHICAGO — Lisa Varga began her new role as associate executive director of the American Library Association's Public Policy and Advocacy Office, in Washington D.C., April 21.

A fierce advocate for libraries, Varga comes to ALA after spending nearly 15 years as executive director of the Virginia Library Association. At VLA, Varga increased membership from 900 to more than 5,000, increasing revenue streams as well as participating in advocacy across the state. She addressed and defeated four bills in the Virginia General Assembly in 2024 and 11 bills in the 2023 session which would have impacted intellectual freedom for students. She is a regular speaker at national and statewide

conferences, where she promotes the value of libraries and intellectual freedom.

"We are fortunate to have Lisa join us at a pivotal time for libraries in our nation," Interim Executive Director Leslie Burger said. "Her background, experience and leadership will be vital as we advocate for libraries."

Varga replaces Alan Inouye, who assumed the role of interim associate executive director in 2022 and is retiring from ALA after 18 years in the Public Policy and Advocacy Office.

Varga has been an ALA member for 20 years and has served on the ALA Policy Corps, Intellectual Freedom Committee, Intellectual Freedom Summit Steering Committee, ALA Leadership Institute, and Chapter Relations Committee. Varga was named 2024 Librarian of the Year by "Library Journal." Varga earned a master's in library science from Rutgers University and a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Pittsburgh.

As associate executive director, Varga will direct and manage the Public Policy and Advocacy Office. She will:

*Continued on next page*



*Above, Lisa Varga and  
Connie Piper*

*Right, Lisa Varga and Judy  
Deichman getting ready to  
put the hammer down for  
Virginia school libraries*





## Varga To Manage ALA Office CONTINUED

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- Build relationships and opportunities to uplift and shape policy that benefits libraries and library users with federal and regional lawmakers;
- Represent libraries, library workers to legislators and stakeholders, including Congress, the Executive Branch, and the Judiciary;
- Raise the visibility of the library and information sector and its concerns for the public.

The appointment was applauded by VAASL leadership, who know what a great advocate she has been for school librarians in Virginia and for our organization.

Past President Judy Deichman said, "Lisa Varga has been a great asset and partner for VAASL, especially aiding us in speaking on the

bills affecting libraries and censorship proposed in the General Assembly. She has a hammer tattoo reflecting her ability to bring the hammer down for libraries!"

"Virginia libraries have been lucky to have Lisa Varga as an advocate for many years," said current VAASL President Carl Harvey. "We have worked closely to help those impacted by book challenges and advocated in the legislature (for both positive and negative bills). We have appreciated Lisa's leadership in Virginia and the opportunity to work with her. We look forward to working with her on a national level as she moves to ALA."

*Editor's note: Information for this article, with the exception of remarks by Judy Deichman and Carl Harvey, is from an ALA press release.*

*"She has a hammer tattoo reflecting her ability to bring the hammer down for libraries!"*

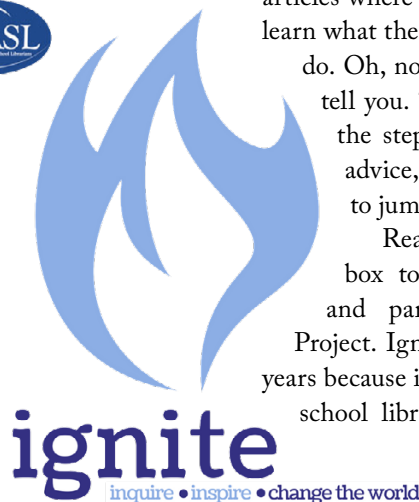


From left to right, Lisa Varga, Mary Keeling, Audrey Church, and Carl Harvey

# Ignite Award: Inquire, Inspire, Change The World

(FOUR FORMER WINNERS SAY YES, YOU CAN!)

By Maura Madigan  
Ignite Project Lead



*I'll lay out all  
the benefits...  
leaving you  
energized and  
raring to jump  
right in.*

I'm going to be completely honest and transparent with you. This isn't one of those persuasive articles where you have to wait until the end to learn what the writer's trying to convince you to do. Oh, no. I'm going to come right out and tell you. Then, I'll lay out all the benefits, the steps to take, and sprinkle in some advice, leaving you energized and raring to jump right in.

Ready? Okay. I'm here on my soap-box to drum up interest, enthusiasm, and participation in VAASL's Ignite Project. Ignite has been a VAASL staple for years because it combines these fundamentals of school librarianship: inquiry, collaboration, and community service.

Convinced yet about the beauty of Ignite? Well, hold on. Let me tell you about all the lovely prizes you can win. These include:

- Free registration to VAASL's Annual Conference (in beautiful Colonial Williamsburg this year)
- \$300 award for your school library
- \$300 donation to your selected charitable organization
- Cool engraved plaque
- Recognition and admiration for your award at the conference

Pretty great prizes, right? I didn't even mention the student benefit. Students who participate in Ignite projects will likely improve their inquiry skills, self-esteem, and attitude toward the school library and librarian. Meaningful learning experiences such as these can have wide-ranging and lasting effects. And they're fun!

Why would anyone *not* do an Ignite project and apply for the award?

Maybe you're thinking, "I don't have time for *something else*." But you're probably already facilitating these types of projects. Think PBL, Guided Inquiry Design, and service learning. The only extra bit is the application, and that's

easy peasy. To help get you started, I'm going to share some advice from previous Ignite Award winners.

## Q&A

### 1. What year did you win the Ignite award and what was the focus of your project?

**Patty Lambusta (PL)** (2021, James Blair Middle School, Williamsburg)

"Elevating Student Voice Through Activism"

**Courtney Porter (CP)** (2023, First Colonial High School, Virginia Beach) Porter worked on this project with co-librarian Wendy Nelson.

"FCHS Senior Service-Learning Experience"

**Heather Baucum (HB)** (2023, Crossfield Elementary School, Fairfax County)

"LAMP Stamps for Limited Speech Students"

**Valerie Lamberton (VL)** (2024, Massaponax High School, Spotsylvania County)

"From Epic Tales to Everyday Heroes: High School Students Shaping Young Citizens"

### 2. Where did your project idea originate?

**CP:** Our project idea originated from the VDOE accreditation standards, which require students to complete a service-learning experience. We wanted to ensure that students not only fulfill this requirement but also engage in meaningful activities by contributing to local organizations that align with their interests.

**HB:** The focus of my project was adapted technology to support LAMP (Language Acquisition through Motor Processing) learners and the Assistive Technology coaches that support them. I saw a tweet from our Assistive Technology Services department on Twitter, and I had the tools to help. My brain made a fast connection, and I reached out across multiple platforms to see how our school could support their work.

**PL:** We did this unit during the spring following the COVID-19 pandemic. Our eighth graders were apathetic about learning, and we wanted to do something that would center on

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## Ignite Award CONTINUED



Above, from left to right, Past President Kelly Passek, 2021 Ignite winner Patty Lambusta, and 2023 IGNITE winners Heather Baucum, Crossfield Elementary School, and Courtney Porter and Wendy Nelson. First Colony High School.

Left, 2024 winner Valerie Lamberton (center) with her collaborating English teacher Amy Stevens (right), and Past President Kelly Passek.

*Continued from previous page*

things about which they were passionate. Hence, we focused on activism and how they could forge change with their passions. Students had complete choice in what their topics of inquiry would be.

### 3. How long did the project take?

**PL:** Six weeks.

**HB:** About three months. We did work only once a week though.

**CP:** Two weeks.

**VL:** Planning for the project began in spring 2023 to brainstorm ideas. In the classroom, the students started researching in early November and were working on their lessons later that month. We visited the elementary schools right before winter break.

### 4. What was your biggest challenge?

**PL:** Ironically, it was the parents. Even though their children had learned information literacy, soft skills, and reflection, a group

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## Ignite Award CONTINUED

of parents were concerned with the “activism” component. One parent even accused me of pushing a “left wing agenda.” I invited these parents into the library to review the gallery of students’ finished products and most were mollified. I learned a lot from this experience. #1: “Activism” is a trigger word.

**HB:** The actual printing itself. Some of those images were so small to adapt. It took a bit to tweak it properly.

**CP:** The biggest challenge was making up the service-learning activity for students who were absent because it was difficult to recreate the learning experience.

### 5. What impact has the project and winning the award had on your school and/or community?

**CP:** Winning the award allowed us to purchase additional supplies, enabling more students to participate in community service-learning experiences and further expand our impact within the community. We also were able to contribute funds to a local organization that directly serves our community.

**PL:** I think the outcome of the award was more beneficial to the library in that other teachers saw opportunities for what they could do with library collaboration. Obviously the Heritage Humane Society was extremely thankful for the donation.

**VL:** Overall, the project provided significant benefits in terms of career exploration, skill development, community service, and personal growth. The sense of accomplishment and the ability to make a positive impact on young students were particularly meaningful for our seniors. All of the elementary teachers who we worked with said they would 100 percent be willing to have us visit again because they felt it had a positive impact on their students as well.

### 6. What advice do you have for other librarians interested in facilitating Ignite projects and applying for the award?

**CP:** My advice for other librarians interested in facilitating Ignite projects and applying for

the award is to get students involved in service-learning opportunities. These projects are incredibly rewarding for all stakeholders, as students enjoy the chance to engage in something different while making a positive impact on others. It’s a refreshing and meaningful way to connect learning with real-world service.

**PL:** Librarians are innovative when it comes to creating lessons they know will ignite excitement and joy in their students. I encourage all librarians to reflect on their units to determine if there was an inquiry unit that ignited a passion in their students. Did that lesson benefit the community in some way? If not, how can a service-learning component be incorporated to extend learning?

**HB:** Find what you are passionate about. Ask the kids how they want to change the world when they are grown-ups. Or bring in something that they didn’t even know about to ignite passion in your students. Sometimes we make small changes in the world that have a big impact.

Pretty great, huh? Have I convinced you? Do you have an idea?

Maybe you’ve already started your Ignite project. If not, there’s still time. You have until July 1 to submit your application. Plenty of time to start, finish, and apply.

Now here’s the obligatory persuasive plea. Get started on your Ignite project today, so you can inquire, inspire, and change the world!

### Resources You Can Use When Applying for the Ignite Award

- [Ignite Guidelines](#)
- [Ignite Application](#)
- [VAASL Ignite Project Webpage](#) (This page contains a list of other helpful resources.)
- [Heather Baucum’s Video](#)
- Contact me, Maura Madigan at [Ignite@vaasl.org](mailto:Ignite@vaasl.org) with any questions.

*Maura Madigan is the librarian at North Springfield Elementary School, in Fairfax County.*

*These projects  
are incredibly  
rewarding for all  
stakeholders...*





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## New VAASL Summer Professional Development Opportunity

*Malespina is passionate about integrating technology into education, particularly through AI...*

We are excited to announce a new summer professional development session July 15 at Salem High School, in Salem, featuring Elissa Malespina, the “AI School Librarian.”

With more than 23 years of experience in education, Malespina has worked as a high school history teacher, special education teacher, and teacher librarian at various schools. As the owner of Educational Equity Advisors, she helps parents navigate the complexities of public education.

Registration will run through July 8 and will be limited to the first 100 who sign up. Registration costs \$40 for members, \$50 for nonmembers, and \$60 if you register at the event. Lunch is included. You can register through this [link](#) on the VAASL website.

Malespina is passionate about integrating technology into education, particularly through AI, and is the author of the AI School Librarians Newsletter. Her work has been featured in NPR, *School Library Journal*, and PBS, and she has presented at conferences like ISTE and



Elissa Malespina

NJASL. Her numerous honors include being named a 2022 EdTech Influencer and a 2014 Bammy Award recipient.

You can find more information about Malespina on her [website](#).

The screenshot shows the VAASL website with a dark blue header containing a search bar and navigation links: Home, About, Regions, Events, Awards, Advocacy, Initiatives, Connect, and Resources. The main content area features a large announcement for the 2025 elections, stating they are now open from May 1st to 15th. It encourages members to cast their vote for the President-Elect, Secretary, Legislative Coordinator, and Regional Director-Elects. Below this, there is a section for announcements, a 'Log in and cast your ballot' button, and a 'Quick Links' sidebar with links to My Profile, Join/Renew Now, Annual Conference, and Contact Us. At the bottom, there is a 'Latest News' section with a headline about an Executive Order regarding IMLS and a 'ONE CLICK POLITICS' logo with a sign-up link for advocates for Virginia School Libraries.

Get the latest at  
**vaasl.org**  
Including  
past issues  
of VAASL Voice!



REGISTRATION NOW OPEN

## 21st Longwood University Summer Literacy Institute: Literacy For All

Registration is now open for the 21st Longwood University Summer Literacy Institute: Literacy for All. The event will be held July 24–25, on the Longwood campus, in Farmville, featuring three stellar authors and concurrent sessions by librarians and educators.

Author and educator Dr. Jarred Amato will lead the Thursday half-day workshop. He is an award-winning English teacher and the co-founder of Project LIT Community, a national grassroots literacy movement. Amato will reflect on his literacy journey and reveal how he continues to refine his game plan to reach every reader. Specifically, he will touch on the big ideas from his book, *Just Read It: Unlocking the Magic of Independent Reading in Middle and High School Classrooms*, including: the independent reading (Read and WRAP) framework; approach to whole-class novels; Article of the Week protocol; and authentic grammar and vocabulary instruction.

Sylvia Liu will be the speaker for Thursday's author banquet. Liu grew up with books and daydreams in Caracas, Venezuela. Once an environmental attorney, she now spins stories about nature, strong girls, and the intricacies of family and friendship. Her books include *Near and Deer* (Scholastic 2024), *Hana Hsu and the Ghost Crab Nation* (Razorbill 2022), *Manatee's Best Friend* (Scholastic 2021), and *A Morning with Grandpa*, illustrated by Christina Forshay (Lee & Low New Voices Award winner 2016). She lives in Virginia with her family and a very fluffy cat. She will talk about the power of both the universal and individual story.

On Friday, our keynote author speaker John Schu will present "The Gift of Story." Schu,



Jarred Amato

Sylvia Liu  
(photograph by  
K. Woodard)John Schu  
(photograph by  
Saverio Truglia)

who is the children's librarian for Bookelicious, believes when we share our hearts through story, we inspire others to think more deeply about their own hearts and how stories connect us all. He invites readers to consider literacy beyond its academic benefits, highlighting the ways story speaks to our hearts and brings us together.

Schu also is the *New York Times* best-selling author of *Louder Than Hunger*; *This Is a School*, illustrated by Veronica Miller Jamison; *This Is a Story*, illustrated by Caldecott Honor artist Lauren Castillo; *Ruthie Rose's Big Idea*, illustrated by

*Continued on next page*

## Longwood University Summer Literacy Institute CONTINUED

*Continued from previous page*

Holly Hatam (publishing in March 2025); and *The Gift of Story: Exploring the Affective Side of the Reading Life*.

In addition to these three great authors, the institute will include:

- Four 60-minute literacy concurrent breakout sessions for those working with K-12 students. The institute is still accepting proposal submissions for concurrent sessions. Consider sharing your good ideas and work around literacy with other attendees by submitting those ideas [here](#).
- Lunch buffet on both days and continental breakfast on Friday.
- Bookworm Central has opened an online [book-store](#) so you can order your books by our speakers now. You'll pick them up at the conference.
- Opportunities to network with professional colleagues.

For those in need of graduate credit, a three-credit course will be offered in conjunction with the institute, beginning in mid-June with work online, requiring attendance at the Institute, and ending in early August. In addition to registering for the Institute, participants will need to pay Longwood's graduate level tuition and fees for this course.

Visit the institute [website](#) to register, submit a concurrent session proposal, or to find information on hotel reservations. Registration for the entire institute is \$199. A one-day registration is available for \$110 for either Thursday or Friday. The SLI is organized by Longwood's Department of Education and Counseling; Elementary Education; Educational Leadership; Reading, Literacy and Learning; and School Librarianship.

If you have any questions, contact Carl Harvey at [summerliteracy@longwood.edu](mailto:summerliteracy@longwood.edu) or [harveyca@longwood.edu](mailto:harveyca@longwood.edu).

*Consider  
sharing your  
good ideas and  
work around  
literacy...*

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## Support for Every Step of the Literacy Journey

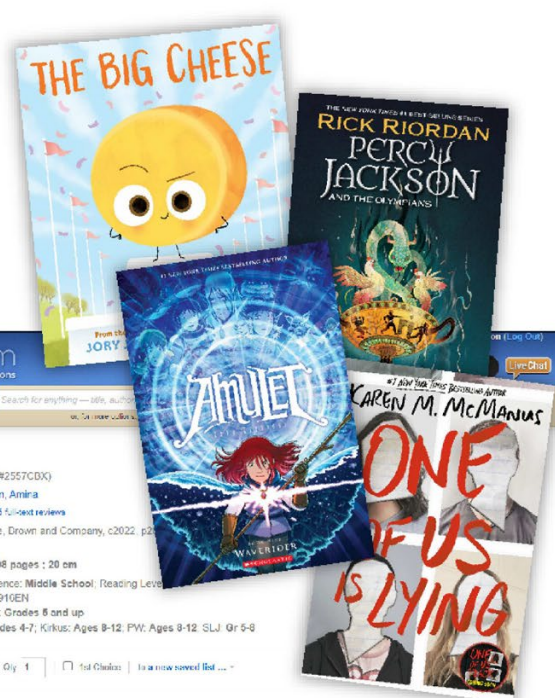
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Preview

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Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

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Featured in Follett's Top ...  
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**Diversity Training**  
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Keywords: Diversity, Equity & Inclusion



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# Masked Readers

By Christina Comer

*Both students  
and teachers  
loved it, and  
everyone  
wanted to do it  
again this year.*

Last year I tried something new with the Virginia Readers' Choice program after reading about an activity called "The Masked Reader."

I asked for any staff that worked in Lee M. Waid Elementary School to volunteer if they wanted to be a Masked Reader. I then had each of them record one of the 10 VRC books using Canvas Studio and a document camera. You could not see them in the video. Each person wore an animal mask and a graduation robe, and each told an interesting fact or two about themselves that wouldn't completely give them away. I purchased the rubber animal masks from Amazon with profits from a book fair.

Each week during their library time, students watched two to three videos of the actual stories (showing only the pages of the book) and the

Masked Reader videos. They got to guess who the Masked Readers were, but I didn't tell them if they were right or wrong. They would find out when we had the reveal during our Read Across America Week program. All of the Masked Readers were behind tables on the stage during the program, and the book they read was in front of them. Our school reading coach, Brenda Weeks, helped me host the program.

I reminded the students of the clues that the reader gave and the book that they read. The reading coach had an entire grade yell out who they thought it was, then had them yell, "Take off the mask!" The reader stood up and took off the mask. Both students and teachers loved it, and everyone wanted to do it again this year.

I changed some things for this year's program. I purchased new masks that matched

*Continued on next page*



Masked Readers on stage at Lee M. Waid Elementary School



## Masked Readers CONTINUED

*Continued from previous page*

animal characters in a few of the books. Because students at last year's program were sometimes guessing from the fingers they saw turning the pages, I took photographs of the book pages and made slideshows for teachers to use when recording so you couldn't see their fingers. I also used a voice changer app called PowerDirector to alter the voices on the Masked Reader videos.

For more diversity, I recruited a couple of teachers before I asked for volunteers this time. To fool the students, I had a couple of teachers from last year participate too. Some teachers were actually upset that they didn't get to do it this year! Because everyone enjoyed the two programs so much, it looks like this is going to be an annual event. Best of all, it has created a lot of excitement for reading at my school.

*Christina Comer is the librarian at Lee M. Waid Elementary School, in Rocky Mount (Franklin County).*



*Christina Comer, dressed up as Dog Man, during the Masked Reader program*



*Teachers had just as much fun as students during the Masked Reader program.*

# Virtually In-Person: Reflections On My Years As A Virtual School Librarian

By Kaila Thompson

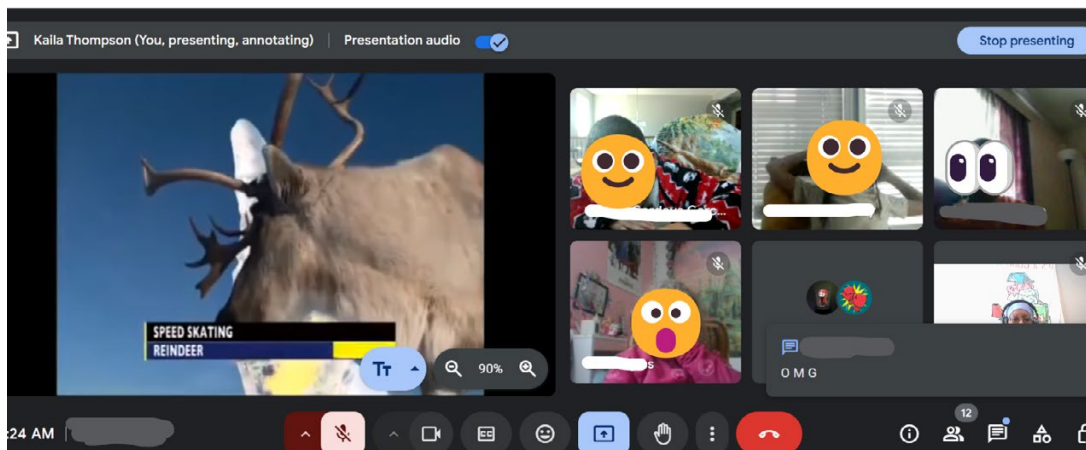
In 2021, I became a K-8 virtual school librarian at Chesterfield Virtual School, in Chesterfield County Public Schools. Previously I worked for 10 years as a traditional, in-school librarian in Virginia, serving all grades from preschool to high school. My own virtual student experience, plus my graduate and school librarian certification programs, helped prepare me for my current role and made me confident that a quality education can be delivered through virtual means. As a virtual school librarian, I help students learn to be responsible for their education and teach them skills they can use to succeed in both virtual and traditional settings.

As a traditional high school librarian at Washington & Lee High School, in Westmoreland County, I first saw the potential of virtual teaching when I was asked to supervise and assist students taking asynchronous classes

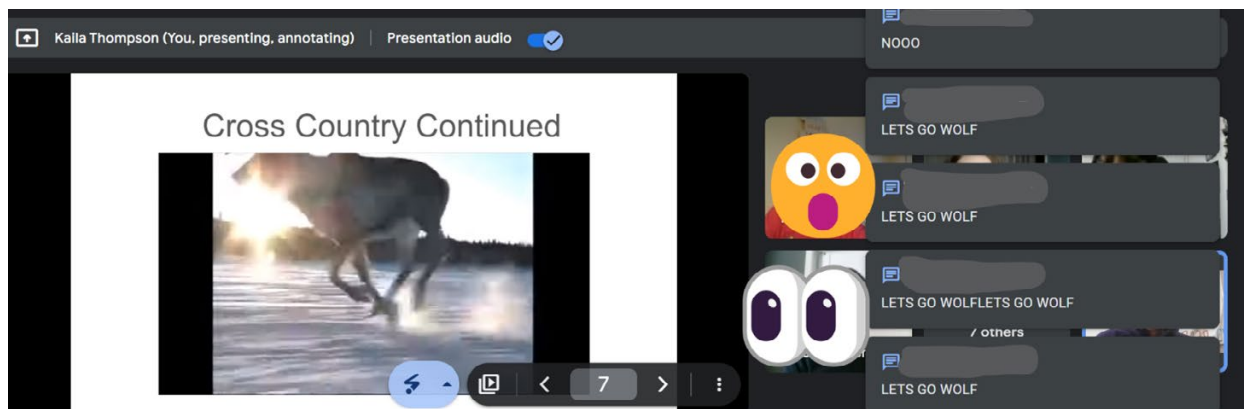
to earn missing credits. I saw the benefit for students whose schedules and needs did not fit what was available in the school building. I was glad that I could pull from my knowledge (and teacher's notes) to help when I was asked. I noticed, however, that most students would have benefited from a synchronous setup where each class had their teacher present to provide a higher quality service.

Although we have staff in CVS who live out of state, the distance does not negatively impact our chance to collaborate. Jeremy Breitenbach, my last virtual library partner, was a former CCPS in-school librarian at Hening Elementary, but worked virtually with me after moving to Arizona. Many staff members work on-site at the Chesterfield Technical Center–Courthouse Campus, including me and my present virtual librarian partner, Susan Shepherd. Our workday is 7:30–3:00, with students online 7:45–2:15.

*Continued on next page*



*Students compare hypotheses for a Who Would Win race.*





## Virtually In-Person CONTINUED

*Continued from previous page*

Library classes have remained 45 minutes long, but the resource schedule has changed yearly. During our first two years, we only had time for elementary classes. Last year, we split each day between elementary and middle grades. This year, both of us teach elementary classes before lunch and middle school classes after lunch.

For many, virtual teaching during the 2020–2021 school year was hit or miss, especially when teachers had virtual and in-person classes going simultaneously. I was able to teach most of my classes virtually and became comfortable planning for the needs of virtual learners by the time my current position became available. For me, elementary lessons were “virtually” unchanged from how I taught in-person.

I still support instruction for English Language Arts, Math, Science, and History. I still share good stories paired with activities, from drawing to various interactives using resources

from PBS, Discovery Education, and even BreakoutEdu. The main difference is how I teach students to find books. In the virtual setting, I use digital sources and screen sharing in Google Meet to teach students how to find books *on* their computers, rather than me teaching them how to find books in the library *with* the computer and by sharing lessons on a smartboard.

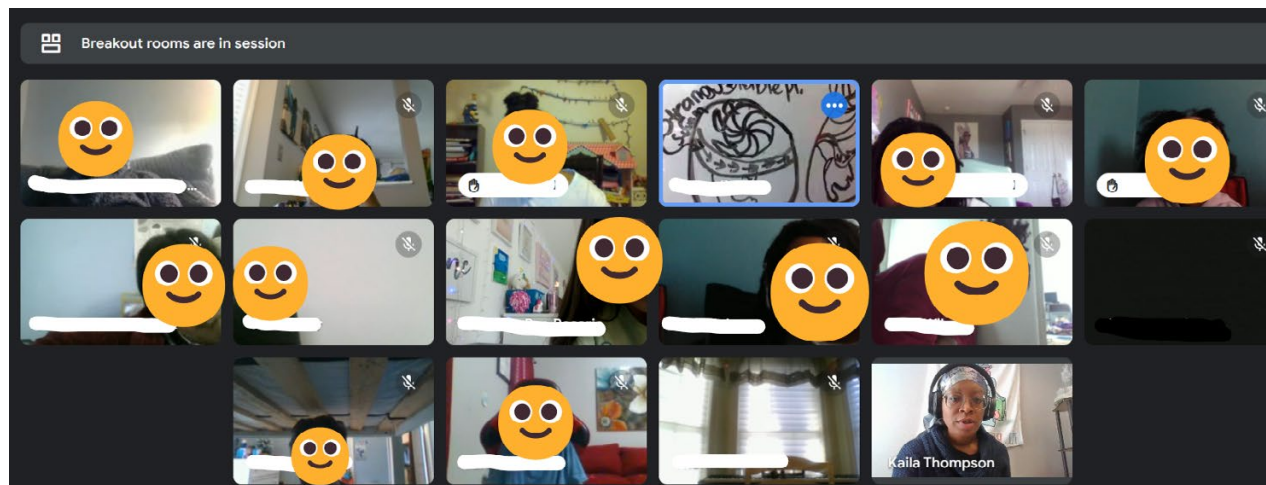
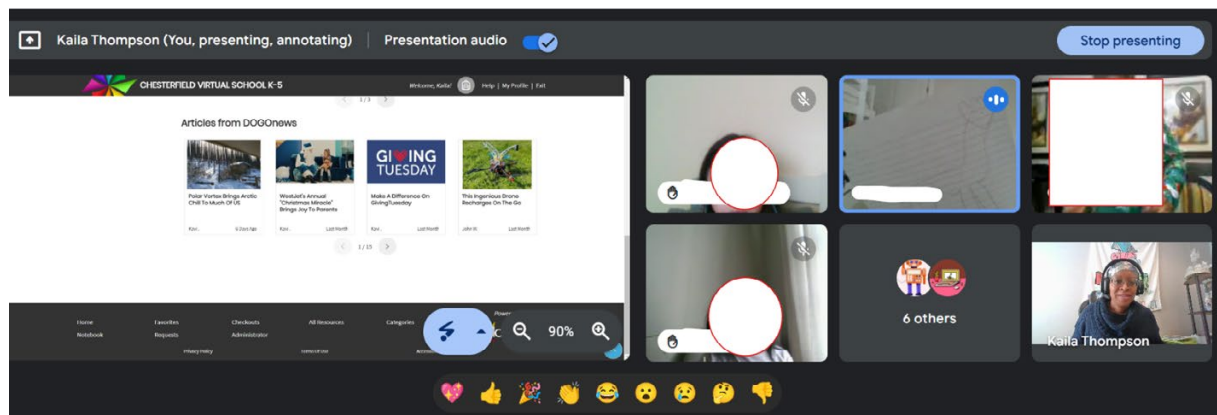
I address the same standards and expectations that I did when I taught in-person. Though my regular class needs are digitally focused, we (the librarians) may use paper or whiteboards for drawing and writing. With the help of digital resources like Nearpod, BrainPop, and various databases, and the use of alternative reading resources like myON, GetEpic, and MackinVia, I found that moving to completely virtual learning was a fairly smooth transition.

I appreciate the resources provided by our district and school. The databases have been essential to ensuring students are able to develop

*I... teach students how to find books on their computers, rather than how to find books in the library with the computer...*

*Continued on next page*

*Students share images related to articles they read via MackinVia—stable and unstable polar vortex.*



## Virtually In-Person CONTINUED

*Continued from previous page*

inquiry skills through the years, regardless of the learning environment. Britannica and PebbleGo/PebbleGo Next are informative and quality resources that improve each year. Explora, PowerKnowledge Science Suite, and Kids InfoBits provide the variety needed to answer questions and fill most instructional needs.

In the virtual environment, students can create and collaborate on projects using tools like Nearpod and Google Slides. They also have access to easy citation tools using the options that are included with the databases. Plus, we have access to Noodle Tools and Report Builder to help students create the most complete projects. With these resources, our students can meet any required standard.

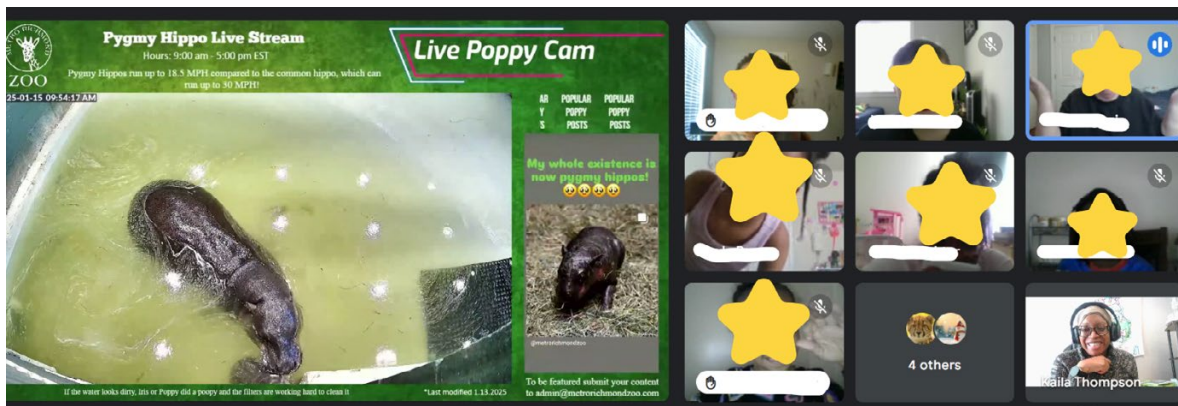
As I reflect on the past few years, there have been both pros and cons to virtual teaching. One of the pros is that I have expanded my practice to teach the middle school library last year and an elective class, Student Success, this year. As a result, I have gained experience and enhanced

my abilities. Another benefit is not having traditional duties like student drop-off and lunch monitoring. While we do have to support testing, this gives me a chance to see students in person. This seems to make testing a bit better and helps students feel more at ease. If I have to miss class, like when I'm testing, then I can leave asynchronous work for students through resources that track student progress, like Canvas, Nearpod, or BrainPop.

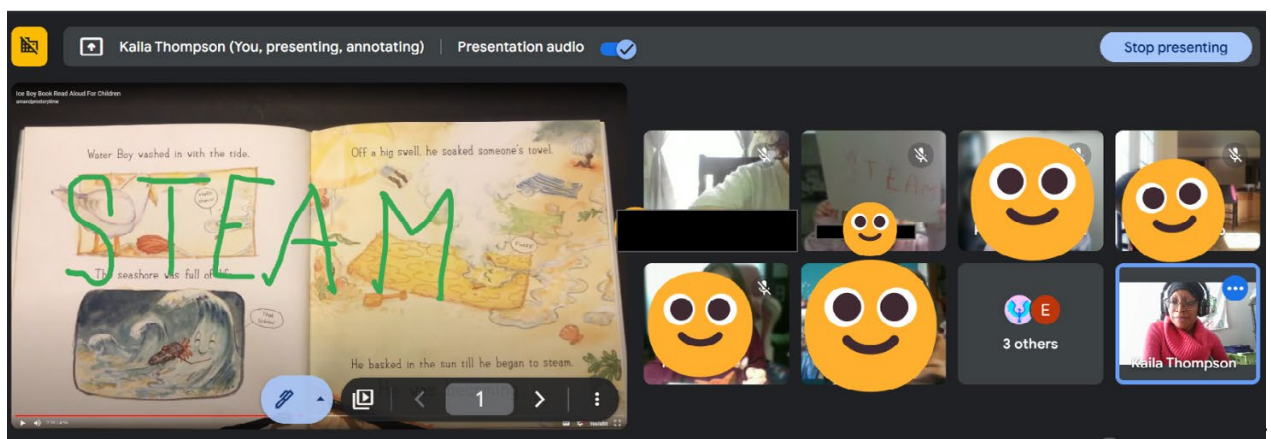
I am sure you have wished for a way to stop noises and distractions. In the virtual environment, classes are more easily managed with features like mute and open/closed chat. Students can share by speaking or using the chat box, but the teacher is in control. I use the function as a way to stay on task without stopping to remind students of expectations. If I mute them or close the chat, they notice, return to task, and then the options return. Behaviors are corrected without interrupting instruction. For more fun interaction, you can allow emojis.

*Continued on next page*

*Behaviors  
are corrected  
without  
interrupting  
instruction.*



*Students share and discuss the Poppy Cam.*



*K Students  
practice  
writing.*



## Virtually In-Person CONTINUED

*Continued from previous page*

Overall, our students have done well meeting expectations. As a whole, resource teachers note that student behavior has been better compared to teaching in-person. This may be a result of them being acclimated to the school as a whole, the fact that we have been together for the past four years and respect each other, or the comfort of being at home and not in each other's spaces disturbing each other. Whatever the reason or reasons for the improved behavior, I am glad of it.

In the virtual world, you do not have to worry about what may be spreading around school. I have not been near students to find out they were carrying an illness the day after they attended class. Consequently, I have used fewer health days. One staff member was able to save their spouse's life because they were working at home when a health crisis occurred.

There are pros for students, as well. I believe teaching virtually can be a positive means for students to learn the full meaning of digital citizenship. It is a built-in, real-life application of library lessons. They have to be responsible users of information, as well as responsible citizens, classmates, and students every day.

Students with various differences have found virtual school to be a more comfortable setting, especially in avoiding situations where they may be embarrassed and/or bullied. Students who are hesitant to interact in-person are more likely to share, and resources like Nearpod offer different response options (voice, video, text). Plus, we have students who maintained their attendance while their family was traveling.

As many librarians know from the COVID-19 shutdown, there are cons to virtual teaching and learning. I may be able to limit distractions in class, but I cannot control students' home environments. In a virtual setting, there are multiple distractions that students would never have in-person if class/school expectations are not followed. For example, some students "attend" class while their parents are running errands. The students, though present, were unable to participate and were clearly distracted.

Tech issues are common in any setting, but they are especially problematic when you depend on technology. The quality of internet service

varies among students. Their Chromebooks can have different issues, whether self-inflicted or not. Our MackinVia library consists mainly of books with some form of subscription, which means books expire and cannot be renewed or replaced due to funding changes. Access to MackinVia can be glitchy at times, and student access is not as user friendly or consistent between grade levels, or from year to year compared to in-person schools. It is still a work in progress, but backup options like myON, Get Epic, and our public libraries help us ensure students have access to books too.

Overall, this has been the best experience in my professional career as an educator and librarian. If given the opportunity, I always recommend this format for those on both sides of the camera. If given the proper support, resources, and training, I believe most participants will see that the benefits of the virtual school can outweigh any negatives that might arise. It is true that the first year after the COVID-19 shutdown was a mess for many, but virtual librarians and students are proof that things can and will improve. While not yet perfect, there have been continuous improvements throughout the years to where most are able to operate on a fairly "normal" basis. If you ever have the opportunity to participate in a similar program, I encourage you to investigate. You may be surprised to learn how you could fit. As expectations for educators progress, I believe that virtual education can be a focal point for the future.

*I believe teaching virtually can be a positive means for students to learn the full meaning of digital citizenship.*



*Kaila Thompson is a K-8 librarian with Chesterfield Virtual School, in Chesterfield County. She received her school librarian certification through the University of Virginia-Wise.*



## VAASL Applauds ...

Heather Baucum, the librarian at Crossfield Elementary School, in Fairfax County, had an article, "Equity in Action: Adapting Library Lessons for Autistic Students," published in the January-February issue of *Knowledge Quest*.

Rebekah Circelli is the 2024 Teacher of the Year for Corporate Landing Middle School, in Virginia Beach.



Heather Baucum



Rebekah Circelli



Christina Comer

Christina Comer, librarian at Lee M. Waid Elementary School, in Franklin County, passed her National Board Maintenance of Certification in Library Media. This is her second time passing renewal/maintenance. She has been a National Board Certified librarian since 2004.

Jennifer Cooper, librarian at Osbourn High School, in Manassas, had a column, "Include and Fostering Growth in School Libraries," published in the January-February issue of *Knowledge Quest*. A member of the *KQ* editorial board, she also served as the board liaison for the issue.

Marylou DeCamillis, library media specialist, was named the Chesapeake Center for Student Success Literacy Teacher of the Year. The CCSS, formerly known as the Chesapeake Alternative School, is part of the Chesapeake Public Schools system and serves students in grades 6-12.

Dale Harter, the librarian at Albert Hill Middle School, in Richmond, has an essay in *Careers in Library and Information Services: First-Hand Accounts from Working Professionals*, published in January by Bloomsbury. He also appeared on Episode 313 ("Career Twists and Turns") of Amy Hermon's School Librarians United podcast in March.

Carlee Smith, the Lower School librarian at The Steward School, in Richmond, was awarded the Lower School Teacher of the Year for 2024-2025.



Jennifer Cooper



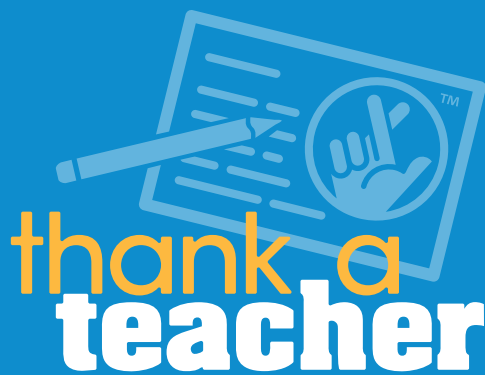
Marylou DeCamillis



Carlee Smith



Encourage the Virginia K-12 public school students that you know to send a thank-you note to their teachers!



**Who:**

Virginia K-12 public school students, parents and community members.

**What:**

A chance to thank your favorite Virginia K-12 public school teachers with a thank-you note from the Virginia Lottery!

**When:**

April 1, 2025 – May 10, 2025

**Why:**

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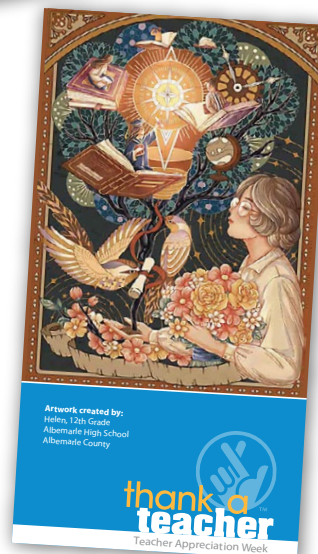
Visit [thankateacherva.com](http://thankateacherva.com) for more information.



## It's time to Thank a Teacher!

Each year, the Virginia Lottery's Thank a Teacher campaign encourages the public to send custom thank-you notes to Virginia K-12 public school teachers.

These thank-you notes are provided by the Virginia Lottery, and each contains a code that the teacher can use to enter a drawing for a chance to win \$2,500 plus \$2,500 in supplies for the teacher's school!



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Published quarterly September through June by the Virginia Association of School Librarians, P.O. Box 545, Ashland, VA 23005, and included with membership in the Association.

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## VAASL Calendar

May 1–15, 2025	VAASL Elections
May 20, 2025	Colleague Connect (via Zoom) — Advocacy Through Data
May 23, 2025	Deadline for submissions for <i>Voice</i> 14(1)
June 17, 2025	Colleague Connect (via Zoom) — Library and the Law
July 1, 2025	Deadline for Ignite Award Submissions. See article on p. 16.
July 7, 2025	Deadline for Concurrent Sessional Proposals for 2025 VAASL Annual Conference. See article on p. 8.
July 8, 2025	Last day to register for VAASL Summer Professional Development with Elissa Malespina. See article on p. 20.
July 15, 2025	Follett Weed and Feed Grant deadline
July 15, 2025	VAASL Summer Professional Development with Elissa Malespina.
July 24–25, 2025	Longwood Summer Literacy Institute, Farmville. See article on p. 21.
Sept. 13, 2025	VAASL Board Meeting (via Zoom)
Oct. 1–3, 2025	Virginia Library Association Annual Conference, Richmond
Oct. 16–18, 2025	AASL Conference, St. Louis, Mo.
Nov. 5–7, 2025	VAASL Annual Conference, Williamsburg, Va.

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## Voice Needs Your Voice!

Have you created an exciting lesson that you would like to share with other librarians?

Have you given a conference presentation that drew thunderous applause?

Do you have a unique idea for which you would like help developing into an article?

Would you like the rest of the world to know about the amazing things you are doing in your library?

Do you know another librarian in your county, division, or region who deserves to be recognized for their awesomeness?

If the answer is yes to one or all of these questions, then consider writing an article for *Voice*. We are looking for lengthy and short articles, scholarly and just plain fun submissions, and even stand alone photographs that capture a moment in time in your school library life. If you want more information or if you are ready to submit something, contact the editor, Dale Harter, at [harterdf@gmail.com](mailto:harterdf@gmail.com).

