

The Framework, Core Elements, and Implications of the U.S. National School Library Standards: Postprint

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Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] This paper introduces the framework system and core elements of the American *National School Library Standards* to provide reference and reflection for the current formulation of school library standards in China. [Method/Process] Through analyzing the American *National School Library Standards*, it summarizes its framework system and core elements, and distills the implications for the formulation of school library standards in China. [Results/Conclusion] The *National School Library Standards* integrates three separate sets of standards (learners, librarians, school libraries) into a unified framework through six shared foundations (inquiry, inclusion, collaboration, curation, exploration, engagement) and four learning domains (Think, Create, Share, Grow). Under this integration effect, it respectively establishes the core competencies covered by the learning domains corresponding to the shared foundations within each separate set of standards. Overall, the *National School Library Standards* features a coherent content architecture, clearly defined characteristic concepts, and detailed implementation support, which can provide reference and guidance for the future formulation of school library standards in China.

Full Text

Preamble

The Framework, Core Elements, and Implications of the United States' *National School Library Standards*

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Abstract: *[Purpose/Significance]* This paper introduces the framework and core elements of the United States' *National School Library Standards*, providing reference and reflection for the current formulation of school library standards in China. *[Method/Process]* Through analysis of the U.S. *National School Library Standards*, this paper summarizes its framework and core elements and distills insights for Chinese school library standard development. *[Result/Conclusion]* The *Standards* integrate three separate sets of standards (for learners, librarians, and school libraries) into a unified framework through six shared foundations (Inquire, Include, Collaborate, Curate, Explore, Engage) and four learning domains (Think, Create, Share, Grow). Under this integrated effect, core competencies are established for each individual standard corresponding to the learning domains covered by the shared foundations. Overall, the *Standards* feature a coherent content structure, clear conceptual principles, and detailed implementation support, offering valuable reference for future school library standard development in China.

Keywords: United States; school library; standards

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Introduction

China's current primary and secondary education reform is deepening progressively, with curriculum adjustments and quality-oriented education initiatives presenting both opportunities and challenges for school library development. The formulation of U.S. school library standards began in 1920 and has undergone nearly a century of evolution, transitioning from initial administrative management needs to industry self-regulation, reflecting the professionalization and vocational development of American school library standard construction. This paper analyzes the U.S. *National School Library Standards* (hereinafter referred to as "the *Standards*") to provide reference and inspiration for future school library standard development in China.

The American Association of School Librarians (AASL) maintains that continuous evaluation and revision of school library standards is crucial for the profession's development. Since 1920, AASL has formulated and revised approximately ten sets of standards. Consequently, the *Standards* build upon this historical foundation, demonstrating timeliness, transformative potential, and continuity while reflecting changes in librarians and school libraries within the current educational environment. AASL began developing the *Standards* in 2015, and after three years of work, the American Library Association (ALA) officially published them in 2018 [1].

Literature Review

2.1 School Library-Related Standards

Existing research has introduced and summarized school library standards from various countries. Ma Xiaoling provided a detailed interpretation of the U.S. *Standards for School Librarians*, suggesting that China could consider establishing a school library media specialization within educational technology programs to train school library media specialists [2]. Chai Huiming noted that the United States has been developing and implementing school library standards since the 1920s, reflecting the professionalization trajectory of American school libraries [3]. Meanwhile, Japan's *School Library Law* has provided a foundation for standardization efforts [4]. Yin Jianbing found that Japanese school library industry standards feature detailed content with quantitative indicators, offering clear guidance for professional management [5]. After analyzing the evolution, content, and implementation of Australian school library standards, Liu Cuiqing identified internal issues in China's school library standard construction [6] and advocated for multi-stakeholder collaboration to advance standard development [7]. B. Sandra proposed that Canadian school library standards emphasize collaboration between librarians and subject teachers while focusing on individual student development [8]. D. Kester noted that French school library standards place greater emphasis on the importance of information literacy for student learning and curriculum implementation [9]. H.L. Peng argued that Singapore's school library standard construction plays an irreplaceable role in supporting librarian interests, industry self-regulation, and resource acquisition [10].

Beyond these studies, research has also examined IFLA's school library guidelines and the current state of domestic school library standard construction. Liao Lan [11] and Zheng Yang et al. [12] respectively interpreted the *IFLA School Library Guidelines (2nd Edition)*, finding that the guidelines aim to help students and teachers obtain quality school library services. Zhang Jing et al. noted that these guidelines have limited applicability in China, with significant differences primarily between secondary and primary school libraries [13]. Yang Naiyi et al. [14] and Wu Huiru [15] comparatively analyzed school library construction standards in mainland China and Taiwan, concluding that China's school library standard construction should emphasize operability and sustainability while valuing librarian development. Zhang Wenyan found that the 2018 edition of *Regulations for Primary and Secondary School Libraries (Rooms)* increased attention to and guidance for school library construction and service management, though deficiencies remain [16].

2.2 Industry Response and Reflection on the Standards

Following publication, the *Standards* received positive industry response and widespread recognition, generating a rich array of derivative outcomes including interpretations by *Standards* committee members, feedback from school library

managers and librarians on *Standards* implementation, and commentary from relevant researchers.

As *Standards* committee members, E.A. Burns et al. noted that the *Standards* ensured a more thorough and standardized development process through environmental scanning of school libraries, community feedback, establishment of a dedicated *Standards* development committee, and collaboration with research firms [17]. L. Jennison proposed that the *Standards* development process solicited key indicators from school libraries and selected the editorial committee through a competitive screening process to ensure content applicability and representativeness [18].

As school library managers, J.E. Aaron et al. found that measuring learner benefits requires comprehensive consideration of specific learning community contexts and learner characteristics [19]. C.H. Lori et al. suggested that *Standards* implementation can drive school libraries to co-design learning content and processes that promote active learner exploration with their stakeholders [20].

As librarians, A.M. Lee believed the *Standards* help learners develop critical thinking and self-directed learning abilities within learning communities [21]. L. Kate et al. further noted that the *Standards* advocate for school libraries to foster learner growth by building open environments [22]. As researchers, G. Caitlin pointed out that the *Standards* emphasize cognitive skills and advocate lifelong learning and self-directed learning, reflecting current social development needs and practical requirements [23]. A. Kelly argued that the *Standards* main content and value orientation maintain high compatibility with the U.S. Common Core State Standards, ISTE Standards, and ACRL Standards [24].

In summary, existing research has analyzed school library standards domestically and internationally, concluding that such standards play an indispensable role in school library service management, professional librarian development, and enhancement of students' multiple literacies. The industry recognizes that the *Standards* demonstrate good inheritance and integration, effectively promoting school library development. Therefore, building upon existing research, this paper conducts an in-depth examination and systematic analysis of the *Standards* to provide reference for standardization practice in China's school libraries.

3. Content Architecture of the *Standards*

The *Standards* document comprises five parts (introduction and overview, standards framework and content, assessment and application, scenario case studies, and extended resources) totaling 314 pages. Its basic framework consists of shared foundations and learning domains, integrating three separate sets of standards (for learners, librarians, and school libraries) into a unified whole.

The six shared foundations describe core elements that learners, librarians, and school libraries should possess: Inquire, Include, Collaborate, Curate, Explore, and Engage. Key commitments clarify the basic components of shared foundations and serve as extended definitions: Inquire (building new knowledge through critical thinking, problem identification, and problem-solving strategies); Include (demonstrating understanding of inclusivity and respect for diversity in learning communities); Collaborate (working effectively with others to broaden perspectives and achieve common goals); Curate (making learning meaningful for self and others by collecting, organizing, and sharing relevant resources); Explore (discovering and innovating with a positive mindset through experience and reflection); and Engage (demonstrating safe, legal, and ethical use of knowledge products independently).

The four learning domains include: Think (acquiring knowledge through critical thinking); Create (applying existing knowledge to unknown areas and creating new knowledge); Share (sharing knowledge ethically and efficiently); and Grow (pursuing development of personal literacy and aesthetic appreciation). Competencies represent action goals for learners and librarians to achieve under the shared foundations, as well as responsibility requirements for school libraries.

3.1 Learner Standards

Learners need continuous growth and learning, driven by curiosity and initiative to explore, learning to view problems critically to obtain new knowledge, interacting with others to collaborate and achieve common goals, and following ethical and legal principles in information practices. Additionally, learners must use existing knowledge to seek explanations that narrow their knowledge gaps and build collective knowledge within learning communities to support inquiry processes. When facing learning community members with different experiences and backgrounds, learners must learn to include other perspectives, broaden their thinking, and negotiate with others to construct new shared meanings, thereby thinking critically to solve problems they cannot resolve independently. Learners need to collect, organize, describe, and share resources to make them useful for their learning and growth. Specific details are shown in Table 1 .

3.2 Librarian Standards

Librarians play indispensable roles in encouraging learners to ask questions and clarify viewpoints, constructing self-directed learning contexts, and promoting critical thinking. Librarians design and create opportunities for learners to present their innovative solutions to appropriate and authentic audiences. Librarian competencies primarily involve reflecting on, identifying, and planning for learner needs. As mediators who facilitate problem discovery, critical thinking, information strategy formulation, and new knowledge construction, librarians must promote inclusivity and diversity in learning communities, helping learners view problems from different perspectives. Librarians must collaborate not only with other educators but also facilitate collaboration among learners,

as effective collaboration with others is key to broadening perspectives and working toward common goals. Librarians should guide learners to manage information efficiently by providing opportunities for exploration, encouraging perseverance, and advocating continuous reflection to promote learner growth and development. Specific details are shown in Table 2 .

3.3 School Library Standards

School libraries are vital components of the national education system, providing appropriate spaces and venues for personalized learning for all learners. They encourage learners to actively explore issues related to personal learning and growth, and are committed to cultivating learners' multiple literacies and inquiry skills to support lifelong learning. School libraries help learners integrate existing knowledge and develop critical thinking and communication skills through exploration and research. They should ensure the authority, circulation, and relevance of their resources, enabling learners to expand and enhance their interests through exposure to diverse resources and services, and helping them demonstrate inclusivity toward others and perspectives within the global learning community. School libraries encourage collaboration to expand individual knowledge and share viewpoints and achievements responsibly and ethically. By developing interest-oriented reading culture and creative spaces, school libraries help learners master resource management skills and information security principles. Specific details are shown in Table 3 .

4. Core Elements of the *Standards*

4.1 Overall Characteristics

4.1.1 Shared and Consistent Goals During the *Standards* development process, AASL conducted thorough research among school library stakeholder groups, integrating their requirements for professional development and establishing goals to be achieved through collective effort: school libraries are unique and important components of learning communities; qualified librarians ensure effective school library operations; and the growth of learners, competencies of librarians, and services of libraries constitute the main content. The *Standards* incorporate core elements advocated in related school library standards, such as inquiry-based learning, critical reflection, collaborative participation, literacy education, lifelong learning, and information ethics.

4.1.2 Concise and Coherent Structure The *Standards* adopt Bloom's Taxonomy as the basis for their hierarchical structure, integrating three separate sets of standards into a unified framework through six shared foundations and four learning domains. Under this integrated effect, core competencies are respectively established for each individual standard corresponding to the learning domains covered by the shared foundations. During practical application, users

can quickly locate school library business by understanding and applying the six shared foundations and four learning domains according to specific content interpretation and step-by-step breakdown. Additionally, the *Standards* provide extensive audio-visual materials through AASL's self-directed learning website section and have developed APPs for different users based on the *Standards* content architecture to facilitate interactive learning and real-time feedback.

4.1.3 Detailed Supporting Applications The *Standards* establish corresponding assessment indicators and measurement methods to evaluate the core competencies covered by the learning domains corresponding to the shared foundations in the three separate sets of standards. Virtual case scenarios are designed to reproduce the specific contexts and key details of *Standards* implementation, while basic and extended reading resources help users better understand the conceptual knowledge involved in the *Standards*.

4.2 Core Concepts

4.2.1 Reading Ability and Digital Education Are Crucial for Learners Good reading comprehension and appreciation abilities are essential for lifelong learning, comprehensive learning, and success in multiple aspects of life. Reading helps learners acquire language and understand various cultures. Digital education enables learners to actively participate in the digital world in collaborative, personalized, and meaningful ways through data collection and problem-oriented learning.

4.2.2 Qualified Librarians Play Multiple Roles in Learning Communities Librarians serve as instructional partners, educators and information specialists, school library managers, and program administrators, playing interdisciplinary and cross-domain connecting roles in learning communities. As instructional partners, librarians contribute to curriculum design; as educators and information specialists, they provide information literacy and digital literacy instruction for all learners; as library managers, they supervise and manage school libraries; and as program administrators, they expand and improve library resources and services through school and community partnerships.

4.2.3 School Libraries Provide Multidimensional Learning Spaces and Growth Opportunities School libraries serve as third learning spaces beyond classrooms and homes, providing equitable and personalized learning environments for learners' comprehensive education. They enable learners to access and share information in simple, free, critical, and safe ways, ultimately promoting personal growth in knowledge acquisition, advanced learning preparation, and emotional and intellectual development.

Implications for China's School Library Standards

Although school libraries are important learning spaces, current campus culture and teaching practices in China's primary and secondary schools rarely consider their contributions, making their value difficult to perceive. Therefore, standardizing school library service management could promote professionalization. Through analysis of the *Standards*, three considerations emerge for future standard development in China:

First, what core concepts should standards convey to school libraries and their stakeholders? Industry standards must incorporate professional philosophy and development goals to provide basis for formulation and implementation. During the *Standards* development, AASL clearly defined learning and empowerment as the advocated core concepts, collaborating with research firms to develop and deploy surveys examining librarians' use of existing standards and their preferences, while conducting targeted focus group interviews with stakeholders to obtain feedback for integrating group requirements. Currently, China's school libraries lack consistent interpretation of their core competencies and value concepts, and have not effectively aligned with other stakeholders' demands, resulting in inadequate support for professional development and enhancement.

Second, what should the standard architecture encompass? As criteria for measuring professional activities, industry standards should have concise and coherent structures to facilitate user understanding and application. The *Standards* consist of three separate sets addressing learner growth, librarian competencies, and library services, involving six shared foundations and four learning domains that integrate core elements from related school library standards. The structure is concise and coherent, allowing quick location of relevant content during application. Although China's Ministry of Education issued the *Regulations for Primary and Secondary School Libraries (Rooms)* in 2018 [25], with comprehensive content covering resource construction, service management, supporting facilities, librarian qualifications, and regional collaboration, it has not yet formed a systematically integrated architecture.

Third, how can standard implementation be ensured? Standards must be effectively implemented to be meaningful. The *Standards* rely primarily on industry self-regulation, with professional associations and the school library community jointly promoting implementation, supported only by administrative forces and public supervision without excessive intervention. The *Standards* include assessment measures to test target achievement, virtual case scenarios to reproduce implementation contexts and key details, and extended knowledge sections to aid conceptual understanding. Currently, China's school library service management development relies mainly on government administrative intervention and promotion. Once issued, standards require implementing bodies to be vested with certain enforcement authority. However, current implementing bodies (schools, school libraries) cannot easily be granted administrative enforcement power, making it challenging to ensure implementation rather than

mere guidance, requiring further experimentation.

As China's primary and secondary education reform deepens, with advancing curriculum innovation and quality-oriented education, stakeholders will demand new levels of professionalization and standardization in service management, which the school library profession must address. China has not yet developed specific standards for school library service management. While the *Regulations for Primary and Secondary School Libraries (Rooms)* provides overall development guidance, it lacks systematic architecture and standardized processes for practical application and promotion. This paper's analysis of the U.S. *National School Library Standards* aims to provide reference and reflection for future standard development and professional advancement of school libraries in China.

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Author Contributions

Zhu Ming: Responsible for research design and manuscript writing;
Liao Xizhu: Responsible for data collection and analysis;
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English Abstract

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Abstract: *[Purpose/significance]* This paper introduces the framework system and core elements of the United States' *National School Library Standards*, providing reference and inspiration for the current formulation of school library standards in China. *[Method/process]* Through analysis of the U.S. *National School Library Standards*, this paper summarizes its framework system and core elements and distills insights for Chinese school library standard development. *[Result/conclusion]* The *Standards* integrate three separate sets of standards (for learners, librarians, and school libraries) into a unified framework through six shared foundations (Inquire, Include, Collaborate, Curate, Explore, Engage) and four learning domains (Think, Create, Share, Grow). Under this integrated effect, core competencies are respectively established for each individual standard corresponding to the learning domains covered by the shared foundations. Overall, the *Standards* feature a coherent content structure, clear conceptual principles, and detailed implementation support, offering valuable reference for future school library standard development in China.

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Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

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