

By Patricia L. Owen



## BENEFITS

Creating a new school librarian evaluation form aligned with *Empowering Learners* guidelines offers four significant benefits similar to the benefits that resulted from my ACS-based evaluation tool.

1. The process of developing a school librarian evaluation tool gives school librarians a chance to engage in self-assessment and reflective practice as well as participate in the formative stage of establishing an evaluation tool. Both the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) and the AASL's Standards for the 21st-Century Learner encourage this self-assessment and "reflections on one's own learning."

2. Participation in an evaluation form development process allows school librarians to build library advocacy into the assessment tool.

3. School librarian evaluation tools create opportunities to collaborate with principals using measurable, objective, evidence-based practices. Indeed, placing an already created school librarian evaluation form directly into the hands of principals helps them become better educated about school librarians and their impact on student achievement.

4. School librarian evaluation forms with familiar, classroom teacher-compatible formats fulfill the needs of principals, boards of education, and labor unions because they enable evaluators to understand AASL standards specific to librarians, address rules

# AN IMPROVED "FORM OF OUR OWN" A 21ST CENTURY APPROACH TO SCHOOL LIBRARIAN EVALUATION

## INTRODUCTION

Recently, the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) published *Empowering Learners: Guidelines for School Library Programs*. This resource sets the standards for school librarians and articulates the five roles required of today's school librarians. *Empowering Learners* standards are the perfect foundation for evaluating the performance of individual school librarians. However, in practice, schools administrators sometimes use evaluation forms that do not include current library standards, or they rely on forms designed only for classroom teaching and student intervention strategies. These evaluation forms fail to assess at least four of the five *Empowering Learners* librarian roles.

Consequently, 21st century school librarians who are assessed using typical evaluation tools may still be searching for "a form of their own" to share with their principals.

In the past, I addressed the misalignment between classroom teacher evaluation forms and school librarian roles by creating an evaluation form based on my state's (Ohio) academic content standards (ACS) and formatted, according to the conventions of Praxis (Educational Testing Service), classroom teacher evaluation forms used nationwide (Owen). Now the release of *Empowering Learners* has spurred me to create a new school librarian evaluation form aligned with these updated standards.

TERM	DEFINITION
Full-Model Rubrics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Include three main elements: criteria, performance levels, and performance descriptions.</li><li>• Formatted on a grid and used to evaluate performance</li></ul>
Criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Describe the major elements of a performance.</li><li>• Included in the left hand column of the grid</li></ul>
Performance Levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Indicate the degree to which the performance is successful.</li><li>• Listed across the top row of the grid</li></ul>
Performance Descriptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Describe what the performance of each criterion looks like at each level.</li><li>• Included in the grid cells at the intersection of criteria and performance levels</li></ul>

Figure 1: Definition of a full-model rubric

and laws that boards of education must uphold, and comply with issues that concern teacher labor unions.

**THE SOLUTION—THREE STEPS**

To create a Praxis-type evaluation form for school librarian performance appraisal aligned with *Empowering Learners*, I re-examined my initial school librarian evaluation document, noting the structure and format. Next, I took three steps to create a new school librarian evaluation tool:

1. I identified the content for the new evaluation tool. *Empowering Learners* describes the roles of the school librarian and a framework for planning a library program; it provides a rich resource for an evaluation tool. Using *Empowering Learners*, I identified three main areas for inclusion in the new form.

- Area 1: Teaching for Learning
- Area 2: Building the Learning Environment
- Area 3: Empowering Learning through Leadership

Then I created one to eight evaluation criteria under each area. These criteria are based on *Empowering Learners* guidelines.

2. I continued the process by identifying four performance levels for each guideline—foundational, developing, mastery, and exemplary—using the *Empowering Learners* action statements for each guideline (see Figure 2 for additional performance level labels). Typically, effective rubrics have three to five performance levels for each evaluation criteria; I chose four performance levels to match the number of levels in the local district’s classroom

Mastery	Satisfactory
Progressing	Proficient
Emerging	Marginal
Foundational	Advanced
Beginning	Novice
Sophisticated	Intermediate
Competent	Distinguished
Exemplary	Accomplished
Adequate	Developing
Expert	Professional

Figure 2: Performance level labels

teacher evaluation form. These levels represent a continuum that fits first-year librarians as well as experienced librarians. For example, school librarians in their entry year might be expected to exhibit foundational skills while a more experienced librarian might perform at a mastery level. By describing school librarian performance at each level, evaluation forms can educate school administrators about AASL guidelines and create shared performance expectations. Because the strength of performance level descriptions depended on clear writing, the performance levels are differentiated concretely and concisely (Oakleaf 247). They were written using common terminology, consistent (parallel) construction, positive phrasing, and clear differentiation between each of the four levels (247).

3. I developed a Praxis-type form—a rubric covering each of the three areas identified in step 1. In order to align these forms with my district’s new evaluation process, I mirrored the format of the classroom teacher evaluation tool.

1. TEACHING FOR LEARNING	FOUNDATIONAL	DEVELOPING	MASTERY	EXEMPLARY
1.5 The school library media program is guided by regular assessment of student learning to ensure the program is meeting its goals.	<p>The school library media specialist:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implements critical analysis and evaluation strategies</li> <li>• Uses summative assessments of process and product in collaboration with teachers</li> </ul>	<p>The school library media specialist:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implements critical analysis and evaluation strategies</li> <li>• Uses summative assessments of process and product in collaboration with teachers</li> <li>• Solicits student input for the assessment of inquiry-based instructional units upon their completion</li> <li>• Solicits student input for post-assessment of inquiry-based instructional units</li> </ul>	<p>The school library media specialist:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implements critical analysis and evaluation strategies</li> <li>• Uses summative assessments of process and product in collaboration with teachers</li> <li>• Solicits student input for the assessment of inquiry-based instructional units upon their completion</li> <li>• Solicits student input for post-assessment of inquiry-based instructional units</li> <li>• Uses formative assessments that give students feedback and the chance to revise their work</li> <li>• Uses performance-based assessments, such as rubrics, checklists, portfolios, journals, observation, conferencing, and self-questioning</li> </ul>	<p>The school library media specialist:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implements critical analysis and evaluation strategies</li> <li>• Uses summative assessments of process and product in collaboration with teachers</li> <li>• Solicits student input for the assessment of inquiry-based instructional units upon their completion</li> <li>• Solicits student input for post-assessment of inquiry-based instructional units</li> <li>• Uses formative assessments that give students feedback and the chance to revise their work</li> <li>• Uses performance-based assessments, such as rubrics, checklists, portfolios, journals, observation, conferencing, and self-questioning</li> <li>• Creates rubrics for student work that integrate curricular, informational, and critical thinking standards</li> <li>• Documents student progress through portfolios that demonstrate growth</li> </ul>

Figure 3: School librarian evaluation rubric, guideline 1.5

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### THE SAMPLE

The sample rubric segment shown in Figure 3 focuses on guideline 1.5 from area 1, “Teaching for Learning.” Guideline 1.5 states, “The school library media program is guided by regular assessment of student learning to ensure the program is meeting its goals.” (Note: Because of publication restrictions, only one guideline of the rubric can be shown in detail in Figure 3.) This guideline is described consistently and measurably at performance levels ranging from foundational to exemplary. For example, a school librarian at the foundational level “implements critical analysis and evaluation strategies” and “uses summative assessments of process and product in collaboration with teachers.”

In comparison, an exemplary school librarian “implements critical analysis and evaluation strategies; uses summative assessments of process and product in collaboration with teachers; solicits student input for the assessment of inquiry-based instructional units upon their completion; solicits student input for post-assessment of inquiry-based instructional units; uses formative assessments that give students feedback and the chance to revise their work; uses performance-based assessments, such as rubrics, checklists, portfolios, journals, observation, conferencing, and self-questioning; creates rubrics for student work that integrate curricular, informational, and critical thinking standards; and documents student progress through portfolios that demonstrate growth.” (Note: The order of these *Empowering Learners* actions within the rubric performance levels are suggestions only. Individual school librarians should arrange these actions in a way that best reflects their school library context.)

### THE EVIDENCE

Guidelines-based evaluation forms provide an evidence-based framework for evaluation of school librarian performance. Using such a form as a guide, school librarians can create paper and/or electronic portfolios of evidence to document their work performance. Some example documents are listed in Figure 4 (to right).

This evidence of school librarian performance can be maintained and periodically updated in a print portfolio or shared online via the school librarian’s library website.

EVIDENCE	EXAMPLE DOCUMENTS
Library Website	Screenshots, research skills tutorials, database links, website statistics, widgets, Delicious/Diigo links, school/public/college catalogs, student-created products
Lessons	Student orientations, collaborative instructional units, information literacy one-shots, blogs, wikis, Moodle
Schedules	Class visits, scope and sequence, academic librarian visits
Parental Contacts	Open houses, emails, newsletters, phone calls, communication logs, parent-teacher conferences, advisory committees
Student Assessments	TRAILS, worksheets, SurveyMonkey.com results, student response system data, formative and summative rubrics, student portfolios
Student-Created Products	PPTs, interactive board presentations, spreadsheets, timelines, “works cited” pages, book reports/talks, CDs, blogs, wikis, Wordles, LibGuide pathfinders, Glogster posters, Scrap-a-Book pages (see Figure 5)
Policy and Procedure Manual	Mission/vision statements, collection policies, strategic plans, school district report cards
Student Library Activities	Photos, videos, locally-created READ posters, multimedia shows
Recognition/ Appreciation	Thank you letters, awards/acknowledgements, school board recognition, state/national recognition
Promotional and Event Materials	Contests, fliers, bookmarks, bulletin boards, local/student newspaper articles
Professional Development	Library conference session descriptions, certificates of attendance, college transcripts, college courses taught, NBCT certification, presentations, published articles
Teacher and Staff Training	Checklists, job descriptions, in-service agendas, webinars, survey feedback
Equipment and Technology Access	Sign-out sheets, safety tips, AUPs, 24/7 library website, circulating laptops/netbooks/iPads/eReaders
Resource Access	Library website, inter-library loan, professional shelf holdings, video streaming
Budget	Annual reports, grant proposals, sample budgets
Usage Statistics	Circulation reports, attendance counts, website statistics, resource usage surveys, value of collection data
Assessment	Needs surveys, program evaluation, library advisory committee
Reading Literacy and Advisory	Reading lists, book clubs, displays, book talks, visiting authors

Figure 4: Examples of documents that demonstrate teacher-librarian performance



### THE CONVERSATION

School librarians can take documentation, including their evidence-based portfolio, to an evaluation meeting with their principals. Using the portfolio as a guide, the principal and the school librarian maintain focus on measurable, objective, evidence-based professional practices. Future professional goals grow from these conversations.

### CONCLUSION

School librarians need evaluation forms that fit their unique roles and responsibilities and acknowledge both the similarities and differences between classroom teachers and school librarians. The incorporation of *Empowering Learners* and the use of a Praxis-type format provide a solid framework for such evaluation forms. These tools allow school librarians



Figure 5: Student-created product: *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants* "scrap-a-book" page

to demonstrate their value and advocate for themselves using evidence-based documentation in conversations with their principals. Reflective school librarians welcome the opportunity to participate in the creation of a form of their own that achieves these multiple goals.

### NOTE:

In another interesting development, AASL released *A Planning Guide for Empowering Learners*, a document that includes a program assessment rubric. This program assessment rubric is designed to evaluate school library programs, not school librarians. Because program assessment and personnel evaluation are not equivalent or interchangeable, the AASL program assessment rubric needs to be distinguished from school librarian evaluation forms. Program assessment seeks to examine strengths and weaknesses of an entire school library program; evaluation of a school librarian involves analysis of individual job performance and employee accountability. In contrast to program assessment, personnel evaluation may result in the awarding of tenure or other contractual changes. Because of these differences, the assessment of school library programs and the evaluation of school librarians require two distinct tools. While the AASL program assessment rubric and the school librarian evaluation form described in

the article are quite different, librarians may find them complementary tools.

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