

Reaching Out: Meeting the Needs of Rural School Librarians

Technology and Innovation in Education (TIE), a division of Black Hills Special Services Cooperative (BHSSC), seeks a three-year, \$240,000 Laura Bush 21st Century Library Program, National Digital Platform, Continuing Education, Project Grant to enhance the skills of South Dakota, North Dakota, and Wyoming's rural school librarians, including skills needed to utilize the collection of online, open education resources (OERs) available to these librarians and to their constituents.

Need: The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) calls for “effective school library programs” that provide professional development (PD) for librarians and library professionals. The American Association of School Librarians (AASL) defines effective school libraries as ones led by at least one state-certified school librarian who supports digital learning, participatory learning, inquiry learning, technology literacies, information literacy and up-to-date digital and print materials and technology, including OERs. AASL calls for library staff to be capable of providing PD and offering collaboration with classroom instructors.

For rural school librarians, the AASL descriptors are often more idyllic than practical. For example, in South Dakota rural schools situated in high-poverty districts, media centers are as likely to serve as storage space rather than as the hub for students and teachers to develop personalized learning content by researching online, perusing online and text-based resources, or collaborating with peers. Results from the South Dakota State Library's (SDSL) School Library Data Digest, partially funded by IMLS, reflect this trend. In May, 2013, students in 40 of the 218 responding school districts exited buildings without a staffed library. By the beginning of the 2016-17 school year, that number increased to 52. The most recent report reveals that 59% of the state's school libraries lack certified teacher librarians. In those libraries, either teachers (67) and paraprofessionals (309), many of whom receive little or no PD, fill the role of librarian. Since the 2012-2013 school year, certified teacher librarians decreased from 152 to 129, a 15.13% decline. These numbers reflect trends in rural schools nationwide and demonstrate a need to provide support to all rural library staff. This proposal addresses this concern in three rural states: South Dakota, North Dakota and Wyoming. (Letters from SD, ND and WY representatives are attached.)

Goals and Timeline: If funded, this project will address PD needs of rural school librarians and library staff as they transition to a more digital-based environment. Through face-to-face and virtual PD opportunities, the project will also provide librarians with the opportunity to better understand and apply tenets of ESSA and the 2017 AASL standards.

Goal #1: Through PD opportunities, rural school librarians will develop skills to enhance personalized creative learning for students, work collaboratively with faculty, and provide student and staff trainings that build participants' future ready skills, particularly skills focused on the integration of digital resources.

- Reaching Out will offer synchronous and asynchronous PD opportunities. The project will be anchored by the primary outcome of the Future Ready Librarians (FRL) association: to unleash “the instructional leadership of school librarians to foster future ready schools.”
- With support and input from State Libraries in South Dakota, North Dakota and Wyoming, project staff will coordinate opportunities in all three states and build an online network of librarians in rural areas.
- Although open to applicants from all rural areas, the target group for this project will be tribal, Hutterite Colony, and rural schools identified as Priority or Focus Schools by the SD DOE, the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, and the Wyoming Department of Education. The second tier of project priority participants will come from Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) schools and private schools located on or near reservations. Trainings will be facilitated by TIE learning specialists, by the SDSL School Library Technology Coordinator or by other consultants, as needed.

- Throughout the grant, PD opportunities will be aligned with the FRL principles. These principles revolve around the Future Ready Schools (FRS) framework of seven “gears”—in particular, Personalized Professional Learning and Curriculum, Assessment, and Instruction (see graphic below)

Goal 2: Librarians will further develop skills for helping peers implement Open Education Resources (OER). OER are freely available online teaching and learning resources. Many districts are adopting OER in lieu of purchasing curriculum, but this requires staff time and training. Having librarians trained in curation and evaluation of OER content is a natural fit for assisting staff with the development of curriculum. OER development occurs at school, district, state, and regional levels.

Future Ready Schools	Future Ready Librarians	Reaching Out Professional Activities
Personalized Professional Learning	Facilitates Professional Learning	Librarian as Curator, Future Ready Librarians, Using Rubrics to Identify Quality Lessons, Understanding ESSA and the AASL Standards
Curriculum, Instruction, & Assessment	Builds Instructional Partnerships, Creates Digital Resources & Tools	Building Collaborative Relationships, Best Teaching and Learning Apps, Makerspace for Librarians, Digital Literacy, Librarians & Self-Directed Learners, The Librarian’s Role in a Blended Learning Classroom, Finding a Place in the Flipped Classroom, Helping Instructors Integrate Project-Based Learning

- Each year one two-day face-to-face trainings will provide opportunities for participants to build skills and to become involved in a professional learning community. Virtual training opportunities will support concepts introduced in face-to-face sessions.
- Reaching Out will offer Continuing Education Units (CEUs) and/or college credit (both graduate and undergraduate) through Black Hills State University, Spearfish, SD. Currently, more than 190 school districts in ND, SD, and WY hold TIE memberships that will provide them with the opportunity to participate in online learning courses without charge.
- Throughout the project, Director Julie Erickson, TIE learning specialist, will lead the development of online learning opportunities and complementing face-to-face components. In addition, the project director will work to build relationships with State Librarians in SD, ND, and WY.
- Erickson will work with Consultant Joan Upell, former SDSL School Librarian, who has served as a certified teacher librarian in Illinois and South Dakota schools. Both Erickson and Upell have earned Masters of Library Science degrees and are recognized for their expertise in digital literacy.

Impact: Reaching Out will explicitly provide school librarians, especially those in typically under-served, rural areas with easily accessible, quality PD opportunities to improve professional expertise and to provide constituents (both students and teachers) with resources that will enhance student learning and student achievement. As such, the Reaching Out process of professional development can be replicated nationwide.

Budget: The proposal includes a budget of \$240,000 over three years. The Year 1 budget of \$120,000 will include funds for project planning, module development for both face-to-face and online PD throughout the grant and development of tools used to ascertain the grants effectiveness (surveys, interviews, etc.). It is anticipated that funding in Years 2 and 3 will be \$60,000, respectively, due to the decrease in time needed for creation of trainings, identification of digital resources and evaluation tools. Each year the budget will include support the Project Director’s salary; travel and accommodations for participants; self-paced online courses; and project staffing expenses, including contracts with consultants.