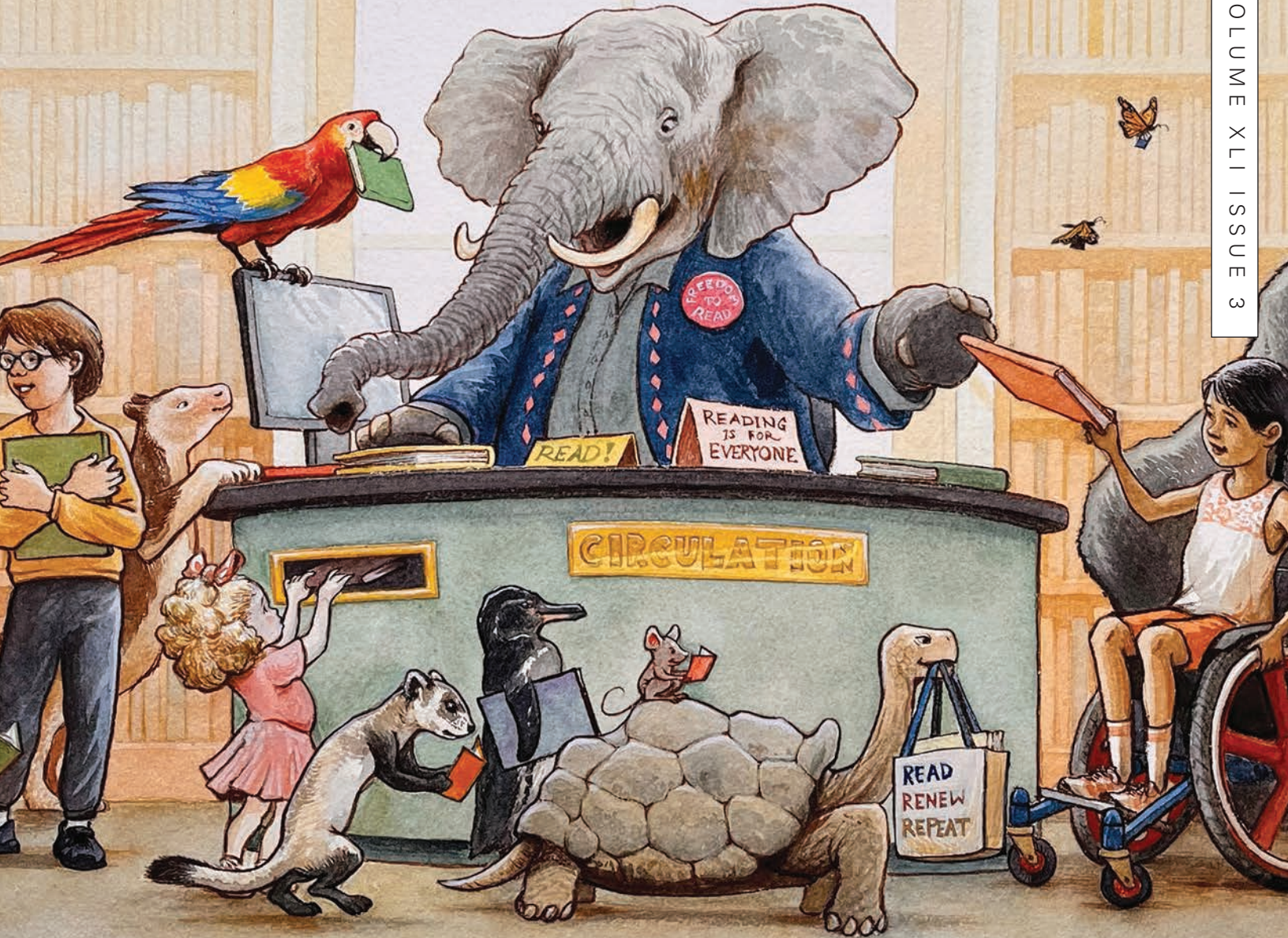


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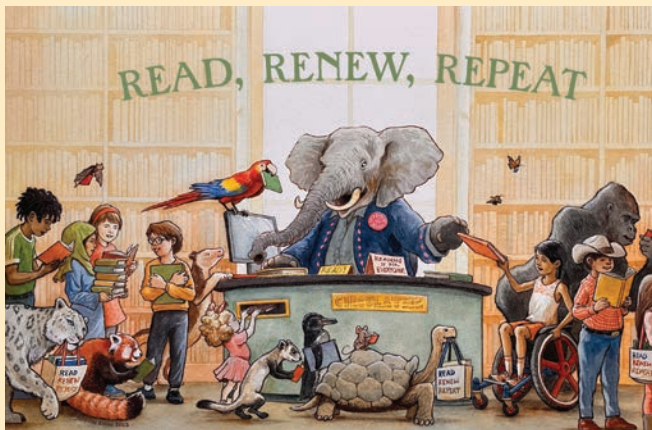
REPORTER

SEPTEMBER 2023 | VOLUME XLI ISSUE 3



The Illinois Library Association Reporter

is a forum for those who are improving and reinventing Illinois libraries, with articles that seek to: explore new ideas and practices from all types of libraries and library systems; examine the challenges facing the profession; and inform the library community and its supporters with news and comment about important issues. The *ILA Reporter* is produced and circulated with the purpose of enhancing and supporting the value of libraries, which provide free and equal access to information. This access is essential for an open democratic society, an informed electorate, and the advancement of knowledge for all people.



ON THE COVER

Caldecott Medalist Jason Chin's original poster artwork is a fun and creative depiction of the iREAD 2024 theme, Read, Renew, Repeat. Designed for all ages, 2024's theme will feature the idea of conservation. Conservation as a movement focuses on protecting species from extinction, maintaining and restoring habitats, enhancing ecosystem services, and protecting biological diversity. Do you see the Galapagos giant tortoise and black-footed ferret? All the animals featured on the poster fall into a category of the endangered species list. iREAD 2024: Read, Renew, Repeat makes for a wonderfully diversified summer reading program that encourages reading as a restorative method of self-improvement and self-preservation.

Chin received the Caldecott Medal in 2022 for his illustration of *Watercress* by Andrea Wang (Neal Porter Books/Holiday House, 2021) and received a Caldecott Honor in 2018 for his book *Grand Canyon*. Chin is an adventurous researcher; he has swum with sharks and camped at the bottom of the Grand Canyon, known to be the home of scorpions, to provide accuracy and depth to his books and illustrations. Read more about Jason Chin and how he developed the artwork he contributed for iREAD 2024: Read, Renew, Repeat on page 4.

Chin is one of four featured artists for iREAD 2024; he is joined by Zoe Persico, an illustrator known for her whimsical style found in titles such as *Greta and the Giants* (Frances Lincoln Children's Books, 2019) and *You Be Mommy* (Macmillan Publishers, 2020); Holly Bradley, a digital artist with bold, colorful designs who's based in Illinois; and James Stanley, a freelance storyboard artist/comic artist and illustrator best known for their work on TV series such as *Avatar: The Last Airbender* and *Black Dynamite*. iREAD 2024: Read, Renew, Repeat will launch in November at iREADprogram.org.

Artwork ©2023 Jason Chin for iREAD® Summer Reading.

The Illinois Library Association is collaboratively shaping a new future for libraries in Illinois, providing leadership, advocacy, partnership, and learning for the benefit of Illinois libraries. It is the eighth oldest library association in the world and the third largest state association in the United States, with members in academic, public, school, government, and special libraries. Its 3,000 members are primarily librarians and library staff, but also trustees, publishers, and other supporters.

The Illinois Library Association has six full-time staff members. It is governed by a sixteen-member executive board, made up of elected officers. The association employs the services of Blaida and Associates for legislative advocacy. ILA is a 501(c)(3) charitable and educational organization.

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See ILA calendar for submission deadlines for the *ILA Reporter*. Copy should be submitted by email to ila@ila.org. You are encouraged to include press-ready digital photos (300 p.p.i.) and graphics with your articles, which will be included on a space-available basis.

CONTENTS



- 4 CHATTING WITH JASON CHIN
by Becca Boland, Illinois Library Association
- 8 A “COURSE” OF ACTION: INCENTIVIZING
THE MOVE TO LOW AND NO-COST
COURSE MATERIALS
by Dee Anna Phares and Larissa Garcia, Northern Illinois
University Libraries
- 12 RAILS EDI LEARNING COHORT
by Diana Rusch, Reaching Across Illinois Library System,
and Katie Clausen, Gail Borden Public Library
- 16 MY TURN: YES, SCHOOL LIBRARIES STILL
EXIST, BUT TO KEEP THEM IS GOING TO
REQUIRE YOUR HELP
by Leah Gregory, Illinois Heartland Library System

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- 20 FIND YOUR VOICE IN 2023: iREAD ROUNDUP
- 22 ILA WELCOMES NEW MEMBERS



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Chatting with Jason Chin

When Gretchen Schultz, the 2024 iREAD Chair, was thinking about illustrators for the theme of Read, Renew, Repeat, Jason Chin came to mind. His illustrations, like those in *Island: A Story of the Galapagos* and *Grand Canyon*, were what she envisioned when thinking about how Read, Renew, Repeat could be interpreted visually. iREAD is lucky and grateful that Jason confirmed he would be happy to be one of our illustrators on January 25, 2022, the same day he happened to win the Caldecott Medal for his illustrations in *Watercress* by Andrea Wang.

But the art you see now isn't where Jason started. He went on a journey of reading, renewing, and repeating as he created. "When I got the artist brief, and it had the read, renew, repeat language on it, the first step was to start to interpret the language and try and make some connections with it and see where it led me. I came up with three concepts," Chin shared.

The first idea was an MC Escher-like optical illusion where people were walking on stairs going in different directions in a library that was ultimately repetitive. The figures traveled using the stairs to check out books, renew them, return them, and start again.

The second concept started with Earth. "People were walking around the perimeter of the earth. You could see people walking around a circle around the outside, and at the top of the circle was the library building," said Chin. "And some people were walking in and then other people were walking out and then walking around the globe and then back in the building." He noted that the people were not to scale; you could clearly see them walking around the planet. There was also a similar idea where the figures around the earth were planting seeds, and as they walked, they grew and flowered—but instead of flowers, books grew.

As Jason created, he thought a lot about circles because of the cyclical nature of Read, Renew, Repeat. But eventually, he decided it would be best portrayed by zooming in. A lot. From space to the circulation desk. "Then I just thought, well,

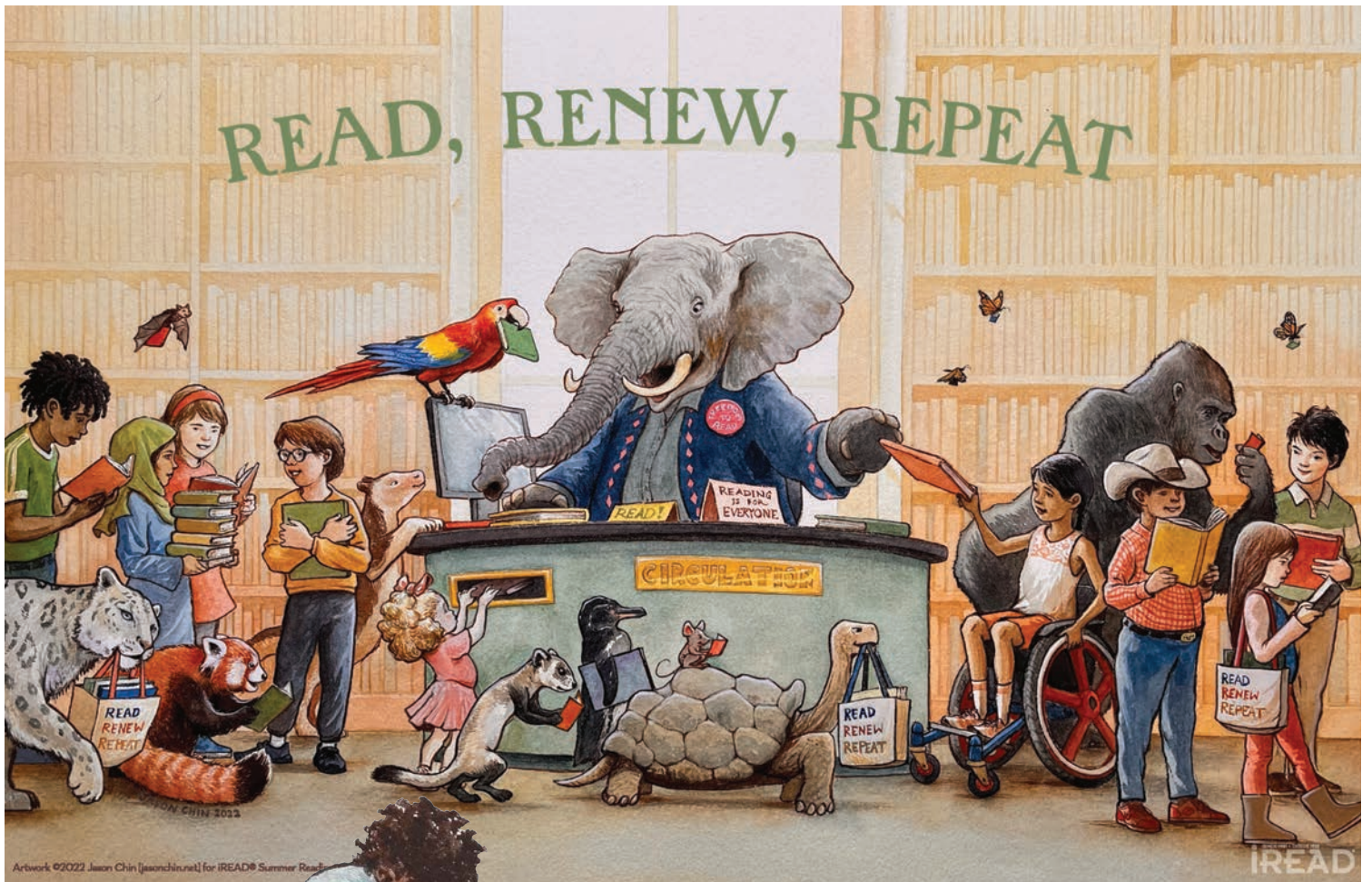
what if there were just a bunch of animals, people and animals, just at a circulation desk?" Chin said. "It was the farthest away from the initial concept. It still has that kind of flow. The poster has a left to right flow, people going past the desk."

When adding animals, the iREAD committee suggested focusing on endangered, vulnerable, or threatened animals. But he couldn't just add any animals—they had to be

balanced and interesting to look at. This is why you see animals like the tree kangaroo instead of the natterjack toad, a fairly typical and recognizable toad found in Europe. Chin started with the larger animals and added smaller animals last. "In a crowd scene or an illustration with a lot of elements, it helps me to block in the larger components first, or in this case, animals, the larger things first," Chin said. "So that meant kind of blocking where's the gorilla going to go, where's the snow leopard going to go, where's the elephant going to be, and then working down to the kids—figuring out where they're going to be—and then fill in the smaller animals around them. Just helps me to go in that order, to keep it organized," Chin explained.

Essentially, that is what made this concept the one used for the poster and spot art. "Looking back at all the concepts, this one, I think, made the best poster," stated Chin. If you look at the poster through this 'circular' lens, you'll see that from left to right, there is still a cyclical nature to the art. People and animals come into the library to return books, renew if needed, and then find more books to check out, and the circle continues to repeat through the summer and beyond.





“When adding animals, the iREAD committee suggested focusing on endangered, vulnerable, or threatened animals.”



The discussion about the iREAD art led to a larger discussion about art and Chin's creative process. Chin spends a lot of time researching before starting. If he can't visit his subject, he watches videos, looks at photos, and reads as much as possible. Ideally, if he can, he prefers to experience it for himself—whether it is visiting the Galapagos, hiking the Grand Canyon, or standing beneath a redwood. "I always want in my books to be able to make them in a way that communicates how I feel about the place. If it's about a place, that it communicates my enthusiasm for it or a connection to it," said Chin.

Experiencing a place for himself translates well to the page. "When I'm illustrating, a lot of the answers to those questions come to me when I am there; or afterwards, when I'm thinking about what it felt like to be there, why it impressed me, what was special about it. To me personally, that's always it." He explains, "Those questions can serve as a guide to what information to include and what information to leave out at a very basic level." It all comes down to what was most important to him and what left the biggest impression. Chin's books gain their heart by the inclusion of his experiences and pieces of himself.

The best way for him to capture feelings and moments is to sketch them. "Sketching is important. It's an observational tool, really," said Chin. "Drawing can be about drawing, creating something to show people, creating art as an expression to express your ideas or feelings, or whatever. It also can be about learning. And for me, when I'm on a research trip, say, when I was at the Galapagos, drawing the animals was very much about helping me study them and spend time investigating what they look like. And since they're living and moving about, investigating what they're doing, drawing is an important part of that."

Ultimately, Jason's approach to art is circular, just like the art he created for iREAD. "Creativity is about combining things," said Chin. "And in a painting, when I create a painting in my studio, I get to combine everything that I've learned about the subject. With my memories of being there, my knowledge and experience painting ideas that I have from, say, looking at someone else's paintings of something completely different. I might look at someone's paintings of a cityscape and think, oh, wow, I like the way that that image was composed and framed, how they framed the character. I'm going to try and incorporate, do something like that. But I'm working on the Grand Canyon because when I look at this picture of the cityscape, it makes me feel this sense of wonder. And that's the feeling that I felt when I was at the Grand Canyon. So maybe I can combine these things and create something new. That's the way my creative process goes."



“Creativity is about combining things”

Chin continues, “It’s like gathering and mixing things up and seeing what comes out. And maybe, hopefully, on some level, my enthusiasm for the subject or the wonder I felt when I was there or the fear I felt of the cliff or whatever is there. That is the magic of it.” It’s these feelings and sense of wonder that he aims to incorporate into his art so that the reader can experience it as well. “If you’re not feeling something when you’re making it, then I don’t know, how can you expect the reader to feel it too? How can you ask them to go with you on this journey if you didn’t invest yourself in the journey?” said Chin.

After swimming with sharks and hiking volcanoes, I asked Chin what his dream project would be. It came as no surprise that he continues to think big. “I don’t know what a big dream project would be, but a project that could help readers see their place in the big picture history of the universe, I think that would be it. It’s a big book. It’s a big topic.”

What does Jason Chin read when he’s not working? Primarily research. Currently, he is reading books about meteorology for a new book in progress; however, he makes sure to fit in some pleasure reading. He’s a big audiobook fan.

Especially when he’s working. “When I’m painting, I listen to stories. I do my fiction reading while I’m painting,” said Chin. When asked about his favorite audiobook, he replied, “I’d say the book that I like the most, definitely at the top of my list, was *Braiding Sweetgrass*.”

Chin would make a fabulous librarian. It is clear that research is very important to him. He spends a lot of time learning as much about a subject as possible before he begins creating art. He is very curious about the world around him and wants to take in as much of it as possible. One might deduce that his approach to creating is: research, art, repeat.

Jason Chin will be the speaker for the Youth Services Forum Author Breakfast at this year’s ILA Annual Conference in Springfield. If you’ll be attending the conference on Wednesday, October 25 and are interested in seeing Jason speak, be sure to register in advance for this special event. You can find details about the 2023 ILA Annual Conference online at ila.org/events/annual-conference. The 2024 iREAD Resource Guide, featuring Jason Chin’s art, will be available for purchase online in October at iREADprogram.org. **ILA**

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A “Course” of Action: Incentivizing the Move to Low and No Cost Course Materials

INTRODUCTION

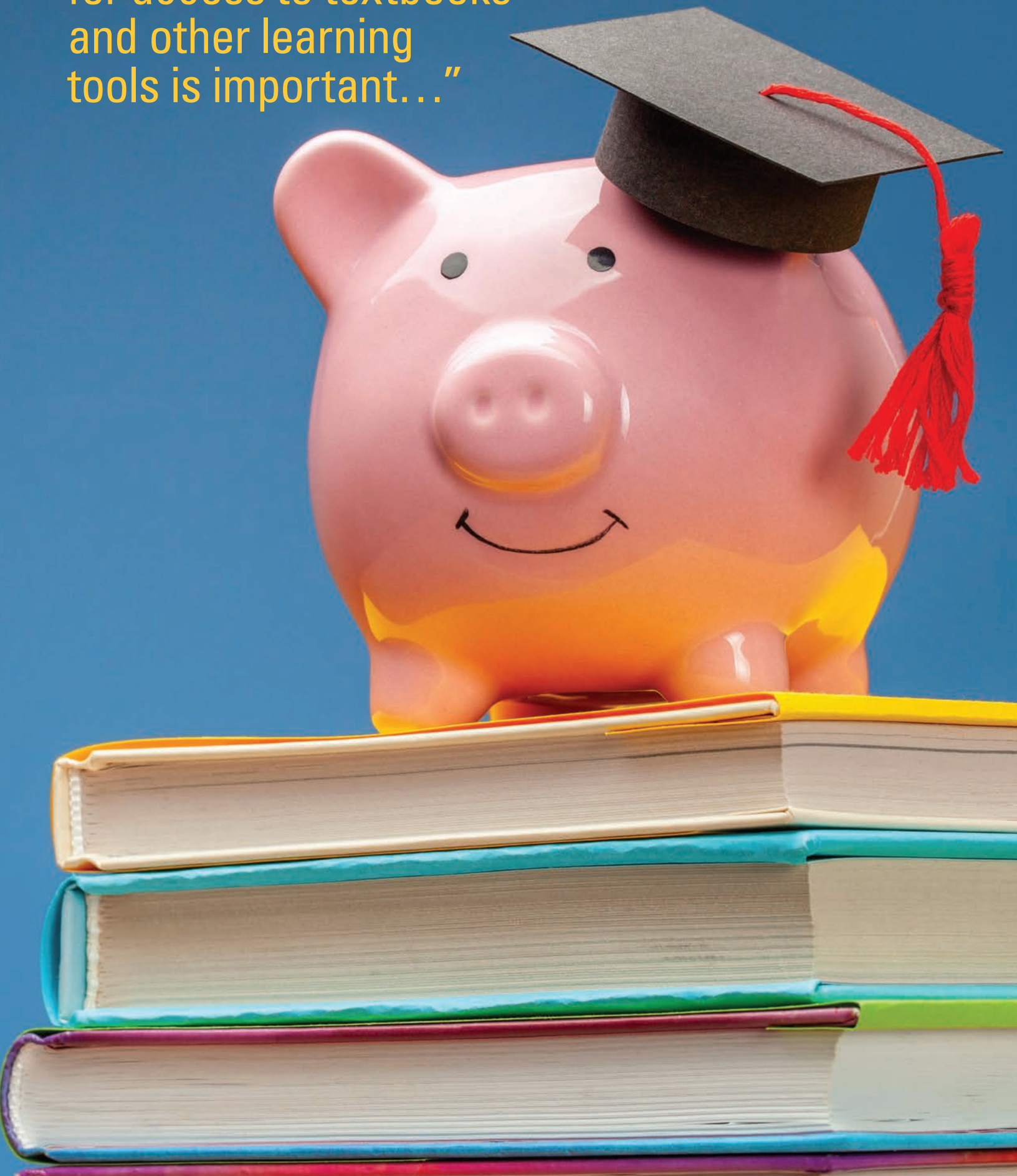
The high cost of course materials is not just a student problem—it has far-reaching consequences for all stakeholders of colleges and universities, and for society more broadly. Barbara J. Wilson, former Executive Vice President and Vice President for Academic Affairs for the University of Illinois System, remarked that “Changing the model for access to textbooks and other learning tools is important, especially as we address issues of social and educational equity.” Wilson further noted that “challenges facing higher education require collaborative solutions.”¹

One of the most productive and vital collaborations is the one between faculty and academic librarians. Since the Illinois Board of Higher Education and the Illinois Community College Board surveyed public and private institutions about Open Educational Resources (OER) initiatives in 2021, there has been a significant increase in the number of faculty partnering with libraries and faculty development offices to opt out of traditional textbooks and opt into electronic and print reserves, library-licensed materials, and Open Educational Materials.² While great strides have been made in textbook affordability across Illinois, transforming the access model for required course materials needs greater institutional and individual buy-in. Faculty incentive programs are one way to achieve this.

A SHIFTING LANDSCAPE

The Illinois Institutional Survey on Open Educational Resources (2021) revealed some good news about efforts to confront course materials affordability while illuminating areas where programs and initiatives are vulnerable. Of the 65 institutions that responded—representing 36 community colleges, 18 private institutions, and 11 public institutions—44 institutions (68%) stated that OER was being used as required course materials at their institution. Twenty-five institutions identified having 1–10 instructors using OER, and 24 institutions reported Open Educational Resources being utilized by 11 or more instructors. In addition, schools more than doubled enrollments in courses with OER materials from 2019 to 2020.³ While the survey results showed dedicated affordability committees or task forces and instructional design and professional development support for faculty, there were few OER incentive or grant programs, with only 14 institutions reporting a current program and 7 institutions reporting a program in development. Fifty-two of 65 institutions reported less than \$10,000 was dedicated to OER initiatives. Potentially powerful tools for driving progress in affordability efforts are faculty incentives; however, these are often dependent on sufficient and sustained funding, which the survey data shows, is more the exception than the rule.

“Changing the model for access to textbooks and other learning tools is important...”



STATEWIDE EFFORTS

The most notable addition to the state's course materials landscape is the \$1.08 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education's Open Textbooks Pilot Program awarded to the University of Illinois System and the Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries in Illinois (CARLI) to support the creation of OER. Illinois SCOERs (Support for Creation of Open Educational Resources) provides subgrants of up to \$65,000 to "develop, improve, and expand" open textbooks and ancillary materials focused on "The Human Condition: Care, Development, and Lifespan."⁴ The first round of funding went to 9 teams at institutions across the state: City Colleges of Chicago and Olive-Harvey College; Illinois Central College; Morton College; National Louis University; Roosevelt University, DePaul University, and Harper College; Southern Illinois University Carbondale; University of Illinois Chicago; University of Illinois Springfield; University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (Carle Illinois College of Medicine) and Knox College.⁵ Two additional rounds of funding allowed for the development of materials for courses beyond STEM fields, with 14 more teams from 13 institutions receiving the financial award: Southern Illinois University Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, Parkland College, Illinois Institute of Technology, Moraine Valley Community College, Lincoln Land Community College, Governors State University, College of DuPage, Northern Illinois University, Columbia College Chicago, Concordia University Chicago, Roosevelt University, and Triton College.⁶ Materials produced from all rounds of grants will be deposited into CARLI's Open Illinois Hub.

Further recognizing the importance of incentive programs, the Illinois Association of College and Research Libraries (IACRL) launched the first OER Campus Kickstart: Award for Growing Illinois OER Programs designed to help smaller college campuses or campuses with little or no support for OER initiatives.⁷ Teams from Governors State University, Roosevelt University, Elgin Community College, Chicago State University, and Oakton College were selected to receive a \$500 award for implementing an OER textbook in fall 2023 and spring 2024 courses.⁸ These inducements are significant not only because of the free materials used in classrooms statewide but because they acknowledge the time, labor, and financial support required for such an undertaking, including collaboration between librarians, instructional designers, and teaching faculty.

INCENTIVIZING CHANGE

Individual college and university libraries and their campus allies have been expanding course materials affordability efforts with faculty incentive programs that financially reward and recognize the energy instructors expend to rethink and redesign their courses when transitioning to low and no-cost textbooks and other classroom resources. In fall 2022, Bradley University's Cullom-Davis Library and the Center for Teaching Excellence and Learning rolled out a pilot OER program that provided internal grants of up to \$500 to support OER adoption; 9 instructors working on 6 projects received funding and library-led training on OER, Creative Commons licensing, and Open Pedagogy. Morris Library at Southern Illinois University Carbondale awarded grants to 5 faculty applicants to adopt (\$500-\$1000), adapt (\$1500-\$2000), or create open textbooks (\$3000) with funding levels varied based on the number of course sections impacted, number of participants on the project, and level of labor required to make the transition to OER. In addition, they provided a \$200 stipend to faculty who reviewed an open textbook from the University of Minnesota's Open Textbook Library—the process of reviewing not only adds legitimacy to the open resources but also familiarizes faculty with the textbooks available in their field.

Northern Illinois University Libraries and the Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning launched its Leading Impact Program in fall 2022. This program included a \$500 stipend for 7 faculty selected for the ACM Integration Cohort to transition existing courses to low or zero-cost materials. In addition, NIU implemented affordable materials course designators in its *MyNIU* registration system in late spring 2022, so the percentage of courses using low (\$40 or less) or zero-cost course materials in a department can now be calculated. Departments offering the highest percentage of affordable materials courses in the academic year received a financial award funded by the University Libraries. Although the hope is that the faculty and department incentive programs will continue beyond the pilot, there currently is no dedicated budget to support these initiatives.

One of the more established programs in the state, College of DuPage's OpenCOD, has awarded approximately \$400,000 in incentive grants and professional development opportunities to faculty over the last three years, saving students \$3 million. While most institutions worry about sustainable funding for their faculty incentive programs, COD serves as an aspirational model: its Board of Trustees and the Provost's office recently created a budget to support OER, and the College hired a tenure-track librarian assigned, in part, to lead its textbook affordability initiatives.⁹

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Because course materials affordability is a seemingly insoluble problem that seriously affects student success and retention, it feels as if progress is slow. However, academic librarians in Illinois have been working diligently to increase the faculty allies needed to ensure change. Faculty incentive programs are making a difference, especially after the pandemic when the consequences of high-cost and inaccessible course materials became undeniable and untenable. Even the modest number of CARLI Illinois SCOERs grants, ILA awards, and internal stipends financed by colleges and universities across the state offer the promise of significant savings for students and the potential for increased academic success. However, these programs are only as stable as their funding. At present, many academic libraries are footing the bill for these initiatives—some of which were conceived as pilot programs instead of ongoing ventures with commitments for sustained funding. Ultimately, pilots need a safe place to land.

Promoting and supporting a transition to affordable textbooks and Open Educational Resources is often a labor of love rather than a labor enumerated in a librarian's job description, and very few carry the official title of OER Librarian. Instead, college and university librarians frequently work as unofficial champions, advisors, and occasional gadflies whose OER endeavors extend beyond their official duties—which means that on-campus efforts can be derailed if that cheerleader-in-chief leaves the institution or takes on a new role. Faculty and librarians need clear, consistent, and continuing funding from their institutions that sends the message that their college or university is not only talking about affordable course materials but also making a pledge to ensure they are. James Baldwin once noted that “Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.”¹⁰ In Illinois, academic librarians and faculty are facing course materials affordability. However, it will take financial commitment from their institutions, the higher education community across the state, and consortial partners to guarantee positive change now and well into the future.

*The authors thank Dan Matthews, Moraine Valley Community College; Lauren Kosrow, College of DuPage; Christina Norton, Bradley University; and Amber Burtis, Southern Illinois University Carbondale, for contributing information. **ILA***

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RAILS EDI Learning Cohort

Last October, RAILS provided a special opportunity through its EDI Learning Cohort. The Cohort was promoted primarily through RAILS E-News. Library staff members in a management, professional, or paraprofessional role were invited to apply via an online application. All applicants were accepted into the cohort. Composed of nearly 40 library staff members in a wide spectrum of job positions from all library types, this program engaged participants in a collective discourse on critical EDI issues.

Led by EDI trainer and consultant Elisabeth “Biz” Lindsay-Ryan, the cohort met monthly from October 2022 through May 2023. Each session focused on a different topic and participants had access to monthly readings, podcast episodes, and videos through Moodle, an open-source learning platform.

Sessions took place via Zoom, where participants learned EDI concepts synchronously via live lectures and group discussions. Small group discussions rounded out each month’s active learning experience.

As part of RAILS’ Consulting and Continuing Education (CCE) team, I assisted with implementing this program along with then-Director of Consulting and Continuing Education—now RAILS Associate Executive Director—Joe Filapek. One of the program’s participants, Katie Clausen, spoke about her experience via email. My questions and her responses follow.

Diana Rusch: *Introduce yourself and share why you applied to the RAILS EDI Cohort.*

Katie Clausen: I’m Katie Clausen, and I’m the Early Literacy Services Manager at Gail Borden Public Library in Elgin, IL. I applied to the RAILS EDI Cohort because libraries and librarians have a deep impact on children’s lives. Each library visit is a formative experience in which children learn about the library, their community, and the world. My words, actions, and behaviors (or the absence of them) matter to the kids who attend my storytimes. I wanted to take responsibility for my own learning about EDI and find actionable ways to speak up but not speak for historically marginalized communities. I believe one of the biggest issues of racism is silence; another is the belief that it is in history. Or that racism no longer exists. This cohort helped me understand that racism and discrimination are perfect shapeshifters. They are highly adaptive, constantly morphing and figuring out how to survive and emerge in a new way. Racism is a format, not a single event. As a White person, I wanted to be a part of dismantling the system that hurts everyone—White people and people of color, alike. This cohort offered many ways to show up and actively challenge our system.

“I wanted to take responsibility for my own learning about EDI and find actionable ways to speak up but not speak for historically marginalized communities.”



DR: *Briefly describe your overall experience with the cohort.*

KC: The cohort was incredibly impactful. Biz provided a safe space (which doesn't always mean comfortable space because growth can be uncomfortable) to be brave in our learning community. Here are some takeaways that I hope others may find useful:

- No one can be the spokesperson of an entire community. During one session, Biz asked the White women in the cohort, "What do White women think of Donald Trump?" We were a Zoom room of blank stares. Because of course, White women are part of a group of individuals, and individuals feel differently from one another. Yet, we often ask Black people, Indigenous people, other people of color, as well as those in the LGBTQIA+ community, disability community, and other diverse communities—to do just that, speak for a whole group of people, and that is unfair and exhausting.
- Anti-racist isn't a fixed identity. It's not a tattoo you get or a name tag stating, "No longer racist." I know I can still cause racial impact and harm because everyone has that capacity. I live in the system. But I will never give up learning and growing. Prejudice starts with a lack of interest, in the same way that violence starts with segregation. I am committed to asking myself over and over, "Who am I seeing in my community? Who am I not seeing?"
- Talking about White privilege (and owning your own if you are White) does not mean you've never suffered. Suffering crosses all possible boundaries. No matter what group you're in, you've been touched by trauma. But your identity, the color of your skin, your group are not the cause of the harm. And that is one thing we will never understand as White people, and trying to compare our own suffering is detrimental.
- When you are used to having privilege, equity can feel like oppression.
- When having conversations with others you disagree with, it can feel so challenging and can end up in debate that inhibits progress. Instead, maybe the goal could be to create doubt. To plant a seed for the next conversation, and the next, and the next. You don't need to facilitate the growth or entire socialization of a human being. But maybe you can get someone thinking that maybe they don't have the whole thing figured out! Maybe your own viewpoint will be challenged, too.
- Accept the fact that impact counts more than intention. It doesn't matter if I didn't mean to hurt someone, I still need to apologize when they are hurt.

- Commit to not deciding what or who someone is by one factor. Assumptions like, "Oh they have a phone; they must have access to food," only perpetuate stereotypes.
- Not all diversity is visible. Neurodivergences, learning differences, debilitating pain, PTSD, and other disabilities are not always obvious to the onlooker, but can really impact how someone shows up in the world. Be compassionate to all.

DR: *Tell us about a cohort highlight that positively impacted you.*

KC: There are too many to name! One particular conversation does stand out to me, however. We were discussing the layers and nuances of racism and discrimination. Biz, our leader, said to pay attention to surprise. All of us have biases and make assumptions about what and who we interact with every day. We are all filling in a narrative about each other all the time. When we do this, we stop wondering about others, and instead put them in a box of "This is all I need to know about that person." Instead, how can we create a space for people to be all the dimensions that they are? So when someone shares something with you and you are surprised, that means you were biased. Confronting that bias head on—getting into the messy muck of our bias instead of pretending that it doesn't exist—is the first step of extinguishing it.

DR: *What have you brought from what you learned in the cohort back to your library?*

KC: One action item I've brought to our library is a DEI in Storytime group, which began about halfway through the RAILS Cohort. This group is composed of library staff district-wide who present storytimes in the community (Children's department, but also staff from our branch locations, bookmobile, and school outreach, for example). We meet every other month with the common goal of modeling diverse representation by the books and materials we choose in programming. We discuss the importance of uplifting voices that have historically been marginalized, we share books that feature everyday diversity, and are collaborating to create an Early Literacy Philosophy for our storytime planning and presentation. Inclusivity is the bedrock of librarianship, and storytimes need to feature stories that are "mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors" (quote from Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop). Children need to see themselves, but also each other, in stories. They need books that reflect their unique identity, but also books that illustrate the lived experience of their peers, and the larger world they are a part of.

DR: *Given your experience with this cohort, what is your hope for the future of EDI training in the Illinois Library Community?*

“How can we create a space for people to be all the dimensions that they are?”

KC: I hope that it doesn't stop. EDI education isn't a box to check off, or the end of a board game where you've suddenly completed the journey. Continuous critical thinking about language, messaging, behavior, policies, practices, and power structures is essential. Inclusive terminology and practices evolve, and we are responsible for navigating that evolution and changing our practices. Because inclusivity matters. I wish everyone in Illinois could have been a part of this training, and I hope RAILS offers it again. We all need opportunities to grow as library workers, but also as human beings. Like Jason Reynolds said once in an interview, “Let's sprint towards compassion, and crawl towards judgment.” We owe it to each other to recognize our beautiful differences and also know that we all want the same thing: to belong.

The Cohort was just one opportunity for RAILS members to increase their awareness and knowledge of EDI and consider how this work impacts individuals, libraries, and communities.

Hear more about the EDI Cohort and other RAILS Libraries and their EDI initiatives in the upcoming ILA Annual Conference session *Cultivate Belonging: How We Moved EDI Initiatives from Training to Action*. Moderated by Becky Spratford, La Grange Public Library Trustee and RA Specialist. This panel discussion is scheduled from 3-4 p.m. on Thursday, October 26.

This year's ILA conference is October 24-26 at the BOS Center in Springfield. For more information and to register visit ila.org/events/annual-conference. **ILA**

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My Turn: Yes, School Libraries Still Exist, but to Keep Them is Going to Require Your Help

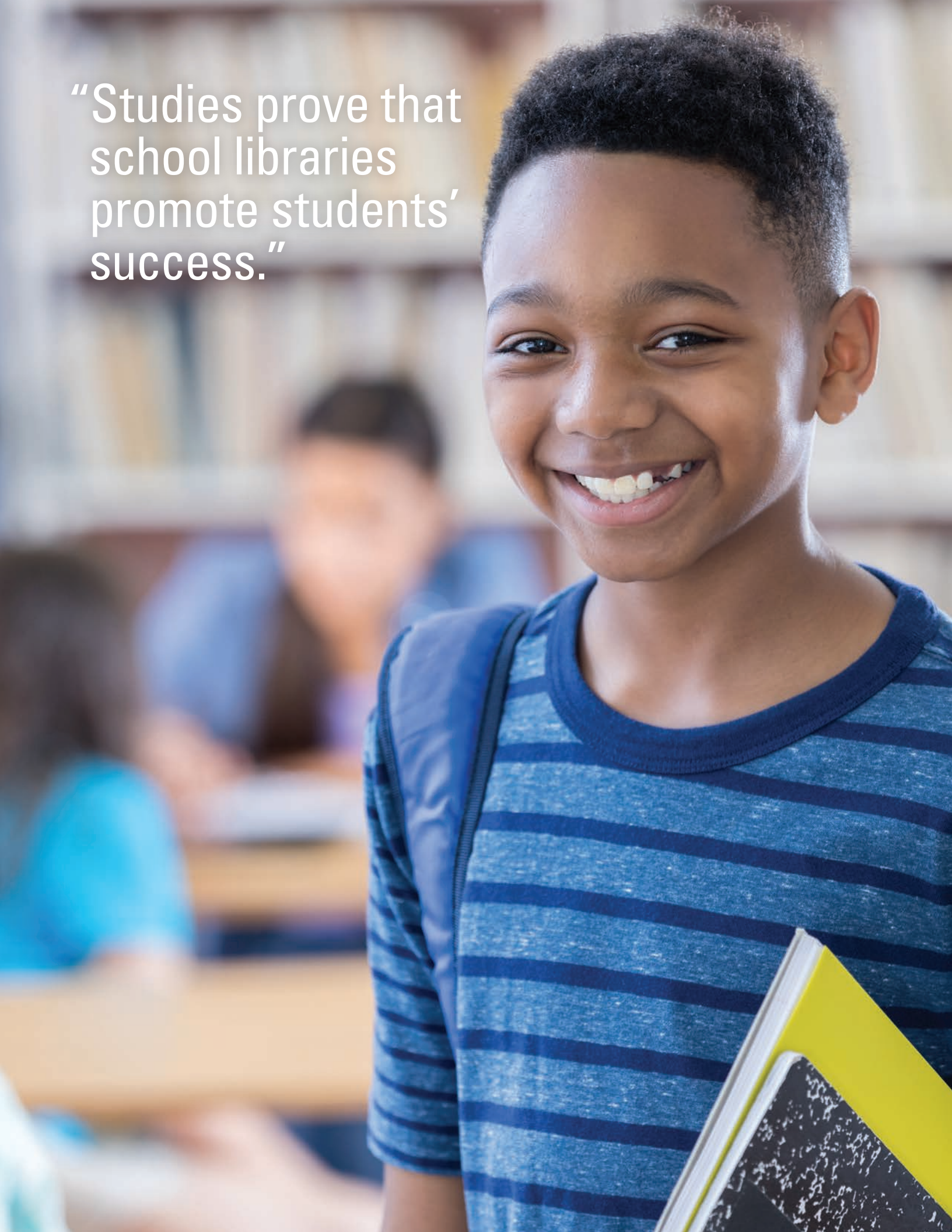
Recently, a poster on a school library listserv I frequent asked, “Are there still middle school libraries?” The poster said her administrator stated that “middle schools don’t really have libraries anymore.” Since the administrator coveted the library’s classroom space, he advised her that the library’s demise was near. The listserv instantly jumped to life with indignant posts. Are there still middle school libraries? The answer is a resounding, “Yes!” There are hundreds of middle school libraries in Illinois.

The most oft-repeated reply to this query was, “Where did that principal go to school? I want to warn our administrators not to recruit there.” Most of all, there was heartbreak. How can one of the most essential services in a school be sidelined by an administrator who seemingly has no idea of the value of libraries and librarians to his students? What’s more, the administrator had already made the decision. He did no research, asked no advice, convened no committee, conducted no library usage surveys, and asked no students or teachers what the library does for them.

Administrators, we get it, you need more space, and you need more money. Our country needs to address that, but your school library is the last place to skimp. Studies prove that school libraries promote students’ success. Let’s look at some research-proven statistics:

- 67% of children ages 6-17 find books to read from libraries. The same report shows that children from low-income families are more likely to get books from school libraries.¹
- Schools that gained librarians have shown increased standardized reading test scores over schools that lost libraries and/or librarians.²
- In Illinois high schools, ACT scores were highest in schools where librarians collaborate with teachers.³
- School librarians are critical for teaching digital literacy skills, online citizenship, and internet safety.⁴
- School libraries are not just for learning—they are a community within a school that provides a safe space for many diverse students. “Students today are often anxious and overwhelmed. Many just need a place to take a break, relax, explore ideas, or simply feel that they belong and are welcome.”⁵

“Studies prove that school libraries promote students’ success.”



I can't understand why we are still discussing whether schools need libraries despite all the available research on this subject, but here we are. So, let's look at further issues administrators may not consider when libraries are on the chopping block.

First, anti-library decision-makers love to say that everything is online. Anyone who regularly surfs the web knows that this is untrue. I often encounter paywalls in the most basic of internet searches for news. I usually decide whether to pay the fee or subscription based on how important the answer is to me. I certainly can't afford to pay for everything I want to access behind a paywall. What if I had a school assignment that required it? How is a student with no credit card or money supposed to get that information? Parents or guardians can't drop \$9.99, \$14.99, or \$29.99 every time a student needs an article, and then remember to cancel the initial subscription to avoid paying for a year of access they no longer need. There is a clear link between information provided on the internet and providers' desire to obtain personal details and other online habits. Do we want our students to turn over their email addresses, names, and locations to every random website with the needed information?

Supposing students can find free information online, how do they know how to vet it? As a trained library professional, even I find the hits returned by Google overwhelming. How often do we find our elderly loved ones convinced of something preposterous they read online? A twelve-year-old student who spends time on TikTok might believe that everyone they see online is an expert. How can we expect children to make discernments that many adults struggle with? Librarians can and do teach the skills of determining what resources are accurate, reliable, unbiased, and appropriate.

A second major argument from people who want to ax school libraries is that students can use public libraries. Public libraries are fantastic, valuable resources for students who can get to one. Do the majority of students in your area ride the bus to school? Is there a bus to your local public library? If a student lives in a suburban or rural area, how will they get to the public library? Worse yet, towns may have multiple districts, and residents may not live within a library district. The students who fall outside a library's tax district may have to pay a non-resident fee, which can be out of reach to many families. It's heartbreaking to consider that low-income students, students with parents or guardians who work nights, or those living too far away are out of luck when their school library closes. There is no guarantee that a parent or guardian has the resources, time, ability, or the desire to drive their student to a public library. Digital resources are not the answer, as students may not have access to the internet or a device at home. Digital resources may also cost money a student and their family does not have. A school library immediately solves many American citizens' access issues.

Yet another common refrain is, "Kids don't read for pleasure anymore anyway." Kids who have access to books they want to read, read. If your library is a dusty room full of books published in 1965, no, they will not read those. A good school librarian will build a reading culture, select appropriate books, and encourage reading. A school librarian can turn a resolute non-reader into a voracious reader by suggesting a magical book that converts them. It's a miracle that happens regularly in school libraries, but it requires a staff member who has the time to build a connection, a collection to pull from, and the skill to do reader advisory. Kids who read for pleasure build reading skills that allow them to become better readers, which benefits them academically. Administrators are short-sighted to close the one place where reading is fun instead of a requirement.

I regularly make these arguments as a School Library Membership Coordinator at Illinois Heartland Library System. One of my ongoing goals is to convince schools without libraries that they need to open a library. But districts with a functioning library, with a librarian or library staff in place, deciding to close their libraries? I will never understand that. You may save money temporarily but must compensate for the impact of the library being gone. Your reading scores will decrease, and you'll have to hire a specialist or pay for new programs that address those losses. You'll have to find someone to teach media literacy, now state law. Your students will struggle in college because they've never learned to use databases or reference materials. And worst of all, many students will never learn to love reading.

Recently, I have had the pleasure of helping schools establish libraries. Three small, rural school districts said they have realized the importance of libraries and librarians. These rural districts have committed to the requirements of the Illinois State Library, which include a dedicated library space, a dedicated staff member for at least 15 hours per week, and ongoing financial support for the library. The administrators of these schools are choosing to provide their students with the opportunity to improve their media literacy, love of reading, and research skills. I always argue that opening a library in your school doesn't take a huge expenditure outlay. Schools can apply for grant funding to get started, and if you are a member of Illinois library systems, you can get free training on grant applications. If you are a parent of a school-age child, ask your administration if your school has a library. If the school doesn't have a library, ask them why not. Parents need to advocate for school libraries as much as they advocate for the football team and extracurricular activities. If you teach a subject that would benefit from having a library and access to research materials (English, History, Civics, Electives, I'm looking at you), tell your school administration how much that would help your students. If you are a student and don't have a library, ask your administrators to start one.

I am also fighting against the closure of school libraries. A high school near my office recently informed us that it intended to close its library. After much back and forth with them, they have agreed to keep it open, saying that one person 15 hours per week is little to spend for a functioning library. This kind of win is rare—a school district in the northern area of our territory decided to close its high school library and keep only the elementary library open. I am saddened for those high school students who will no longer have access to research materials. I work with many community colleges who say that most of their students arrive with no preparation to do college-level research. This skill will only become more rare as high schools close their libraries and fail their students in preparing them for college success.

If you are a taxpayer in a school district and value libraries, please reach out to your school district administration and let them know how critical it is to keep libraries open. Write to the Illinois State Board of Education and ask them to require school librarians in every school. Take your children to the public library if you're able. Let them become educated, civic-minded users of libraries, so they can advocate for libraries when they reach the voting age. If you are a student with a library, tell your administrators how important it is to you!

Public libraries can also support schools through partnerships. The Metro East area has several public libraries that support school libraries. We run the gamut, from a public librarian going into the schools to provide library services, to a public library that partners with the schools to have textbooks in their public library and enroll kids in summer reading at the schools, to agreements that students can use their school identification at public libraries. These are complicated arrangements and require intra-governmental agreements. I caution libraries to follow Illinois laws to ensure libraries stay open and eligible for system membership and state grants. Partnerships are not simply a case of outsourcing your library service to a public library but a genuine, committed, interactive relationship where both parties have responsibilities and receive benefits.

Join me in fighting for school libraries. When I contact school administrators and hear these same tired arguments, it is evident that no one else is telling them how important a school library is to a school community. Please don't lose your school library because your administrator thinks no one cares. **ILA**

SOURCES

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Begun in 1981 as an Illinois-only partnership among youth services librarians in the state, iREAD® has grown to include formal or partial statewide adoptions well beyond our borders, including Alaska, California, Connecticut, Iowa, Maine, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Oregon, Rhode Island, and Washington. In 2023, libraries decorated their spaces; including creating murals, bulletin boards, and displays; had innovative programs like "Find Your Pirate Voice" or "Find Your Animal Voice" and encouraged patrons to be a part of our world with Little Mermaid themed "Find Your Voice" programs. Libraries hosted talent shows where patrons could share their creative voices and expressed themselves through painting and creation of all kinds. The possibilities were endless and there were seemingly endless ways that libraries found ways to help their patrons share their unique voices. We are so happy to share some of those unique experiences here. Visit your library and find your voice!

We thank Donna Block of the Bensenville Community Public Library, 2023 iREAD® chair, and her committee for their hard work to develop and implement this year's theme. **ILA**



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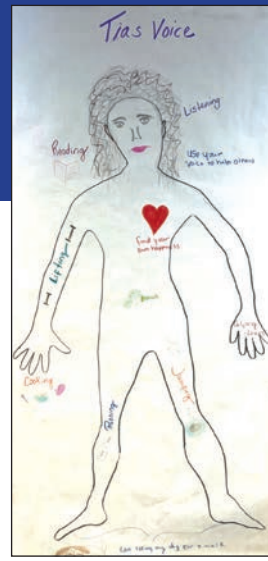
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Shawneetown Public Library, Illinois



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Tri-Valley Community Library, Alaska



Turner Free Library, Massachusetts



Ericson Public Library, Iowa



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ILA Welcomes New Members

On behalf of the ILA community, Executive Board, and staff we would like to welcome our recent new members. We hope as a member of ILA you contribute, grow, and thrive within the library profession and the ILA community; and support ILA's continuing efforts to create and promote the highest quality library services for all people in Illinois.

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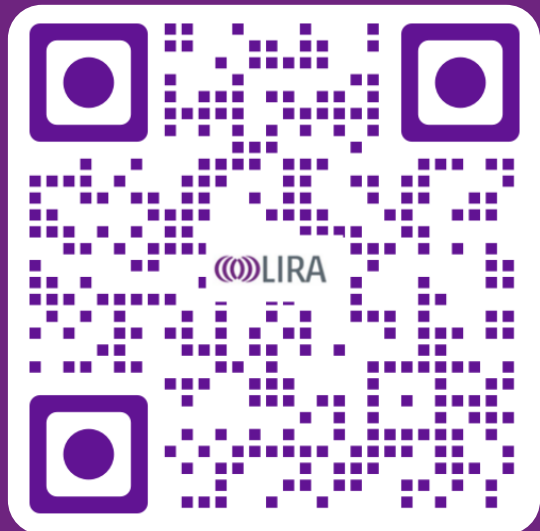


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