



Let's Talk:

A Conversation Starter for Future Ready Librarians® Building Collaborative Relationships

CONVERSATION STARTER

This step-by-step guide is designed to help librarians start and sustain strategic conversations with school and district leaders.

Future Ready Librarians® lead beyond the library, collaborating not only with teacher colleagues but also with building and district leaders to prepare future ready learners. Creating exciting and dynamic opportunities for future ready learners requires shared leadership among school leaders, including librarians, instructional coaches, principals, IT leaders, and district administration.

Whether you are just getting started or trying to take the next step in your strategic collaborations, this step-by-step guide provides simple processes and curated resources that can help you examine your current situation, inspire creative thinking, build new partnerships, and then collectively develop a collaborative plan for your students and teachers.

Let's Get Started



Reflect

Make a copy of our [Reflection Guide](#) to use throughout this experience to collect your responses to questions and great ideas.

The Current Conversation: *Librarians as Leaders During the Pandemic*

The sudden closure of schools and the transition to digital and remote learning have turned education upside down. While this guide was designed before the pandemic, the opportunity for librarians to strategically partner and collaborate with building and district leaders has never been more critical. Recognizing that new challenges, questions, and opportunities have emerged for librarians to lead, teach, and support schools, we have updated the resource and include these Current Conversation sidebars to help you find success in starting (or sustaining) conversations with building and district leaders.

Essential Questions and Conversations

Step 1



What's My Mindset?

Step 2



Where Is My Future Readiness?

Step 3



What More Do I Need to Know?

Step 4



What Are the Missing Pieces?

Step 5



Where Do the Dots Connect?

Step 6



What Can We Do Together?

Step 7



What Did I Learn?



STEP 1: WHAT'S MY MINDSET?

We've all heard about a "growth mindset." But what does that mean? And how growth-y are you? Let's start by looking in the mirror. That will help us be more successful when we work with others. Don't worry—you look great!

Key Competencies

1. Examine your own professional mindset and dispositions.
2. Identify areas of strength and growth related to effective collaboration.

Process Checklist

- Seek out and review** one or more articles or diagrams that explain a *growth* versus *fixed mindset* as first conceived by Carol Dweck. As you're reviewing these resources, in what ways do they describe your own professional (and personal) mindset?



Reflect

1. What are some ways in which you see yourself as having a fixed mindset?
2. What are some ways in which you see yourself as having a growth mindset?

Resources



[Growth Mindset vs. Fixed Mindset](#) (video)



[Fixed vs. Growth: The Two Basic Mindsets That Shape Our Lives](#) (article)



[What Having a "Growth Mindset" Actually Means](#) (article)



[Growth Mindset Infographics](#) (images)

- Diagram** your *fixed* and *growth* attributes. With *fixed* on one end and *growth* on the other, note key phrases based on your answers from your reflection above and place them on the continuum.



As an example, let's say you struggle with feedback from others. You could put "feedback from others" on the side closer to *fixed*. Perhaps you love to try new things. Then you might put "try new things" on the line closer to *growth*. Be honest with yourself and try to identify at least two or three things that are on the *fixed* side of your spectrum. This is all about growth, right? (Pun intended.) While this exercise is for your eyes only, it will be an important resource that you will be using again.

Next, think about any other habits or behaviors that might affect your collaborations with others. If they fit on the spectrum, put them there. If they don't, include them at the bottom of your document.

- **Example:** "I get excited by ideas and start to interrupt others" or "I sometimes struggle to presume good intentions by administrators."

- Highlight** or note the items that fall on the *fixed* side of your spectrum or that you included at the bottom.



Reflect

1. In what situations do you most often exhibit those fixed behaviors?
 - Using the example above: perhaps you struggle with feedback from others when you are in front of a group or with people you don't know.
2. In what ways does this influence or impact your interactions and collaboration with others?
 - If you struggle with feedback, you might say: "I tend to stay quiet in new groups because I'm afraid of criticism for what I say."

How could this be managed or mitigated when you're working with others?

- We're not asking you to change who you are, but if you understand your own mindset, you will likely be more successful in working with others.



Don't forget to save all your reflections—you will be using them again.

The Current Conversation:

Growth Mindset Is More Important Than Ever

It has never been more important for educators to have a growth mindset. Given the stress and uncertainty that many educators are currently facing, our social, emotional, and psychological outlook and health are not normal. It can be difficult to be positive in the face of uncertainty and concern for our students, peers, and communities. In more normal times, it is likely that educators could muster more self-motivation, optimism, and ability to imagine a better future for our students and schools. Nevertheless, educators with a growth mindset have the ability to see opportunity and a productive challenge despite the circumstances around them.



Think Out Loud

- How might you have responded to these prompts before the pandemic?
- Have your responses changed since the pandemic has changed school operations? How?
- In what ways do you think others around you have changed in their outlook or mindset?
- How might this affect their ability or willingness to collaborate?



STEP 2: WHERE IS MY FUTURE READINESS?

What is your Future Ready Librarians® superpower? What's your kryptonite? Assess your professional strengths and areas for growth to help inform where you might start your collaborations with colleagues and leaders.

Key Competencies

1. Self-assess library and professional practices in relation to the Future Ready Librarians® Framework.
2. Identify areas of current strengths, interests, and future growth.

Process Checklist

- Complete** the online Future Ready Librarians® Self-Assessment. This short survey allows you to measure your practice against the Future Ready Librarians® Framework.
- Review** your results and respond to the following questions.



Reflect

Current strengths

1. What are your current **strengths** in relation to the framework? In these areas of strength, what are some **examples** of things you are doing with students, colleagues, or others?

Strength: Empowering students as creators

Example: You recently launched an after-school robotics club for students.

2. How are these areas of strength **aligned** with current classroom, school, or district priorities?

Strength: Empowering students as creators

Alignment: You are participating in a district team focused on promoting computational thinking and computer science.

3. What, if anything, are you doing to **promote** or **share** these areas of strength beyond the library? (Examples: social media, newsletters, events, etc.)

Strength: Empowering students as creators

Example: You just completed and earned the Future Ready Librarians® Micro-Credential on Empowering Students as Creators.

Future growth

1. Are there areas that might be **future “stretches”** in which you are interested in learning more or engaging in professional development?
2. Why are these areas of interest?

Area for growth: Curating digital resources

Reason for interest: Wanting to provide more credible online resources as part of a schoolwide focus on media literacy.



Save or bookmark your results from the survey and your responses to these questions. You'll be using them later.

The Current Conversation:

Identify and Focus Your Assets and Interests

The Future Ready Librarians® Framework remains a clear and focused way to think about your professional practice. Despite the closures of schools and the transition to remote learning, the wedges help provide clarity to focus your practice around areas of shared strategic need in schools and districts. The new Future Ready Librarians® Self-Assessment provides you with a quick snapshot of your current strengths, interests, and areas for growth. After you take the self-assessment and respond to the questions, consider these additional questions.



Think Out Loud

- With schools closed and potentially operating in new ways in the future, how could your areas of strength and interest support the needs of students and teachers in different ways?
- Considering the changes to school and instruction, what are specific areas for professional growth or “stretches” where you could invest your time to better meet the needs of students and colleagues?



STEP 3: WHAT MORE DO I NEED TO KNOW?

Where is your district going next? What does your principal dream about? What do kids in your school need right now? Put on your library research hat and engage in some due diligence to better understand your system and school goals.

Key Competencies

1. Research strategic school and/or district priorities and plans.
2. Review and seek to understand identified areas of focus for your system and school.

Process Checklist

- Locate** or request the following resources.

System or district level

- Current district strategic plan
- Other strategic plans
 1. Capital improvement (new construction or remodels)
 2. Technology levies or bonds
 3. Major curriculum initiatives

Building level

- School improvement or growth plan
- Other building-level plans
 1. Professional learning initiatives
 2. New technology or improvements



Tip

Make sure that the resources are current. (Old plans are just reminders of what didn't get done last year.) In most cases, the district resources can be found on your district website. If you can't find them, reach out to your district communications or public relations team. Building-level resources may not be posted online. You may have to ask your building secretary or principal for them.

- Review** these resources and answer the following questions on your Reflection Guide.



Reflect

1. What stands out as you review these documents? What, if any, are correlations to the wedges or gears of the Future Ready Framework?
2. What are the main areas of focus for your district or system?
3. What are the main areas of focus for your school?
4. Are these the same or different?
5. What are some questions or areas needing clarification?
6. Are there any obvious connections with your library or professional goals or interests?

- Map** your responses using a simple three-circle Venn diagram that includes circles for *district*, *school*, and *library*. Identify items that are unique to each area as well as those that overlap one or more circles.



Don't forget to save all reflections—you will be using them again.

The Current Conversation:

The Conversation May Have Changed

This is one area of this resource where the questions and answers may have radically changed since the pandemic. While districts and schools continue to have strategic goals and plans, they may have evolved, been deferred, or even been redefined to meet new challenges that didn't exist before. Despite this, it's important to understand the core aspirations and objectives of your school and district. Issues of equity, digital access, innovative instruction, and achievement of student learning standards remain critical to the mission even as schools have closed and students learn from home. While the focus of school and district leaders may seem reactive now, the need to be proactive and innovative to meet student achievement and well-being goals has not gone away. The future may have changed, but the need to be future ready is still there.



Think Out Loud

- As you look at the main areas of focus for your school and district as they existed before the pandemic, what are some of the challenges that you see as educators seek to implement these goals?
- What changes have occurred that create new opportunities for more collaboration?
- From your perspective, what are some of the outstanding challenges faced by classroom educators that didn't exist before the pandemic?
- From your perspective, what will educators need to be successful in the future?



STEP 4: WHAT ARE THE MISSING PIECES?

Offer before you ask. Listen before forming an answer. Now that you've done your research, meet with a building leader to hear what they have to say and answer any questions they might have. Your goal is to understand the problems and opportunities at this point—you'll work on solutions later.

Key Competencies

1. Clarify strategic school and/or district priorities.
2. Interview the building leader to better understand school and district work.



Sample email

Dear [building leader],

How can I help? As a teacher and librarian, I can lead, teach, and support efforts to help students and teachers be successful in these uncertain times. I've done some preliminary work to identify potential areas to support teachers and students. I'd like to schedule a meeting with you to better understand the challenges and opportunities and find ways in which we could work together.

Process Checklist

- Identify** key questions of clarification that you identified when you reviewed the district and building strategic plans and documents. You may have a lot of them, but focus on two or three that will best help you understand how your library program might support district or school priorities.
- Schedule** a meeting (45 to 60 minutes) with a building leader who can respond to the following questions.



1. What are the most immediate needs and challenges for students and teachers?
2. As you think about the future, what are some specific needs that students will have to be successful?
3. What do teachers and staff need to be able to support students effectively?
4. At this point, what are some areas in which you need assistance or support?

- Share** these questions with your building leader before your meeting so they will have time to look them over.
- Review** the mindset document that you created in Step 1.



1. What personal habits or behaviors might affect your conversation with your building leader?
2. How will you manage them?

- ☐ **Meet** with your building leader.

Sample Meeting Protocol



Tip

Keep in mind the following norms:

- Presume positive intentions on their part.
- Listen thoroughly without interjecting or interrupting.
- Ask clarifying questions based on what you hear.

Start out by briefly sharing your goal of increasing library collaboration with colleagues to support student learning, and briefly describe some examples of what you've already done. You can refer to your reflections from Step 2.

Begin a conversation by asking the questions you shared in advance. (Examples are listed above.) If you have questions based on your research of district and school goals, ask them as well.

All you need to do now is listen carefully and take notes, like a reporter doing research for an article. Your goal for this first meeting is simply to listen and learn. Based on your research and this conversation, you will schedule a future conversation that is more specific to the library and your work.

Finish the meeting by thanking your building leader for their time; sharing that you will be using this information to inform professional and program planning for your library; requesting that you schedule another meeting after you have had an opportunity to process and can bring some ideas to share; and asking if additional persons should be invited to the next meeting.

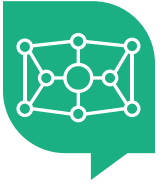
You may choose to take notes using a shared document. This helps ensure that key ideas are recorded and allows for both the librarian and leader to add additional information or comments.

The Current Conversation:

Now Is the Time for Collaborative Leadership

There has never been a better time to reach out to find ways to work with your school and district leaders to support students and teachers. That bears repeating: There has never been a better time to reach out to find ways to work with your school and district leaders to support students and teachers.

Before the pandemic, this conversation would have been quite different than it will be now. First, you'll probably be meeting on Zoom or a call, not in their office. Second, the challenges facing school or district leaders are different. Third, there is new urgency and immediacy to these challenges. Fourth, the people in charge may not have the answers in the same ways they used to. Finally, your willingness and ability to help will likely be treated differently than it was before.



STEP 5: WHERE DO THE DOTS CONNECT?

Where is there alignment between great work in the library and great work in the classroom? How can your library goals better support student learning outcomes in your school? Now that you have a better understanding of yourself, your systems, and your building leader, you will identify some areas of potential collaboration.

Key Competencies

1. Analyze inputs to identify common interests and priorities for collaboration.
2. Identify one or two areas of possible collaboration for further review.

Process Checklist

- Review** your notes from your conversation with your building leader. Consider the following questions.



1. What is your building leader most hopeful about?
2. What are they most concerned about?
3. What are the most immediate needs?
4. What are the needs for the near future?

- Review** your results of the Future Ready Librarians® Self-Assessment. Consider the following questions.



1. Do any of your current strengths or areas of interest align with district or school priorities?
2. If so, what are the specific wedges of the framework?
3. If not, list your areas of strength and the wedges they correspond with.



Map possible connections for collaboration. On a sheet of paper, draw a circle. Write two or three school and/or district priorities on sticky notes, based on your research and interview. Write your current library strengths and interests from the Future Ready Librarian® Framework on sticky notes. If you think they align with the school and district priorities, place them next to these notes. If you're unsure or they don't clearly align, place them on the margins of the document.

- Schedule** another 45- to 60-minute meeting with the building leader you interviewed earlier. Tell them you'd like to share some initial thinking about how to lead, teach, or support school or district efforts to meet the needs of students and teachers.

The Current Conversation:

Ask not what your district can do for you . . . ask what you can do for your district.

All educators need to accept the possibility that some great ideas from 2019 may not translate or resonate in 2020. Innovation and creativity are not without value, but they may need to be directed to solving new problems. While it is always important to offer help before asking for it, it is also critically vital to meet colleagues where they are, not where you wish they were. Given the current challenges that schools face in meeting student needs, your building and district leaders may need you to lead, teach, and support outside of your areas of comfort or expertise.



STEP 6: WHAT CAN WE DO TOGETHER?

How can great minds think alike? In what ways could you work more closely with your colleagues and school leaders to support future ready learners? You may not have all the answers yet, but your goal is to identify an area that you can begin exploring together.

Key Competencies

1. Explore and discuss areas of possible collaboration with your building leader.
2. Review and annotate collaboration map.
3. Find consensus on one area for collaboration to support student learning and success.

Process Checklist

- Review** the responses from your building leader and your analysis of them from Step 5. What additional questions or clarifications are needed?
- Identify** two or three areas of possible collaboration to explore with your building leader based on the collaboration map you drafted in Step 5. You should have at least two options for consideration.
- Answer** the following questions before the meeting.



Reflect

In what ways do these options support student learning and success in school?

Which students are we focused on? All? Some? Specific groups?

Who are other partners or collaborators to consider?

Why is this important?

- Meet** with your building leader to share your collaboration map and discuss your initial thinking. You are not presenting a finished plan—instead, you are bringing some ideas to explore together.



Tip

Meeting Outline

Begin by briefly updating what you've done since the last meeting.

1. Review notes from the first conversation.
2. Reflect on areas of your own professional strength and interest.
3. Map possible areas of collaboration and partnership.

Since you may not be able to do this in the same physical space, create a shared document where you can complete the following tasks.

- Share** your draft collaboration map from the previous steps. Review and discuss the two or three potential areas that you identified, with the objective of adapting or identifying *one specific area* in which library goals and work can be aligned with school and/or district priorities.



Craft a short draft title and brief description for each area.

- Title example: “Distance Computational Thinking Club”
- Description example: “At-home enhancement program for students to learn computational thinking to support math success.”

Put all the notes and ideas for your favorite/best topic in the center of the collaboration map circle and move other sticky notes onto the table as a “parking lot.” You will now focus on just the one idea on which you found consensus.

Draw lines from the center circle to create four quadrants on your draft sheet. In each corner, write the following and then collectively identify the answers:

- **Who:** Who will move this idea forward? Are there other colleagues or partners who need to be part of future discussions and planning?
- **When:** When will the next meeting take place? What timeline do you have to work on this project?
- **What:** What additional information or resources will be needed for us to get started with the planning process?
- **Where:** Where will the meetings take place? Where will the work occur?

Identify who will initiate the next steps to begin planning for implementation

The Current Conversation:

Find Ways to Get Onto the Same Page

This step was initially designed for a face-to-face meeting with intentional interactive tasks at a table. Since face-to-face meetings may not be possible, use collaborative documents so that both you and your building leader can be working on the same document. The goal of this step remains the same: finding consensus and initial ideas for a collaborative project or activity. Brainstorming is about generating ideas, not judging, eliminating, or questioning suggestions. Some of these ideas may not find their way beyond these initial steps, but the goal is to start the process.



STEP 7: WHAT DID I LEARN?

Now that you have the conversation started, it's up to you to work with your colleagues and building leaders to move the partnership forward. Hopefully, this toolkit helped you with necessary first steps. But before you move on, take time to reflect on the process itself. What did you learn about yourself? What did you learn about your school leaders? Your system? It's easy to skip this step, but if you want to keep the conversation going, you have to build a culture of trust and understanding to sustain your work.

Key Competencies

1. Reflect on learning and process.
2. Identify areas of success and growth for future collaboration and partnership.

Process Checklist

Reflect and answer the following questions based on your work using this toolkit.



Reflect

1. What stands out as a new insight in any one of these areas? Choose one or more. Some examples are included below.

Mindset

- I didn't realize my fear of failure was a barrier to engaging with my principal.

Future Ready Librarians practices

- My strength and interest in personalized professional learning aligns well with the new technology focus of our school.
- District, system, or school priorities and plans
- I'm surprised at the focus on equity and inclusion by my district.

Building leader

- They are very logical and focused on measuring success.
Through this process, what is one thing that you did differently than you've done in the past?
2. Through this process, what is one thing that you did differently than you've done in the past?
 - a. What did you notice about yourself in meeting and working with your building leader?
 - b. What did you do well?
 3. What could you do better next time?
 4. What will you need to do to ensure the success of your project as it progresses?

The Current Conversation:

Don't Stop Observing, Empathizing, and Reflecting

The exceptionality of the current situation is an opportunity to be reflective of our own practices, beliefs, and assumptions. While you acknowledge that the stress and uncertainty may cause you or others around you to act in different ways than before the pandemic, it is also important to be observant without judgment or prejudice. Take the time to be thoughtful about what you are doing, what you are learning, and what you are wondering about. These insights can help inform how you plan for your own professional future and ensure that you are part of the important work of restoring and/or reimagining school for your students, teachers, and community.