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# Expanding the Educational Network for Students with Autism: Partnering with School Librarians

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*School librarians play an important role in our public schools by supporting students through both formal and informal learning opportunities. All students have access to library services, including those who receive additional support through special education. Students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), in particular, may benefit from both the library environment and the knowledge and training specific to school librarians. Yet, school librarians frequently are not included as part of these students' educational teams. This study utilized a survey to discover the extent to which school librarians report providing services and supports to students with ASD, as well as the barriers they experience in working with this group of students. Results of the survey revealed school librarians may have the desire to support students with ASD but experience many obstacles in implementing the services they are uniquely qualified to provide.*

## Introduction

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a disability characterized by impairments in social communication and the presence of restricted and repetitive behaviors (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). The prevalence of ASD has grown and it is now the fastest growing developmental disability, with worldwide estimated prevalence rates of at least 1 in 160 (World Health Organization, 2019) and an even greater prevalence rate of 1 in 54 children in the United States (Maenner et al., 2020). In schools, the prevalence of ASD has more than doubled over the past decade and in 2018, the number of students found eligible as a student with autism between the ages of 3-21 years was 699,541 (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2018a; NCES, 2018b). While the definitions for eligibility vary by state, students who are found eligible for special education under the category of autism display unique characteristics that vary widely from their typical peers (Hendricks, 2011). Students with ASD demonstrate deficits in the areas of communication and social skills with potential additional challenges in areas such as academics, behavior, or adaptive skills (Ennis-Cole & Smith, 2011; National Autism Center, 2015; Steinbrenner et al., 2020). Additionally, approximately 33% of children with ASD have been reported to also experience cognitive impairments (Maenner et al., 2020). Steinbrenner et al. (2020) aptly stated "the increased prevalence of autism has intensified the demand for effective educational and therapeutic services..." (p. 7).

Professionals working with students with ASD in school settings are bound by the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act*, (IDEA) to provide appropriate educational services and supports that are uniquely calculated to meet the individual needs of the student

with a disability, including those with ASD (IDEA, 2004; Small & Snyder, 2009). However, to effectively serve students with ASD, education professionals “must possess autism-specific knowledge and demonstrate methods that fit into best practice” (Hendricks, 2011, p. 39). Additionally, more students with ASD are being served within inclusive, general education settings throughout the school environment, leaving many educators at a disadvantage (Marder & deBettencourt, 2015). Providing appropriate education, as required by IDEA (2004), to students with ASD can be complex and this is impacted by the range of professionals who work with these students (Hendricks, 2011) including school librarians.

## Review of Literature

Given the potential challenges experienced by many students with ASD, it is important for these students to have a network of support. This can involve teachers, instructional assistants, speech therapists, occupational therapists, and a myriad of other professionals. School librarians will also likely support and educate students with ASD in the school environment. This means they are also legally bound to provide appropriate services and supports (IDEA, 2004). Unfortunately, Small and Snyder (2009) reported an overall lack of library services to students with disabilities in a sample of 47 schools throughout New York, though this study did not report on individuals with ASD, specifically. Yet, Arnone (2010) indicated seeing students achieve and becoming lifelong learners is important to school librarians. There is good reason to believe that school librarians can be leveraged to integrate their unique knowledge and skills which may promote even greater social and academic success for students with ASD.

Libraries are a space within the school environment that encompasses many important resources and educational opportunities for students with ASD, not only while they are in school, but as they become adults. Libraries provide information literacy instruction and materials and space for creating new knowledge. They also provide opportunities for participating in leisure activities, access to technology and support to build technology skills, space designated for quiet activities, activities to support social learning, and volunteer and internship opportunities to build potential employment skills (Bress, 2013; Markey & Miller, 2015; Okyle, 2015). It is the school librarian who facilitates these types of interactions positioning them to support students with ASD. Librarians can also utilize their unique skills in information literacy to support curiosity and harness the interests of students with ASD. Many students with ASD have unique and intense interests and Arnone (2011) suggests interest can impact not only attention but the level of learning which could further enhance instruction for students with ASD. Additionally, school librarians frequently support students across the school environment and multiple grade levels which means they can get to know their students over time and potentially provide added consistency.

School librarians are uniquely situated to support students with ASD and the individualized education program (IEP) teams who support them. An IEP is developed to address the diverse needs of students by the professionals who work with them. The IEP addresses multiple areas including goals, accommodations, and services, among others. School librarians can provide accommodations and support to students with more individualized needs, such as those with ASD (Subramaniam et al., 2013). Specifically, school librarians can assist the

IEP team with supporting students' goals (Albanese, 2008) by increasing learning opportunities as well as supporting efforts of generalization. Additionally, these professionals could potentially be utilized for their skills to provide leadership, consultation, and collaboration to these teams in the area of assistive technology (Ennis-Cole & Smith, 2011; Small & Snyder, 2009). Some school librarians provide specialized programming for students with ASD, such as with sensory storytimes and adapted collections, as well as through building a culture of empathy and inclusion among peers (Baucum, 2019).

Yet not all librarians are adequately trained to meet the needs of individuals with ASD (Anderson & Everhart, 2015; D'Orazio, 2007; Layden et al., 2021; Small & Snyder, 2009). In a recent study of graduate programs designed to prepare librarians, including school librarians, only four of 90 reviewed programs included any coursework on individuals with disabilities and of those four programs, very little information about students with ASD was included, if at all (Layden et al., 2021). This finding is similar to that of Small and Snyder (2009) who indicated only 3% of their sample reported having any special education training. Additionally, once in their profession, autism is reported to be the most prevalent disability librarians are asked to accommodate (Adkins & Bushman, 2015). While Adkins and Bushman (2015) reported results from librarians and not just school librarians, we were unable to find comparable information specific to school librarians.

As members of the school community, students with ASD should be able to benefit from the services and supports available in the school library. It also is important to remember the services provided to those with ASD will likely also benefit others (Bress, 2013). Despite the proposed benefits of engaging the school librarian as a professional supporting the needs of students with ASD, there is a paucity of research regarding how school librarians provide services and supports for students with ASD in public school settings.

## **Methodology**

### ***Research questions***

- To what extent are school librarians included in the individualized education program (IEP) process for students with ASD receiving special education services?
- What specialized programming do school librarians report providing for students with ASD?
- What consultative supports or services do school librarians provide for educators working with students with ASD?
- In what areas do school librarians provide support and services for students with ASD?
- What barriers do school librarians perceive in working with students with ASD?

The current study utilized survey methodology in order to address the research questions. The survey was developed using Qualtrics, an online survey software. The study analyzed 12 quantitative and qualitative questions (Table 1) focused specifically on school librarians and their self-reports of services and supports for students with ASD.

## Participants

As no central repository of school librarians employed in school settings was available, we operationalized our sample so that we included adults who were currently employed as a school librarian in the United States (Rea & Parker, 2014). All participant responses were anonymous. Participants could discontinue the survey at any time and could skip any question they did not wish to answer. The university's internal review board (IRB) approved this study. Participants were given information about the survey before beginning in order for them to determine whether they wanted to participate.

**Sampling and Recruitment.** In order to obtain participants, we utilized a nonprobability sample, specifically a version of a snowball sampling procedure where participants were identified and then asked to share the survey with colleagues who also met the criteria (Rea & Parker, 2014). Distribution included groups specifically for school librarians such as the Facebook group "The School Librarians' Workshop" with 11.9k members, the LISTSERV "School Library Media & Network Communications" with 12k subscribers, as well as through emails sent to the heads of all American Association of School Librarian (AASL) state chapters, asking for distribution to their memberships. The survey was also shared with the broader librarian community in which school librarians participate, including the Reddit forum "Librarians" with 34k members, the Facebook group "ALA Think Tank" with 42k members, the American Library Association (ALA) "Middle Grade" LISTSERV, the Facebook group "Storytime Underground" with 15k members, and through the second author's personal Twitter account, which was then retweeted by at least one autistic self-advocate who is also a school librarian.

**Table 1**  
**Survey Questions**

Number	Question
1	Do you provide special programming for students with ASD in the school library?
2	If so, what does that programming look like?
3	Do you receive a copy of IEPs for students you serve at the beginning of the year?
4	Do you receive an updated copy of IEPs for students you serve throughout the year?
5	Are you invited to IEP meetings?
6	Have you ever provided consultation to teachers or other professionals to support students with ASD?
7	Have you ever been consulted to provide supports or suggestions regarding assistive technology to assist a student with ASD?
8	If yes, how many times have you done this?
9	How frequently do you collaborate with someone from the district for assistive technology support for any student?
10	As a school librarian, you likely provide support to all of the students you see in many areas. This question is specific to the students with whom you work who have ASD. Please rank the following areas you provide support for students with ASD in the library setting.*

11 Do you feel barriers exist to providing appropriate services and supports to students with ASD in the library?

12 If yes, what barriers to you believe exist?

Note. \* indicates which questions were ranked by participants

## Findings

### **Respondents**

121 school librarians participated in the survey. Of these, 56.4% reported primarily serving elementary school students, grades K-5 (typically ages 5 through 11 years), 18.0% reported their primary students served were middle school students (grades 6-8; typically ages 11-13 years), and 25.6% indicated they worked primarily with high school students in grades 9-12 (typically ages 13-18 years). No participants reported primarily working with pre-school students, or those under the age of 5 years. The majority of participants (63.9%) indicated their highest earned degree was a master's of library and information science (MLIS). Other participants (10.1%) indicated they master's degrees in education such as a M.Ed., MS.Ed., or MAT. Participants also indicated a bachelor's degree (7.6%), a specialist degree such as an Ed.S. (12.6%), or a doctoral degree (10.9%), which was the highest earned degree. Specific data on gender, race, or socioeconomic status were not recorded.

Participants reported experience as a school librarian ranging from less than one year to 15 years or more, with 63% indicating seven years of experience or more. Most (67.2%) reported having seven years of experience or more working with students with ASD (Range 0 to >15 years). Participants were asked about their years of experience but their specific age was not recorded. Additionally, participants were asked how many students with ASD they have worked with during their career as a school librarian. The number of students with ASD varied across participants, but 70.6% reported working with more than 10 students with ASD during their career and 3.4% reported having never worked with a student with ASD. Participants also represented 33 states throughout the United States.

### **Survey Results**

School librarians were asked about their level of involvement and knowledge of a student's IEP. At the beginning of a school year, teachers who support students with ASD or other disabilities should review a student's IEP to ensure they meet the accommodations and services as well as other components of the IEP. The survey asked school librarians whether they reviewed a copy of a student's IEP at the beginning of the school year. 47% of respondents stated they always or almost always receive a copy of a student's IEP at the beginning of the school year. The remaining 53% shared that they sometimes (17.4%), rarely (9.1%), or never (26.4%) receive a copy of a student's IEP at the beginning of the year.

It isn't unusual for changes to be made to a student's IEP during the school year. When that occurs, it is important for all team members who support and serve students with an IEP receive and review any updates. For that reason, the survey asked school librarians if they

received an updated copy of the IEP during the school year. The number of librarians reporting always or almost always receiving a copy of the updated IEP fell to 31.4% with the remaining respondents reporting sometimes (20.1%), rarely (14.9%) or never (33.1%) receiving an updated copy. Participants were also asked if they were ever invited to IEP meetings for their students with ASD. Only 2.5% of participants reported always being invited and 4.1% of participants reported almost always being invited. The greatest number of participants, 57.9%, reported never being invited to the IEP meetings. The remaining participants reported rarely being invited (19.8%) or sometimes being invited (15.7%).

Of 121 responses, only 21.5% of respondents reported providing specialized programming for students with ASD. Of those that responded “yes” to providing specialized programming, when asked what that specialized programming looked like, most of the respondents (70% of comments) reported specialized programming consisted of a paraprofessional or special education teacher who came into the library with the student with ASD, The lessons were the same or similar to other students but students with ASD came in at a different time or only with their self-contained class, or that some modifications were made to lessons used with other students who did not require modifications. Some respondents reported conducting Makerspace or STEM activities, using social stories, or having storytime as their specialized programming for students with ASD, but answers were not more specific. Two respondents reported having students with ASD engage in housekeeping or cleaning type activities such as dusting, shelving books, and wiping tables.

One potential role for a school librarian is to provide consultation to teachers, particularly in the areas of assistive technology or digital literacy. The survey inquired if the school librarians had ever provided consultation to teachers or other school professionals to support students with ASD. 59.5% responded they had not provided consultation, 31.4% responding they had provided consultation, and the remaining 9.1% responding they were unsure.

Participants were asked specifically if they have ever been consulted to provide supports in the area of assistive technology. 34.7% had provided consultation regarding assistive technology, 61.2% responded they had never been consulted on assistive technology supports and services and the remaining 4.1% indicated they were unsure. When asked how many times they had been consulted for suggestions, most participants who had been consulted previously (51.2%) indicated they done so between four to six times total. Another 22.0% reported being consulted between one and three times; 9.8% reported being consulted between seven and nine times; and 17.1% indicated they had been consulted ten or more times. When asked how frequently they collaborated regarding assistive technology for any student, 30.5% reported never collaborating with district personnel for any student regarding assistive technology. Another 25.4% reported doing so at least once in their career but not even on a yearly basis. Only 4.2% reported doing so on a weekly basis; 8.5% reported collaborating with others in the school district on assistive technology at least monthly but not weekly and another 8.5% reported at least once per quarter (nine-week period) but not monthly. Finally, 11.0% indicated they collaborated for this purpose at least twice per school year but not quarterly and 11.9% shared they collaborated one time per year.

Participants were asked to rank order the areas in which they provide support or services to students with ASD. They were provided with 13 areas that included common areas for support

for students with ASD as well as common areas of support for school librarians: academics, adaptive skills, assistive technology, behavior, college readiness, communication, community access, information seeking, learning environment, leisure, sensory, social skills, and vocational skills. When data were analyzed by the rank given by participants for each area, the greatest number of participants, 23, indicated a rank of “1”, or the highest area of support provided, was tied between academics and information seeking. After those, the rank order for the highest areas of support was learning environment and behavior which both had 15 respondents indicating that was their highest area of support followed closely by social skills with 11. Next came communication, which was reported by five participants as their highest area of support with leisure skills, adaptive skills, and assistive technology following with four respondents each. Community access and vocational skills each had three respondents ranking that area as their number one area of support. Sensory had two participants indicating that was their highest area of support. Finally, no participants indicated college readiness was their highest area of support (Table 2).

**Table 2**  
**Participant Rankings of Top Areas of Support**

<b>Area of Support</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>
Information Seeking	23
Academics	23
Behavior	15
Learning Environment	15
Behavior	57
Social Skills	11
Communication	5
Adaptive Skills	4
Assistive Technology	4
Leisure	4
Community Access	3
Vocational Skills	3
College Readiness	0

*Note.* Numbers indicate how many participants ranked each area as a 1, or their top area of support.

Participants were asked if they felt barriers exist to providing appropriate services and supports to students with ASD in the library. Of the total respondents, 72.3% reported yes, they did believe barriers exist and 27.7% indicated they did not believe barriers exist. For those who responded affirmatively, they were asked to identify the barriers. The responses were reviewed by the researchers and coded into themes. After reviewing all comments, eight themes emerged which can be seen in Table 4 with example quotes that fell under each theme.

The barrier most frequently reported was lack of training or knowledge, with 31 comments specific to this challenge. Second was lack of money, resources, or time, with 24

comments related to these challenges. Issues regarding lack of funding for materials, lack of time for planning or collaboration, and lack of resources such as physical space or specialized equipment were mentioned here. Twelve comments related to lack of inclusion of library staff and/or lack of support for library staff from other educators and administrators. This included comments about not being part of communication with the special education department or administrators regarding students with ASD and their needs. Ten comments reported student-specific issues such as behavior challenges, sensory challenges, or communication challenges for the student. Nine comments were related to lack of personnel; specifically comments in this theme revolved around the librarian being one person but having large numbers of students at one time or not having support from paraprofessionals in the library. The sixth theme was related to lack of knowledge specific to the student with ASD and these six comments were specific to not having access to the IEP or not being told a student even had ASD. Five comments were related to finding books that are a good fit for students with ASD in terms of including characters that had ASD, reading levels, or interests that matched the narrow interests some of their students with ASD displayed. Finally, two comments mentioned they just did not know enough to even know how to respond to the question. Themes derived from the barriers reported with examples from the respondents can be seen in Table 3.

**Table 3**  
**Themes Derived from Reported Barriers**

	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Example Responses</b>
1	Lack of training or knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I was never trained how to run a library program for ASD</li> <li>• Professional librarians are not trained to offer disability supports. Often students are “dumped” in the library and the librarian is expected to be a caretaker</li> <li>• More than anything a true lack of training. I just feel unprepared in how to handle variations and the abilities of the students</li> </ul>
2	Lack of money, resources, or time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial barriers to buy materials</li> <li>• Lack of time; too much noise</li> <li>• Lack of time to collaborate</li> </ul>
3	Lack of inclusion and/or support of library staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I feel like I’m the only one who cares about neurodivergent students and the library.</li> <li>• The library is not. Included in decisions. I’m not involved</li> <li>• Special educators like to have autistic students under their control and in their own classrooms</li> </ul>
4	Student-specific challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students with disruptive behaviors cannot come in with a para/teacher</li> <li>• Sensory stimulation</li> <li>• Communication barriers</li> </ul>

- |   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| 5 | Lack of personnel                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sometimes aides are not sent with the class</li> <li>• Lack of support staff during library classes</li> </ul>                                    |
| 6 | Lack of knowledge specific to the student         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not enough info for librarians on who has special needs</li> <li>• Not being made aware of the student's IEPs</li> </ul>                          |
| 7 | Challenges with finding books that are a good fit | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not enough books with characters with autism</li> <li>• Their reading interest area is very narrow and I'm unable to provide materials</li> </ul> |
| 8 | Doesn't know enough to know                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I don't have enough information to know what barriers exist</li> <li>• I'm just not aware of what I can do</li> </ul>                             |

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*Note:* Examples are direct quotes taken from the survey. The quotes may have been changed slightly for punctuation or grammar for clarity.

## Discussion

This study adds to the very limited literature on this topic by providing information from school librarians regarding how services and supports are provided in the public school setting for students with ASD by these professionals. While the results provide information about school librarians in the United States, the information garnered from this study could have application to other countries. The results indicate that while school librarians may be interested in working with students with ASD, they report they lack the training, resources, and support they need to be effective. They also reported being excluded from the IEP process and, frequently not receiving a copy of the IEP, which was developed to support the student with ASD in their school setting.

When asked about providing specialized programming for students with ASD only 21.5% reported providing such programming. What is of particular interest is participants were not able to describe what specialized programming was when asked. Instead, most participants noted additional staffing or some modifications to the lesson plans were what they considered specialized programming. While it is not required, or even necessarily recommended, to provide separate programming for students with ASD, it is concerning that only a small handful of participants could even describe what specialized programming could look like. Additionally, despite federal regulations promoting inclusion (IDEA, 2004), participants did not describe taking inclusive measures for providing specialized programming with multiple comments describing students with ASD being brought into the library during a time separate from other students without disabilities. Further, while some participants mentioned this provision of segregated programming where students either attended the library without non-disabled peers or where the librarian went to the special education classroom rather than the students going to the library, it was unclear what was specialized about such programming they received.

Participants were also asked to rank their areas of support and service. It was not surprising the highest areas were information seeking, learning environment, and academics as these are primary functions of most school librarians. Social skills was ranked as the next highest area of support provided overall. This is encouraging because social skills is a core deficit area

for students with ASD (American Psychiatric Association, 2013) and students with ASD frequently need more support with social skills. The library is a great option for not only learning new social skills but perhaps, even more importantly, applying previously learned social skills in a different environment. However, it is unclear what training or knowledge school librarians have regarding teaching social skills which may relate to concerns with the finding discussed above regarding challenges with specialized programming. This also aligns with findings from Layden et al. (2021) reporting a lack of graduate coursework for librarians, including school librarians, in the area of ASD. The areas of college readiness and vocational skills were ranked lowest in the areas of support provided by school librarians, but this finding should be considered with some caution. It may be school librarians are not focusing on these areas, but this finding also may be related to the fact of having only about 25% of school librarians who responded to the survey reporting being in the high school setting where college readiness and vocational skills are likely more of a priority.

A notable finding is that less than 10% of participants reported being invited to attend IEP meetings, with less than 50% reporting reviewing the IEP at the beginning of the year and only 31.4% of participants reporting receiving an updated copy of a student's IEP when it was changed during the year. This finding is important because students with ASD typically have specific accommodations that are applicable across many school settings. If a school librarian isn't attending the IEP meeting, is not reviewing the IEP at the beginning of the year, and is not receiving the updated copy throughout the year when changes are made, it is highly unlikely that they know and are implementing the IEP goals and accommodations in the school library setting, particularly when they are providing instruction. This is further confirmed by some of the barriers reported by participants, such as not knowing a student has ASD or not knowing specifics about a student with ASD. These are major concerns as the student with ASD may not be getting the accommodations, supports, and services required by the IEP, which may reduce the likelihood of success for the student. Additionally, it leaves the school district vulnerable to potential litigation for not appropriately implementing the IEP.

School librarians have some very specific training and skills surrounding digital literacy, technology, and other skills that could be valuable to students with ASD (e.g., Ennis-Cole & Smith, 2011; Markey & Miller, 2015). However, only 31.4% of respondents reported providing consultation to teachers or other professionals in order to support students with ASD. This suggests that the skills of school librarians are being underutilized when it comes to students with ASD. When asked if they were ever consulted regarding assistive technology supports and services for students with ASD, 34.7% shared they had. This number was slightly higher than participants who reported they had provided consultation. One potential reason for this may be participants had provided suggestions for assistive technology, yet had not engaged in a formal consultation process. Regardless, the number is still relatively low considering school librarians may have specialized knowledge of technology, as suggested by Anderson and Everhart (2015) as well as Ennis-Cole and Smith (2011), that could be beneficial in supporting students with ASD with their school work, accessing resources and information, and consuming information, which are important life skills for all students. Unfortunately, the frequency of collaboration on assistive technology for any student was low with less than 15% of participants collaborating with other professionals in the school district on at least a monthly basis. The survey did not ask how many

students those collaboration efforts affected so it is not possible to ascertain if those who do engage in frequent collaboration with others in the area of assistive technology are focusing on a few students or the needs of multiple students.

### ***Limitations***

There are a few limitations that should be noted when considering the results of this study. The first limitation is the study was distributed widely, yet there were 121 responses. It should be noted this survey was distributed during the initial Covid-19 pandemic when schools were closed throughout the United States and school librarians largely transitioned to new and uncharted working environments. While it is impossible to be certain, this may have contributed to less response than expected. A second and related limitation is it is possible those who participated in the survey were more interested in the topic of autism, making them more likely to complete the survey. Thus, the responses should be considered with this in mind. Finally, one participant indicated she worked with students in all grades, K-12, though selecting this was not an option on the survey. It is possible that more school librarians who participated in the survey work with a broader range of age groups, and this was not captured in the survey results.

### ***Future Research***

While this study does begin to fill the gap of research in this area, there are a number of areas of future research to consider. First, gathering information by additional means such as focus groups or interviews would provide more depth to the topic. Examining special educators' or administrators' perspectives on including librarians in professional development opportunities, planning, and instruction could provide valuable information on increasing collaboration with school librarians. Additionally, this study was focused on school librarians in the United States, but future research should expand that scope to include other countries.

## **Conclusions**

Notwithstanding the limitations, it seems safe to draw certain conclusions. It seems clear school librarians are in need of more training in the area of ASD. As found by Small and Snyder (2009), a very small percentage of school librarians report receiving special education training and Layden et al. (2021) found graduate coursework in disabilities, specifically in ASD, is rarely required for school librarians. Supporting students with ASD requires specific skills and knowledge and school librarians would be better suited to work with this population if they received training and on-going professional development. Graduate programs should provide training before students enter into the profession and school leaders should include librarians in training related to ASD. However, it is likely it will be incumbent upon school librarians to seek out their own training in this area and in order to meet the needs of their students with ASD, they should do so. This is in line with the recommendations of the American Library Association/American Association of School Librarians/Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (ALA/AASL/CAEP)

School Librarian Professional Standards (2019) which includes standards on collaboration, ongoing professional learning and development, learning differences, and access to the library while overcoming physical, social, and intellectual barriers, among others. Additionally, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) School Library Guidelines (2015) emphasizes the importance of school librarians engaging in instruction and collaboration.

Special educators would benefit from having a greater understanding of the knowledge and skills school librarians possess. School librarians can assist with this by having purposeful discussions with special education teachers about their skills and knowledge that may be applicable to students with ASD. Special educators should consider the specialized knowledge and skills of the school librarian and should look for opportunities to collaborate with them. Specifically, special educators should include the school librarian by at least providing a copy of the IEP each time it is updated. However, school librarians also need to understand their own responsibility in knowing and understanding a student's IEP in order to provide the required supports and services. School librarians and special educators should also collaborate on planning to improve opportunities for utilizing the school library as well as looking for additional technology supports for their students with ASD. School librarians could be a valuable asset to teams supporting students with ASD, but they need to be included by special educators and school leaders. School librarians should make an effort to get to know special education teachers and foster collaborations by discussing how the school librarian can support the student and the special education teacher. Future areas of research and practice should focus on improving training opportunities for school librarians in supporting students with ASD as well as bolstering the collaborative efforts between school librarians and special educators.

There were a number of participants who indicated extra staffing or separate groups as specialized programming and so perhaps consideration of professional development activities regarding how to develop and implement specialized programming in a meaningful manner is appropriate for school librarians. It would be beneficial for school librarians to receive information on special education practices and regulations as well as further training on planning and implementing specialized instruction. Ultimately, school librarians need to seek out and take advantage of more training regarding the characteristics of ASD and how to instructionally support these students. Conversely, special educators need information on the supports and services a school librarian can provide seems. Both groups of professionals have specific skills and knowledge and combining them can only help improve the educational experience of students with ASD.

The findings of this study suggest school librarians are interested in supporting students with ASD, but they report multiple barriers in doing so. Few school librarians participating in this survey indicated they provided specialized programming and those who did were not able to identify and describe what constituted specialized programming. Additionally, school librarians are not always included in the IEP team or informed of the supports and services in the IEPs for students with ASD. This is concerning because school librarians can serve as a unique and valuable support for students with ASD. Also, a lack of knowledge regarding student needs can mean the student does not receive the supports and services required by their IEP. More work is necessary to determine how school librarians can be included in the IEP process and additional

supports for students with ASD. These professionals are a valuable and consistent presence in the schools and their involvement with students with ASD can only be of benefit to students with ASD.

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