Adopting the 2019 ALA/AASL/CAEP School Librarian Preparation Standards: A Competency-Based Curriculum Revision for School Library Preparation Programs

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ABSTRACT

In 2020, The Utah State Board of Education announced their plan to redesign all educator endorsements to a competency-based model, which would provide certified teachers additional pathways to earning an endorsement in areas such as educational technology and school librarianship. This was a pivotal shift in the landscape of endorsing school librarians in the State. As one of two higher education institutions serving pre-service school librarians through State-approved university coursework, the program director and teaching faculty at Southern Utah University were closely involved in the two-year process of redesigning the endorsement requirements. This work ranged from the State-level committee to the eventual curriculum overhaul and program approval. Our team advocated for the state-adopted competencies to be derived from the 2019 ALA/AASL/CAEP School Librarian Preparation Standards. This paper provides an overview of the collaboration and pedagogical decision-making that took place in order to proactively respond and adapt to this shift.

ALISE RESEARCH TAXONOMY TOPICS

education of information professionals; curriculum; standards; education programs/schools

AUTHOR KEYWORDS

competency-based education; school librarian preparation; library advocacy

INTRODUCTION

In 2020, The Utah State Board of Education announced their plan to redesign all educator endorsements to a competency-based model, which would provide certified teachers additional pathways to earning an endorsement in areas such as educational technology and school librarianship. This was a pivotal shift in the landscape of endorsing school librarians in the State. As one of two higher education institutions serving pre-service school librarians through State-approved university coursework, the program director and teaching faculty at Southern Utah University were closely involved in the two-year process of redesigning the endorsement requirements. This work ranged from the State-level committee to the eventual curriculum overhaul and program approval. Our team advocated for the state-adopted competencies to be derived from the 2019 ALA/AASL/CAEP School Librarian Preparation Standards. This paper provides an overview of the collaboration and pedagogical decision-making that took place in order to proactively respond and adapt to this shift.

BACKGROUND

Prior to the State's intention to move to competency-based education (CBE), the sole method of earning an educator endorsement was university coursework. There are various definitions of CBE. For the purposes of this project, CBE is defined as a framework for education in which candidates are provided with a variety of pathways, which empowers them to demonstrate evidence of their mastery of skills and competencies and advance at their own pace (Holmes et al. 2021; Levine & Patrick 2019). CBE in teacher education is not a new concept, in fact, it first gained popularity in the 1970s and has made a resurgence in the past decade. CBE has roots in technical education and apprenticeship training and is one way governing bodies are responding to calls for increased accountability in education. Additionally, the focus on exit, rather than entrance requirements is thought to help address the teacher shortage (Field 1979; Nodine 2016; Schmieder 1973).

The State's decision to move to CBE would provide new pathways for existing educators to add endorsements to their existing teaching license. Options for potential pathways included: State Board provided training opportunities, competency assessments, industry certifications, portfolios of evidence, microcredential stacks[1], demonstrated competency observations, Bachelor's or Master's degree in the content area or related areas, and evidence of student learning outcomes.

In response to the CBE directive, we discussed the merits and concerns of providing alternative routes to endorsement. Although the decision was not up for debate, our approach to advocacy in this process needed to be strategic with the best interest of Utah's school libraries and K-12 students in mind. Most agreed that it is a reasonable accommodation for out of state educators transferring their existing credentials and experience. However, concerns were raised about maintaining a high-level of rigor and accountability when providing these pathways to

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[1] Microcredentials are verified assessments of a specific skill or competency based on submitting demonstrated evidence. Several complimentary microcredentials can then "stack" to become a collection of related skills often resulting in certification (Tooley & Hood, 2021).

classroom teachers looking to move into the school library. Due to the common misconception that school librarians are mainly focused on book circulation rather than the understanding of their critical role as instructional partners with respective standards to infuse across the curriculum, we wanted to ensure that the other pathways would be firmly rooted in the latest standards for preparing school librarians for the field. This became the motivator of our advocacy work on the yearlong committee to determine said competencies.

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COMMITTEE WORK

The School Library Specialists for the Utah State Board of Education invited key stakeholders across the state to participate in the committee that would decide on the school library competencies. Invited parties included higher education faculty and instructional designers, State Board of Education content specialists, district/charter content leaders, and community stakeholders. The timeline was set for one year, beginning with the Competency-Based Endorsement Design Committees convening to develop the endorsement requirements. It was expected that the committee would decide on opportunities for multiple pathways to attaining the endorsement. Next steps included seeking feedback from across the State and implementing any changes based on comments received. The new endorsement requirements would go into effect one year later. The directors of school endorsement programs from both Universities joined the committee, as did library supervisors from four separate school districts, a retired librarian, and a representative from the Utah State Library.

The committee was charged with describing the content knowledge, pedagogical skills, and professional dispositions necessary to effectively and efficiently engage and instruct K-12 students and for the school librarian candidates to achieve mastery in their learning. Next, we were tasked to develop the competencies based on the content knowledge, pedagogical skills, and professional dispositions created. Finally, the committee was asked to determine the multiple pathways for demonstrating mastery in the competencies to earn the endorsement.

In 2018, The American Association of School Librarians (AASL) released new standards for the first time in a decade (AASL 2018). The following year, the School Library Preparation Standards–-a collaborative document from the American Library Association, American Association of School Librarians, and Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation–was updated accordingly (ALA/AASL/CAEP 2019). The ALA/AASL/CAEP School Library Preparation Standards are intended "to inform the preparation of school librarians" (Burns & Dawkins, 2021).

Our team at Southern Utah University was already using the newly revised ALA/AASL/CAEP School Library Preparation Standards in their practicum course and recommended the committee use of these standards to guide the discussion of competencies. The statewide committee decided to adapt the 2019 version of the standards with two major changes. First, the committee wanted candidates, who are often longtime classroom teachers, to be adequately prepared with up-to-date instructional technology skills. As a result "technology-enabled learning" (3.3) was taken from Standard 3 and made into its own requirement area. Utah would therefore have six requirement areas as opposed to 5. Second, committee members were

concerned that classroom management in the setting of a library was a vital skill not adequately represented in the existing standards, so a competency of "learner management" was added to the first requirement area. The committee reached out to AASL to request permission to adapt the standards and were granted permission under the condition of proper citation.

CURRICULUM REVISION

Once the new pathways were finalized, it was time for the Universities to update their curriculum accordingly so that they could apply for re-approval through the Utah State Board of Education. At the same time, separate committees began their work building the microcredential stacks that would offer the primary alternative to endorsement.

Our team of faculty at Southern Utah University worked to map the new competencies across the endorsement program. It was determined that six course modifications would need to be submitted to the University curriculum committee. Courses were divided by knowledge area and course modification proposals were drafted. This stage required the drafting and submission of a syllabus, learning outcomes, description of major assignments, and an impact report describing how the changes would affect other programs, majors, or courses. After four months of work, the proposals were submitted to the University Curriculum Committee for approval. Once approved, they were sent on to the State Board of Education where they again received approval. It was now time to build the new courses.

Working with the University's Center for Online Teaching and Learning, the faculty were tasked with completing course maps from a template. Sections of the course map template included: course overview, course outcomes, assessments, assignments, how the assessments align with course outcomes, grade weights, and a table of course modules. The course modules table mimics the backward design process (Wiggins & McTighe 2005). Based on the modules table, the instructor needed to describe how the objectives of each module aligns to the overall course objectives; which required readings, videos, and other presentations would assist student learning; the planned learning activities; and related assessments.

Once each course map was created and approved, the actual courses were designed and populated in our web-based learning management system, Canvas. This was also completed with the help of the Center for Online Teaching and Learning, using design templates to highlight the structure prepared in the course map. The design template in Canvas includes blocks with consistent organizational structure that clearly lays out the learning outcomes, lists of readings and resources, and clear assessment instructions that once again include the learning outcomes and purpose of the assessments. We collectively chose a design theme to ensure further program consistency, and then the design templates were populated from the course maps created earlier.

When revising our courses, Southern Utah University's team relied heavily on the ALA/AASL/CAEP School Librarian Preparation Standards (2019) not only for competency definitions, but also for inspiration on how to assess the competencies. The Preparation Standards document includes examples of activities and assignments that could be adapted into coursework to effectively teach each competency (p. 63-68). These examples were very helpful in creating activities and assignments for each course and competency within. Naturally, the examples had to be expounded upon, and as the courses were actually created, detailed instructions were added. The Preparation Standards document also aided in the creation of rubrics by providing example scales measuring how each candidate could meet the competency.

For example, in the Technology-Enabled Learning course, the focus of the new competency is on teaching with technology, as the title suggests, which is a fair bit different from the original course, which focused more on using technology rather than teaching with it, and more on physical equipment than digital tools. The entire course is based on one of the shortest and simplest of the competencies, so breaking it down into modules and steps was an interesting process. The previous class's major project was creating a website, which didn't seem to have a place in this class, but through some reorganization, it became the first project instead. After breaking down the competency into smaller parts, there ended up being a flow to the class that made it possible to keep building on one lesson plan, adding new elements and concepts to the same large project, or to keep it as many different small projects.

Many of the suggested activities from the ALA/AASL/CAEP School Librarian Preparation Standards (2019) were focused on creating lesson plans that incorporated technology in some way, from gamification to differentiation. A major focus of the course was also how technology could aid with accessibility, which included a discussion of Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) while the students designed an accessible website, and planned differentiated lessons with accessibility in mind. Other assignments required the students to use technology to create their lesson plan, or a portion of it. This included gamification software, video creation software, and becoming familiar with makerspaces and associated equipment.

Our faculty found that being open-minded to the new standards was a challenging but necessary part of evolving our curriculum to align with new directions rather than adhering to the way it has always been. One major change in the 2019 standard was the shift from traditional cataloging to an emphasis on the organization of and access to collections. This was a major change, as the former cataloging class evolved from teaching the intricacies of the MARC record to focusing on the development, maintenance, and diversity of collections and only a brief overview of descriptive cataloging (title, author, edition, publication, series) and subject headings. Based on the suggestions from the ALA/AASL/CAEP School Librarian Preparation Standards (2019) new course assignments include creating a facility accessibility policy assignment, conducting a diversity audit, and creating a library policy on collection management.

At the completion of the curricular updates, each course underwent several stages of review by: a peer faculty member, the program director, college and university curriculum committees, and finally the state school library content specialist for quality assurance.

DISCUSSION

In this paper we aimed to share our experience undergoing a major curriculum overhaul in response to our State's pivot to competency-based teacher education. Our biggest takeaway was the importance of having a seat at the table as these critical decisions that would affect our role in educating pre-service teacher librarians were being made. Though we were fortunate to be invited to participate, this point underscores the importance of being involved with State-level leaders and being aware of any shifts, initiatives, and priorities to be able to respond proactively to changes of this kind.

Another lesson learned was the importance of staying on the cusp of the most up-to-date standards in the field. With knowledge of the recently released 2019 standards, the University stakeholders were able to bring that option to the committee for consideration and ensure that

any alternative pathways would be rooted in the latest best practices in the field. We also considered communication to be an essential part of successfully responding to this shift in state requirement. Effective communication needed to go in four directions throughout the process: with the State, with University administration, with our teaching faculty, and our current and prospective students.

Regular communication with the university's administration assured them of our adequate and capable response to this change and ensured their ongoing support. This open line of communication helped anticipate any policies that would affect our ability to align our curriculum with these new requirements, such as curriculum committee procedures. Our teaching faculty were kept apprised of important decisions and updates throughout the first year's committee work, which empowered them to contribute as desired and prepared them for the curriculum updates that would be required as a result. Communication with our current students assured them of the timely and uninterrupted completion of the endorsements underway and prospective students could feel confident enrolling during this shift, knowing that we were developing contingency plans for the transitional year in between endorsement requirements.

A shift in state requirements for the preparation of school librarians is a major undertaking which requires proactive engagement and strategic action to ensure beneficial outcomes for all stakeholders. While updating university curriculum to match new requirements is no small feat, it is a good opportunity to ensure alignment with the latest standards in the field.

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