TEXAS LIBRARY JOURNAL

Volume 102, Number 2, Summer 2026

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Community Care Corner: Small Shelf, Big Impact

Year One: Impact of SB 13 on School Libraries

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President's Perspective

By Melissa Rippy

AS I STEP INTO THE ROLE OF TLA PRESIDENT, I find myself reflecting on the journey that brought me here and the community that continues to shape our work. Serving this association—as a member, a volunteer, and now as president—has been both humbling and energizing. Like so many of you, I have found mentors, built meaningful relationships, and developed a foundation that supports the work we do every day in our libraries.

I'm a proud Texan, and I believe something deeply about this state: when we're at our best, we make room for each other.

If you've ever walked into a TLA conference—whether for the first time or the twentieth—you've probably felt it. Somewhere between sessions, in a hallway conversation, or sitting next to someone who just gets it, you realize "these are my people." That sense of connection and belonging is what makes our association special—and it reflects the very best of who we are as librarians across Texas.

At its core, that experience reinforces a simple but powerful truth: libraries are about people.

Across Texas, in school, public, academic, and special libraries, we create spaces where individuals feel welcomed, supported, and connected. We meet our communities where they are, and we strive to ensure that everyone—every patron, every colleague, every voice—has a place. In education, we often say "all means all," and that belief extends deeply into our profession.

That idea guides the 2027 Annual Conference theme: Your Voice, Our Community. For ALL. For me, that theme is about more than a conference. It's about how we show up—for each other, for our communities, and for our profession. It's about creating space for every voice and ensuring people feel they belong. So many of us have said it: "I found my people here." That doesn't happen by accident, it happens because we intentionally build that kind of community. The TLA 2027 Call for Proposals is now open, with a submission deadline of June 24, 2026. I invite you to share your voice in our community.

Our **mission** reminds us that we exist to embrace, unite, and amplify the voices of the library community, while our vision calls us to be an integral partner, innovative leader, and passionate advocate for libraries and librarians across Texas. These commitments guide not only what we do, but how we move forward together.

Equally important is how we live out these commitments. The **TLA Code of Conduct** provides a shared framework for building a professional environment grounded in respect, inclusion, and integrity. It challenges us to listen with intention, communicate thoughtfully, and engage in ways that ensure all members feel welcomed and valued.

We see these values in action when we:

- Listen actively and seek to understand different perspectives
- Engage in respectful, professional dialogue—even when we disagree
- Create environments that are welcoming, accessible, and inclusive
- Act with integrity, fairness, and transparency
- Recognize that our actions reflect on our entire profession

These expectations are rooted in our **core values**—community, professional growth, forward-thinking leadership, intellectual freedom, and the belief that libraries are essential to every community. Together, they define not only our purpose, but our culture.

As an organization, TLA continues to evolve to better serve its members. Efforts to increase access, streamline engagement, and strengthen participation reflect our commitment to a thriving and sustainable association. At the same time, important work lies ahead. As we examine governance structures to ensure we are positioned for the future and prepare for upcoming legislative conversations, our collective voice remains essential.

What gives me confidence is the strength of this community. TLA has always brought people together—across library types, regions, and perspectives—to support one another and advance our profession.

This year, I invite you to lean into our community—through Engage, governance training, district meetings, and conference sessions:

- Share your voice
- Listen with intention
- Engage with respect
- Support one another

Because when we do, we ensure that TLA remains more than an association—it remains a professional home where every member can grow, contribute, and belong.

I look forward to continuing this work with all y'all.

Melissa Rippy

Melissa Rippy
2026–27 TLA President

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Libraries: Truly Texas

By Wendy Woodland

LIBRARIES: TRULY TEXAS. It's a bold statement, but what does it mean? It aligns libraries with widely held ideas about what Texas represents: independence, local control, practicality, community pride, and opportunity. At its core, it suggests that libraries aren't abstract institutions or outside influences — they are homegrown, shaped by and for Texans.

It is also the campaign theme for the two public library research projects, funded by a grant from the Mellon Foundation, which TLA is releasing this year.

PUBLIC LIBRARY PUBLIC OPINION POLL

At a time when public discourse has questioned the relevance of libraries and the role of librarians, the data tells a very different story: Texans across political perspectives, and demographics strongly support their libraries, trust library professionals, and believe in maintaining broad access to information.

The results of the **Public Library Public Opinion Poll** conducted by KRC Research on behalf of TLA confirm that Texans don't just appreciate their libraries, they rely on them. Some key findings:

- 95% of Texans agree that public libraries play a vital role in providing free and equitable access to information, promoting literacy, and supporting workforce readiness.
- 90% say libraries should be treated as an essential public service—placing them alongside other critical community infrastructure.
- 92% of Texans believe librarians should ensure collections meet local informational, educational, and cultural needs. And 89% trust their ability to select materials that reflect community needs and interests.
- 94% of Texans agree libraries should provide access to a broad range of information and ideas, and 80% support offering materials even if some community members strongly disapprove.

TLA created graphics, sample media posts, and a local news release template for libraries to use to share these results with their communities.
Download resources

PUBLIC LIBRARY RETURN ON INVESTMENT (ROI) STUDY

TLA contracted with JBK Economics Group to conduct a study of the economic benefits and return on investment of Texas public libraries. The final report will include an analysis of public library expenditures, budgets, usage, and service data to measure the impact of libraries on their local economies. The study will be released late August/early September.

CONCLUSION

Libraries are widely used and deeply rooted in communities. They support independence and economic opportunity, reflect local values, and are trusted, practical, and essential. Libraries aren't just in Texas. They are, in every sense, **Truly Texas**.

LIBRARIES
TRULY★TEXAS

Community Care Corner Small Shelf, Big Impact

Hillsboro Library Staff, Reach Across Hill County staff, and volunteers from Heart of Texas Behavioral Health Network, Presbyterian Children's Homes & Services, Advocacy Center for Crime Victims and Children, REACH Recovery Communities gather to stock C3 shelves.

By Justin Dyer

A small shelf on the back porch of the Hillsboro City Library is changing lives in a meaningful way. The Community Care Corner, known locally as C3, is helping the library meet more than the community's informational needs; it is providing dignity through access to basic care items, free of charge.

A recent partnership between the Hillsboro City Library (HCL) and REACH Across Hill County (RAHC), a nonprofit community coalition focused on promoting behavioral health and preventing the negative consequences associated with substance misuse, brought C3 to life. "A key aspect of preventing substance misuse is ensuring people have their basic needs met, and C3 aids us in accomplishing that goal," said Sabrina Dyer, RAHC Coalition Coordinator. "Libraries, as community hubs of information, resources, activities, and socialization, have a unique avenue into the community that our organization simply could not accomplish on its own," Dyer continued.

The Community Care Corner provides access to socks, blankets, deodorant, feminine hygiene products, razors, first aid items, toothbrushes, toothpaste, lotion, shampoo, tissues, sunscreen, and other basic care items. For additional support, informational handouts about the area food bank, free medical clinic, youth home, and other area nonprofits are available.

Upon request, RAHC provides library visitors with free Deterra Bags, a safe prescription drug disposal tool, and Narcan, an over-the-counter opioid overdose reversal medication. Patrons may request these items at the library's circulation desk. RAHC trained HCL's staff on how to properly use the disposal bags and how to administer Narcan.

"While we hope to never need Narcan at the library, this training enables staff to teach community members the proper use of this life-saving medication. Accidental overdoses of medications make news headlines every day. It is important to educate that Narcan is beneficial for more than individuals affected by substance misuse," said Library Director, Justin Dyer.

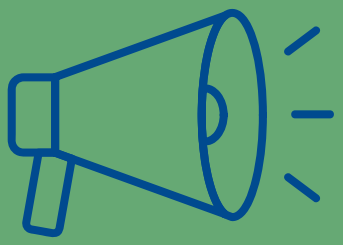
Callie Pittman, Programming and Outreach Librarian, assembled the Community Care Corner's shopping list, designed the promotional materials, and worked to ensure staff members were informed on how to restock supplies as needed.

RAHC purchased the start-up materials and is working with the community to ensure the sustainability of this popular initiative over time. To kick off the service, RAHC coalition members representing several local community care organizations gathered at the library to organize and stock C3. Users are invited to take what they need, no questions asked, in the privacy of the library's back porch area. Pittman commented, "HCL has a strong partnership with our area nonprofits. It was wonderful to have those partners working together in the library to assemble C3 for our community"

Community usage and feedback from the program have been overwhelmingly positive. Beyond usage, other nonprofits, businesses, and individuals have been asking how they can support this unique initiative.

Feedback from C3 users can best be summarized in two words: "Thank you." A simple, yet resounding statement that reflects the care and dignity this program offers to the community of Hillsboro.

Justin Dyer is the Library Director of the Hillsboro City Library.



What Advocacy Looks Like When It's Shared, Not Siloed

By Kaitlyn Carpenter

LIBRARIES ALL OVER THE U.S. APPROACH ADVOCACY IN A VARIETY OF WAYS, WITH A GOAL OF ACHIEVING SUCCESS AT THE LOCAL LEVEL. However, these efforts are frequently siloed — focused on individual institutions or library types. Librarianship, too, can often feel siloed, within our own buildings or our specialties or our library types, but it does not have to be like this.

While we must continue advocating for our own communities, it is time to consider how we can advocate more intentionally for each other.

Libraries do not operate in isolation; they function as an interconnected ecosystem, and our advocacy should reflect that reality. At its core, the library ecosystem recognizes that different types of libraries serve the same individuals across different stages of life. Public, school, academic, and special libraries each meet distinct needs, but together they form a continuous network of community support. No single library can meet every need — and that is precisely why we need one another.

For six years, I worked as a school librarian before transitioning into academic librarianship. That shift has not weakened my commitment to school libraries; instead, it has expanded my perspective. From this new position, I have begun to consider how advocacy can extend beyond one's immediate role. For those who want to support the profession but may not feel safe engaging in highly visible advocacy, there are meaningful sustainable ways to contribute.

THREE MODES OF CROSS-LIBRARY ADVOCACY

Institutional Advocacy

Institutional advocacy is often overlooked, particularly in a time when there are a lot of broken institutions and systems, and trust in those systems can feel fragile. But these structures — professional organizations, boards, and community groups — offer powerful opportunities to support each other.

Volunteer for a Professional Association

Early in my career, as conversations around book challenges intensified, I did not feel positioned to advocate publicly without risking my role. But I knew that while I could not control the happenings around me, I could control the feeling of contributing and advocating at a different level by turning to professional service. I became involved in the Texas Library Association (TLA), eventually serving as a councilor for the New Members Round Table. This experience allowed me to make more connections and give a helping hand where I could to my colleagues in new ways. Knowing I was giving back to the profession, and the state, was my own type of advocacy at the time. Helping arm others with knowledge and experiences is just as important as standing on a stage and speaking to those book banners.

Join your Local Friends Group

More recently, after transitioning out of my school librarian role, I joined my local Friends of the Houston ISD libraries group as a board member. In this position, I help decide how the non-profit money is given back to the librarians through grants and help plan various gatherings to support the librarians within the district. While my job title has changed, my ability to advocate for school libraries has not- it has simply taken a different form.

Institutional advocacy can also include joining a local Friends group, participating in a PTO or PTA, or contributing to professional organizations at the local, state or national level. These roles may seem small, but they provide critical infrastructure for sustained advocacy.

Spatial Advocacy

Advocacy also happens through how we use and promote library spaces. Libraries are not only places of information — but they are also civic spaces, and how they are used shapes public perception.

I am an active member in a local bonsai club, Houston Bonsai Society, which recently lost access to its regular meeting location. We hold monthly meetings that are informational, open to the public, and often include demonstrations with key bonsai artists. When a last-minute cancellation left

us without space to meet, I suggested we consider public libraries as an option. Public libraries are more visible spaces and holding our event there might entice new people to join us. We secured a room on short notice, and the results were immediate: increased attendance, new community members stopping in, and at least two individuals from the bonsai club signing up for library cards. This was a great way to show my bonsai community how to utilize libraries in a new way and I took a moment to promote relevant materials in the collection, one of which was checked out during the meeting. While these outcomes may seem small — one meeting, one circulation, two new cardholders — they reflect something larger. By bringing a non-library community into a library space, we reinforced the library's role as a welcoming, accessible space.

Spatial advocacy can also be as simple as referring our patrons to the other libraries that hold resources we do not have. When a student recently asked me for manga — something my academic library does not collect — I directed them to the public library's physical and digital offerings. Recognizing the ecosystem, and promoting what other libraries can provide, actively connecting users to those resources, is a form of advocacy rooted in collaboration rather than competition.

Narrative Advocacy

Finally, advocacy happens by telling your story. Librarians regularly witness the impact of their work — yet those stories often remain within our own circles.

During my transition from schools to academic librarianship, I experienced assumptions that minimized the intellectual and pedagogical work of school librarians. In response I wrote an essay reflecting on my experience — "Not Just A School Librarian." I wanted to help my academic librarian colleagues understand the important work that school librarians do. The response to the essay has been meaningful: academic librarians gained a clearer understanding of school librarianship, and school librarians shared that they felt seen and validated. That experience reinforced for me that storytelling is a powerful form of advocacy.

Narrative advocacy can take many forms, writing Op-Ed pieces for your local paper, presenting at conferences, contributing to professional publications, writing letters to your representatives to share your stories, and writing short pieces for your neighborhood newsletter/HOA meetings. These do not always need to focus specifically on advocacy, but sharing effective practices, challenges, and successes can help shape how our work is understood.

Advocacy can occur in everyday conversations. In one instance, a brief exchange with individuals outside of the profession shifted a dismissive perception of librarians into a recognition of their value. It was an uncomfortable conversation that I did not necessarily want to engage in, but it offered an opportunity to challenge misconceptions and build understanding. Not every conversation will lead to change, but some will — and that is enough to matter.

WHY THIS MATTERS NOW

Libraries are navigating increasing challenges: shrinking budgets, political pressures, and rampant misinformation. It is more important every day for libraries to advocate for each other. In this environment, isolated advocacy is not enough. When libraries support one another — across types, roles, and communities — we strengthen the profession as a whole.

Advocacy does not have to be large-scale to be meaningful. Choose any small way that you can support one of the libraries in your community and do it. All the tiny slivers of support can add up over time and hopefully help all of us to come out stronger.

ADVOCACY AS ECOSYSTEM STEWARDSHIP

If we begin to see advocacy as ecosystem stewardship, our role changes. We are not only responsible for our individual libraries — but we are also stewards of a larger, interconnected system. Just as interlibrary loan allows us to share resources, cross-library advocacy allows us to share responsibility.

Librarians already invest deeply in their work, often going beyond formal expectations to support their communities. Extending that mindset outward — toward other libraries and the profession as a whole — is a natural next step.

Supporting another library is not separate from our work; it is an extension of it. When we advocate for the ecosystem, we advocate for the continued relevance, strength, and future of all libraries — and the communities they serve.

Kaitlyn Carpenter is a Public Services Librarian at the University of St. Thomas in Houston.

Libraries Change Communities

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

By Kristin Linscott and Jessica Rico

How can libraries support individuals who are often overlooked in workforce development opportunities?

IN 2021, A CONVERSATION WITH A LOCAL MOTHER HELPED ANSWER THAT QUESTION. The mother was looking for a meaningful volunteer opportunity for her son, an adult with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD). That conversation led Plano Public Library (PPL) staff to connect with My Possibilities, a local nonprofit that provides vocational training and life-skills programming for adults with IDD. Many adults with IDD face significant barriers to employment and community inclusion. Libraries can come alongside organizations that are part of the solution for those with IDD."

Together with My Possibilities, we built what is now the Work Experience Program, a 12-week volunteer-based program that focuses on real-world job skills in a public library setting. In the Work Experience Program, the library offers a safe, structured environment where participants build practical job skills, gain confidence, and experience the sense of belonging that comes from contributing as part of a team.

VOLUNTEERING REIMAGINED

Rather than building something entirely new, the program was intentionally designed from PPL's existing volunteer framework and adapted to better support the needs of adults with IDD. PPL has structured the Work Experience Program as a 12-week session, with participants volunteering twice per week for two-hour shifts. Each cohort is supported by a dedicated library staff member who serves as a "supervisor-of-the-day", working alongside a Job Coach provided by the partner organization.

Job Coaches are trained professionals who accompany their clients to worksites, model workplace expectations and provide guidance tailored to each individual's needs. For staff who may feel uncertain about how to support adults with disabilities, Job Coaches also serve as on-site partners and educators. They help staff build confidence, understand appropriate accommodations, and navigate support in real time, making the experience manageable and sustainable for everyone involved.

Participants take on real responsibilities: sorting donations, cleaning toys in the children's area, preparing supplies for programs, and helping maintain shared spaces. These aren't simulated tasks or busywork; they're part of the library's day-to-day operations. This gives participants a clearer sense of purpose and helps build skills they can carry into future jobs.

Graduation ceremonies held at the end of each session are a meaningful way to celebrate. Volunteers, staff, and families come together to reflect on growth, friendships, and accomplishments. Families of the volunteers often share stories, such as the parent who thanked PPL for restoring his son's confidence after being turned away from another library's volunteer experience for "working too slowly." That same volunteer later found employment at a local museum and credited this experience with helping him get there.

Plano Public Library has offered the program since 2021 and facilitated the experience for 40 individuals with IDD. Several participants have gone on to secure employment or return to the library as volunteers.

FACTORS FOR SUCCESS

Collaboration is the foundation of the Work Experience Program's success. The partnership with My Possibilities laid the groundwork for developing a replicable model based on shared goals, clear communication, and setting realistic expectations for staff. Once the foundation was in place, other organizations serving adults with IDD have asked to participate and the number of individuals served has increased.

Setting parameters for hosting volunteers helps library staff to make the experience rewarding without becoming

A group from My Possibilities visits one of the Plano Public libraries.

Two Work Experience Program participants receive guidance from their job coach at Plano Public Library

overwhelmed. The Work Experience Program is delivered in partnership with direct service organizations and is scheduled when requested and library staffing allows. At the time an organization requests to place a group, leadership assesses the capacity at our five locations and accepts the number of groups/volunteers that our staff can comfortably manage at that time. Due to added traffic when school is out, groups are typically not accepted during the summer.

At each session's conclusion, volunteers participate in an exit interview. For many, this process doubles as interview practice for future employment opportunities. While it can sometimes be challenging to interpret feedback from participants who communicate in unique ways, their insights have proven invaluable. Comments from volunteers have inspired practical changes, such as introducing scheduled breaks during physically demanding tasks and adjusting workspace layouts for accessibility. The feedback loop includes volunteers, library staff and job coaches, and serves to continually refine practices and enhance the overall experience for everyone involved.

We have found that creating a successful work experience program builds upon these key components:

- **Meaningful Work Design**: In collaboration with Job Coaches, library staff identify tasks that are both beneficial to library operations and tailored to the volunteers' abilities. This approach not only respects the volunteers' time and dignity but also provides opportunities to learn transferable job skills, while contributing directly to library productivity.
- **Strong Partnerships**: Working with local organizations that specialize in serving adults with IDD ensures that participants receive the guidance and support they need to succeed. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is prepared for each partner organization in collaboration with the City of Plano's legal team, to document the shared expectations
- **A Dedicated Team**: A passionate team of library staff, willing to learn to work alongside volunteers with disabilities, is key to successful implementation. These staff members provide daily support, initial training and educate the rest of library staff on the accessibility needs of our volunteers
- **Evaluation and Adaptation**: Each Work Experience session concludes with volunteer interviews, staff surveys, and partner retrospectives to assess impact and identify improvements for the program. Feedback has directly informed task creation, accessibility accommodations, and new staff training tools

IMPACT ON THE COMMUNITY

Partner organizations have praised the program for providing a reliable, structured, and dignified learning environment where their clients can develop real-world skills and social connections. Partners are also consistently impressed with the friendliness of library staff, and their sensitivity to the need for accessibility practices.

Library staff involved with the program regularly report increased comfort and competence serving neurodiverse patrons and identifying where library spaces or services could be made more accessible.

A growth element is planned for this program in fall 2026; volunteers in the Work-Experience program will plan and deliver a library program for their peers. This is intended to further expand the participants' job skills with a leadership element.

Ultimately, the Work Experience Program embodies the mission of Plano Public Library: to engage and enrich the community. Through creativity, compassion, and collaboration, PPL has redefined the library's role as a catalyst for change, proving that inclusion doesn't just strengthen individuals, it strengthens entire communities.

Kristin Linscott is the Library Development Coordinator and Jessica Rico is a Public Services Programming and Engagement Librarian at Plano Public Library.

"ALMOST EVERYONE FEELS IT"

WHAT A SURVEY OF SCHOOL LIBRARIANS REVEALED ABOUT IMPOSTER SYNDROME

By Amanda Chacon

If you have ever wondered whether you are doing enough in your library role, you are definitely not alone.

RECENTLY, I SURVEYED 165 SCHOOL LIBRARY PROFESSIONALS, and an astounding 88% reported experiencing imposter-related feelings at least occasionally. 42% reported feeling that way often or very often. Nearly 65% said they questioned whether they truly belong in the profession despite holding the required credentials and experience, and almost 50% reported that self-doubt has influenced professional decisions.

Those numbers should shock and concern you, as they did me.

As librarians, we talk about advocacy, censorship, programming, and funding. However, we do not often talk about the quiet, detrimental undercurrent of doubt running beneath our work. But it is there, and it is clearly affecting our work and our decisions as library professionals.

NOT JUST EARLY-CAREER NERVES

One assumption about imposter syndrome is that it primarily affects those new to the profession; however, the survey data suggest otherwise. Librarians from early-career professionals to those with more than 20 years in the field, responded to the survey and feelings of doubt were not limited to early-professionals. Many veteran librarians described questioning their competence, especially when facing new initiatives, legislative scrutiny, or administrative turnover.

One respondent wrote, "Every time there is a new principal, I feel like I have to prove I deserve to be here again."

Instability only serves to foster feelings of imposter syndrome, and overwhelmingly respondents indicated that an administrator can "make or break" how they feel about their work.

ROLE AMBIGUITY ADDS FUEL TO THIS FIRE

Further compounding the situation, school librarians hold one of the most expansive job descriptions in education, encompassing roles such as instructional partner, technology superhero, literacy leader, programs administrator, budget manager, event planner, defender of intellectual freedom, and many more.

Respondents described not receiving schedules until the day school starts, administrators minimizing the complexity of the job, or teachers treating them like baby-sitters instead of instructional partners. When expectations are unclear, people often internalize the confusion.

Instead of thinking, "The role is poorly defined," we think, "Maybe I am not doing it right," and this shift from role ambiguity to personal inadequacy is where imposter syndrome likes to fester.

THE LONELINESS FACTOR

Further, many school librarians are the only librarian or library professional in their building. Unlike classroom teachers, we do not have grade-level teams, and we do not have colleagues down the hall to ask, "What do you think about this or that?"

Isolation amplifies doubt, and several respondents used the word lonely to describe their work environment. Others expressed feeling like "an island" and "in a silo." When you lack affirmation from peers who understand the work, it becomes easier to assume that everyone else is doing it better.

COMPARISON CULTURE AMPLIFIES DOUBT

While professional conferences and social media are powerful spaces, they are also curated spaces. We see the award-winning programs, the impressive displays, and the innovative collaborations, but we may not necessarily see the failures, the meltdowns, and the doubts.

One respondent shared, "I leave conferences inspired but also wondering why I am not doing more."

Comparison is not new; however, working in a highly visible, high-traffic location on campus, can intensify self-doubt. When excellence is constantly showcased without equal attention to process, struggle, or context, it can create the illusion that everyone else is operating at a higher level.

INTRA-PROFESSIONAL HOSTILITY

One of the more surprising patterns in the survey was not about administrators, legislation, or funding; it was about us.

Unfortunately, many respondents mentioned feeling excluded, judged, or dismissed by other librarians. Many also described district or social groups that felt cliquish. Others talked about veteran professionals unintentionally discouraging newer librarians, while some admitted they avoid certain online spaces or conversations because they do not feel comfortable contributing due to judgements and cliques. One respondent stated, "It seems like the same few people getting chosen for committees, presentations, and awards over and over. Seems pointless to even try to get any recognition when the 'chosen' few take up all the room."

This does not mean the profession is inherently hostile; in fact, most librarians are deeply supportive of one another. However, when conversations lean toward competition instead of collaboration, or when vulnerability is met with "you just need to toughen up" or "Well, I never experience that," it can reinforce the idea that doubt is something to hide rather than something to talk through.

In one case within the survey itself, a respondent dismissed imposter feelings as weakness. That response stood out, as it highlighted how easy it is to misunderstand what imposter syndrome really is. Self-doubt is not a lack of competence or a weakness. Often, it reflects high standards and a strong sense of responsibility.

As librarians, we spend our careers building inclusive spaces for students and communities, so it is worth asking whether we are offering the same grace to one another. A profession navigating censorship challenges, staffing shifts, and public scrutiny needs internal trust. Creating space for honest conversations about growth, uncertainty, and learning does not lower the bar. It strengthens the community.

If nearly nine out of ten librarians are experiencing some level of imposter feelings, then it is likely that someone sitting next to you at a conference (or posting on social media) is navigating that same quiet question of "Am I doing enough?" A little generosity and grace in those arenas can go a long way.

SO WHAT DO WE DO?

There's no one-size-fits-all solution, but the survey highlights several possible ways forward.

First, we need preparation programs and continuing professional development to make identity development a priority. Imposter feelings are common and recognizing that early on can help professionals understand their doubts without taking them personally.

Next, district leaders must be clear about their expectations and actively support the work of librarians. Having clear evaluation criteria and including librarians in instructional leadership teams is crucial. If we're not being invited to the table, then it's up to us to advocate for ourselves and educate others about the diverse and vital roles we play in our school and community ecosystems. Just as we fight for intellectual freedom, we also need to advocate for awareness and recognition of our own roles.

Lastly, and maybe most importantly, we should take a hard look at our professional culture. Are we encouraging honest conversations about our struggles? Are we mentoring across different experience levels? Do we unintentionally reward those who appear overly competent instead of encouraging collaboration?

If nearly nine out of ten librarians are feeling these imposter-related emotions, it's clear this is a professional trend rather than just individual, personal issues.

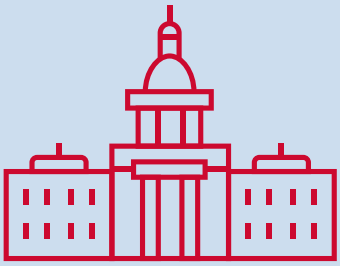
A DIFFERENT WAY TO FRAME IT

What if imposter syndrome isn't a sign that we don't belong, but rather a reflection of how much we care about doing our jobs well? One seasoned librarian from the survey put it perfectly: "If I stop questioning whether I'm doing enough for students, that's when I'd really start to worry," a perspective that places doubt in context.

School librarianship is challenging and constantly evolving; as it often goes unrecognized and appreciated by society, it's completely normal to have doubts from time to time. The key is to use those doubts as chances for growth instead of letting them hold us back.

The survey shows that *almost* everyone feels this way. Sometimes, the most powerful thing we can do is simply acknowledge it together and commit to nurturing inclusivity within our own profession just as we do for our libraries and our students.

Amanda Chacon is a former school librarian. She currently is the course operations manager at Media Source (LJ/SLJ Professional Development)



Year One

IMPACT OF SB 13 ON SCHOOL LIBRARIES

By Julie Leuzinger, Katie Talhelm and Wendy Woodland

IMPLEMENTATION OF SB 13 HAS BROUGHT SIGNIFICANT CHANGES TO SCHOOL LIBRARIES ACROSS TEXAS. Districts have worked to adapt their policies and practices to comply with the new law's requirements, and librarians are playing a central role in both planning and execution. The Texas Library Association conducted two surveys of school librarians to learn more about the new complexities resulting from SB 13 that affect library operations, student access, and professional responsibilities.

The first survey, sent in September 2025 (145 responses), focused on planning, preparation and early implementation. The second, sent in February 2026 (126 responses), addressed purchasing, School Library Advisory Councils (SLACs), and parental access and opt-out capabilities.

This article provides a high-level overview of the results of those two surveys and the impact of SB 13 on school libraries and librarians.

PLANNING, PREPARATION, AND EARLY IMPLEMENTATION

Districts began preparing for SB 13 at different times, with most starting in the summer of 2025. Librarians emerged as key figures, providing expertise and guidance for superintendents, school boards, and administrative teams. Planning activities included interpreting legislative requirements, developing district procedures, revising collection development practices, updating library systems, coordinating with various departments, training staff, and preparing compliance documentation.

The time commitment required for implementation varied, from 25 to more than 100 hours spent on policy development, training, and system updates. Librarians in leadership and coordinator roles consistently reported the greatest time demands.

Compliance typically began with a review of administrative structures, processes, technology capabilities, and policies to determine changes needed to comply with SB 13.

POLICY UPDATES

Districts adopted updated policies to address procedures for purchasing and approving materials, parental access to library records, collection development criteria, and challenge and reconsideration of library materials. Policy updates adhere to the Texas State Library and Archives Commission mandatory collection development standards and were often based on model guidelines from the Texas Association of School Boards or Texas Education Agency.

While these policy updates and associated changes to administrative structures were implemented for compliance, they add new layers of bureaucracy, slow decision-making, and reduce operational efficiencies.

PURCHASING TRENDS AND BARRIERS

While library purchasing has not stopped statewide, the process has become more cumbersome. Roughly 77% of districts continued buying new materials during the school year, but 22% halted acquisitions entirely. Compliance requirements have made purchasing more procedural and iterative, with librarians spending more time on administrative tasks.

Public engagement during the comment period was minimal; most districts received little or no feedback on proposed purchases. District size influenced disruption levels: mid-sized districts reported the highest rates of halted purchasing, while larger districts continued more consistently due to greater administrative support.

A respondent from a small district (approximately 600 students) described the impact, "Last year, I purchased approximately 700 books for my high school and middle school campuses. Due to the additional work caused by SB 13, this year, I have only ordered 78 books for the middle school, and no books for the high school. Of the 78 books that I have ordered, I have not had time to get them processed and onto the shelves. So far, they are still sitting in a box in my workroom. The additional administrative work required to purchase books

etc. has made it impossible to run a library efficiently. I am working 60 or more hours a week, and I cannot keep up."

SCHOOL LIBRARY ADVISORY COUNCILS (SLACS): UNEVEN IMPLEMENTATION

Only about 16% of respondents reported establishing a SLAC. For those that did, approval processes were often delayed, leading to limited access to new materials during the school year. Respondents described SLAC procedures as cumbersome, with formal approval chains extending timelines.

Many librarians felt that authority had shifted away from trained professionals to committees or administrators, challenging their professional autonomy and responsiveness to student needs. Implementation hurdles varied by district size, with larger districts facing bureaucratic complexity and smaller districts struggling with staffing.

PARENTAL ACCESS TO LIBRARY RECORDS

SB 13 requires that parents have access to their children's library records to see what books have been checked out. It also requires that parents can provide a list of library materials their child is prohibited from checking out to the district which must ensure that child is unable to check out those items.

Most districts either already provided parental access to the library management system and their child's record or were actively working to implement it. Library management systems (LMS) such as Destiny, Insignia, AccessIt, LS2, and TLC allow parents to view checkouts, due dates, and book information. In some cases, those platforms also allow parents to restrict individual titles.

Districts used various methods to inform parents about these tools, including websites, newsletters, QR codes, and instructional guides. However, some districts encountered technical challenges, such as syncing accounts, refining notifications, and establishing parent-specific portals. And districts that do not have sophisticated LMS technology have to find funds to invest in an option that will comply with SB 13 requirements.

PARENTAL OPT-OUT: MINIMAL UTILIZATION

Although SB 13 allows parents to restrict their child's access to specific library materials, actual usage by parents remains very low. In most districts, only a handful of parents requested restrictions, representing a tiny fraction of enrolled families. Nevertheless, districts have invested significant resources into establishing, maintaining, and educating parents on these systems.

DIGITAL RESOURCE ACCESS

A significant operational challenge resulting from SB 13 relates to third-party digital content providers. About 30% of districts reported removing student access to certain digital resources—like Sora/OverDrive and Epic! Books for Kids—because vendors could not fully support SB 13's parental access requirements. Concerns included the inability to provide parents with student reading histories or to set title-level restrictions.

In response, some districts suspended digital access altogether, while others used temporary solutions like parent waivers or opt-out forms. These changes reduced student access to e-books and audiobooks, that support literacy development, independent reading and accessibility for students with dyslexia, visual impairments, or limited access to books outside of school.

Librarians voiced concerns that this lack of opportunities for engagement with high-quality, curated digital resources forced students and teachers to seek information from less-curated resources outside of vetted library materials.

IMPACT ON LIBRARY OPERATIONS

Librarians and administrators reported spending substantial time reviewing thousands of titles to compare and track ISBN information before placing a title on a purchasing list, coordinating SLACs, and preparing materials for public review and board approval. This increased administrative requirement reduced the time available for instruction, collaboration with classroom teachers, and student engagement.

As one survey respondent noted, "The amount of time and work involved in segmenting out new vs existing ISBNs in every order for 40+ campuses is a logistical nightmare as well as incredibly time consuming."

The process of acquiring new books has slowed considerably. New requirements —public posting, extended review periods, board approvals, SLAC procedures, and increased administrative work required to compile purchase lists—have led to delays, with students sometimes waiting months for new materials, and some not having access to new library materials at all during the school year.

Another respondent stated, "Originally, we were told that we would have four opportunities to order books this year. Now, ordering new materials has been paused until a SLAC is formed and trained."

CONCLUSION

SB 13 has not stopped library purchasing completely but it has fundamentally changed how school libraries operate in Texas. The law has introduced new administrative layers, shifted professional responsibilities, and slowed access to new materials to a crawl. The impact varies by district size and resources, raising concerns about equitable access for students across the state.

As districts continue to adapt, the experience of Texas librarians highlights the ongoing challenge of meeting legal requirements while maintaining a vibrant, student-centered library program. Their work underscores the vital role that school libraries—and the professionals who lead them—play in supporting literacy and learning, even amidst significant policy shifts.

Julie Leuzinger served on the TLA Legislative Committee from 2022-2026 and is a librarian at the University of North Texas.

Katie Talhelm served on the TLA Intellectual Freedom Committee from 2023-2026 and is a librarian at the Arlington Public Library System.

Wendy Woodland is the Director of Advocacy and Communications for the Texas Library Association.

The Technology of TSLAC's Talking Book Program

By Warren Davis

The Texas State Library and Archives Commission's (TSLAC) Talking Book Program (TBP) provides free library services for Texans of any age who are blind or have a visual, physical, or reading disability. Just recently, TBP circulating patron devices were upgraded to utilize Wi-Fi and Bluetooth, greatly improving user experience and access. We reached out to Alicia Topolnycky, TBP Engagement Specialist, to learn more about the technology TBP uses to power their ever-expanding programming and services.

> "For more than 100 years, the Texas Talking Book Program has redefined what a library can be—but our core mission has remained the same: ensuring that every Texan, regardless of visual, physical, or reading disabilities, has seamless access to the books they love."

WD: WHAT TECHNOLOGY DOES TBP USE?

AT: TBP uses a mix of low-tech and high-tech to make reading accessible.

Our Digital Talking Book Machine (DTBM) is a simple, user-friendly player that TBP loans out. Patrons receive books on digital cartridges through the mail, and the DTBM is designed to work even when not connected to the internet.

Behind the scenes, TBP also uses Duplication on Demand (DOD), which means books are copied onto cartridges only when a patron requests them. This allows for faster turnaround, a larger available catalog, and more personalized service without needing to store thousands of pre-made copies.

For patrons who read braille, TBP provides refreshable braille displays, including devices from HumanWare and Zoomax. These devices use small moving pins to form braille characters that update in real time, allowing users to read digital books line by line.

And on the digital side, TBP connects patrons to the BARD (Braille and Audio Reading Download) platform and mobile app, where they can instantly download thousands of audiobooks and braille titles to their phones, tablets, or computers.

Together, these technologies ensure that whether someone prefers physical materials or digital access, TBP can deliver books in a way that truly works for them.

WD: HOW DO THE VARIOUS TECHNOLOGIES ADDRESS THE UNIQUE NEEDS OF PATRONS?

AT: The DTBM is easy to use for those with low or no vision, thanks to the braille button labels, large buttons of different shapes and colors, and audio navigation (the buttons announce what they do when you press them). But it's also ideal for people who are rough with their tech (prone to dropping or breaking), because it's very sturdy. Parents also love that using the DTBM doesn't count as screentime because, well, there is no screen. The carrying handle and long battery-life allow all patrons to take the machine on the go.

The refreshable braille displays allow braille readers to carry the ultimate portable library. Instead of thick, multi-volume braille embossed paper books, patrons can carry one device that's the size of a Kleenex box (Zoomax) or pocketbook (HumanWare).

The BARD mobile app makes accessing audiobooks easy for those who already own a smartphone, Chromebook computer, or tablet (from Apple Ipads to Kindle Fire tablets). The app is free to download and has an easy-to-learn interface that looks like the DTBM. People of all ages can understand the large play/stop button and the search bar to find new books.

WD: HOW HAS TECHNOLOGY EVOLVED OVER THE YEARS?

AT: The technology began in the 1930s with phonograph records, where books were recorded on slow-speed discs to maximize listening time. By the late 1960s and 1970s, this shifted to cassette tapes, which were more portable and allowed features like variable speed playback. In the 1990s and early 2000s, TBP moved into the digital era. Recording became fully digital, improving sound quality and durability, and services like Web-Braille allowed patrons to access braille books online for the first time—no mail required.

A major leap came with the development of the DTBM in the late 2000s. Instead of tapes, books were now stored on flash cartridges, offering better reliability and easier navigation. Around the same time, BARD launched, allowing patrons to download books directly from the internet.

The 2010s brought even more flexibility, with the BARD Mobile app enabling users to read on smartphones and tablets, and the introduction of refreshable braille displays, which let patrons read digital braille in real time.

WD: HOW HAS THE RECENT UPDATE TO WI-FI ENABLED DEVICES BEEN GOING?

AT: Patron feedback has been very positive! Patrons appreciate the expanded ability for self-service by searching and downloading books and magazines from BARD 24/7 using either the new DA2 DTBM or the refreshable braille eReader. This is a great option for those patrons who do not have access to a smartphone or tablet, or who prefer the DTBMs. Patrons are also enjoying the new Bluetooth connectivity, which allows them to listen to their DA2 over Bluetooth-enabled speakers or headphones!

WD: WHAT ARE YOU EXCITED ABOUT IN TERMS OF THE FUTURE OF ACCESSIBILITY TECHNOLOGY?

AT: I'm excited about all of the new AI and human-powered smart-device apps that are accessibility focused, like Be My Eyes, SeeingAI, and TapTapSee.

Another tool I've been especially curious to explore more is the "My

Talking Books" Alexa skill from NLS. It allows patrons to access and stream BARD audiobooks entirely through voice commands. There is no need for screens, downloads, or navigating apps. Users can search the catalog, manage wish lists, adjust reading speed, and pick up where they left off, all by simply speaking to a smart speaker.

What excites me about it is how it pushes accessibility even further, especially for patrons who may have limited mobility, low tech confidence, or prefer a completely hands-free experience. It feels like a natural next step in reducing barriers to reading. I am very interested in exploring how it could fit into outreach and training, especially as voice-first technology becomes more common in people's homes.

WD: HOW DO USERS TYPICALLY FIND OUT ABOUT THE TALKING BOOK PROGRAM?

AT: Patrons typically learn about TBP through a mix of personal recommendations, community connections, and targeted outreach. Many hear about it from their local library (some of which are officially designated as TBP "demonstration sites"), school, senior center, or doctor. TBP has a dedicated team of engagement specialists who set up booths and tables at expos and information fairs across the state to get the word out. This team also hosts many virtual outreach events throughout the year. And many patrons hear about the program through word-of-mouth: their friends or family members are already signed up and love the program.

WD: YOU MENTIONED LIBRARIES AS DEMONSTRATION SITES. WHAT DOES THAT ENTAIL?

AT: We have about 100 libraries participating as demonstration sites and are adding more all the time. Libraries which become demonstration sites receive a DTBM, two book cartridges (one in English and one in Spanish), and access to BARD. Sites receive an email newsletter just for the group with programming ideas and general FAQs. We hold Demo site "office hours" so they can ask questions online or they can call directly. We do ask that libraries keep a tab of how many folks they speak to about the program.

One librarian from a new demo site stated, "I am excited to let people know about your wonderful services, and I'm sure we have plenty of folks in the community who could make use of what you offer."

If a library does not want to be an official demonstration site at this time, but is interested in promoting the TBP to patrons, we encourage them to send us an **email** or call 800.252.9605 and we will share our marketing materials that can be used to share the information with library users.

Learn more about the services offered, how to register patrons, becoming a TBP demonstration site, and more at TexasTalkingBooks.com.

Warren Davis is the Library Development and Networking Community Engagement and Outreach Coordinator at the Texas State Library and Archives Commission.

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TLA's Libraries Transform Texas Podcast is your go-to destination for all things Texas libraries!

Hear from librarians and authors about their work, trends shaping libraries, and inspiring insights.

You'll laugh, learn, and might just discover your next big idea.

Find the podcast on your favorite platform.

TLA

TLA Executive Board Candidate Nominations Now Open

The Texas Library Association is now accepting applications for the 2027 Executive Board election. Serving on the Executive Board is an opportunity to contribute at the highest level of leadership, helping guide the association's strategic direction, strengthen advocacy efforts, and support a thriving library community across Texas. The Texas Library Association is now accepting applications for the 2027 Executive Board election. Serving on the Executive Board is an opportunity to contribute at the highest level of leadership, helping guide the association's strategic direction, strengthen advocacy efforts, and support a thriving library community across Texas.

The following positions are open for 2027:

- President-Elect (Academic)
- Representative-at-Large (Academic)
- Representative-at-Large (Public)
- ALA Councilor

Ideal candidates demonstrate alignment with **TLA's core values**, an understanding of the evolving landscape for libraries, and the ability to think strategically about the future of the profession.

If you are ready to make an impact and represent your colleagues across the state, we encourage you to apply. **Learn more and apply here**. Applications close July 17.

INTERESTED IN BUILDING YOUR LEADERSHIP SKILLS? REGISTER FOR LAUNCH!

New to the library field or looking to build your confidence in the profession? Join us in San Marcos July 25-27 for LAUNCH, this TLA leadership program designed for library professionals with less than five years of experience. Participants will learn and expand leadership skills through group work, self-directed learning, and internal reflection. Each session will be taught by a dynamic leader in the field.
Register today!

TCAL ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Deans and directors from Texas universities and colleges are invited to join the Texas Council of Academic Libraries (TCAL) from September 20-22 in Galveston for the TCAL 2026 Annual Conference. This year's conference will be your opportunity to collaborate with academic leaders, gain insights from experienced professionals, and take actionable ideas back to your library. Register today for the best rates!
Learn more and register today.

TLA 2027 CALL FOR PROPOSALS CLOSES JUNE 24

Share your expertise, inspire peers, and help grow the library profession by submitting a proposal for the TLA 2027 Annual Conference! TLA is seeking presentations on innovative programming, emerging trends, and new developments in the field. Submit your proposal by midnight on June 24.
Learn more.

TLA Awards $326,350 in Summer Programming Grants

In 2025, TLA was the beneficiary of H-E-B's Summer at the Library check stand campaign. Thanks to the generous donations from customers from across the state, a total of $326,350 was awarded to 104 libraries to support summer programming this year.

Congratulations to the 2026 Summer at the Library Grant recipients!

Alma Martinez Intermediate School
Alpine Public Library
Arlington Public Library
Aubrey Area Library
Benbrook Public Library
Burleson Public Library
C.F. Goodwin Public Library
Canyon Area Library
Carrollton Public Library
Castleberry ISD Libraries - Mo Bus
Chambers County Library System
Chico Public Library
Cleburne Public Library
Coldspring Area Public Library
Comanche Public Library
Commerce Public Library
Comfort Public Library
Corpus Christi Public Libraries
Corsicana Public Library
Cozby Library & Community Commons
Crowley Public Library
Daggett Elementary School
Decatur Public Library
Denton ISD
Dickinson Public Library
Don Jeter Elementary
Dr. Hector P. Garcia Memorial Library
Driscoll Public Library
Dublin Public Library
Eagle Pass Public Library
East Travis Gateway Library District
Eastland Centennial Memorial Library
E.M. Gilliam Memorial Public Library
Eula Hunt Beck Florence Public Library
Fort Bend County Libraries
Garland Public Libraries (Nicholson Memorial Library System)
Giddings Public Library and Cultural Center
Hamilton Public Library
Harlingen CISD Library Services
Harlingen Public Library
Harris County Public Library
Hewitt Public Library
Hillsboro City Library
Hondo Public Library
Honey Grove Library & Learning Center
Houston Public Library
Hutto Public Library
Imperial Public Library
Jack Lowe Sr. Elementary Library
Jacksonville Public Library
Joe Barnhart Bee County Library
Jones Public Library
Judith J. Carrier Library
Kaufman County Library
Kennedale Public Library
Kilgore Public Library
Kurth Memorial Library
Lago Vista Public Library
Laguna Vista Public Library
Lake Dallas Public Library
Lake Travis Community Library
Lampasas Public Library
Laredo Public Library
Lena Armstrong Public Library
Little Elm Public Library
Lovett Memorial Library
Lucy Hill Patterson Memorial Library
Lyons Elementary School Campus Library
Mammen Family Public Library
Mansfield Public Library
Marathon Public Library
Marble Falls Library
Margery Malin Library
Marfa Public Library
McAllen Public Library
Mission Junior High
Nesbitt Memorial Library
New Braunfels Public Library
Palmview Municipal Library
Pottsboro Area Public Library
PSJA ISD Libraries
Rains County Library
Red Oak Public Library
Round Rock Public Library
San Benito Public Library
San Juan Memorial Library
Sharyland North Junior High Library
Sherman Public Library
Smithville Public Library
Sonny and Allegra Nance Elementary School Library
South Houston Branch Library
Southlake Public Library
Taft Public Library
Traphene Hickman Library
Tyler Public Library
Val Verde County Library
Valley Mills Public Library
Van Alstyne Public Library
Victoria Public Library
Waco-McLennan County Library
Watauga Public Library
William Marsh Rice Public Library
Woodridge Elementary Library

Libraries Connect Families to the Texas Department of Agriculture Summer Meals Program

Each summer, many Texas children lose access to the meals they rely on during the school year. The Texas Department of Agriculture's Summer Meals Program helps bridge that gap by connecting children and teens 18 and younger with no-cost meals served at approved sites across the state. Meals are available to participating children without an application or registration, helping families access food support during the summer months.

Libraries can play an important role in helping families learn about Summer Meals. As trusted community hubs, libraries are often one of the first places families turn for summer activities, information, and support. By helping promote Summer Meals, libraries can increase awareness, reduce barriers, and connect more children with nearby meal sites.(**Download TDA Summer Meals Program poster**)

Libraries can provide support by sharing Summer Meals information through newsletters, websites, social media, summer reading communications, bulletin boards, flyers, and event calendars. Staff may also direct families to the Summer Meals site map, display summer outreach materials in visible areas, and share information with community partners, local schools, youth-serving organizations, and caregivers. Libraries interested in deeper involvement may also explore opportunities to partner with approved meal sponsors or serve as a local access point for Summer Meals information.

Families and partners can find more information, resources, and meal site details at **SummerFood.org** or **SquareMeals.org**. Questions may be directed to Outreach@TexasAgriculture.gov

TLA OFFICER GOVERNANCE TRAINING & WORKSHOP

TLA unit officers are encouraged to attend the TLA Officer Governance Training and Workshop to prepare for their 2026-2027 roles. The workshop will be held from Thursday, July 9, to Friday, July 10, at the Austin Marriott North in Round Rock, Texas.

Register today!

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE TLA REFERRAL PROGRAM WINNER!

Thank you to everyone who took part in the TLA 2026 Referral Program. Our association thrives when we are connected and can reach members across the state. Congratulations, Claudia Villareal-Quiroz, for referring the most members during this year's campaign.

"I am a TLA member because it offers professional development opportunities, allows me to connect with fellow library professionals, exchange ideas, and remain up to date on library practices, technologies, and industry standards."

– Claudia Villarreal Quiroz

H-E-B 2026 SUMMER AT THE LIBRARY CHECK STAND CAMPAIGN

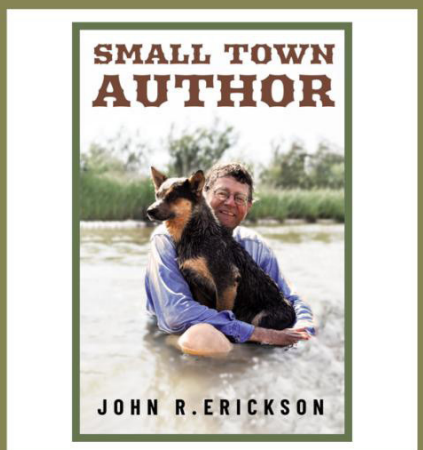
For the third year, H-E-B has selected the Texas Library Association as the beneficiary of the Summer at the Library check stand donation campaign. From June 3 – June 30, customers at any H-E-B store will be able to give at checkout. The impact of this partnership will be significant, enabling libraries to provide better services to their communities during the summer months. The next time you're at your local H-E-B, be sure to check the terminal pad and add your donation.

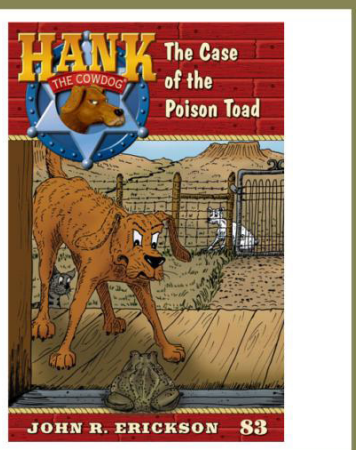
2026 Texas Great Read

The Texas Center for the Book at the Texas State Library and Archives Commission (TSLAC) is delighted to announce its Texas Great Read youth and adult selections for 2026.

- **Youth selection:** *Hank the Cowdog #83: The Case of the Poison Toad* by John R. Erickson
- **Adult Selection:** *Small Town Author* by John R. Erickson

Every year, the Library of Congress asks each state Center for the Book to select titles that represent the state's literary landscape to highlight at the National Book Festival, an event showcasing the importance of books and reading. **Learn more** about the 2026 Texas Great Read Program.





CULTIVATING COMMUNITY
THRIVING TOGETHER

TLA 2026

TEXAS LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

HOUSTON ★ MARCH 29–31

CONFERENCE WRAP UP

TLA 2026 Conference Wrap Up

The TLA 2027 Annual Conference took place in Houston from May 29-31, welcoming thousands of professionals for the first time in ten years since TLA was last hosted in the Space City. Librarians from across Texas gathered to connect, learn, and reignite their passion for the profession, united under the theme "Cultivating Community. Thriving Together."

Over the course of three days, the conference featured more than 200 educational sessions, 200 author signings, and 200 exhibitors, showcasing the latest advancements in library technology, programming, and ideas. Attendees were immersed in the heart of Houston, exploring the country's largest outdoor mural gallery, cultural centers, restaurants, and the city's robust library systems.

This year, the Exhibit Hall included a new TLA community corner and a TLA membership booth. There, attendees connected with TLA staff and fellow members while participating in activities such as building a community tree, creating seed packets, and meeting Houston Public Library's Cowboy Larry, along with some adorable furry animals.

During the 2026 Bluebonnet Award luncheon, guests heard from winning author Minda Dentler, who spoke about her autobiography, *The Girl Who Figured It Out*. This Bluebonnet award-winning book received hundreds of votes from students across Texas in 2025, inspired by Dentler's story of perseverance and growth.

Mychal Threets returned to the stage for a celebration of library joy, sharing his message of

TLA 2026 Conference Wrap Up

belonging and the power of libraries with audiences during a featured session tied to his new book, *I'm So Happy You're Here*. His conversation centered on the importance of creating welcoming library spaces and uplifting every reader's story.

The Illustrator Sketch Off and Battle Decks once again energized attendees, filling rooms with enthusiastic participants competing for the title of best storyteller, artist, or funniest presenter.

A special thank you goes to the TLA executive board, conference planning committee, staff, and volunteers for their work in organizing this year's conference.

Keynote Speakers

At General Session I, actor, author, and producer John Leguizamo joined Dr. Karina Quilantan Garza for an engaging conversation about his newest children's book, *Kiki and the Can*. During their discussion, Leguizamo reflected on his lifelong love of books and libraries, sharing how storytelling shaped his creative journey from an early age. Leguizamo spoke candidly about navigating Hollywood as a Hispanic actor and his commitment to creating authentic representation for Latino communities both on screen and in literature. The discussion highlighted how stories can empower young readers when they see themselves reflected and celebrated.

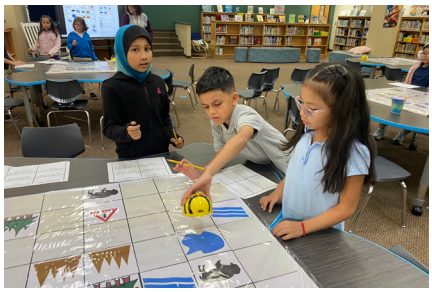
General Session II featured bestselling historical fiction author Kate Quinn in conversation with CPC Co-Planning Committee Chair Kate Carter about Quinn's newest novel, *The Astral Library*. Quinn discussed the inspiration behind the book's magical setting and the ways libraries can serve as places of discovery, wonder, and connection. She provided insights into her writing process and the imaginative world-building that shaped her latest work, leaving attendees inspired by the transformative power of both stories and libraries.

John Leguizamo

Kate Quinn

2026 Branding Iron Awards

Across Texas, librarians plan and execute inventive, inspired marketing campaigns to promote their services, programs, and events. The Texas Library Association's Branding Iron Awards honor creative and memorable work, presenting awards in several categories and an overall Best of Show winner.



BEST IN SHOW

Mesquite ISD

The 2026 Best in Show winner was awarded to Mesquite ISD Library Services for their districtwide social media advocacy campaign that elevated the instructional impact of certified school librarians across 52 campuses serving approximately 40,000 students.

The campaign used district-aligned storytelling to position librarians as essential instructional partners who support teaching and learning through collaboration, inquiry-based instruction, and information literacy. During a year of significant budget uncertainty, the initiative maintained a strong, visible narrative of the impact of librarianship across campuses and the broader community. The campaign effectively showcased the contributions library services provide to student success, emphasizing the need for staffing and program stability across the district.

2026 Branding Iron Awards

READING PROGRAMS: PUBLIC LIBRARY

Arlington Public Library

"Discover Summer" is the Arlington Public Library's (APL) annual summer reading and engagement initiative that serves more than 400,000 residents. In 2025, APL focused the campaign on increasing participation and addressing local literacy challenges through data-driven communications.

The APL communications team used tracking links, QR codes, social media, newsletters, and print materials to connect patrons with programs and the summer reading challenge. The library achieved a 30% increase in reading challenge completions and recorded 5,443 participants, 3,455 completions, and 15,233 program attendances across 485 events.

DIGITAL MARKETING: PUBLIC LIBRARY

Carrollton Public Library

In 2025, the Carrollton Public Library (CPL) launched a coordinated marketing campaign to support the rollout of its new Integrated Library System (ILS) and catalog interface, serving approximately 136,000 residents across three counties. The team deployed eNewsletters, social media, digital displays, and cable channels tailored to different audiences, ensuring broad and targeted reach across user groups. As a result, CPL achieved increased awareness, stronger engagement, and successful adoption of the new system.

2026 Branding Iron Awards

FUNDRAISING MARKETING: PUBLIC LIBRARY

Fort Worth Public Library

The Fort Worth Public Library (FWPL) serves nearly one million residents across 20 locations. Last year, the library launched a campaign to showcase a decade of growth and its value during a pivotal year of expansion. The FWL Communications Team transformed the fiscal year report into a multi-format advocacy tool, utilizing print, digital media, video, and social media to engage city leaders and the public.

The campaign highlighted significant outcomes, including 1.14 million visits, over 4 million checkouts, more than 45,000 new library cards issued, and over 112,000 program attendees across more than 10,000 programs.

DIGITAL MARKETING: SPECIAL LIBRARY

Harris County Robert W. Hainsworth Law Library

The Harris County Robert W. Hainsworth Law Library launched the LAWPod initiative in partnership with Harris County Public Library to expand access to legal information for self-represented litigants facing barriers to counsel. The program introduced six accessible LAWPods across regional libraries, offering private workspaces, legal research tools, and remote access to legal support services. To increase awareness, the library created the “LAWPod Rod”. A video campaign, using short, humorous, character-driven content distributed across YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and newsletters.

In 2025, outreach efforts included 10 community presentations, 24 CLE sessions, and 89 speaking events, reaching 2,726 individuals. LAWPod usage showed measurable increases, with 800+ video views across channels—demonstrating growing awareness, engagement, and access to justice through digital outreach.

2026 Branding Iron Awards

DIGITAL MARKETING: SCHOOL LIBRARY

Northside ISD

In 2025, Northside ISD Library Services launched the "Shoutout" social media campaign to enhance visibility for school libraries across San Antonio. This low-cost initiative showcased daily library activities, student engagement, and innovative practices through a simple submission process shared on their official Facebook page. The campaign significantly increased post engagement and raised awareness of library programs among families and administrators.

PRINT MARKETING: PUBLIC LIBRARY

Round Rock Public Library

The Round Rock Public Library, serving a rapidly growing and diverse Central Texas community, launched the Discovery Pass program in 2025 to expand access to cultural, educational, and recreational experiences beyond the library. The initiative allows patrons to reserve free passes to regional destinations, including the Thinkery, LBJ Presidential Library, and Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center.

The program's marketing campaign focused on increasing awareness of this new service and encouraging equitable access by making the reservation process simple and accessible. Since its launch, the program has generated sustained growth, including hundreds of holds and strong checkout rates across participating institutions.

TLA 2026 Awards

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT

Kristi Johnson Starr

Kristi Starr was an inspiring teacher, school librarian, professor, mentor, writer, and advocate for almost three decades. Throughout her career, she served in various leadership roles within TLA and the Texas Association of School Librarians, helping guide statewide initiatives and encouraging others to explore leadership. She continued to support the Texas library community during times of uncertainty until her passing in 2025. Kristi is remembered for her humility, generosity, and steady encouragement, as well as her belief that leadership is rooted in service and collaboration.

LIBRARIAN OF THE YEAR

Brooke Corso

Brooke Corso is a librarian at Pin Oak Middle School. Her leadership has transformed the campus library into a dynamic, research-driven learning environment that responds to the needs of students, families, and staff. Brooke has designed instruction, collections, and spaces that are multilingual, inclusive, and intentionally accessible.

DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD

Dawn Reyes

Dawn Reyes has served at the Arlington Public Library since 1996 and has continued to expand her impact over nearly three decades. Dawn leads many of the library's most successful and lasting initiatives, including the 1,000 Books Before Kindergarten program, large-scale events like Harry Potter Day, and early learning outreach that connects the library with dozens of local centers. Reyes mentors new staff, shares her deep knowledge of both librarianship and the Arlington community, and continues to expand access to support the next generation of library professionals.

TLA 2026 Awards

BENEFACTOR AWARD

Dr. T. Bradford Willis

Through decades of collecting, research, and philanthropy, Dr. T. Bradford Willis has made significant contributions to the University of North Texas Libraries' Special Collections and The Portal to Texas History. His donations include the Willis Family Photography Collection and the Private Collection of T. B. Willis, providing thousands of digitized items documenting Texas and family history, including wartime experiences, historic photographs, and genealogical records.

His financial support has further strengthened library access and preservation efforts, including a foundational gift to the Cathy Nelson Hartman Portal to Texas History Endowment and multiple endowed scholarships supporting student workers in digitization and preservation.

OUTSTANDING SERVICES TO LIBRARIES

The Librarians Film Team

The Librarians Film Team—Kim A. Snyder (Director/Producer), Janique L. Robillard (Producer), Maria Cuomo Cole (Producer), and Jana Edelbaum (Producer)—received this award for creating and widely distributing a documentary that highlights the impact of censorship and book bans on libraries, librarians, and communities. The film documents the real-world challenges to intellectual freedom across multiple states and captures the experiences of librarians on the front lines.

The documentary has reached audiences across the United States and internationally, sparking dialogue, strengthening advocacy efforts, and reinforcing librarians' essential role as defenders of the freedom to read.

LIBRARIES CHANGE COMMUNITIES AWARD

Plano Public Library

The Plano Public Library was recognized for its community impact with its "Work Experience Program", a partnership-based model designed to provide job skills practice for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

The Work Experience Program offers adults with disabilities the opportunity to gain hands-on job training and inclusive workforce experience while providing tangible volunteer support for library operations.

TLA 2026 Awards

SAM. G. WHITTEN INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM AWARD

Toni Carter

Toni Carter, member of Pearland ISD Board of Trustees, has been a fierce advocate for her district's library and has used her platform to emphasize the importance of reading and intellectual freedom for Texas students.

WAYNE WILLIAMS PROJECT OF THE YEAR

Margarita Longoria

Under the leadership of Margarita Longoria, Kiera's Closet at Mission High School provides essential items to support student equity and address the barriers that impact learning. The project demonstrated the library's ability to serve not only as an academic resource but also as a community connector and guide for libraries across the state.

Other Awards & Recognition

INDIVIDUAL AWARDS & SCHOLARSHIPS

Christina B. Woll Memorial Fund Grant
Marathon Public Library

Jeanette and Jim Larson Mystery Grant
Comanche Public Library

Ray C. Janeway Scholarship
Sammy Bass

TLA Summer School Scholarship
Shelby Rocca

Vivian Greenfield Award
Karina Rodriguez

Young Adult Reading Incentive Award
Brittnee Emerine

DISTRICT CONFERENCE STIPENDS

District 2: Chelsea Keuhler, Amanda Izard

District 4: Celeste Lopez

District 5: Heather Lassley

District 6: Sarah Mayne

District 8: Terri Romero

DIVISION AWARDS & STIPENDS

College and University Libraries Division Conference Stipend
Kelli Wilder, Rachel Pilcher, Kelly Hoppe, Lieanna Clymer

Public Libraries Division Conference Stipend
Aimee Sawyer, Jenny Miner, Josh Rudd, Lina Burklin, Rebecca House, Rachel Reeves, Carolyn Booker

Texas Association of School Librarians Media Virtual Presence (MVP) Award
Miranda Quintero

Texas Association of School Librarians Distinguished Library Service Award – School Administrator
Pam Montalvo

Texas Association of School Librarians – Texas PTA Shirley Igo Award
Jennifer E. Moore

Texas Association of School Librarians Travel Stipend
Lauren Jones, Joni Harris, Angela Pedigo, Kelly Born, Jane Benjamin

Texas Association of School Librarians Scholarship
Cassandra Reynolds; Cecelia Romero

ROUND TABLES

Black Caucus Round Table Ashley Bryan Award
Keenan Jones

Black Caucus Round Table Stipends
Kenya Johnson, Keyetta Mathis

Children's Round Table Stipends
Abby Moore, Leslie Whitaker, Bianca Jones, Jennifer Gomez

Innovation & Technology Round Table
Stephanie Galvan Russell, Margaret Miller

Jack Alton Strawn Standing TALL Award
Dr. Rose Brock

Latino Caucus Round Table Stipend
Zenovia DeCuir, Stephanie Galvan Russell

Library Friends, Trustees, & Advocates Round Table Conference Stipend
Erika Andrade Smith, Erika Andrade Smith, Hira Nickole

New Members Round Table
Tamra Kelley, Alicia Ford

Siddie Jo Johnson Award
Taylor Revilla

Small Community Libraries Advocate Award
Norma Fultz

Small Community Libraries Award
Rebeka White

Programming for Adults Stipend
Dawn Zeig

Young Adult Round Table Conference Stipend
Amanda Hunt, Lauren Scott, Geogg Scott, Sandra Naranjo, Andrea Keller, Wafa Ihweil, Keyetta Mathis, Mary Williams, Rachel Kammerer, Bailee Hazelwood

TOCKER GRANTS

Bailee Hazelwood
Bernadette Thompson
Misty Smith
Kassie Culwell
Aimee Sawyer

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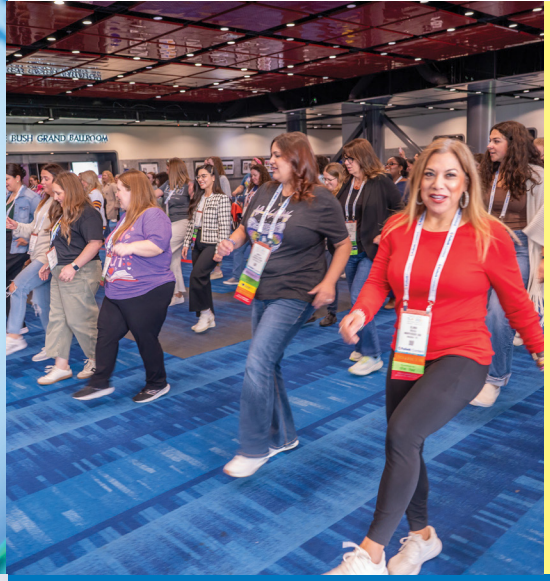
TLA



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