

# The AASL Experience

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**F**or many Ontario school library professionals, the pinnacle of PD is the Ontario Library Association Super Conference. It is an annual opportunity to network, discuss, and experience some fantastic speakers and sessions. Have you ever wondered, however, if there were other, similar events that you could attend? What if I told you that there was an affair of approximately the same size as the OLA Super Conference, but exclusively focused on school libraries?

The American Association of School Librarians (AASL) runs a conference once every two years, and in 2017, it was in Phoenix, Arizona. I learned about the conference via a tweet that referenced a list of state and national school library conferences. (I don't remember the original source for this information, but another comparable link is [librarianlisa.com/the-ultimate-school-library-conferences-calendar-2017-18](http://librarianlisa.com/the-ultimate-school-library-conferences-calendar-2017-18)). I convinced a couple of Ontario teacher-librarians to submit proposals and we (Melanie Mulcaster, Alanna King, and I) were all accepted.

Travelling out of the country for a conference entails its own set of unique challenges. Funding is one of them. Presenters were required to be members of the American Library Association and there were no discounts for conference registration if you were speaking. We also had to arrange our flights and accommodations. Thankfully, Melanie was a superb deal-finder and found our team a wonderful home-away-from-home with its own kitchen, close to the conference centre. We spread out paying our expenses so that we didn't take a financial hit all at once.

Attending AASL was a wonderful opportunity. Between Melanie, Alanna, Mary (my daughter) and I, we presented ten times! This meant that we didn't have as much free time as we might have liked, but we ensured that we fed our brains at different sessions. Needless to say, there were almost too many to choose from! I wrote about the presentations I saw on my blog (see [mondymollymusings.blogspot.ca/2017/11/aasl17-conference-reflections-its-worth.html](http://mondymollymusings.blogspot.ca/2017/11/aasl17-conference-reflections-its-worth.html) and [mondymollymusings.blogspot.ca/2017/11/aasl-conference-reflections-part-2.html](http://mondymollymusings.blogspot.ca/2017/11/aasl-conference-reflections-part-2.html)). The energy at the event was tangible, and everyone we met seemed to be friendly and approachable. The big buzz at the conference was the release of the new National Standards. (*School Library Journal's* summary of the event can be found at [slj.com/2017/11/industry-news/aasl-17-starring-standards](http://slj.com/2017/11/industry-news/aasl-17-starring-standards)). It was fascinating to compare the situation in Canada with our southern neighbours and it made us realize that Ontario school libraries (where they exist, properly staffed) are at the forefront of innovation. We should be proud!

Another benefit to attending a conference in a different place is sharing the experience with others. I know I tweeted a lot and thought a lot about what I heard and learned. It made me want to bring these ideas back to friends and colleagues back home. (I also wrote about this more in depth at [mondymollymusings.blogspot.ca/2017/11/important-people-disembodied.html](http://mondymollymusings.blogspot.ca/2017/11/important-people-disembodied.html).) The next AASL conference will be in 2019 in Kentucky and if you are financially fortunate enough to attend, I highly recommend it. If you'd like to try a conference within Canada, check out Canadian School Libraries ([canadianschoollibraries.ca/school-library-association](http://canadianschoollibraries.ca/school-library-association)). ■