Probability of Reinstating School Librarians Once Eliminated

What happened over time in districts that eliminated school librarians? How often have lost librarian FTEs been restored?

To examine whether districts reinstated librarian positions once eliminated, we tracked, from 2015-16 through 2018-19, districts that reported no librarians in 2015-16.

In 2015-16, 3,560 districts nationwide reported no school librarians. (That may have been the district's first year of no librarians, or it may have eliminated its last librarian sometime earlier.)

In 2016-17, of those no-librarian districts, 210 (5.9%) reported something greater than zero for librarians. It may have been one librarian for the entire district, a full-time librarian in every school, or anything in-between.

In 2017-18, of those no-librarian districts, 275 (7.7%) reported something greater than zero for librarians.

In 2018-19, of those no-librarian districts, 336 (9.4%) reported something greater than zero for librarians.

Although this group of "no librarians" districts tracked from 2015-16 through to 2018-19, showed some minimal additions of school librarians over time, the probability of librarian positions being restored was not high. In 2016-17, 94 out of every 100 districts that reported no librarians the year before had none. Even three years later, in 2018-19, 91 out of every 100 districts that reported no librarians in 2015-16 still had none.

> **Nine out of 10 districts that had eliminated school librarians by 2015-16 had not reinstated them by 2018-19. This indicates that, once lost, a school librarian position was highly unlikely to be restored.**

These data suggest that decision-makers for the vast majority of districts that eliminated school librarians did not see a need to reinstate them—at least, within the three subsequent years for which data were examined. These findings raise important questions that SLIDE interviewers will seek to explore with decision-makers from such districts.

- If school librarian cuts are not reversed within three years, what, if any, consequences for their students and teachers do decision-makers believe resulted from those cuts? What, if any, steps were taken to ameliorate those consequences? What, if any, protests were heard from students, their parents, teachers, the community, or local media?

- If, as NCES data indicate, school librarians were cut, who, if anyone, replaced them? Were any of their responsibilities shifted to other particular staff (e.g., reading teachers, educational technology staff) or added to the workloads of all teachers? Or are those responsibilities no longer fulfilled by anyone?

- If school librarians were cut in order to make room for a new staffing model involving a different position or positions, what does that model look like? How were alternative positions staffed and by whom?

The SLIDE interviews will be the first time there has been a large-scale effort to understand the thinking of school leaders regarding such decisions and their consequences. An improved understanding of their thinking would better inform the school library community to identify more promising strategic directions for the profession's future, possibly including new alliances with other types of educators (perhaps newer types) who share wider concerns for what are now perceived as library, learning resources, and teaching-with-technology functions.