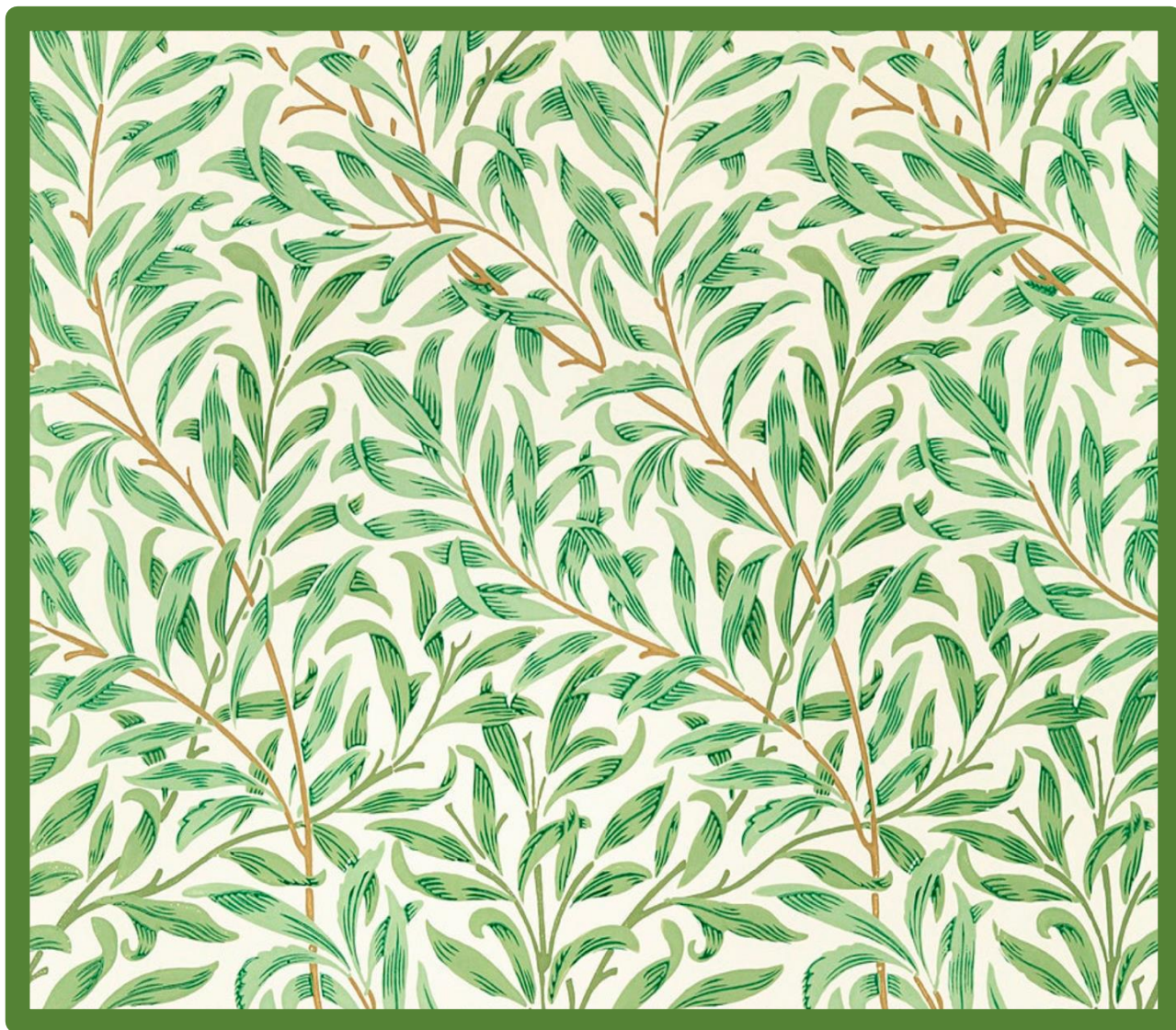


slide	The School Librarian Investigation
	<i>Decline or Evolution?</i>

Voices of Decision-Makers

*How District & School Leaders
Decide About School Librarian
Employment*

Keith Curry Lance 🍃 Debra E. Kachel 🍃 Leah Breevoort
Caitlin Gerrity 🍃 Deeth Ellis



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Executive Summary

In this final phase of the School Librarian Investigation—Decline of Evolution? grant project, a multi-state, qualitative study of interviews of K-12 school leaders was conducted. The purpose of the interviews was to shed light on the declining numbers of school librarians as documented in the previous work of the SLIDE project. 49 school leaders agreed to be anonymously interviewed from 29 states and D.C. Most were superintendents, assistant superintendents, or district-level administrators.

The 49 interviewees were placed in two groups for analysis—those that added or restored school librarians (28) and those that reduced, eliminated, combined, or reclassified librarian positions (26). (Five made both types of decisions.) The decision factors they identified were further categorized in three groups. Structural factors include pre-existing laws, regulations, or local circumstances that drive staffing decisions, like difficulties finding qualified candidates. Such factors leave decision-makers with little choice. Pragmatic factors are practical, often logistical problems that administrators must resolve, such as providing coverage for teacher planning time or reassigning a librarian to a classroom due to a teacher shortage. Strategic factors are discretionary ones initiated by leaders to advance district or school goals and included both positive and negative librarian staffing decisions, i.e., cutting a librarian position to fund a needed specialist.

Based on three processes of the evolutionary organizational theory, these research questions were addressed:

- What factors affected how school decision-makers chose to staff library/information resources? (Selection and Retention)
- What advantages or disadvantages did decision-makers perceive in their chosen models for staffing library/information resources compared to other alternatives they considered? (Competition)

Interview questions were developed and vetted by the project staff and the Advisory Council. Interviewers were trained and conducted practice interviews to ensure consistency. An interviewer's report form was developed with initial, anticipated responses that were later developed into codes. Dedoose, a qualitative coding app, was used to code recorded transcripts and produce co-occurrence tables for a deeper analysis of how decision responses were interconnected. Questions sought information about:

- Formal/informal instruction provided (e.g., information literacy, digital citizenship, etc.)
- Staff providing the instruction (e.g., all teachers, ed tech staff, etc.)
- Nature of the librarian staffing changes (e.g., added, reduced, etc.)
- Other positions involved in staffing decisions (school board, principals, etc.)
- Decision-making factors (see below)
- Advantages/disadvantages or tradeoffs to decisions made
- Interviewee's interactions with librarians that may have influenced their decisions

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Interviewees who reported adding or restoring school librarian positions were more likely to report strategic factors that shaped their decisions than their counterparts who cut librarian positions. Among those who increased librarian positions, decision factors clustered in these four themes, based on frequently cited factors and factors that co-occurred with them.

- For the theme of Librarians for Equity of Access, factors co-occurring with equity were stand-alone instruction by librarians and changes in priorities.
- For the theme of New Leadership, New Priorities, co-occurring factors were change in administration and change in priorities.
- For the theme of More Teaching by Librarians, co-occurring factors were priority changes, stand-alone instruction by librarians, planning time for teachers, and librarian-teacher collaboration.
- For the theme of Opportunity to Meet Mandates, co-occurring factors were new funding and changes in priorities.

Interviewees who reported reducing, eliminating, combining, or reclassifying school librarian positions were more likely to report structural factors that shaped their decisions than their counterparts who made positive decisions about librarians. These three prevailing themes emerged from this group.

- For the theme of New Priorities, More Specialists & Teachers, co-occurring factors were budget constraints, change in priorities, needing an incumbent librarian in another position, and needing more teachers;
- For the theme of New Leadership, New Priorities co-occurring factors were change in administration, change in priorities, and budget constraints.
- For the theme of Can't Find a Librarian co-occurring factors were finding a qualified candidate and budget constraints.

A prevailing theme among both groups of interviewees—whether librarian positions were increased or decreased—related to changes in administration and/or changes in priorities. This suggests that changes in support for school librarian staffing are sometimes based on preconceived beliefs of new leaders about the value of school libraries and librarians.

Examples and selected quotes gathered about the advantages, disadvantages, and tradeoffs made by interviewees' decisions—whether to increase or decrease librarian positions—are presented in the full report. Interactions with school librarians that impacted the interviewed school administrators' views and perceptions about providing school librarians in their schools ran the gamut of responses defying meaningful analysis. Selected quotes are also included in the full report. However, most comments were positive about school librarians, even among those who decided to reduce librarian positions.

Since 49 cases cannot be used to generalize, NCES data on school librarian employment were also analyzed to add perspective. Comparing the 2020-21 and 2021-22 years revealed extreme volatility in hiring patterns likely due to

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the impact of the COVID pandemic. During this one-year interval, 15.4 percent of U.S. school districts added librarians, while 15.9 percent, reduced or eliminated librarians. In 2021-2022, according to NCES data, 7.1 million U.S. students were in districts that had no school librarians—that is 35 percent of all local school districts (Lance & Kachel, 2023).

Thematic analysis revealed patterns in how administrators decide about school librarian staffing and provided interesting examples and quotes from interviewees. Those patterns provide insights to stakeholders seeking to better understand often-volatile trends in school librarian employment. This work offers a glimpse into the thinking of K-12 leaders who must frequently make unenviable decisions that impact educational opportunities for students and academic support for teachers. In short, access to school librarians continues to be a major source of educational inequity driven by the circumstances and often unique realities of today's K-12 environment and the priorities and values of key administrative school leaders.

Introduction

For at least a decade, public schools nationwide experienced net losses of school librarians—20 percent since 2009-10, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). Yet, as the number of school librarian positions decreased during this time period, numbers of school administrators and instructional coordinators increased and numbers of teachers remained relatively stable (Lance & Kachel, 2021). These data also illuminated that not all districts and not all schools have been losing librarians. Between 2020-21 and 2021-22—as districts and schools began to recover from disruptions from the COVID-19 pandemic—27 states experienced net gains of school librarians, while 20 states experienced net librarian losses (Lance & Kachel, 2023). Such facts suggested that interviews of school administrators were needed to understand how and why they decided to add, reduce, eliminate, combine, or reclassify school librarian positions. This study identified those making these difficult decisions and investigated the factors, tradeoffs (advantages or disadvantages), and personal interactions that influenced school leaders' decisions about school librarian employment.

The School Librarian Investigation: Decline or Evolution? was funded by a three-year Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian/Research in Practice grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) and conducted under the auspices of Antioch University Seattle. Begun in Fall 2020, the project included three major phases of research:

- A survey of the states and District of Columbia to determine how states support school libraries and school librarians, including staffing mandates and the number of institutions of higher education that prepare school librarians (Kachel & Lance, 2021).
- A quantitative analysis of data on school librarian employment at national, state, and district levels over the past decade utilizing the Common Core of Data (CCD) of NCES. In particular, this analysis examined inequities of access to school librarians associated with geography (state and region), district characteristics (enrollment, locale, and per-pupil school spending) and student demographics (poverty, race, and ethnicity) (Lance & Kachel, 2021).
- A qualitative analysis of interviews of school leaders who decided how to staff librarian and other information resources-related positions to learn the experiences, perceptions, values, and rationales that motivated their decisions.

The SLIDE project's research to date has documented serious inequities in access to school librarians, particularly among those students who likely need school librarians and library services the most. Access to school librarians is strongly related to student race and ethnicity and further exacerbated for economically disadvantaged students, students living in more isolated locales, and students in smaller enrollment districts—districts where students are less likely to have access to educational resources available in other districts (Lance, Kachel & Gerrity, 2023). In 2021-2022, according to NCES data, 7.1 million U.S. students were in districts that had no school librarians—that is

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35 percent of all local school districts (Lance & Kachel, 2023). In short, access to school librarians is a major source of educational inequality.

The final phase of the SLIDE project, the focus of this report, is based on 49 interviews of school leaders from districts and schools in varied settings in 29 states and the District of Columbia. The number of interviewees was fewer than originally planned, largely due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which occurred during this grant project. Nonetheless, these interviews shed a tremendous amount of light on the thinking of district and school leaders and the factors driving their decisions about school librarian employment. Readers of this report will gain a deeper understanding of how and why those decisions were made by listening to the voices of decision-makers and considering what they had to say.

Literature Review

This literature review focuses on relevant studies and articles about the perceptions, experiences, and factors that impact the decisions made by key school leaders relative to school librarian staffing. Forces at the school, district, state, and even federal levels are considered, as well as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on school library staffing. While schools and districts today have some unique circumstances, sources are included that examine the common challenges and priorities of K-12 schools that shape school decision-makers' choices in staffing school libraries and library services for students.

School administrators are guided by professional standards (National Policy Board, 2015) to “develop and support intellectually rigorous and coherent systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment” (p. 12), and to “develop the professional capacity and practice of school personnel” (p.14). Administrators take different approaches to meet these standards and make decisions about staffing their schools to achieve district goals. Their understanding of their staff's skills and job responsibilities contributes to how the school is staffed and how each member of the staff contributes to student achievement. The staffing choices hinge in part on the administrator's views and experiences but also on other, sometimes external, factors such as the budget, legislated requirements, and the local political climate.

Perceptions of School Librarians by School Administrators

School administrators and librarians continue to envision librarian roles differently despite state and national school library standards, guidelines, and position statements (AASL, 2018). Role ambiguity of a school librarian has been the topic of research since the early 2000s with little consensus. Hartzell's seminal work (2002, 2003) presented four interactive forces that shape principals' perceptions of school librarians which are still documented in current literature. First, principals' own K-12 school experiences in which libraries were often either absent or peripheral to the classroom instill a lasting impression. Second, a lack of formal administrative training or any knowledge of the library's role in curriculum and instruction impedes an administrator in leveraging the school library in student achievement. Third, the collaborative nature of the work of a school librarian enables others, particularly teachers, to take full credit for lesson design, inclusion of resources, and instruction, making the librarian's role “invisible.” And fourth, there is the lack of research and articles about the role of school librarians and libraries in professional literature read by administrators (Hartzell, 2002).

In addition to Hartzell's work, several studies in the early 2000s examined the extent to which the perceptions of the school principal influenced the sustainability or erosion of a library program (Church, 2008, 2010; Roberson, et al., 2005; Shannon, 2009). More recent studies indicate that Hartzell's assessment continues (Gordon & Cicchetti, 2018; Loh, et al., 2021; Newsum, 2018; Stevenson, 2018; Wright, 2022). Johnston & Green (2018) conducted a comprehensive literature review of empirical school library research studies published between 2004 and 2014. Of the 110 studies included, 52 focused on the role of the school librarian (p. 6). Many studies indicate that principals most often learn about the librarian's role from their own school librarian (Church, 2008; Taylor, 2016). When

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administrators only learn from their school librarian and do not receive formal training about the role of the librarian and how to supervise them, inconsistent expectations and varying levels of library service and instruction persist.

Barriers—some self-imposed by librarians; some, imposed by necessity of school schedules—thwart efforts for the school librarian to take on a leadership role and become an effective collaborative partner within the school (Kizzier, 2021; Loh et al., 2021; Lupton, 2016; Taylor, 2016; Stevenson, 2018). Stevenson (2018) found that principals viewed teaching as the first priority of librarians and often set rigid schedules to ensure librarian contact time with students. In some studies, leadership activities of librarians were the least visible and library program management tasks were less valued by administrators. Centerwall (2019) describes librarians being rendered invisible when they curate resources for teachers or embed librarian-developed instruction in classroom teachers' curriculum. This unwittingly leads to the librarian's work being unrecognized and absorbed into the classroom teacher's practice.

Emphasis by administrators of one librarian role over another (instructional, management, library supervisor, technology instructor, or source procurement) can weaken key areas of library practice (Merga, 2019; Shannon, 2009; Stevenson, 2018). Kizzier (2021) illustrates this point by stating "Two school administrators emphasized the school librarian's role as teacher while another administrator emphasized the librarian's role as being a support system for stakeholders" (p. 69). Lupton (2016) provides an example of a principal, who stated "My biggest beef is you pay for the 'T' part of the TL [teacher librarian] and you don't get any 'T' from the TL. That's an issue with me...So my difficulty is a teacher-librarian is employed under the same conditions as other teachers but doesn't do anywhere near the contact and face-to-face" (p. 53).

Lewis (2019) found that administrators' personal values influence their decisions to select and utilize instructional coaches or librarians to provide instructional leadership. She posits that school administrators are more apt to identify with instructional coaches than librarians because they see instructional coaches as extensions of themselves in leadership roles (p. 16). Underutilization of libraries can also be linked to "unclear knowledge about the role and work of the school librarian" (Loh et al., 2021, p. 550).

As technology demands have grown, so has the principal's view of the librarian as technology leader in their school (Baker et al., 2020; Dooney, 2021; Johnston, 2015; Newsum, 2018). Some principals place the librarian as a professional development partner to transform teacher practices, particularly in the area of technology. However, this overly narrow view of the role of the librarian excludes key areas of library practice, such as reading motivation, collection and library management, and information literacy instruction. Using librarians as technology leaders ultimately can have mixed results for the library program (Ahfield, 2019; Newsum, 2018).

Yet, school administrators who have worked with exemplary school librarians have positive perceptions of school libraries. Cellucci and Harland (2022) describe principals and superintendents who understand the value and leadership of their school librarian and programs. Kachel (2017) similarly explains that school librarians gain

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support from principals when they focus library goals on principals' priorities and contribute to school improvements.

What apparently has not influenced most school leaders in their decision-making about school librarian staffing is the several decades of school library impact studies conducted in over 30 states. This body of research found increases in reading and writing test scores in schools with school librarians compared to schools without librarians (Lance, et al., 2000, 2002, 2014; Lance & Kachel, 2018; Lance & Schwarz, 2012; Rodney, et al., 2003; Smith, 2001, 2006; Wine, et al., 2023). A Washington state study found improved graduation rates where schools had certified school librarians (Coker, 2015). In a new study, Wine et al. (2023), found students who attend schools with a full-time certified librarian score significantly higher on math and reading tests than do similarly matched students who attend schools without a full-time school librarian. Seldom published in journals that administrators read, these studies have not been widely read or accepted by school administrators. Such studies conducted at state levels often do not resonate with school leaders looking for local solutions (Hartzell, 2012; Johnston & Green, 2018).

Funding and School Budgets

A frequent explanation for eliminating or reducing school librarian positions is the budget. Interestingly, the SLIDE project uncovered two facts that put this response in question—other educator positions have increased while librarians decreased and districts that spent the least per pupil were not the districts with the least school librarians.

Between 2018-19 and 2020-21, district administrators in full-time equivalents (FTEs) increased by 6.0 percent—an increase of more than 3,200 FTEs; building-level school administrators grew by 1.6 percent—an increase of more than 2,350 FTEs. Teacher FTEs, although fairly static pre- and post-pandemic, still grew by over 16,000, an increase of 0.7 percent. In contrast, during the same time interval, the number of school librarian FTEs dropped by more than 1,800 FTEs—a loss of 4.9 percent (Lance & Kachel, 2022, p.1). Notably, these data include only 46 states and D.C. due to missing data from other states. If all states had reported data, librarian losses would have been even higher. This suggests that school decision-makers chose to put staffing dollars into other positions—mostly administrators instead of hiring school librarians.

In an analysis of per pupil expenditures, SLIDE researchers found that poorly-funded districts were more likely than better-funded districts to lose librarians after the pandemic began. However, for districts spending \$10,000 or more per student, the percentage of districts gaining librarians between 2018-19 and 2020-21 was steady at about 14 percent. For districts spending less than \$10,000 per student, almost 19 percent gained librarians (Lance & Kachel, 2022, p.7). This suggests a inconsistency in the thinking that the poorest districts are least likely to have school librarians. Clearly, school leaders are making choices not solely based on school funding.

There is no doubt that school leaders must make difficult staffing choices. According to NCES data, 80 percent of current school expenditures are spent on salaries and benefits of employees (NCES, 2023). With an average of only 20 percent discretionary spending, school decision-makers re-evaluate each position when a school employee retires

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to decide if replacement is warranted. School librarian positions are particularly vulnerable as administrators often prioritize classroom teachers to keep class size within reason. Additionally, school libraries are expensive. Beyond salaries, there are collection, technology, and facility costs (Kachel, 2018). However, other factors, such as lack of an effective library program or a need for increased staff in another department, are often cited as reasons for cutting school library programs or staff (Kachel, 2018).

The prevalence of charter schools in many areas has caused reduced enrollments in traditional public schools as students are moved into the charter system. According to the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, there are 3.7 million students in 7,800 charter schools and campuses. Between 2019-2020 and 2020-21, charter schools saw their highest percentage of enrollment increase since 2015-16 (White, J., 2022). State funding for charters results in reduced state funding to those public schools. School leaders and school boards then need to make judicious cuts to staffing and programs while trying to preserve their identified goals and priorities. Shifting staffing dollars from professional positions to instructional support positions, often classified or paraprofessional, is one factor influencing the staffing of school libraries nationally (Kachel & Lance, 2018).

Funding is often pre-determined at the district level leaving principals to make decisions about staffing and resources with limited funds (Ahlfeld, 2019). Thus, school-based decision-making has led to inequitable access to school libraries and librarians, even within the same district (Vercelletto, 2017). Kachel (2021) found that "While funding can be a serious factor, local school priorities and site-based decisions are just as likely to determine school library staffing" (p. 50). Building principals, especially in districts that endorse site or school-based management, play a significant, if not primary, role in deciding how to allocate staffing dollars within their buildings. Principals with a strong understanding of school library programs help to clarify the librarian's role and lobby for funding and staffing (Ahlfeld, 2019; Kachel, 2018; Kachel & Lance, 2018). A key role of the building principal is to educate district leaders of the librarians' leadership role and instructional value (Baker, et al., 2020; Celluci & Harland, 2022; Kachel, 2017).

In some districts, a library coordinator or supervisor in a middle management position has influence over budget and staffing decisions. They can clarify the vision and mission for library programs, develop policies, and advocate at the school and district levels for resources and budgets (DiScala, et al., 2019; Weeks, et al., 2017). In a literature review, Massey, et al. (2016) examined the perception that district leaders hold of the role of a library supervisor. A strong and consistent district school library administrator can provide stability for staff and programming, particularly in districts with high administrator turn-over, a key factor that influences the staffing of school librarians nationally (Kachel & Lance, 2018). However, the number of district library administrators is diminishing, leading to weaker school library programs and overreliance on individual librarians to fill leadership gaps and to educate administrators with no librarianship experience (Croft, 2022).

Unpredictable Changes in Leadership

Superintendent and principal turnover is of growing concern and can be very disruptive to the continuity of district goals, initiatives, staffing decisions, and support for school improvement plans, including library staffing and library support. In a nationwide study, White (2023) determined that superintendent turnover rate over the last four years was 16.1 percent which, significantly increased over time, growing nearly three percentage points from 14.2 percent between 2019–2020 and 2020–2021 to 17.1 percent between 2021–2022 and 2022–2023. McMurdock (2022, April) reports on a 2021 Rand study of 3,000 superintendents that more than a quarter of them planned to leave their posts “imminently.” According to NCES data (2019), about 18 percent of principals leave their schools annually, for a variety of reasons and about half of new principals leave by the end of three years. Some of the highest turnover rates have been documented in larger and urban school districts (McMurdock, 2022, April; Rosenberg, 2022) and have been a chronic problem as well in small, rural districts (Ewbank, 2021). For example, the incoming superintendent for the Houston ISD decided to eliminate 28 school libraries and repurpose at least some of them as discipline centers for students, while the previous superintendent was adding one for every school. The librarians were offered to transition into other teaching jobs (Jimenez, 2023).

Superintendents and school boards ultimately set policy, budgets, and decide staffing patterns in fulfillment of district goals and priorities. Although school boards cast the last vote for staffing, positions, and budgets, D’Orio (2020) writes that school board decisions are influenced by the direction and recommendations of the superintendent and upper-level administrators. However, Ashley and Douglass (2022) report that nearly three-fourths of incumbent school board members stated that they would not seek reelection at the end of their terms. This comes at a time when school boards are being targeted by conservative groups with agendas to control what is being taught in schools and ban certain curriculum and books. “Typically, nonpartisan school boards have become increasingly polarized. Board members faced sharply divided communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Political parties and special interest groups are fueling the polarization over education” (Hetrick, 2023).

These disruptive leadership changes leave schools and their staff in chaotic, unstable situations, never sure of the support they need to implement successful programs for students.

Staffing Mandates and State Adopted Information Curricula

State regulations and mandates also drive how school district leaders and school boards allocate staffing dollars. As part of the SLIDE research, Kachel and Lance (2021, p. 30) found a clear association between state staffing mandates and school librarian staffing. According to survey data collected in Fall 2020, only 10 states and the District of Columbia required and enforced employment of school librarians; 16 more states required, but did not enforce; and 24 states had no mandates (Kachel & Lance, 2021). States with enforced, and even unenforced, librarian staffing mandates averaged more school librarians than states that had no staffing requirements. Young (2021) describes Washington state legislation that requires a specific level of school librarian staffing in every school but has not yet funded the staffing component. Thus, school officials have been ignoring this law.

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In some states, laws requiring specific curricula, believed to be within the school librarian’s purview to teach, have been passed. According to Media Literacy Now, eighteen states have enacted legislation promoting or requiring media or information literacy in schools (“Putting Media Literacy,” 2023.). New Jersey recently passed a K-12 information literacy bill that requires school librarians to be included in the committee that will develop the information literacy standards but not necessarily to teach the curriculum (Governor Murphy, 2023). Delaware also has passed a K-12 media literacy bill that may strengthen the need to employ school librarians to teach it (Kirkpatrick, 2022). At the federal level, the Right to Read Act of 2023, if passed, would acknowledge that every school needs to employ a certified school librarian (Right to Read, n.d.).

Some states have adopted the AASL 2018 *National School Library Standards* which state that every school should have a certified, full-time school librarian. Alaska (Madsen & Rinio, 2021), Arkansas (Barnett, 2021), Pennsylvania (Mackley, 2021), and Oklahoma (Lewis, et al., 2021) are among the early adopters of the standards. However, even though the AASL standards are recognized by the state departments of education, these standards, so far, have not resulted in additional school librarian positions. According to the State Profiles in the SLIDE data tools (<https://libslide.org/data-tools/>) these four states continued to show losses of school librarian FTEs between 2018-2019 and 2021-22. Thus, it appears that adoption of national standards—at least to date—has had little influence on school leaders who decide about school librarian employment.

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) enacted in 2016, was the first time “effective school library programs” related to student learning outcomes was included. School library associations encouraged school districts to include school libraries in their implementation applications: to employ librarians, provide professional development for librarians, and purchase technology for libraries (Every Student Succeeds Act, n.d.). However, only 31 of 51 states included school libraries in their ESSA plans (Burress & Martin, 2022, p. 220). Burress and Martin (2022) also found that administrators were “limited by their lack of understanding of the research findings that school librarians have a positive impact on student learning and achievement” (p. 229). It is unclear how effective these plans have been in the decision-making process of school leaders.

Another factor that contributes to library staffing decisions is the “pipeline.” SLIDE researchers found that school librarians were least prevalent and most likely to experience job loss in states with no institutions of higher education preparing school librarians. As of January 2021, there were no such institutions in five states—Alaska, Arizona, New Mexico, Oregon, and Wyoming. (Lance & Kachel, 2021, p. 32). More isolated, rural areas far from university programs often want to hire a certified school librarian but can’t find one or find someone willing to relocate. If a trained school librarian cannot be recruited, leaders look to other staffing options for providing library services.

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Recent Challenges

It may be too early to assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on public school staffing and, in particular, school librarian staffing. However, not only has there been an increase in school administrator job exits (McMurdock, 2022, April; Rosenberg, 2022), but according to a new poll, as many as “35 percent of teachers say they’re likely to quit and find another job outside of teaching within the next two years. Of those, 14 percent said they were ‘very likely’” (Will, 2023). Filling classroom teaching positions is a high priority for school leaders and likely takes precedence over employment of instructional specialists, including school librarians.

In order to ameliorate the impact of the pandemic on schools, the federal government has allocated billions for K–12 education in ESSER (Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief) funds to address learning loss and improve school health and safety concerns caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Allowable uses of these funds related to school libraries include “summer literacy programs, enrichment programming, robust digital collections, additional library staff positions, reconfiguring library space for optimal learning and safety, and necessary technology and equipment” (Carroll, 2021). However, many school leaders were cautioned not to hire permanent staff fearing staff lay-offs when ESSER funds cease (Connolly, 2022; McMurdock, 2022, August). Connolly (2022) reports little evidence so far that any ESSER funding has been spent on school librarian positions. Connolly further stipulates that due to the inconsistent way data on the use of ESSER funds is reported by school districts, it may never be known how much of these federal funds were spent on professional school library staffing.

Short term positions such as tutors and paraprofessionals are more apt to be hired over more permanent teaching and librarian positions, particularly with non-recurring federal funds (McMurdock, 2022, August). According to NCES data (K. Lance, personal communication, July 29, 2023), this is a growing trend. Of districts that reported data for both school librarian and library support staff, in 2009-10, 8.6 percent of school districts employed library support staff but no librarians; in 2018-19, 12.5 percent; and in 2021-22, 13.1 percent reported library support staff but no librarians. Torres (2022) and Rowe (2018) describe how administrators are replacing certified librarians with inexperienced, emergency licensed staffing. Although this is a less expensive staffing option with less long-term commitments, this strategy presents a particular risk to low-income schools because of the high number of unqualified or untrained staff. When untrained paraprofessionals are hired to serve as or replace certified school librarians, these staffing changes erode the role of the professional librarian as an essential instructional component of students' literacy education, including protection of students' freedom to read and access to books with diverse experiences, characters, and voices.

By emphasizing the longstanding roles and responsibilities of school librarians to promote literacy, as an instructional partner, and technology leader, Wright (2022) asserts that librarians have a role in helping with students' learning loss and social and emotional needs resulting from the pandemic. Wright describes that in her study librarians struggled during the pandemic to remain relevant during remote instruction. Wright describes librarians as feeling marginalized and never integrated into the remote learning school. After the pandemic a virtual

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school option was maintained by the district but without a defined role for the school librarian. Even for librarians returning to school after the pandemic, their responsibilities had blended with other positions (education technology, instructional coach).

The only national data available at this time to document gains or losses of school librarians during the pandemic is the most recent NCES data. After years of a downward trend in school librarian losses, librarian FTEs nationwide showed a small gain between 2020-21 and 2021-22. During these two years, 27 states experienced net gains of school librarians FTEs, while 20 states experienced net librarian losses (Lance & Kachel, 2023). This may be explained by the reassignment of librarians to other teaching or technology positions during the pandemic when schools were shuttered. After schools reopened during the 2021-22 school year, school librarians may have returned to their library positions. More data is needed to confirm this.

Another factor driving the exodus of school leaders, school board members, and librarians alike has been the caustic politicized environment in which school staff are under attack by far right and conservative groups for what they teach and hold in library collections. PEN America reports, “As book bans escalate, coupled with the proliferation of legislative efforts to restrict teaching about topics such as race, gender, American history, and LGBTQ+ identities, the freedom to read, learn, and think continues to be undermined for students” (Meehan & Friedman, 2023). PEN America found that in the first half of the 2022–2023 school year, there were “1,477 instances of books banned affecting 874 unique titles,” which is up 28 percent over the prior six months, occurring in 37 states (Meehan & Friedman, 2023). In some states, laws are being passed that permit criminal prosecution of school librarians, causing many to rethink continuation in their library and education careers (Nathanson, 2023). How this will impact the “pipeline” of trained school librarians for those districts deciding to hire one is too soon to tell.

Summary

This literature review blends scholarly library and education studies with articles detailing current K-12 factors in which school leaders must weigh staffing decisions to meet district goals and student needs. Research studies continue to report on the ambiguity of the role of the school librarian, particularly as understood and enacted by school administrators versus the roles that librarians are trained to perform. In recent years, as school districts struggle to meet student, teacher, and parent needs during the COVID-19 pandemic, the job of the school librarian has taken on new dimensions, at times merging with technology, coaching, and professional development roles. Further study is required to determine its long-term impact on the status of school librarian employment.

Previous interactions with school librarians appear to influence school administrators’ perceptions of the value of school librarians perhaps more than the body of school library research that associates effective school library programs with student achievement. However, school librarian staffing mandates, whether enforced or not, do impact school librarian staffing in the states that have them. New laws requiring instruction in information or media literacy may have a future impact on the status of school librarian employment. However, it is unclear which educators will be designated at the school level to instruct such curricula.

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Although school leaders frequently tout that a lack of funds determines librarian cuts, two factors uncovered in the SLIDE research suggest otherwise. Districts that spend the least per pupil are not the districts with the least school librarians. And, while the employment of school librarians has trended down by some 20 percent over the past decade, employment of district and building school administrators and instructional coordinators has increased, sometimes dramatically, suggesting staffing dollars are spent on positions other than librarians.

Constant turnover in superintendents, principals, school board members, and even teachers has an impact on the employment of school librarians. Filling classroom teacher positions likely has priority over employing specialists of any kind. Fearing job instability and the recent toxic and politicized school environment aimed at librarians for their curation of library collections, school librarians may be leaving the profession causing a further pipeline issue. The employment of paraprofessionals instead of certified school librarians is also a trend that needs to be documented in future studies of the status of school librarian employment.

Methodology

The methodology of the SLIDE interviews—the questions and answers and their analysis—was rooted in evolutionary organizational theory. Developing the purposive sample for this qualitative research effort was a challenging, multi-stage effort; but, one that yielded a substantial number of interviews, particularly considering that much of the work involved in recruiting and conducting interviews occurred in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. The coding and analysis of the completed interviews was dictated by a comprehensive analysis plan whose key steps are reported herein.

Theoretical Perspective: Evolutionary Organizational Theory

This descriptive study assessed the status of school librarian employment and explored the decision-making processes that lead to increased or decreased librarian full-time equivalents (FTEs)¹, and, in some cases, hiring of related positions. The four processes of evolutionary organization theory (Evolutionary organization theory, 2013)—variation, selection, retention, and competition—were utilized to explain how school librarianship is changing and evolving. Variation results from decision-makers seeking different skill sets they believe will better meet needs of their schools. Selection happens when school leaders choose from known or created alternatives. Retention occurs when decision-makers become committed to chosen alternatives that meet expectations and produce results. Competition enters the process when scarce resources motivate school leaders to favor one staffing model over another, deciding that the advantages, disadvantages, or tradeoffs associated with their decision options favor either adding, restoring, or retaining school librarians or reducing, eliminating, combining, or reclassifying those positions in favor of other positions.

Research Questions

The SLIDE study's interview phase addressed two of the project's four research questions and three of the four processes of evolutionary organization theory.

- What factors affected how school decision-makers chose to staff library/information resources? (Selection and Retention)
- What advantages or disadvantages did decision-makers perceive in their chosen models for staffing library/information resources compared to other alternatives they considered? (Competition)

¹ “Full-time Equivalency (FTE): The amount of time required to perform an assignment stated as a proportion of a full-time position and computed by dividing the amount of time employed by the time normally required for a full-time position” (NCES, n.d.). For example, one individual working 38 hours per week (i.e., full-time) and another working 15 hours per week (i.e., part-time) equals 53 hours divided by 38 for 1.39 FTEs.

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Selection, Recruitment, and Scheduling of Interviews

Initially, the project leaders hoped to recruit 100 school leaders who made staffing decisions concerning school librarian positions sometime since the 2015-16 school year. Decision-makers at either the school or district levels were sought and categorized into three groups—schools or districts that gained librarians, lost some librarians, and eliminated or lost all librarians. This strategy employed purposeful or purposive sampling in which interviewees were selected “on purpose” due to the decisions they made that were needed in our sampling. Notably, random sampling was rejected, because there were too many uncontrollable, self-selection biases involved to achieve randomness. Randomness was also unnecessary, because the project did not aim to characterize the total extent of variation in staffing models for library and information resources; but, rather, to identify variations among districts that have reported changes in librarian FTE gains and losses since 2015-16. Districts with little or no change in librarian staffing—including those where there have been no librarians for years—were excluded as being less likely to contribute to answering the interview questions. To maximize representativeness to meet the 100-interviews target, snowball sampling based on the same criteria was used.

Prior to recruiting potential interviewees, the SLIDE project director completed Antioch’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) application and the project was awarded exempt status. As an exempt study, the project assured the voluntary participation of interviewees and guaranteed them complete anonymity. Interviewees were assured that the fact of their being interviewed and their responses to interview questions would be confidential: no identifying information about them or their school districts would be revealed in the SLIDE report, unless their permission was sought. All interviewees were made aware of the purpose of the project, the research questions, the project leaders, the role of Antioch University Seattle, the federal funding source, and how results of the interview would be used and published.

To identify districts that gained, lost some, or lost all librarians, NCES data from 2015-16 to 2018-19 (the most recent data available at the time) were examined. A spreadsheet of identified districts in these three categories by state was created and shared with the 51 “state intermediaries” (50 states plus District of Columbia) as confirmed in the original grant proposal. Each of these intermediaries was a contact person who served either in state government advising on school library programs or a school librarian leader in a state library organization. These state intermediaries were instrumental in identifying and contacting prospective interviewees via their state networks. Additionally, project leaders and the SLIDE Advisory Council also recruited via email and social media in their networks and among known school library leaders across the U.S. Since NCES data were only available at the time through 2018-2019, school leaders from districts not identified via that data, but which experienced more recent changes of the types under study, were accepted as interviewees.

School leaders willing to be interviewed completed an interviewee recruitment form. (See Appendix A.) A SLIDE project staff person vetted these prospective interviewees to confirm that they were involved enough in decision-making to be able to address the interview questions. While 81 prospective interviewees were recruited initially—

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close to the hoped-for 100 interviewees—several were excluded, as they only advised about staffing decisions; they did not have any decision-making authority. In most cases, staffing decisions were not made by a single individual, but by a district leadership team or ad hoc group of leaders. Thus, every effort was made to ensure that the scheduled interviewee would be able to address the interview questions. The recruitment process began in August 2021 and ended in September 2022.

Unfortunately, just as interview scheduling began, the COVID-19 pandemic dramatically disrupted K-12 public education. Consequently, many of the original interview recruits withdrew, and some did not respond to three follow-up contacts. Interviews began in November 2021 and concluded in October 2022, resulting in 49 completed and usable interviews. Three other interviews were attempted, but discarded as incomplete and unusable, due to the interviewees failing to answer key questions required for the analysis.

Four interviewers were contracted and trained via several online sessions designed to ensure consistency in asking and recording responses to the survey questions. Each interviewer conducted a practice interview, and the interviewer team reviewed and critiqued these together. For each interview, there was a transcript of the Zoom session as well as an interview report form completed by the interviewer. (See Appendix B.)

Throughout this process, the eight education and library leaders comprising the Advisory Council reviewed and made suggestions, enabling the project to recruit appropriate interviewees and assisting in the development of the interview questions. (Advisory Council members are acknowledged by name at the beginning of this report.)

Interview Questions

With the recruitment phase underway, interview questions included in the grant proposal were reviewed, expanded, and refined. The project director and principal investigator, Advisory Council members, and the interviewer team developed the final versions of the interview questions during a series of meetings devoted to an iterative process.

The following open-ended questions were asked in the course of each interview of a school leader who had made, or participated substantially in, a decision that changed a district's or school's staffing levels for school librarians.

1. Does your district or school provide formal or informal instruction on topics such as information literacy, educational technology, use of the school library, digital citizenship, or the like? This might be a stand-alone curriculum or integrated into a broader curriculum.
2. Which staff positions instruct students on those topics? For example, librarian, ed tech specialist, STEM coach, computer or makerspace teacher.
3. You were recruited as an interviewee because your district or school changed its staffing in these areas sometime since 2015-16, perhaps very recently. Over the last five years how did your staffing change? For example, did you add, reduce, eliminate, or combine positions?
4. What others were part of the staffing decisions that were made?

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5. Beyond budget, what factors motivated the staffing change? For example, changes in personnel, policy, priorities, organizational restructuring, or legislation or regulations.
6. What were the trade-offs (advantages and disadvantages) that had to be accepted when making this decision?
7. Which of the factors you identified in your response to question 5 were most important when finalizing the staffing change?
8. Which single one of the factors you identified in your response to question 5 was the highest priority when finalizing the staffing change?²
9. How have your previous interactions (positive and/or negative) with school librarians, media specialists, and/or ed tech staff influenced your perception of the importance or value of this staff to the student learning experience?

Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Interviews of school leaders were analyzed via reflexive thematic analysis (RTA). RTA is a theoretically-flexible approach to qualitative analysis that is compatible with evolutionary organization theory. It permits analysis of qualitative data answering questions about people's experiences, views and perceptions, and representations of a given phenomenon—in this case, their own decision-making processes (Brule, 2020). RTA was employed to identify patterns of meaning across the interviews that help to answer the research questions. These patterns were identified by reviewing videos and transcripts, coding patterns that recur across the interview dataset, and developing themes that summarize those patterns.

Deductive Latent Coding Orientation

The coding of patterns discerned through RTA may be primarily inductive or deductive and primarily semantic or latent. We conducted deductive latent coding of our interview data. Deductive coding was driven by the study's theoretical framework, research questions, and the knowledge of the researchers about K-12 education and school librarian staffing. (Inductive coding is used for more exploratory studies in which the end result is theory development.) Also, the coding was latent, as it focused conceptually on the interviewees' experiences, perceptions, expectations, and priorities. (Semantic coding is used when one is conducting a word-for-word analysis of qualitative data, and that was not the purpose of this study.) Dedoose, a web-based application designed to facilitate qualitative analysis was utilized to code interview responses and to analyze patterns in those responses.

² Limited answers received to questions 7 and 8 were not included in the analysis. Responses could be elicited from fewer than half of interviewees in both the positive and negative decision groups, and responses to question 8, asking for a single determining factor, sometimes included multiple factors. Ultimately, it was decided that analyzing co-occurrences of factors identified in question 5 was more revelatory about the often-complex motivations for decisions than these two questions.

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Coding Process

For each of the major interview questions, initial coding was done by the interviewers using the interview report form. (See Appendix B.) The report form was developed by the project leaders and the interviewers and reviewed by the Advisory Council. Since these project leaders well understood the K-12 school environment and hiring practices of schools, they identified potential responses for the interview questions which were then developed into codes. These codes were loaded into Dedoose with some subsidiary codes (“child codes”) added as needed. Descriptions for some codes were added in Dedoose to ensure consistency of use. For example, “stand-alone instruction” referred to instruction of information literacy, critical thinking, media literacy, or digital literacy. “Change in priorities” referred to a change in district or school goals whether or not it was associated with a change in administration or other codes regarding specific priorities associated with library programs. As the need for additional codes arose, additions to, and refinements of, the coding scheme—both on an iterative basis and after all interviews were completed—were made by the research team (i.e., by the principal investigator, other RSL researchers, and a volunteer). The project director and principal investigator reviewed all coding changes, and interacted with other research team members and interviewers as needed to ensure coding reliability and validity.

Formal/Informal Instruction Provided

Answers to the question about formal or informal instruction provided were coded as one or more of the following.

- Information literacy
- Educational technology
- Use of school library
- Digital citizenship
- Other (recodes included: makerspace, media literacy, social/emotional learning, and STEM)

Staff Providing Instruction

Answers to the question about who provides the above instruction were coded as one or more of the following.

- School librarian / teacher librarian / library media specialist
- Educational technology professional (whether teacher, coordinator, consultant, coach, etc.)
- School librarian / educational technology (combined position)
- Specific other specialist teacher (reading, social studies, STEM, etc.)
- All teachers
- Paraprofessionals
- Other

Nature of Librarian Staffing Changes

Answers to the question about how the school or district’s librarian staffing changed were coded as one or more of the following.

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- Added positions or hours (e.g., part-time to full-time)
- Restored positions or hours (i.e., additions that re-established a pre-existing status quo)
- Reduced positions or hours (e.g., full-time to part-time)
- Eliminated all positions supporting a library program
- Combined positions or split assignments (e.g., librarian and educational technology staff)
- Reclassified positions (e.g., library aide to librarian or vice versa, librarian or educational technology staff to classroom teacher)
- Changed job title (which may have affected how the hours were reported to NCES)
- Other

Other Positions Involved in Staffing Decisions

Answers to the question about who else played a part in staffing decisions were coded as one or more of the following.

- District superintendent
- School principal
- Other district official
- School board member(s)
- Other school official
- Parents / community
- Other school staff
- School librarian
- Human resources

Decision-Making Factors

A variety of factors were identified by interviewees as influential in their decision-making about library and information resources staffing changes. Factors identified by interviewees who reported adding or restoring librarians were coded as one or more of the following:

- Addressing special student needs
- Change in administration
- Change in priorities
- Collaboration with teachers
- Equity of student access to library staff
- Grant/funding requirements
- New funding
- Opened a new building or increased enrollment
- Planning time for teachers

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- Social/emotional learning
- Stand-alone instruction by librarians
- Standards-based test preparation/scores
- State government mandate
- Strategic plan

Factors identified by interviewees who reported reducing, eliminating, combining, or reclassifying librarians were coded as one or more of the following:

- Budget constraints
- Change in administration
- Change in priorities
- Closed a building or decreased enrollment
- Difficulty finding qualified candidates
- Hired other specialists/coaches
- Needed incumbent in another position
- Needed more teachers in classrooms
- Position deemed obsolete
- Retirements/resignations
- Strategic plan

Types of Factors

An evolving two-tier coding scheme was applied to understand the factors that motivated decisions to make staffing changes.

Interviewee responses about factors motivating staffing decisions were coded using two sets of initial codes, one for gains and another for losses of librarians. (See Tables 1 and 2.)

Factors identified as motivators of staffing decisions were assigned to three categories: structural, pragmatic, and strategic. The development of these three categories was based on the evolutionary organization theoretical perspective, existing knowledge about decisions impacting school librarian employment, and the initial review of interviews.

Structural factors are ones that drive decisions automatically, such as state mandates, opening and closing of school buildings, and formulas and guidelines, sometimes enshrined in legal rules and regulations. “Pipeline” issues—whether or not and where school librarians are available to schools or districts—may also drive structural decisions. A school leader in a rural area, for example, might wish to hire a school librarian, but be unable to find qualified individuals to consider for the position. So, as a result, another position is filled instead. Conversely, a school leader in an urban area—perhaps one near a library school that trains school librarians—might choose to hire

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more librarians partly because they are available. Structural factors may explain the presence or absence of school librarians as well as their increasing or decreasing presence.

Pragmatic factors are ones that motivate school leaders to address practical, often logistical issues that demand some kind of resolution in order for a school or district to function efficiently. “Coverage” is the umbrella term often used by decision-makers to explain such decisions. For example, a frequently reported pragmatic decision is moving a librarian with teaching qualifications from managing the library program to teaching in a classroom. This sort of decision might eliminate a librarian job altogether or change it from full-time to part-time. No external policy or structural factor is mandating such a specific reassignment, and it is not being made to meet some specific strategic goal. It is simply a matter of ensuring that there is a qualified teacher in every classroom. The COVID-19 pandemic also presented many decision-makers with urgent needs to re-assign staff. Pragmatic considerations could drive decisions that increase, reduce, eliminate, or otherwise change librarian employment; although, most such factors explained reduction or elimination of librarian positions.

Strategic factors are ones at the discretion of school leaders, but driven less by practical concerns than by their anticipated and perceived contributions to specific ends the decision-maker wishes to achieve. A common example of such a decision is when librarian jobs are cut because the decision-maker prioritizes hiring reading, writing, or math coaches to help raise students’ scores on state tests. Conversely, a decision-maker might decide to hire more librarians if they perceive that librarians make a substantial contribution to higher scores on reading or writing tests by promoting inquiry-based learning and teaching information literacy skills. Like structural decisions, strategic ones can result in gains, cutbacks, or elimination of school librarians.

Structural, pragmatic, and strategic factors involved in decisions to add or restore librarians are listed in rank order in Table 1.

Table 1. Factors in Decisions to Add or Restore Librarians by Type in Rank Order

Structural Factors	Pragmatic Factors	Strategic Factors
New funding (8)	Planning time for teachers (7)	Change in priorities (13)
Opened a new building/enrollment increase (7)		Direct/stand-alone instruction (11)
State government mandate (4)		Equity of student access to staff (10)
Grant/funding requirements (2)		Change in administration (9)
		Collaboration with teachers (7)
		Standards-based testing (4)
		Special student needs (3)
		Social/emotional learning (2)
		Strategic plan (2)

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Decision-making factors in decisions to reduce, eliminate, combine, or reclassify librarians are listed in rank order in Table 2.

Table 2. Factors in Decisions to Reduce, Eliminate, Combine or Reclassify Librarians by Type in Rank Order

Structural Factors	Pragmatic Factors	Strategic Factors
Budget constraints (17)	Needed incumbent in another position (6)	Change in priorities (12)
Closed a building/enrollment decrease (6)	Needed more teachers in classrooms (5)	Hired other specialists/coaches (7)
Pipeline issues finding qualified candidates (4)		Position deemed obsolete (6)
Retirements/resignations (2)		Change in administration (4)
		Strategic plan (2)

In reality, decisions were rarely made exclusively on the basis of structural, pragmatic, or strategic factors. More often, multiple types of factors were involved in most decisions about school librarian employment.

Advantages, Disadvantages & Tradeoffs

To ascertain the relative costs and benefits of their decisions about school librarian employment, interviewees were asked about the perceived advantages, disadvantages, and tradeoffs they weighed in their decisions. In some cases, advantages were perceived in win-win terms and disadvantages in lose-lose terms. Increasing the presence of librarians enabled them to do more for students and teachers; decreasing their presence meant they had to do less for those constituencies. In other cases, tradeoffs were perceived in win-lose terms or lose-win terms. If librarians gained, other positions were cut; if librarians were cut, other positions gained.

Answers to this question were coded as one or more of the following, depending on whether their decision was positive or negative in its impact on librarian employment and positive or negative in its other consequences:

- Added or restored librarian / other staff cut, not filled
- Added or restored librarian / other-than-staff loss
- Reduced, eliminated, combined, or reclassified librarian /other staff added or increased
- Reduced, eliminated, combined, or reclassified librarian/other-than-staff gain
- Increased or decreased specific types of staff activity, specifically: stand-alone instruction by librarian, collaboration between librarian and teachers, and teacher support by librarian
- Increased or decreased the utility of the library space
- Other

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Interviewee's Interactions with Librarians

Answers to the question about the interviewee's interactions with librarians³ were coded as one or more of the following.

- Worked with librarian as classroom teacher
- Worked with librarian as district or school administrator
- Supervised librarians
- Librarian supported my or my teachers' design and/or delivery of instruction
- Collaborated with me or my teachers on design and/or delivery of instruction
- Received in-service from librarian
- Personally related to or influenced by someone in these fields
- Other

To reiterate, the coding system grew and was refined on an iterative basis as interviews were completed. As the number of completed interviews increased, other codes, other than those anticipated or identified previously (e.g., prioritizing test preparation), were added to make these lists more comprehensive. Initial coding by the interviewers using the interview reporting form was reviewed by at least one other member of the research team. When needed, adjustments to coding were made in consultation with the interviewer and/or other members of the research team.

Theme Development

The development of the themes derivable from the decision-maker interviews involved analyzing their coding from multiple perspectives:

- Whether the district or school made positive or negative staffing decisions about librarians;
- Patterns in the co-occurrences of structural, pragmatic, and strategic decision factors; and
- The research questions (selection, retention, competition).

The themes were developed on an iterative basis as interviews were completed, and reviewed once all interviews were completed.

³ While this interview question included educational technology staff, almost all of the responses concerned librarians or ones whose positions also included responsibility for educational technology.

Thematic Analysis of Interviews

The analysis summarizes the responses to each interview question and cross-tabulates the answers to questions and combinations of questions that shed new light on the decision-making processes of school leaders impacting librarian and related employment.

Interviewees

Of the 49 usable interviews of school leaders, 23 interviewees made decisions to add or restore school librarians, 21 made decisions to reduce, eliminate, combine, or reclassify librarians, and 5 made both types of decisions. To put the 49 interviews in context, however, the first step in the analysis was to summarize who the interviewees were by geography and position and to examine how their districts compared to all other local school districts based on geography and key district characteristics.

Geography

Districts represented by SLIDE interviewees were compared to all other local school districts using 2021-2022 national data from the Common Core of Data (CCD) of NCES. (See Map 1.) Interview districts include local school districts from 29 states and the District of Columbia. Notably, 26 states mandate some level of school librarians, so were less likely to have districts that would be selected for interviews, because their staffing levels were more stable (Kachel & Lance, 2021, p. 4). Of the states with participating interviewees, four states were represented that had enforced staffing mandates (D.C., Montana, Nebraska, and North Dakota); eight states were represented that do not enforce their mandates (Maine, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Tennessee, Vermont, Virginia, and Washington).

Interview states include eight Northeastern states: Connecticut, Delaware, Massachusetts (3 interviews), Maine, New Jersey (2), New York (2), Pennsylvania (3), and Vermont. (Unless otherwise noted, there was a single interview from each state.) The South was represented by four states—Maryland, Tennessee, Texas (3), and Virginia—as well as the District of Columbia. Interviewees came from eight Midwestern states: Indiana, Kansas (5), Michigan, Minnesota (2), Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, and Ohio. Nine interview states were in the West: California, Colorado (4), Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon (3), Utah, Washington (2), and Wyoming. Thus, there were nine interview states in the West, eight each in the Northeast and Midwest, and four in the South plus D.C. Again, the absence of more interviews in the South is almost certainly due to the greater likelihood that states in that region mandated school librarians. Doubtless, this broad geographic representation could not have been achieved without the active support of the state intermediaries, the project partners, Advisory Council members, and others.

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Map 1.

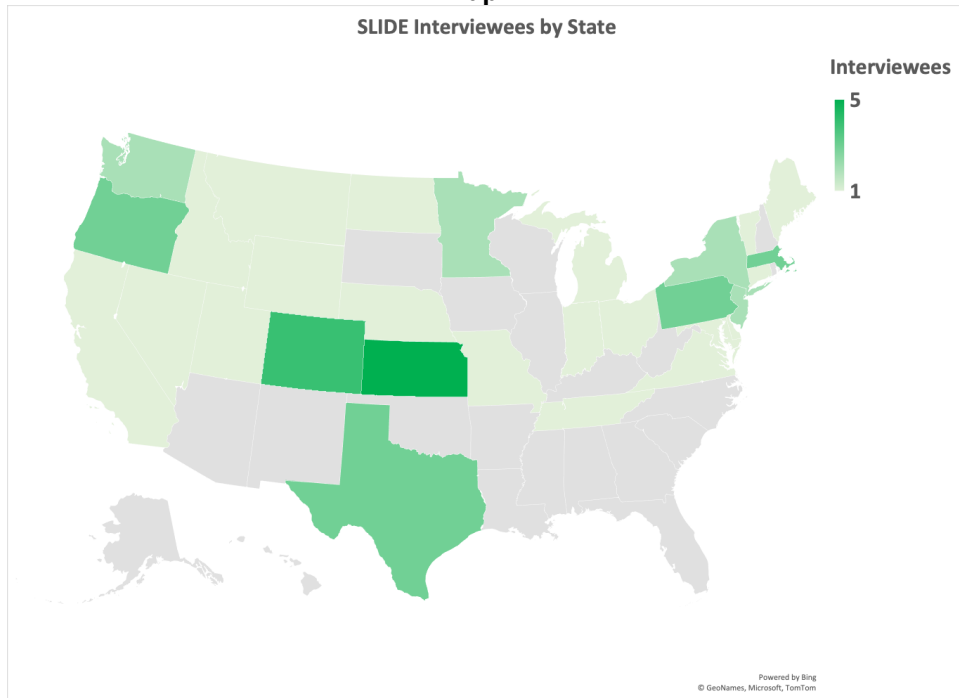


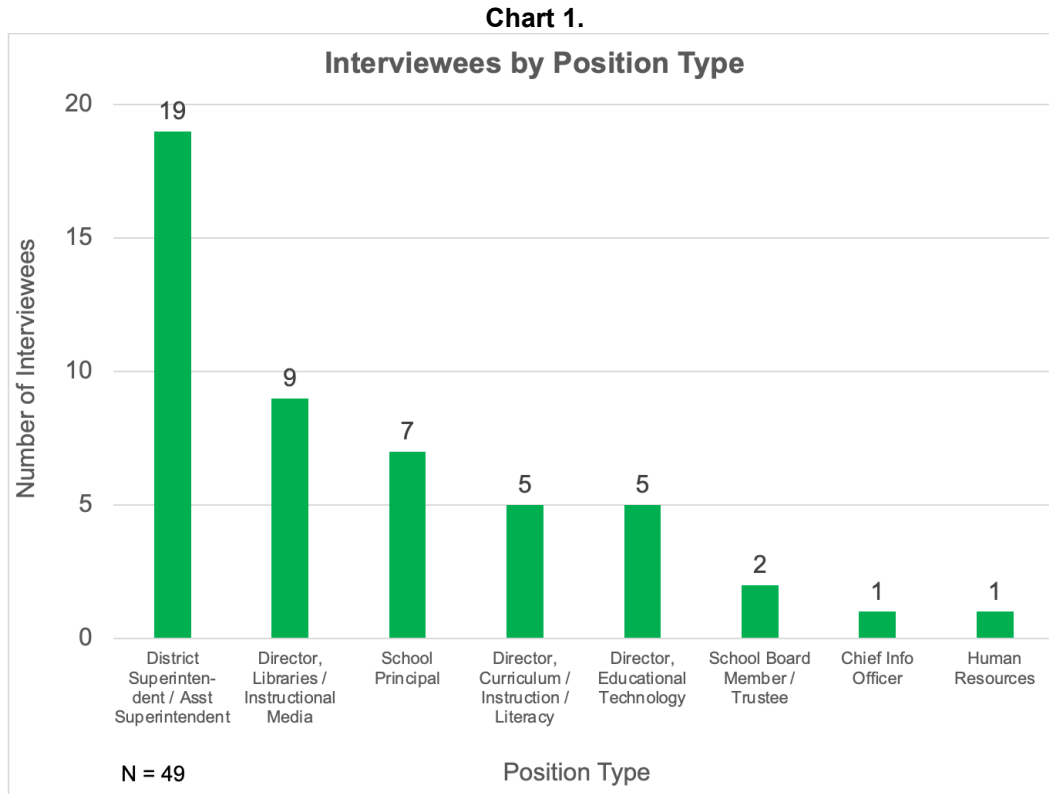
Table 3. Number of Interviewees by State

State	Interviewees	State	Interviewees
CA	1	ND	1
CO	4	NE	1
CT	1	NJ	2
DC	1	NV	1
DE	1	NY	2
ID	1	OH	1
IN	1	OR	3
KS	5	PA	3
MA	3	TN	1
MD	1	TX	3
ME	1	UT	1
MI	1	VA	1
MN	2	VT	1
MO	1	WA	2
MT	1	WY	1

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Position Type

Of the 49 interviewees, the vast majority, 42, were district level officials—19 were district superintendents or assistant superintendents; nine were directors of libraries or instructional media; five were directors of curriculum, instruction, or literacy; five were directors of educational technology; two were school board members or trustees; one was a chief information officer; and one was a human-resources official. Only seven were school principals. (See Chart 1.)



To assess the representativeness of the interview districts, they were compared statistically with all other districts on key district characteristics and student demographics:

- Student enrollment (ranging from 25,000 or more to less than 300),
- District locale (i.e., city, suburb, town, and rural),
- Per pupil expenditures (ranging from \$15,000 or more to less than \$10,000),
- Percentage of students eligible for Free and Reduced Price Meals (ranging from 75% or more—indicating districts with the most poverty—to less than 35%—indicating districts with the least poverty),
- Majority race (majority non-white vs. majority white), and
- Majority ethnicity (majority Hispanic vs. majority non-Hispanic).

Tables 1-6 present comparative data for each of these variables.

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Student Enrollment

School leaders interviewed for SLIDE overrepresent districts with higher student enrollment with 73.9 percent of interview districts having enrollments of more than 2,500 compared to 28.0 percent nationally. (See Table 4.) The greatest percentage difference is for the more than 25,000 category, which includes 30.4 percent of interview districts compared with only 2.0 percent of all local districts. This gap is found in the districts with student enrollment less than 2,499 where school leaders interviewed under-represent districts at 26.1 percent in comparison to 72.0 percent of national districts.

Table 4. Distribution of Interview Districts and All Other Districts by Student Enrollment, 2021-22

Group of Districts	Student Enrollment							
	25,000 or More	10,000-24,999	5,000-9,999	2,500-4,999	1,000-2,499	600-999	300-599	Less Than 300
Interview Districts (n=46)	30.4% (14)	10.9% (5)	10.9% (5)	21.7% (10)	15.2% (7)	6.5% (3)	2.2% (1)	2.2% (1)
All Other Districts (N=13,273)	2.0% (269)	4.6% (607)	7.5% (996)	13.9% (1,849)	23.8% (3,161)	13.7% (1,821)	14.4% (1,905)	20.1% (2,665)

Source: Common Core of Data (CCD), National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 2021-22 School Year
 Note: There were only 46 interview districts because there were multiple interviewees from a few districts.

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Locale

School leaders interviewed for SLIDE partially reflect the national breakdown of local districts by locale. 4 (See Table 5.) The percentage of interview districts in City locales is 43.5 percent in comparison to 6.0 percent nationally. The largest gap is found in the Rural location category with 15.2 percent representation of school leaders interviewed for SLIDE in comparison to 53.2 percent nationally. Interviewed leaders in both Suburb and Town locales align with the representation nationally. This data aligns with the findings for enrollment: districts with higher enrollments are over-represented, while districts with lower enrollments are under-represented. Rural districts tend to have lower enrollments, and City districts, higher enrollments.

Table 5. Distribution of Interview Districts and All Other Districts by Locale

Group of Districts	School District Locale			
	City	Suburb	Town	Rural
Interview Districts (n=46)	43.5% (20)	21.7% (10)	19.6% (9)	15.2% (7)
All Other Districts (N=13,343)	6.0% (807)	23.0% (3,064)	17.8% (2,378)	53.2% (7,094)

Source: Common Core of Data (CCD), National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 2021-22 School Year

⁴ The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) categorizes school districts by locale as follows:

- City: territory inside an urbanized area and a principal city; large cities having population of 250,000 or more; midsize cities having population greater than or equal to 100,000, but less than 250,000; and small cities having population less than 100,000.
- Suburb: territory inside an urbanized area but outside a principal city; large suburbs being associated with large cities, midsize suburbs with midsize cities, and small suburbs with small cities.
- Town: territory inside an urban cluster; fringe towns being less than or equal to 10 miles from an urbanized area; distant towns being more than 10 miles and less than or equal to 35 miles from an urbanized area; and remote towns being more than 35 miles from an urbanized area.
- Rural area: territory defined as rural by the U.S. Census Bureau; fringe rural areas being less than or equal to 5 miles from an urbanized area and less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an urban cluster; distant rural areas being more than 5 miles but less than or equal to 25 miles from an urbanized area or more than 2.5 miles and less than or equal to 10 miles from an urban cluster; and remote rural areas being more than 25 miles from an urbanized area and more than 10 miles from an urban cluster (NCES, n.d.)

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Per Pupil Expenditures

School leaders interviewed for SLIDE generally reflect the national breakdown of local districts by per pupil expenditures (includes salaries, employee benefits, purchased services, supplies, and tuition). (See Table 6.) Interview districts are slightly overrepresented in the top two categories and underrepresented in the bottom two categories. 84.5 percent of leaders interviewed are in the two top categories, in which states spend more than \$12,000 per pupil, versus 75.9 percent nationally. School districts in the bottom two categories, in which states spend less than \$11,999 per pupil, are less represented in SLIDE at 15.5 percent versus 24.1 percent nationally. This suggests that the interview districts somewhat over-represent districts with higher per pupil expenditure levels compared to other districts nationwide.

Table 6. Distribution of Interview Districts and All Other Districts by Per Pupil Expenditures, 2019-20

Group of Districts	Per Pupil Expenditures			
	\$15,000 or More	\$12,000-14,999	\$10,000-11,999	Less Than \$10,000
Interview Districts (n=45)	55.6% (25)	28.9% (13)	13.3% (6)	2.2% (1)
All Other Districts (N=13,044)	49.1% (6,402)	26.8% (3,496)	18.1% (2,365)	6.0% (781)

Source: Common Core of Data (CCD), National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 2019-20 School Year.
 Note: Per pupil expenditures data are for 2019-20, 2 years behind other data, because they are released separately after auditing. There are only 45 interview districts for per pupil expenditures due to one district not reporting.

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Eligibility for Free/Reduced-Price Meals (Poverty)

School leaders interviewed for SLIDE partially reflect the national breakdown of local districts on the percentage of students eligible for free and reduced-price meals (FARM). (See Table 7.) Districts with higher percentages of FARM-eligible students are ones with higher levels of community poverty. The percentage of interview districts with 75 percent or more and 35 to 49.9 percent of students eligible for FARM closely align with the national data. The greatest percentage difference is for the less than 35 percent category—districts with the least poverty—which includes 61.8 percent of interview districts compared with only 40.6 percent of all local districts. This is followed by a smaller percentage gap for the 50 to 74.9 percent group, which includes only 5.9 percent of interview districts, but 21.0 percent of all local districts. Notably, however, the proportional gap for this group—interview districts represent less than a third of all districts in this category—is larger than for the less than 35 percent category. This suggests that the interview districts under-represent districts with 50 to 74.9 percent of students eligible for FARM more than they over-represent districts with less than 35 percent of students eligible for FARM, when compared with other districts nationwide.

Table 7. Distribution of Interview Districts and All Other Districts on Percent of Students Eligible for Free and Reduced Price Meals (Poverty Indicator), 2021-22

Group of Districts	Percent of Students Eligible for Free/Reduced-Price Meals			
	75% or More	50-74.9%	35-49.9%	Less Than 35%
Interview Districts (n=34)	11.8% (4)	5.9% (2)	20.6% (7)	61.8% (21)
All Other Districts (N=9,663)	11.3% (1,093)	21.0% (2,034)	27.1% (2,614)	40.6% (3,922)

Source: Common Core of Data (CCD), National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 2021-22 School Year.
 Note: FARM data were only available for 34 of the 46 interview districts. These data had to be aggregated from school to district level, and incomplete reporting by some schools made it impossible to calculate a district figure.

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Race & Ethnicity

In terms of both majority race and majority ethnicity, interview districts are remarkably representative of all other local districts. In the case of majority race, majority non-white districts are approximately a quarter of all districts. In the case of majority ethnicity, majority Hispanic districts are about four percent of interview districts, and about nine percent of all other local districts. Because of the relatively small proportions of majority Hispanic districts, however, this percentage difference is not statistically significant. (See Tables 8 and 9.)

Table 8. Distribution of Interview Districts and All Other Districts on Majority Race (white vs. non-white), 2021-22

Group of Districts	Majority Race	
	Majority non-white	Majority white
Interview Districts (n=46)	12 (26.1%)	34 (73.9%)
All Other Districts (N=13,021)	3,136 (24.1%)	9,885 (75.9%)

Source: Common Core of Data (CCD), National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 2021-22 School Year

Table 9. Distribution of Interview Districts and All Other Districts on Majority Ethnicity (Hispanic vs. non-Hispanic), 2021-22

Group of Districts	Majority Ethnicity	
	Majority Hispanic	Majority non-Hispanic
Interview Districts (n=46)	2 (4.3%)	44 (95.7%)
All Other Districts (N=12,981)	1,208 (9.3%)	11,773 (90.7%)

Source: Common Core of Data (CCD), National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 2021-22 School Year

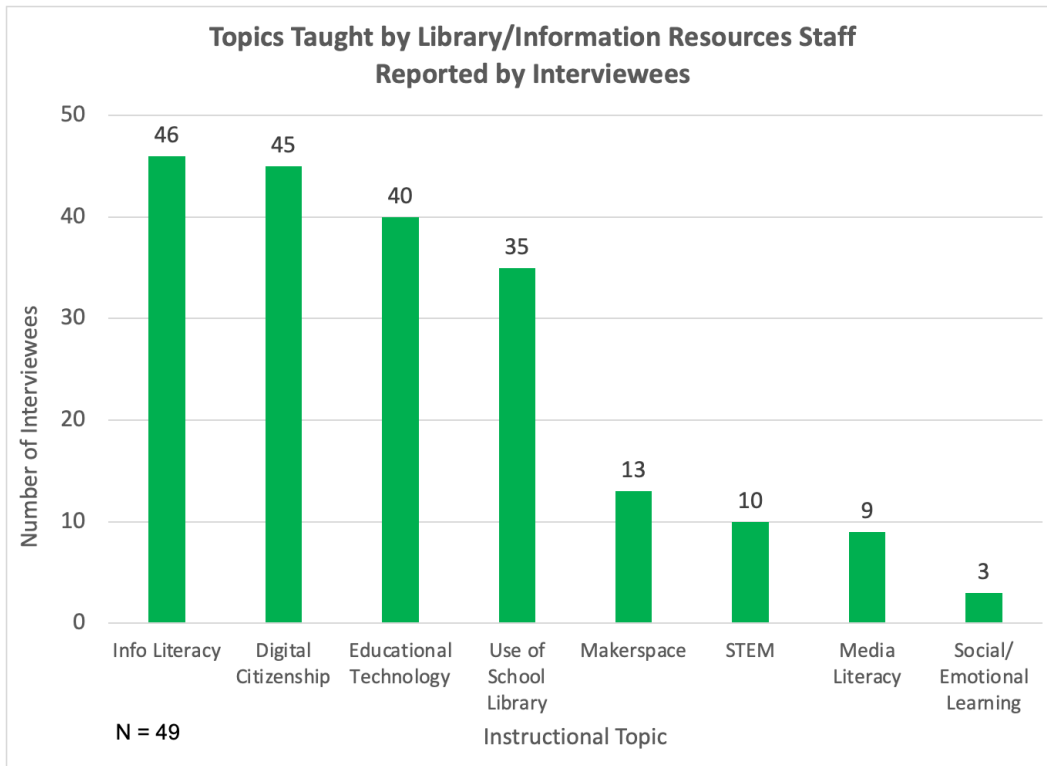
This comparative profile of interview districts and all other districts demonstrates that districts interviewed for SLIDE, although geographically representative, more often include school leaders from districts in cities as well as those with lower poverty levels and larger enrollments. However, interview districts are somewhat representative of all districts in terms of per pupil expenditures, and highly representative of them in terms of majority race and ethnicity.

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Instruction Topics

The first substantial question in the interview of each school leader concerned what library/information resources topics were taught in their schools. As information literacy, digital citizenship, educational technology or technology education, and use of the school library were examples mentioned in the question itself, it is unsurprising that those four instruction topics were the ones most frequently mentioned by interviewees. Additional topics identified by interviewees included makerspace, STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math), media literacy, and social/emotional learning. (See Chart 2.)

Chart 2.



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Co-occurrence of Instructional Topics

The larger context of library and information resources-related topics is clearer when one considers which of the most frequently mentioned curricular topics coincided with each other, and how those concurrent topics varied between interviewees who reported adding school librarians and those who reported reducing, eliminating, combining, or reclassifying them. Among the 28 interviewees who added or restored librarians⁵, the instructional topics—in rank order—were information literacy, digital citizenship, educational technology, and use of the school library. Generally, a substantial proportion of both groups of interviewees indicated that these instructional topics tend to be taught together. It is noteworthy, though, that, whatever the interviewee’s decision about school librarian staffing, use of the school library was the least frequently mentioned instructional topic in the area of library and information resources of the four reported most frequently. The implication of these findings is that information literacy, digital citizenship, and educational technology were taught apart from use of the school library in some districts or use of the school library was not regarded as an instructional topic. (See Tables 10 and 11.)

Table 10. Co-occurrence of Instructional Topics Taught Reported by Interviewees Who Added or Restored School Librarians

Instruction Topic	Information Literacy	Digital Citizenship	Educational Technology	Use of School Library
Information Literacy	27			
Digital Citizenship	25	25		
Educational Technology	23	21	24	
Use of School Library	22	21	20	22

Note: The bold number in the gray diagonal is the number of interviewees in this group who identified that topic of instruction. Others reflect the number of interviewees identifying the topics in the intersecting rows and columns. N=28

Table 11. Co-occurrence of Instructional Topics Taught Reported by Interviewees Who Reduced, Eliminated, Combined or Reclassified School Librarians

Instruction Topic	Information Literacy	Digital Citizenship	Educational Technology	Use of School Library
Digital Citizenship	27			
Information Literacy	25	25		
Educational Technology	23	21	24	
Use of School Library	22	21	20	16

N=26

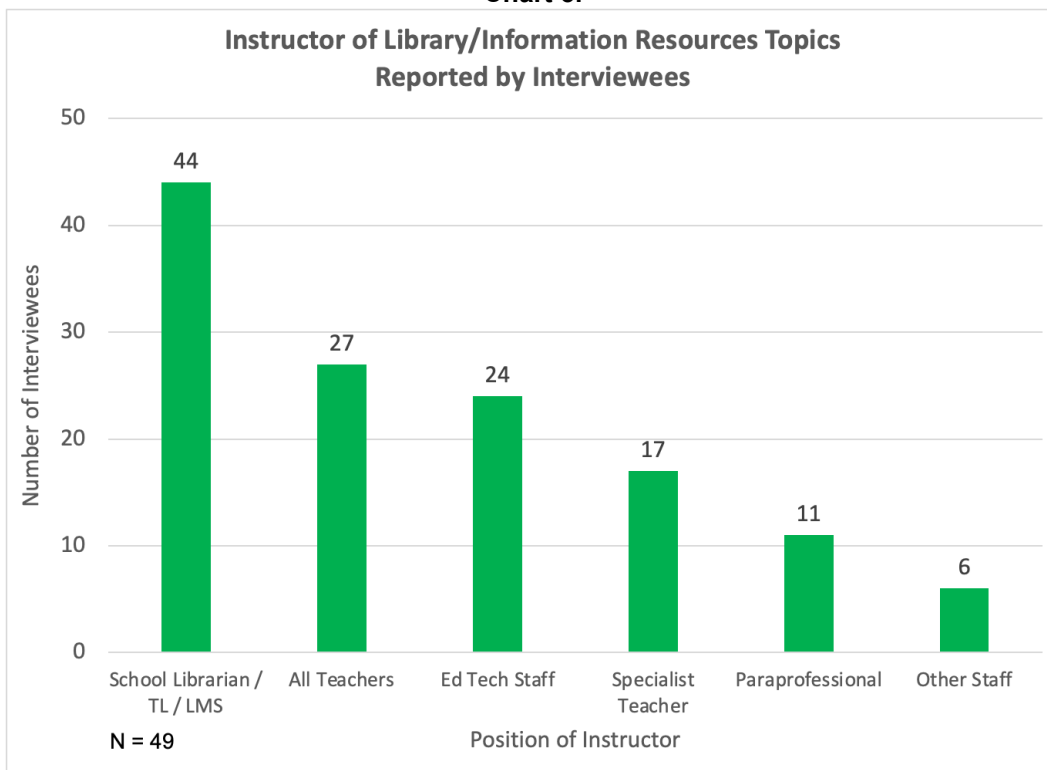
⁵ These 28 interviewees include 23 who only added or restored librarians plus four who both added or restored and reduced, eliminated, combined, or reclassified positions.

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Instructors of Library / Information Resources Topics

When interviewees were asked who taught the topic or topics they identified, by far the most frequent response (44) was a school librarian, teacher librarian, library media specialist, or the like. This included three interviewees who reported combined librarian/educational technology positions. That was not, however, the only position identified as addressing these instructional topics. Slightly more interviewees (27) reported that all teachers taught the identified topics than reported that educational technology staff (24) taught those topics. Smaller numbers of interviewees reported that such teaching was done by specialist teachers (17), paraprofessionals (11), or other staff (6). (See Chart 3.)

Chart 3.



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Instructional Topic & Instructor

The “disconnect” for some interviewees between teaching use of the school library and teaching other instructional topics related to information resources—specifically, information literacy, digital citizenship, and educational technology—makes the responses of the interviewees about who teaches those topics even more interesting. (See Tables 12 and 13.)

Almost all of the interviewees who made positive decisions about school librarian jobs identified them as teachers of those four inter-related topics. Indeed, school librarians were the most frequently mentioned instructors on those topics among all interviewees, whether they made positive or negative decisions about librarian jobs. In the case of those who made positive decisions, school librarians were identified as instructors on those topics twice as often or more than the nearest other type of instructor—all teachers.

Notably, other instructor types—particularly all teachers and educational technology staff—were also mentioned as having responsibility for teaching these library/information resources topics. And, unsurprisingly, those instructor types—along with specialist teachers—were more frequently mentioned by interviewees who reduced, eliminated, combined, or reclassified school librarians.

While school librarians generally acknowledge that teaching such topics effectively requires their collaboration with other specialists as well as classroom teachers, these findings suggest that, where school librarian positions have been added or restored, many school leaders expect the school librarian to teach these topics without collegial support. As for school leaders who decided to reduce, eliminate, combine, or reclassify library jobs, far more of them indicated expecting other specialists and classroom teachers to at least share in teaching these topics. Perhaps this finding reflects the decision-maker’s recognition that a librarian whose hours have been reduced—in whatever way—cannot be expected to teach information-related topics as effectively as they might have done previously without the support of other teaching colleagues.

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Table 12. Instructional Topic by Instructor Reported by Interviewees Who Added or Restored School Librarians

Instructor	Instructional Topic			
	Information Literacy	Digital Citizenship	Educational Technology	Use of School Library
School Librarian*	27	25	25	24
All Teachers	13	13	10	11
Educational Technology Staff	11	11	9	11
Specialist Teachers	6	6	7	6
Paraprofessionals	7	7	6	7

* School Librarian category includes combined School Librarian/Educational Technology Staff positions.
 N=28

Table 13. Instructional Topic by Instructor Reported by Interviewees Who Reduced, Eliminated, Combined or Reclassified School Librarians

Instructor	Instructional Topic			
	Digital Citizenship	Information Literacy	Educational Technology	Use of School Library
School Librarian*	19	19	17	15
All Teachers	17	15	15	10
Educational Technology Staff	14	14	12	9
Specialist Teachers	11	9	10	6
Paraprofessionals	5	5	4	4

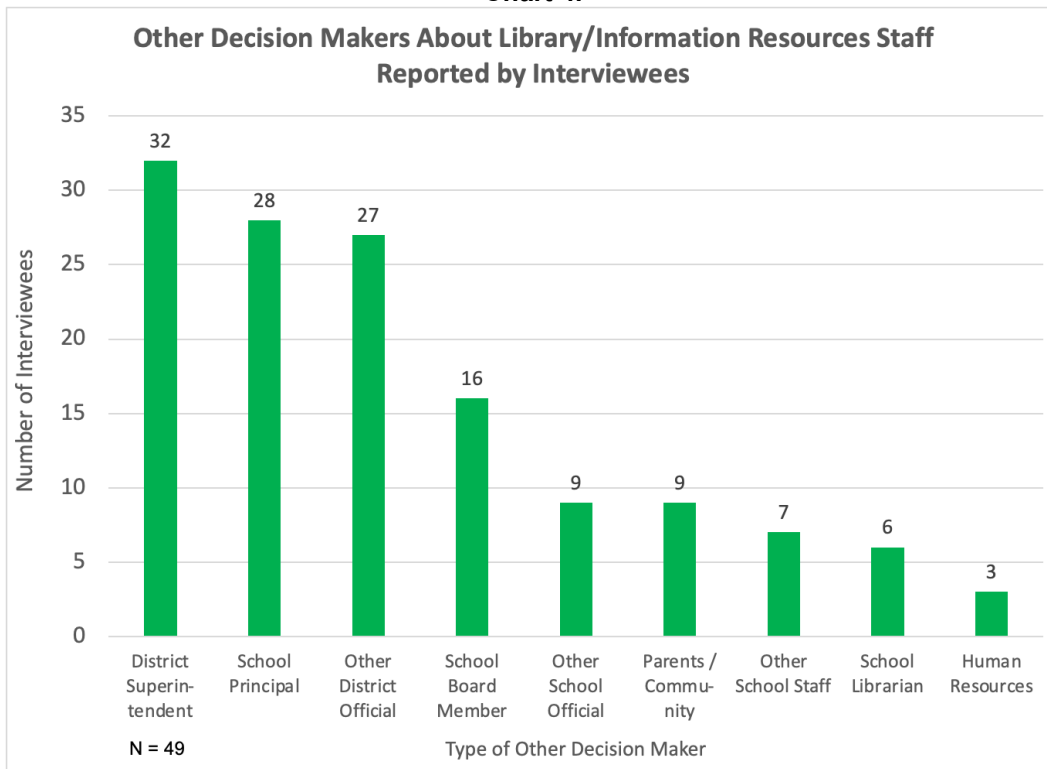
* School Librarian category does not include combined School Librarian/Educational Technology Staff positions as no such positions were reported by any of these interviewees.
 N=26

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Other Decision-Makers

As reported earlier, most of the school leaders who agreed to be interviewed for SLIDE were district level officials. That being the case, it is unsurprising that their most frequent answers regarding who else participated in their decision-making about school librarians were district superintendents (32), school principals (28), and other district officials (27). Indicative of the more activist role being taken by school boards in the management of many districts, about a third of those interviewed (16) reported involving one or more school board members in their decision-making about librarian and related staffing. The next most frequently reported types of other decision-makers included other school officials (9), parents or community leaders (9), school staff (7), and incumbent school librarians (6). Finally, three interviewees reported involving human resources staff. In addition to these various other contributors to decision-making, two interviewees each mentioned referencing library association standards or guidelines and union contracts. (See Chart 4.)

Chart 4.



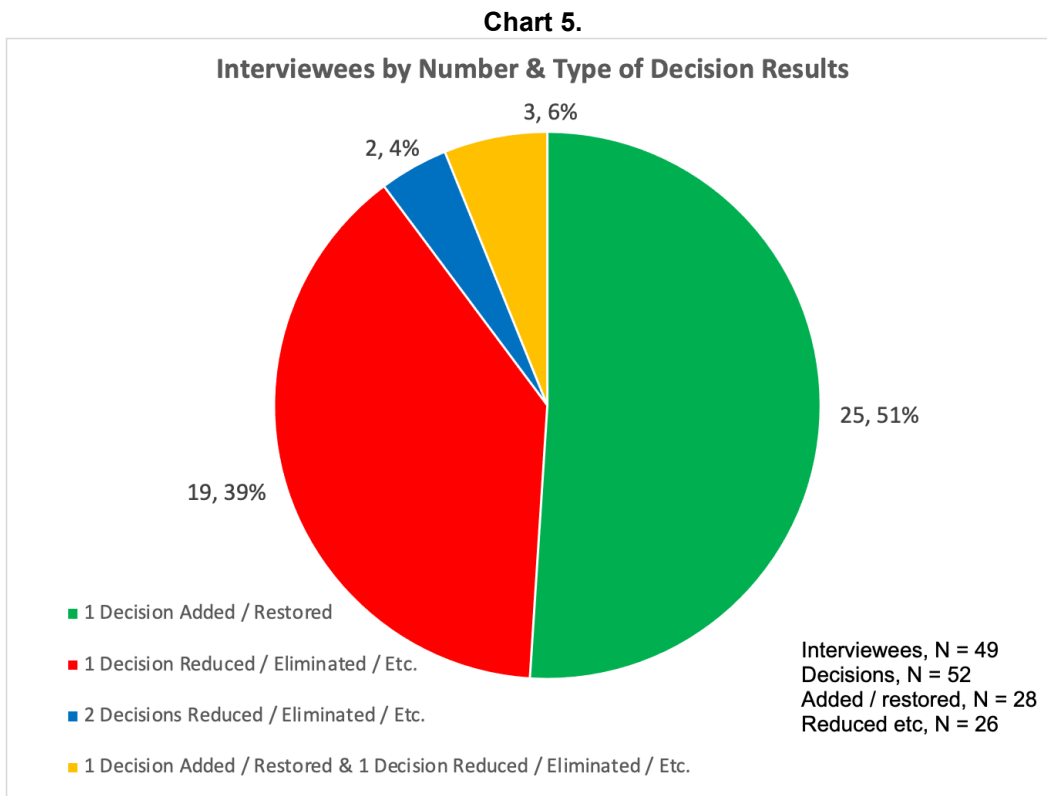
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Decision Results

The results of interviewee decisions about school librarian employment fell into two almost equal size groups: 28 interviewees made decisions that resulted in school librarian full-time equivalents (FTEs) being added or restored, while 26 interviewees made decisions that resulted in those FTEs being reduced to a lower level, eliminated entirely, combined with other positions, or reclassified (i.e, changed job title, different position). Notably, the 49 interviewees reported 54 total decisions, five school leaders choosing to discuss more than one decision affecting school librarian employment. (See Chart 5.)

The 28 positive decisions include 25 interviewees who each made only one decision to add or restore librarians plus three interviewees, each of whom made a positive decision as well as a negative one. The 26 negative decisions include 19 interviewees who each made only one decision to reduce, eliminate, combine, or reclassify librarians plus two interviewees who each made two negative decisions and three interviewees who made negative as well as positive decisions.

Decisions resulting in librarian positions being either added or restored were over-represented relative to decisions resulting in librarians being reduced, eliminated, combined, or reclassified. For this reason as well as the substantive difference between such decisions, much of the subsequent analysis is separated into these two groups.



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Decision Factors by Type

As interviews were completed and reviewed, project researchers sorted the decision factors identified by interviewees into three categories: structural, pragmatic, and strategic factors. Structural factors are pre-existing laws, regulations, or policies that drive staffing decisions automatically. Pragmatic factors are practical, often logistical problems that administrators must resolve. And strategic factors are ones initiated by leaders to advance district or school goals. (See pages 19 and 20 for fuller definitions and examples of these three types of factors.)

Among those who added or restored school librarians, the most frequent structural factors were new funding and opening a new school building or experiencing an enrollment increase. The lone pragmatic factor was providing for planning time for teachers. And the strategic decision-making factors that achieved double-digit mentions were change in priorities, stand-alone instruction by a librarian, and providing equity of student access to library staff. (See Table 14.)

Table 14. Factors in Decisions to Add or Restore Librarians by Decision Type in Rank Order

Structural Factors	Pragmatic Factors	Strategic Factors
New funding (8)	Planning time for teachers (7)	Change in priorities (13)
Opened a new building/enrollment increase (7)		Stand-alone instruction by librarians (11)
State government mandate (4)		Equity of student access to library staff (10)
Grant/funding requirements (2)		Change in administration (9)
		Collaboration with teachers (7)
		Standards-based testing (4)
		Special student needs (3)
		Social/emotional learning (2)
		Strategic plan (2)

Among interviewees who decided to reduce, eliminate, combine, or reclassify librarians, the most frequently-mentioned structural factor—indeed, the most frequently-mentioned factor of any type—was budget constraints. This is noteworthy, given that the question specifically asked the interviewee to think of factors other than this one. Other notable structural factors were closing a school building or experiencing an enrollment decrease and experiencing pipeline issues that made it difficult to find qualified candidates to fill librarian vacancies. Two related pragmatic factors were mentioned by several interviewees: needing staff in other positions and, in particular, needing more teachers to ensure there was one in every classroom or to manage class size. The three strategic factors most frequently cited by interviewees for their decisions to reduce, eliminate, combine, or reclassify librarians were making a change in priorities (a broad category), hiring other types of specialists or coaches instead of librarians, and believing the position of school librarian to be obsolete. (See Table 15.)

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Table 15. Factors in Decisions to Reduce, Eliminate, Combine or Reclassify Librarians by Type in Rank Order

Structural Factors	Pragmatic Factors	Strategic Factors
Budget constraints (17)	Needed incumbent in another position (6)	Change in priorities (12)
Closed a building/enrollment decrease (6)	Needed more teachers in classrooms (5)	Hired other specialists/coaches (7)
Pipeline issues finding qualified candidates (4)		Position deemed obsolete (6)
Retirements/resignations (2)		Change in administration (4)
		Strategic plan (2)

Factors by Type & Decision Results

The fact that school leaders who reported 54 decisions mentioned 174 factors indicates that, on average, each decision was based on three factors. A comparison of the decision factors identified by leaders who made positive and negative decisions about school librarian employment reveals an interesting difference. The largest number of potential factors by type was strategic followed by structural. Two-thirds of those who made positive decisions about school librarians attributed them to strategic factors, while only a quarter cited structural factors. (See Chart 6.) By contrast, those who made negative decisions about librarians attributed their decisions almost equally to strategic and structural factors. Those who made negative decisions were far more likely to cite structural factors than those who made positive decisions. (See Chart 7.)

These findings raise an interesting question about how school leaders perceive their own rationales for staffing decisions. One possibility is that district and school leaders who decided to add or restore librarian jobs were more inclined to attribute them to strategic factors, because they wanted credit for making positive decisions. On the other hand, leaders who decided to reduce, eliminate, combine, or reclassify librarian jobs may have been more inclined to attribute an often-unpopular decision to structural factors that were beyond their control.

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Chart 6.

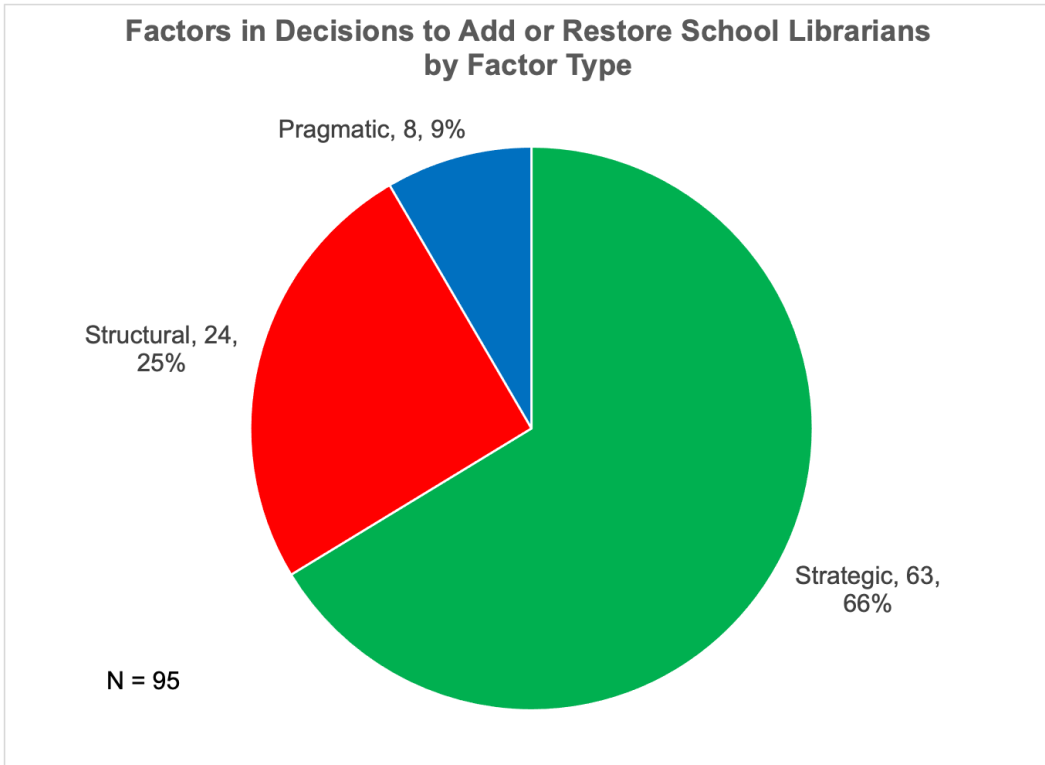
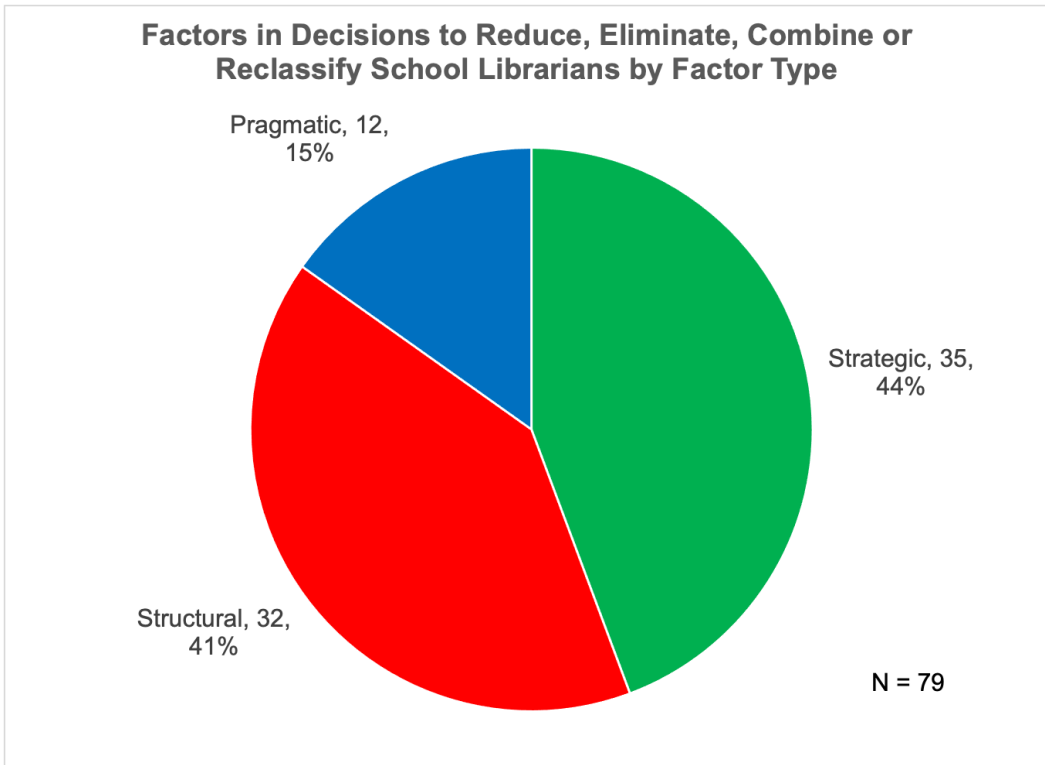


Chart 7.



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Co-occurrence of Decision Factors

Whether interviewees decided to add or restore school librarians or to reduce, eliminate, combine, or reclassify them, the factors they identified as drivers of those decisions—and the concurrence of those factors with each other—shed new light on their decision-making processes. The complexity of these decisions is evident in the fact that 49 interviewees identified a total of 174 factors that influenced their decision-making.

Factors in Decisions to Add or Restore School Librarians

Of the many factors to which interviewees attributed decisions to add or restore school librarians, those most frequently mentioned included: making a change in priorities; stand-alone instruction by school librarians; equity of student access to staff; experiencing a change in administration; the closely inter-related factors of stand-alone instruction by librarians, planning time for teachers, and collaboration between librarians and teachers; and standards-based testing. For each of these factors, concurrent ones indicate more about the interviewee's thinking. (See Table 16.)

Change in Priorities

Not surprisingly, making a change in priorities, the broadest and most frequently-cited factor—mentioned by 13 of the 28 interviewees who added or restored librarians—concurred with:

- 2 structural factors:
 - new funding (mentioned by 6 interviewees) and
 - state government mandates (3).
- The lone pragmatic factor: providing planning time for teachers (4), and
- 4 other strategic factors:
 - equity of access to staff (7),
 - stand-alone instruction by a librarian (5),
 - a change of administration (4), and
 - collaboration between librarians and teachers (3).

These patterns suggest that several interviewees who decided to add or restore librarians prioritized more equitable student access to a librarian, availability of new funding, the instructional role of a librarian—independently, in collaboration with teachers, or both—or some combination of those three factors. Other interviewees were motivated to prioritize adding or restoring librarians by a change of administration, the existence of a state government mandate, or their intent to facilitate collaboration between librarians and teachers.

Stand-Alone Instruction by School Librarians

Of the 11 interviewees who attributed their decisions to add or restore librarians to the stand-alone instruction provided by librarians, six also cited concerns about equity of student access to staff, and five each also cited

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changing priorities, providing for planning time for teachers, and facilitating collaboration between librarians and teachers. Another concurrent factor for four of these 11 interviewees was new funding.

The concurrence of these factors suggests that interviewees who decided to add or restore librarians prioritized having more of them because of their understanding of the contributions librarians can make. Those contributions include collaborating with teachers on the design and delivery of instruction and ensuring that all students in their districts benefit equally from the presence of a librarian. And, in some cases, the availability of one or more new funding sources made possible the addition of more librarians for these and other reasons.

Equity of Student Access to Library Staff

Ten interviewees credited their decisions to add or restore librarians to a concern about ensuring equity of student access to staff. Concurrent factors with this equity factor included: making a change in priorities (mentioned by 7 interviewees), facilitating stand-alone instruction by school librarians (6), and availability of new funding sources (3). That these decision-making factors coincided suggests that a substantial block of interviewees who added or restored librarians believe that the presence of a librarian is an educational equity issue, at least in part because of the instruction librarians provide on their own. Not surprisingly, such decisions to add or restore librarians were made easier in some cases by the availability of new funding.

Availability of New Funding

Of the eight interviewees who cited availability of new funding as a structural factor in their decisions to add or restore librarians, three of them also cited state government mandates as another structural factor. In these cases, the availability of new sources of funding may have enabled a district to add librarian positions in order to comply with a state government mandate. New funding may have ranked higher due to an influx of federal pandemic relief funds known as the American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Funds (ARP ESSER) that became available during the time period of this study. (Funds must be spent by September 2024.) The ESSER legislation allocated approximately \$190 billion in aid to states and school districts (“Frequently Asked Questions,” 2021).

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Table 16. Co-occurrence of Factors in Decisions to Add or Restore Librarians

Factors	Structural				Pragmatic	Strategic								
	New funding	Opened new building/ enrollment increase	State government mandate	Grant/funding requirements	Planning time for teachers	Change in priorities	Stand-alone instruction	Equity of student access to staff	Change in administration	Collaborating with teachers	Standards-based testing	Addressing special student needs	Social/emotional learning	Strategic plan
<i>Structural</i>														
New funding	8													
Opened new building / enrollment increase	2	7												
State government mandate	3	1	4											
Grant/funding requirements	1	1	1	2										
<i>Pragmatic</i>														
Planning time for teachers	3	1	1	1	7									
<i>Strategic</i>														
Change in priorities	6	1	3	2	4	13								
Stand-alone instruction	4	2	0	0	5	5	11							
Equity of student access to staff	3	1	1	0	2	7	6	10						
Change in administration	2	2	2	1	0	4	0	2	9					
Collaborating with teachers	2	3	1	2	3	3	5	2	1	7				
Standards-based testing	1	1	0	0	2	1	2	1	2	1	4			
Addressing special student needs	1	2	0	0	2	1	2	1	0	1	2	3		
Social / emotional learning	2	0	1	0	1	2	1	1	0	1	0	0	2	
Strategic plan	1	0	0	0	2	1	2	2	0	2	0	0	1	2

Notes: Each bold number in the gray-shaded diagonal is the number of decisions in which that issue was a factor. Read to the left and down from that number to find all concurring factors. Lightest shades indicate co-occurrences of 0 to 2. Medium shades indicate co-occurrences of 3 to 4. And darkest shades indicate co-occurrences of 5 or greater. N = 28 decisions

Planning Time for Teachers, Librarian-Teacher Collaboration & Stand-Alone Instruction by Librarians

Seven interviewees attributed their decisions to add or restore librarians to providing for planning time for teachers. Seven also attributed their decisions to facilitating collaboration between librarians and teachers. Five mentioned prioritizing stand-alone instruction by librarians. For both teacher planning time and librarian-teacher collaboration, another coinciding factor for four interviewees was making a change in priorities. Another concurrent factor for providing planning time for teachers was gaining access to new funding (3 interviewees). And, for librarian-teacher collaboration, another concurrent factor was opening a new building or experiencing an enrollment increase (also 3

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interviewees.) Taken together, these inter-related factors suggest that the school leaders interviewed about adding or restoring librarians understood that librarians can play an instructional role, both in collaboration with classroom teachers and independently. In the latter case, leaders valued stand-alone instruction by librarians, whether delivered in the context of planning time for teachers or otherwise. Pointedly, most leaders perceived librarians teaching students in the library while teachers had planning time as a win-win schedule. None expressed or implied a perception of the librarian's role as "babysitting." Notably, though, their support for both this kind of scheduling and collaboration between librarians and teachers—which calls for teachers and librarians to plan together—is contradictory. The opportunity to add or restore librarians for these interviewees was variously associated with changed administrative priorities, availability of new funding, and opening of new schools or increases in enrollment—all factors that may make it easier for decision-makers to staff libraries to contribute to instruction.

Opened New Building / Increased Enrollment

Of the seven interviewees who explained their decisions to add or restore librarians to having opened a new school building or experienced an enrollment increase, three also cited the need for collaboration between librarians and teachers, while two also mentioned valuing the stand-alone instruction provided by librarians and their contribution to addressing special student needs. This factor was also associated with a change in administration, a likely coinciding event when a new school opens. When a school is opened or experiences an influx of new students—particularly when that coincides with the arrival of a new administrator—it is an opportunity for school leaders to prioritize librarians.

State Government Mandates

Of the four interviewees who attributed their decisions to add or restore librarians to state government mandates, three each also associated the decision with a change in priorities and the availability of new funding, and two also identified a change in administration as a contributing factor. When a new administrator arrives, it is probably not unusual for a district or school to review its compliance with state mandates. And, when that is done and it is found that a mandate is not being met, the availability of extra funds provides an opportunity to prioritize a staffing increase to meet the mandate.

Standards-Based Testing

Of interviewees who added or restored school librarians, only four indicated that their decisions were influenced by concern about standards-based testing. Interestingly, though these numbers are obviously small, two each also mentioned providing planning time for teachers, stand-alone instruction by librarians, addressed special student needs, and a change of administration. Notably, only one of these interviewees mentioned facilitating collaboration between librarians and teachers. This pattern of concurring factors suggests that school leaders—especially new ones—who are concerned about test scores may value stand-alone instruction by librarians. Such instruction

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simultaneously helps to free up planning time for teachers and gives librarians an opportunity to focus needed attention on students facing special challenges.

Factors in Decisions to Reduce, Eliminate, Combine or Reclassify School Librarians

Interviewees attributed their decisions to reduce, eliminate, combine, or reclassify school librarians to many factors. The most frequent structural factors were budget constraints, closing a building or experiencing enrollment decrease, and facing pipeline issues finding qualified candidates for librarian vacancies. The most frequent pragmatic factors were needing more teachers and needing the incumbent in another position. The most frequent strategic factors were change in priorities, choosing to hire other specialists or coaches, believing the position of librarian to be obsolete, and change in administration. For each of these factors, concurrent ones indicate more about the interviewee's thinking. (See Table 17.)

Budget Constraints

Whenever a school librarian position—or, indeed, any position—is under threat, the most predictable explanation usually offered is that it is a matter of budget constraints. As indicated by the other decision factors coinciding with that one, however, a district or school budget documents the priorities and perceptions of decision-makers. Unsurprisingly, therefore, the other factor coinciding most frequently with budget constraints was change in priorities. Eleven (11) of the 17 interviewees who attributed librarian cuts to budget constraints also cited priority changes. The next three most frequent factors coinciding with budget constraints were: hired other specialists or coaches (6), needed staff in another position (5, and 4 of those specifying the need for more teachers), and deemed the position of librarian obsolete (5). In fewer cases, attributing librarian cuts to budget constraints coincided with change in administration and “pipeline” issues finding qualified candidates for librarian vacancies (3 each).

Change in Priorities

Of the 12 interviewees who associated librarian cuts with a change in priorities, 11 also mentioned budget constraints, underscoring the earlier point about the most frequent factors coinciding with budget constraints. The kinds of priority changes most frequently mentioned were: hired other specialists or coaches (5), needed the incumbent in another position (4, of which 2 specified classroom teacher), and change in administration and position of librarian deemed obsolete (3 each).

Thus, when interviewees indicated that a change in priorities motivated their librarian cuts, the greater priorities—to the extent they were identified—tended to be preferences for hiring other specialists or coaches and other district or school positions (often classroom teachers). Notably, of interviewees whose change in priorities was hiring other types of educators, many believed librarians were obsolete. Librarian cuts attributed to priority changes also sometimes coincided with changes of district or school leadership—though, priority changes were more often not associated with such senior personnel changes.

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Table 17. Co-occurrence of Factors in Decisions to Reduce, Eliminate, Combine or Reclassify Librarians

Factors	Structural				Pragmatic		Strategic				
	Budget constraints	Closed building/ enrollment decrease	Pipeline issues finding qualified candidates	Retirements/ resignations	Needed incumbent in other position	Needed more teachers	Change in priorities	Hired other specialists/coaches	Position deemed obsolete	Change in administration	Strategic plan
<i>Structural</i>											
Budget constraints	17										
Closed bldg./enrollment decrease	2	6									
Pipeline issues finding qualified candidates	3	1	4								
Retirements/resignations	1	1	0	2							
<i>Pragmatic</i>											
Needed incumbent in other position	5	1	2	2	6						
Needed more teachers	4	2	1	1	2	5					
<i>Strategic</i>											
Change in priorities	11	1	2	1	4	1	12				
Hired other specialists/coaches	6	1	1	0	2	1	5	7			
Position deemed obsolete	5	2	2	0	3	1	3	3	6		
Change in administration	3	0	0	1	2	0	3	1	0	4	
Strategic plan	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2

Notes: Each bold number in the gray-shaded diagonal is the number of decisions in which that issue was a factor. Read to the left and down from that number to find all concurring factors. Lightest shades indicate co-occurrences of 0 to 2. Medium shades indicate co-occurrences of 3 to 4. And darkest shades indicate co-occurrences of 5 or greater. N = 26 decisions

Hiring Other Specialists or Coaches

Of the seven interviewees who attributed their librarian cuts to choosing to hire other specialists or coaches, six also mentioned budget constraints, and three expressed a belief that school librarians were obsolete.

For these interviewees, the decision was probably a more clear-cut one. If money is tight, and you believe a certain position is needed, while another is obsolete, cutting the latter position is the obvious one to let go.

Closing Building/Enrollment Decrease

For most of the six interviewees who attributed librarian cuts to one or more buildings being closed or enrollment decreases, few, if any, concurrent factors were needed to explain their staffing decision. If a school building closed, obviously there was no longer a need for a librarian. If enrollment decreased, a budget cut (2) or need for more teachers elsewhere (2) might have provided some incentive for a librarian cut. And, if the decision-maker was

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already questioning whether the position of librarian might be obsolete (2), a building closure or drop in enrollment might suffice as a reason to cut a librarian job. Again, though, for most interviewees, this factor alone sufficed to justify librarian cuts.

Needed Incumbent in Other Position

Of the six interviewees who justified librarian cuts by the need to re-assign the incumbent to another position, five also cited budget constraints; four, a change in priorities; and three, the belief that the post of school librarian is obsolete. These concurring factors suggest that, when decision-makers believe money is tight, they have competing priorities, and they entertain doubts about the value of school librarianship, librarian cuts are anything but surprising.

Needed More Teachers

Of the five interviewees who cited the need for more teachers in explaining their librarian cuts, four also mentioned budget constraints—the single, most overwhelmingly concurrent factor in their decision-making. Most school leaders probably consider it a minimal expectation of their own performance to have a teacher in every classroom. It is difficult for a school librarian—or any other educator at district or school level who is based outside of a classroom—to compete with that overriding imperative.

Position of Librarian Obsolete

The most daunting threat to a school librarian's job is a school leader's belief that the position is obsolete. While there is an abundance of evidence with which to argue that such a belief is inaccurate, the fact remains that there are administrators at district and school levels who believe it. Of the 26 decisions to reduce, eliminate, combine, or reclassify school librarians, 6 of those decisions involved expressed such beliefs. Unsurprisingly, concurrent factors were budget constraints (5) as well as change in priorities, need to re-assign the incumbent to another position, and need to hire other specialists or coaches (3 each). Notably, however, none of these decisions involved re-assigning a librarian to classroom teaching or having difficulty filling vacancies after retirements or resignations. Those may be coincidental results of the small number of interviewees citing this factor. Or they may suggest that some administrators who question the need for school librarians also believe they need people in other positions (e.g., other specialists or coaches) than classroom teacher.

Change in Administration

Somewhat surprisingly, only four interviewees associated their librarian cuts with a change in administration. It is noteworthy that budget constraints and change in priorities were both identified as concurrent factors by three of the four. Two of these interviewees also mentioned the need to reassign a librarian to another position. Though the number of interviewees citing this factor was small, these coinciding factors are predictable issues that new administrators often face.

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Difficulty Finding Qualified Candidates for Librarian Vacancies

Four interviewees attributed their losses of school librarians not to their own voluntary decisions to cut the positions, but to the difficulty of finding qualified candidates to fill vacancies. Isolated locale, a smaller community, a less diverse community, or a lower pay scale can make filling vacancies even more difficult. Consequently, librarian losses sometimes result from such involuntary factors, instead of a district or school leader's voluntary decision not to employ a librarian.

What Decision-Makers Said

One of the reasons interviews were deemed essential to this project was that school decision-makers' voices need to be heard. Summarizing their responses numerically, as done above, helps to assess overall trends; but, it can obscure substantive details worthy of attention. Further, references to specific circumstances and responses to them help to flesh out the numbers. To ensure confidentiality for interviewees and their districts or schools, the following quotes are paraphrased to eliminate identifying information, to simplify grammar, and to edit for conciseness and clarity.

Interviewees Who Added or Restored Librarians

Interviewees who added or restored librarians tended to explain their decision-making primarily in terms of strategic and structural factors. The strategic factors in their decisions to add or restore librarians included: accessing new funding sources, opening a new school, responding to an enrollment increase, meeting state government mandates, and finding grant funds. (See Table 18.)

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Table 18. Structural Factors in Decisions to Add or Restore Librarians

Decision-Making Factor	Examples / Quotes from Interviewees
New funding: Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Funds	Adding three certified library positions over the last few years was made possible by recent federal ESSER funds. It is important for administrators to braid together new sources, like ESSER, and core funds in order to make positive changes work long-term.
Opened new school building	With two new buildings opening, we'll be adding two more library media positions in the new school year.
Enrollment increase	As enrollment grew and classrooms were being added, we had a need for more time in the library.
State government mandate: Graduation requirements for educational technology	This district has expressed a commitment to support both media specialists and technology teachers. The state does not dictate staffing for library media positions; it is up to districts to determine.
State government mandate: Working toward a mandate	In the past, library positions were often traded out for reading specialists or classroom teachers. Now there is an amendment to make all library positions full-time and mandatory, requiring a master's in library science or education. Candidates for these positions are expected to complete appropriate coursework from an accredited library program, so they qualify for an additional certification.
Grant funding: scholarships	I applied for and received funding for multiple new hires to go to graduate school to earn their MLS degree and school library certification.

Pragmatic factors cited by those who added or restored librarians included facilitating planning time for teachers—in some cases, providing coverage while teachers planned in isolation; in other cases, planning collaboratively with teachers, especially when responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. Pandemic response efforts also included supporting students and parents during remote learning. (See Table 19.)

Table 19. Pragmatic Factors in Decisions to Add or Restore Librarians

Decision-Making Factor	Examples / Quotes from Interviewees
Planning time for teachers	Adding a librarian helped to fill out the “specials” rotation that facilitated our providing prep time to teachers. We wanted to provide consistent prep time for all teachers across all elementary schools.
Planning time for teachers: Part of broader COVID-19 pandemic response	Library media specialists were critical in helping the district pivot from in-person to fully remote and then hybrid because they worked continually with students, teachers, and parents. They also provided basic technical support to ensure that students were able to use technology for learning.

Most decisions to add or restore librarians were explained in terms of strategic considerations. These factors included: changes in priorities (e.g., becoming a 1-1 technology school), having librarians do more stand-alone instruction (e.g., critical thinking skills), addressing educational equity concerns (e.g., information literacy skills gaps), having librarians collaborate more with teachers (e.g., digital citizenship), and expanding their role in preparing students to meet state standards (e.g., digital literacy). (See Table 20.)

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Table 20. Strategic Factors in Decisions to Add or Restore Librarians

Decision-Making Factor	Examples / Quotes from Interviewees
Change in priorities: 1:1 Facilitating iPad/Chromebook initiative	Library media specialists led this initiative, including ensuring the devices were inventoried, adding them to the online catalog, and managing circulation of these assets.
Stand-alone instruction: 1-1 device-specific digital citizenship instruction	Librarians implemented digital citizenship instruction at the beginning of the year, so all students received instruction specific to the type of device they received.
Stand-alone instruction: Increasing library instruction	Use of the library was transformed. Before, staff checked things in and out and did read alouds. Now, there is a librarian to teach digital literacy and research techniques as well as integrate information resources with content areas.
Stand-alone instruction: Information literacy skills	Librarians bring to the table more than circulating books: information evaluation skills are needed and they are the ones who teach them.
Stand-alone instruction: Need for certified professional to teach	Before retiring, she made a pitch to me about why her position should be retained as a certified role. When it was time to hire, I emphasized to the superintendent and HR that we needed to hire someone with certification, not a paraprofessional.
Equity of student access to library staff: Critical thinking skills	Assessment is a key piece because when you're trying to get approval for more positions, you have to have a compelling argument. "This helps critical thinking skills" isn't enough; it has to be "some of our students don't have any of these skills."
Equity of student access to library staff: Low-income students	Librarians are resourceful people. They help provide a high-quality education—especially for low-income students—by collaborating with teachers and helping them source information for their classrooms. They make learning fun and interesting.
Collaborating with teachers: Digital literacy needs	Librarians worked with teachers to develop the digital citizenship curriculum; so the increase in staffing didn't happen because of the library, it happened because of technology.
Standards-based testing: Added responsibilities	The librarians have more time with students to teach library as well as digital literacy standards.
Social / emotional learning	Our counselor and librarian implement our social-emotional curriculum. There's some co-teaching, so they work closely together.
Strategic plan	Teachers expressed the need for a librarian during the district's annual review and improvement process.

Interviewees Who Reduced Librarians

Interviewees who reduced librarians explained their decisions in terms of a variety of structural, pragmatic, and strategic factors. Structural factors in these decisions included budget constraints, closure of school buildings, and enrollment decreases that activated district staffing formulas. (See Table 21.)

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Table 21. Structural Factors in Decisions to Reduce Librarians

Decision-Making Factor	Examples / Quotes from Interviewees
Budget constraints	If the principals' budgets were cut, the end result was that the library positions were cut. Certified librarians were replaced with paraprofessionals and recently-built schools haven't included school library facilities because there is no need to manage them.
Closed school building	Staffing for libraries is codified into state law; but, many schools in this district are either closing or consolidating.
Enrollment decrease	In smaller schools, principals have begun to combine the school librarian position with the computer teacher. Realistically, students in buildings with smaller enrollments are getting only half-time library instruction—half of what the larger schools with full-time librarians are getting.

Pragmatic factors influencing librarian reductions included needing staff in other positions, particularly ones addressing post-pandemic skill loss, and needing more classroom teachers. Sometimes these decisions resulted in librarians having their responsibilities split between the library and a classroom, and, in other cases, they were reassigned to classrooms altogether. (See Table 22.)

Table 22. Pragmatic Factors in Decisions to Reduce Librarians

Decision-Making Factor	Examples / Quotes from Interviewees
Needed staff in other positions: Interventionists for post-pandemic skill loss	I couldn't cut interventionists, because data showed students, especially after the pandemic, weren't learning virtually. I knew the interventionists would need to do as much catch-up work with those students as possible; so, I had to cut librarian positions.
Needed more teachers: librarian's time split between library and classroom	Instead of cutting positions entirely, our media center specialist has taught one or two classes in a split model; half her day being working in the library, making sure the resources are there, making sure everything's where it needs to be, and the other half teaching English
Needed incumbent in other position: technology teacher	With a teacher shortage, they didn't have enough teachers when school started; so, the librarians were told to teach technology classes.

Strategic factors driving librarian cuts included hiring new educational technology staff, administrator perceptions that—if the position of librarian was not obsolete—it was at least less needed than in the past, and the pressure on districts and schools to improve their students' test scores. (See Table 23.)

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Table 23. Strategic Factors in Decisions to Reduce Librarians

Decision-Making Factor	Examples / Quotes from Interviewees
Hired other specialists / coaches: New tech staff added, librarians reduced	Media services were brought under the Technology department. As part of re-alignment, library staffing was reduced and new technology positions were added.
Hired other specialists / coaches: Teachers asked for more ed-tech staff	Library paraprofessionals were decreased and educational technology paraprofessionals were hired to provide teachers with more collaboration time and add a new experience for the students.
Position deemed obsolete: Teachers need less support from librarians	Demand for library spaces and librarian expertise has been declining. Circulation of library materials was falling, and librarians were spending less time teaching students and collaborating or supporting their classroom colleagues. That was not their fault: teachers have become more comfortable working with online resources and databases. These usage trends led us to cut one librarian and have the other split her time between two schools.
Position deemed obsolete: Aides needed more than librarians	When our librarians received multiple teacher requests to collaborate, they began declining some, explaining that one of them had to remain in the library for “crowd control.” So, we went from 2 professional staff to 1. Our current librarian is no longer tethered to the library as a space manager. Two teacher aides took over managing the space. On paper, it looks like we cut a librarian; but, in truth, we’re able to fully maximize one person, sometimes more than when there were 2 librarians.
Standardized testing: Librarians sacrificed for more intensive test prep	The pressure to improve standardized test scores left principals in a pickle. At schools with lowest enrollment, lowest socio-economic students, and most pressure to deliver on test scores, they decided they couldn’t afford to have librarians anymore. They had to focus on preparing students for state tests.

Interviewees Who Eliminated Librarians

Interviewees who chose to eliminate school librarians completely felt compelled to do so by structural forces beyond their control. The opening of charter schools resulted in losses of both enrollment and funding for regular public schools (losses that sometimes activated staffing formulas). Small schools had insufficient economies of scale to justify continuing the position. And some districts and schools—particularly ones in isolated locales—had difficulties finding qualified candidates for librarian jobs, often exacerbated by retirements. (See Table 24.)

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Table 24. Structural Factors in Decisions to Eliminate Librarians

Decision-Making Factor	Examples / Quotes from Interviewees
Budget constraints: Budget cuts due to charter school	The district had a charter school open and, unfortunately, its drain on enrollments of regular public schools negatively impacted their funding.
Budget constraints: Mandated positions prevail	Many principals don't want to cut librarians; but, when you have a limited budget, the most expensive thing is personnel, and, if another position is mandated, it forces the issue.
Enrollment decrease: Loss of students to charter school	The largest charter school in the state is getting some of our students. That impacts enrollment and funding for regular public schools, and costs us staff.
Enrollment decrease: Economy of scale	One thing you're looking at is how many students are my staff reaching each day? Say I have a librarian and they're only getting 15 kids a day. If I assign them as a teacher, suddenly they've got three more classes of 25. It's a small school; I don't have the economy of scale that a school of 600 or 2000 would have.
Issues finding qualified job candidates: Filled alternate position	We did attempt to hire a librarian; but, were unsuccessful. When we couldn't find one, we opted for hiring a reading specialist instead. It was who we could get.
Issues finding qualified job candidates: Need leadership of strong "21 st century" librarian	If I were to add someone right now, I would need somebody really strong, someone with a vision of what the library could be. Our current librarian operates an old-fashioned library—the kind I had growing up in the '70s and '80s. We need somebody more up-to-date; a 21 st century librarian who has vision and leadership skills.
Retirements	In fall of 2020, one of the two librarians retired and her position was not replaced.

The prevailing pragmatic motivation for eliminating a librarian position was needing staff in other positions (e.g., reading specialist, counselor). In some cases, librarians were re-assigned to other positions rather than laid off. (See Table 25.)

Table 25. Pragmatic Factors in Decisions to Eliminate Librarians

Decision-Making Factor	Examples / Quotes from Interviewees
Needed incumbent in other position: Shifted librarian to reading specialist	All librarian positions were furloughed; one became a reading specialist, because she had both certifications.
Needed staff in other positions: Eliminated librarian to hire COVID-era counselor	We needed to address homelessness by hiring another counselor. Also, during COVID, we had to save some money and, with kids not in school, we didn't need a librarian. Mental health support was vital. We had to make the new counseling position full-time. It's difficult to hire a half-time counselor. People want a full-time job, so they can receive benefits.

Other interviewees who eliminated librarians altogether cited strategic factors, such as a change in priorities (e.g., keeping kindergarten full-day, hiring STEM teachers) and pressures associated with standards-based testing (i.e., hiring more teachers of tested subjects. (See Table 26.)

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Table 26. Strategic Factors in Decisions to Eliminate Librarians

Decision-Making Factor	Examples / Quotes from Interviewees
Change in priorities: Kindergarten and STEM	The district kept kindergarten a full-day program—rather than cutting it to half-day—instead of restoring librarian positions. When more funds became available, a STEM teacher was hired rather than a librarian.
Change in priorities: STEM	One of our elementary schools did not have a STEM teacher, and given that we're a 1:1 district now, that was seen as a higher priority than keeping a librarian.
Standards-based testing	Unfortunately, if I have to make a decision between library and math or language arts, those are tested areas. That's why I had to cut a librarian position.

Interviewees Who Combined or Reclassified Librarians

Librarian full-time equivalents (FTEs) do not decline only because decision-makers choose to reduce their hours or eliminate their positions completely. Sometimes, losses of librarian FTEs result from the position being combined with another (e.g., librarian/educational technology specialist) or reclassified in ways that may involve new job titles unrecognized as librarians (e.g., information literacy/educational technology specialist). Decisions to combine librarian positions with others or reclassify them under new titles tended to be explained mostly in terms of structural and strategic factors.

Structural factors that drove combining or reclassifying librarians included budget constraints (most notably, due to fiscal pressures from charter schools), difficulties finding qualified candidates for librarian vacancies (sometimes associated with district or school locale or cost-of-living issues), and the need to meet certain standards. (See Table 27.)

Pragmatic factors that influenced decisions to combine or reclassify librarian positions included needing more teachers to reduce class size and needing specialists to address specific academic needs (e.g., reading). (See Table 28.)

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Table 27. Structural Factors in Decisions to Combine or Reclassify Librarians

Decision-Making Factor	Examples / Quotes from Interviewees
Budget constraints: Charter schools mean cuts at regular schools	We serve a lot of marginalized populations. Schools of choice have been devastating to this community. Of our thousands of school-age children, only half attend regular public schools. Consequently, the district is strapped financially. During the COVID years, we cut our full-time library positions to half-time, because we didn't have a lot of library use then.
Budget constraints: cost-of-living raises vs. adding staff	When you don't get funding increases and you're trying to give teachers a cost-of-living raise, sometimes you've got to do what you've got to do. You give the raise, and combine staff responsibilities to avoid increasing the payroll.
Issues finding qualified job candidates: High cost-of-living discourages applicants	We have a housing crisis. There's not enough affordable housing near our schools. We advertise for a certified library media specialist, and candidates got excited because of how much we pay. Then, they discover they can't find a place to live. So, we end up having to add library duties to another position.
Legislative standards	You get more points on our standards for having highly qualified teachers and librarians. Sometimes, you can get credit for both by combining positions.

Table 28. Pragmatic Factors in Decisions to Combine or Reclassify Librarians

Decision-Making Factor	Examples / Quotes from Interviewees
Needed more teachers Needed incumbent in other position	Ask a principal, would you rather have smaller class sizes, a reading specialist, or a library media specialist? They're going to choose one of those over a library media specialist.
Needed more teachers	To avoid cutting positions entirely, we decided to split some educator roles. The middle school librarian's job was split between the library and an English classroom. Our librarian is a certified English teacher, too; so half her day is in the library, and the other half is teaching English.
Needed incumbent in other position	At the elementary level, the librarian's day is split. Part of her day is spent teaching in the elementary school library. The other part of her day, she serves as a basic skills [i.e., reading and math] specialist, visiting classrooms, mostly in our kindergarten or first grade classes. Due to class sizes and basic skills instruction needs, that extra help is needed by classroom teachers.

Decisions to combine or reclassify librarian positions were also tied to specific strategic concerns, such as changing priorities to address local conditions or to fulfill a particular vision, as well as updating the responsibilities of school librarians to meet current needs. (See Table 29.)

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Table 29. Strategic Factors in Decisions to Combine or Reclassify Librarians

Decision-Making Factor	Examples / Quotes from Interviewees
Change in priorities: One district librarian oversees aides in schools	We opted for one librarian for the district, overseeing an aide in each school. Is it ideal? No, but we have great people doing the work. When you're making these decisions, you have to take into account all the constraining realities and determine how to achieve goals most efficiently. You start looking at who is certified, and decide how to better utilize staff so they are working smarter and not harder.
Change in priorities: Future-ready makerspace	As a principal you can choose to have a librarian or another teacher. A lot of schools in the district got rid of the librarians. Those principals were not thinking about what the library of the future can provide students. We redesigned the whole approach and call it a future ready library, a huge makerspace combining everything together.
Position deemed obsolete: Librarian responsibilities need updating	The responsibilities for secondary librarians need to be changed and updated to be more consistent with what students need and expect today. Some librarians have not kept up to date, and some just want it the way it used to be. The job needs to be reconceived, and filled appropriately.

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Tradeoffs / Advantages & Disadvantages of Decisions

When district or school leaders make decisions to add or restore librarians or to reduce, eliminate, combine, or reclassify them, those decisions are not made in isolation. The implications for other staffing decisions and for other consequences for the district, schools, and students have to be taken into account. Sometimes, new funding or other fortuitous turns of events make it possible to add library staff without sacrificing staff elsewhere. In such times, the impetus for the decision may be the perceived advantage to be gained. Other times, in more challenging circumstances, there is no good or right decision, because the leader knows that whatever decision they make, it is likely to do harm. The best they can do is try to minimize the damage. Sometimes, it is not a matter of choosing one position over another; but, of having to make a cut without any compensatory gain.

Win-Lose Tradeoffs

One type of scenario interviewees described was a win-lose tradeoff, gaining librarians while cutting elsewhere to pay for them. Some interviewees described staff-for-staff tradeoffs in which librarians were chosen over other types of staff, such as classroom teachers and counselors. Other interviewees reported adding a librarian rather than a teacher, even when it meant larger class sizes, or adding a librarian to ensure that teachers had planning time. Notably, the latter was such an absolute commitment that the interviewer noted that cuts had to be made elsewhere. (See Table 30.)

Table 30. Win-Lose Tradeoffs of Adding or Restoring Librarians

Tradeoff	Examples / Quotes from Interviewees
Added staff / Lost staff: Recruiting best teachers to become librarians	We will pull the best teachers, train them and send them to school to get their library credential. The challenge: making sure we don't take too much from the classroom environment, given teacher shortages.
Added staff / Lost staff: Gaining librarians meant losing counselors	The tradeoff was not getting elementary school counselors. I was able to get secondary school counselors, but I would have liked to have them at every level—pre-school, all the way up through grade 12. We just couldn't afford the elementary counselors, because I wasn't willing to give up the librarians.
Added staff / Lost staff Added staff / Lost elsewhere: Larger class sizes	For many of our principals, taking on another certified person—a librarian—meant giving up a certified person somewhere else. So, the tradeoff was having larger class sizes in one grade to add another media specialist. There was no extra money to have both.
Added staff / Lost elsewhere: priority to give teachers planning time	We add librarians when necessary because they enable us to provide planning time for our classroom teachers. Reducing the number of librarians is not an option. Cuts have to be made elsewhere.

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Win-Win Advantages

Some interviewees reported that their decisions to add or restore librarians were win-win scenarios, in which the decision was made due to the anticipated benefits of the new positions rather than their preference over kinds of other staff. In some cases, circumstances permitted adding librarians without making staff cuts elsewhere. In other cases, adding librarians was chosen for the anticipated advantages of increased collaboration between librarians and teachers, more stand-alone instruction by librarians, more support for teachers from librarians, and improved utility of library space. (See Table 31.)

Table 31. Win-Win Advantages of Adding or Restoring Librarians

Advantage	Examples / Quotes from Interviewees
Added librarian / No other staff loss	The success of adding staff did not come at the expense of other positions in the district. We were able to add staff thanks to a highly collaborative Director of Technology and Library Media Director working together. They negotiated something that would work for both of them.
Added librarian / Gained more collaboration between librarian and teachers	Teachers who want a co-teaching partner no longer have to worry about whether or not the librarian will be in their building on a particular day. Professional teacher librarians set a different tone than the paraprofessionals principals used to cover lunch duty or other assignments.
Added librarian / Gained more stand-alone instruction by librarians	Adding a librarian gave teachers one more planning period a week.
Added librarian / Gained more teacher support by librarians	Our principals don't ask to exchange their librarian for another classroom teacher. Those conversations are non-existent. They understand that their librarian supports teachers in ways that have positive impacts on student achievement.
Added librarian / Increased utility of library space	A new librarian became the person to put into practice our makerspace / technology / hands-on learning space. This supported what students were learning in the classroom and vice-versa.

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Lose-Win Trade-Offs

A common lose-win scenario when school librarian positions are lost is when district or school leaders choose to sacrifice a librarian position for another, most often a classroom teacher position. In other cases, a librarian position—and, indeed, the library itself—may be sacrificed in order to use library space differently. (See Table 32.)

Table 32. Lose-Win Tradeoffs of Reducing, Eliminating, Combining or Reclassifying Librarians

Tradeoff	Examples / Quotes from Interviewees
Lost librarian / Gained teacher	It's hard to keep an adult in the library when a group of children doesn't have a second-grade teacher. When you're not directly responsible for kids, a lot of people wonder what you do all day.
Lost librarian / Gained other staff: gained technology integrationists	While we lost librarian expertise, we gained by hiring technology integrationists who already had great relationships with teachers. There was a huge infusion of new energy and skills around instructional technology, and the district saved money.
Lost librarian / Gained more classroom space	In addition to losing librarian time, our high school is so crowded, we had to take part of the library for classrooms, leaving less space for books.
Lost librarian / Gained more classroom space	Space was a tradeoff. Our library is more of a classroom space now. So, we had to remove a lot of books. High school kids don't check out books like they used to--they all have MacBooks. The way our high school is headed, we will have hardly any books.

Lose-Lose Disadvantages

Many interviewees who reported making negative decisions about school librarian staffing acknowledged the negative consequences of those decisions for both students and teachers. Sometimes, district or school leaders feel they have no other choice, even though they know that cutting a librarian position—perhaps the last one in a district or school—will have undesirable consequences. They know that such cuts mean less collaboration between librarians and teachers, less stand-alone instruction by librarians, less support for teachers from librarians, and less worthwhile use of library space. (See Table 33.)

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Table 33. Lose-Lose Disadvantages of Eliminating, Reducing, Combining or Reclassifying Librarians

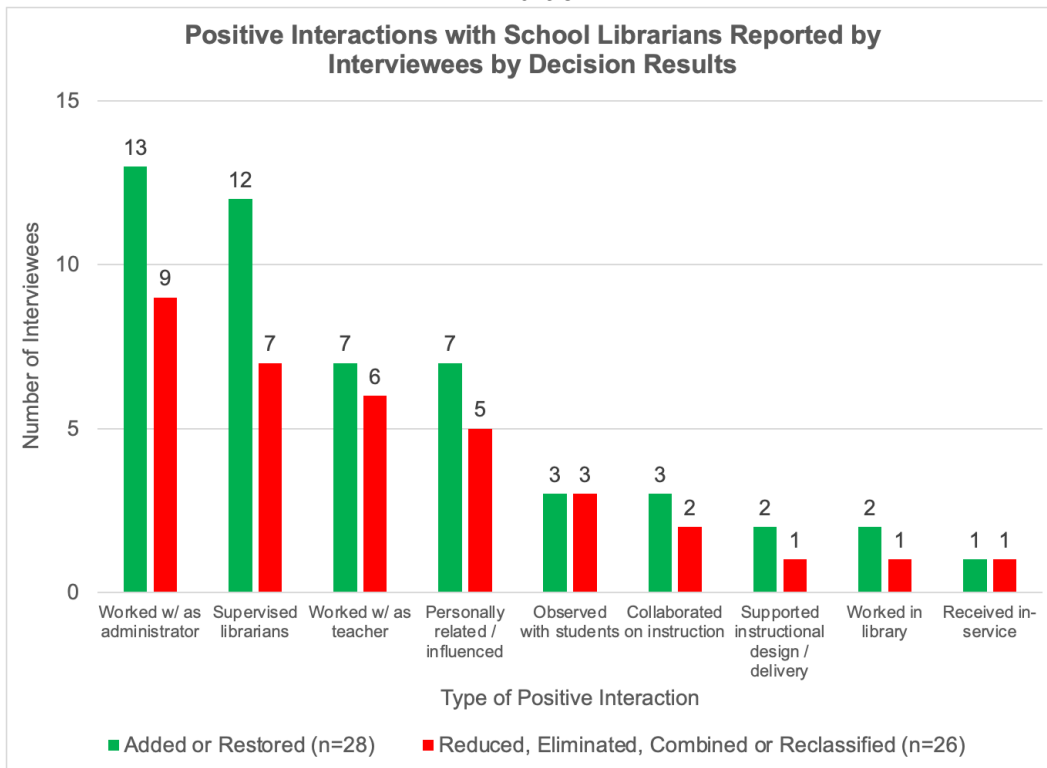
Disadvantage	Examples / Quotes from Interviewees
Lost librarian / Students suffered: State requirements forced choice	As an administrator, a one-time classroom teacher, and even a parent, I know how important it is to have a strong school library and librarian. But, in our state, other positions are required, while a librarian is not. It is frustrating to feel little choice but to take something away from our kids that I know will harm their academic growth.
Lost librarian / Students suffered: Reading scores suffer as circulation shifts from print to digital	The downside is a lack of equity and access. District staff can't cover for every librarian who has been cut. Students not doing as well in reading is the biggest learning impact. Where librarians have been lost, print circulation has declined, while digital information use has surged.
Lost librarian / Lost collaboration between librarian and teachers: Future administrators may devalue understaffed libraries	When we lose librarians, it's more than just an immediate loss for one school or district; it's a potential long-term loss. Many teachers are going to move on into administrative roles. Then, they're going to make decisions based on their recollection of a lone librarian who couldn't collaborate with teachers because she didn't have a library assistant.
Lost librarian / Lost collaboration with teachers: Resource curation now focus	Our reduction in librarian FTE took time away from our media specialist's co-teaching role. Teachers used to bring classes to the library for the librarian's help with research projects, and we can't do that at the same level now. All she has time to do is build resources instead of collaborate with teachers.
Lost librarian / Lost stand-alone instruction: Teaching information literacy suffers	Our teachers have classroom libraries; but, that's nothing compared to having a librarian in a library—with so many more options—helping students understand how to verify and analyze sources. Some of that happens in our English classrooms; but, this loss definitely has had a negative impact on our district and its students.
Lost librarian / Lost stand-alone instruction: Aides can't replace librarians	Our former librarian could help our kids in ways the aide there now cannot. All the aide can cover is more rudimentary things, such as the basics of locating resources.
Lost librarian / Lost stand-alone instruction: Critical thinking suffers	Critical thinking suffered when we decreased our investments in library services.
Lost librarian / Lost support of teachers by librarian: Lost technology integration	We need someone who understands how to integrate technology into classroom instruction, and who can co-teach with, and provide professional development for, teachers. Teachers need help in using different platforms in their classrooms. Not having that person has been tough.
Lost librarian / Lost utility of library space: Student workers insufficient	I wanted the kids reading as much as possible. With no librarian or even an aide, two students were checking out books, but nobody was getting them back in order on the shelves. Let alone anything else. It wasn't good.

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Interactions of Interviewees with Librarians

Observers of school leaders’ decisions about school librarian employment may question what kind of interactions those leaders are having, or have had, with librarians and how—whether positive or negative—that affects their decision-making. Interestingly, both leaders who added or restored librarians and those who reduced, eliminated, combined, or reclassified them shared similar kinds of positive interactions with librarians. Notably, though, substantially more leaders who made positive decisions about librarians reported having worked with them as administrators, particularly in a supervisory capacity. Noticeably fewer leaders who made negative decisions about librarians reported similar positive interactions. Beyond that, while the numbers reporting other kinds of experiences were only in single digits, there were no other major differences between positive and negative decision-makers in the numbers of interviewees reporting most other kinds of interactions with librarians. That included such positive interactions as: observing their interactions with students, collaborating with them on instructional design and delivery, receiving instruction support from them, and having received in-service from them. (See Chart 8.)

Chart 8.



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Most decision-makers' accounts of positive interactions with librarians were divided easily between experiences they had as administrators and those they had as teachers. As administrators, many interviewees had either worked with librarians previously in an administrative role or supervised them. And, at least one received in-service professional development from a team of librarians when entering a new administrator role. School leaders who had worked with librarians previously as classroom teachers reported a range of experiences: collaborating with librarians on design and delivery of instruction, receiving support from librarians for their own design and delivery of instruction, observing students' library use, actually working in a library themselves, and receiving in-service professional development from librarians. The district and school leaders interviewed described a wide variety of examples of these formative experiences with their librarian colleagues. Notably, this was probably the easiest question for practically all of the interviewees to answer—for good or ill, they all had personal experiences with librarians to share. Interestingly, it does not appear that any of the interviewees had come to their current administrator role without any previous experience of school librarians. Perhaps that biased the interviewees to volunteer to be interviewed, or perhaps it suggests that most administrators are not as inexperienced at working with librarians as many suspect. Some interviewees were candid about their negative perceptions of, and experiences with, librarians.

Positive Interactions as Administrators with Librarians

Interviewees who reported having positive interactions as administrators with librarians clearly valued the impact that a highly effective school librarian can have on the whole educational eco-system. They recounted how administrators, teachers, librarians, and students worked together. They credited library spaces coming alive under the leadership of an excellent librarian. They described how a skilled librarian can help a school negotiate controversy when library materials are challenged. And they explained how the best school librarians helped them as new administrators and their fellow librarians make the most of library programs. (See Table 34.)

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Table 34. Positive Interactions of Interviewees as Administrators with Librarians

Type of Interaction	Examples / Quotes from Interviewees
Worked with as district/school administrator: Resource for students, teachers and administrators	As an administrator, I've witnessed a media specialist being a force for positivity. A principal in a school I was working with started to realize that the media specialist wasn't just an extra resource for teachers and students, but also an extra resource for the principal. The principal realized that the media specialist was truly a leader in that building—someone who talked regularly with and influenced all of its teachers.
Worked with as district/school administrator: Library as collaborative learning space	I've had a lot of opportunities to work with librarians. To be in those spaces, and to see how students use them—both well and not-so-well—helped drive what I think a library should look like. A library is a community space where you can bring people together. It impacts the school climate, particularly collaboration. We want to bring the whole community to it. We want to use it as a model of what education can be like.
Worked with as district/school administrator: Book challenge	There was a book on one of our reading lists that some parents thought controversial. Our librarian was integral to the conversations about how you choose a book with your child, and why these books are published. Kids need to see themselves in different types of literature. Her expertise needed to be there. Your library becomes a living place instead of a book repository because of that person.
Worked with as district/school administrator: Exemplary librarians	As a vice principal and principal, I worked closely with some phenomenal librarians. They helped me learn what to look for when hiring a librarian. They knew how to engage kids—whether through encouraging them to read books or teaching them how to access information via technology. I want all of our kids to know the excitement of being able to access knowledge that's beyond their usual sphere.
Supervised: Librarians who make the most of library space	When I supervised librarians, I saw the power of these large, beautiful spaces where kids can find quiet time for learning, for getting lost in books, and for creating. Every school should have someone to provide those opportunities to our children.
Supervised: Elevating learning across the board	I just completed a unit observation with the library media specialist, watching our 2 nd grade students get excited about coding. Only 7 or 8 years old, they learned terms like algorithm! Whatever the topic, the library media specialist is elevating student learning, helping them learn concepts that are going to help them in math, science and other classes. I think it's a huge success.
Received in-service from: Learning as new administrator	As a new district administrator, I had a couple of veteran librarians pull me aside and say: "We are going to teach you what we do." They were great role models of effective school librarianship to their principals. It really helped.
Received in-service from: Learning as new district library leader	I was part of the LILEAD fellowship. There's not a lot of support in the library community for district library leaders to learn how to make a difference. That experience gave me the chance to learn from other districts and make powerful connections.
Worked in a library	I put myself through college as a public library clerk. Today, of course, my school library looks dramatically different. Then, people called us to settle bar bets that they can now settle themselves by consulting Google on their smartphones. Still, I always encourage teachers who show any interest to get their library science endorsement. I truly believe that, despite all the changes, what our school librarians do is important.

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Positive Interactions as Teachers with Librarians

Interviewees who had positive personal experiences as teachers with librarians were equally clear about how much they valued highly effective librarians as collaborators and supporters. They especially noted the contributions librarians often make to ensuring educational equity, particularly for students requiring extra attention. In at least one case, this was an “echo” of the administrator’s own under-privileged-childhood experiences with libraries and librarians. (See Table 35.)

Table 35. Positive Interactions of Interviewees as Teachers with Librarians

Type of Interaction	Examples / Quotes from Interviewees
Worked with as classroom teacher: Librarian as information-seeking support system	I marvel at our librarian’s ability to shift from the needs of one student or group of students to another. One minute, a group of students needs help starting the research process; the next minute, it’s an individual wanting help finding detailed information about bio-medical research; and, the minute after that, it’s another student wondering what to wear to prom. When I see so many kids in a library, I know we have the right person in that job; they are being a resource, a support system those kids truly need.
Worked with as classroom teacher: Librarian as literacy-gap closer	When I started teaching, it was the certified high school librarian who convinced me that it’s our role to create opportunities to close the literacy gap. She really opened my eyes.
Personally related to or influenced by: Childhood library experiences	When I was growing up, my parents taking me to the library was a big deal. We didn’t have a lot of books at our house; so, getting to go to the library and check out books—so varied in topics and depth—was exciting. As a teacher, I brought that love of libraries to my relationship with my librarian.
Observed students’ library use: Own children	My children are in the school system right now and every week, when they come home from their library, they have a new book. I see the excitement on their faces: “Look, I brought home a new book ... we need to read this!” So, I understand the value of a strong library program, not just from a teacher’s perspective, but as a parent. It means a lot to my kids—and all kids—to have access to a well-managed library in their school. They are able to find more and newer books that interest to them than they would have access to otherwise.
Collaborated with me/my teachers on design/delivery of instruction: Tag-team teaching and troubleshooting	My librarian and I usually partnered on teaching research assignments, each teaching different things. When I was Battle of the Books sponsor, my librarian helped me coach the kids. She also made sure that we had access to needed books. Anytime I noticed kids struggling, I’d say “Hey, can you help me with this?” And I knew she would.
Supported my/my teachers’ design/delivery of instruction: Love of reading as foundation of learning	As a kindergarten teacher, I had students who loved going to the library, especially bringing back that first book. They were so excited. The role of librarians is to see students, spend time with them, and foster a love of reading.

Negative Interactions as Administrators with Librarians

Only 12 of the 49 interviewees reported negative interactions with librarians. These decision-makers were candid that, while the position of school librarian is a valuable one, its value can be undercut dramatically by simply having the wrong person in the job. Others acknowledged that their negative perceptions of school librarians could be

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traced to a variety of related factors. Some acknowledged that a generally poor school climate contributed to their negative experiences. Others attributed their experiences to unqualified staff being assigned to work as librarians. Still others described lack of consensus about the school librarian’s role, outright bad hiring decisions, and librarian burnout. Perhaps most notably, negative interactions were associated with the failure of educator preparation programs to teach prospective administrators and teachers about school libraries and librarians. (See Table 36.)

Table 36. Negative Interactions of Interviewees as Administrators with Librarians

Type of Interaction	Examples / Quotes from Interviewees
Worked with as district/school administrator: good and bad librarians make lasting impressions	I've seen good librarians and bad ones. The ones that don't do a good job leave a bad taste in people's mouths. When administrators and teachers have bad experiences with folks like that, it can influence their perceptions for a long time.
Worked with as district/school administrator	We have focused on re-educating our librarians, because some are curmudgeons who are set in their ways. We've had to bring those librarians along.
Supervised: Ed-tech staff outperformed librarians at teaching digital literacy	Digital literacy is taught by our tech integrationist and digital citizenship, by the librarian. I have a huge amount of appreciation for the tech integrationists, who I feel are a step closer to the classroom in terms of working with teachers on a daily basis. Part of what happened is a move from centralized information to de-centralized information, changing how students access primary sources and research materials. It doesn't require a field trip to the media center any longer. We are following the natural trend from one center of information to everyone holding that power.
Supervised: Unqualified paraprofessional overwhelmed	When I was a principal, I had a paraprofessional who acted as the librarian. She was always griping about how the kids left the library so messy. They were always messing up her books.
Supervised: Librarians difficult and ineffective	The librarians were really difficult to manage and supervise. The personality and style of the librarian has a lot to do with the level of support within the building for that individual. We had a librarian in an elementary school who was a pain to deal with. The rest of the staff were worn out by it. Teachers delivered students to the library and left. At middle and high school levels, it was even worse. Our previous high school librarian had been there for a long time. Teachers didn't want to collaborate with her; they didn't even want to take their classes to the library. So, the library was empty all the time, and there were books on the shelves that students weren't reading. The personality of the individual in this position is critical.
Received in-service from: Gap in administrator preparation	Administrators have to learn about libraries and librarians on the job, whether formally or informally. They don't get any training in academic classes on the impact of libraries and librarians on learning. That's something that needs to start happening at the university level.

Interviewees who referenced negative experiences with librarians as teachers echoed those referencing administrator experiences. (See Table 37.)

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Table 37. Negative Interactions of Interviewees as Teachers with Librarians

Type of Interaction	Examples / Quotes from Interviewees
Worked with as classroom teacher: Witnessed teacher hostility to working with librarian	When I taught, some of my teacher colleagues were very defensive of their turf. They didn't want anyone else interjecting themselves into their classrooms. They didn't want to work with the librarian at all.
Worked with as classroom teacher: Early teacher perception of librarian as easier job	When I taught in a classroom, I always thought librarian was the best gig in the world—you just sat there and read to kids. You probably even got a helper.
Personally related to or influenced by	The librarians I know love to curl up with a great book. I love to read, too. I like reading an e-book, listening to an audio book, and holding a physical book. I like reading an actual newspaper; but, I also don't mind reading it online. I've had to learn. Some librarians are stuck in "curl up with a good book" mode--and there's just no space for that in our schools anymore.
No librarian support for teachers on design/delivery of instruction: invisible librarian	A librarian just does a minimal job: checks out books, does library orientation, punches the clock, and leaves. As a result, in that school, the librarian is invisible, and the value of the library program is diminished. Is it any surprise when an administrator asks, why do we need it?
No support for teachers' design/delivery of instruction: Comparing current school to previous one	My current school does not compare well with my last one, which is a 21 st century learning school. At the previous school, technology is better integrated into instruction. It isn't about Apple TVs, iPads, etc.; it's about a school culture that facilitates collaborative learning. That's not happening yet at my current school.
No quality in-service: Some librarians out of touch	Theoretically, librarians should be instructional coaches, although I would argue that, in my experience, many librarians wouldn't be comfortable doing that. They've been removed from the classroom for too long.

Surprisingly, seven of these 12 interviewees decided to add or restore school librarians, despite reporting negative interactions with them. Many of their negative experiences became learning opportunities that enabled them to have more positive, subsequent experiences with librarians. From negative experiences, they learned what they did not want in a librarian, and that affected their hiring of librarians in the future.

Summary of Findings & Conclusion

The dataset for this study was 49 interviews of district and school leaders who made recent decisions about school librarian employment. They were identified by state, region, and position, and their representativeness was assessed by selected district characteristics and student demographics. They were asked questions about information-related instructional topics and instructors; others involved in decision-making; the results of their decisions; factors influencing their decisions; advantages, disadvantages, and tradeoffs considered in decision-making; and their positive and negative interactions with librarians. Their answers were tabulated individually and, as appropriate, cross-tabulated with each other. This analysis addresses some of the study's major research questions, applies evolutionary organization theory to school librarian employment, and contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of how leaders make decisions about school librarian employment.

Research Questions & Evolutionary Organization Theory

Two research questions addressed by these interviews concerned the factors involved in decision-making about school librarian employment as well as the advantages, disadvantages, and tradeoffs of those decisions. Respectively, their answers confirmed applying evolutionary organization theory to this study, specifically three of its four processes: selection and retention (i.e., decision factors) and competition (i.e., advantages, disadvantages, and tradeoffs).

Interviewees

The 49 interviewees represented 29 states and the District of Columbia. The West, Northeast, and Midwest were better represented than the South. Few districts in Southern states were eligible for interviews due to states mandates of school librarians. Most of the interviewees were district superintendents or assistant superintendents followed by other types of district officials.

Regarding district characteristics and student demographics, interview districts over-represented districts with larger enrollments, those in cities, and those with lower levels of poverty. Interview districts under-represented districts with smaller enrollments, those in rural areas, and those with higher (but not highest) levels of poverty. Interview districts were representative of districts nationwide based on per pupil expenditures and race and ethnicity.

Instructional Topics & Instructors

Majorities of the 49 interviewees identified four major instructional topics related to information resources: information literacy (46), digital citizenship (45), educational technology (40), and use of the school library (35). Other related topics mentioned less often included makerspaces, STEM (science, technology, engineering and math), media literacy, and social/emotional learning.

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Whether interviewees made positive or negative decisions about school librarians, all four major information-related topics tended to be taught together. In both positive and negative decision groups, the topics retained their overall rank order.

Overall, school librarians (including teacher librarians, library media specialists, etc.) were identified as instructors of these topics by 44 of the 49 interviewees. Notably, however, other instructors included: all teachers (27), educational technology staff (24), specialist teachers (17), paraprofessionals (11), and other staff (6).

Whether interviewees made positive or negative staffing decisions about librarians, school librarians were the most frequently reported instructors for information-related topics. Interviewees who reported making negative decisions about librarians were more likely to identify others as instructors. Those who reported positive decisions about librarians were less likely to identify others as instructors of those topics.

Other Decision-Makers

When asked who else participated in their decision-making about librarians, the most frequent responses were: district superintendent (32), school principal (28), other district official (27), and school board member (16). Other, single-digit responses were for other school official, parents / community, other school staff, school librarian, and human resources.

Decision Results

The 49 interviewees reported 54 decisions relating to school librarian employment. Of the 49, 25 reported about one positive decision, 19 reported about one negative decision, two reported about two negative decisions, and three reported about one positive and one negative decision.

Decision Factors by Type

Factors influencing interviewee decisions were aggregated into three groups: structural, pragmatic, and strategic. The most frequently cited structural factors were new funding and opening a new building or increased enrollment for positive decisions and budget constraints and closing a building or decreased enrollment for negative decisions. Pragmatic factors included providing planning time for teachers for positive decisions and needing the incumbent in another position or more teachers in classrooms for negative decisions. Strategic factors included change of administration or priorities for both positive and negative decisions; stand-alone instruction by librarians and equity of access to library staff for positive decisions; and hiring other specialists or coaches and considering librarians obsolete for negative decisions.

When the factors in positive and negative decisions about librarians were sorted by factor type, interviewees who made positive decisions were more likely to report them as primarily strategic in nature, while those who made negative decisions were more likely to report them as structural.

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Decision-Making Themes for Positive Staffing Decisions

Decision-makers identified multiple factors influencing their staffing decisions about school librarians. Several webs of co-occurrences of these factors suggest seven themes in their decision-making, four for those who decided to add or restore librarians and three for those who decided to reduce, eliminate, combine, or reclassify librarians. As the number of co-occurring factors and frequency of their concurrence with each other varied in complexity and strength, they will be described for each type of decision—positive and negative—in descending order for positive and negative decisions about school librarian employment.

The four themes which summarize most positive decisions about school librarians have been named:

- Librarians for Equity of Access,
- New Leadership, New Priorities,
- More Teaching by Librarians, and
- Opportunity to Meet Mandate

Librarians for Equity of Access

The three positive-decision factors with the most concurrences are change in priorities, stand-alone instruction by librarians, and equity of access to librarians. In turn, each of these factors had multiple concurring factors, often shared ones. Together, these factors and their concurring factors comprise the theme, Librarians for Equity of Access. (See Table 38.)

Decision-makers who made a change in priorities identified most frequently the wish for greater equity of access to librarians as the most influential other factor in their decision. Often, too, they reported the availability of new funding as a factor that made it possible to increase librarian staffing levels. Other factors, each credited for influencing their positive staffing decision included stand-alone instruction by librarians, their contributions to facilitating planning time for teachers, and their collaboration on the design and delivery of instruction with teachers. Other factors which sometimes enabled such positive decisions were a change in the district or school administration and the presence of a state mandate for having librarians.

Table 38. Librarians for Equity of Access

Change in Priorities (13)	Stand-Alone Instruction (11)	Equity of Access to Librarians (10)
Equity of access to librarians (7)	Equity of access to librarians (6)	Change in priorities (7)
New funding (6)	Planning time for teachers (5)	Stand-alone instruction (6)
Stand-alone instruction (5)	Change in priorities (5)	New funding (3)
Change in administration (4)	Collaboration with teachers (5)	
Planning time for teachers (4)	New funding (4)	
Collaboration with teachers (3)		
State mandate (3)		

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The second most frequently mentioned factor for this theme is valuing stand-alone instruction by librarians. Increasing equity of access to school librarians was also the most frequently cited factor by those placing a high value on instruction by librarians. This factor is followed by facilitating planning time for teachers and collaborating with them on instructional design and delivery. Factors sometimes associated with stand-alone instruction by librarians were a change in priorities and new funding. Finally, the third most oft-cited factor is the one that figured prominently in the two preceding groups, equity of access to librarians. Of those who mentioned that factor as a decision driver, stand-alone instruction provided by librarians was a concurring factor, while changes in priorities and new funding were factors that made it possible.

Across these three complexes of factors, change in priorities, equity of access to librarians, stand-alone instruction by librarians, and new funding are present in all three. This combination of factors suggests that leaders likelier to make positive decisions are ones to whom educational equity in general is a concern and who understand the contribution that a librarian's stand-alone instruction can have in closing equity gaps.

More Teaching by Librarians

After Librarians for Equity, the next largest complex of most frequently cited factors with the most concurring factors was named More Teaching by Librarians. This theme is comprised of four factors which tied together several concurring factors. Its four principal factors are new funding, opening of a new school building, collaboration between librarians and teachers, and facilitating planning time for teachers. (See Table 39.)

Positive decision-makers who mentioned new funding also mentioned changes in priorities, stand-alone instruction by librarians, and planning time for teachers. A state mandate for school librarians was mentioned by a few as a contributor to making decisions based on these factors.

Decision-makers who identified planning time for teachers as an influential factor were also ones who sometimes credited changes in priorities and instruction by librarians—whether on their own or collaborating with teachers. Notably, interviewees who identified teacher planning time as a factor in their decisions to add or restore librarians did not perceive librarians as babysitters; they saw sending students to the library so teachers could have a planning period as a win-win opportunity for librarians to have an opportunity to deliver instruction on their own. Intriguingly, though, they did not perceive a conflict between having teachers plan on their own and valuing collaboration on instructional design and delivery between librarians and teachers. These decisions focused on teacher planning time were also sometimes influenced by new funding.

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Table 39. More Teaching by Librarians

New Funding (8)	Planning Time for Teachers (7)	Collaboration with Teachers (7)	New Building (7)
Change in priorities (6)	Stand-alone instruction (5)	Stand-alone instruction (5)	Collaboration with teachers (3)
Stand-alone instruction (4)	Change in priorities (4)	Change in priorities (3)	
Planning time for teachers (3)	Collaboration with teachers (3)	Planning time for teachers (3)	
State mandate (3)	New funding (3)	New building (3)	

Decision-makers who increased librarian staffing were likely to credit librarian collaboration with teachers for their decisions. Of those who cited this factor, stand-alone instruction by librarians was the most frequent co-occurring factor. Three additional factors which sometimes influenced pro-collaboration decisions included changes in priorities, teacher planning time, and openings of new school buildings.

Another factor cited by as many positive decision-makers as teacher planning time and librarian-teacher collaboration was opening of new school buildings. Its lone concurring factor was valuing librarian-teacher collaboration.

Across these four complexes of factors, changes in priorities, stand-alone instruction by librarians, planning time for teachers, and collaboration with teachers were present in three of the four sets of factors. These findings suggest that leaders who are more likely to make positive decisions about librarians are those who understand that librarians not only teach on their own but support and collaborate with classroom teachers.

New Leadership, New Priorities

The next theme was named New Leadership, New Priorities, because a change in administration was its most frequently cited factor, and, for that group, the single concurring factor was change in priorities. Some interviewees who chose to add school librarians were clear that they strongly valued librarians and were in a position to act on it. They rarely felt the need to identify any other factors to justify their decisions; it was simply a high priority in and of itself. (See Table 40.) This theme emphasizes that changes of administration and/or priorities present opportunities for new administrators to act on their established beliefs in the value of school libraries and librarians.

Table 40. New Leadership, New Priorities

Change in Administration (9)
Change in priorities (4)

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Opportunity to Meet Mandate

Finally, Opportunity to Meet Mandate is the theme based on one of the least frequently mentioned factors, state mandates for school librarians. That factor has two concurring factors—new funding and change in priorities—each shared by three of the four decision-makers citing mandates. (See Table 41.)

Table 41. Opportunity to Meet Mandate

State Mandate (4)
New funding (3)
Change in priorities (3)

Decision-Making Themes for Negative Staffing Decisions

Three themes that explain the most negative decisions about school librarians have been named:

- New Priorities, More Specialists & Teachers,
- Can't Find a Librarian, and
- New Leadership, New Priorities

New Priorities, More Specialists & Teachers

Of these three themes, the first, strongest, and most complex one is no surprise. This theme is called New Priorities, More Specialists & Teachers. (See Table 42.)

Predictably, its most oft-cited factor influencing negative decisions about librarians is budget constraints. That factor has several concurring factors that reveal more about the thinking behind those decisions. Of those citing budget constraints, the majority also mentioned changes in priorities. The other factors they mentioned suggest, to some extent, what those priorities might have been: hiring other specialists or coaches (e.g., reading, literacy, STEM), needing more teachers, and needing the incumbent librarian in another position. Other factors contributing to decreases in librarian staffing blamed on budget constraints included believing librarians were obsolete—or at least, less necessary than in the past— changes in administration, and “pipeline” issues recruiting qualified candidates for librarian vacancies.

The second most frequently mentioned factor associated with this theme was changes in priorities. Of those citing priority changes, several preferred to hire other specialists or coaches. Contributing factors were priority change, believing librarians are obsolete, and changes in administration.

The third most-cited factor in this group was needing the incumbent librarian in another position. The dilemma facing many “teacher librarians” is that, if they are credentialed as both teachers and librarians, they are subject to be reassigned to classrooms. That scenario is reflected in the concurring factors: budget constraints, changes in

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Table 42. New Priorities, More Specialists & Teachers

Budget Constraints (17)	Change in Priorities (12)	Need Incumbent in Other Position (6)	Need More Teachers (5)
Change in priorities (11)	Budget constraints (11)	Budget constraints (5)	Budget constraints (4)
Hired other specialists / coaches (6)	Hired other specialists / coaches (5)	Change in priorities (4)	
Librarian obsolete (5)	Librarian obsolete (3)	Librarian obsolete (3)	
Needed incumbent in other position (5)	Change in administration (3)		
Need more teachers (4)			
Change in administration (3)			
Pipeline issues (3)			

priorities, and believing librarians are either obsolete or less necessary—and certainly less necessary than having someone in another position that is a higher priority in the leader’s thinking.

The fourth and final factor making up this theme is needing more teachers, and its sole concurring factor is budget constraints. Regardless of what other priorities an administrator might prefer, the one that usually over-rules having a professional in the library is having a teacher in every classroom.

Predictably, budget constraints are a principle or secondary factor in all four of these complexes of factors. All four also include needing more teachers, needing an incumbent librarian elsewhere, or choosing to hire other specialists or coaches. Changes in priorities and believing librarians are obsolete appear in three of these four sets of factors. When administrators believe there are not enough classroom teachers, making the case for a librarian or any other specialist teacher is an uphill battle. When their staffing choice is between a librarian and another type of specialist or coach, however, leaders might make different decisions if they had more information about the relative contributions of a librarian and some alternative specialist.

New Leadership, New Priorities

Another theme describing some negative decisions about school librarians is called New Leadership, New Priorities. It is the flipside of its positive-decision counterpart. While a small number of interviewees cited change in administration as a decision factor, most of them also mentioned changes in priorities and budget constraints. As several acknowledged, the fate of a school librarian—in most states, a position not mandated by law or regulation—is subject to being cut whenever leadership changes, priorities change, or the budget gets tight. As with “pipeline” issues, some interviewees deflected blame for negative decisions, as they felt no real choice. (See Table 43.)

The New Leadership, New Priorities theme in cutting librarian staffing may suggest that these administrators simply do not share their positive-decision counterparts’ established belief in school librarians. It is also possible, given accounts of some interviewees, that these administrators feel constrained by a lack of choice. If another position is prioritized by the state or district and a librarian is not, the solution might be to seek a librarian mandate.

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Table 43. New Leadership, New Priorities

Change in Administration (4)
Change in priorities (3)
Budget constraints (3)

Can't Find a Librarian

The final theme concerns interviewees who were forced to cut librarian staffing involuntarily due to “pipeline” issues finding qualified candidates for vacancies. (See Table 43.) Recruiting challenges were described by interviewees from districts with small enrollments and limited budgets and those in outlying towns and rural communities. They also reported that some qualified school librarians seeking jobs were unwilling to relocate to communities far from their families, lacking conveniences of urban life, or available, affordable housing. In some cases, salaries such districts could offer were discouraging. Unsurprisingly, the lone concurring factor with “pipeline” issues was budget constraints. (See Table 44.)

To avoid involuntary losses of school librarians due to such pipeline issues, decision-makers may need technical assistance in marketing and recruiting for librarian vacancies to attract applicants. Their districts or schools may also require budget increases, new funding sources, or other financial assistance to address issues such as salary, cost-of-living, and affordable housing availability.

Table 44. Can't Find a Librarian

Pipeline Issues Finding Qualified Candidates (4)
Budget constraints (3)

What Decision-Makers Said

These seven themes summarize in broad terms the prevailing decision-making patterns that are reshaping school librarian employment. In addition, this report contains a tremendous amount of detail—examples and quotes from dozens of specific situations—about the many and varied circumstances in which administrators had to make staffing decisions. Thematic analysis reveals patterns that enable us to better understand the larger patterns of this decision-making process, while their examples and quotes offer us inspiration or allow us to empathize with their unenviable positions.

Advantages, Disadvantages & Tradeoffs

Interviewees were asked about anticipated consequences of their decisions about librarians. In some cases, there were clear advantages to increasing librarian staffing and clear disadvantages to cutting it. In other cases, decisions were more difficult, tradeoffs being inevitable: gaining a librarian meant sacrificing other staff or hiring other staff meant losing a librarian. The stories interviewees told about weighing such consequences were classified into four groups: win-win, win-lose, lose-win, lose-lose. Win-win scenarios were ones in which positive decisions were

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made, because of expected positive outcomes. Win-lose scenarios were ones in which interviewees opted to improve librarian staffing at the expense of something else, most often another position or positions. Lose-win scenarios were ones in which interviewees felt they had to sacrifice librarians in order to have other staff (e.g., teachers; reading, literacy, and STEM specialists). And, lose-lose scenarios were ones in which they felt compelled to make negative decisions even though they expected negative consequences for their schools, students, and teachers.

With 49 interviewees, only some of whom felt they faced difficult decisions, their stories of these four types of scenarios ran a gamut that defied quantitative tabulation or analysis. Their wide-ranging stories included situations where options were equally good or bad as well as situations where they felt little choice. Excerpts from some of their stories will remind readers that many decisions administrators must make are unenviable ones. At best, someone will be displeased with them; at worst, someone else—a student, a teacher, a family—will suffer damaging consequences. Yet, they are responsible to make decisions, regardless of their difficulty or their consequences.

Positive & Negative Interactions with Librarians

The interviews concluded by asking about their interactions with school librarians. Most of those interactions were positive, though there were some negative ones. Many of the interactions were ones experienced as administrators; others, as classroom teachers. Most administrator experiences involved working with librarians (e.g., launching district-wide 1-1 technology, dealing with challenges to library materials). Some interactions involved supervising librarians. Experiences as teachers cited most often included working with librarians—with additional specific mentions of collaborating on instructional design and delivery, receiving instructional support, and receiving in-service professional development. Others reported a personal relationship, sometimes a mentoring one, with a school librarian who strongly influenced their perception of the field.

Volatility of Librarian Staffing

It is impossible to generalize from 49 self-selected interviewees. For some sense of the scale of the decisions administrators make about school librarian jobs, NCES's Common Core of Data is revealing. Consider the impact of these decisions on districts, school librarians, and students.

School Librarian Employment by District

During the latest one-year data interval—from 2020-21 to 2021-22—1,833 districts (15.4 percent) added librarians and 4,405 (37.0 percent) retained their librarians. Beyond that, the number of districts either gaining or losing librarians was remarkably volatile. School librarian jobs were reduced but not eliminated entirely by 1,584 districts (13.3 percent). Librarian jobs were eliminated by 304 districts (2.6 percent). And there were no librarians either year in 3,793 districts (31.8 percent). (See Table 45. These figures exclude districts run by federal and state agencies and all-charter districts as well as any districts that did not report to NCES.)

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Table 45. Local Districts Making Changes in Employment of School Librarians, 2020-21 to 2021-22

Change by district	Number of Districts	Percent of Districts
Adding librarian FTEs	1,833	15.4%
Retaining librarian FTEs	4,402	37.0%
Reducing librarian FTEs	1,584	13.3%
Eliminating librarian FTEs	304	2.6%
Having no librarian FTEs both years	3,788	31.8%
Total local school districts	11,911	100.0%

School Librarian Employment in FTEs

Between 2020-21 and 2021-22, school librarian full-time equivalents (FTEs) increased by almost 71. Nationwide, that is a negligible increase that does not counter-balance more than a decade of year-after-year net losses. It also obscures the volatility of school librarian employment by masking a combination of dramatic gains and losses. Between 2020-21 and 2021-22, districts that gained librarians added 2,110 FTEs, while districts that reduced librarian staffing accounted for a loss of 1,611 FTEs. Districts that eliminated librarians completely decreased librarian ranks by another 429 FTEs. The rest of the school librarian workforce—13,789 FTEs—were in districts that reported the same number of FTEs both years. (See Table 46.)

Table 46. Changes in School Librarian Full-Time Equivalents Made by Local School Districts, 2020/21 – 2021/22

Type of Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) / Change	Total School Librarians in FTEs		Change in FTEs from 2020-21 to 2021-22	
	2021-22	2020-21	Number	Percent
FTEs added (higher in 2021-22 than 2020-21)	13,627.28	11,516.84	2,110.44	18.3%
FTEs retained (no change, same both years)	11,785.37	11,785.37	0.00	0.0%
FTEs reduced (lower in 2021-22 than 2020-21)	12,178.13	13,788.98	-1,610.85	- 11.7%
FTEs eliminated (zero in 2021-22, > zero in 2020-21)	0.00	428.66	-428.66	-100.0%
Total school librarian FTEs	37,590.77	37,519.85	70.92	0.2%

Impact on Students of School Librarian Employment

The consequences of this volatility for students is also striking. (See Table 47.) In 2021-22, compared to the previous year, 12.7 million students were in districts that reported more librarian FTEs; 11.2 million students were in districts that reported the same number of librarian FTEs; another 12.7 million were in districts that reported having fewer, but still some, librarian FTEs; and 1.3 million students were in districts that reported eliminating librarians altogether. It is a likely consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic that, in a single year, more than 25 million students were almost precisely divided between districts that gained and lost librarians. Underscoring a major SLIDE finding (Lance & Kachel, 2021; Lance, Kachel & Gerrity, 2023), these data indicate a dramatic dimension of educational inequity.

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Table 47. Students Impacted by Changes in School Librarian Employment by School Districts, 2020-21 to 2021-22

Students	Number of Students	Percent of Students
Having more librarians	12.7 million	29.3%
Having same librarians	11.2 million	25.9%
Having fewer librarians	12.7 million	29.3%
Losing all librarians	1.3 million	3.0%
Having had no librarians either year	5.4 million	12.5%
Total students in school districts⁶	43.3 million	100.0%

The 49 administrators who reported about their decisions affecting school librarian employment shared a lot of information that should be useful to many. Those who should find this report valuable include: federal and state policy-makers; school boards and administrators; and school library associations, advocates, library and information science faculty, scholars, students, and practitioners. Pointedly, this report should be valuable to all of these constituencies, regardless of whether or not they are currently invested in school libraries and equity.

The decisions described by these interviewees were influenced by their current state and local contexts, their interactions with school librarians, and a wide array of factors. Structural factors were ones beyond their control; pragmatic factors were ones in which they had limited options; and strategic factors were ones they chose to pursue as means to specific ends. In making their decisions, they also had to weigh foreseeable consequences—advantages, disadvantages, or tradeoffs. Anyone seeking to support and strengthen school librarianship—and, more broadly, the teaching of the critical information-related topics for which they may share responsibility with other educators—should benefit from considering what these decision-makers have shared.

While a larger pool of interviewees was sought, the timing of this study in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic thwarted many recruitment efforts and limited access to, and availability of, many administrators who had expressed genuine interest in being interviewed before the pandemic’s onset. Still, this study provides input from the largest multi-state pool of decision-makers to date who have consented to such in-depth interviews. The future of school librarianship depends on more and better communication between the leaders of the school library community, the leaders of the larger education community, and public policymakers.

This is believed to be a first-of-its-kind study. May it not be the last.

⁶ Notably, the above figures reporting on 2020-21 to 2021-22 change are incomplete, due to some districts not reporting about school librarian employment, particularly in 2020-21, when there were unprecedented levels of non-reporting due to the pandemic. As indicated above, those non-reporting districts could not be included in these calculations. Based on the 2021-22 data alone, there were 7.1 million students in districts that reported zero librarians. Only 6.7 of those 7.1 million students are accounted for by districts that reported for both years.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the findings from the major reports of the three-year SLIDE project encompassing both the quantitative analysis of NCES data and the qualitative results from the interviews of school decision-makers. The two previous reports referenced below are:

Equity and Accountability

With renewed attention to diversity, equity, and inclusion in education, better and more consistent data collection about school library programs and staffing is needed to accurately understand the equity of school library services to K-12 students. From NCES to state departments of education to local school districts, definitions used in the Common Core of Data need to be clarified for professional, instructional staff, including school librarian, instructional technology specialist, reading specialist, instructional coordinators, and any other instructional, non-classroom teacher educators—of which there are many today. Also, distinctions among classified staff need to be defined, including library support staff and instructional aide. More oversight is needed at state levels to ensure that data are submitted, vetted and complete. More training should occur for school officials who annually complete required data surveys. Federal and state agencies that fund education cannot make decisions on incomplete and inaccessible data sources. The publication of the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) report that focused on school libraries, last published in 2013 with 2011-12 data (NCES, 2013), should be reinstated. Such reports translate detailed NCES data and charts more understandable to the education community and general public.

NCES data examined by SLIDE researchers (Lance & Kachel, 2021) reveals two important trends: 1) the number of school districts without any librarians is increasing (pp. 35-36) and 2) replacement of professional librarians with classified staff is increasing (pp. 63-64). Unknown is what is happening with the residual library collections when librarians disappear or paraprofessionals manage their use. There need to be accountability measures in place for school library programs, including collections, technology, and the instruction by a school librarian trained in curriculum and instruction. What is happening with school library spaces and resources in the absence of librarians, and how are they being managed and used by whom? As documented in the SLIDE interviews, in order to allocate scarce staffing funds to librarians, administrators want to see value in library programs that contribute to the school goals.

National and state school library associations could assist the library profession in developing accountability tools in collaboration with school administrators that articulate the value of investing in library programs based on administrators' expectations, rather than based on librarians' expectations. Professional development is needed based on tools, collection methods, and ways to communicate findings that are meaningful to stakeholders and focused on student achievement.

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Standards, Mandates, and Expectations

National and state library associations that have developed aspirational standards, guidelines, and job descriptions for school librarians and their work need to develop best practices for school library services where there are scarce or no school librarians. According to 2021-22 NCES data, only 10.6 percent of all school districts reported enough school librarians to have the equivalent of one full time librarian in every school (K. Lance, personal communication, June 3, 2023), meeting the AASL standard. That percent dropped significantly in just a few years. In 2018-19, 23 percent of all school districts reported enough school librarians to have the equivalent of one full time librarian in every school (Lance & Kachel, 2021, p. 36). The downward trend of employment of school librarians ---now over a decade--is not likely to change, considering the NCES data. Only 1 out of 10 districts ever rehire school librarians once those positions are cut (Lance & Kachel, 2021, p.73). If the library profession is truly dedicated to helping every learner be successful and traverse the information world we live in today, then new models of school library service must be developed and aimed directly at school administrators and those who set staffing priorities, particularly in schools without any school librarians.

Through a state survey (Kachel & Lance, 2021, p. 4), the SLIDE project found that approximately half of the states mandate some level of school librarian staffing—sometimes based on a ratio of students per librarian—but, only 10 of those states enforce those mandates. However, whether staffing mandates are enforced or not, states with mandates had on average better staffing than states that had no staffing mandates (Kachel & Lance, 2021, p. 31). Based on this, if state education entities value equity, they should work to include language that legally requires school libraries and librarians in their state education statutes, code or law.

The over-reliance on librarians to educate district and school leaders about the value of library programs and the essential instructional roles of librarians is too frequently seen as self-serving. These circumstances are exacerbated by the problem of role ambiguity: administrators and librarians perceive the librarian’s roles differently. With approximately 40,000 school librarians employed in approximately 92,000 U. S. schools, it’s absurd to expect that those librarians could provide equity of library services for all students.

Simply expecting individual school librarians to do this “heavy lifting” clearly has not happened, and will not happen, without powerful supporters. If equitable access to librarians and library services are essential to quality education, then library associations, teacher unions and associations, and state government education officials need to develop a consensus about policy goals. These stakeholders need to work together toward those goals to ensure that all students have access to the information resources and teaching about them that they need to succeed academically.

Funding and Choices

Many interviewees in this project cited, quite legitimately, that budget is a major factor determining library staffing. However, NCES data revealed that employment of administrators and instructional coordinators increased, often dramatically, while librarians staffing continued to plummet over the last decade (Lance & Kachel, 2021, p. 7; Lance

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& Kachel, 2022, pp.1-3). This suggests that staffing of schools had more to do with priorities of decision-makers than school finance. Choices were made and school librarian jobs were lost. Interviewees cited various reasons for decisions to reduce or eliminate librarians, including needing more classroom teachers, often reassigning the librarian to serve as a classroom teacher, choosing to hire other specialists or coaches, deeming the librarian role obsolete, or not being able to find a librarian to hire.

Turnover among administrators is escalating, but a constant no matter where an administrator finds employment is their professional organizations. Library associations should partner with teacher unions and administrator and teacher associations to educate them as supervisors of, and collaborators with, school librarians. We know the path to becoming an administrator—one likely to be in a position of power to determine librarian staffing—is through the teacher ranks. Teacher unions, where they exist, can also be critical to negotiating working conditions, schedules, and staffing levels for teachers, including librarians, and could gain membership by advocating for library positions.

At a district level, centralized funding for school libraries and librarians would be the most effective way to ensure equity to all students. As site-based management has become a way to “kick the can down the road,” school principals have made varying staffing choices. Some schools in a district may have strong school library programs with certified librarians; others, have no library services at all. According to NCES data for 2021-22, 35 percent of school districts had no school librarians (K. Lance, personal communication, June 3, 2023). Those districts served 7.1 million students, disproportionately impacting many economically disadvantaged students and students of color. This does not include students in individual school buildings that do not have librarians, as NCES only reports librarian staffing data about school districts, not school buildings.

Although not a source of stable, ongoing funding, multi-year federal and state grants could help to launch libraries and hire librarians in districts without them, particularly districts with majorities of marginalized students. State library agencies should make Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) funds available for school libraries. More districts in need could benefit from increased access to, and funding of, federal grant programs, such as Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian and National Leadership Grants (administered by IMLS) and the Innovative Approaches to Literacy grant (administered by the U.S. Department of Education).

Recruitment and Certification

Several SLIDE interviewees mentioned that they could not find “the right person” for a librarian position or that they were unable to recruit any applicants willing to move to their, often remote, location. University library programs and programs that provide school library certification for teachers are closing due to low enrollment—the pipeline is drying up. In order to earn school library certification, most states require a teaching certificate, a Master’s degree, required library science credits, and often, several years’ experience as a classroom teacher—a position also endorsed by the AASL. This advanced level of education exceeds entry-level requirements for teachers, takes longer to earn, and consequently costs more. State teacher certification agencies and teacher education universities could integrate required library courses, and possibly library content, in an undergraduate

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teaching degree. A bonus to this approach would be to educate prospective teachers about the role and advantage of instructional partnership with a school librarian. Pathways from high school to entry-level school librarian jobs need to be created. This would reduce the cost of a graduate degree and be more attractive as a post-high school career option.

Adding to the pipeline problem, established teachers who earn the school library certification after years of classroom teaching are usually unwilling to move to where school librarians are needed and sought. They have families and community connections in local areas, often earning the degree to replace a retiring librarian in the school where they work. Reducing the time and cost to become a school librarian could encourage a younger and more diverse profession willing to take jobs where needed. Other potential solutions to this problem include encouraging development of “grown your own” programs through which already-local teachers are encouraged to become school librarians and promoting the availability of online preparation programs for school librarians that such teachers could pursue without leaving their home communities.

However, if students are graduating from high schools without any school librarians, role models and career options in school librarianship are hard to envision. NCES data revealed that majority non-white and majority Hispanic districts were more likely than majority white and majority non-Hispanic districts to have no or fewer librarian (Lance & Kachel, 2021, p. 48). When Black and Brown students don’t see themselves or even anyone as a librarian in their schools, they are unlikely to consider school librarianship as a profession. This further inhibits recruitment for diversity.

Curriculum and Instruction

Many interviewees stated they valued instruction by the school librarian either independently or in collaboration with teachers. Yet, interestingly, in schools that reduced or eliminated school librarians, the instructional content thought to be “owned” as a librarian’s curriculum was still taught by other educators. Some states have articulated K-12 curricula with varying titles, such as information literacy, media literacy, library and information skills, etc. State math, science, and language arts curricula are mandated and aggressively assessed—not so for information literacy, although one could say it is because it is not a tested content area. Yet, recently, some state legislatures are passing laws to require instruction in information skills, particularly in online and media sources, as essential skills for K-12 students. This is a trend that national and state library associations as well as state departments of education should not ignore. Curricula addressing what stakeholders, such as legislators and parents, deem important should be created, integrated, and articulated with competencies that need to be taught by grade levels. State education agencies should inform school administrators of these requirements, and universities need to teach prospective librarians and teachers how to teach the content. Accreditation agencies like Blue Ribbon Schools and Cognia should include school librarians, libraries, and library curricula as factors of excellency in school evaluations.

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School Librarians

Administrators expressed concerns about hiring the “right person” for the library job. They frequently discussed wanting librarians to be up to date in technology and to share that knowledge with teachers in professional development. Technology is an important concern for administrators and an area in which librarians can demonstrate leadership. Administrators value librarians who are engaged with school goals, not managers of a “silo” program.

Many interviewees expressed high regard for librarian’s teaching both independently and in collaboration with teachers. School decision-makers also related how they learned informally about school libraries and the roles of school librarians from librarians they have worked with. This suggests the important and critical influence that individual librarians, perhaps unknowingly, exert on staffing and other library-related decisions made by district and school leaders. Regular and positive communications documenting the instruction and work of librarians to meet school priorities and student success is critical to the status and longevity of school librarian employment.

Future Data Collection & Reporting

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) is responsible currently for collecting and reporting data on school libraries and librarians. Counts of school librarians and library support staff in full-time equivalents (FTEs) are collected from all school districts annually. That is the extent of annual universe data collection about school libraries and librarians. Those annual data are not reported at school level; such data are only available for a sample of the nation’s schools. The last comprehensive sample survey of school libraries—the last of one of the Schools and Staffing Surveys (SASS)—was for the 2011-12 school year. SASS was succeeded by the National Teacher and Principal Surveys (NTPS). The NTPS public school survey includes only a few relevant questions: whether or not the school has a library and head counts (notably, not full-time equivalents) of full-time and part-time librarians and library instructional aides. So far, data from these NTPS questions have been released for 2015-16 and 2020-21. At present, the interval between NTPS surveys is every three years. The library questions—like some others—are only asked in every other round. This means that the next sample data about school libraries and librarians at school level will be for 2026-27, and—going on recent reporting schedules—those data are unlikely to be available before 2029. Such limited data, released on such an infrequent basis, are grossly inadequate to inform planning, evaluation, decision-making, and policy research. NCES—or perhaps another federal agency like the Institute of Museum and Library Services—should be mandated and funded specifically to collect and report comprehensive data about school libraries and librarians at least biennially.

In addition to collecting and reporting more data on a timely basis, NCES or another federal agency should review and update—in consultation with representatives of the school library community--definitions for data presently being collected. The existing definition of a school librarian dates from pre-Internet days and does not reference issues such as e-books, licensed databases, curated free websites, information literacy, or the instructional roles of a librarian. It is highly probable that this definition is sufficiently outdated as to compromise the accuracy of the data and its consistency with data from previous years. A comprehensive review of the definitions for NCES’s Common

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Core of Data is long overdue. Notably, for the NTPS surveys, there appear to be no definitions at all for terms such as “school librarian” and “technology specialist.” The lack of such definitions seriously compromises the comparability of NTPS data from school to school.

Future Research

The following future studies are recommended on the basis of findings from the entire SLIDE project:

- Qualitative study of school administrators’ expectations of school librarians.
- Assessment of the instruction of information literacy/library curricula in the absence of school librarians—who teaches it, how consistently, at what grade levels, and how competencies are assessed.
- Review of the inclusion or absence of school libraries and librarians in the evaluative criteria of K-12 accreditation agencies and award-nominating agencies (e.g., Blue Ribbon).
- Exploration of ways in which the two major national teachers’ unions support school librarian positions (including how many school librarians are members of these unions).
- Analysis of how projects funded by the U.S. Department of Education’s Innovative Approaches to Literacy competitive grant program has impacted school librarian staffing.
- Study comparing the impact on student learning when a library is staffed with a paraprofessional versus a certified school librarian.
- District studies of the average number of days/hours that school libraries are open to all students and staff at different educational levels--elementary, middle and high school (how temporary assignments of librarians to cover classes as substitutes or other duties occurs and how frequently).
- Study of the effectiveness of school library services provided by degreed and certified school librarians compared with teachers who earn school library certification by passing a test, such as the Library Media PRAXIS test (with no library coursework).
- Study of state-endorsed and enforced information/media or similar curricula, who teaches it, and how student achievement of skills is assessed.
- Study of library budgets, print collection size and age, and access to subscription-based digital resources in schools with certified school librarians versus schools without certified school librarians.
- Study of alternative and expanded uses of school library spaces in the absence of librarians and who manages them.

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Appendices

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Appendix A.

Voices of Decision-Makers Author Roles

Keith Curry Lance

As principal investigator of the SLIDE project and lead author of this Voices of Decision-Makers report, Lance was responsible for composing the narrative for the methodology, analysis, and summary sections and creating the final versions of most of the tables and charts as well as the map.

Debra E. Kachel

As SLIDE project director and second author of this report, Kachel was responsible for composing the introduction and recommendations, revising and editing the literature review and references, and reviewing, editing, and finalizing the entire report.

Leah Breevoort

In addition to designing SLIDE infographics, Breevoort was a consultant on the interview phase of the project. She supported use of Dedoose content analysis software to facilitate the coding and analysis of the interviews. This included training project leaders and coders on use of the Dedoose application, troubleshooting problems, editing original codes and creating new ones, as needed, and creating the original versions of most of the analysis tables and charts, having generated the data that populated them.

Caitlin Gerrity

In addition to coding several of the interviews, Gerrity reviewed all of the interview transcripts and interviewer reports to glean from them examples and quotes regarding the interviewees' decision-making factors; the advantages, disadvantages, and tradeoffs they considered in making their decisions; and their personal interactions with librarians.

Deeth Ellis

In addition to an expanded, in-depth literature review about administrators and school librarian employment (separately published on the SLIDE website), Ellis provided much of the narrative and references for this report's literature review. She also conducted the analysis of the interview districts relative to other districts to assess the representativeness of the interview districts.

Appendix B.

SLIDE Project Interview Recruitment Form

ANTIOCH UNIVERSITY
SEATTLE

SLIDE Project Interview Recruitment Form

ABOUT OUR RESEARCH

Antioch University Seattle is conducting a federally funded, nationwide study called SLIDE: The School Librarian Investigation—Decline or Evolution? This research seeks to learn about current—and especially new—models for staffing information/technology services, whether or not they involve the job title “school librarian.” The following information will help us schedule your interview at your convenience. Be assured that neither you nor your district will be identified in our report without your permission. If you have questions, please email our Project Director, Deb Kachel at dkachel@antioch.edu.

* 1. Your state. Enter the two letter abbreviation, like "AR", "MA", etc.

* 2. Your First and Last Name

* 3. Your Title within your School or District

* 4. Your School District Name

* 5. Your Preferred Email Address

* 6. Your School District's Website Address

* 7. If your district's or school's change in librarian staffing occurred since 2018-19, which of the following best describes it?

- Gained some FTE (any part of a full-time equivalent)
- Lost some FTE, but still have some remaining
- Lost all FTE, no longer have any librarians
- Our change occurred prior to 2018-19

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* 8. The months during the first half of 2022 which you currently think might be convenient times for you to be interviewed. This is NOT a commitment. Mark all that apply:

- January
- February
- March
- April
- May
- June

* 9. The months in 2022 when you specifically do NOT wish to be interviewed. Mark all that apply:

- January
- February
- March
- April
- May
- June

10. Is there anything else you would like us to know about scheduling an interview with you?

The Institutional Review Board for Antioch University Seattle has approved this study and granted it "Exempt Status."

Appendix C. SLIDE Interviewer's Report Form



SLIDE Interviewer's Reporting Form

Interviewee's name

Interviewee's position

Interviewee's District / School

* Date of this interview, as MM/DD/YYYY

Interviewer's Name

* Interviewer's email address

Did interviewee make a staffing decision (re: Gained, Lost some, Lost all)?

- Yes (Proceed)
 No (Ask for referral, then stop interview)

Notes: If a referral was given, enter detailed contact information on the referral. Also enter any other relevant notes.

Interviewee's responses reflect:

- A School building perspective
 A District perspective

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Does interviewee understand this Zoom discussion is being video recorded and transcribed?

Yes

No

[NOTE: SHIFT FROM SURVEY TO INTERVIEW MODE. CHECK BOXES TO BE USED FOR PROMPTS & CODING ONLY.]

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SLIDE Interviewer's Reporting Form

Q1: Does your district or school provide formal or informal instruction on topics such as information literacy, educational technology, use of the school library, digital citizenship, or the like? This might be a stand-alone curriculum or integrated into a broader curriculum.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Information literacy | <input type="checkbox"/> Digital citizenship |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Educational technology | <input type="checkbox"/> Other—specify in Notes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Use of the school library | |

Enter any notes on any response(s) to question Q1.

Q2: Which staff positions instruct students on those topics? For example, librarian, ed tech specialist, STEM coach, computer or makerspace teacher.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> School librarian / teacher librarian / library media specialist | <input type="checkbox"/> Specific other specialist teacher (reading, social studies, STEM, etc.) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Educational technology (followed by teacher, coordinator, consultant, coach, etc.) | <input type="checkbox"/> All teachers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> School librarian / educational technology (combined position) | <input type="checkbox"/> Other(s)—specify in Notes |

Enter any notes on any response(s) to question Q2.

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Q3: You were recruited as an interviewee because your district or school changed its staffing in these areas sometime since 2015-16, perhaps very recently. Over the last five years how did your staffing change? For example, did you add, reduce, eliminate, or combine positions?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Added positions or hours (e.g., part-time to full-time) | <input type="checkbox"/> Reclassified positions (e.g., library aide to librarian or vice versa, librarian or ed-tech staff to classroom teacher) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Reduced positions or hours (e.g., full-time to part-time) | <input type="checkbox"/> Changed job title (which may have affected how the hours were reported to NCES) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Eliminated positions (i.e., cut position(s) completely) | <input type="checkbox"/> Other--specify in Notes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Combined positions (e.g., librarian and ed-tech staff) | |

Enter any notes on any response(s) to question Q3.

Q4: What others were part of the staffing decisions that were made? (Enter X before response.)

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> District Superintendent | <input type="checkbox"/> Other school official
—specify in Notes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other district official
—specify in Notes | <input type="checkbox"/> School board member(s) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> School Principal | <input type="checkbox"/> Other—specify in Notes |

Enter any notes on any response(s) to questions Q4.

NOTE: Focus on WHO makes the decisions. Ask about any other influences on interviewee's decision making from superintendents, school boards, parents, technology coordinators, etc.

We are not interested in who interviews and ultimately recommends candidates for positions. Focus is on who decides that the staffing positions will be funded and filled.

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SLIDE Interviewer's Reporting Form

Q5: Beyond budget, what factors motivated the staffing change? For example, changes in personnel, policy, priorities, organizational restructuring, or legislation or regulations.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> "Gain"/ Neutral Factors | <input type="checkbox"/> "Loss" Factors |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Opened a building | <input type="checkbox"/> Closed a building |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Changes in administration | <input type="checkbox"/> Change in administration |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Change in priorities | <input type="checkbox"/> Change in priorities |
| <input type="checkbox"/> State government mandate | <input type="checkbox"/> Position deemed obsolete |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Instruction - info literacy, critical thinking, media literacy, digital citizenship | <input type="checkbox"/> Budget constraints (try to move beyond this one) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Standardized test prep and scores | <input type="checkbox"/> Needed more teachers to reduce class size |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Planning time for teachers | <input type="checkbox"/> Needed incumbent in another position (e.g., STEM, gifted) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Restructuring of grade levels in buildings | <input type="checkbox"/> "Pipeline" issues finding qualified job candidates |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Equity of access to staff for these services across all district schools | <input type="checkbox"/> Hired other specialists or coaches to improve test scores |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Addressing special student needs, ELL, tutoring, ESL, etc. | <input type="checkbox"/> New job title, responsibilities |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other—specify: | <input type="checkbox"/> Retirements or resignations |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other--specify: | <input type="checkbox"/> Other—specify: |

Try not to prompt, but if needed, mention some of the above.

Enter any notes on any response(s) to question Q5.

Q6: What were the trade-offs (advantages and disadvantages) that had to be accepted when making this decision? (Note to interviewers: This question may not be relevant where librarian gains occurred.)

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Q7: Which of the factors you identified in your response to Q5 were most important when finalizing the staffing change?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> "Gain"/ Neutral Factors | <input type="checkbox"/> "Loss" Factors |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Opened a building | <input type="checkbox"/> Closed a building |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Changes in administration | <input type="checkbox"/> Change in administration |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Change in priorities | <input type="checkbox"/> Change in priorities |
| <input type="checkbox"/> State Government mandate | <input type="checkbox"/> Position deemed obsolete |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Instruction - info literacy, critical thinking, media literacy, digital citizenship | <input type="checkbox"/> Budget constraints (try to move beyond this one) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Standardized test prep and scores | <input type="checkbox"/> Needed more teachers to reduce class size |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Planning time for teachers | <input type="checkbox"/> Needed incumbent in another position (e.g., STEM, gifted) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Restructuring of grade levels in buildings | <input type="checkbox"/> "Pipeline" issues finding qualified job candidates |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Equity of access to staff for these services across all district schools | <input type="checkbox"/> Hired other specialists or coaches to improve test scores |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Addressing special student needs, ELL, tutoring, ESL, etc. | <input type="checkbox"/> New job title, responsibilities |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other - specify | <input type="checkbox"/> Retirements or resignations |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other - specify | <input type="checkbox"/> Other - specify |

Enter any notes on any response(s) to question Q7.

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Q8: Which single one of the factors you identified in your response to Q5 was the highest priority when finalizing the staffing change?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> "Gain"/ Neutral Factors | <input type="checkbox"/> "Loss" Factors |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Opened a building | <input type="checkbox"/> Closed a building |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Changes in administration | <input type="checkbox"/> Change in administration |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Change in priorities | <input type="checkbox"/> Change in priorities |
| <input type="checkbox"/> State Government mandate | <input type="checkbox"/> Position deemed obsolete |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Instruction - info literacy, critical thinking, media literacy, digital citizenship | <input type="checkbox"/> Budget constraints (try to move beyond this one) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Standardized test prep and scores | <input type="checkbox"/> Needed more teachers to reduce class size |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Planning time for teachers | <input type="checkbox"/> Needed incumbent in another position (e.g., STEM, gifted) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Restructuring of grade levels in buildings | <input type="checkbox"/> "Pipeline" issues finding qualified job candidates |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Equity of access to staff for these services across all district schools | <input type="checkbox"/> Hired other specialists or coaches to improve test scores |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Addressing special student needs, ELL, tutoring, ESL, etc. | <input type="checkbox"/> New job title, responsibilities |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other - specify | <input type="checkbox"/> Retirements or resignations |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other - specify | <input type="checkbox"/> Other - specify |

Enter any notes on any response(s) to question Q8.

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SLIDE Interviewer's Reporting Form

Q9: Tell me about any interactions with school librarians and/or ed tech staff that have influenced your perception of the importance or value of this staff to the student learning experience?

	Positive	Negative	Both
Worked with librarian/ed-tech staffer as classroom teacher	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Worked with librarian / ed-tech staffer as district / school administrator	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Supervised librarians / ed-tech staff	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Librarian / ed-tech staffer supported my / my teachers' design / delivery of instruction	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Collaborated with me / my teachers on design / delivery of instruction	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Received in-service from librarian/ed-tech staffer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Personally related to or influenced by someone in these fields	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other—specify in Notes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Enter any notes on any response(s) to question Q9.

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In closing, if you are willing to share job descriptions for any newly created or changed positions, please email me a link or send them as an attachment to interviewer's email.

Again, thank you so much for this valuable insight into how your school or district staffs learning resources for your students.

Interviewer's Narrative

Your personal notes on anything else you learned that is relevant to how staffing decisions for library, learning resources, and educational technology programs are being made, and on the factors and priorities decision makers consider important.

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Appendix D. Contexts of School Librarian Employment

Debra E. Kachel & Keith Curry Lance

A survey of all 50 states and District of Columbia was conducted in Fall 2020 to gain background information to inform an Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) grant project called SLIDE: The School Librarian Investigation--Decline or Evolution? As part of the grant, a school library leader, some in a state government/agency position or in a state school library association, agreed to participate in the grant as a "State Intermediary" to help share project findings and assist with providing state-level information. The responses, collected via Survey Monkey, were gathered to provide context to the findings of the SLIDE study's analysis of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) library staffing data and to inform planned interviews of school district leaders who make staffing decisions. The project is directed by Debra E. Kachel with principal investigator Keith Curry Lance, administered through Antioch University Seattle. More information about the SLIDE project can be found at <https://libslide.org>.

Kachel, D. E., & Lance, K. C. (2021, January 26). State contexts for school librarian employment. <https://libslide.org/pubs/contexts.pdf>.

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Appendix E. Perspectives on School Librarian Employment in the United States, 2009-10 to 2018-19

Keith Curry Lance & Debra E. Kachel

This report was produced by "The School Librarian Investigation: Decline or Evolution?" (SLIDE), a research project funded by a Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian grant from the Institute for Museum and Library Services to Antioch University Seattle. It studied the employment status of school librarians in the United States from 2009-10 through 2018-19. The analysis examined data from all 50 states and D.C. as well as over 13,000 local school districts. The data are collected annually by the National Center for Education Statistics via its Common Core of Data program.

The findings document an almost 20 percent loss of school librarians between 2010 and 2019, the most recent data available at the time. Further analysis uncovered gross inequities in access to school librarians across the U.S. Districts with more students living in poverty, more minority students, and more English language learners were less likely to have librarians than districts with fewer such students.

Other notable findings: (1) Three out of 10 districts had no librarians in any of their schools; (2) More than 4.4 million students in high-poverty (50 percent or more) districts had no librarians; (3) Almost 3.1 million students in predominantly Hispanic districts were without school librarians; (4) Almost 4.8 million students in predominantly non-white districts were without school librarians; (5) Smaller and rural districts were more likely to have no librarians than larger and suburban districts; and (6) Nine out of 10 charter school districts had no school librarians.

The study questions the conventional wisdom that losses of school librarians are explained by school funding cuts. During the decade studied, employment for other types of educators increased--sometimes dramatically--while librarian employment alone declined steadily. Also, districts with the most librarians relative to schools were those that spent the most, and the least, per pupil. Stronger librarian staffing was also found in states that had staffing mandates, whether they were enforced or not, and in states that had more institutions of higher education preparing school librarians. These findings provide solid evidence of inequities nationally, by state, and based on characteristics of local districts and their student demographics. It also has implications for the future preparation of school librarians and for school districts attempting to improve educational equity for their K-12 students.

Lance, K. C., & Kachel, D. E. (2021, July). *Perspectives on school librarian employment in the United States, 2009-10 to 2018-19*. SLIDE: The School Librarian Investigation—Decline or Evolution?

<https://libslide.org/publications/perspectives/>

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Appendix F. The COVID-19 Pandemic & Inequities in Access to School Librarians: A SLIDE Special Report

Keith Curry Lance & Debra E. Kachel

As part of the federally-funded grant project "SLIDE: The School Librarian Investigation--Decline or Evolution?" this study analyzed the status of school librarian employment for almost 13,000 U.S public school districts from 2018-19 and 2020-21. The purpose of the study was to learn how the COVID-19 pandemic, which radically disrupted K-12 education, impacted the losses or gains of school librarian positions.

The dataset utilized was the Common Core of Data annually collected by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) which consists of self-reported data from school districts. The report is based on data for public school districts in 46 states and the District of Columbia as data for California, Illinois, New York, and Utah were either unavailable or unusable for this analysis. Full-time equivalents (FTEs) of school librarian positions were compared to percentages and net numbers of district administrators, school administrators, teachers, and instructional coordinators. Additionally, other characteristics were studied--enrollment size, locale (city, suburb, town, rural), per pupil expenditures, majority race of students, and poverty based on the federal Free and Reduced-cost Meals Program--in relation to the losses or gains of school librarians.

The results showed that between 2018-19 and 2020-21, the decrease in the total number of reported school librarians nationwide--more than 1,800 librarian FTEs--was about 800 FTEs greater than for the previous two-year interval. For districts in every enrollment range and every locale type, the percentage losing librarians exceeded the percentage gaining librarians. Inequities in access to school librarians most notably increased in lower-enrollment districts, those in rural areas, those serving more minority students, particularly Black students, and districts with more students living in poverty. Nationwide, school librarian FTEs decreased while other educator positions increased or remained relatively stable, suggesting that the loss of librarians may not merely be a matter of school funding. These data illustrate that, as the pandemic set in, staffing dollars were more likely to be targeted toward administrators than toward educators who have more direct contact with, and instruct, students--teachers and librarians. It is unknown whether these inequitable losses of school librarians are temporary or will become a post-COVID "new normal."

Lance, K. C., & Kachel, D. E. (2022, August). *The COVID-19 pandemic & inequities in access to school librarians: A SLIDE special report*. SLIDE: The School Librarian Investigation—Decline or Evolution?
<https://libSLIDE.org/publications/pandemic>.

Appendix G. The School Librarian Equity Gap: Inequities Associated with Race and Ethnicity Compounded by Poverty, Locale, and Enrollment

Keith Curry Lance, Debra E. Kachel, & Caitlin Gerrity

The School Librarian Investigation—Decline or Evolution? (SLIDE) project is a federally funded study of the almost 20% national decline in the number of full-time equivalents (FTEs) of school librarians between 2015 and 2019, according to the National Center for Education Statistics. In this update to the project’s original research, school librarian employment data for the 2020-2021 school year were examined for 12,537 school districts and associated with district characteristics (poverty, locale, and district enrollment) and student demographics (race and ethnicity).

Data supported previous findings that access to school librarians is strongly related to race and ethnicity and further exacerbated for students living in extreme poverty, in more-isolated locales, and in the smallest districts—locales where students are less likely to have access to the educational resources available in large urban areas. In school year 2021, three million students in majority nonwhite districts were without any librarians; they were 54% of the 5.6 million students in all districts without any librarians during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The gap between students in districts with a “library privilege” and those without librarians continues to widen.

Lance, K.C., Kachel, D.E., & Gerrity, C. (2023, January 6). [The school librarian equity gap: Inequities associated with race and ethnicity compounded by poverty, locale, and enrollment](https://doi.org/10.1080/0161956X.2023.2160112). *Peabody Journal of Education*, 98(1), 85-99. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0161956X.2023.2160112>

ANTIOCH UNIVERSITY SEATTLE

Antioch University Seattle embodies values of inclusion and self-guided education, offering programs rooted in social, environmental, and economic justice to unite passion with purpose.

Antioch leverages experiential learning, internships, research studies, outreach projects and other student participation opportunities to enhance the educational experience beyond the classroom.



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