The Status of State Support of School Library Programs

DEBRA E. KACHEL AND KEITH CURRY LANCE

"Whether states mandate that schools employ school librarians—and whether those mandates are enforced—matters.'

In the fall of 2020, researchers Kachel and Lance conducted a survey of all 50 states and the District of Columbia (D.C.) to examine how states support school library programs. The survey is part of an Institute of Museum and Library Services grant project called SLIDE: The School Librarian Investigation—Decline or Evolution? (https://libSLIDE.org). This background information will provide context for planned, confidential, and voluntary interviews that will occur next year to learn how school leaders decide to staff libraries, learning resources, and instructional technology services. Sites for future interviews will be determined using National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) library staffing data.

A designated school library leader in each state and D.C.—some in a government/agency position, some in a school library association—responded to the following questions. The complete report and responses are available at https://libslide.org/publications.

- Has your state adopted standards or guidelines for school library programs?
- Does your state have certification requirements for school librarians?
- Does your state have any legal requirements for school librarian staffing?
- Does your state have a state government employee assigned specifically to work with school libraries?
- Does any state agency or organization regularly collect school and/or district-level data about school librarian employment?
- Does your state provide direct funding to school libraries for any purpose?
- Does your state government provide access to licensed databases or other subscription-based e-resources, including e-books, to all schools in your state?
- How many institutions of higher education prepare school librarians in your state?
- Are there districts in your state seeking to hire certified school librarians that cannot find them? In other words, is there is a shortage of certified school librarians in your state?

PROGRAM STANDARDS, GUIDELINES, AND CERTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS

A potential indicator of state support is whether the state has endorsed school library program standards and/or guidelines to assist schools in developing programs that impact students and their learning. Usually, these documents address such aspects as librarian job responsibilities, staffing levels, collections, technology, instruction, and program administration, and often include evaluative rubrics. The survey revealed that 43 states have program standards and/or guidelines. There is no consistent distinction between standards and guidelines across states,

Table 1. Ratio staffing requirement by state.

State	Enforced	Part-time	1 Full-time	1.5	More than 1	2	2.5	3
Alabama	Yes	Less than 250	250–999		1,000+			
Arkansas	Yes	Less than 250	300–1,499			1,500+		
Georgia	No	ES with ⇠ 450; MS with ⇠ 624; HS with ⇠970	ES with 450+; MS with 624+; HS with 970+					
Montana	Yes	126–250*	251–500	501–1000		1001–1500	1501–2000	2001+
Nebraska	Yes	70–249 at least a .2 librarian; 250–749 at least .5	750+					
New York	No	Secondary schools of 100–700 staffing levels range from 1 period to 5 periods per day	701–1,000					
Oklahoma	Yes	Less than 300	300–999**					
South Carolina	Yes	Less than 375	375+					
Tennessee	No	ES & MS = .5 for 400–549 HS = less than 300	ES & MS = 550+ HS = 300–1499			HS = 1500+		
Vermont	No	Less than 300	More than 300					
Virginia	No	ES = Less than 299 MS & HS =.5 less than 299	ES = More than 300 MS & HS = More than 300			MS & HS = 1,000+		
Washington	No	ES: FT librarian at .663 librarians per 1,000 students; MS: .519 librarians per 1,000 students; HS: .523 librarians per 1,000 students.						
Wyoming	No	Recommended: ES: librarian staffing as 1:288 ADM; MS and HS: 1:105–630; prorated under 288 and over 630						

ES = elementary school; MS = middle school; HS = high school
* In Montana, schools of less than 126 students will contract with a consortium or service for multiple schools.
** In Oklahoma, schools with student populations between 300 and 500 may have a .5 librarian and a .5 library assistant in place of a FT librarian. Over 500 must have a FT librarian and a PT library assistant.

and some states such as Texas have both, combining them in one document. (For the results from each state, refer to https://libslide.org/pubs/contextsappendix.pdf). Some states refer to these documents as handbooks or guidebooks. A few include quantitative recommendations for staffing levels, collections, facility spaces, and budgets. Some states, such as Colorado and Michigan, have voluntary recognition programs that detail benchmarks or credentials of exemplary programs and thus serve as standards or guidelines.

All states have certification requirements for school librarians, with most states requiring a teaching certificate. Some states require a master's degree plus passing a standardized school library test, such as the PRAXIS II Library Media Specialist test. A question not asked on the survey is whether teachers can receive a school librarian certificate through a test-only option,

which occurs in some states, like Pennsylvania. In Washington state (Vercelletto, 2017), school library leaders fought a test-in option and were able to maintain school library coursework requirements for teachers wishing to earn school library endorsement.

LEGAL REQUIREMENTS FOR SCHOOL LIBRARIAN EMPLOYMENT

Only 10 states plus D.C. report an enforced mandate to employ public school librarians. Sixteen additional states report having a state mandate that is not enforced. Almost 50% (24) of the states report having no legal requirements for schools to employ school librarians (Kachel & Lance, 2021b, p. 4). In states without mandates or where they are not enforced, employing a librarian and, indeed, whether to even have a library, is at the discretion of the district or school. This has led to gross inequities for students across the nation, especially among poor and underrepresented students (Jessen, 2018; Pribesh, Gavigan, & Dickinson, 2011; Tuck et al., 2016).

The following states have ratio staffing requirements, although not all are enforced (see Table 1). "Ratio" staffing indicates the number of students to be served by either part-time or full-time librarians.

Whether states mandate that schools employ school librarians—and whether those mandates are enforced—matters. In 2018–2019, states with an enforced mandate to have school librarians had an average of .61 full-time equivalent (FTE) librarians per school. States with unenforced mandates had an average of .50 FTE per school, and those with no mandate had only an average

of .38 FTE per school. Further, the presence of a librarian mandate correlated with state averages for percent change in librarian FTEs. Between 2009–2010 and 2018–2019, states with enforced mandates averaged librarian FTE declines of 9%, those with unenforced mandates averaged declines of 23%, and those without mandates averaged declines of 29%. Between 2015–2016 and 2018–2019, on average, states with enforced mandates saw librarian FTEs increase by 3%, those with unenforced mandates saw librarian FTEs decline by 2.5%, and those with no mandates declined by 7.6% (Lance & Kachel, forthcoming).

STATE GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS AND DATA COLLECTION

Survey responses indicated that 13 states have a full-time state employee dedicated to oversight of school library programs; 21 have a part-time official; 17 states have no one (Kachel & Lance, 2021b, p. 5). Generally, a state government school library advisor represents school libraries on state-level boards and committees, provides guidance on technical support, leverages grants and state-subscribed databases and e-resources for schools, collects relevant data, and monitors evaluation of school libraries (AASL, 2008). Since data provided to NCES does not require that the reported positions are certified school librarians, often states collect their own data to verify the number of certified school librarians, as well as other data regarding collection sizes, budgets, and use of resources. Two-thirds of states report collecting some data about school library staffing, though some of these reports may be referring to the NCES data collection

in which state education departments are involved.

STATE SCHOOL LIBRARY FUNDING AND PROVISION OF E-RESOURCES

Only 15 states provide some direct state-level funding to school libraries, although several survey responders reported that their districts often use these funds for other purposes. Direct library allocations range from $96.14 per school in Alabama to $36.99 per student in Wisconsin to $.75 per student in Illinois. Colorado distributes either $3,500 or $4,000 per district for school libraries. However, 70% of states provide no direct funding, and thus school library budgets are dependent on local district and school budgets (Kachel & Lance, 2021b, p. 7). National data on school library budgets are scant to nonexistent. However, almost 75% of states provide free access to e-resources in the form of databases, e-books, and other digital programs to their schools. Six percent of states provide discounted e-resources to their schools.

THE SCHOOL LIBRARIAN "PIPELINE"

Thirty-six, or 71%, of the 51 survey respondents indicated shortages of certified school librarians in their states. Nine responded that they didn't know; only 6 responded no shortages. Some respondents remarked that classroom teachers are being assigned to the library. Some respondents mentioned that shortages exist only in high-needs schools or remote rural areas. According to the U.S. Department of Education (n.d.), 12 states reported school

librarian shortages for 2020–2021, while 22 states reported shortages of school librarians in the past 3 years (2018–2019 through 2020–2021). As shortages increase, state departments of education are instituting alternative pathways to certify teachers to meet the growing demand (Education Service Center, 2021; Nagl, 2019).

According to the survey responses, there are a total of 123 institutions of higher education that offer school library preparation programs. Thirteen states report having 4 or more such universities, while 5 states have no institutions preparing school librarians (Kachel & Lance, 2021b, pp. 9—10). Some respondents commented that several institutions no longer offer school library certification or a school library program of study due to declining de-

mand. Some states have extensive certification requirements yet few higher education institutions offering the certification program. For example, New Mexico has no such universities, and Michigan, Ohio, and South Carolina have only one each. Yet certification requirements in some states remain rigorous, requiring a combination of a master's degree, a teaching certificate, teaching experience, completion of school library coursework (some with an internship), and passage of standardized tests ("State by State Certifications," n.d.).

The number of higher education institutions preparing school librarians matters to librarian staffing levels. States with 4 or more such institutions have an average of .61 FTE librarian per school; states with 1–3

such institutions, .45 FTE; states with no such institutions, .21 FTE (Lance & Kachel, forthcoming). The number of these institutions further correlated with year-to-year change in librarian FTEs. Between 2009–2010 and 2018–2019, states with 4 or more such institutions averaged FTE declines of 17.9%; those with 1–3 such institutions, 22.5% declines; and those with no such institutions, 36.5% declines (Lance & Kachel, forthcoming). This information requires a deeper exploration of the impact of school librarian preparation programs in institutions of higher education on state and regional staffing patterns.

CONCLUSION

To dig deeper into the declines in

school librarian positions and understand the staffing priorities of district and school leaders who make these decisions, a survey of state support factors that may be relevant to school librarian staffing was needed. After gathering data from all 50 states and D.C., certain correlations were discovered. Of the data collected about standards and guidelines, certification requirements, mandated staffing, presence of a state government official, state data collection, direct state funding, state provision of e-resources, and number of preparatory institutions, only mandated staffing and the number of higher education institutions that prepare school librarians significantly impacted the number of librarians in the state (Lance & Kachel, forthcoming). In other words, there are more librarians relative to schools in states mandating that schools employ librarians and in which more higher education institutions prepare candidates for those jobs.

Not surprisingly in our era of local control, many states define in detail—whether in statutes, regulations, or standards—the components of a school library program and the services that students must be provided without ever specifying who is responsible for implementing the program and student services. New Mexico legal statutes, for example, articulate 52 competencies required by its certified school librarians, requiring both educator and library credentials, without requiring certified school librarians in their schools. In addition, New Mexico law governs the competencies that institutions of higher education must embed in their library media curriculum for certification (New Mexico, n.d.). Ironically, New Mexico no longer has any institutions of higher education that prepare school librarians.

NEXT STEPS

In 2021–22, during the next phase of the SLIDE project, researchers will interview staffing decision makers in districts meeting one of three criteria: (1) districts that have gained school librarian FTEs since 2015–2016; (2) districts that have reduced levels of librarian FTEs since 2015–2016; and (3) districts that have lost all school librarian FTEs since 2015–2016. The results of the state survey will help project staff understand the state conditions in which district leaders make the criti-

Photo 220199772 © Seventyfourimages | Dreamstime.com

cal decisions on how to staff libraries, learning resources, and instructional technology for their K–12 students. The qualitative analysis of the interviews will further explain the extent to which these state factors impact local staffing decisions.

The poster, on page 30, "Data Speaks, Preliminary Data on the Status of School Librarians in the U.S" is compiled from Kachel and Lance's work on SLIDE: The School Librarian Investigation—Decline or Evolution? (https://libSLIDE.org) covered in this article.

REFERENCES

AASL. (2008). *Impact of the loss of a state library consultant/coordinator*. Retrieved from http://www.ala.org/aasl/sites/ala.org.aasl/files/content/aaslissues/advocacy/Loss_of_a_State_Library_Consultant.pdf

Education Service Center Region 19. (2021). *Librarian alternative certification (LACE)*. Retrieved from https://www.esc19.net/domain/98

Jessen, S. B. (2018, March 16). Charter schools, segregation, and school library access. *School Library Journal*. Retrieved from https://www.slj.com/?detailStory=charter-schools-segregation-school-library-access

Kachel, D. E., & Lance, K. C. (2021a, January 26). *Appendix to contexts of school librarian employment*. Retrieved from https://libslide.org/pubs/contextsappendix.pdf

Kachel, D. E., & Lance, K. C. (2021b, January 26). *Contexts for school librarian employment*. Retrieved from https://libslide.org/pubs/contexts.pdf

Lance, K. C., & Kachel, D. E. (forthcoming). *Perspectives on employment of school librarians in the U.S*. Retrieved from https://libslide.org/publications/

Nagl, K. (2019, February 19). *Wayne State to roll out fast-track librarian certificate amid shortage, student demand*. Retrieved from https://www.crainsdetroit.com/education/wayne-state-roll-out-fast-track-librarian-certificate-amid-shortage-student-demand

New Mexico. (n.d.). *Title 6. Primary and secondary education. Chapter 64. School personnel-competencies for licensure. Part 8. Competencies for entry-level library media specialists*. Retrieved from http://164.64.110.134/parts/title06/06.064.0008.html

Pribesh, S., Gavigan, K., and Dickinson, G. (2011). Access gap: Poverty and characteristics of school library media centers. *Library Quarterly, 81*(2), 143–160. Retrieved from https://doi-org.antioch.idm.oclc.org/10.1086/658868

State by state certifications. (n.d.). *School Library Connection*. Retrieved from https://schoollibraryconnection.com/Glossary/StateCertifications/1959400?topicCenterId=0

Tuck, K. D., Holmes, D. R., & National Education Association. (2016). *Library/media centers in U.S. public schools: Growth, staffing, and resources*. Retrieved from https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED581060U.S.

U.S. Department of Education. (n.d.). *Teacher shortage areas*. Retrieved from https://tsa.ed.gov/#/reports

Vercelletto, C. (2017). A win in Washington state. *School Library Journal, 63*(11), 11.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Kachel, D. E., & Lance, K. C. (2021, January 27). *Requirements for school librarian employment: A state-by-state summary*. Retrieved from https://libslide.org/pubs/requirements.pdf

Long, C. (2016, November 2). Study: Access to school library resources forms along racial lines. *NEA Today*. Retrieved from https://www.nea.org/advocating-for-change/new-from-nea/study-access-school-library-resources-forms-along-racial-lines

Debra E. Kachel is an affiliate faculty for Antioch University Seattle's K–12 Library Media Endorsement program and project director of SLIDE: The School Librarian Investigation—Decline or Evolution? (https://libslide.org). She serves as the cochairperson of the Pennsylvania School Librarians Association's Advocacy Committee and received the 2014 AASL Distinguished Service Award. Her email is dkachel@antioch.edu. Twitter: @SchLibAdvocate and @lib_SLIDE

Keith Curry Lance, Ph.D., consults with the RSL Research Group as well as independently. He was the principal investigator for several statewide school library impact studies, earning him the 2013 AASL Distinguished Service Award. He and Debra Kachel collaborate regularly on research and writing about the changing status of school librarianship as a profession. His email is keithlance@comcast.net, and his consulting website is KeithCurryLance.com.