

Student Demographics

Socio-economic differences between districts were also powerful drivers of inequality of access to school librarians. The Common Core of Data (CCD) provides data on three student demographics that demonstrated strong, significant relationships to the District Ratio of Librarian FTE per School: Free and Reduced-cost Meals Eligibility (a poverty indicator), race/ethnicity, and language status.

How does poverty relate to a district’s level of librarian staffing?

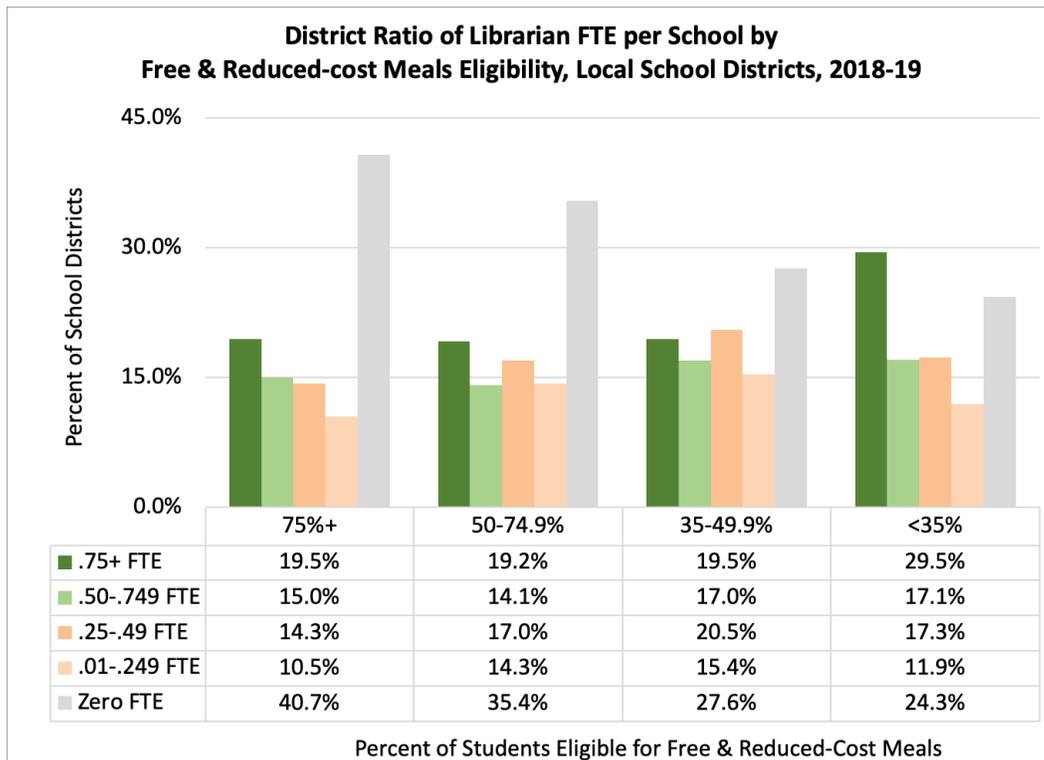
A common measure of poverty in education research is the percentage of a district’s students who are eligible for the federal Free and Reduced-cost Meals program. Notably, unlike school spending, this financial variable was more predictably related to librarian staffing levels. (See Chart 17.) In 2018-19, almost 3 out of 10 districts with the fewest students eligible for the federal meals program (29.5%) had .75+ librarian FTE per school. Of other districts, only 1 out of 5 (19.2% to 19.5%) had that highest staffing level.

The relationship between poverty and having no librarians was more linear. Two out of 5 (40.7%) districts with 75% or more of their students in poverty reported no librarians, while fewer than a quarter (24.3%) of districts with fewer than 35% of their students in poverty reported no librarians.

Districts with the most students in poverty were most likely to have no librarians. Districts with the fewest students in poverty were most likely to have librarians in all or most schools.

These findings are concerning, as they indicate that schools in poorer communities were less likely than schools in wealthier communities to enjoy the benefits of the services librarians have to offer to students and their teachers. Despite decades of federal and state education programs intended to reduce such inequities, they continue. Ironically, students in schools experiencing such inequities need the services of librarians even more than their counterparts in more prosperous schools.

Chart 17



How does the racial and ethnic composition of a district's student body relate to its level of librarian staffing?

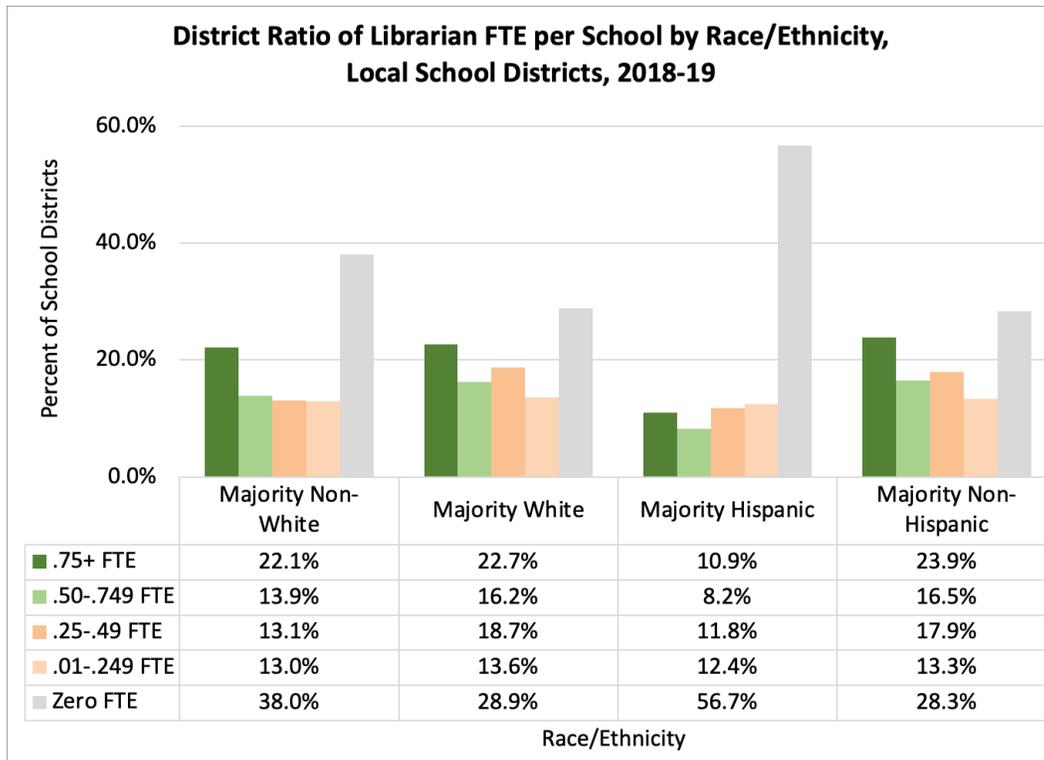
There were predictable differences in librarian staffing associated with majority non-white versus majority white districts as well as majority Hispanic versus majority non-Hispanic ones. The extremity of the two sets of differences is somewhat surprising. (See Appendix B for explanations of “race” and “ethnicity.”)

Majority white and majority non-Hispanic districts were more likely than others to have higher levels of librarian staffing. Majority Hispanic districts were twice as likely not to have librarians as majority non-Hispanic districts.

In 2018-19, the percentages of majority non-white and majority white districts with .75+ librarian FTE per school were almost equal at 22.1% and 22.7%, respectively. The same year, however, 38.0% of majority non-white districts reported no librarians compared with 28.9% of majority white districts. (See Chart 18.)

Differences associated with ethnicity were much more extreme than those associated with race. Also, in 2018-19, fewer than half as many majority Hispanic districts (only 10.9%) reported .75+ librarian FTE per school compared to majority non-Hispanic districts (23.9%). Conversely, twice as many majority Hispanic districts (56.7%) reported no librarians compared to majority non-Hispanic districts (28.3%).

Chart 18



How does the presence of English Language Learners relate to a district's level of librarian staffing?

Districts with the most English Language Learners (ELL) were least likely to have .75+ librarian FTE per school and most likely, by far, to have no librarians. In 2018-19, the highest level of librarian staffing (.75+ FTE per school) was found in fewer than 1 in 5 districts (18.7%) with the most ELL students compared to more than a quarter of districts (26.4%) with the fewest ELL students. The same year, more than 2 out of 5 districts (42.7%) with the most ELL students had no librarians compared with 1 out of 5 districts (19.5%) with the fewest ELL students. (See Chart 19.)

Districts with the most English Language Learners were least likely to have the highest level of librarian staffing and most likely, by far, to have no librarians.

Chart 19

