

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



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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This study was funded by a Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian/Research in Service to Practice grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) and conducted under the auspices of Antioch University Seattle. The data are from the Common Core of Data, the flagship data collection of the National Center for Education Statistics. Data for 2009-10 through 2018-19 were assessed, and substantial errors and omissions were addressed using state data sources. While these adjustments made little difference at the national level, they made a substantial difference in several states and districts.

National Perspective

- In 2018-19, there were more than **42,000 school librarians** in the U.S.—almost **20% fewer** than in 2009-10. Over the same interval, Instructional Coordinators increased by almost 34%; District Administrators, by more than 16%, and School Administrators by more than 15%. Teachers were reduced by a little over 1%.
- In 2009-10, if school librarians were distributed equally across all schools, there would have been a half-time librarian in every school nationwide. By **2018-19**, there was **less than a half-time librarian** (.43 FTE) in every school.
- In 2009-10, the **national ratio of students per librarian** was 939 to 1. In 2018-19, that ratio grew to 1,199 to 1—an almost **28% increase**.
- In 2009-10, the **national ratio of teachers per librarian** was 61 to 1. In 2018-19, that ratio grew to 75 to 1—a **23% increase**.

State Perspective

In the absence of school level data, a **state ratio of librarian FTE per school** was calculated. State contextual data regarding laws, regulations, policies, and practices related to the employment of school librarians were also collected.

- Between **2009-10 and 2018-19**, **all states lost** school librarian full-time equivalents (FTEs) **except New Hampshire** which gained almost 3%.
- In 2018-19, generally, there were **more school librarians** in the **eastern** half of the country than the **western** half. Among the four major U.S. regions, the Southern states had the largest concentrations of school librarians. In Texas alone, there were more librarians than in the bottom 20 states combined.
- Between 2015-16 and 2018-19, **school librarian FTEs rose in D.C.** (16%) **and 14 states**—Alabama (38%), Alaska (13%), Kansas and Michigan (7%), New York and Virginia (6%), New Hampshire (4%), California and Arkansas (2%), Wisconsin (1%), and South Carolina, Oregon, Texas, and Rhode Island (all less than 1% increases).

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

- Of the 10 states with the **lowest** state ratios of **librarian FTE per school** (.25 or fewer), 7 were **west of the Mississippi River**: California, Idaho, Oregon, South Dakota, Arizona, Wyoming, and Utah. Michigan, Minnesota, and Ohio round out the bottom 10 states.
- Of the 10 states with the **highest** state ratios of **librarian FTE per school** (.75 or higher), 9 were in the **South**: Arkansas, Georgia, South Carolina, Alabama, Virginia, Tennessee, Maryland, North Carolina, and Mississippi. Connecticut—the only state in this group outside the South—rounds out the top 10 states on this ratio.
- The 13 states with the **highest** ratios of **students per librarian** (1,500 or more to 1) include 8 **Western** states (New Mexico, Colorado, Nevada, Arizona, Utah, Oregon, Idaho, and California), 4 **Midwestern** states (Indiana, Ohio, Michigan, and Minnesota), and Massachusetts.
- The **lowest** state ratios of **students per librarian** (fewer than 750 to 1) occurred in 8 **Southern** states: Arkansas, Alabama, Mississippi, Kentucky, Tennessee, South Carolina, Virginia, and Louisiana.
- School librarians were **least prevalent** in states that **do not mandate** some level of school librarian staffing, and **less prevalent** in states that have such mandates but **do not enforce** them. They were most prevalent in states that have and enforce mandates.
- 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 Spring 2021, the 5 states with no such institutions were Alaska, Arizona, New Mexico, Oregon, and Wyoming.

District Perspective

At the district level, analyses focused on the following:

- the district ratio of librarian full-time equivalent (FTE) per school (a proxy for school level data),
- districts that employed any librarian FTE, or no librarians, from 2015-16 through 2018-19,
- whether or not districts that had no librarians by 2015-16 had reinstated any level of librarian staffing by 2018-19,
- the extent to which library support staff have replaced school librarians by state and over time,
- district ratios of students per librarian FTE and teachers per librarian FTE,
- districts affiliated with Future Ready Schools compared with those that were not, and
- charter districts.

District Ratio of Librarian FTE per School, 2018-19

- In 2018-19, of the almost 13,000 **local school districts** that reported about librarian staffing, **3,983 (31%)** had **no school librarians**. Districts with no librarians were more prevalent in the Midwest and West. Since 2015-16, numbers and percentages of districts with no librarians have increased.
- **Fewer than 25%** of districts reported a **.75 or greater librarian FTE per school** (i.e., enough for a full-time librarian in most schools).
- Districts with **no librarians** were likelier to be ones with **smaller enrollments** and to be located in **rural** areas. Districts with **high levels** of librarian staffing tended to have **larger enrollments** and to be located in **suburban** communities.
- Districts spending the most per pupil (\$15,000+) were most likely to have high levels of librarian staffing and least likely to be without librarians. However, districts spending the least per pupil (less than \$10,000) had better staffing than districts spending between \$10,000 and \$15,000 per pupil. Consequently, there was **no clear relationship between staffing and funding**.

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

- Districts with higher levels of **poverty**, more **minority** students, and more **English Language Learners** were **less likely** to have librarians. **Majority Hispanic** districts were **more than twice** as likely to have **no librarians** and **less than half** as likely to have the **highest level** of librarian staffing.

Districts Reporting Any Librarians & No Librarians, 2015-16 through 2018-19

- Almost **1 out of 4 districts** (23.3%) reported **no librarians from 2015-16 through 2018-19**. States with more districts consistently reporting no librarians were concentrated in the West and the northern tier of the Midwest.
- More than **3 out of 5** school districts (61.5%) employed **school librarians consistently since 2015-16**.
- Districts reporting **no librarians between 2015-16 and 2018-19** tend to have **smaller enrollments** and to be located in **rural** communities. Districts that **sustained librarians** during that period tended to have **larger enrollments** and to be located in **cities or suburbs**.
- Districts spending the most per pupil (\$15,000 or more) were more likely to maintain librarians and least likely to eliminate them. Nevertheless, there was **no clear relationship between staffing consistency and funding level**.
- Districts **without librarians** from 2015-16 through 2018-19 tended to serve **more poor** students, **more minority** students, and **more English Language Learners**, while those that retained librarians long-term tended to serve fewer such students. More than 3 out of 5 majority Hispanic districts (56.7%) had no librarians from 2015-16 through 2018-19.

Status of Districts Without School Librarians by 2015-16 in 2018-19

- **By 2015-16, 3,560** districts nationwide (**28%**) had **eliminated all** school librarians.
- **Nine out of 10** districts without librarians in 2015-16 (91%) had **not reinstated** them **by 2018-19**.
- By 2018-19, some level of school librarian staffing had been **reinstated** in only **9%** of districts that had eliminated school librarians completely by 2015-16.

Replacement of School Librarians with Library Support Staff

- In 2018-19, **almost half** of districts **with no librarians** (47.1%) reported some level of **library support staff**. In other words, these library support staff are working independently—without the guidance of librarians.
- Between 2009-10 and 2018-19, the percentage of **districts** employing **library support staff, but no librarians**, grew by more than half—from **almost 9% to over 12%**.
- More than 2 out of 5 districts employed library support staff, but no librarians, in 4 states: **Oregon** (46.0%), **Minnesota** (45.9%), **Idaho** (45.2%), and **Colorado** (40.4%).
- Over the past decade, the percentage of **library support staff** working in districts **without librarians** has **more than doubled** from **5% to 12%**.
- Nine states accounted for most library support staff working without librarians. In **Arizona**, 7 out of 10 library support staff (71.2%) were employed by districts without librarians. More than half (5 out of 10) of such staff in **South Dakota** (57.8%) and **Michigan** (55.9%) did not work with librarians. Four out of 10 **Alaska** library support staff (41.3%) lacked librarians. And more than 3 out of 10 such staff worked

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

without librarians in **Idaho** (35.5%), **Oregon** (35.1%), **Minnesota** (34.6%), **Delaware** (33.3%), and **Ohio** (31.6%).

District Ratios of Students & Teachers per Librarian FTE

- In 2018-19, there were **1,250 or more students for every librarian** in **1 out of 6** districts (17.1%). In about the same proportion of districts (17.9%) there are **fewer than 500 students per librarian**.
- In 2018-19, there were **90 or more teachers per librarian** in **1 out of 6** districts (16.9%). In only **1 out of 5** districts (19.5%) were there **fewer than 40 teachers per librarian**.

Future Ready Schools Districts

- In 2018-19, districts that had signed the Future Ready Schools (FRS) Pledge were **more likely** to provide the **highest level** of librarian staffing (.75 FTE or more per school) and **less likely** to have **no librarians**.
- Since at least 2015-16, FRS districts were **more likely** to have **kept librarians** and **less likely** to have been **without them**.

Charter Districts

- In 2018-19, there were **4,000 all-charter school districts** operating 5,203 schools. (This does not include charter schools operated by local school districts, for which separate data are not available.)
- There were **only 321 school librarians** in charter school districts in 2018-19. Thus, 90% of charter districts had no school librarians.

For Information About Your State & District and Districts Like Yours

More detailed data are reported at both state and district levels in the full report at <https://libslide.org/publications/perspectives>. Tables present many data details, and charts and maps help to visualize it for more intuitive understanding. In addition, visit the SLIDE project website, <https://libslide.org>, for links to related publications (journal articles, news items, infographics, and social media posts).

Most importantly, though, check out the SLIDE project's interactive web tools at <https://libslide.org/data-tools/>. These tools will enable you to generate tables, charts, and maps that summarize data for your state and school district as well as district like yours based on what you select from this study's 3 district characteristics (enrollment, locale, per pupil expenditures) and 3 student demographics (poverty, race/ethnicity, and English Language Learners).

Sources

ELSi Table Generator, Common Core of Data, National Center for Education Statistics (state and district data, 2009-10 to 2018-19). <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/elsi/tableGenerator.aspx>
Kachel, D. E., & Lance, K. C. (2021, January 26). *Contexts for school librarian employment*. <https://libslide.org/pubs/contexts.pdf>

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